2 LATINOS WITH INTERRUPTED EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Latinos are by far the largest linguistic minority in the United States, composing about 20% of the total population (Pew Research Center, 2013; U.S. Census, 2011). The term **Latinos** or **Hispanics** will be used somewhat interchangeably in this chapter, with Latinos being the larger population including anyone from Latin America, and with Hispanics referring only to the Spanish-speaking portion of the group. The phrase *Latin America* will encompass all the areas of North and South America in which Latin-based languages are spoken, predominately Spanish, but also French Creole and Portuguese.

Other than language heritage, the area represents extreme diversity in ethnicity, socio-economics, and educational opportunities. Some of the issues faced by new arrivals from this world area are common to several of the countries, while others are more particular to certain countries or areas. Attempts will be made to not overgeneralize, but to look at trends and concerns that some of the students from these countries bring with them as they enter U.S. schools. This chapter will focus on the issues that impact the education and social integration of new arrivals whose educational experiences in their home countries are affecting their academic success today.

The top Latin American countries represented in the continental United States, according to the Pew Research Center (2016), are listed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Number of Latinos Living in the United States

Mexico	35,371,000
Puerto Rico (living in the U.S.)	5,319,000
El Salvador	2,100,000
Cuba	2,045,000
Dominican Republic	1,763,000
Guatemala	1,324,000
Colombia	1,046,000
Honduras	812,000
Haiti	616,000

Why Latinos Are Coming to the United States

As has been the case throughout history, people who are leaving their home country and culture are usually doing so for what is commonly termed either *push* or *pull* factors (Noguera, 2014, p. 295). Push factors are those that cause a person to leave because life has become difficult or even dangerous, such as war, natural disaster, or political upheaval. A pull factor is one that attracts **immigrants** such as economic or educational opportunity, religious or political freedom, or family ties. Immigrants from Latin America have chosen to come to the United States for a combination of both types of factors. Many of the countries listed above have experienced political or economic upheaval, and the resultant disarray has led many to flee to an area that offers physical or economic safety, often the United States. However, the political climate in the United States has not always been the most welcoming and peaceful for these new arrivals. Issues that can arise because of this dichotomy will be addressed later in the chapter.

These push and pull factors are especially strong for adolescent Latinos.

> Many arrive without having experienced formal education in their countries of origin nor literacy in their native Spanish language. Consequently, there is growing evidence that immigrant youth are susceptible to a variety of hardships and pressures that many adults, including their parents, do not fully understand. These challenges and hardships encountered by Latino immigrant

> youth living in a society where hostility toward their presence is growing must be of concern to educators, service providers, and policymakers. . . . Many Latino immigrants leave to escape the ravages of political violence, to flee the suffering caused by unrelenting poverty, or in the wake of a natural disaster that has destroyed jobs, communities and possibilities for advancement. There are also those who come as political refugees to escape war, persecution, and torture. Even though they must overcome tremendous obstacles—barbed wire fences, coast guard vessels, or armed militias, they still come because for many, immigration offers the only possibility of hope. (Noguera, 2014, pp. 295–296)

Although most new arrivals face challenges, and must overcome social and well as physical barriers, it is the new arrivals from these countries with significant educational gaps that will be considered in this chapter. While it is possible to have students from Colombia and Cuba with interrupted educations, the percentages are so low (Lukes, 2015) that those countries will not be discussed in this chapter.

SITUATIONS AND CONDITIONS IN LATIN AMERICA THAT MAY CONTRIBUTE TO INTERRUPTED EDUCATIONS

Mexico

By far, the majority of Latinos in the United States have their roots in Mexico. Some are recent arrivals and others have a heritage in the United States that dates back to before the annexation of the Southwest by the growing nation more than 150 years ago. One reference to this heritage is the statement that for some Mexican-Americans, they crossed the border, but for others, the border crossed them.

It is impossible to look at the educational challenges of recent arrivals from Mexico without discussing the overwhelming impact of their immigration status. The percentage of Mexican-Americans immigrants who are undocumented is just over 50%. (It was 52% in 2012 and the percent has been declining for close to a decade, according to the Migration Policy Institute.) The implications of life in the shadows affect almost every aspect of life. In a recent study by Casteñada, Felt, Martinez-Taboada, Casteñada, and Ramirez (2013), it was found that more than half of young Mexican immigrants live in poverty or in near poverty. They also found

that "[m]ore than any other group, Mexican immigrants have very little access to health insurance in the United States. In 2010, more than half (55%) of all Mexican immigrants living in the US did not have health insurance" (Casteñada et al., 2013, p. 70). And with adolescents, the percentage rises to 65%.

Another consequence of life "without papers" is the large number of students who are living with the uncertainly and fear this type of life generates. Young children, who often don't understand the concept of "authorized immigration status," will still be aware of the fear and anxiety that it causes. They may be afraid to leave home and go to school out of uncertainty of what may happen while they are gone, especially if they have witnessed the devastation of arrest and deportation of friends or family members. They may cling to the remaining family members, have nightmares, cry excessively, or have trouble eating and sleeping. Older youth may express their frustration and fear through depression, aggression, or rebellion at home or at school. And they may decide that rather than focus on the long-term, unsure benefits of an education, they will get a job and make as much money as possible while they can. When combined with the difficulties of being able to enter the post-secondary education world (which will be discussed later in the chapter), the allure of even a low-paying job is strong (Macias, 2015).

