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“I know you are trying to help me, but …”: Complexity in Supporting Immigrant Youth and Communities through Schooling

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Binh is a young Vietnamese woman who immigrated to the United States in early childhood. Recently enrolled at a well-regarded liberal arts college, she is fulfilling not only her dream, but that of her parents who have had high hopes that their daughter will be the first in the family to attain a college degree. However, despite Binh's hard work, her parents' vision involved a beginning at "an affordable community college and a job that would make [her] life easier than theirs." Binh herself thought this would be her path until sophomore year of high school, when, she says, "my story changed." The guidance counselor at her urban high school mentioned a college preparatory program for youth who live close to the poverty line and earned high grades and scores. Reflecting on the benefits of the program--SAT preparation, ongoing college admission advising, two summers of college-level courses with faculty from prestigious schools and a four-year stipend after admission—Binh concludes: "I could not imagine where I could have been today without the support of this program." At the same time, although this was "a bridge of connection," she recognizes the tremendous additional effort that this opportunity took— not only the 5 am commute, but also the months spent working and crossing cultural capital boundaries as she had "to step out of [her] comfort zone and grow in connection with the program's faculty members."

Binh's story is one that tends to capture the popular imagination narrative of overcoming obstacles through hard work and the right opportunities. At the same time, our work with newcomers and immigrant-origin youth needs to also consider the paths of the nearly 19 million children under age 18 who live with at least one immigrant parent, satisfying the census definition for "immigrant children" and accounting for over a quarter of United States children under the age of 18. These demographics, along with the changing racial makeup of the United States, is most visible among children, as about two in three children are projected to be a race other than non-Hispanic White by 2060 (Vespa, Armstrong & Medina, 2018). Being attuned to these shifts is important and the work of educators and school professionals is not simply reactive, but rooted work, anchored in the principles and promises of justice and equity. In this chapter, we aim to highlight how educators might become more attuned to their students', families', and community's needs across the diversity of their experiences, in order to support their educational success in relevant, context-based ways that affirm their identities and recognize their valuable contributions.

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This is significant in the North American context as we engage with competing narratives about the promising or challenging futures of newcomer and immigrant youth. As they transition to the new society, immigrant youth often face obstacles that range from socio-economic needs to difficulties in socio-emotional growth due to bullying, ambivalent contexts of reception in local schools, and a lack of perceived support from and connection to peers and educators within their schools. These struggles are exacerbated by racism and other forms of hostility (Fergus, 2009; Holdaway & Alba, 2009) or by political contexts that target newcomers with direct attacks or deficit discourses and microaggressions (Cammarota & Aguilera, 2012). At the same time, there are hopeful narratives (Alba, Kasinitz, Waters, 2011; Alba & Alba, 2012) that argue immigrant young adults manage, for the most part, as well as their native-born comparison groups. However, even among the hopeful narratives—which are at times contested—one common condition for successful adaptation emerges: access to equitable education and training. The scholarly context reinforces the importance of the multi-layered work of educators, schools and teacher educators and the centrality of envisioning and working towards storylines of possibility for immigrant and refugee youth.

Approach and Conceptual Anchoring

To this end, the narratives presented here provide an account of the lived experiences of immigrant students and their families in U.S. educational contexts. Specifically, we outline a series of vignettes intended to serve as counter-stories, or “stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 475). In doing so, historically marginalized groups can render their own empowering stories and challenge the complacency of dominant discourses. In the context of our work, counter-storytelling is a means to reveal the non-majoritarian stories of immigrant and refugee youth in order to challenge the prevailing,

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often deficit-laden accounts of racialized and minoritized communities and suggest ways schools can trade in deficit frames for asset-based, storylines of possibility. In doing so, we describe the variety of experiences as sources of strength and counter-stories aimed at provoking transformational discussions on the social, political, and cultural positioning of immigrant and refugee communities in educational contexts.

