Increasing the Supply of Latino Bilingual Teachers for the Chicago Public Schools

By Karen Sakash & Victoria Chou

I did not believe I would be the "great Latino savior." I would be me. I decided to teach in the public school system where I felt the students would need someone like me. As it turned out, I ended up where I belonged, in the Mexican community, helping nurture young minds and giving comfort and confidence to those that need it. In a way, I am . . . a "savior," but to myself, not the students. (Retana, 1997)

The prevailing situation in which students of color represent over one-third of school enrollments, yet teachers of color represent merely one-tenth of the nation's teacher force (Clewell & Villegas, 2001b; Ladson-Billings, 2005), is an important yet rarely considered factor amidst the constant claims of teacher shortages. Urban and rural schools struggle with an inadequate supply of teachers, but shortages are more concentrated in selected fields such as bilingual education and special education. In urban school districts that are majority children and youth of color, students have great need for teachers who can be cultural intermediaries to navigate between school and home cultures (Clewell & Villegas, 2001b; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004; Weiher, 2000).

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In this article, we describe our programmatic efforts

to address the urgent shortage of certified Latino bilingual teachers for the Chicago Public Schools. We start by setting the Chicago context and introducing the *Pathways* opportunity, portray our Project 29 Pathways program in some detail, and close by discussing outcomes and lessons learned.

Setting the Chicago Context

The number of Latino students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is growing rapidly but the number of Latino teachers, though a developing presence, does not keep pace. In just 12 years, 1992 to 2004, the CPS Latino student population grew 9%, from 29% of 411,582 students, to 38% of 426,812 students. By contrast Latino teachers increased only 4%, from under 10% in 1992 to 13.2% in 2004. A similar disparity confronts students who are English language learners and the bilingual/ESL teachers available to teach them. Approximately 14.1% of CPS students are identified as limited English-proficient, and approximately 4 of every 5 English language learners (ELLs) speak Spanish. The *Illinois Bilingual Education Programs: 2004 Evaluation Report* tallies 58,447 Spanish-speaking English language learners in Chicago public schools in 2004 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2005).

The perennial shortage in Chicago and in Illinois of certified bilingual/ESL teachers to serve ELL students continues. The shortage has been so severe that the Illinois State Board of Education rushed to entitle Baccalaureate holders who passed a language proficiency test to a Type 29 provisional certificate to alleviate the bilingual/ESL teacher shortage. Type 29 holders were given six years to attain an initial teaching certificate plus a bilingual/ESL "approval" on the certificate. In 1993, CPS hired 576 Type 29 bilingual teachers, approximately 80% of them Latino; by 1997, their numbers nearly doubled; two-thirds of ELL students were being taught by teachers with provisional teaching certificates.

In 1992, CPS turned to us for help when it became apparent that few Type 29 holders would achieve regular certification within the six-year time limit. We were a logical choice: our College has a long history of preparing predominantly Latino bilingual teachers for Chicago's public schools. Coincidentally, CPS contacted us around the time Bank Street College, on behalf of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Foundation, invited colleges of education to apply for a planning grant to propose a *Pathways to Teaching Careers Program* (PTCP). The parent PTCP was launched in 1989 to increase the number of certified teachers in high-need public schools, particularly teachers of color. Our opportunity grew out of PTCP's decision to fund a Northeast and Midwest Expansion. We recognized immediately that *Pathways* presented a unique opportunity to apply what we had learned about preparing prospective bilingual teachers to the preparation of provisionally certified teachers.

We were awarded an initial planning grant, and subsequently both a four-year $600,000 implementation grant plus a two-year $200,000 extension grant. The grants covered costs of tuition, a half-time faculty program director, and miscella-

neous expenses. Bank Street College offered technical assistance to the Northeast/ Midwest Expansion programs, and the Urban Institute conducted the *Pathways* evaluation (Clewell & Villegas, 2001a). Bank Street brought the *Pathways* directors and sometimes the *Pathways* Scholars (as the teacher candidates were called) together intermittently through the life of the program. They helped us celebrate our accomplishments, and held us accountable for reporting progress and for institutionalizing our respective programs.

