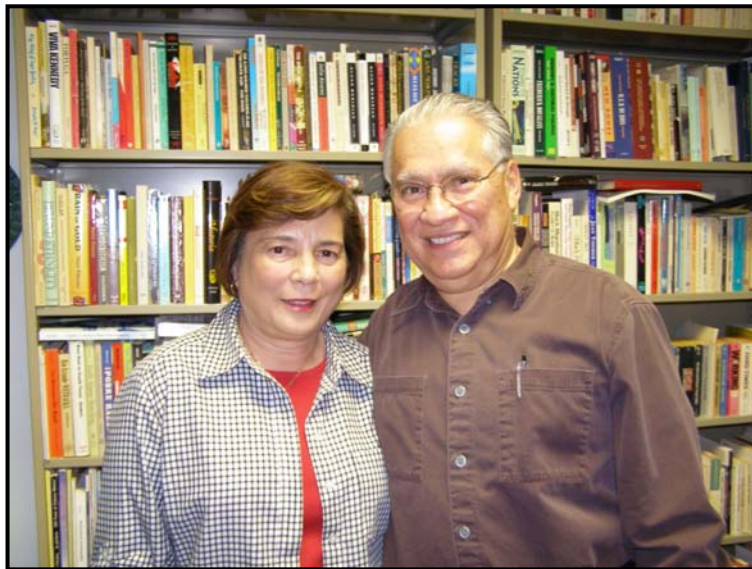


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Quality Education for All Students: Marco and Rita Portales

By Robert H. Leos

Marco and Rita Portales have been educators for over 30 years. After earning his doctorate in English at age 25 from the State University of New York in Buffalo, Marco began a career in higher education that has included faculty positions at the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Houston–Clear Lake, and Texas A&M University, where he’s taught in the English Department since 1991. Prior to joining the faculty at Texas A&M, Dr. Portales served as Dean

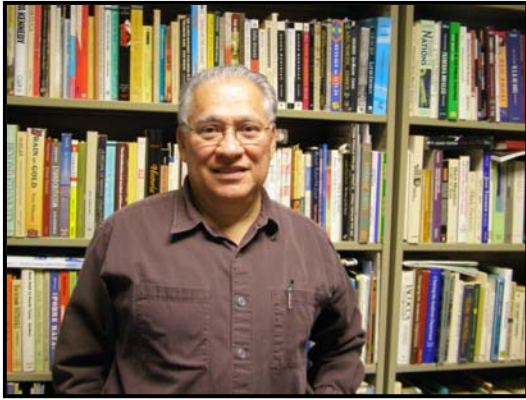


Rita Portales; Marco Portales

of the College of Arts and Sciences at Texas Southmost University, now part of The University of Texas System. At Texas A&M University, Dr. Marco Portales teaches graduate and undergraduate classes in creative writing and literature. He has written several books: *Youth and Age in American Literature: The Rhetoric of Old Men in the Mathers, Franklin, Adams, Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and James*; *Crowding Out Latinos: Mexican Americans in the Public Consciousness*; *Latino Sun, Rising: Our Spanish-speaking U.S. World*; and *Quality Education for Latinos and Latinas: Print and Oral Skills for All Students, K-College*, written in collaboration with Rita Portales.

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Dr. Portales has been designated “Outstanding Professor” by Texas A&M’s Society for International Studies (2005) and has been recognized for his contributions by the Committee for the Awareness of Mexican American Culture, the Mexican American & Latino Faculty Association and the Professional Hispanic Network. He is an honorary member of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honors Society.



Marco Portales

Rita Portales’ experience includes teaching and administrative positions in the public schools in Buffalo, New York, Oakland, California, and in the Houston suburbs of Alvin, Clear Lake City, and Pasadena. For the past 15 years, she has held teaching positions in Bryan, Texas, at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. She has taught bilingual classes, English as a Second Language courses, Spanish in high school, and regular English classes from first grade through high school. Currently, she is a part-time English Language Instructional Specialist at Jane Long Middle School for the Bryan Independent School District. From the spring semester of 2002 until 2004, she was a Student Teacher Supervisor for the College of Education at Texas A&M University in College Station. Rita earned a Bachelor’s degree from Medaille College in Buffalo, New York, and a Masters degree from New York University in New York. She has earned additional credentials in supervision and writing, and is trained in AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Instruction for high

school. Rita has produced a radio talk show directed at parents of English language learners, participated as an invited speaker in numerous conferences, served on textbook committees and advisory councils in public schools and higher education, taught graduate level courses, developed curriculum materials, and taught adult English language learners.

Rita and Marco attended the annual meeting of the Association of American Publishers in Austin, where Dr. Portales was an invited speaker on English language learners. Marco and Rita Portales agreed to discuss their passion for education, their collaboration on **Quality Education for Latinos and Latinas**, and their continued work to improve educational opportunities for all students. We met in Dr. Portales’ office at Texas A&M University.

Robert Leos: You refer to three of your books, **Crowding Out Latinos**, **Latino Sun, Rising**, and **Quality Education for Latinos and Latinas** as “The Latino Trilogy.” How did the idea of writing a trilogy come about?