By engaging with the academic, socio-emotional, and community experiences of families, we explore a range of factors such as race, ethnicity, class, legal status, ability markers, and spirituality that profoundly influence families' lives, yet often remain obscure in school settings. Conceptually, we position these narratives within two related frameworks—1) *intersectionality* and 2) the *bridging multiple worlds theory*. An intersectional perspective allows us to understand the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth as individuals with a multiplicity of identities that converge, diverge, and evolve over time. Thus, intersectionality seeks to move beyond the tendency to oversimplify and essentialize identity categories in ways that further push minoritized populations into the margins (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). An intersectional lens, then, emphasizes the need to see immigrant and refugee youth as simultaneously positioned in particular social locations such as race, class, religion or legal status, while also foregrounding the power relations that structure these intersections in daily experiences and in institutional practices (Núñez, 2014). In doing so, intersectional frameworks resist the tendency to position immigrant and refugee youth as monolithic groups and instead aim to counter the potential ways educational and curricular contexts may stigmatize, disempower, and produce inequitable outcomes. Taking an intersectionality lens, multicultural educators can examine newcomer students' situations structurally, as well attend to local contexts and how

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varied structural positions may be foregrounded or obscured to a different extent in each experience.

At the same time, the *Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory* (Cooper, 2011; Cooper, Cooper, Trinh, Wilson, & Gonzalez, 2012) builds on previous contributions that explain academic successes or challenges among minoritized youth, such as accessibility to various forms of capital that impact their ability to form "school-relevant selves," or the assurance that they have the necessary abilities to belong and succeed in academic environments (Stephens, Brannon, Markus, & Nelson, 2015). Others focus on the fact that despite a family's desire to succeed, structural barriers and marginalization can deter and alienate youth who eventually disengage from the process when the barriers seem insurmountable (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998). Even if some find ways to penetrate the barriers, they may experience a continuous sense of 'mismatch' and lack of belonging (Phillips, Stephens, Townsend, & Goudeau, 2016). Similarly, the 'bridging multiple worlds' is a 'challenge model' because it emphasizes how, under particular conditions, the vicissitudes of marginalization can sometimes compel students to succeed for the sake of their communities and families. Therefore, Cooper et al. (2012) examine dimensions that impact youth over time, including factors that may compel students to drop out of the academic pipeline prematurely, aspirations and identities, math and literacy pathways throughout schooling, patterns of navigation among their multiple social worlds, and the resources they have there. They also examine partnerships between universities and communities that support youth trajectories over time. We find this conceptual model useful as it emphasizes the possibilities for youth to navigate various social contexts— including the world of community, school, family and peers—and craft their journeys through education and careers without having to renounce ties to families and cultural communities.

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We drew the vignettes that follow from two larger, interview-based research studies in urban contexts in the Southwest and the Midwest. Each study examined how the participating immigrant and refugee youth adapted to and transitioned through schooling. Specifically, the first study collected data from a group of bilingual, Latinx adolescents in their final two years of high school in the Southwest, while the second focused on immigrant youth from African and European countries who had already graduated from high school in the Midwest. Both studies identified students for participation through snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) and used semi-structured interviews to elicit rich descriptions of the unique experiences, stories, characters, and settings that made up the participants' schooling narratives (Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010; Riessman, 2008). The first author conducted one-on-one interviews with students during the afterschool hours at local coffee shops throughout the spring of 2016, while the second author conducted in-person and phone interviews from 2014 to 2015. All interviews were audio recorded (averaging one to two hours each) and transcribed verbatim. The researchers coded the students' interviews, clustering initial codes into conceptual categories (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012) and undertaking an iterative thematic narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 2002; Riessman, 2008).

In what follows, vignettes are coupled with analysis of the emergent themes, then positioned within the broader educational research landscape as a series of implications for educational practitioners and leaders working in culturally and linguistically diverse settings with immigrant and refugee youth. Expectedly, themes overlap among the vignettes, emphasizing important patterns of shared experience structured by migration and interactions with educational institutions, while also highlighting different needs brought forth by the students' intersecting identities.

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Vignettes: Youth and Family Voices

Mateo

Mateo (pseudonym) was an 18-year-old, Latinx high school junior attending a large comprehensive high school in an urban Southwest city. His family immigrated to the U.S. when he was five years old. Mateo's experiences in school centered around his perceptions of being labeled with a learning disability. He placed experiences with bullying and second language acquisition at the center of his narrative when he shared that he was placed in an anger management class after reacting to persistent bullying he experienced at his K8 school. While attending the anger management course, he said "… they checked my reading [and]… decided to put me in the full IEP program…" However, he emphasized, "…that was like back then because I barely came here, so my reading was not that fluent…because I was midway learning English."

Once in high school, he grew conflicted about being labeled with a learning disability and shared, "I've gotten better in my testing, and language and reading and writing skills, so I don't really interact with the IEP staff anymore." He then explained that there was a special educator in his English class, but he was pretty direct about not wanting her help. He said this was "because I'm an IEP… they think I need help… but I don't and I'm like I know you're trying to help me but... I don't want the help." Mateo added that he appreciated the extra time on exams, particularly language arts exams.

