

JOURNAL of GLOBAL INITIATIVES
POLICY, PEDAGOGY, PERSPECTIVE

VOLUME 2 2007 NUMBER 1

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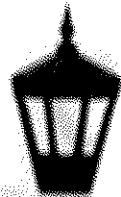
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ISSN 1533-7709



Rowman & Littlefield

JOURNAL OF GLOBAL INITIATIVES

SPECIAL EDITION

VOLUME 2

2007

NUMBER



SPECIAL EDITION

Hispanic Immigration,
Education and Empowerment
in the U.S. South

Guest Editor: Robert A. DeVillar

JOURNAL
of GLOBAL
INITIATIVES

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VOLUME 2

Teacher, Researcher, and Agent for Community Change: A South Texas High School Experience

Francisco Guajardo, *University of Texas Pan American*

“Joven ... ¿tú has tomado agua en este pueblo? En 1926, yo escarbé los ditches para sentar las paipas de agua para este pueblo ... Yo soy fundador de Edcouch.” (“Young man...have you ever drunk water in this town? In 1926, I dug the ditches to lay down the water pipes for this town ... I am a founder of Edcouch.”)

—Isabel Gutiérrez, 1997
during the first of four oral history visits

A Visit to Don¹ Isabel's Home: A Narrative of Transformation

One balmy south Texas afternoon a few years ago, a team of teachers and students from Edcouch-Elsa (E-E) High School drove to don Isabel² Gutiérrez's small, blue frame home in Edcouch, Texas, a rural border community approximately 16 miles north of the Texas Mexican border. Two rocking chairs, a coffee table, and numerous plants adorned the porch; La Virgen de Guadalupe and other religious symbols lined the exterior front of the house. Don Isabel stood by his door front, dressed in blue work pants and his typical white t-shirt, a rolled up cigarette between his withering yet calloused fingers. Supported by his silver cane, the 97-year-old man eagerly awaited his next storytelling session, as he erectly fashioned all 5 feet 2 inches and 95 pounds of his feeble frame. We had been there twice before and spent more than 6 hours listening to his life history and getting to know him. He enjoyed our company, appreciated that students from the local school showed an interest in his life, his stories, and in the history of his community; and we looked forward to don Isabel's fascinating continuing oral history. He was ready to teach, and we were ready to learn in don Isabel's class.

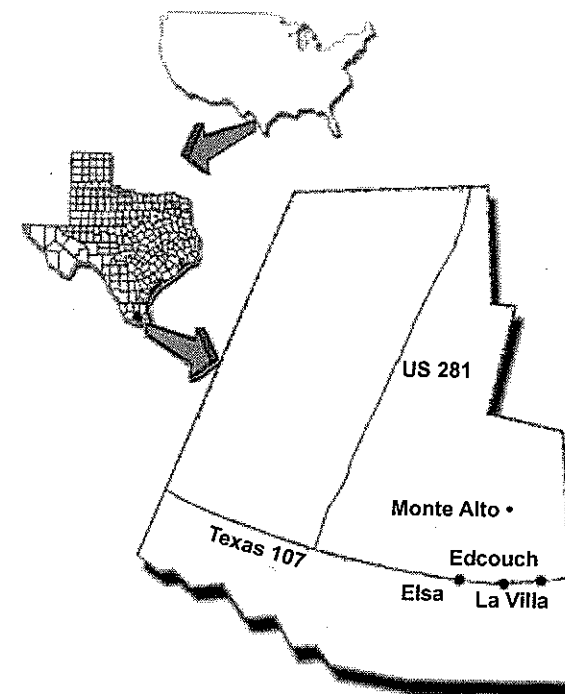


Figure 1. Map of area. Courtesy of Jason Rodriguez, Edcouch-Elsa High School student.

