

Chapter 10

There Are No Spanish– Speaking Therapists Here: Advancing Language Equity Practices With Support From Bilingual Psychologists

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ABSTRACT

This chapter involves the issues in the creation of a bilingual and culturally competent psychological clinic in a university town in a southern state in the United States known as one of the most Latinx immigrant hostile states in the country. Prior to the creation of the clinic, there were virtually no options for Spanish speakers for culturally or linguistically competent psychological services, and the population of bilingual/bicultural graduate students in psychology and the college of education was very low. This chapter is written from the perspective of the faculty founder of the clinic and the women who have served as clinic coordinators and sacrificed much time and energy in addition to their significant program requirements so that the local Latinx immigration could have linguistically and culturally competent psychological services. Thus, this chapter will blend the available research literature with the experiences of creating and running a clinic that supports many Latinx immigrant students and their families.

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INTRODUCTION

“Ley pareja no es dura”

In the United States (U.S.), children are guaranteed an education until the 12th grade, and that education is to be the same for every child regardless of race, national origin, and documented status. However, within that guarantee is the reality is that many Latinx residents and immigrants find themselves in unfair and unjust situations when interfacing with the educational system, in particular when cultural and linguistic issues come into play (Olivos & Mendoza, 2013; Dabach et al., 2018). As the Spanish *dicho* that opens this chapter states, Latinx people are willing to accept hardship in the name of equity. However, their experiences in the U.S. have also taught them that *quien hace la ley hace la trampa* – the person who makes the laws, creates ways to cheat the law. Thus, in this chapter we address the interface of Latinx people and the educational system where legislative guarantees and benevolent intent often fall short of their promise.

Educators rely on allied professionals to comprehensively meet the needs of students and their families both in and out of schools, especially in an environment hostile to immigrant families. Allied professionals such as psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychiatrists ideally work alongside educators to address the needs of immigrant communities. Educators in schools are often the front line in identifying the needs of immigrant children and their families as they adjust to life in a new country. Once mental health needs are identified, a referral to a linguistically and culturally competent mental health professional is essential. However, what if there are no such professionals available? How can educators and psychologists work together to create the necessary infrastructure to address the needs of immigrant communities under unrelenting stress?

This chapter focuses on the issues in the creation of a bilingual and culturally competent psychological clinic in a university town in a Southern state in the United States, Georgia, known as one of the most hostile states in the country towards Latinx immigrant community (Henderson, 2018). Prior to the formation of the clinic, there were virtually no options for low to no cost therapy for Spanish speakers. This chapter is written from the perspective of the faculty and doctoral students who have sacrificed much time and energy to provide linguistically and culturally competent psychological services to the local Latinx immigrant population. Thus, this chapter will blend the available research literature with the experiences of creating and running a clinic that supports many Latinx immigrant students in a hostile sociopolitical context. In this chapter, we examine the ways in which Latinx bilingual psychologists can help advocate for language equity in the context of systemic injustice. This chapter will also provide concrete suggestions for educators working with Latinx students and their families.

SETTING CONTEXT: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

The demographic transformation of the U.S. can readily be seen in states such as California, Florida, and Texas, where native born and immigrant Latinx people have significantly grown in numbers throughout the years. However, Latinx people have settled to new settlement areas of the U.S. such as Georgia over the last two decades (Delgado-Romero, Matthews & Paisley, 2007). Athens is a small community in the State of Georgia located to the east of the metropolitan capital of Atlanta. As of 2017, Athens has a population of 127,064 (United States Census Bureau, 2018). By official counts, Athens is one of the top

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