The Project 29 Pathways Program

Each *Pathways* program determined its own strategies, uniquely tailored to its own students and urban context. We named our program Project 29 after the provisional Type 29 certificate our Pathways Scholars possessed. Key program components are elaborated below, beginning with the recruitment and selection of Project 29 Scholars.

Recruitment and Selection: Valuing Educational and Life Experiences

We recruited for Project 29 at a propitious time: the six-year limit for the Type 29 certificate created a demand for a program like ours. We immediately created an advisory board, including members of the Human Resources and Language and Cultural Education departments of CPS. In addition to providing a valuable sounding board for program development, the advisory board helped us publicize the program to prospective Spanish-English bilingual CPS teachers through flyers, newsletters, and recruitment meetings.

We admitted one cohort of Project 29 Pathways Scholars annually in the fall term. All applicants had to meet our regular graduate elementary education admissions criteria (3.75 GPA, three letters of recommendation, writing sample and, more recently, passing scores on required Illinois State Board of Education certification tests), although we occasionally made GPA exceptions. We also interviewed each applicant. Because many of our applicants were already experienced provisionally certified teachers, we asked them to relate to us how they came to choose teaching as a career path, what experiences led them to make the decision to teach, and what progress they had made towards attaining a teaching certificate. We noticed early on that certain characteristics and experiences seemed to predict good bilingual teacher potential, similar to the way Haberman's (1995) characteristics of star teachers of children in poverty predicted urban teacher potential:

· Educators in the family, especially in Chicago Public Schools.
· Caring for other siblings or family members or years of experience parenting.
· Activism and leadership activities.
· Development of special talent or ability.
· Good student, or former poor student-made-good.
· Coaching or teaching experience.

· Unusual perseverance in the face of obstacles.
· Time living or working abroad.
· Proficiency in another language.
· Prior career or extended volunteer work in social work or other related field.

Our Project 29 candidates exhibited group qualities strikingly different from other Chicago-bound candidates with baccalaureate degrees. Owing in part to their age and maturity, Project 29 Scholars' educational and life experiences and key attributes foreshadowed their longevity in the teaching profession. Similar to applicants for alternative certification programs, many of the Scholars made a conscious choice to enter teaching from diverse professions such as law, business, engineering, social services, and the media. A majority had at least three years of teaching experience in CPS when they began the program and some had as many as nine years. Many had taught in other countries and brought rich and alternative understandings about education. We served returning Peace Corps volunteers, published artists, well-known singers and musicians, well-traveled individuals, multilingual persons, and former housemaids. Many told stories of astonishing immigration challenges, from walking across the Rio Grande to having to take refuge with a Chicago Ethiopian social service agency. A surprising number of applicants grew up in communities where they were now teaching, and a few found themselves teaching in their old grade schools, underlining Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff's (2003) finding that teachers prefer to teach close to where they grew up. These factors equaled or sometimes outweighed GPAs in predicting good teacher potential. After we launched the program, teachers in the first two cohorts spread the word among their Latino networks of neighbors, co-workers, and relatives—including siblings and spouses—and recruitment took care of itself.

Advising: Creating Family-Like Support Systems

This program component was cited as an "outstanding program feature" in an external evaluation (Clewell & Villegas, 2001a). Initially, the lead director (Sakash) performed a preliminary analysis of each student's transcripts to develop an individualized plan of studies to meet the requirements for certification and the master's degree. She identified courses that might be transferred, as well as courses needed to fulfill general education requirements, and provided each student with a written plan. While the students' transcripts were eventually evaluated by the College's certification officer and the graduate admissions/degree advisor, the early one-on-one assistance communicated to students that they were supported and could count on a relationship with one caring individual to ensure their success.