Don Isabel captured our imagination and shook our entire view of history, community, politics, and education. Early in the interview process, a student asked don Isabel about the founders of the town of Edcouch. “*Yo fui fundador de Edcouch*,” (“I am a founder of Edcouch”) don Isabel responded. “What do you mean by that, don Isabel? Wasn't the founder Edward C. Couch?” the student asked in his best Spanish. Undoubtedly this student, and his teachers, had fallen prey to what Macedo (1999) calls a “poisonous pedagogy,” which systematically provides information to students based on the dictates of what Hirsch (1988) refers to as common cultural background knowledge. Don Isabel's post-common cultural awareness, however, dictated an entirely different truth. “*No, no, no, joven ... mira, tú has tomado agua en este pueblo?*” (“No, no, no, young man ... listen, have you ever drunk water in this town?”), he asked. The student said yes, and don Isabel proceeded to explain that in 1926, he dug the ditches to lay the water pipes to bring water to Edcouch. “*Yo soy fundador de Edcouch*,” (“I am founder of Edcouch”), he proudly proclaimed.

In stark fashion, don Isabel provided what Delgado calls a “counter-story.” Critical narrators, suggests Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), “use counter-stories to challenge, displace, or mock” (p. 43) accepted beliefs, premises, or

myths, especially those held by the dominant culture. As our teacher that day, don Isabel subverted the dominant paradigm instilled in many of us through traditional schooling and through the standard textbooks on history and culture (Foucault, 1984). We sat in admiration of this 97-year-old South Texas pioneer who had labored in anonymity his entire life, but who had a great deal to teach us about our view of the world and even our view of ourselves. Don Isabel essentially taught us what Giroux (1997) describes as counterhegemonic skills needed to critically analyze existing curricula. And, don Isabel even did it with a sense of humor. Before we left his house on our first oral history session, don Isabel asked, with a paradoxically serious yet light-hearted voice, "*Ya se van? Pero apenas voy en mil novecientos veintisiete*" ("You're leaving already? But I've barely covered up to 1927") (Gutiérrez, 1997).

After four visits to his home and dozens of stories captured, we developed a strong and respectful relationship with don Isabel. He also came to the school on three occasions: once to guest lecture in a world history class, another time to visit the Llano Grande Center, a school and community based nonprofit organization my students and I founded out of my classroom in 1997. On a third occasion, don Isabel participated in a history fair at a local elementary school. On our last visit to his house, approximately a year before his funeral, don Isabel asked if we could help him repair his leaky roof. We did, and we found him additional assistance through a federally funded program that supported senior citizens, much as Lewis and O'Donnell (1990) describe in their work documenting oral histories in Appalachian communities. Describing one interviewee, Miss Minnie, they recall college student volunteers helped repair Miss Minnie's home, including a new bathroom, new floors and walls, which she was able to enjoy before she died. It was important for us too, to go beyond honoring don Isabel's stories. We felt compelled to commit to a certain level of reciprocity; we did not want simply to take his story, in a fashion akin to what Villenas (1996) describes as the ethnographer as colonizer.

Others who conduct oral histories similarly grapple with this issue. Olmedo's article (1999) on her oral history work with Latina women in Chicago points to the importance of reciprocity as a central piece to oral history research. It should be viewed, she suggests, "not merely as what the researcher can return to the researched ... but rather the ways in which the research process itself provides rewards and satisfaction and therefore meaning to participants" (p. 360). Similarly, it is important that we humanize the research process by attempting to build relationships with those we research, to create opportunities for rewards and satisfaction through the exploration of meaning, and to do what we can to make their lives better. In don Isabel's case, he helped us find meaning, while we legitimized him as pioneer and historian, and we also fixed his leaky roof.

After completing the oral history, we asked don Isabel's permission to publish his story in the *Llano Grande Journal*, a school and community based publication, to use his story to teach a greater number of students and other community members. He agreed. We first took him a copy of the *Journal*, then circulated hundreds of copies to teachers throughout the high school campus. Shortly thereafter, we received a phone call at the Llano Grande Center. "It's don Isabel," said the teacher who answered the phone in relative amazement. He was surprised because don Isabel did not own a phone, nor was he known for making phone calls. He was, to be sure, a man from a bygone era, almost preindustrial, agrarian, in style and manner. He called that day to request 30 copies of the *Journal* that featured his story; his friends at the Bluebonnet Adult Day Care Center (*el "Bluvane,"* as he called it) had requested copies. We mobilized immediately, delivering said copies to the Bluvane. Ten minutes after distributing all the copies, the director of the Center approached me and said, "Mr. Guajardo, do you know that more than half of these elderly who are reading don Isabel's story are illiterate?"

