

**EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS OF MIDDLE-GRADE SCHOOL
TEACHERS: WHAT PRINCIPALS OF SCHOOLS ALONG THE TEXAS-
MEXICO BORDER SEEK IN NEW HIRES**

by

MIKE FRANCIS DESIDERIO

ISBN: 1-58112-019-2

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SEEK IN NEW HIRES

A Dissertation

by

MIKE FRANCIS DESIDERIO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 1997

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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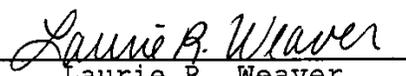
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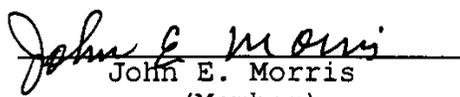
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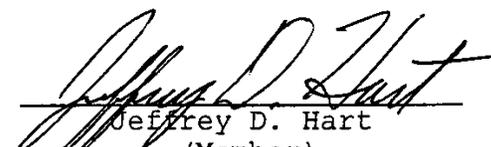
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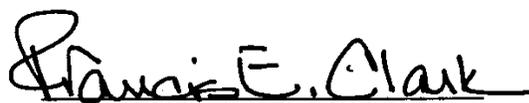

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ABSTRACT

Educational Qualifications of Middle-Grade School Teachers: What Principals of Schools Along the Texas-Mexico Border Seek in New Hires. (December 1997)

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Principals of middle-grade schools in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border were surveyed to learn about the education and preparational experiences these principals believed novice teachers should have before coming to teach in their schools. Demographic data about themselves, teachers, students and middle-grade schools, along with suggestions for improving Texas teacher education programs were also obtained.

Mexican Americans were the dominant ethnic group and culture in these schools for principals, teachers and students. Principals were mostly male, well educated, and certified for the position they held. Student populations ranged from 437--1,603 in rural, urban and suburban settings. Eighty-two percent of the student population participated in the Federal Free Lunch Program. Faculty populations in these schools ranged from 35--145. Student/Teacher ratios range from 8.8/1--18/1. Half the rural schools in this study have difficulty attracting all the

properly certified teachers needed for their classrooms.

Principals slightly preferred secondary certified over elementary certified teachers for middle-grade teaching positions.

Combined responses from principals revealed that knowledge centered around middle school themes was at least as important for pre-service teachers as their knowledge of pedagogy. The majority of responding principals ranked the following coursework and experiences as "essential" or "very important" for pre-service teachers: student teaching in the middle-grades, appropriate teaching methods for pre- and young adolescents, pre-student teaching field experiences in the middle-grades, developmental characteristics and needs of pre- and young adolescents, and curriculum and organization in middle-grades. Other coursework and experiences ranked by the majority of principals as "important" are: dealing with the culture of poverty, dealing with the Latino culture, and ESL certification.

The compiled responses from data revealed responding principals believe Texas teacher education programs are adequately preparing pre-service teachers. However, more emphasis should be placed on: middle-grade teaching skills and concepts, classroom management and discipline, curriculum and instruction, and communication with parents, staff, and community. Pre-service teachers need more information about working with students and parents living in poverty. Responding principals would also like pre-service teachers to have greater

exposure to middle-grade classrooms through additional observation experiences and student teaching.

To Nidia and Katie:

Your love and sacrifice made this possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the faculty at Texas A&M University for allowing me the opportunity to pursue this dream. I wish to especially thank Dr. Lynn Burlbaw, chair of my dissertation committee, for his encouragement, ideas, and willingness to listen. Without him, this journey would not have been as much fun.

The members of my faculty committee have provided me with the guidance needed to stay the course. Dr. John Morris provided inspiration and alternatives that proved helpful in my day to day struggles. Dr. Laurie Weaver helped provide expertise and insight into the Latino culture. Dr. Mark Sadoski, with his expertise in research and writing, proved to be very valuable. Dr. Jeffrey Hart provided expertise in statistical research.

