

# **Sociological Field Research With Junior High School Teachers: The Discounting of Mexican American Students**

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## **Theory and Methods**

Two important books on Hispanics in the United States (Moore & Pachon, 1985; Cafferty & McCready, 1992) agree that historically the treatment of Mexican Americans in the public schools of this country has been deplorable. Both books review studies examining the dropout rates and reporting that between 50 and 70 percent of the Mexican American students drop out of

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school. Moore and Pachon (1985) estimate that the dropout rate for Mexican Americans in the U.S. is approximately 50 percent. They conclude, "There is no possible doubt about the failure of the American school system to serve Hispanic students" (p. 145). Moore and Pachon believe that the unwritten goal of American society is to keep Mexican Americans in the agricultural fields with the lowest paying jobs.

Cafferty and McReady (1992) conclude, "Most scholars have argued that Mexican American students have been systematically discriminated against in school" (p. 116). They believe that a more accurate term for such students who drop out would be "push-outs."

Valencia's (1991) research findings indicate that the treatment of Chicano students has been persistently pernicious throughout the twentieth century. He states, "Low achievement is the norm for a substantial portion of the Chicano population in the nation's public elementary and secondary schools" (p. 7).

Valencia (1991) sees this tragedy occurring because Chicanos are excluded from the curriculum, the students are given inadequate language training, and their teachers are not prepared to work with minority students. He estimates that one in every two Chicano students drops out of school and concludes, "There is long-standing evidence that Chicano students tend to be less favorably treated than white students by teachers" (p. 23).

The current research was undertaken to better understand the role teachers play in the high dropout rate of Mexican American students. The current study is part of a larger research project that involved a year and a half of participant observation in a junior high school and high school in Nampa, Idaho. Though Nampa High School (NHS) did not keep official records on their dropouts by ethnicity, I examined the weekly withdrawal records of each class for the academic year 1994-1995 and counted the number of students with Hispanic surnames. From this, I then extrapolated an estimate for a cohort of students dropping out over their three-year high school career. My estimate, based on one-year's count of Mexican American dropouts, is that NHS has a 67 percent dropout rate of Mexican American students.

West Junior High School (WJHS) had 1,130 students in grades seven through nine of which 25 percent were Mexican American. In Idaho, Mexican Americans are referred to as Hispanics, though Hispanic is a generic definition that refers to all Spanish-speaking groups that have immigrated to the United States. WJHS has 50 full-time teachers along with part-time band and choir instructors. The field research at WJHS consisted of interviewing 31 of these teachers and observing in 75 classrooms. The researcher also had access to all student records.

The interviews with the teachers revealed a general and persistent insensitivity on the part of teachers concerning the problems facing Mexican American students.

Junior high school teachers are not the architects of the educational profession but more like the builders of the profession. They are trying to lay a sound foundation, to inculcate basic skills, that will enable students to be prepared for high school. The downside of teaching at the junior high, according to the teachers, is the reality of having too many students in class, having to teach too many classes, and having endless sets of papers to correct at night and on the weekends. Most teachers said they felt exhausted at the end of the school day from excessive interaction with students.

The key objective of the teacher interviews was to ascertain their perceptions of Mexican American students. How do Mexican American students differ from the white students? Why do so many Mexican American students drop out of high school? What challenges do Mexican American students present to teachers? What curriculum and teaching strategies have teachers adopted to work with Mexican American students? What grade would teachers give WJHS for working with Mexican American students? What percent of their colleagues are sensitive to the needs of Mexican American students? What training have teachers received to assist them to work with minority students?

The similarities in the teachers' responses to these questions is striking. I have integrated what would be the typical conversation with a WJHS teacher responding to questions pertaining to Mexican American students. It would be as follows:

Hispanic students are no different than white students. I treat all students the same. Hispanic students are not academically behind the Anglo students when they reach junior high school. I do not see them as being different in any way from white students. No, I have no teaching strategies or techniques for working with Hispanic students. Many Hispanic students belong to gangs, and gangs have a negative impact on the school. I do not like having ESL students in my classes; they have not had enough training in English to benefit from my class. The Hispanic students fail because they come from homes where the parents do not value education. I do not know why they drop out of high school in such large numbers. No, I do not know

anyone in the local Hispanic community. No, I would not support special programs to assist Hispanic students. No, I do not know how we could do any more than we already are for our Hispanic students. You know, we have some Hispanic students who are excellent students. No, none of my curriculum is geared toward Hispanic culture, literature, or history. If Hispanic students receive poor grades it's their choice. Education is not important in Hispanic culture. For some reason, they do not feel as connected to the school. For some reason, they seem to be more angry. I do not have enough time to do anything multicultural in my classes. I don't see them as being Hispanic, they're just students like everyone else.