While not all undocumented immigrants are from Mexico, they definitely make up the largest percentage. In total, the

> Mexican unauthorized population stands at about 6.7 million, compared with about 500,000 for the next-largest source country (El Salvador), and as a group, unauthorized Mexicans have been in the country longer than others. Consequently, this group dominates the children of unauthorized immigrants. . . . The 450,000 U.S.-born children of unauthorized immigrants from Central and South America make up the next largest group. (Passel, 2011, p. 21)

While being undocumented does not equate to being categorized as students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), far too many Mexican-American students, especially adolescents, fit into both groups.

Educational System in Mexico

One of the major reasons children from Mexico make up a large percentage of students with interrupted schooling is the education system of Mexico. A recent book by Margarite Lukes (2015) titled *Latino Immigrant Youth and Interrupted Schooling: Dropouts, Dreamers, and Alternative Pathways*

to College looks at the educational opportunities available in the home countries of many Latino students and discusses how those education systems contribute to the issues many of these children face. For example, she states that

> [c]ompulsory schooling in Mexico was limited to *primaria* or elementary school (six years) until 1993. In Mexico, nearly 17% of those between the ages of 12 and 15 have never attended school, while more than 25% do not finish the six compulsory years of school. Almost 50% of Mexicans leave school after elementary school and another 13% leave without finishing secondary education. Thus, nearly two thirds of the Mexican population do not complete nine years of education. (Lukes, 2015, p. 61)

This is especially true of students in rural or impoverished urban areas. The situation is compounded by the fact that

> students from Mexico may believe that they have completed their education upon finishing *la secundaria*, the equivalent of ninth grade in the U.S. because that is the end of compulsory education in Mexico. Upon immigrating to the U.S., these students may be unaware of the expectation to continue their education until the age of 18. (*Focus on SLIFE*, 2015, p. 1)

Since compulsory education ends with grade nine in Mexico, many students are confused and frustrated when they find out that U.S. laws and U.S. schools expect them to continue with their education until age 18. Additionally, many are expected to repeat grade nine because their transcripts may not indicate the completion of the typical grade nine courses for a U.S. high school. This is especially frustrating for the youth who choose to come to the United States to work, thinking they are ready for employment. One researcher stated that for many Mexican youth, this is *la edad para ir al norte*—"The age to go north" (Lopez Castro, 2005). These educational factors could contribute to the 60% dropout rate of Mexican immigrants (Cortina, 2009).

Many Mexican immigrants choose not to enroll in school when they arrive in the United States and enter directly into the workforce (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). While they will obviously not be included in the dropout rate, they also will never obtain the all-important high school diploma and probably be relegated to low-wage jobs for life. In Lukes's study of Latinos in New York City, she found that Mexican immigrants have about a 40% nonenrollment rate, and it can be assumed that the

percentage would be somewhat similar in other areas of the country. In a 2005 study by Fry for the Migration Policy Institute, the percentages are even more disturbing: Of recently arrived Mexican-born teens who did not keep up in school before coming to the United States, 83% were not enrolled in school. Hernandez, Denton, McCartney, & Blanchard (2012, p. 32) believe that "our education policy must address two very different populations, children for whom the education system has failed and adolescents and young adults who have never been touched by the US education system."

Work or School?

Recently, a door-to-door survey was conducted in an apartment complex in a Midwestern school district with a large Latino population. The desire was to identify school-age residents who would qualify for migrant assistance programs such as a summer tutoring and lunch program. The team conducting the survey returned to the school reporting that 12 teenagers, ranging in age from 13 to 18, had been discovered within just a few hours who had never enrolled in school since arriving in the United States. Ten were boys and two were girls, and all had chosen to obtain a job rather than enroll in school. Some stated that they didn't even realize that they were eligible for or permitted to attend school, or that it was required of teens in the United States. Some later enrolled, others simply disappeared.

How much of the high dropout rate of about 40%, as well as the non-enrollment rate, is caused by the pull to employment, how much is affected by the limited educational backgrounds and experiences before arrival, and how much is a result of the immigration status of these children is impossible to determine. Probably it is a combination of all of these factors and others as well. But schools need to be aware of these factors when dealing with Mexican immigrants and take these factors into consideration when planning curriculum and programming. Without immediate and drastic interventions, this new "underclass" of people in the United States will continue to grow—undereducated, living in poverty, and with limited or no access to health care.

Why is Mexican immigration declining?

While the number of immigrants from Mexico remain by far the largest nationality in the United States, the number and the percentage is actually on the decline. The number of recent immigrants from Mexico

fell from 369,000 in 2005 to 125,000 in 2013, a 66% reduction in just eight years, according to the Census Bureau study. While legal immigration from Mexico declined slowly from 161,000 in FY 2005 to 135,000 in FY 2013, illegal migration fell much more rapidly. Southwest border apprehensions of Mexican nationals, which indicate patterns of illegal entries, topped 1 million in FY 2005, falling to a historic low of 229,000 in FY 2014. Furthermore,

> [a] coincidental alignment of economic and demographic factors in both countries has spurred the decline in illegal immigration from Mexico. In the United States, the Great Recession significantly weakened the economy, and in particular depressed demand for low-wage workers, in construction and also in agriculture and other sectors that traditionally employ Mexican unauthorized workers. Equally important, the United States has significantly strengthened the immigration enforcement system in the past decade, making it more risky and costly to cross the border, and by deporting unauthorized immigrants quickly and in record numbers. (Chishti & Hipsman, 2015, p. 4)

While this pattern change will have an impact on schooling new arrivals in the United States, those who are already here and the significant numbers who are still arriving will continue to require specialized assistance. And while the number of recent immigrants from Mexico may be on the decline, the number of students from Central America is rising dramatically.

Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua)

Many people from Central America began arriving in the United States during and immediately after the civil wars that rocked Guatemala and El Salvador in the early 1980s. When it became evident that requesting **political asylum** from the bloody revolutions was not going to be granted, most chose instead to live undocumented (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

The economies of these two countries, and also that of neighboring Honduras and Nicaragua (after the fall of the Sandinistas), has led to unemployment rates of almost 50% and a precipitous rise of drug- and gang-related violence that has resulted in a mass exodus from these countries. Some people are internally displaced, some have moved to more stable areas in Latin America, and thousands per year have trekked across Mexico to the Rio Grande border. Israel Medina (2014), a field psychologist

who works with Doctors Without Borders, made this statement in an article found in *Forced Migration Review*:

> In some regions of these countries [El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras], gang rule is absolute and young people are extremely vulnerable to forced recruitment into the gangs. Adolescents are continually intimidated and subjected to violence, pressurized into joining the gangs or working for them as drug pushers or in other roles. A recurrent theme in out-migration is the large number of children forced to leave their countries, exposing them to the dangerous conditions of the journey. Some families prefer to see their sons and daughters exiled rather than risk them being killed or forced into a life of crime. (p. 74)

An unprecedented number of emigrants from this violence-ridden area of the world are children. Those who make it to the southern border of the United States are overriding the ability of the legal and social services organizations to deal effectively with them. They have become known by their legal status as **unaccompanied minors** or unaccompanied alien children.

Who qualifies as an unaccompanied alien child?

An unaccompanied alien child is defined in the Homeland Security Act of 2002 as a child who (1) has no lawful immigration status in the United States; (2) has not yet attained 18 years of age, and (3) with respect to whom there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody. (Many educators prefer the term unaccompanied minors to the official term, UAC.)

Kids in Need of Defense, a non-profit organization that provides pro bono defense lawyers for these students, has recently published a document about the situation of these children. In a 2013 brief by KIND, they state that

> [t]he United States serves as a leading destination for thousands of children who migrate every year without a parent or legal guardian. They are escaping severe abuse and violence, persecution, extreme deprivation, and other human rights abuses such as female genital mutilation or forced marriage; others have been abandoned, or trafficked, and some are seeking work, hoping to go to school, or are trying to reunify with family members, many of whom had left the children behind years before. The children's

> migration can also be, and very often is, the result of a combination of these factors. (*Understanding and addressing the protection of immigrant children who come alone to the United States,* 2013, p. 5)

While about 15% of the children that they serve are from other parts of the world, the vast majority are arriving from Central America.

A large percentage of this exodus are young people, some as young as 6 or 7. The number of unaccompanied children has increased dramatically in the last 10 years from less than 2,000 in 2004 to almost 60,000 in 2014. They travel singly or in groups, often traveling part of the way on the roof of the train known as the *La Beastia* (a cargo train that makes the journey from southern Mexico to near the northern border). Most of the children who are caught as they cross the border give violence in their home countries as their main reason they are seeking asylum in the United States. Others are coming to join family members who came before them or to find employment to be able to send money back to desperate family members.

> These children are given into the care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, because they are asking for refugee asylum status. Most are united with family members or friends (90%), and some are kept in **ORR** [emphasis added] custody until some other placement is found (*Unaccompanied Alien Children U.S. Law and Policy Backgrounder*, 2014).

In a study prepared for Congress (Wasen & Morris, 2014) about the unaccompanied alien children arriving in FY2014, the following statistics were shared:

> 67% of the children were males and 33% females
>
> 25% were under the age of 12
>
> 38% were from Honduras
>
> 36% were from El Salvador
>
> 26% were from Guatemala

> The recent wave of unaccompanied minors coming to the United States from Central America also generally fit into the SLIFE [students with limited or interrupted educational education] category. The violence and poverty that many of these young people experienced in their native countries have led to limited and interrupted educational opportunities. (*Focus on SLIFE,* 2015, p. 1)

In addition, the typical education provided for many of the students in Central America impacts their ability to adjust quickly to U.S. schools and be successful. As with Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador do not require attendance after Grade 9, while Guatemala has compulsory education until Grade 11. However, only about 60%–70% of the eligible students actually attend in each of these countries. And even when enrolled in school, attendance may be sporadic and the quality of the education varies depending on the length of the school day, the quality of the materials and the training of the teachers, and the facilities available for instruction (Lukes, 2015).

Some of these unaccompanied children have faced difficulty enrolling in school after arrival because they may not have an immediate family member with whom to be placed, being placed instead with a more distant relative or even into foster care. Guardianship issues have led to some schools refusing entry. A May 8, 2014, memo issued jointly from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education, in response to this situation, reminds school districts that no child may be denied admission to school based on immigration status, referring to the ***Plyler v. Doe*** Supreme Court decision of 1982. In the workshop mentioned above, the immigration lawyers giving the presentation stated that when contacted by families, they have directed school districts to enroll students as homeless as described in the **McKinney-Vento Act** if there is not yet legal guardianship established. This gives the families time to obtain the proper guardianship paperwork needed by the schools and allows the students to be enrolled immediately.

Teacher Resource Suggestions: Additional information for school district personnel is available on the internet in two documents: *Legal Issues for School Districts Related to the Education of Undocumented Children* (National Education Association and National School Boards Association, 2009) and *Unaccompanied Children in Schools: What You Need to Know* (2015).

