

A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *Academic Profiling* by Gilda L. Ochoa

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gilda L. Ochoa is professor of sociology and Chicana/o-Latina/o Studies at Pomona College where she teaches courses on education, race/ethnicity, and Los Angeles. She is the author of *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community* (2004) and *Learning from Latino Teachers* (2007).

PRAISE FOR *ACADEMIC PROFILING*

“Remarkably provocative and perceptive, *Academic Profiling* is a meticulously researched and masterfully argued comparative study of how the system of schooling, contrary to the rhetoric of equal opportunities, re-enforces the achievement gap and reproduces disparities. With ethnographic insight and analytical precision, Gilda L. Ochoa details how immigration, racialization, class, and gender differentially impacts the educational trajectories for Asian and Latino students, and presents compelling lessons for transforming the context, culture, and process of learning.”

—Linda Vo, University of California, Irvine

“In the absence of an all-encompassing social movement, Ochoa demonstrates how only a courageous, power-conscious, counter-hegemonic curriculum can act as a counterweight to divisive policies and practices like student tracking. Ochoa has done the important work of addressing the complexities of Latino/a and Asian American schooling in one community and given us a language, framework, and perspective with which to discuss and critique it.”

—Angela Valenzuela, University of Texas, Austin

CONTEXT FOR *ACADEMIC PROFILING*

Since the 1960s movements for civil rights, an emphasis on confronting power, inequality, and racism in U.S. schools has receded. So too has the movement to reverse racial/ethnic segregation and enhance student interactions. Instead, current federal educational policies such as No Child Left Behind and a Race to the Top focus on standardized tests and academic achievement gaps. Driven by market-based reforms and the movement to privatize public education, these approaches leave the social aspects of schooling and race/ethnic interactions under-explored and largely ignored. Combined with entrenched practices of curriculum tracking and stereotyped treatment, such policies exacerbate racial/ethnic and class-based divisions, hierarchies, and inequalities.

In *Academic Profiling*, Gilda L. Ochoa centers the voices of students, teachers, and parents at a southern California public high school to explore these ramifications of contemporary schooling. Drawing on nearly two hundred interviews, Ochoa focuses on the two fastest growing racial/ethnic groups in the United States – Asian Americans and Latinas/os. Of particular significance are the ways students navigate the multiple practices fostering social and opportunity gaps. Along with stories of anger and despair, the book also shares the creative ways students and teachers are affirming identities and striving for more inclusive schools.

12 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the purposes of schooling in the U.S.? What do you think should be the purpose(s) of schooling? How do your views compare with Ochoa's characterization of today's educational system?
2. What are the macro, meso, and micro processes influencing schools and students' relationships? How are these processes experienced differently by race/ethnicity, class, and gender? What influence do these processes have on multiple forms of capital—human, social, and cultural?

- 3.** Why is the book titled *Academic Profiling*? What are the origins and impacts of academic profiling? Discuss how and why Latinas/os and Asian Americans at Southern California High School (SCHS) experience different forms of academic profiling. How does academic profiling compare with racial profiling?
- 4.** Reflect on the emphasis in popular and educational circles on the achievement gap. What are some of the limitations of this focus? Consider the other gaps detailed in *Academic Profiling*.
- 5.** What do you think explains students' educational outcomes? Compare and contrast your explanations with the ones offered in Chapter One. To what extent do you believe that biological, cultural, and structural factors are responsible for differences in educational success?
- 6.** What are some of the impacts of curriculum tracking at SCHS? Given the racist and classist origins of tracking and how this practice reproduces inequality, why does it persist in many public schools in the United States?
- 7.** How do students and “staffulty” respond to the multiple messages and inequalities they observe? What are some of their resistance strategies?
- 8.** Discuss the differing responses Ochoa received from the staff and faculty about her findings. What might explain these reactions? Do any of her categorizations of these responses—critically hopeful, resigned acceptance, and cultural determinist—reflect your reactions to the study's results?
- 9.** Discuss Ochoa's research methodology and her relationship to the community and the topic. How did her approach influence her findings and your reactions to the book? What lessons does she share about her methodology? What additional lessons are to be learned from her approach? If you were designing a similar study, how might you approach it?
- 10.** Compare and contrast your high school experiences with the ones presented in *Academic Profiling*. Do any of the students' narratives resemble your experiences? What might explain the similarities and differences between your experiences and those shared by the students at SCHS?

11. What do you think about the proposed school changes offered in *Academic Profiling*? What role might ethnic studies courses have in shifting the campus culture? Why might the staff have favored cultural appreciation days and the AFFIRMS program over other school changes? What recommendations would you have proposed for changing the school and the U.S. educational system in general?

12. Take Action: Talk to people in your community about the schooling experiences of students. Write a letter to a school or government official detailing the changes you believe need to be made to better serve all students, or write an opinion piece for a local newspaper on the contemporary state of education.