



Implications for Social Work Education

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Working in the Borderland: Implications for Social Work Education

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The U.S.-Mexico border area provides a rich learning environment for professional social workers, and at the same time poses challenges to social work practitioners as they graduate. This paper will explore some of the unique demographic and socio-cultural features that are barriers to the delivery of social services in the border area. These distinctive factors have implications both for the teaching of social work and the continuing education needs of social work graduates.

Demographics of the U.S.-Mexico Border Region

The border region was geographically defined by the La Paz Agreement of 1983 signed by the U.S. and Mexican Governments for the protection, improvement, and conservation of an area 62 miles wide on each side of the border and extending approximately 2000 miles from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico (PAHO, 2007). Approximately 12 million persons live in the border region, equally divided between the U.S. and Mexico (See Table 1.) By the year 2025, the population is estimated to double (U.S.-Mexican Border Health Commission, 2001). Inhabitants in this strip of land reside in 23 U.S. counties and in 49 Mexican municipalities. While most of the area is a vast rural desert, 92% of the population live in 14-paired cities along the border (GAO, 2000).

The level of poverty on the U.S. side of the border is one of the most striking features of the region. Contrary to popular thought, populations on the Mexican side of the border have higher income, literacy, wage, and employment rates than elsewhere in Mexico. However, this is not true for the U.S. side. According to the Pan American Health Organization (2007)

Conditions in the United States are the reverse: four of the seven poorest cities

and five of the poorest counties in the United States are located in Texas along the Mexican border. Generally, counties on the U.S. side have experienced an increase in unemployment and a decrease in per capita income over the past 30 years. For example, in the city of El Paso, Texas, poverty is twice the national average and average income is one-third the national figure. The educational level of the population in the U.S. border counties also is lower than elsewhere in the country (pp. 733-734).

Using 2000 census data, it is estimated that one-quarter of United States families residing in this region live at or below poverty. This is more than double the poverty rate in the rest of the country (Anderson & Gerber, 2007). According to the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission (2001), a total of 21 of the 32 counties located in the U.S. border region have been designated as economically distressed areas. The unemployment rate in this region is 250 to 300% higher than in the rest of the country.

If the U.S.-Mexico border region were considered as one state, this state would have the following demographics:

1. Rank last in access to health care;
2. Second in death rates due to hepatitis;
3. Third in deaths related to diabetes;
4. Last in per capital income;
5. First in the number of school children living in poverty;
6. First in the number of children who are uninsured. (U.S.-Mexico BHC, 2008).

A unique land management system has emerged in the border area. The term *colonias* has been used to describe the substandard housing and impoverished, unincorporated settlements that exist along the U.S.-Mexico border. It is esti-

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mated that more than 300,000 people live in 1,300 colonias in Texas and New Mexico (EPA, 2003). In Texas these areas are peri-urban settlements that were formed in the 1970's through creative land sales. They are characterized by cheaply acquired land, inadequate infrastructure, and self-help construction. New Mexico's 138 *colonias* are primarily in rural areas and were settled in the 19th century as farming or mining communities. In both states poverty is the distinguishing feature, along with lack of a potable water supply, lack of adequate sewage systems, lack of electricity, poor, unpaved roads, and lack of decent, safe, and sanitary housing (Koerner, 2002).