Ricardo's Story

Ricardo is a 15-year-old boy from Honduras. He attended school for 4 years until he quit to help his mother work on the farm. His mother was killed when he was 12 and he moved in with an uncle. When he was 14, he was threatened by a local gang member and told that he would be shot if he did not join. Reluctantly,

his uncle paid a **coyote** to help Ricardo escape and make the dangerous journey across Central America and Mexico to be reunited with a father he had never met. After 8 months, Ricardo crossed the border into Texas and was captured. He spent 2 months in a detention center until he was sent to Wisconsin to be with his father. Dad had since married and had other children, and the situation was uncomfortable and finally became untenable. He soon left dad and moved again to live with a cousin and uncle in a nearby state. Ricardo is now enrolled in a high school and struggling to fit in.

What types of academic and emotional supports will Ricardo need to be successful in his new setting?

Family Reunification Issues

Family reunification is extremely difficult when the family has been separated for so long. In a study conducted by the Harvard Immigration Project, 85% of immigrant children are separated from one or both parents sometime during the immigration process. For Central American children, the percentage rises to 96%, and the separation is of a much longer duration, and 80% of the time involved both parents (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

These authors also are concerned at the

> stunningly high proportion of newcomer students, both legal and illegal, who endure long separations from their parents is an issue of serious concern. Not only do the separations extract a high emotional cost for both parents and children, but they also often result in complicated and conflictual periods of adjustment when the family is finally reunited. (p. 375)

Furthermore, according to Rong and Priessle (2009), "Immigrant Central American children are more likely to have parents with fewer years of schooling and employment in menial jobs, to live in a linguistically isolated household, and to have English proficiency problems" (p. 245). They also have an extremely high dropout rate, almost twice the national average (p. 240).

While the number of minors who arrived in the United States during the fiscal year 2015 declined significantly to about half of the numbers in 2014, this still meant 30,000 new children entering U.S. schools with emotional issues to compound their academic challenges. And the numbers of unaccompanied alien children were back to the 2014 levels during the first half of fiscal year 2016.

Puerto Rico

The economy in Puerto Rico has been declining for almost two decades, and the impact of this is being felt in the education realm. One of the results of this economic decline has been the increase in people moving to the continental United States. The Pew Research Center says that this emigration is at its highest rate in 60 years, and it is affecting the number of students attending local Puerto Rican schools. The decline is so dramatic that there are about 40% fewer children in the schools than just 10 years ago (Krogstad, 2015). In fact, since the turn of the 21st century, there have been more Puerto Rican nationals living in the continental United States than on the island, and the trend continues.

As a result of this decline, educational funding from both Washington and San Juan has been cut. Schools that once had strong extracurricular activities and support services have been forced to cut back. Some of the incentives for secondary students to stay in school have disappeared at a time that the pressure to leave school and work to help support the family is growing. Some of these teens are choosing to move to the continental United States to look for work, but without first completing their high school diploma. And because they don't have the requirements to find a well-paying job in the United States, they either end up back in school with gaps in their education, are trapped in dead end jobs, or turn to drugs or crime for quick money.

Even students who have had consistent and uninterrupted education in Puerto Rico may have problems adjusting to the school system in the United States because their English is usually not at grade level. Many of the teachers in Puerto Rico teach reading and writing English as a subject, but instruction is in Spanish, and the students often have little opportunity to practice oral communication. (Personal interview with Sonia Colon, June 23, 2015, and Jose Luis Morales Crispin, July 21, 2015.)

Another consequence of the economic decline has been a shrinking of the salaries of teachers, which were already extremely low. Teachers are frustrated to see resources and student supports cut, leading to teacher strikes and work stoppages. All of these problems are leading to more students coming to U.S. schools on the mainland with interrupted educational experiences. (Personal conversation with Berena Cabarcas, principal of International Community High School in the Bronx.)

Implications for Teaching

In a study published in 2011 by Irizarry and Antrop-Gonzàlez, which focused on the factors leading to academic success for what they termed the "diasporicans," they found some exciting information. The researchers saw that teachers who

respected the language and culture of the students, and who created a personal relationship with them, were able to encourage a positive attitude toward school, increasing attendance and academic engagement (pp. 249–254).

"Traditional notions of cultural capital also tend to define Puerto Rican students and others of diverse cultural backgrounds by who they are not and what they may lack, as opposed to who they are and what assets they bring to school" (p. 250). They quoted one teacher in their study as saying,

> Culture is a big thing that needs to be affirmed. My students feel very strong about being Puerto Rican. Kids need to keep who they are without being assimilated to American culture to be able to understand who they are as people. It is hard to define American culture, but basically, they shouldn't have to give up one culture for a new one. If you are going to work with people in any setting, you need to know their culture.

The teachers in this study saw their knowledge of and concern for the culture of their students as a "mutually enriching partnership," in which both the teachers and the students gained from the relationship.

Another factor in the perceived success of the students and teachers in this study was the willingness of the teacher to allow code-switching in the classroom [going back and forth between two languages], as well as the use of the home language and even "Spanglish" in the classroom to create an atmosphere of acceptance and empowerment. And finally, the students voiced their belief that their families and communities, including their religious institutions, gave them an inner strength to succeed (p. 250).

What teaching implications does this study have for working with other Latino students?

See Chapter 4, "Providing Social and Emotional Support: Developing Resilient Students" for additional suggestions for building resilience in SIFE.