Not surprisingly, academic advising often included problem solving around unexpected life circumstances and barriers (e.g., divorce, child-bearing, death of family members, childcare, changing schools, spouse's loss of job, finances). We did not adhere to a "sink-or-swim" attitude about student support and advisement; indeed, we definitely inclined toward what some faculty dismissively termed

"hand-holding," believing that full-time working professionals seeking to improve themselves can use all the support we can give them towards success.

From the start we implemented an advisory model developed by Bank Street College for supporting students. Groups of six to eight students met regularly throughout their program to discuss issues of importance to them in their schools and lives. Scholars in these advisories garnered support from their peers and created a cohesive sense of identity as bilingual teachers. We encouraged communication in either Spanish or English, and sought other ways to respect language and cultural issues in these small groups. This helped solidify the peer-to-peer support which eventually became one of the hallmarks of the program. Networks formed in the advisories resulted in teachers helping classmates change school assignments; siblings, spouses, and other relatives finding jobs and entering the program; and the development of life-long friendships and professional relationships that continue today.

We embedded the small-group advisory meetings in a program-long seminar through which we provided Scholars with ongoing academic, professional, and personal advising. The seminar included information about changing program and certification requirements, followed up on field supervision visits, offered support with electronic portfolio requirements and passing state required certification tests, and communicated program- and CPS-relevant news.

Curriculum: Adapting the Program to Scholars' Unique Experiences and Needs

It was essential that our curriculum acknowledge and draw on Scholars' personal and cultural attributes (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Each Project 29 Scholar embodied several cultural contexts, among them professional, ethnic, and academic. We recognized that the Scholars' program had to be responsive to any current and previous experience as teachers. We were also aware that Project 29 served predominantly Latino Scholars, many born and schooled in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Central and South America. We realized that each Scholar could share unique insights about the teaching of English language learners with graduate elementary classmates who had not yet taught.

Our elementary certification requirements comprised general and professional education credits. Students completed general education courses as needed at community colleges or online. Our professional elementary education curriculum comprised nine courses leading to a master's degree with elementary certification: three foundations courses (9 hrs.); two literacy courses, one focusing on bilingualism (8 hrs.); two methods courses, one integrating mathematics and science, and the other integrating literature, social studies, and the arts (12 hrs.); a course on the inclusion of students with disabilities (3 hrs.); and student teaching (12 hrs.). We invited a bilingual mathematics education professor to team-teach the mathematics/science methods course; and in our integrated literature/social studies/arts

course, we took care to incorporate the rich cultural capital in the humanities and the arts that many of our Project 29 candidates brought with them. Modifications made to courses were cited as another "outstanding program feature" by external evaluators (Clewell & Villegas, 2001a). To qualify for the bilingual approval, students took an additional four courses (16 hrs.) in bilingual education/ESL, covering topics in theory, methods, assessment, foundations, and linguistics.

We intentionally integrated the Scholars and their fellow graduate elementary students in program courses for several reasons. We thought the Scholars would benefit from mixing with more recent students who were savvy about academic life and university culture. We knew that understanding and negotiating the bureaucratic structures common in a large public urban college could present unique challenges to the Scholars, especially to those who had not completed their baccalaureate degrees in the U. S.

Moreover, we recognized that integrating a significant number of Latinos into the existing graduate elementary program would positively influence non-bilingual teacher candidates (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). Project 29 Scholars were practicing teachers who not only knew more about K-8 teaching and learning than their non-teaching peers, but also knew much more about serving English language learners. Our other students and our own faculty saw the Scholars as a distinctive resource to enhance teacher preparation and embraced their participation.

We accommodated the special needs of Project 29 Scholars in two ways. First, to help Project 29 Scholars negotiate the combined load of full-time teaching and graduate school, we required enrollment in *"Teaching and Learning in a Bilingual Classroom"* during the program. Herein we gave attention to praxis issues—how program learnings were supporting Scholars' daily elementary teaching duties. We conducted the first of seven observations in Scholars' classrooms, primarily to understand their needs as teachers with no previous pedagogical preparation. This process revealed a need to alter our own curriculum with respect to the learning needs of ELLs (e.g., dual language instructional issues, accommodating children with varying language proficiency levels, creating learning environments for children with large gaps in previous schooling, mainstreaming issues).