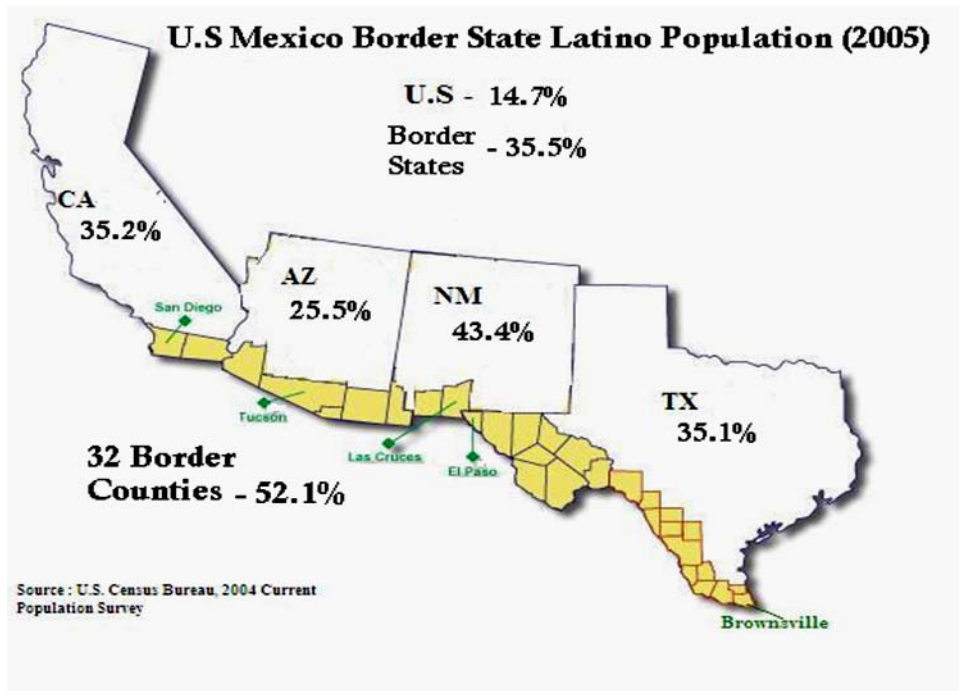
Health Disparities

Associated with the above conditions, this region has been plagued by major health problems on both sides of the border. A very mobile population further compounds these health conditions. The northern part of Mexico, which bor-

ders the U.S., has the highest rate of HIV infection and drug abuse in Mexico, and the rate of tuberculosis in the U.S. - Mexico border region is almost twice the national rate. In 1995, the four U.S. Border States accounted for 31% of all tuberculosis cases in the nation. The U.S.-Mexico Border States accounted for 20 to 21% of the total number of hepatitis A cases in the two countries. There are also higher rates of salmonellosis, shigellosis, mosquito transmitted malaria, and measles in the border area (Chahin, 2000; PAHO, 2007; USMBHC, 2003, pp. 15-18). It is estimated that the Type 2 diabetes rate along the U.S.-Mexico border is approximately 16% versus 13.9% for the United States. The death rate due to diabetes in the border area for Hispanics is 46.7% versus 16.3% for White non-Hispanics (La Fe Policy and Advocacy Center, 2006, p. 5). According to the health policy advocacy organization, Families USA (2005),

“Disparities in health care refer to the differences between two or more popula-

Table 1: (La Fe Policy and Advocacy Center, 2006, p. 2)



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tion groups in health care access, coverage, and quality of care, including differences in preventive, diagnostic, and treatment services” (p. 2).

This lack of accessible, affordable health care has resulted in rates of illness along the borderland that rival Third World countries. Teenage births on the border are higher (17%) than the nation (12%). Women are not as likely to receive timely prenatal attention, and children are at risk of serious childhood diseases (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005).

Education

Educational attainment is a major concern in the Borderland. Too few of the residents are educated for 21st century jobs. According to a report presented at a Center for Health Communities Health Policy Forum,

- In 2000, 73 percent of Border residents above the age of 25 had completed high school, compared with 80.4 percent nationally, ranking border counties 50th if considered a 51st state. Without San Diego, that ranking would drop to last.
- Latino students are three times (15%) more likely to drop out of high school compared to non-Latinos (5%). (La Fe Policy and Advocacy Center, 2006, p. 4)

Barriers to Service Delivery

While the needs in this area are great, services are not supplied to those who need them most. Some of the reasons for this have to do with people’s immigrant status, border security and the enforcement of border laws, lack of linguistically appropriate services, and cultural understandings/misunderstandings.

Immigration Status

Many of the families living in the border area are undocumented, living in the U.S. for work or for family. In the border area, there is a frequent flow of extended family members across a fairly permeable border. Families visit, remain for a while, and return to their country. It is not uncommon to have households where there is a mix of

individuals with differing immigration or citizen statuses. Children of immigrant families often live in multi-generational, mixed immigration status homes where various family members represent different legal statuses, including citizens, legal residents, and undocumented immigrants. A report by the Urban Institute found that nearly one in ten families with children have a mixed status family in the United States, and in Texas and New Mexico one in four families has an immigrant parent (Fix & Zimmermann, 1999). Based upon the personal experiences of the first author of this article, the number of mixed families can be as high as 30% of the families in the border region.