Dominican Republic

The situation of students from the Dominican Republic is also strongly impacted by the educational system in their home country. Most immigrants come through the sponsorship of family members living legally in the United States. There are approximately 1.7 million Dominicans in the United States, with 1 out of 3 living in the New York metropolitan area (Nwosu & Batalova, 2014).

> In this Caribbean nation of nearly 10 million people, the education system ranks among the worst in the world. . . . The Dominican Republic struggles with overcrowded classrooms in shoddy facilities. There's a high dropout rate, an outdated curriculum, overage

> students who fail classes and have to repeat grades, among other problems. But perhaps the most worrying issue is poorly trained teachers. . . . Across the country, about 40 percent of boys and girls leave school before eighth grade. Even those who get through high school and complete 12 years of school start college at a sixth-grade reading level, according to a Dominican university study. (Manning, 2014, p. 1)

Many students in the Dominican are not working at grade level and are required to repeat a grade because of excessive absences or broken enrollments. The issue of interrupted education is occurring even before the students leave and come to the United States. When these students arrive in the United States, their high rate of repeating grades due to excessive absence and poor attendance, often because of the economic demands that force children to work to support the family, impacts their academic success. "44% of Dominican elementary school students and 60% of secondary students are older than average for their grade" (Lukes, 2015, p. 39). In addition to issues related specifically to education, many children have their education interrupted by the need to work.

This background of low expectations and interrupted schooling affects the children who arrive in the United States. Very few students are prepared for grade-level academic expectations even in their native Spanish, and when compounded with the necessity of learning English as quickly as possible to prepare for graduation, the barriers may seem insurmountable. Lukes (2015), in her study of Latinos with interrupted schooling, calls for specialized programming for these students. With her focus on the education system in New York City, which is home to a substantial Dominican population, she saw the challenges that both the students and the schools face to meet the needs of students in the current political atmosphere with its inordinate focus on accountability. She states that

> [t]he US has failed systemically and nearly without exception to create incentives for schools to serve students of high school age who have gaps in literacy, English proficiency and academic skills. The very system that was created to hold schools accountable for ensuring high achievement of all students has perpetuated a dogged deficit-oriented view of certain students. (Lukes, 2015, pp. 41–42)

Despite this negative climate, the education systems of both New York City and the state of New York are working on developing specific SIFE curriculum, material, and programming for these students, many of whom are from the Dominican Republic. Building literacy and content skills,

while recognizing and acknowledging the culture and language capital of their students with limited schooling, are an attempt to not just keep students in school, but to allow them to reach their potential.

Haiti

Although Haiti shares the small island of Hispanola with its neighbor, the Dominican Republic, they have little else in common. The western third of Hispanola was given to the French in the 1600s, and rapidly became a wealthy colony with its economy based on the imported African slaves brought to work on the many plantations. In 1804, after a bloody struggle for independence, Haiti became the first black-led, post-colonial country in the world. The economy never fully recovered from the revolt, and today Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Dictators and political disruptions were finally replaced by a democratically elected leader in 2004, only to be devastated by a powerful earthquake in 2010, reported to be the strongest in the region in the last 200 years. Because of the political and economic difficulties in the country, people have been emigrating to other Caribbean countries as well as attempting to come illegally to the southern coast of the United States for decades. Many have gone to their neighbor, the Dominican Republic, for work and safety. Recently, the government of the Dominican Republic has decided that any undocumented Haitians are going to be aggressively found and deported, leading to strikes and protests. At the time of the writing of this book, the situation remains strained and unresolved.

For those families who make it to the United States, their reception is slightly more welcoming. Following the earthquake of 2010, the government decided to allow Haitian immigrants to apply for Temporary Protective Status **(TPS)**, allowing them to remain until conditions improve in Haiti. According to the Migration Policy Institute, there are about 600,000 Haitians in the United States, with the overwhelming majority living in Miami, New York City, Boston, Orlando, and Atlanta.

> Surveys conducted by the UNDP [United Nations Development Program] indicate that Haitians who are 25 years and older received on average only 4.9 years of education and only 29 percent attended secondary school. These statistics show that a generation of Haitian youth is at risk for not having the necessary knowledge and basic skills to succeed in the labor force and contribute to the continued development of the country. Most schools in Haiti have minimal government support, lack qualified instructors, and are relatively expensive. More than 80 percent of primary schools are privately

> managed by nongovernmental organizations, churches, communities, and for-profit operators, with minimal government oversight. School expenses are often a significant financial burden for low-income families. Half of public sector teachers in Haiti lack basic qualifications and almost 80 percent of teachers have not received any pre-service training. (USAID.gov website, 2014)

TYPICAL ISSUES OF LATINO SIFE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

While Latino students attending U.S. schools may have varied national backgrounds and may even speak different languages, there are some similarities in their experiences and their challenges. Listed below are some of the barriers that may contribute to the high dropout rate and lower academic achievement seen in many of these students. Recommendations will be provided, which may help ameliorate these barriers, providing support that will help students stay in school, graduate, and be prepared for life after high school.

Attendance

The poor attendance rate of some Latino students can be attributed to a number of key factors. Because many families are working in low-paying, minimum wage jobs, they may have to work more than one job to make enough money to support the family. Adolescents, especially girls, are often needed at home to care for young children so that parents are able to work. If a young child is sick, parents may not have the option of staying home. And when the children know more English that the parents, they may be needed as translators for appointments. Young men may be needed to help the older men at a construction or landscaping job, or they may be required to work day hours at their regular night job. Many teenagers work late hours and find the early hours of a typical high school impossible to maintain.