A variety of interpretations can be elicited from the teachers' collective response to questions concerning Mexican American students. One view is that teachers expect Mexican American students to assimilate. They believe their role as teachers is to induce Anglo-conformity. The assimilation perspective reflects the belief that ethnic groups should adapt to the dominant culture; therefore, from such a perspective, it would be inappropriate to teach Mexican American students about their culture or to in any way reinforce their cultural identity.

Another interpretation is that the teachers are attempting to be and to portray themselves as being non-racist. This would involve a naive belief that by recognizing race, one is automatically being discriminatory.

I believe a more appropriate interpretation for the avoidance of recognizing that Mexican American students have a distinct culture, that they are different from other students, and that they have serious academic problems is that teachers do not have the academic skills to meet the academic and social needs of the Mexican American students. The teachers are so immersed in their own cultural/academic framework that they simply do not realize they are failing to meet the needs of the Mexican American students. My interpretation is supported by Trueba (1987, 1988, 1989) who, in his cultural differences theory, examines the failure of minority students and concludes that teachers are not trained to teach minority students. Additionally, the inordinate value placed by the dominant culture on individualism automatically enables teachers to blame the students for their academic failure.

Teachers however, cannot be totally exonerated because they lack knowledge of the culture and lack training in working with minority students. On a

day-to-day basis, teachers examine and grade the work of their students and, thus, are knowledgeable of the academic deficiencies of the majority of Mexican American students. Still, they persist in blaming the Mexican American students and deny their responsibility as teachers to educate these youth.

The interviews show that most teachers have minimal knowledge of Mexican American culture. Many teachers wanted to avoid discussing Mexican American students. A typical response was, "I am uncomfortable with your singling out the Hispanic students. I can't see any types. Each student is an individual. Every student is different."

Almost all of the teachers stated that they did not have any Mexican American friends, and they also said they have no knowledge of the local Mexican American community. Approximately one fourth of the teachers commute to Nampa from other communities that have few Mexican Americans.

Mexican American students at WJHS are visibly different in dress, appearance, and demeanor from white students. The majority have poor grades; they do not participate in extracurricular activities to anywhere near the extent of white students, and they are far more likely to be involved in disciplinary infractions. However, when asked in what ways Mexican American students differ from white students, teachers made the following types of remarks:

"I treat all students the same."

"I don't see them as being Hispanic; they are just students like everyone else."

"A student is a student; race doesn't make any difference."

"I don't see them as being Hispanic."

"I do not see them as being different in any way from white students."

During the interviews, teachers were questioned as to how Mexican American students did academically in comparison to white students. Many responded that they did not know. The most common teacher response was, "I don't know. I only look at students as individuals."

Most teachers failed to acknowledge that Mexican American students are having serious academic problems. Only three teachers recognized that few Mexican American students receive top grades. In using the school's computer to examine first quarter grades, I found that over 50 percent of the Mexican American students were failing the majority of their classes.

Teachers may not want an outsider to discover the extent to which the school

is deficient in meeting the academic needs of Mexican American students. One teacher said what many may think, "Ninety percent of the Hispanic boys won't do the work; they get poor grades; they never do their assignments. I can't reach them. They have no incentive. Hispanic boys just don't fit in."

As an indicator of the discounting of Mexican American students, almost all teachers responded that they did not include any Mexican American material in their curriculum. The neglect of Mexican American students was magnified by the fact that almost all teachers interviewed said that they had no teaching techniques or strategies that take into account, or are specifically used to stimulate the interest of Mexican American students.

Teachers were asked the number of college classes and in-service workshops they had completed that focused on educating minority students. Less than five percent of the teachers had received such training. Those few who had attended workshops commented that the workshops did not provide enough information and methodology for them to feel comfortable including workshop material in their pedagogy.

Most teachers at WJHS gave the school a grade of A or B for working with Mexican American students. Only a few teachers believe the school deserves a failing grade for the effort to educate this group of students. The following remark is representative: "We are doing all we can for Hispanic students. I would give the school a B-plus for working with them."