The literacy displayed by don Isabel's friends that day also influenced the way we thought, taught, and shaped curriculum. In *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Freire and Macedo (1987) outline the different approaches to literacy ranging from the academic and utilitarian to the romantic approaches. They further posit that these literacies have not empowered those who most need power. Don Isabel's story in the *Journal* confirmed and celebrated his 97 years of life, but it also moved his peers to want to "read" his story in whatever manner they understood it. As they "read" his story, they also exercised their considerable skills in "reading their world," a world they had taken part in authoring. Don Isabel as author, the student interviewers as researchers, and community members as readers gave shape to a new pedagogy. This pedagogy is consistent with Freire and Macedo's argument toward emancipatory literacy programs, in which educators create innovative teaching and learning approaches that allow students to use their own life stories as a way to become literate, as well as to gain power. Through this oral history project, a new emancipatory literacy and pedagogy have emerged and have become important elements through which a community and many of its people have been transformed (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gutiérrez, 1997).

Grounding the Broader Narrative

In a conversation in Austin, Texas, in 2001, education anthropologist George Spindler said, "I don't know where we went wrong . . . thinking that learning comes from books instead of from people . . . and that the best learning happens in the university. I don't know where we went wrong."

Two notions principally ground this article: (a) knowledge comes from people, their stories, their struggles, their triumphs, their pain; and (b) teachers and students learn best when they teach and learn in a community context. People's stories, I have learned, are the richest material any teacher can use for instruction, for personal development, and even for transforming a community. Knowledge, spirit, and inspiration come from people, not from books; I have come to that realization after more than a dozen years as a public school teacher, because I have listened to the wisdom and the stories of more than 350 of our elders through the oral history project my students and I operate. We have turned many of those stories into books, and the books are rich, to be sure.

Books and the written word occupy an important place in the chronicle of Mexican American people in the United States. Saldívar's (1990) insightful analysis of Chicano literature as an expression of resistance, survival, and celebration argues for the vitality of a "dialectic of difference." Saldívar suggests that the world exemplified in the literature of Chicanos is intensely political. Don Isabel's story, however, combined with the comment by George Spindler, challenges Saldívar's view of what literature means. Though Saldívar includes the *corrido*, the Mexican folk ballad, as a legitimate form of literature, this paper argues that the oral story exists as an even more influential form of discourse, and as a viable dialectic of difference as well, particularly as it relates to transforming young people's lives, as well as the lives of elders and their community. In *A Dialogue with the Past: Empowering Students To Be Oral Historians*, Whitmann (2004) quotes Edcouch-Elsa High School student Gilberto Perales, who said:

The oral history experience taught me a lot about myself and the people I live around, and my community. A lot of students just want to get out of here, but I realized through the interviews the importance of carrying on traditions and this community's history. I learned that we were not merely living in a barren, desolate desert town at the tip of Texas. I also experienced the powerful emotions associated with the events that took place here and the uniqueness of our culture. Oral history brings history to life; it makes you excited about the past and how it affects you and teaches you. An author of a textbook has no connection to our town, the material is not geared to our personal history, but I could understand me and my community more by doing the interviews. (p. 103)

While books are important, they are not central to building young minds, helping schools thrive, or revitalizing communities. Learning comes from

people, primarily, from listening to them, working with them, and creating with them. This study shows a learning process where students, teachers, and other community members engage in a development experience that has positioned young people for a wide range of academic, social, and cultural opportunities. It also demonstrates how the pedagogical process employed by the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development at Edcouch-Elsa High School has revitalized many in this rural community.

Between 1990 and 2002, I taught history, English, and community-based research studies at Edcouch-Elsa High School in Elsa, Texas; and I direct the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development. Out of the Center, we (teachers, students, and other community volunteers) launched an oral history project as part of a larger ethnohistorical research project because we understood that as our elders passed away, hundreds of important stories died with them. Studs Terkel (1986), one of the great oral historians of the 20th century, suggested that while the United States may be the wealthiest country in the world, it could be the poorest in memory. Since time immemorial, oral history has been an important means of communication. Greek historians Thucydides and Herodotus utilized the method to great effect. Before them, Homer kept his brilliant poetry alive through the oral tradition, and after the time of Christ, the Apostles kept much of Jesus' teachings current and alive through the oral tradition. More recently, with the 20th century rise of social history as a system of inquiry, oral history offers a legitimate lens through which to learn from the past (Charlton, 1985).