Another reason for disrupted attendance is the desire for families to maintain strong ties with relatives who remain in the home country. Often this results in the entire family returning for an extended Christmas vacation, or to sending children back home to care for aging relatives or to maintain the home language and culture. Pedro Noguera, in his study, states, "Finding ways to help reduce the strains caused by separation, while minimalizing the losses in learning associated with the extended absences, is an important pedagogical consideration for schools that serve large populations of Latino immigrant youth" (Noguera, 2014, p. 296).

Limited Postsecondary Options

The ability to attend college is a huge issue for undocumented students. As of 2009, only nine states permitted undocumented students to receive in-state tuition rates according to the National Immigration Law Center. In 2012, President Obama issued an executive order now known as **DACA** (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) that temporarily allowed undocumented students to attend college and get jobs. Since the implementation of DACA, the number of states who allow in-state tuition for undocumented students has risen from 9 to 24 (*Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals,* 2014). At the time of the writing of this book, there continues to be controversy and uncertainty over the future of this program. Repeated attempts to declare this executive action illegal have been unsuccessful, leaving these students in limbo yet again.

DACA was a reaction to the frustration over the inability of Congress to pass a version of the DREAM Act, which has been discussed and debated for several years. The DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act) would have allowed undocumented children to attend college, join the military, and gain legal employment. Despite numerous attempts to draft and pass this legislation, it has not gotten the majority of legislators behind it that would be required for passage.

DACA is an acronym for an executive order given by President Barack Obama in June 2012 to assist young people who arrived in the United States before 2007 and who were currently attending school or who had previously graduated. It allowed these students to be free from deportation, obtain a work permit, and in half of the states attend college at in-state tuition rates. It also allowed them to join the armed forces (see box below) and in most states, obtain a driver's license. It is not a path to citizenship, but it does provide a future for these students, even if only in the short term. (For more information on DACA and the DREAM Act, visit the National Immigration Law Center at nilc.org.)

Suggestions for Supporting DACA Students

School employees, and especially high school counselors, need to familiarize themselves with the impact of DACA in their own state. Some school districts are not allowing students who had previously left school to return and complete high school, in violation of their rights to an education. More states are allowing in-state tuition each year, and some are even permitting state financial aid to be

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available to undocumented students. Legal action to allow "DACAmented" students to join the military is hoping to open those doors soon as well. With driver's licenses available in most states and many colleges open to undocumented students, DACA is providing students with more reason than ever to stay in school and graduate.

Impact of Immigration Status

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the impact of immigration status for many Latinos cannot be overemphasized. Aside from students from Puerto Rico, who are U.S. citizens, a significant number of students from many of the other Latin American countries are not in the U.S. legally. For many of the other students, the possibility of coming through legal channels is remote if not virtually impossible. In addition to the stress of uncertainly about limited opportunities to life after high school, living with the constant threat of discovery and deportation affects almost every aspect of life while still in school.

When thinking about the impact on children of their or their parents' immigration status, the authors of *Learning a New Land* ask this question: "Are we willing to pay the price of having nearly two million children and youth living in the shadows, sentenced to managing life as undocumented immigrants? . . . Our challenge is to make sure that they will one day be able to better themselves and contribute to their new society" (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008, p. 375). This belief mirrors the landmark Supreme Court decision that opened the doors to elementary and secondary education to anyone living in the United States.

***Plyler v. Doe*—1982 Supreme Court Decision**

In 1982, the Supreme Court announced its decision on a case overturning a Texas law in which school districts would receive funds only for the education of children legally in the country. This decision, known as ***Plyler v. Doe,*** found that school districts must not consider a child's immigration status a factor for enrollment. In the majority opinion, written by Justice Douglas, the court stated that because "the illegal alien of today may well be the legal alien of tomorrow," and that without an education, these undocumented children, who are already at a

disadvantage as a result of poverty, lack of English-speaking ability, and undeniable racial prejudices "will become permanently locked into the lowest socioeconomic class." He continued by writing,

> By denying these children a basic education, we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation.

Poor Educational Opportunities in the Home Countries

An extensive study of the educational experiences of Latino immigrants was conducted by Marguerite Lukes and published in 2015. One of the most compelling components of her study was a chart listing how many years of compulsory education is required in many Latin American countries and what percentage of the eligible population actually attends. This information helps educators in the United States to understand why so many of our Latino students are ill-prepared for the academic challenges of secondary school.

The total educational picture of students from Latin America must also include the type of education being received in the school when attending. "Quality of schooling is a moving target and includes factors such as time spent in the classroom, quality of materials, instructional design, teacher quality and academic achievement and literacy levels" (Lukes, 2015, p. 59).

