From Wall Street to Main Street to “El Callejon”

Economic and Educational Realities of Latino Immigrant Families in the Rural Midwest

Robert Reyes, Ph.D., CFLE
Goshen College
Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning (CITL)

Rubén P. Viramontez Anguiano, Ph.D., CFLE
Bowling Green State University
“We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about the progress and prosperity for our community.... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others for their sake and for our own.”

– Cesar Chavez
Economic and Educational Realities of Latino Immigrant Families in the Midwest

Premise of the Study

• To examine the experiences of Latino immigrant families in a small community in the Midwest during a time of rapid demographic change, economic instability, and a hostile social and political climate.

• The study showed:
  • The political and social landscape in the region and its impact on Latino families.
  • Immigrant families demonstrated stability as a result of their socio-centric values regardless of the social and economic obstacles they were facing.
Research Questions

• How do Latino family dynamics and acculturation processes within the family impact the adaptation process of immigrant Latino families?

• How do external factors including social, cultural, educational, and political affect the adaptation process of immigrant Latino families?
Theoretical Constructs

• **Social Capital Theory**
  – How resources are acquired through social relationships and networks
  – How those relationships can be fostered to support the success of a family and community.

• **Acculturation**
  – The process of social and psychological exchanges that take place when there are ongoing encounters between individuals of different cultures, with subsequent changes in either of both groups.

• **“Familismo”**
  – A strong identification with and attachment to their nuclear and extended families
  – This socio-centric belief is manifested through a social network of support that transcends the family on through the Latino community.

• **Ecological Systems Theory**
  – Specifies five types of nested environmental systems, with bi-directional influences within and between the systems
  – These systems are: **microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem.**
Methods

• **POPULATION:** Latino families and school personnel in North Central Indiana

• **SAMPLE:** 63 immigrant Latino parents; 7 parent liaisons from schools; 7 school principals
Methods

PROCEDURE:

• **Spradley model of ethnographic research** (Spradley, 1979); respondents invited to become active partners in research process

• **Participant observation**: “the participant observer takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of the people being studied” (Dewalt, Dewalt & Wayland, 1998).

• **Semi-structured interviews** that lasted approximately one hour; interviews consisted of open-ended questions that explored external factors that may impact the intersection between immigrant Latino families, schools, and communities

• **Theme analysis** -- an approach focusing on the intersections of Latino families, schools, and communities
Social Context:
Demographic Information
Latinos in Indiana by county - 2010

TOP COUNTIES

Lake                      82,663 — 16.6%
ELKHART                     27,886 — 14.1%
Clinton                    4,395 — 13.2%
Cass                        4,897 — 12.5%
Noble                       4,567 —  9.6%
Marion                     84,466 —  9.3%
Porter                     13,933 —  8.5%
Marshall                    3,971 —  8.4%
Tippecanoe                 12,947 —  7.4%
St. Joseph                19,395 —  7.2%
Kosciusko                  5,634 —  7.2%
Allen                     23,093 —  6.4%
Regional Demographics

Latino Population in Indiana and Elkhart County

- Indiana has seen its Latino population more than triple.
- In Elkhart County, the Latino population increased on 700%.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of Latino population in Indiana and Elkhart County for 1990 and 2010.](chart.png)

Indiana

- 1990: 1.8%
- 2010: 6%

Elkhart County

- 1990: 1.9%
- 2010: 14.1%
## Elkhart County and Goshen

### U.S. Census 2000-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ELKHART COUNTY</th>
<th>GOSHEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>197,559</td>
<td>31,719</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000-2010 increase:</td>
<td>14,766</td>
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<td>2000-2010 percent increase</td>
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### Goshen Populations

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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minorities</td>
<td>10,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>8,903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| % Minorities   | 33.3%      |
| % Hispanics    | 28.0%      |
Regional Demographics


- Most of Latino population growth took place in the 1990s and continued into the 2000s but growth slowed.
Regional Demographics


- Most of Latino population is of Mexican origin
- Next significant minority are Puerto Ricans in St. Joseph county and Central Americans, particularly those from Guatemala, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic

![Bar chart showing the Latino population by country of origin in Elkhart and St. Joseph counties, 2009. The largest group is Mexican, followed by Puerto Ricans and Central Americans.]
• Between 2007 and 2009, unemployment more than doubled.

• Median household income dropped 16%.

• 1 in 4 children living below poverty in 2009.
Regional Demographics


- In both Elkhart and St. Joseph counties, manufacturing and services employed more Latinos and non-Latinos than any industry.
- In Elkhart County, a large majority of Latinos are employed in manufacturing and 30 percent are in services.

