

Triangle

Educators schooled on immigrant children

Knowledge of students crucial, ASU dean says

By TIM SIMMONS
STAFF WRITER

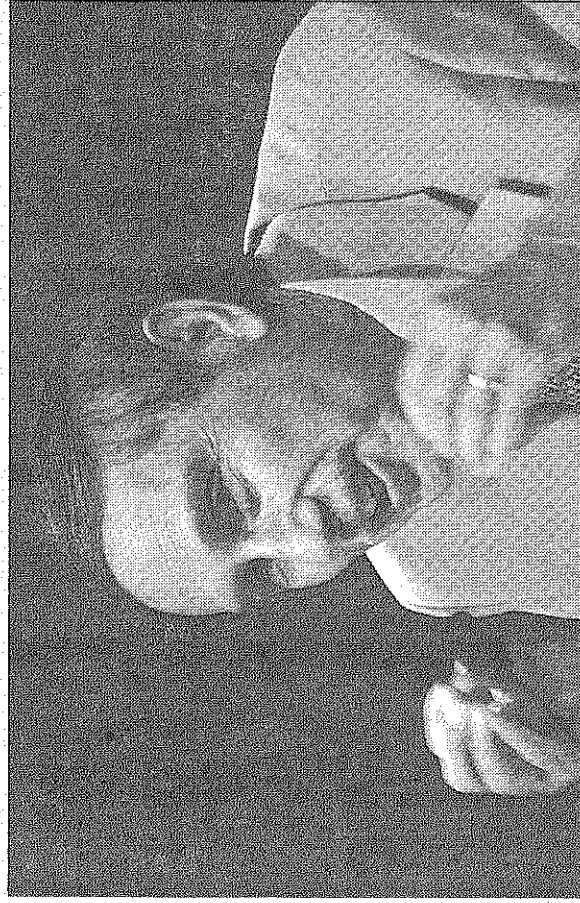
DURHAM — Teachers who struggle to reach Hispanic immigrants often fail because they simply do not know the children they are trying to educate, according to a leading researcher on Latino education.

Eugene Garcia, vice president and dean of the College of Education at Arizona State University, told about 400 North Carolina educators Friday that knowing every child is obviously important for teachers.

But the author and researcher said knowing the background of Hispanic immigrant children is especially critical given the ways in which culture, history and language are intertwined in many Spanish-speaking countries.

"If you could distill education to a single sentence, it would be that one learns from what one has previously learned," Garcia said. "This means children not only learn best in their native language, but for an immigrant child it means they learn best from all the experiences that live with that language."

Garcia offered his thoughts during the fourth annual Hispanic Achievement Conference, held this year at the N.C. School



'If you could distill education to a single sentence, it would be that one learns from what one has previously learned,' Eugene Garcia says.

STAFF PHOTO BY HARRY LYNCH

of Science and Mathematics. The conference is sponsored by the North Carolina Society of Hispanic Professionals, a group that is based largely in the Triangle with the purpose of improving Hispanic achievement in the classroom and reducing dropout rates.

Garcia, who grew up in a poor family of

"English assessments for kids who don't speak English are just silly," Garcia said. "The research is clear: Every test in English is a test of English."

But teachers today must also understand that today's immigrant children are much different from immigrants who came to the country 30 or 40 years ago.

"Immigrants 40 years ago got one message: assimilate, assimilate, assimilate," he said. "But immigrants today realize they do not need to give up who they are to be successful, and some parents are seeing that it isn't even healthy for their children to let go of their past too quickly."

Garcia said he expects it will be difficult for some schools and the public to accept the changes needed to provide a successful education, but he also suggested society might have no choice.

While Hispanic children make up less than 10 percent of students in most North Carolina schools today, Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States. Some researchers are predicting that in 20 years, Hispanics will become the largest nonimmigrant work force available in the country.

"These are the children we are educating today," Garcia said.

Staff writer Tim Simmons
can be reached at 829-4535
or tsimmons@newsobserver.com.