Finally, thanks must go to the principals who participated in this study. Many times they are asked to complete additional paperwork for a variety of reasons. By completing and returning the survey instrument, they again demonstrated their dedication to our profession of education and the pursuit of knowledge.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Merseth (1996) states that the 1983 release of A Nation at Risk, subsequently followed by the Carnegie report A Nation Prepared in 1986, brought about the present reform movement in teacher education. Darling-Hammond (1994) and Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996) call for teacher preparation programs which will help future teachers focus on the learner and his/her need to compete for jobs in the technology based economy of the 21st century. One area where improvement in teacher preparation is called for is in middle grade education.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development wrote "teachers in middle grade schools should be selected and specially educated to teach young adolescents" (1989, p. 58). In This We Believe, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) (1995) wrote "educators need specific preparation before they enter middle level classrooms" (14). The NMSA justifies their call for special preparation for teachers in middle-grade schools because middle-grade school students have characteristics that are different from those of students in elementary and high

The citations follow the style of the Middle School Journal.

school. These differing characteristics of middle-grade school students include: (a) biological-physical changes of pubescence, (b) transition from concrete to abstract thinking, (c) transition in moral development, (d) emotional-psychological mood swings, and (e) strong need to belong to a group (NMSA, 1995). While these characteristics are generalizable to the majority of middle-grade students, they do not go far enough in identifying all the needs of Latino students in a border community. Two additional needs described in the literature include: (a) improving English language and literacy development (Christian, 1994; Montemayor, 1994), and (b) acculturation with mainstream society (Grambs, 1983; McWilliams, 1982).

The Texas Education Agency (1997a) documents that Latino students number 1,323,467; the second largest ethnic group in Texas public schools at 36% of the student population. Latinos are projected to become the dominant ethnic group in Texas and its public schools before the year 2030 (Murdock, Hoque, Michael, White & Pecotte, 1995). Much of this growth will occur because of immigration from Mexico.

When Mexican Nationals immigrate to the United States, their first contact with this country and its cultures is

in port of entry communities (Maril, 1992). Although Latinos are the dominant ethnic group in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992), the path to acculturation for children is through the public school system. Thus looking at education research concerning the needs of Latino middle-grade students would be helpful for educators working in these port of entry communities.

Statement of the Problem

Reform recommendations, including those for the education and preparation of teachers, for middle-grade school education has focused "on the schooling of White middle-class students to the exclusion of minorities in general and Mexican-Americans in particular" (Donato & de Onis, 1994, p. 172). A search using on-line data bases was conducted at the Sterling C. Evans Library to locate research concerning middle-grade teacher education for those working with Mexican immigrant students. This search yielded no information.

Researchers have been working and continue to work in the areas of middle-grade teacher education and the education of Mexican immigrant students. In years 1966-96, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) lists 452 research studies concerning middle-grade teacher education.

ERIC also lists 18 research studies conducted in the area of education of Mexican immigrant students from 1966-96. However, none of these studies deal with middle-grade teacher education for those working with Mexican immigrant students. Similar results were obtained when other data bases were searched using the same criteria as above. The data bases, along with the years searched, include: a) Educational Resources Information Center (1966-1996), b) Dissertation Abstracts Ondisc (1861-1996), c) PsycInfo (1967-1996), and d) the library holdings of Texas A&M University. Thus the contention by Donato and de Onis seems to have merit.

The Texas-Mexico border area, with a rapidly growing school-age population, will demand increasing numbers of teachers who are prepared to deal with ethnic diversity, cross-cultural interaction, and growing adolescents. Donato and de Onis (1994) see this as an area where educators should focus their research attention. Thus a logical question to ask would be, is the education and preparation suggested by experts affiliated with the NMSA appropriate for middle-grade school teachers who work in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border?

Statement of the Purpose

In an effort to determine the appropriateness of courses and preparation experiences, as recommended by the NMSA, for new middle-grade school teachers in schools along the Texas-Mexico border, the following questions are posed:

1. What are the characteristics of the principals, students, teachers, and middle-grade schools located in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border?
2. In the opinion of principals of middle-grade schools located in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border, to what degree do the education and preparation experiences, as suggested by the NMSA, seem appropriate for new teachers they hire?
3. In the opinion of the responding middle-grade school principals, how well do Texas universities prepare teachers to interact and nurture growth in students attending middle-grade schools located in these port of entry communities?

Assumptions

1. Middle-grade schools located in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border are the most appropriate schools for this study because of the high number of recent immigrant children who attend.

2. The use of a survey is an appropriate method for gathering data in this study.
3. Principals in this study will respond to the questions in the instrument honestly.

Limitations

1. Not all schools with middle-grades are called middle schools.
2. Regardless of name, some schools may not subscribe to the philosophy of the NMSA.
3. The response rate of this voluntary survey will depend upon the willingness of the principals to participate.
4. Data collected will be dependent upon the accuracy of the perceptions/memories of the principal.
5. Findings can be transferable to middle-grade schools based upon the reader's judgment concerning the "applicability or fit of the inquiry findings to their own context" (Green, 1990, p. 236).