Source: US Census
School Demographics

Percentage of Students who are English Language Learners, 2009-2010

- South Bend has the lowest rate of English Language Learners.
- West Noble has the highest.

Source: Indiana Department of Education, 2009-2010 School Data

- In all but one of the local school organizations, Latinos graduated at a lower rate than whites.
- Noble County is the exception, with a Latino graduation rate close to that of white students.
- South Bend's gap between Latino and white student graduation rates (14 percentage points) is comparable to that of the state (14.6 percentage points) but in Elkhart County the gap is higher (23 and 19 percentage points).
Study Participants: Parents

Education of Latino Immigrant Parents

- **9** Six or less years of formal education in Latin America
- **11** Completed between 7th and 11th grade
- **3** Completed 12 years of schooling in Latin America and 1 in US
- **15** Completed two years of college
- **24** Obtained a bachelor's degree

63 Total Respondents
Study Participants: School Staff

Parent Liaisons

- **All seven** parent liaisons (*school staff*) were women.
- **Six of the seven** were Latina.
- Respondent ages ranged from **23-62**.
- Years of experience ranged from **3-17 years**.
- **All seven** liaisons were bilingual.

Principals

- Of the seven principals, **4 were male** and **3 female**.
- **All seven** were European Americans.
- Experience ranged from **5 to over 20 years**.
Findings
Challenges and Obstacles

- Language—non-English Speakers
- Minimal education
- Limited understanding of America culture
- Mixed legal status for most families
- Unique level of unemployment
- Median household income drop

Strengths of the Latino Families

- Community-mindedness
- Reciprocal exchanges of social capital
- Belonging to a larger social reality
- Preservation of home culture and Spanish Language
- Relocation to regions with better economic conditions and less anti-immigrant sentiment
- Schools as a source of familial and community support
Acculturation and the Family Adaptation Process

Elements that Support Latino Identity

• Preservation of home culture and mother language
• Chicano/a in place of Mexican American, because many generation 1.5 do not feel American
• 2nd generation of “Latino-Hoosiers”

Factors that Affect the Latino Adaptation Process

• Almost all families had at least one undocumented family member
• Decision to move to another state
• Struggles among Generation 1.5
• Generation gap between parents and 2nd generation
Economic Challenges

• Economic Challenges included...

• Unemployment rate in Elkhart County reach 19% in 2008; several points higher for Latinos

• Difficult for Latino families, documented or not, to earn a living wage

• Anti-immigrant sentiment a result of the economic crisis

Methods of Confronting these Challenges

• Though Latino families have higher levels of unemployment, a socio-centric foundation rooted in “la familia” has served as a buffer

• Still, many families have returned to Mexico or Latin America

• Latino-based businesses experienced decline in profits and contemplated relocation or closure
• Reciprocal social capital as a means of survival; family and community working together and reinforcing each other
• Development of social capital necessary to offset economic realities
• Community-mindedness passed from generation to generation
• Belonging to larger social reality in North Central Indiana
Educational Opportunities and Family Adaptation

- **Strong support for Latino students and families** from school systems, including parent liaisons.
- **Schools try to work with families** as much as possible with the transition out of high school, especially for undocumented students.
- Families who had lived in **other school districts** and other regions with **smaller Latino populations** reported **less accommodating and welcoming experiences**.
Conclusions

Acculturation

• Most **acculturative stress** associated with the host country’s **political, social, and economic climate**

• **Dual process needed** for immigrants to maintain connection with ethnic community while also participating in larger population *(i.e., Selective Assimilation)*

Economic Challenges

• Immigrant Latino families have shown **resiliency in face of economic struggles**

• This study illustrates a rare understanding of **how the economic crisis has impacted ethnic minorities**
Conclusions

Development of Community

- Latino communities understood that the development of social capital was necessary to offset economic realities

Educational Opportunities
Acculturation and the Family Adaptation Process

“We stress to our children that they need to learn our customs and traditions. The importance of family values and the religion have been reinforced since they were children.... All our children speak Spanish, they are proud to be of Mexican background but that have also enjoyed their experience in Indiana. My daughter plays soccer for the high school ... and my son attends the university of South Bend.” — an immigrant mother
Acculturation and the Family Adaptation Process

“My daughter has done everything that this country has asked of her. She is respectful and a good daughter, an honor student in school and is an excellent athlete. All I ask of the United States is to allow her to reach her potential. She will make this country better if given the opportunity. She wants to become a medical doctor. She is an example of the American Dream, but she is undocumented.”

— an immigrant father
Acculturation and the Family Adaptation Process

“I am willing to give my life for this country to become part of it, but still, that is not good enough.”