We encouraged Scholars to exchange stories. By doing so, they built a collective confidence and trust that contributed mightily to their success (see Bryk & Schneider, 2004). We recreated a family atmosphere for cohort members by design, accenting cultural values for family and community, teamwork and collaboration. We asked each Scholar to write an autobiographical paper explaining his or her journey into teaching, helping them (and us) understand the language and cultural strengths of their current K-8 students and themselves. The resonance of trust and empathy from listening to one another's astonishing personal stories and struggles during Friday evening potluck suppers created a mutually supportive ambience within and across cohorts.

We also accommodated the Scholars by creating a special "student teaching"

course. We applied for and received from the state board of education a special "deviation from compliance" to allow Project 29 Scholars to "student teach" in their own classrooms. They engaged in teacher inquiry, received focused observations by bilingual field instructors who provided them detailed, specific feedback, and joined with general program monolingual teachers from their schools to conduct a peer-to-peer collaborative project. Our inquiry assignment emulated a prior successful collaborative initiative, Project TeamWorks (Sakash & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995).

Program Outcomes

Three external evaluations of Project 29 were conducted (Clewell & Villegas, 2001a; Li, 2003; Li, 2005), as well as internal annual evaluations. Findings from the evaluations can be clustered into three areas: Project 29 teacher effectiveness and retention, quality of leadership support and development, and extent of institutionalization.

Teacher Effectiveness and Retention

Clewell and Villegas (2001a) analyzed survey data from principals/supervisors of teachers in *Pathways* programs in four domains of teacher effectiveness: organizing content knowledge, creating a classroom environment, teaching for student learning, and teacher professionalism. Data comparing the teaching performance of *Pathways* teachers with that of typical novice teachers indicated *Pathways* Scholars are perceived by both their supervisors and an independent assessor to be more effective than typical novice teachers in their schools.

> Particularly noteworthy was the participants' ability to create an environment for student learning — the teaching domain that attained the highest rating across all three data sources. This domain includes the ability to create a climate that promotes fairness, to establish and maintain rapport with students, to communicate challenging learning expectations, to establish and maintain standards of behavior, and to make the physical environment safe. We suspect that the participants' overall teaching effectiveness may be related to two key Program factors — their careful recruitment and selection, and the rigorous pedagogical training they received in the program. (p. 45)

Since 1993-1994, Project 29 has enrolled 194 provisionally certified teachers in the graduate elementary master's program, comprising 12 cohorts with a program retention rate of 95 percent. One hundred forty-five completed the degree program and are fully certified; the remaining Scholars are still in the program. Of the certified Project 29 teachers, four out of every five (79.3%) are teachers of color and three out of every four (75.6%) are Latino, compared with two out of every five (39.8%) teachers of color and 13.7% Latinos for the non-Project 29 graduate elementary teachers.

Compared with their non-Project 29 peers, Project 29 teachers are double the proportion of teachers of color, and quintuple the proportion of Latino teachers. Moreover, Project 29 teachers represent other language groups, including Scholars

from Poland, China, Korea, Iraq, and the Philippines. Project 29-certified teachers serve schools in all of the predominantly Latino communities of Chicago (south-southwest and north-northwest), CPS magnet schools mostly on Chicago's north side, and several African American schools.

Project 29 teacher post-graduate data are impressive and inspiring. Reviewing the available data from 1995 forward, Project 29 teachers are far more likely to teach in Chicago Public Schools than graduates from all programs at the University of Illinois at Chicago, combined (93% vs. 59%). They are also more likely to teach in predominantly Latino schools (average 77.9% vs. 40.7% Latino student body) and poorer schools (average 86.3% vs. 60.6% low-income). They teach in slightly lower-achieving schools (53.6% vs. 58% of students meeting or exceeding state achievement standards). And, on average, they have taught longer in CPS than peers graduated from all of our programs combined (5.1 vs. 3.7 years).