At Edcouch-Elsa High School, we wanted to preserve the stories, and through the oral history project, we promised to confront the traditional method by which schools teach history. Moreover, we meant to "lift every voice" through the development and practice of a critical pedagogy in a public school district where 99% of the student body was of Mexican ancestry (Bartolome, 2000). Nevertheless, in this same school every state-adopted textbook generally disregarded the experience of Mexican people in the making of Texas (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1980; Apple & King, 1977; Ladson-Billings, 1995). We were nowhere in the history books. We addressed the issue by convening community people with teachers and students to develop a plan of action. The history of rural South Texas, we contended, had not been fully told.

Perhaps more importantly, we initiated the oral history project to have students understand themselves and their own identities more clearly. Identity as a form of self-identification and of self-understanding is also an important base from which people generate new ways of looking at themselves and the world (Holland, 1998). Of course, Edcouch-Elsa High School students had a sense of themselves. They knew who they were, had an understanding of their school, and a general concept of their community; everyone, to some extent, has

a kind of working understanding of himself or herself. Students at this school, however, did not have the privilege to understand themselves in relation to major sociohistorical, cultural, or economic processes in their lives. To a lesser degree, features such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation were explored at school, but they were done in the course of social activities and not within the context of the school's organized or sanctioned curriculum.

Trueba's (2002) essay on multiple identities in action makes the compelling case for a strengthened positionality for Latino youths because of their relative and often seamless ability to weave between cultures and between personal identities. A vast and significant cultural capital further solidifies Latinos' sense of self and even sense of themselves in a community context. In *The New Americans*, Trueba (2004) similarly argues that the development of identity is an important process that often suggests personal success for Latinos. People's resilience and ability to succeed in south Texas, he argues, are often due to their ability to form strong ethnic identities and the subsequent ability to adapt to different social and economic environments. Trueba's thesis is compelling and supported by the literature (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2002, 2004; Min & Rose, 1999; Smith, 2002; Trueba, 2002; Trueba & Zou, 2002). Unfortunately, public schools in South Texas, at least until the early 1990s, did not encourage the formation of self-identity through curriculum or through any other kind of systemic program. Any kind of identity building was done "outside of what we did in formal schooling," recalls Gabriel Farías, a local educator and lifelong resident of this rural community. Farías suggests he and his peers growing up in the 1960s and '70s learned about survival, about group dynamics, and about their individual selves from the stories and experiences generated out on the streets, on the football field, on the basketball courts, or *en las labores* (in the fields) (Farías, 2003; Saldívar, 2002).

I begin every semester by posing two questions to my students. First, I ask them where they live, physically. It is important I know the student's street, neighborhood, or *colonia*; because I grew up in the same community, I can connect with every student through a story I have experienced and will recall that story as soon as my student announces where he or she lives. Secondly, I ask students, "What is your story?" The first question is easy to answer, but the second gives many students fits. "What do you mean, what's my story?" is a common reaction. I cannot recall a single student failing to respond to this question, nor do I recall students unable to become expert about their story and their own reality. If done sensitively, and with due patience, the exercise of exploring one's own story becomes a method through which a teacher creates conditions for student success. In addition, the process of finding, developing, and understanding one's story is an academic, social, cultural, and psychological endeavor that makes school interesting, relevant, compelling, and often fun. Most important, through

finding their own story, students also explore and understand their own identity in a personal, familial, and community manner.