Twenty percent of the teachers recognized that they and their colleagues did not have the training or interest in meeting the academic needs of Mexican American students. A science teacher remarked, "We teachers are not prejudiced, but we don't know how to meet the cultural and language needs of the Hispanic students."

The comments of two Mexican American students are relevant, "The teachers talk about white history, they even talk about blacks, but they never talk about us Mexicans." Another Mexican American student remarked, "My favorite class is Spanish; it is the only class that has something to do with me."

In response to interview questions, half of the teachers said their fellow teachers are insensitive toward Mexican American students. The few teachers who expressed empathy for Mexican American students estimated that 90 percent of the teachers are insensitive to the needs of Mexican American students.

Human beings are not entirely rational, and we should not expect teachers always to be so. But it is difficult to find any rationale in the contradictory comments of WJHS teachers when most of them give their school an A or B grade for working with Mexican American students while, at the same time, 50

percent of these same teachers observed that their fellow teachers are insensitive to working with Mexican American students.

Most of the WJHS teachers believe that their colleagues are not prejudiced against Mexican American students. But Ms. Smith's (a WJHS teacher) remarks clarify a key point that even though a teacher may not be prejudiced, he or she still may fail to meet the academic needs of Mexican American students. She commented,

Most of the teachers are prejudiced in an unconscious way. You just have to listen to how we teachers talk to one another. Many disapprove of the Hewlett-Packard project because it is viewed as a special privilege for Hispanic kids. The teachers don't think we need to adapt our lessons. Yet most teachers don't have the skills to teach Hispanic students.

One teacher was being brutally honest when he said, "I do not understand Hispanic culture, so what can I do?"

I asked teachers why Hispanic students fail. The majority responded that they did not know why. Approximately 40 percent of the teachers had a standard response consisting of three parts. The first is that Mexican American parents do not value education. This is fascinating because the teachers had also responded that they did not know anyone in the Mexican American community. When questioned as to why they think Mexican American parents do not value education, most replied that Mexican American parents do not attend parent-teacher conferences. The analysis that parents do not value education is contradicted by statements made by almost all the Mexican American students interviewed who said that their parents placed considerable importance on their graduating from high school.

The second part of the teacher explanation for Mexican American student failure is that it is the Mexican American students' own fault. One teacher said, "You have to want to learn." Another commented, "If Hispanics are getting poor grades it is their own fault. We give students every opportunity to learn."

Many teachers made remarks similar to the one made by a teacher who said, "They (Mexican American students) choose to fail." Another teacher commented, "The Hispanic students make the choice, they don't take the responsibility." She gave the school an A grade for working with Mexican American students saying, "There is not much else we can do."

The remarks of this teacher are typical; that is, blaming the student while failing to recognize that the academic performance of a majority of Mexican American students is below average, indicating a problem far greater than

simply an individual's choice to fail.

Third, the teachers said that Mexican American culture does not value education and this explains why Mexican American students fail. This is an interesting observation since, again, few teachers had claimed any knowledge of Mexican American culture.

Most teachers at WJHS are not receptive to the idea of establishing programs or instructional assistance for Mexican American students. They viewed such programs as giving special preferences to the Mexican American students. Hewlett-Packard, an international computer company with facilities in Idaho, arranged for Mexican American students at WJHS to visit their company as a career day experience. Many teachers thought it was unfair to only offer this program to the Mexican American students.

The few teachers sympathetic to Mexican American students recognized how limited a perspective most teachers held toward the problems faced by the majority of these students. One said, "Most teachers don't know how to help Hispanic kids and they are defensive when you ask them about their Hispanic students."

Several teachers recognized that WJHS has an unofficial tracking system. Most of the top students are enrolled in band, and this requires scheduling them into the same classes. Few Mexican American are enrolled in the band class. Few of the teachers addressed the actual degree of tracking because they failed to recognize that Mexican American students also are under-represented in the accelerated reading and English classes; they are significantly under-represented in the two advanced math classes and are substantially overrepresented in the reading and math labs established to assist students who received failing grades in these courses the previous year.