Delimitations

1. The respondents in this study consist of principals of schools with 7th and/or 8th grades, whose school districts are located in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border.
2. This study looks at the pedagogical preferences of middle-grade principals regarding the education and

preparation of new teachers, not content area preferences.

Definition of Terms

1. European-American. A citizen of the United States who is a descendant of European parentage.
2. Latino. "Descendants of immigrants from Latin American countries and [or] those persons of Spanish-Indian heritage present in the Southwest [United States] when the U.S. Army arrived in the 1830s and 1840s" (Campbell, 1996, p. 32).
3. Mexican-American. A citizen of the United States who is a descendent of Mexican parentage.
4. Mexican National. A citizen of Mexico who resides in Texas.
5. Middle-Grade School. A school that includes grades seven and/or eight.
6. Port of Entry Community. City or town located along the Texas-Mexico border with United States Customs Service Officials stationed to check people and/or foreign goods into the United States.

Organization of the Dissertation

There are four additional chapters following this introduction. Chapter II contains a review of the related literature necessary to understand the issues concerning the questions posed earlier. Chapter III describes the methods and procedures used to conduct this dissertation study. Chapter IV includes the presentation of the data, findings and analysis. Chapter V contains a summary of the dissertation study, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the related literature addressing the research questions posed in Chapter I. These questions are:

1. What are the characteristics of the principals, students, teachers, and middle-grade schools located in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border?
2. In the opinion of principals of middle-grade schools located in port of entry communities along the Texas-Mexico border, to what degree do the education and preparation experiences, as suggested by the NMSA, seem appropriate for new teachers they hire?
3. In the opinion of the responding middle-grade school principals, how well do Texas universities prepare teachers to interact and nurture growth in students attending middle-grade schools located in these port of entry communities?

This review is divided into four areas that are necessary to develop a basis for understanding the issues surrounding this question. These four areas include: (1) the changing demographics of the United States and Texas, (2) acculturation process, (3) the educational experiences

of immigrants, and (4) middle-grade school teacher preparation.

Demographics

As a country of immigrants, the demographics of the United States is in a constant state of change. Prior to 1819, there are no official statistics concerning the number of people immigrating to the United States (Bromwell, 1856). However from 1819 to 1855, over four million people immigrated to this country (Bromwell, 1856; Yang, 1995). From 1860 to 1882 over five million people immigrated to the United States (Yang, 1995). While these immigrants came from many countries and continents, the overwhelming majority of these almost ten million people came from four countries in northern Europe: Ireland, Germany, England, and France. In 1885, the once immigrant, now citizens of the United States, population was made up predominantly of individuals from northern and western European parentage.

Immigration from northern and western European countries continued in large numbers through the end of the nineteenth century. During the last decade of the 19th century, over eight million immigrants arrived from northern and western Europe. So many Europeans were requesting to immigrate to the United States that U.S.

Consulates in European countries could not process the applications. A central location was needed to meet and process new arrivals before they came ashore. Thus Ellis Island opened as a Federal Immigration Station in 1892 (Brownstone, Franck, & Brownstone, 1979). This was just in time to meet the largest wave of immigration to the United States. This wave took place during the first fifteen years of the 20th century. Over thirteen million people from southern and eastern Europe immigrated to the United States due to the unemployment and poverty that was occurring in this part of Europe (Guggenheim, n.d.).

With the beginning of World War I in 1914, immigration sharply declined. However, at the end of World War I, immigration rose again so that by 1921, over 800,000 immigrants were entering the United States each year. The Immigration Act of 1921 placed a ceiling of 358,000 per year on immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere. Two hundred thousand of these slots were designated for immigrants from northern and western Europe; 155,000 slots were designated for immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. The remaining 3,000 slots were divided among the nations of Africa and those Asian countries not restricted by the Immigration Act of 1917.

Pressures on politicians to limit immigration to people of northern and western European origin continued to mount after World War I (Brownstone et al., 1979). As one example of this sentiment, Cubberley, in his Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History (1919), wrote:

These Southern and Eastern Europeans were of a very different type from the North and West Europeans who preceded them. Largely illiterate, docile, lacking in initiative, and almost wholly without the European-American-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, liberty, law, order, public decency, and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock and to weaken and corrupt our political life (338).