Mateo then explained how he was thankful for the teachers he had that "see that I'm in that IEP program [but treat me] like I have potential." He said this was especially true for his math teachers who treated him like he "function[s] even better… than their honors and IB students."

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Mateo also explained how he felt the label he received in school contributed to him feeling like “the dumb one” at home. Although he at times struggled in his relationship with his father, he also felt his dad was instrumental in “pushing” him to do well in school because he was “very strict about grades.” In order to cope with some of his feelings, Mateo said he “started going more to church” and “read more of the bible.” He also sought out friends and “elders” at church who were “willing to listen” and “encourage” him.

Looking forward, Mateo described college “as one of my main goals.” He was interested in becoming a lawyer. However, when discussing this desire openly with the teacher who oversaw his IEP, he said “she didn’t try to encourage me….she was kind of being rude to me like oh uh you should be more like… a mechanic and stuff.” He felt that he was not taken seriously and was encouraged to have a “backup plan.” Upon graduating, Mateo began working part-time in a retail position where he saved enough money to begin attending the local community college.

Implications for educators. For students with learning or other disabilities, it is important they receive the support services they need. At the same time, in the category of specific learning disabilities and speech impairment, current and former English language learners (ELLs) are often overrepresented (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002). Although the *how* and the *why* behind this issue is undoubtedly complex, the literature suggests that educators may have difficulty distinguishing between second language acquisition processes and learning disabilities in some cases (Yates & Ortiz, 1998). In the case of students placed in English mainstream classrooms with insufficient primary language support in their primary years, there are increasingly large numbers of students struggling with academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2000). Therefore, it is important that both pre- and in-service educators

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receive robust training and professional development in second language acquisition processes, the specific needs of both current and former ELLs, and special education.

Mateo’s narrative also opens up an important space for discussing the place of labeling in schools and society. In schools and in families, diagnostic labels can be a relief and help facilitate access to needed supports and healing. Yet, we must ask ourselves if sometimes even our most well-intentioned systems are over-labeling and over-pathologizing youth (Shannon, 2007). Attention to these nuances would require teachers and school psychologists to consider issues of disproportionality in referrals to special education for language minoritized and racialized youth (Fergus, 2010). Especially for those students whose multiple identities place them at the margins of our school systems, it is essential that we open up a space within schools to question mainstream ways of thinking about ability differences, intelligence, and language. Central to this process are teachers and administrators who are willing to discuss and make visible contemporary forms of deficit thinking about students with distinct labels and markers of difference (Valencia, 2010). School administrators play an important role in leading for social justice by promoting equitable structures for students, strengthening professional development programs, and promoting positive school cultures around issues of “labels” and student identities (Theoharis, 2007). Likewise, educators play an important role in communicating asset-based perspectives to immigrant and refugee parents and families who may be unfamiliar with the programs, practices, and possibilities for their children who receive special education services. Continued professional learning on best practices for serving culturally and linguistically diverse students with exceptionalities and their families is essential for educators (e.g. see Hamayan, Marler, Lopez, & Damico, 2013; Hass & Brown, 2019)

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Also revealing in Mateo's account is the role of religious communities—in his case, a Christian church—to function as a form of social capital (Pérez Huber, 2009), or the relationships and networks of trust and support without which certain outcomes would not be possible (Coleman, 1988). For many immigrant and refugee families the religious community represents an irreplaceable protective mechanism in terms of refuge, respectability and resources, as the 3Rs of immigrant faith communities (Hirschman, 2004). At the same time, in cases where the church is mainly formed of recent immigrants or refugees, the vast majority of church members may have a social network that is overwhelmingly constituted of members of the same ethnic and religious group. This may be insufficient for social and economic integration, especially when these networks do not have a long-established history in the U.S. (as other groups have), and when they are not economically or educationally well-positioned in their new context.

Relying, therefore, on ethnic religious groupings to provide the major or only means for positive adaptation and protection in the new society can be highly problematic and tends to absolve other responsible parties from more involvement in this process. Teachers and schools, through being attuned to the social situations of their newcomer and immigrant students, can learn about these dynamics and facilitate "bridging" social capital, which are "outward-looking [networks] and encompass people across diverse social cleavages" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Mateo's support from his church mentors was essential to his mental health and aspirational attitudes, yet it may have been insufficient for tying him to the tangible necessary resources for college attainment. This resonates with what educators know to be very beneficial, namely the centrality of partnerships between universities and communities that amplify family voices and

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enhance the forms of capital that support youth trajectories over time (also highlighted by the Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory).