An insightful class observation occurred in an accelerated reading class. The students were learning Greek and Latin roots of words that could then be applied to help understand many words that incorporate these roots. The students commented to the teacher that this lesson was much more interesting and valuable than their regular vocabulary work and, thus, stimulated their interest in the class. The minority at-risk literature (Wehlage, 1989; Wehlage and Rutter, 1991; Wehlage et al., 1989) contends that students who are less academically successful would do better in school if they were exposed to the curriculum and teaching strategies used in accelerated classes. In short, the critics of tracking believe that the less successful students receive the least stimulating educational experiences which further reduces their interest in school.

Many educators and social scientists (Feagin and Feagin, 1994) believe that

tracking has the effect of lowering teacher expectations of minority students. They also think that tracking results in an unnecessarily lower quality of education for those in the lower tracks. Another reason given for opposing tracking is that the less proficient students benefit from having the top students as role models in their classes.

Few WJHS teachers recognized that alternative curricular and pedagogical practices are necessary to assist at-risk minority students. No teacher was aware of the multicultural movement in education or of the research with at-risk students, both of which provide a broad range of curricular and teaching techniques that, if implemented, could substantially reduce the academic failure rate of the Mexican American students in their school (Baruth and Manning, 1992).

Lacking a knowledge of alternative programs led teachers and administrators into denial of the academic problems faced by the majority of Mexican American students. The teachers and administrators did not think that they could make a difference with these students. The attitude of the school personnel was that the majority of students are learning; consequently, the failure of the minority students is due to their lack of commitment to obtaining an education. The idea of alternative pedagogy for different students was an alien idea at WJHS.

### **Observing Teachers in the Classroom**

From observing in 75 classrooms at WJHS, I was able to make several generalizations in relation to student instruction. Having complete access to the school allowed me to observe in all subject areas, and I was able to observe several teachers multiple times.

A common teacher practice was to ask students questions concerning class material. The students were expected to raise their hands and answer when granted permission by the teacher. This student/teacher interaction was brief and the majority of the students did not participate. In the typical class period, the teacher's discourse accounted for 90 percent of the dialogue.

Mexican American students are much less likely to participate in this type of student/teacher exchange. When controlling for the proportion of Mexican American students in the class, I found that Mexican American students generally did not participate in class discussions to anywhere near the extent that white students did. I documented this observation by actually counting white and Mexican American students who participated in class.

The most important classroom observation obtained from the research was that teachers discount the culture of one quarter of their students. I did not observe any WJHS teacher discussing Mexican American culture. In teacher interactions with students, not a single teacher requested a Mexican American student to respond in a way that would take his or her culture into account. The attitudes and values of the dominant culture were always taken for granted. Whether teachers recognize it or not, their interactions with their students conveyed a denial of the culture of the Mexican American students.

Teachers not only teach subject matter, they also teach the informal characteristics of their own culture. The teachers used several methods of rewarding the best students and penalizing those students who performed less well, dividing the students into winners and losers.

Competitions such as students receiving praise for raising their hands and answering questions correctly to imitation sports events, where a student obtains points for correct answers were common in the school.

In another example, students who had completed all their homework were rewarded with a movie, while those students who had not done so were sent to study hall. The teachers are not aware that Mexican American students are consistently overrepresented in the loser category.

Individual competition is an important aspect of the dominant culture but not of Mexican culture. The majority of Mexican American students, less successful in these competitions, are consistently defined by their teachers as non-winners, in a much higher ratio than white students.

Teachers appeared not to be aware of labeling theory (Shur, 1973) which contends that by negatively labeling students, regardless of one's intentions, teachers create a negative academic self-concept in the students who are not defined as winners. Naturally, grading is the ultimate competitive game of the dominant culture.

Mexican American culture places more value on cooperation than does the dominant culture. Students at WJHS are granted few opportunities to work together on projects and they are always graded individually. Some of the teachers occasionally allow students to become involved in group activities.

Teachers at WJHS, for the most part, did not have close, intimate relationships with students. They viewed themselves as professionals whose primary function is to formally educate students. Having to teach five or six large classes a day prohibits them from developing personal relationships with their students. The "cold" nature of WJHS culture is a normative arrangement that goes unnoticed by teachers.

In contrast, the Mexican American culture has a "warm" nature involving

intimate relationships, making it difficult for students from this ethnic group to feel comfortable in the impersonal world of the public school. Mexican American students did not articulate this problem directly, but the majority said they did not like school and few of them had a favorite teacher.