Border security and the enforcement of border laws

Since 9/11 and the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, increased attention has been given to border security aimed at stemming the flow of illegal immigration and better securing the country from terrorist attack. In addition, Homeland Security forces have been recruited to counteract the long-standing problem of drug smuggling along the border that has been heightened in 2008 by the increase of drug cartel violence in Juarez, Mexico, and other areas along the border. As a result, the past seven years have seen the growth of very aggressive immigration and drug enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border. Actions have included the construction of barrier proof fencing, the stationing of National Guard troops along the border, and a significant increase in the number of U.S. Border Patrol Officers and other law enforcement agents posted in the borderland area. According to Emily Cary (2008) of the Las Cruces ACLU, there are currently 43 different law enforcement agencies operating throughout the U.S.-Mexican border area.

This aggressive enforcement effort serves to reinforce traditionally held views by Mexican-Americans about social service agencies. They often view government agencies as extensions of the anti-immigration effort and have little trust in them. Given the large number of Mexican-American families in the area who live in mixed immigration status homes, there is a fear that

merely seeking any type of social service assistance will draw unwanted attention to family members who may be at risk for deportation. As a result, many families' needs go unmet. Furthermore, U.S. Border Patrol traffic checkpoints are placed strategically along major highways. These can serve as barriers to the utilization of social services by families wishing to minimize their travel from one side of the checkpoint to the other.

Lack of Linguistically Appropriate Services

Along the U.S.-Mexico border, the ability to provide language-appropriate services is not a luxury but rather a necessity. Being bi-lingual is a key skill if one is to provide for the needs of people in the borderland area.

Suleiman (2003a, p. 189) is emphatic in her view that the provision of services in Spanish is not just an issue of providing culturally relevant services, but one also of civil rights. Access to services for those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is guaranteed under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Suleiman (2003a) states:

Effective communication is the key to ensuring equal access to benefits and services for LEP children and families. The client should be able to: (a) understand information about the services and process, (b) understand the resources and services available to address the particular situation, and (c) communicate with the service provider. From a child welfare perspective, this requirement is congruent with the principles of good social service, because a helping relationship depends on meaningful communication between the provider and client (p. 190).

While basic to effective social services and as a civil rights issue, language continues to be a barrier to criminal justice, health, and mental health services and to the achievement of successful family outcomes in child welfare cases. The limited availability of language-appropriate services in child welfare is critical in meeting the time limits of the Adoption and Safe Families Act. Further, the lack of Spanish speaking foster home placements, group homes, adoptive fami-

lies, and juvenile justice programs all serve to limit the effectiveness of these services. This is particularly troubling as data show that Mexican Americans are disproportionately represented in child maltreatment reports and the foster care populations with the Mexican American foster care population almost doubling from 8% in 1990 to 15% in 2002 (Suleiman, 2003b, p. 3).

Language is an issue that compounds and is related to a number of other issues confronting Mexican Americans in our culture. Whether it is the high rate of dropping out of high school for Mexican American youth (Therrien & Ramirez, 2000) or the low wages and racism on the job that are a fact of life for Mexican American adults (Crouter, Davis, Updegraff, Delgado, & Fortner, 2006), language is a consistent obstacle.

Because the ability to communicate is of such great importance, many agencies have attempted to hire Spanish-speaking staff. While there has been greater focus on providing language-appropriate and culturally sensitive services there are still wide gaps. Suleiman (2003b) sees this variance as being related to:

... efforts that do not take into account the unique socio-cultural characteristics of Latinos, such as language, acculturation, familism, and the experience of discrimination. In an attempt to create "colorblind" or "one size fits all" solutions, Latino family needs go unmet (p. 4).

Language has become a political factor in many parts of the country. Opposition to translation of information into Spanish is widespread. The authors often read and hear many comments in their own communities suggesting that people who live in the United States need to learn and speak English and, if not, then they should go back where they came from. Failure to speak "proper" English is often seen as not only reflecting un-American values, but also implying ones lack of education and intelligence.

Cultural Understandings/Misunderstandings

In conjunction with language-appropriate services, it is equally important to understand Mexican-American culture, primarily the importance of the family in the Mexican-American community. At one time the professional literature dis-

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cussed only the “cultural deficiency” and risks, misinterpreting the traditional Mexican-American value system (Aguirre Jr. & Baker, 2008). More current literature centers on the strengths of the Mexican-American culture and emphasizes the knowledge of and incorporates into practice specific cultural values such as “familismo, value of children, “marianismo,” “machismo,” “personalismo,” “pespecto,” and spirituality, among others (Workgroup on Adapting Latino Services, 2008). Given acculturation and immigration, these values are general and may not apply to all people.