In the mid-1990s, my students and I initiated an extensive oral history project to achieve three principle objectives. First, we were intent on capturing the stories of elders in the community. Not a week went by without an important community elder passing away, and hundreds of stories and vast amounts of wisdom died with every one of those deaths. We understood the value of those stories and decided to explore ways in which the process of capturing the stories, as well as the content documented through the work, could potentially inform the formation of curriculum. Second, we understood the power of students' personal stories but also believed elder master storytellers could model the art of narration to young people. Learning from the elders and their skills could also give youth a clearer understanding of themselves, both in terms of personal identity and as part of a larger community (Darder, 1995). Third, students needed to learn basic research skills, and the oral history project would help them learn a variety of skills ranging from understanding how to conduct an interview to learning how to operate sophisticated digital technology equipment (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2002).

Several hundred oral histories later we have come to the realization that through the stories we captured, we learned much more than any book could teach us (Spindler, 2001). Spindler's quote on learning and books is particularly relevant to the Mexican American experience, just as it is true of the experience of other marginalized groups in this country. The "silent voices" Trueba and others describe have not found an integral place in the content or pedagogical processes of how Mexican American and other children are educated. The stories and experiences of these populations are rich and can provide a vast reservoir of opportunities for schools and communities (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Spring, 1996; Trueba, 1989). Just as important, the process of collecting the stories enriches students, teachers, schools, and the entire community. Students learn about themselves and their community. The content and rich skill building learned from the research process can inform curriculum development. Schools find new community allies and partners in the storytellers, and the entire process simply revitalizes the spirits of individuals and community. "I didn't know anyone was interested in my story," said 97-year-old Isabel Gutiérrez, "but I'm proud to share it ... I think I have a thing or two to teach you" (Gutiérrez, 1997).

I live and work in what most consider an impoverished part of the country; I consider it the richest place in the world. Many see my students as at-risk; I see them as leaders of the world. The elders in my community are viewed as burdens; I see them as conveyors of wisdom, and as those with whom I team-teach.

The Emerging Story

In the fall of 1995, I began my 6th year teaching English and history at Edcouch-Elsa High School in Edcouch, Texas, and it was this year that I had the good fortune to meet Carlos García. Through the years many students influenced my life, changed my approach to teaching, and helped me understand the richness they brought to school on a daily basis. Few students, however, challenged me or my pedagogical assumptions the way Carlos did; indeed, he disrupted the “discursive regimes” under which my teacher colleagues and I operated (Foucault, 1984). One autumn afternoon, as our history class reflected and discussed the proceedings at the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1776, Carlos calmly raised his hand and asked, “Mr. Guajardo, were there any Mexican people around during the time Thomas Jefferson was writing the Declaration of Independence?”

“Of course there were,” I responded, “and you know that, Carlos.”

“Well, Sir, prove it to me,” he said, as he pointed to his history textbook. “I don’t see our people or any part of our experience anywhere in this book.” With that question, Carlos challenged not just me, but the entire establishment.

Carlos was right, and his question challenged me as a teacher to assess once again the kind of approach I used to teach history, language, and everything else. It also forced me to evaluate the conditions and environment under which I worked. Though as a young teacher in the early 1990s I frequently challenged the school leadership to create curricula more relevant to the experience of our predominantly Mexican American students and also questioned the quality of textbooks our school adopted, I had not yet persuaded the school to significantly modify its position or approach in either case. In a traditional sense, I worked as most teachers do, without the political influence or power to determine what or how I taught. Similarly, students and parents were powerless regarding what content was taught, how it was delivered, or even who did the teaching. The dynamics at my school were such that students, teachers, and parents were essentially without power in determining issues related to pedagogy, curriculum, and instructional materials and practices (Scribner & Marshall, 1991).

The Problem

In the fall of 1990, the Edcouch-Elsa Independent School District owned the dubious distinction of being the poorest public school district in Texas. Since the mid-1970s, E-E had held on to that distinction based on the assessed value of property within a given school district. Numerous reasons account for this school district’s property poor status, most of which are rooted in the local and even transnational history of the economy. There is the explanation of the boom

and bust cycles of the tenuous agricultural industry in the area throughout most of the century. Natural disasters such as the freezes of the late 1940s and early 1950s and the prolonged droughts help explain the circumstance. In addition, the economic shift from manual labor to mechanization of the 1950s significantly impacted the regional economy; and the exodus of Anglos from the community following the economic downturns and the historic high school walkout of 1968 also explain the departure of wealth and the consequent existence of economic impoverishment in the area. All this created a problem in this rural border community, and the manifestation of that problem appeared clearly in the local schools, particularly at Edcouch-Elsa High School, my alma mater and the school where I returned to teach in the fall of 1990.