Another significant feature of Mexican American culture is the importance placed on retaining the language spoken in the home because of its importance to the family's identity. Few WJHS teachers spoke Spanish, and only one teacher, other than the Spanish and ESL teachers, used Spanish in the classroom. The Mexican American students' language is not validated in the school, though outside the classroom many students speak to one another in Spanish. The literature in multicultural education contends that schools can become minority friendly by having all school signs written in the minority language as well as in English, by rewarding teachers for learning the minority language, and by presenting vocabulary lessons in all classes where students are learning each other's language (Cummins, 1989).

Students at WJHS are required to enroll in reading each semester of their junior high school education. Because of this, all of the reading teachers were observed. Reading classes have the greatest potential for incorporating minority materials and introducing a multicultural approach to teaching.

A plethora of stories, essays, and books have been written by Mexican American authors in the past two decades; much of this literature is appropriate for junior high school students (Banks, 1993; Baruth and Manning, 1992). The quality of this writing is first-rate. White students who read such literature will be enriched by learning the culture of their fellow students. For minority students, however, it is critical that they have an opportunity to read this literature to enhance their interest in school. Multicultural studies researchers (Cummins, 1989; Baruth & Manning, 1992) contend that students will feel connected to the school when the curriculum relates to their experiences and their culture.

While visiting reading classes during the free reading sessions, I asked students what books they were reading. Not one Mexican American student was reading a book by a Mexican American author. My observations included an examination of the teachers' in-class collections of novels for students to read. In all of these collections, I found only one novel by a Mexican American author.

Interviews with reading teachers revealed they had little or no knowledge of Mexican American literature although two reading teachers did ask for assistance in gaining information about it. A local university offers an education course on using multicultural literature in the classroom. Reading teachers

at WJHS should be encouraged to enroll in this course.

The observations of two reading teachers provide examples of the insensitivity to Mexican American students and are representative of the school's climate. One reading teacher said, "My second period is the class with the most Hispanic students, but they don't come very often, and when they do they don't do anything." When I asked her what she was doing about the situation, she gave me a strange look and then responded that there was nothing she could do.

The most insensitive statement was made by Ms. Beck, a reading teacher with a disproportionately large number of Mexican American students. Ms. Beck said, "Hispanic kids like the same books as the white students. The Hispanic kids don't give it a second thought." This teacher knows of only one Mexican American author, Gary Soto, and she has only one of his many works written for the adolescent reader in her library.

Ms. Beck's comments concerning Mexican American students are revealing. She commented, "The families have always done field work. The children have no aspirations. It's an ingrained attitude that is not easy to turn around. The Hispanic students don't take the responsibility."

Ms. Beck awarded an A grade for the school's efforts to assist Mexican American students.

The old truism that a caring teacher can make a difference was exemplified by Mrs. Lukes, a science teacher at WJHS. The Mexican American students liked her better than any teacher in the school, and they knew she liked them. She provided Mexican American students with the most academic assistance of any teacher observed. Mrs. Luke learned to speak Spanish and used it in class. She attended conferences and workshops that focused on teaching Mexican American students.

Mrs. Luke practices more at-risk teaching strategies than any teacher observed in the school. She uses many visual and hands-on activities. She has students work together in preparing for quizzes, she assists individual students, and she does more repetitious exercises. Finally, she breaks down the assignment into smaller components to assist the at-risk students.

I observed Mrs. Luke in her white lab coat moving around her class checking on how well the students were able to memorize the abbreviations of twenty chemical elements. She returned to assist a Mexican American boy three times in the preparation for a quiz. To an observer in her class, the warmth and caring Mrs. Luke has for students is obvious. A significantly higher percentage of Mexican American students passed her class.

## **Teachers' Awareness of the Failure to Educate Hispanic Students.**

Approximately 20% of the WJHS teachers had some awareness that the academic needs of the Mexican American students were not being met. Mr. Moore, bilingually trained, said,

Ninety percent of the teachers here support the dominance of Anglo culture, that American ways transcend all other cultures. They support the English only movement. . . . We do nothing to recognize Hispanic culture in the school and my attempts have been rebuffed. The school places no priority on Hispanic students.

He concluded that Mexican American students are the victims of academic injustice which he feels helpless to change.

Mrs. Kelly graded the school with a D-minus for its ability to assist Mexican American students. She felt the ESL program was extremely deficient, and she was disappointed that so few teachers are interested in becoming bilingual. Mrs. Kelly said,

You just have to listen to how we teachers talk to one another. Most teachers do not have skills to teach minority students. I feel alone in my concern for Hispanic students. The administration should offer regular training for the faculty to improve their skills in teaching Hispanic students. The teachers need a prejudice-reduction workshop. The teachers here deny our frustrations concerning Hispanic students and the fact that they are not doing well. Few teachers have any knowledge of Hispanic culture.