Table 2.2 Years of Compulsory Education in Latin America

Country	Years Required	Percentage Actually Attending Final Grade
U.S.	12	96
Colombia	9	43
Ecuador	9	40
El Salvador	9	23
Dominican Republic	9	60
Mexico	9	28
Honduras	9	21
Guatemala	11	no data

Source: Lukes (2015)

Dr. Lukes (2015) continues her comments on the role of prior education for new arrivals with her statement:

> Key to understanding the academic progress of immigrant students—the challenges they face and their success—is the research-based finding that among students learning English as a second (or third or fourth) language, those with a more solid academic grounding in their home language have a much easier time both learning English and learning new academic context and skills. (Burt and Peyton, 2003). . . . As a result, students with gaps in their education in the home language tend to struggle and make limited progress in learning English. (p. 64)

The importance of first language literacy is documented through numerous studies, and most well known are the decades of records reviewed by the husband and wife team of Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier. Thomas stated in a Columbus, Ohio presentation in 2014 that together they had looked at close to a million school records over a period of 25 years since their initial 1989 study, and the evidence was overwhelming that students with first language literacy surpassed their peers in academic proficiency. Their research was affirmed by the meta-study, conducted by August and Shanahan in 2006, which showed that when students are literate in their native language and have developed sufficient reading and writing skills in that language, they can more easily apply that knowledge to the new language. Conversely, "school leaders should anticipate that students from non-literacy-oriented homes, with interrupted prior school experiences, and/or who are living in poverty will likely take much longer than high-achieving, literacy-oriented, socioeconomically advantaged students" (Zacarian, 2011, p. 25). The difficulty of building and/or maintaining first-language literacy is compounded by the fact that for some students from rural Mexico or Guatemala, Spanish is not their first language. They speak an indigenous language, and sometimes the students may know little or even no Spanish.

Implications of Limited Educational Opportunities Before Arrival

While educators in the United States cannot control the education received by students before they enter our doors, we must find ways to build on the educations already received. Some students will need less support to make the transition, but many have significant gaps that can only be overcome with specialized

curriculum and programming. Bilingual courses can help students understand complex material while their English skills develop, and ESL classes are necessary to build that critical English proficiency. Sheltered courses are needed for students with some content background who need additional support while transitioning to English instruction. And for the students with the least educational backgrounds, newcomer programs and special SIFE classes are crucial. With time and the proper support, these students can reach their potential and become contributing members of their society.

See Chapter 5, "Providing School-Based Supports for SIFE," for expanded descriptions of recommended support systems.

Higher Dropout Rates

National statistics show a 33% dropout rate for Latinos born outside the United States, with a dropout rate 6 times that of white students and 3 times that of blacks, and also 3 times the rate of their U.S.-born Latino peers (Lukes, 2015).

Statistics also show a staggeringly low college attendance and completion rate. This low number can partly be explained by the high Latino dropout rate. Students who don't complete high school will not be eligible to attend postsecondary programs. Another factor in this low college attendance rate, and probably also in the high school dropout rate, was that before DACA, students without legal status often could not attend college in their home state without paying exorbitant international rates. According to Abrego (2014), these rates are often 3 to 7 times the in-state rate. With little incentive to stay in school and graduate, some students chose to leave school and begin working as soon as they felt they were old enough. In a report published by the Education Trust in 2003, it was stated that both college enrollment and completion rates had not increased in the previous 20 years, and "out of every 100 Latino kindergarteners, only 11 will obtain at least a bachelor's degree." However, by 2014 the same organization was able to report that the college graduation rate had increased to 16%; still too low but moving in the right direction.

This high dropout rate can be attributed to several causes: immigration status and its myriad implications, the pull to choose work over education, frustration over falling behind academically, inability to pass state-mandated graduation tests, and for some girls, pregnancy and motherhood. Two researchers, Noguera and Lukes, have focused their studies on the education of Latino adolescents. Pedro Noguera looked at the data surrounding the dropout rates of Latinos and found that they are the ethnic group most likely to dropout, the most likely to have children as teenagers, and the least likely to attend college.

And the dropout rates are not limited to undocumented teens from Mexico and Central America. The number of Puerto Rican students who do not complete high school is over 50%, and the number of Dominicans is just over 40% (Lukes, 2015, p. 7). Furthermore, all Puerto Rican and most Dominicans are in the United States legally, so their immigration status is not usually the issue.

Employment Issues

Many Latinos from each of the countries listed above come to the United States primarily for employment. Some come to make money to help support family members back home through remittances, some come to support the families that accompany them on the journey, and others felt that their opportunities for advancement or even making a decent living wage were limited in their native environment. Whatever the reason, employment can interfere in the education process in many ways. As mentioned earlier, many youth choose to get a job and never enroll in school upon arrival. Others try to work and go to school at the same time, often working late at night and then coming to school with not enough sleep and no time to have completed homework or studied for tests. Whatever the particular situation, employment cannot be ignored as a factor in educating Latino youth dropping out to work. (Fry, 2005, p. 1).

Especially vulnerable are the teens that come without a strong educational background. Fry found that 40% of the students who came with prior educational difficulties, including being overage for their grade level or having dropped out before emigrating, were most likely to be working in agriculture or construction.

Trauma

Another challenge that faces many adolescent immigrants, not just those with interrupted schooling, is the emotional strain of leaving one's home country behind. This is difficult for all immigrants; but for many of Latino students, it involves a dangerous and potentially deadly journey, often undertaken alone or with other minors.

> Undocumented immigrants can encounter a variety of dangers at the border including heat exhaustion, drowning, rape, and other forms of violence. These experiences can lead to severe posttraumatic symptoms as well as feeling that range from mild sadness to depression. Boys who have experienced trauma tend to exhibit greater levels of anger and depression than girls, but these symptoms usually decline over time. Girls who have had

traumatic experiences associated with immigration, while they do better academically than boys on average, report more psychosomatic complaints the longer they are in the new homeland. . . .