The problem of economic impoverishment in the community, coupled with the very public understanding that this was not only the poorest school but also one of the poorest communities in the state, created a realization in most residents’ minds that they indeed were poor. To be sure, Suárez-Orozco and Pérez (2002) document that poverty for Latinos across the country remains at an exceedingly high rate. Rodgers (1996) also shows that poverty is particularly severe for Latino children, who comprise more than one fourth of the children who live in poverty in the United States. Smith (2002) further argues that, historically, poverty has been designated as a problem for which indigenous and other marginalized populations are blamed. This thinking then feeds into popularized theories of cultural deprivation and cultural deficits that weigh even more heavily on the people themselves. In the South Texas context, Smith’s thesis is born out. As I saw my students in the early 1990s, being from Edcouch-Elsa somehow meant that one was inferior.

Countless stories of local residents describe how being from Edcouch-Elsa often elicited derisive comments from people who lived in other communities in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. “People from McAllen or from Harlingen frequently laughed at us and made snide remarks, just because we were from Edcouch-Elsa,” says local elementary teacher Gabriel Farías. “And, even at the university, we were humiliated constantly and treated as if we were from the backwoods, like we were some lesser kind of people, just because we were from Edcouch” (Farías, 2003). “The Valley was seen as underdeveloped by others across the state, but Edcouch-Elsa was viewed as the poorest of the poor,” says Amy Sánchez (2003), who graduated from Edcouch-Elsa High School and pursued her studies outside the Valley in the mid-1980s. High school principal Robert Rodríguez (1998) recounts his first day as a freshman at the local university, when he answered the professor’s question of where he was from with, “I’m from Edcouch,” only to be embarrassed by the professor’s retort: “You’re from Edcouch, huh, do you know how to read?”

The humiliating anecdotes, which seem ubiquitous, the published reports announcing the school's financial woes, and a seemingly deteriorating local economy all created a collective psyche imbued in the minds of many locals. For me the disillusionment came when I saw it in the eyes and heard it in the voices of my students when I returned to teach. The correspondingly low level of expectations most of my students had was a direct result of the social reality that existed locally, regionally, and even in other parts of the state. As a young, idealistic teacher who saw a world of opportunities for my students, I immediately faced the issue of helping them take advantage of those opportunities. It was not going to happen, however, if they continued to believe what others thought of them, because they were from Edcouch-Elsa, lived, and went to school in the most impoverished community and school in Texas.

In addition, Edcouch-Elsa students, much like students in other educational environments, were subjected to a curriculum and a schooling process where their lives were not valued, where they did not see themselves or their ethnic group in the textbooks or in the curriculum, and where schooling was devoid of community life. This, to me, was a practical problem, as much as it was a social and cultural one. Moreover, it was a research problem. So, I asked myself: "How can I convince my students, their parents, the school, and even some in the community at large that they are better than what they think, and that there is a world of opportunities they can realize? And how can I do this as a teacher, by creating effective instructional practices and a pedagogy that corresponds to their realities?" I asked those questions of my students and of myself, and those questions define the research problem I have spent the last thirteen years exploring, answering, and resolving. Teaching, learning, and research inform the research question and problem, and all are pedagogical processes rooted in both the traditional classroom and the larger classroom we know as the community at large.

Response to the Problem—and the Formation of Student Narratives

A response to the problem of identity-building at Edcouch-Elsa High School, valuing students' cultural assets, engaging community as part of teaching and learning, building young leaders, and capturing the story of a community is what my work as a learner, public school teacher, and community resident is about. Many people have participated in gaining an understanding of this history. We have learned from the storytellers and from the young researchers who have collected the stories and built relationships with the elders. Through research processes and community building work, we have reached a collective understanding of our place in history, which according to Freire is a prerequisite to gaining the critical consciousness necessary to be agents of change (Freire

& Macedo, 1995). The oral history work, combined with initiatives aimed at creating conditions for youth leadership development, has allowed us to reach praxis, where theory, pedagogy, and action merge and consequently transform individuals and community.