— a young Chicano man who had was rejected when he attempted to enlist in the U.S. military
“I disagree with my children. I understand that they have to adapt to the American ways. However, I do believe that there should also be an emphasis on the Mexican culture. I don’t want my children to forget who they are and how it is a beautiful thing to be Mexican.”

— an immigrant mother
The economic realities of Latino families in North Central Indiana was evident as the families struggled to maintain a place on the “main street” and found themselves more and more in the callejon (back alley).

Some of the economic challenges included:

- loss of jobs
- limitations in meeting basic needs
- housing instability
- multiple families living in one household.
“El Callejon”- Economic Challenges & Family Adaptation

“I used to work at the factory and earn good money but the factory let me go for no apparent reason. I had noticed that overtime more and more Latino/as were being let go especially the individuals with no papers. A lot of the factories are scared to hire undocumented people or keep them even if they have worked for over 10 years. For the companies they rather hire European American even if they know Latinos work harder for less pay. Now I work at a restaurant and do other jobs like selling food or products to feed my family. At this point there are three families living in my home including my four children and husband, a couple with their two children and another couple.”

— an immigrant mother
“El Callejon”- Economic Challenges & Family Adaptation

“I used to be able to apply to two or three factories in one week and I would have two offerings to work. Now if you get a call back for an interview you’re lucky. If you do get hired you work longer hours and the conditions are not the best. You never know if you will have a job the next week.”

— an immigrant father
“El Callejon”- Economic Challenges & Family Adaptation

“We have done our best to keep our home but we cannot make the payments ever since I got hurt at work. I had to go through a couple of surgeries and I am not as strong as I used to be. Because of my energy I am not able to do the heavy work that the factory demands of one.”

— an immigrant father
“El Callejon”- Economic Challenges & Family Adaptation

“Even when the economy was at its highest here in the RVs and other factories, the European Americans were complaining that we were taking their jobs. I remember when I first came here and there were only a handful of Latinos working at my RV factory; in less than 5 years the majority of workers were Latino. But it needs to be clarified that the majority of the ‘good jobs’ that pay more at the factory are still done by the European Americans. You rarely see European Americans doing the heavy jobs at the factory and at the same time you rarely find a Latino serving as a supervisor…. Now that the region is in economic crisis we are being blamed for taking the hard jobs? The hard jobs have always been there for the European American, he just chooses to not work in those conditions—good or bad economy.” — an immigrant father
“I have been here for over 20 years and we have encountered prejudice, discrimination and racism at every level. However, our community has endured. Whenever we need the Latino families, business, church, newspaper and radio to rally around a need or a cause Latinos support us by the hundreds. Although there are some “Americanos” organizations and individuals who may not want us to be here, I have found the majority of “Americanos” to be supportive of our community. The mayor and other prominent leaders in the city and the county have been open about how we make the community strong through our work and our culture.” — an immigrant father
“El Pueblo” - Development of Community and Family Adaptation

“We have to develop our young people to carry on the work that we have started. I have been working with *la comunidad* through the church, social outreach and health initiatives for over 20 years and I don’t see enough of our young people being involved in our community. **We, the elders, need to make sure that we challenge the young people that there will come a time that they will have to lead our *gente*.**”

— an immigrant mother
“El Pueblo” - Development of Community and Family Adaptation

“We have to work together as a community to deal with the challenges that we face. Whether it deals with immigration issues or helping our young people earn scholarships. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. struggled and fought for the rights of Black families so they would have a better life in America; Cesar Chavez fought for earlier generations of Latinos; we need to fight for our future our children. It doesn’t matter how much education you have, if you speak English or not, or if you are legally here. We have to be one community working towards the same goals to better our community.”

— an immigrant father
Educational Opportunities and Family Adaptation

“The **Latino families have always demonstrated that they are dedicated to their children**. Whenever we ask them to participate in events or volunteer, we were impressed with their involvement. This is despite the fact that often the parents do not speak English and are not familiar with the American educational system. **We also try to help the families with what we can beyond educational needs our staff especially the school liaisons engage in a lot of social outreach with the families.** It is not uncommon for liaisons to spend time with our families outside school hours and during the weekend. **Our teachers who the majority do not speak Spanish do whatever it takes to make sure the learning environment is positive for the Latino children.”

— an elementary school administrator
“The Latino families want their children to succeed despite the challenges they may be facing. I do struggle with the undocumented status, especially at the high school level. These kids have spent their whole life in the United States trying to live the American Dream but because of their status, it can be difficult for them to accept what will happen after they graduate from high school. For the district and me, we do our best to connect with the parents and ensure that we care about their children regardless of their status.”

— a school system administrator
Theoretical Constructs

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