- “Familismo” is the inclination to maintain close connections to family: close relationships, cohesiveness, and cooperation with family members extending to fictive kin, god parents (Rios). Familism is the process whereby all individual or personal actions are directed toward the benefit of the family as a whole.
- Value of children: Mexican Americans like to keep their children close, physically and emotionally, and to teach through discipline (Niemann, Romero, Arredondo, & Rodriguez, 1999). Mexican American families rarely use baby-sitters and instead take their children with them to relatives. Most Mexican Americans believe that parents alone should decide how to discipline their children, without interference from non-family members or social service agency representatives (Niemann, Romero, Arredondo, & Rodriguez, 1999).
- “Marianismo” is a gender specific value that applies to women. “Marianismo” encourages women to use the Virgin Mary as a role model of the ideal woman, being spiritually strong, morally superior, nurturing, and self-sacrificing. This value has changed through acculturation but still is evident (Workgroup on Adapting Latino Services, 2008).
- “Machismo” refers to a man’s responsibility to provide for, protect, and defend his family and act as the head of the household as father and husband. Recent researchers have examined the concept using terms like bravery,

courage, generosity, stoicism, heroism, and ferocity in the protection of the family (Guttman, 2003; Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 2004). The term has acquired some negative connotations related to arrogance, sexual and physical aggression, and male chauvinism. However, recent studies have portrayed Mexican American men as complex individuals with a multiplicity of attitudes and have questioned the stereotypical understanding of machismo (Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 2004). Because of these stereotypes, many professional social workers practicing in the U.S.-Mexico border do not understand the role of the father within the context of the Mexican-American culture.

- “Respecto” refers to both the value of perceived authority figures, such as teachers and therapists, and the substantive value of the hierarchy of the family and the respect given to parents (Workgroup on Adapting Latino Services, 2008).
- Spirituality, religious beliefs, and faith are keys to understanding Mexican-American culture. The value of the church and alternative health providers cannot be underestimated (Workgroup on Adapting Latino Services, 2008).

Domestic violence is a good example of a family problem that, while affecting all ethnic groups, needs to be understood within the context of culture.

“Domestic violence in Latino populations must be understood within the context in which it happens. A legacy of multiple oppressions (some of which began centuries ago) such as poverty, discrimination, racism, colonization, classism, homophobia, etc., makes it imperative that domestic violence not be viewed as a one-dimensional phenomenon. This important social issue requires that research, policy, advocacy, and services be approached with an understanding of the intersectionality of social forces that are at work in the occurrence of domestic abuse in Latino families and communities (National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence,

2006).

The a higher incidence of domestic violence in border areas may be due to a lack of education regarding domestic violence, a lack of services on the Mexico side of the border, and the complexity of intervening in domestic violence situations due to the intimate nature of domestic violence. Other barriers include traditional beliefs regarding a husband's right to be abusive and privacy issues that include the belief that what happens in one's own home is private and not the business of others, especially law enforcement. Other prevalent beliefs include the ideas that domestic violence does not affect people outside the home, that the woman deserves it, and that she must like it or she wouldn't stay. Abusers in both countries see abusive behavior as their right and feel justified in their behavior, subscribing to very traditional ideas regarding relationships. Women in Mexico may be more likely to be in denial about the abuse, may not see violence as a reason for making a report or getting a divorce, and may not feel that a perpetrator of domestic violence should receive prison time, though these are certainly common traits for women living in all countries. Mexican American women in the U.S. are afraid of being deported if they report. These attitudes continue to exist, but are in the process of changing in both countries through education and law enforcement, mainly in the U.S. (Perilla & Perez, 2002).

Culturally specific batterer intervention programs for Latinos are being developed utilizing a comprehensive family intervention approach. The interventions consider that, in a majority of cases, the abuse of women by men is a behavior that many males have learned at home and in a society in which violence is an accepted way of resolving differences (Perilla & Perez, 2002).