Myrta's Story of Change

Myrta walked into Edcouch-Elsa High School when she was 14 years old, having arrived just days before from the family's yearly trek to the peach orchards of rural Utah. The entire family worked picking peaches and had been doing so since Myrta could remember—it had been a way of life for the family. But it had also been the private side of Myrta's life, a side she didn't talk about in school, for fear of being ridiculed as a "poor migrant kid." On the other hand, Myrta's story had great richness: She worked hard, demonstrated sheer resiliency, adapted to an agricultural working environment in a foreign place and then to a traditional schooling environment back home in rural South Texas, and she built strong relationships with her family members as she toiled by their side.

At Edcouch-Elsa High School, the challenge was to inspire Myrta to see the value in her story, and that is exactly what other teachers and I worked on—to get her to think about, write about, and deeply examine her own narrative. The specific academic strategy that motivated Myrta to explore her story deeply was the work she did on collecting oral histories. She conducted several oral histories, but after organizing and conducting the most important oral history, with her grandmother, Myrta was ready to delve into her own story. Then one day in history class, Myrta sat and crafted a narrative that she not only published, but also used as her essay for college admissions. This is her essay:

Edcouch, Texas, is the only place that I can truly call home, but as a migrant it isn't the only place I live in. Every year as school comes to an end and the heat begins to burn, my family packs our bags and boards up our house. It would be nice to say that leaving gets easier every year, but I cannot. It's gotten tougher every year. I can't say goodbye to my friends because I'm not really leaving, and I can't get sad because I know that I'll be back. Sometimes the only thing you can do is close your eyes for five minutes, because that is how long it takes to leave Edcouch and Elsa. Then, when you open your eyes, all you can do is hope that the three months of upcoming labor will speed by.

I can honestly say that up until my twelfth year of life I did not know what work was. Then one morning before the sun rose, my mother shook me out of bed and told me to get up. It was time to work. I didn't take the moment seriously because it was summer, and I was still 12. No one under 20 woke up before the sun, especially when you didn't have school. Who was I to break this unspoken rule? Unfortunately, that didn't pass through my parents' minds.

The moment initiated my new stage of life, as a worker. I was to rise at the same time as the adults, and to do the same work as the adults. So at 12 years old my summer days were going to be spent in the fields. We started off thinning peaches, the job that I hate with all of my heart. We rose at five in the morning, to make the day shorter and cooler, and terminated each day at around three. This cycle continued for the first month, and proceeded with the picking of raspberries, cherries and blackberries for the last two months. While other kids were at home watching TV and going swimming, I was beneath the sun in my peach tree wearing my long sleeved shirts.

I did not complain as I worked because I understood that this is what my parents needed me to accept. If I complained, I would only make myself look foolish because every other person there wasn't complaining. So, every morning as I rose my heart sank, and I longed to make the sun disappear or the clouds pour their rain. My 12th summer of life was spent in denial and confusion.

I am now eighteen, and I've gone back to Utah as a worker for the last five summers. As each summer passed, I learned things that I know other people would take a lifetime to learn. I experienced life with a new perspective, and I found myself being thankful to my parents for teaching me what hard work is. The opportunities that this type of work offers are overshadowed by society's stereotype of migrant farm workers. Positive effects are blurred by the negative statistics and other data that researchers, the media, and others collect.

My summers spent in and with the land have educated me. I still deplore thinning peaches, but I have an understanding of life and nature that makes my heart race. Every day that I begin before the sun is to my benefit. With this teacher, I have become a better student, not only of school, but also of life. (Guajardo, 2005, pp. 67-69)

With this essay Myrta gained admission to Brown University, and she graduated from Brown, where she studied anthropology and the land.

Cecilia's Story of Change

Like Myrta, Cecilia came into the high school a bit unsure of herself, and certainly, unaware of the power of her own narrative, but like Myrta's, Cecilia's family story possessed great power. Cecilia's turning point occurred when she interviewed her grandfather, who as it turned out was a World War II veteran and

part of D-Day during the historic invasion of the beaches of Normandy in France in June of 1944. Cecilia's reaction to her grandfather's stories was bittersweet; she was happy to know the stories, and she was proud of her grandfather, but she was saddened because just months before the interview her grandmother had suffered a stroke and was now unable to speak—so Cecilia would no longer be able to listen to the important stories of her grandmother. Herein, Cecilia narrates parts of her response:

It wasn't until I began doing oral histories that I learned that immense value that a person's story has—even more so when I had the opportunity to interview my grandfather.