This anti-immigrant sentiment led to the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1924, which later became known as the National Origins Quota System. This act, which took effect in 1929, set national quotas for all countries in the Eastern Hemisphere. Each country was assigned a yearly quota for immigrants based upon the number of descendants of that country living in the United States in 1920. Because the U.S. population in 1920 was predominantly made up of descendants from northern and western European countries, these countries received 82% of total world quota. Eastern and southern European countries received 14% of the quota, leaving 4% for the rest of the Eastern Hemisphere. The total ceiling for the number of immigrants

to the United States from the Eastern Hemisphere was set at 154,227 people per year. No quota system was established for the Latin countries of the Western Hemisphere because immigration from these countries had not become significant at this time (Yang, 1995).

The Immigration Act of 1924 was an attempt to keep the ethnic status quo of the United States that favored northern and western Europeans (Grambs, 1983; Yang, 1995). This Act also drastically reduced the number of immigrants coming to the United States from the Eastern Hemisphere to the point where U.S. Consulates could again process immigration requests. The quota system served as the basis for legal immigration to the United States until 1965.

Following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was passed. This act abolished the National Origins Quota System and replaced it with a first-come, first-served basis for immigration applicants to this country. Ceiling limits for immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere were set at 170,000 annually. For the first time, ceiling limits were set for immigrants from Western Hemisphere countries at 120,000 annually (Johnson, 1965; Yang, 1995). Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1976 and 1978 attempted to eliminate the last trace of discrimination from

immigration policy by setting a worldwide ceiling at 290,000 immigrants per year with no hemispheric designation. The number of people immigrating to the United States is in actuality much larger. Only heads of households (man or woman) are counted. Children and spouses are not included in the annual ceiling number. This ceiling continually increased and was set in 1994 at 675,000 immigrants per year (Clinton, 1994).

According to Yang (1995), one of the chief beneficiaries of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, along with its subsequent amendments, are immigrants from Latin America. Yang's assertion is supported by figures from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1995). Records concerning the population of Latinos were not kept prior to 1980 by the U.S. Bureau of the Census because Latinos can be considered members of several racial groups. However, between 1980 and 1995 the official Latino population increased by 83% to 26,798,000. Banks (1997) considers this figure low because the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated that 53% of the Latino population in the United States classified themselves as White Americans rather than as a member of an ethnic group. Assuming Banks is correct, this would put the Latino population at approximately 54,000,000 making them the largest minority population in

the United States. Since 1965, Mexico is the country of origin for the largest number of legal immigrants coming to the United States (Yang, 1995).

Like the rest of the United States, the demographics of Texas are in a constant state of change. In 1834, when Texas was still part of Mexico, the population was estimated at 23,400. The majority of this population were European-American settlers from the United States (Anderson, Wooster, Stanley, & Armstrong, 1987). After Texas won its freedom from Mexico, the Republic of Texas saw its population grow to 140,000 by 1840 (Fehrenbach, 1985). By 1860 the State of Texas had a population of 604,215; by 1900, 3,048,710 people called Texas home. The majority of this population were European-Americans. Latinos made up less than 5% of this population (Anderson et al., 1987).

From 1910-1930, Texas experienced its first large influx of immigrants from Mexico (Willoughby, 1993). This was due to unrest caused by the Mexican Revolution. By 1930, the Mexican-American population in Texas had reached 695,000; numbering more than four times their population in 1900 (Willoughby, 1993).

Today, Latinos are the largest minority population in Texas. In 1995, the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimates

the official Latino population of Texas as 5,260,000. This is approximately 28% of the total state population. The majority of the Latino population in Texas is made up of individuals of Mexican descent.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1995) reports that 31,773 immigrants from Mexico and their families (approximately 24% of all documented Mexican immigrants) moved to Texas in 1993. President Clinton (1994) stated that approximately 300,000 undocumented immigrants enter the United States each year. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1995) reports that half of all undocumented immigrants come from Mexico.

Projections for the Texas population show that by the year 2008, European-Americans will no longer be the majority in Texas ("Why is UVM Important?," 1996). Latinos may become the dominant ethnic group in Texas by the year 2010 (Salazar, 1997). And by the year 2030, the Texas European-American population may decrease to 36.7% while the Latino population in Texas may increase to 45.9% (Murdock et al., 1995).

The Latino population will become the largest ethnic group in Texas for another reason than immigration. The Texas Education Agency (1997) documents that Latinos make up 36.7% of the state public school population. This

figure is higher than the general population statistics of 28% for Latinos in Texas. This fact indicates a potential for growth in the Latino state population.