Utilization of Social Service Agencies

In addition to fearing deportation and other immigration problems and the lack of Spanish language and cultural competency, other factors are at work. As mentioned above, many Mexican-Americans do not understand the function of most social agencies and perceive that all agencies are part of the government. This lack of familiarity

with the function of social service agencies and their services is a circular process and relates to the agencies' lack of sensitivity to Mexican-American culture, value, and belief systems. Service delivery at best is complex, requiring paperwork documenting personal information. Many formal service providers are involved and, when the activities are conducted in English, there is little consideration for how well the recipients understand what is being said to them. Children are often used and misused for translation. In addition, there is little outreach to Latino populations and few materials written in Spanish to explain the existence of the programs.

Additional barriers to the receipt of services are attitudinal, and include feelings of self-consciousness when "bothering" other people about their personal problems, a lack of sophistication about complex forms of treatment, a perception that culturally sensitive services aren't available, past experience of maltreatment by authorities in the U.S. or Mexico, and shame and stigma particularly related to mental illness or developmental problems (Workgroup on Adapting Latino Services, 2008).

One example of the mistrust of delivery systems is reflected in the under utilization of the Food Stamp and TANF programs in the El Paso area. According to an article in the El Paso Times (Gilot, 2007), 40% of the citizens in El Paso live below the poverty line but do not receive food stamps. In El Paso County only 3.3% of the people in poverty are currently receiving TANF benefits. These low numbers go beyond the impact of the new regulations that resulted from welfare reform and may imply a systematic form of exclusion.

The delivery of social support in border communities is often informal and inter-familial, sometimes involving the church. When problems manifest themselves within families, members rely on each other or fictive kin as the primary sources of support. Seeking help is a private family and community affair, and going outside of family and community is not usually the first option. In case that a family cannot help, most individuals would seek help from a neighbor or co-worker with whom they have an established rela-

tionship.

Understanding this, Suleiman (2003b, p. 22) stresses the importance of the personal relationship or “personalismo” as a key to the success of the interactions between the worker and client. “Personalismo” involves the valuing and building of interpersonal relationships that are warm and friendly as opposed to impersonal or overly formal. As mentioned earlier, many Mexican-Americans do not understand social services. In case they decide to work with the social worker, they expect concrete evidence of assistance and knowledge of their culture, not long waits and confusing qualifications.

Implications for Social Work Education

Addressing the high rate of poverty, poor health indicators, and overall living conditions in the colonias and low income barrios requires social workers who possess the leadership skills and have the in-depth linguistic and cultural knowledge to overcome the barriers to the receipt of services by people in need. The question is how will social work educational programs meet this leadership challenge?

The Council on Social Work Education’s (CSWE) 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) provides guidance for the building of educational programs based upon sensitivity to “contextual” factors in the community and a stronger focus on field education. This means that social work educational programs are charged with creating missions, competencies, and curricula that are clearly differentiated from other programs by their distinctive response to their social context.

Those social work programs residing in the “Borderland” have the exceptional challenge of preparing the majority of their graduates for practice in the border region and, thus, distinguishing their educational offerings from programs in other areas of the country. They have the extra incentive to develop social work education programs that are more focused on meeting local needs in the community, hiring faculty who are representative of the Borderland, developing alternative field programs, emphasis on the Spanish language, and emphasis on cultural education.

Need for a strong community/locality development model of social work

An appropriate model for services in the borderland area can be drawn from the historical successes of community development and community action. This necessitates a return to one of the pillars of social work education that centered on working with the community as a participant, understanding that the community and its people are the real experts, and recognizing that the function of the social worker is dictated by the needs of the community. A community model suggests that the starting point in the education of “borderland” social work students needs to be a focus on the development of a professional generalist with a high skill level in macro practice.

Typically schools of social work prepare students to work for either direct or indirect human service agencies. About one third of all graduate schools of social work in the United States have some type of advanced generalist concentration. While this concentration endorses coursework across all levels of service delivery -- individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities -- it is the opinion of the authors of this paper that macro practice receives little attention. This may be true because employment opportunities demand greater micro skills with clinical orientations. Thus, most graduates from schools of social work find employment as direct service practitioners in child, youth and family services, child protective services, mental health services, medical services, schools, aging services, and corrections.

Advocacy agencies, community support programs, and recreational agencies that may have previously employed social workers do not currently employ social work graduates in the borderland, nor do students apply for positions. To change this practice it is necessary to develop partnerships with the grassroots development organizations and community action groups that have produced successful results in working with colonias and low-income barrios. It is the community that must identify and demand the social services that are needed in order to have a wide participation of the population. Thus, it is important that the services identified must come not

only from the community but also be based on strong cultural and social values of the target population. Once these partnerships are formed and trust developed, hopefully social workers can be hired.