As other students and I interviewed him, it was as if I was getting a history lesson on WWII all over again, only this time I realized that my grandpa played an important role in it. I had no idea that he was part of the Normandy Invasion. I had heard of D-Day, but I never paid as much attention as I did in that interview. My grandfather has wonderful stories to tell but I never bothered to ask until then.

Since that interview, I saw my grandpa's eyes light up. He was no longer scolding me: he was acknowledging the hard work that our class was doing. Now every morning that he takes me to school we talk about the weather, about his cows, and every now and then he'll take a detour to show where the old Mexican school used to be or anything else I should know. I'm glad that now I've learned to appreciate my grandpa's words because I had always taken them for granted.

However, I did not go without punishment for my ignorance. My grandmother is no longer able to speak, so I can't talk to her the way I used to or even the new way that I learned how it's too late for those conversations: all I can do now is read the expressions on her face and reassure her that I love her. If people learn to value others' words and understand the power that the story has to strengthen relationships, perhaps they will not miss out on all the special encounters they could have had, such as with me and my grandmother. (Guajardo, 2005, p. 71)

With a firmer understanding of her personal and family narrative, Cecilia used that story as part of her college admission process, and like Myrta, she gained admission to an Ivy League university. Cecilia enrolled at Columbia University in New York and subsequently graduated in four years.

Final Reflection

Students and other residents in this rural community in South Texas have been revitalized because of this collaborative and participatory work that honors the cultural values of the community, celebrates the stories of the master narrators, and builds the leadership skills of youths along the way (Guajardo, M., 2002; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2002; Navarro, 1995; Smith, 2002; Wigginton, 1972). The response also includes the formulation of an emerging theory grounded in school and community practice, which integrates the energy and passions of youths, values the wisdom and stories of elders, and builds on the values and assets of the community.

Notes

1. Don and doña are titles of respect assigned to elders in the Mexican culture. This narrative refers to Isabel Gutiérrez as don Isabel as a show of respect, but also because that is how he was introduced and how we got to know him and build a relationship with him.

2. Isabel Gutiérrez was born on the day of the patron saint Isabel, Santa Isabel, and was thus named in honor of that patron saint. In many Mexican calendars, each day of the year honors a patron saint. Thus, the boy's parents gave him a saintly, albeit feminine name.

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Cubans, ¡Sí!; Haitians, ¡No! U.S. Immigration Policy, Cultural Politics, and Immigrant Eligibility

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Immigration has always been an issue in the United States and, since the 1990s, has attracted more attention because of revised immigration laws and procedures. Of particular interest is the impact of revised immigration laws on Haitian immigrants to the United States. While 9/11 is generally regarded as a milestone for increased security at our borders, previously enacted immigration laws, the 1991 Haitian coup, and key U.S. court cases present more relevance to Haitian immigration today than do many post-9/11 laws, which focus on terrorism and enemy combatants.¹ For this reason, the present article will examine the legal concepts of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants as applied to Haitians who have sought entrance to the United States since the 1991 coup. The theoretical framework for this research is based on the premise that political forces and policy rather than adherence to (a) strict due process or (b) international law and custom strongly influence legal interpretation pertaining to Haitian immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Why Emigrate?

Haiti is the poorest country in Latin American and the Caribbean and ranks as one of the poorest countries in the world. Haiti's per capita income has shown a steady decline since 2000 rather than the growth or stability experienced by the rest of Latin America. For example, its 2004 per capita gross domestic product was \$390, which was a decrease from \$438 in 2000, and placed it at the bottom of the developing world in economic terms (Economic Commission for Latin America, 2006, p. 88). From a political vantage, Haiti has fared only a little better. From 1957 until 1986 it endured harsh dictatorships, first by François "Papa Doc" Duvalier until 1971, and then by his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier. The overthrow