Undocumented students are particularly at risk as a result of their unstable legal status. Once settled, they may continue to experience fear and anxiety about being apprehended, being again separated from their parents, and being deported. Such psychological duress can take its toll on their academic performance and engagement in school. In addition, undocumented students with dreams of graduation from high school and going on to college may find that their legal status stands in the way of their access to post-secondary education. When immigrant adolescents know this reality while still in high school, it can affect their engagement with learning. (Suarez-Orozco, Qin, & Anthor, 2008, pp. 55–56)

Voices from the Field

An administrator in a high school reported frequent symptoms of self-mutilation or cutting and eating disorders by Latino girls and high rates of depression by both sexes. The majority of potential suicides by the students at the school overwhelmingly involved Latino girls. Although the root causes of these dramatic reactions to trauma was not clear, the problem was compounded by the fact that most had no health insurance. Finding professional long-term counseling for these adolescents was very difficult. Some clinics would work with the students for immediate, emergency situations; but finding organizations and health care professionals who could provide assistance to the teen and their family over a period of time was almost impossible.

Limited Academic Home Support

For a number of reasons already listed above, many Latino parents are able to provide only limited support for homework. They may have limited educational backgrounds themselves, think that their English skills are insufficient to provide the necessary assistance, or may be working in the evening and weekends. They may be embarrassed to approach the teacher or they may believe that the language and cultural barriers are too great. And because high school in the United States is so very different from secondary school in many Latino countries, students and their parents often do not know what is necessary to prepare for post-secondary options. For all of these reasons, parents often feel unequal to the task.

"Immigrant Latino youth often find themselves caught between two worlds, neither fully American, nor fully part of their parent's country" (Noguera, 2014, p. 295). This can cause tension and conflict between the adolescent and their parents, not unlike that of any teenager, but with the additional layer of language and culture loss. With the added challenges of patchy previous schooling, the pressure to work and earn money for the family, and limited legal options after graduation for the undocumented, it is understandable why so many Latinos dropout of school in frustration.

CONCLUSION

As educators, we must stay knowledgeable of state and national policies that are impacting our students. This knowledge will assist us as we open the doors to the future. We want to ensure that all students are prepared to walk through those doors with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to contribute to our society and fulfill that dream that brought them to the United States.

For Further Study

Form a study group in your school or school district to discuss the implications of interrupted education on the students in your area. Use the questions below to guide your discussions.

1. What themes were prevalent in this chapter on the causes and implications of limited previous schooling for Latino students? Are these themes present in your school's newcomer population? What action plan can be developed to address these issues?
2. Whose responsibility is it in your school district to identify, and if possible, enroll students who are not attending school? Has a concerted effort been made to find and enroll missing Latino students?
3. What programming options could be implemented to increase the attendance rate of Latinos and to ameliorate issues such as those listed above?
4. What is the impact of living undocumented, limited legal postsecondary options, and limited access to health care (including dental, vision, and mental health support) on Latino students in your school or school district? What programs does your district currently have to support these students? What could your school do better to assist undocumented students?
5. What are the potential implications for students who are not living with parents or guardians? Form a study group of key school personnel (teachers, counselors, administrators, etc.) to read and discuss *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario, a true account of an unaccompanied minor. After reading, discuss the following questions: Do you know whose responsibility is it at your school to find out which students need extra support because of these types of situations? How can a school find out about home issues without invading a student's privacy?

6. What is the impact of school accountability and standards-based education on Latino SIFE in your school setting?
7. What effect does the economic and political chaos of a student's home country (such as Haiti or Honduras) have on school-age immigrants?
8. What is your state or school district doing to cut the dropout rate for Latinos and to encourage them to stay in school?
9. What can schools do to aid Latino parents in their efforts to provide academic home support?
10. We do not control the situations our students have experienced before coming to our schools, or the political and legislative world in which we and our students now live; but as educators, it is our responsibility to see that each student reaches their fullest potential. With the information you received in this chapter, how can you now better serve the students in your classroom?

Vignettes

Review the following vignettes of the types of issues you may experience when serving Latino children with an interrupted education. Think about the background of each child, what he or she may have experienced that could have contributed to their current situation, and what academic programming and social services may be needed to help this child thrive.

Luis is a 15-year-old boy who recently arrived from El Salvador. He completed the compulsory 9 years of schooling in San Salvador with average grades. He came to the United States to live with his father who came to California almost 10 years ago. During that time, the father has remarried and has two more children. Luis is having a difficult time adjusting to his new home life and his new school.

Marie is an 8-year-old from Haiti. She is very small for her age, possibly due to malnutrition. She attended school sporadically for 1 year in Haiti before her family came to Boston where they are pursuing asylum. Marie is quiet and speaks only when spoken to, even in her native Creole. Her academic skills in both reading and math are mid-kindergarten level.

Beatriz is a 12-year-old girl from Honduras who came to the United States with her 14-year-old brother. They were detained at the border and spent about 2 months in a shelter in southern Texas before being united with an aunt in Chicago. Both children have mid-elementary level academic skills and attendance issues. Social workers at the school have experienced difficulties connecting with the aunt to discuss the school situation of both students.

Lidia is the 12-year-old daughter of a Mexican migrant family who moved to Virginia from the Carolinas. The family has settled in northern Virginia, but years of moving has impacted her ability to feel comfortable and make friends. Her spoken English is almost native-like, but she reads at a second-grade level. Her teachers have recommended her for intervention in the RTI process.

Juan is a 10-year-old recent arrival from Cuba where his family is uniting with grandparents who live in the Miami area. He completed 3 years of school in Cuba, but was pulled from school when the parents received word that they were coming to the United States. He has no English proficiency, but basic skills in Spanish and math.