Faculty representative of the Borderland

Borderland social work education institutions are remiss if they do not hire individuals who are indigenous to and work in these local areas to provide relevant content to students both in the classroom and in the field. While some faculty may be involved in community based research and have in-depth knowledge of community needs, faculty members typically are not from the area and have little experience in either working in the community or understanding relevant cultural factors. While having community leaders serve as guest speakers in class is one way of providing more pertinent content, it does little to recognize the value of the knowledge and skills that these individuals can bring to the educational experience. Programs need to provide greater recognition of the importance of Mexican-American content by recruiting knowledgeable tenure-track faculty, and hiring and paying individuals in adjunct positions.

Developing Alternative Field programs

Field programs are finally capturing the limelight in social work education as the “signature pedagogy,” a form of education that integrates theory and practice. However, to fulfill this promise, social work education field programs will need to develop alternative methods for field instruction to recruit, train, and pay field instructors. In the borderland, as in many rural regions, community based programs do not have employees with the professional credentials to provide supervised field instruction. Yet the best advocacy programs – the ones that are attempting to bring structural changes needed throughout the borderland region -- have dynamic leaders who have a great deal to teach but no formal education format. Students can contribute significantly to these agencies. One solution is to hire seasoned, professional field instructors as consultants to work with the agencies and supervise students.

Emphasis on Spanish Language

In social work there is a need for professional and technical language instruction, particularly in mental health and health. Schools of social work that intend to prepare the majority of their graduates for work in the border area must move to a fluency- in-Spanish requirement for their graduates. This means that students must be able to read and write the language. Unfortunately, many native Spanish-speaking students have never taken Spanish language courses. They grew up learning to speak Spanish from family members, neighbors, and friends, and often the Spanish spoken is highly vernacular and contains many slang expressions. Thus, many native Spanish-speaking students do not have the ability to write, read, and speak grammatically correct Spanish. Native Spanish speaking students are as much in need of formal, professional, and technical Spanish language instruction as the non-native Spanish-speaking students.

Implementing a bilingual requirement will be difficult in the highly impacted and prescribed work education programs. Yet one or two courses could be added to address language needs. Several universities have experimented with innovative programs:

- Some programs are beginning to provide field seminars in Spanish for their bilingual students. These seminars greatly enhance the learning experience by using the language of the clients, thus creating a greater understanding of the problems and barriers to finding solutions. Further, students hone their own language skills and learn how to engage at a professional and technical level.
- Utilizing continuing education, Simmons College School of Social Work has partnered with Berlitz to provide Spanish language courses for social workers and other human service providers in the Boston area.
- The School of Social Work at Texas State University co-sponsors with the Department of Modern Languages a summer Spanish language institute for BSW students during the summer.

Once graduated the bilingual social worker

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faces several issues from the job market. There is no standard as to what constitutes a “bilingual” level of language proficiency, which means that a tremendous disparity exists in the assumptions that employers make when hiring bilingual employees. For some employers the ability to speak Spanish is all that is required. Other employers may also have the expectation that the individual not only can speak Spanish but can read and write in Spanish as well. Exploitive employers require bilingual workers to add to their workload translating for their colleagues without extra compensation. Last, some employers may expect bilingual employees to translate agency and even legal documents into Spanish.

Emphasis on Cultural Education

Closely related to language education is the developing of knowledge and skill in relating to the history and culture of the Mexican-Americans who live in the border region. Many students and many of the people who reside in the community were born and raised for part of their life in Mexico. Spanish was their first language and many came with their parents or other relatives when they were children and over time have become naturalized citizens or permanent residents of the United States. Immediate and extended family members live on both sides of the border and there is frequent visiting back and forth for holidays, family events, and celebrations.

All social work programs are required to have some type of social/ cultural course content in the foundation year of their programs. A piece of this content is directed generally at “knowledge and skills in working with Hispanic clients.” However, this brush is a wide one and attempts to present specific knowledge about people who have the Spanish language in common but come from disparate backgrounds and cultures, such as the Caribbean Islands, or Central and South America. The history and culture of these people may share some similarities, but fail to reflect the specific culture and values of the Mexican experience along the border and to adequately prepare students for the work in the region. Thus, while there is a wealth of information at their doorstep, often what students learn in class is little more than the

replacement of one set of general stereotypes and beliefs with a somewhat more accurate new set of stereotypes and beliefs.