Rita Portales

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Marco Portales: Rita and I have been working on raising the visibility of Latinos since the early 1970s. We were involved as teachers and activists for years when it came to Latino issues but we considered many of these activities as too transient. There was nothing we were leaving behind to show that we had been making a difference in these issues. I decided that one way to leave something behind was to write a book. That's how *Crowding Out Latinos* came about. The second book, *Latino Sun, Rising*, is a collection of essays that deals with three generations. What did my parents' generation go through in raising us in the 1940s and 1950s? What have we gone through in raising our families in the 1970s and 1980s? Too often these days, all Hispanics are lumped together with new immigrants from Latin America. *Latino Sun, Rising* points out that Mexican Americans and Latinos have been here for a number of generations, working quietly, trying to become members of the middle class, given the right opportunities. That's all in this book.

Then Rita and I wrote the third book. After we completed this one, *Quality Education for Latinos and Latinas*, Rita said, "You have a Latino trilogy." So the term *trilogy* was Rita's idea. The books all have the word *Latino* or *Latina* in their titles and they are related in the sense that each one spawned the next one.

Rita Portales: There were other things that were happening that kept edging into our thoughts. Our children were growing up and things were happening in the schools that we believed had to be addressed. For example, we became concerned about the non-visibility of Latinos in the textbooks and the negative visibility of Latinos as portrayed in the media. Our children would come home with stories that

The Latino Trilogy

Quality Education For Latinos and Latinas: Print and Oral Skills for All Students K-College. Marco and Rita Portales. 2005. The University of Texas Press (<http://www.utexaspress.com>).

Latino Sun, Rising: Our Spanish-speaking U.S. World. Marco Portales. 2005. Texas A&M University Press (<http://www.tamu.edu/upress>).

Crowding Out Latinos: Mexican Americans in the Public Consciousness. Marco Portales. 2000. Temple University Press (<http://www.temple.edu/tempress>).

Also Available From Amazon.com
<http://www.amazon.com>

showed us that they were getting stereotypical and erroneous information about Latinos, particularly Mexicans, in their schools. After a while we realized that if this was happening to our children then it was happening to many others as well. One would hope that it wasn't happening but I was in the midst of this in my teaching and realized it clearly was.

Robert Leos: How did you decide to collaborate on *Quality Education for Latinos and Latinas*?

Marco Portales: Rita would come home from school and relate stories about things that happened—"This incident happened today; this event happened to a teacher; this other episode occurred to a student of mine . . ."

Rita Portales: ". . . this happened to me."

Marco Portales: Right. These were things that were happening to Rita but she was telling them to me. It was frustrating so we started to ask ourselves what we could do to address these issues. I suggested that she start writing about these experiences so we could write a book around them. These

were patterns that were being experienced by all students and teachers.

Rita Portales: We wanted to write a book that brought about awareness. But we also wanted to write the book because students' experiences in schools can affect them for the rest of their lives. We thought, we just have to get a dialogue going about how to fix these things if they need fixing. We felt that writing the book would be one way to bring about some change.

Robert Leos: In *Quality Education for Latinos and Latinas*, you write about the need for change in the schools. How do you propose that the ideas and recommendations in your book be applied in the classroom or schools?

Marco Portales: Take a look at page 115, "How to Use a Team Approach to Repair Our K-12 Education System." That's the starting point—a plan of action. The chart on page 115 shows all the players in education. No one is focusing on the teacher and student relationship. That's where education needs to happen—in the classroom. Either it happens there or we don't get educated kids. Everyone else is paying attention to the principal, to the superintendent, to the board of education, to the governor, to the legislature, and all the big players. But it is between the teachers and students, in the classroom—that's where the focus needs to be.

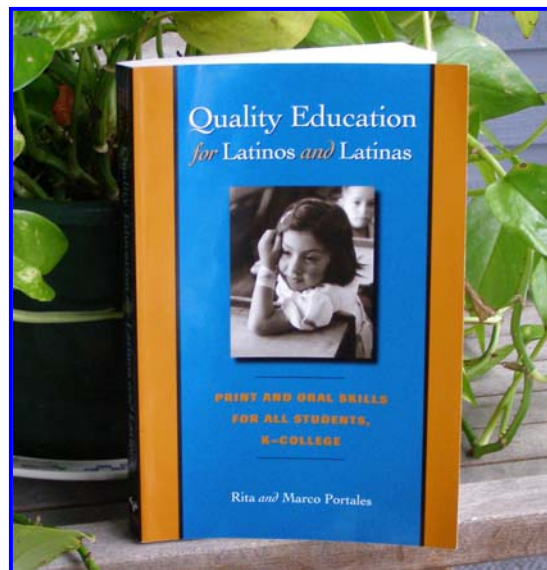
Rita Portales: I've said on many occasions that there should be more emphasis on colleges of education—the programs that are training teachers. The challenge for teacher education programs is to develop solid classroom management training and train teachers to build their curriculum for each group of youngsters. We're all here for the kids but we have to negotiate that with each class. Our

society is changing and we have students from a variety of backgrounds, some the kind of student that we've never faced before. People will pick up this book looking for answers to these issues. The answer is in good teaching and good administrative follow-up.

Marco Portales: The answer that we provide in our book is to focus our efforts on all things in print and require students from their first day in kindergarten to start talking; to develop confidence in their oral skills. As you teach print, you teach reading, critical thinking skills, and writing skills, the basics. But you have to teach these skills every year so that students become increasingly sophisticated. If we focus on these skills throughout K-12, we believe that many more students will be successful in college.

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Quality Education for Latinos and Latinas: Print and Oral Skills for All Students, K-College