Ms. Scheffer is an eighth grade science teacher. She expressed a much higher concern for Mexican American students than most WJHS teachers. She recognized that she needs assistance to improve her skills in teaching Hispanic students. She remarked,

Most of the Hispanic students will not graduate from high school. The few who do have families that have assimilated. Hispanic students have a negative attitude and they are angry because so few teachers take an interest in them. About 20% of the teachers are at all effective with Hispanic students. We need training and we need to become bilingual. The administration places a low-priority on assisting the teachers improve instruction of Hispanic students.

All of the more sensitive teachers recognized that they lacked the training necessary for working with minority students. They voiced strong support for additional in-service training. Even these teachers, however, had a limited multicultural philosophical perspective.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Approximately 80% of the teachers at WJHS do not think the school has a problem in educating Mexican American students. Most teachers state that they are not aware that Mexican American students are failing school at a higher rate than white students. Those who do comment, however, blame the failure of Mexican American students on their parents, their culture, and the students' own lack of motivation. This discourse is widespread and well practiced, and it is repeated without the least doubt or hesitation.

The situation facing Mexican American students at WJHS is a classic case of indirect institutionalized racism. The personnel of the school do not display prejudiced views toward the minority students, but the school systematically denies opportunities to Mexican American students that would allow them to become as academically successful as white students. They do this by maintaining a curriculum and pedagogy that operates solely within the paradigm of the dominant culture.

An important conclusion derived from the teacher interviews is that there is a widespread attitude of complacency among the vast majority of the teachers at WJHS. The ignorance, callousness, and indifference toward the role of ethnicity in the educational process is alarming. The acceptance of and rationalizations for the academic status quo by most teachers provides ammunition for those conservative critics who attack the ineptitude of the public schools.

As a result of my field research at WJHS, I determined that an important ingredient in reducing the dropout rate of Mexican American students would be the development of an organization that consisted of a coalition of Mexican American parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members who have an commitment to working on this problem. The team could do the following:

- (1) Create a five year plan to solve the dropout problem.
- (2) Reallocate resources and find new resources to address the problem.
- (3) Require meaningful in-service training to assist teachers to work with minority students.
- (4) Require teachers applying for recertification to enroll in college courses that address preventing minority dropouts.
- (5) Monitor and evaluate teachers on how they are implementing a curriculum and pedagogy to meet the academic needs of minority students.

- (6) Hire more Mexican American personnel.
- (7) End the tracking of students at the school.
- (8) Retrain administrators to provide leadership in educating minority students.
- (9) Establish minority clubs and organizations.
- (10) At the same time, work to create meaningful interaction between white and minority students.
- (11) Use concerned teachers as leaders in developing a minority-sensitive environment.
- (12) Have local universities provide necessary course work on site.
- (13) Monitor minority students on a regular basis to evaluate success of the program.

Cummins' (1989) work also provides valuable solutions for the education of second language minority students. For Cummins, the language and culture of the minority student must be fully incorporated into the school culture. Schools must reject the idea that their role is the assimilation of minority students. Cummins believes that a complete integration of the minority language and culture must become a fundamental part of the school's culture and curriculum. The school must actively challenge the existing power structure. This requires involving the parents of minority students not only in assisting in the education of their children but also in becoming politically active in challenging the dominant group's control of local politics and school boards. Cummins believes that school personnel should become advocates for minority students.

Teacher instruction must change to promote more supportive and caring interaction of teachers with minority students. Cummins believes that learning should rely less on memorization, drill, and lecturing and more on having active learners. An education process that validates the culture, language, and identity of minority students will result in these students becoming academically successful.

A major component of Cummins' analysis is that minority students fail because their own life experiences are seldom validated in school. The gap between Cummins' insistence on affirming minority students and treatment of Mexican American students at WJHS could not be further apart. Before the minority dropout rate at WJHS can be reduced, the perceptions held by school personnel would have to change. It is only when teachers, counselors, and administrators begin to understand that the current arrangements are academically disabling minority students at their school, can changes then begin to take place.

**Footnote**

All names used in the article are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the subjects interviewed.

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