Recommendations

With some exception, what we are currently doing in social work education does not adequately prepare students upon graduation to grapple with the myriad issues and needs confronting the Mexican-American population within the border region. Students should be required to become engaged in the communities in the area. These communities could become the classrooms for learning.

- Learning activities could include conducting demographic studies of the community, identifying and understanding the history of the area, and identifying community leaders who play important roles in advocacy and problem resolution in the community. Research assignments can use participatory action research, ethnographic studies, and community based evaluation.
- An in-depth and current knowledge of Mexican-American culture and values must be taught so that students can develop a high level of competency. Graduates must be prepared to engage people differently using the skills of “personalismo” to assess, plan, and evaluate the delivery of services at the individual, family, group, and community levels.
- Students need to appreciate the strengths of local community leaders and engage in discussions with them. The informal networks thus formed are important in building effective relationships with community members. One example is to build upon the successes of the “promotoras” in providing basic health education in the colonias.
- To be most meaningful, this type of cultural content needs to be reflected upon while the student is in the field. The depth of learning that is inherent in the content discussed in this article is more than what can be contained in one course and should be part of weekly integrative field seminars that at their

best could be bi-lingual.

A major barrier to the implementation of this direction is the lack of Mexican-American tenure track social work educators in general and Mexican-American social work adjuncts, field instructors, and field liaisons.

- The first step is to grow our own educators by building the number of Mexican-American students in BSW and MSW level programs. In recognition of this type of need, the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health has committed \$1,000,000 over a three-year period to fund scholarships for bilingual students to attend one of the eleven graduate schools of social work in Texas. In the first year, \$300,000 was awarded to fund a total of 27 students. In return for the scholarships that cover all tuition and fees, the students agree to work in the field of mental health in Texas for a period equal to the length of their support (Hogg Foundation, 2008).
- The next step for dealing with the shortage of Ph.D. educated Mexican-Americans to fill faculty positions is to require that programs hire experienced MSW level Mexican-American social workers into non-tenure line teaching positions. Once employed, these individuals need to be given the time and funding to complete the Ph.D. The New Mexico Higher Education Department sponsors a minority doctoral assistance program. Up to \$75,000 can be awarded over a three to four year period for residents who have graduated from a New Mexico institution of higher education to attend a doctoral program. A department at a New Mexico university must sponsor the application and must agree to hire the individual upon completion of their degree.

Achieving the level of individual competency necessary to provide language-appropriate and culturally competent services must be viewed over a span of time that can begin at both the BSW and MSW degree levels. This includes the development of a level of language proficiency to communicate verbally and in writing not only with client systems but also with other profes-

sionals on both sides of the border. Students could attend summer abroad intensive language programs for credit thereby immersing themselves in both language and culture.

However, realistically, a longer period of time that extends beyond the degree program will be necessary to master the depth of content to be required. There are some possible solutions. Schools need to create post-degree certificate programs offering ongoing continuing education opportunities in language knowledge and skill. More concentrated, advanced certificate programs could combine cultural content with language skills or provide a series of continuing education classes on current topics in Mexican-American cultural and Spanish language knowledge and skills. Given the rural nature and expanse of the border region, particular attention should be given to the delivery of content through distance education technology.

If social work education programs are to effectively prepare students to meet the needs of the Mexican-American population in the border region, they must boldly develop their programs to give students the knowledge and skills necessary for culturally competent and language-appropriate practice taught by faculty personally knowledgeable of the area utilizing appropriate and creative field placements. The development, implementation, and teaching of Spanish language skills, Mexican-American cultural content, and community based learning experiences as basic parts of the social work education program must become non-negotiable. This will require leadership from professionals in the community, professional organizations, and social work educators to insure that a teaching workforce is developed to make the above happen.

The U.S.-Mexico border area provides great challenges to social work education and requires unique approaches to prepare social work students to work effectively with families, individuals, and communities in an area that has such a great need for both preventive and remedial resources and services. If we are up to these challenges, we can become leaders in making certain that our future and past graduates can develop the knowledge and skills to become dedicated profes-

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sionals capable of providing language and culturally appropriate services to some of our most vulnerable population in the borderland.

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