Findings are similar when we compare Project 29 teachers and other teachers from the same graduate elementary program from 2000 forward. Project 29 teachers are more likely to teach in CPS (96% vs. 80%), and more likely to teach in predominantly Latino schools (average 79.0% vs. 43.3% Latino student body) and poorer schools (average 86.3% vs. 73.8% low-income). On average, they have taught longer in CPS (5.1 years vs. 3.7 years) in schools with similar achievement levels (53.6% vs. 52.4% of students meeting or exceeding state standards).

Leadership Support and Development

The Clewell and Villegas (2001a) external evaluation cited the development of leadership among the Scholars as another "outstanding program feature" of Project 29. Scholars reported that critical to their becoming leaders was being treated like professionals, being recognized as having significant knowledge already, and being respected. We consciously developed the curriculum to create authentic learning opportunities for Scholars' advanced development levels. Scholars tackled meaningful school-based projects and contextualized their assignments by using their own classrooms as learning laboratories.

When National Board Certification appeared (it did not exist in the early years of the project), we knew many Project 29 Scholars could attain it. We began preparing Scholars for National Board Certification by having them critically analyze videotapes of their own and others' teaching and conducting action research in their classrooms. When they observed and collaborated with non-bilingual teachers, they were perceived as knowledgeable in their own schools.

Scholars presented their research and teaching activities at state and local conferences. A number of Scholars presented at major national conferences such as National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) and American Educational Research Association (AERA). Additional examples of leadership included organizing a professional conference for other certification students and faculty, publishing a journal, writing grants, applying for and winning awards, mentoring

student teachers, teaching bilingual certification courses, and pursuing doctoral studies. Several Scholars assumed administrative roles in their schools, including bilingual coordinator, science coordinator, and advisory committee member. Still others attained district positions such as assistant principal, principal, and regional or central office administrator.

We observed Project 29 Scholars' transformation from teachers with a more or less inchoate pedagogical background into leaders with assured purpose in their goals (Li, 2005). One Scholar echoed this outcome:

> Today I was an instrument of change in some people's lives. I say this with humility and gratitude. I was asked to give a presentation at the Twentieth Annual Statewide Conference for Teachers of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students. I spoke about how I integrate music in teaching English as a second language to my first and second grade students. At the end of the presentation a few people came up to thank me. . . . Who would have thought that I could have spoken to seventy people? (Schiel, 1997)

Institutionalization

Those of us in the field have seen many programs—and their funding—come and go. Too often a worthy program that cannot be institutionalized may not survive. Moving such programs from the margins into the core requires resources along with leadership and legitimacy. And wherever resources are limited, the institutional politics of competitive interests plays a role.

While Project 29 had existing champions from among the bilingual education faculty from day one, it did not begin with institutional support from the parent graduate elementary program. The co-directors, one of whom was a part-time, non-tenured member of the bilingual education faculty and the other an associate dean, provided a leadership structure that initially suggested a program with the earmarks of marginality. Indeed, Project 29 began on "soft," non-recurring funds, had little to no support from tenure-line faculty, served students traditionally not well served by higher education, existed by virtue of a waiver from the State, and had no clear plan for transition to permanent status.

However, because *Pathways* annually held us accountable for progress toward institutionalizing Project 29, we actively sought ways to anchor the program within the mainstream graduate elementary program. The appointment of one of the Project 29 co-directors as dean of the college and the other as graduate elementary program coordinator were unequivocally instrumental in facilitating and accelerating institutionalization. In 1996, the associate dean became acting dean, and then permanent dean in 1997. The other co-director, who became sole Project 29 director in 1996 and who has remained with Project 29 for the entire 13 years, became a full-time faculty member and was appointed graduate elementary program coordinator in 2003. The dean and program coordinator together have provided senior sponsorship for Project 29 and systemic operations affecting all certification programs

generally. Institutional commitment developed over time as the co-founders of the program acquired growing institutional responsibility and as the program director sustained a multi-year dialogue with teacher educators throughout the College.