The people of the United States are descendants of immigrants. Most of our immigrant ancestors came to obtain a better life for themselves and their families. This was the dream of European immigrants of the 19th and early 20th Century. This is now the dream of the Latino immigrant of the emerging 21st Century.

Acculturation Process

The early settlers from northern and western Europe brought to this country the political institutions and cultures that over time became the dominant culture. Immigrant groups coming to the United States have either striven to or were forced to assimilate into this culture and political system (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).

The people of the United States, being the sons and daughters of immigrants, share a common history; this history varies from ethnic group to ethnic group. As each group came to the United States they settled in areas throughout the country. Poorer immigrant groups - such as Irish, Italian, and Jews - settled into ghetto urban areas near their ports of debarkation. These urban areas were places to gain employment in the nation's industrial

economy. Immigrant groups with more financial resources - such as Germans, Norwegians, and Swedes - traveled further inland where they established themselves in the great plains (Grambs, 1983).

The languages and customs European immigrants brought to the United States were different from those of the native born whites. These differences made the immigrant stand out. To keep from standing out and being looked upon as a foreigner, immigrants and their children would work to acculturate as quickly as possible. One of the quickest ways to do this was to learn and use English (Grambs, 1983).

The experience of the Mexican immigrant and his descendants does not fit the pattern of European immigrants (McWilliams, 1982). First, Mexican immigrants identify themselves with a country that was defeated by the United States in a "war of conquest" (101). Because of this fact, many individuals of Mexican parentage feel they are not the immigrants in the United States (Campbell, 1996; Gollnick & Chinn, 1994; Nieto, 1996). Along the border in Texas, descendants of Mexican immigrants are left with "a heritage of bitterness and ill-will which has not entirely vanished to this day" (McWilliams, p. 101).

Ogbu (1977, 1983) originally considered Mexican-Americans to be caste-like minorities. Caste minorities were defined as individuals "incorporated into their societies more or less involuntarily and permanently" (Ogbu, 1983, p. 170). Ogbu stated that caste-like minorities such as Mexican-Americans, and new Mexican immigrants, are seen by European-Americans as being inferior in all respects. The only way for a caste minority to leave this status was to "pass" as a member of the majority culture, which is almost impossible for many Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals because of their dark skin color.

In response to criticism that his theory over-generalized the experiences of minorities (Trueba, 1991), Ogbu modified his classification. Mexican-Americans are now labeled as involuntary minorities, or "people who were brought into their present society through slavery, conquest or colonization. They usually resent their loss of former freedom, and they perceive the social, political and economic barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 9). Ogbu implies that the perceptions most involuntary minorities have concerning social, political and economic barriers prevent them from acculturating in the dominant culture.

Instead of migrating to different areas to seek employment, Mexican-Americans live in areas close to the border (Hurtado, 1995; McWilliams, 1982). The primary reason for this is the proximity of the states of the Southwestern United States to their country of origin, Mexico. Figures from the 1990 census show that 80% of the Mexican-American population resides in the states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). In 1993, 89% of documented immigrants from Mexico also settled in these same four Southwestern states (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995).

McWilliams (1982) states that immigrants from Mexico have not shown as active an interest in obtaining U.S. citizenship as most immigrants from Europe. Part of this is due to large numbers of undocumented immigrants from Mexico in the United States. These undocumented immigrants, fearful of deportation, do not trust the government and are unwilling to apply for citizenship.

Another factor preventing some Mexican immigrants from seeking U.S. citizenship is that when they give up their Mexican citizenship, they can no longer own land in Mexico. This becomes a factor because many Mexican immigrants, legal and undocumented, do not view their stay in the United States as permanent. They come to work and intend

to go back with the money they have saved (Rothenberg, 1995). Many Italian and Greek immigrants came to the United States with intentions of also returning to their homelands with money they saved (Alfers, Simon, Anderson & Wise, 1993). However, this return journey for Europeans was much longer and required greater expense. So the numbers of immigrants returning to Europe are less than those returning to Mexico.

Vega (1995) contends that Mexican-Americans view family as a resource. This resource is used for solving problems. Thus the majority of Mexican-Americans live in extended family units. Vega states that European-Americans are more likely to live in nuclear family units that are some distance from extended family. An earlier study by Mindel (1980) found similar tendencies that support Vega's contentions.

Hurtado (1995) and Massey, Zambrana, and Alonzo-Bell (1995) report that most Mexican-Americans have Spanish as their first language. The Spanish language in Mexican-American homes is preserved and passed down. Hurtado says this is due to the desire of Mexican-Americans to preserve their cultural heritage.