As graduate elementary program coordinator, the Project 29 director chairs the campus teacher certification assessment committee. In that role, she has influenced directly the assessment of teacher candidates in over 20 certification programs. Not only has she been able to serve as advocate and induct Project 29 Scholars into their program, but she has also directly led and effected the institutionalization of Project 29 within the graduate elementary program with the full support of the dean/former co-director.

Situating Project 29 inside a mainstream College program, even within an uncertain State certification context that occasioned wholesale program changes, greatly eased the process of institutionalization. Over time, students knew where to turn in learning how to negotiate the system while pursuing the dual goal of a Master's degree and certification. The coordinator became familiar with support systems in the College and the University, and was able to refer students to the appropriate offices and personnel for matters like improving English proficiency, taking general education courses at community colleges, understanding academic expectations and rules, passing the state exams, transferring credit from other institutions, and getting properly registered. She gauged when and how best to deliver such information. She could call on prior cohorts to help later cohorts get answers to similar questions. In turn, learning more about the inner workings of the University's system and the essential policies and procedures of the degree and certification process led the coordinator to understand how to use the bureaucracy to overcome obstacles and create new pathways for intermediate goals and for students in programs.

Today, all graduate elementary teacher candidates are interviewed. Our colleagues have adopted the intensive, personalized advising support for student cohorts in multiple, albeit not yet all, programs. Most recently, within the College, the broad topic of student advising has sparked serious and ongoing conversations and debate about the kinds of academic and social supports a diverse student body deserves. We have achieved sufficient consensus around the importance of student recruitment and support such that our faculty enthusiastically endorsed the hiring of our first director of student recruitment.

Funding

We must emphasize that the best of programs preparing teachers of color cannot survive without adequate funding for tuition and other supports for teacher candidates. Our original grant funded tuition and fees for general and professional education coursework leading to elementary teacher certification with a bilingual/ESL approval and a master's degree as well as other material forms of student support. When the original four-year phase of funding by DeWitt Wallace-Reader's

Digest (1993-1997) ended, we applied for and received a smaller Phase II institutionalization grant. We stretched that funding for another year and successfully applied for a Title VII federally-funded grant under the Teachers and Personnel category which supported four more years (2001-2005). Meanwhile, we leveraged support from other federally funded projects and from CPS to enhance our ability to provide scholarships to Project 29 students. It is a constant challenge to recruit and support Latino and African American teacher candidates, particularly as federal funding drops.

Conclusion

We have learned much from non-traditional data sources (Sleeter, 2001) about recruiting, preparing, and retaining Latino teachers that other institutions may find useful when creating similar programs. Our program was strengthened by an intentional design based on mutual need. The teachers needed job security, obtained by full certification. We sought to increase the supply of qualified minority teachers to urban school districts. We were able to secure continued funding to support 12 cohorts, supplying a steady stream of fully certified bilingual teachers to the Chicago Public Schools. The program respected the vast, collective experience and knowledge that the teachers brought and we further utilized these resources to inform our general teacher education program about teaching English language learners. Whenever teacher leadership surfaced we encouraged and supported it. The persistent commitment and program longevity of the co-directors, coupled with gradual and continuous experimentation and integration of successful elements of this initial "stepchild" program, led to institutionalization and an ability to supply CPS with Latino teacher-leaders.

Institutionalizing programs such as Project 29 responds directly to the conclusions of a 2002 summit that addressed diversity in the teaching force (see National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004): "Although teacher quality has been accepted and internalized as a mantra for school reform, the imperative for diversity is often marginalized rather than accepted as central to the quality equation in teaching." We agree that the "power of their presence" is the foundation of transformation in urban teacher education (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). Like one Scholar wrote of her sister "who like only a very few, having made it out in the world, went back for those she left behind" (Cardenas, 1997), our Scholars are dedicated to not leaving their own behind.

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