Milagros

Milagros, Mateo's older sister, was a 19-year-old, Latinx high school senior attending the same large, urban comprehensive high school. Her family immigrated to the U.S. when she was six years old. Milagros' narrative centered around her desire to graduate from high school as soon as possible. In ninth grade she was placed in a two-hour block remedial reading course. She said the course was designed "to develop my English because I was from a Spanish language background." Having been in the U.S. for her entire K12 career, she recalled feeling "kind of embarrassed because… everybody was learning English, but I was… the highest one." She felt this way because the course was focused on "the basic stuff from elementary" and many of the students in the class were newcomer immigrant students to the U.S.

Once Milagros completed this class, she discussed pursuing opportunities to take more challenging courses. As a senior enrolled in an AP statistics class, she struggled less with the math, and more with "the language [the teacher] used." She said this was an issue in some of her other courses as well, specifically mentioning science as a place of struggle (which she attributed to not having a consistent science teacher at her middle school). She also became interested in taking Spanish as an elective to, in her words, "develop my Spanish fluency by reading and writing." Unfortunately, she found the Spanish class discouraging because she "wasn't really good" at reading and writing in Spanish and she did poorly on the exams. At the end of the semester, she promptly switched to Chinese. In the midst of all this, Milagros felt out of place and grew increasingly disinterested in school. She sought to graduate early with the help

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of the school counselor, who Milagros said helped her believe that she was someone who “could get an education… [and] a good job” after high school.

Milagros talked about wanting to major in business administration in order to eventually become a manager or start her own business. She said her father encouraged her to study business after talking through various ideas with her. He also gave her motivational pep talks to prepare her for people who “treat you lower and take advantage of you” because of “your status” and because “people see you as a minority.” She said he helped her see that prejudice was inevitable, but that by overcoming these experiences they also “make you stronger.”

With the help of a mentor, Milagros secured funding through a local community college scholars’ program. She has since successfully transferred to a four-year college to finish her bachelor’s degree in business administration. She stressed that her main goal was helping to provide for her family. In her words, “I want my parents to be…. stable” and she hoped to be able to “take care of their bills…. to say thank you” for all they did and sacrificed for her.

Implications for educators. It is not uncommon that students like Milagros are placed in remedial coursework or at times moved back into English language development (ELD) courses (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). This is in part due to inadequate, inconsistent, or low-quality programs during the primary and middle years. Specifically, many former ELLs were provided with little to no instruction or support in their primary language, thus many were foreclosed from meaningful participation in grade-level content throughout their K8 years. Although the research literature indicates that it takes students between five and seven years to develop grade level academic language competency, most states exit students from the ELL classification within three years (García & Kleifgen, 2018).

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It is therefore important for educators to be aware that many former ELLs may have good oral proficiency in English, but still need additional supports to help them access the academic language used in grade-level coursework. Too often, as was the case with Milagros, the solution has been to group former ELLs with newcomer students in remedial instruction programs. Instead, students should be given opportunities to engage with challenging and creative curriculum that includes effective linguistic scaffolds and explicit instruction delivered by teachers who are well prepared to work with students from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Cummins, 2000; Walqui, 2006). This would ideally include ample opportunities to engage with complex multimodal and multilingual texts, programs, and other materials (Kress et al., 2005; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

Pedagogies that recognize the funds of knowledge of families are also important (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In the vignette, Milagros' father played an important role in preparing his children to think about societal discrimination rooted in many of his own experiences. Therefore, schools might consider incorporating critical and multilingual pedagogies that recognize the unique experiences and challenges faced by minoritized youth. In fact, research continues to confirm that pedagogies that affirm students' cultural identities, while simultaneously instilling high academic expectations and incorporating critical awareness of discrimination, prejudice, and social justice issues produce positive student outcomes such as improved standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, and college attendance (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014; López, 2016). Asset-based programs should obtain resources on incorporating a variety of strategies such as translanguaging pedagogies (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017), critical multilingual awareness (Christensen, 2014; García, 2017), and ethnic studies curriculum (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). At the same time, it is also

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important that all teachers, regardless of language or cultural background, receive training in second language acquisition and culturally responsive pedagogies (Santos et al., 2018). And when possible, it is crucial for schools to seek out well-prepared bi-/multilingual teachers and support staff.

Likewise, educators should consult the voices of parents and students (particularly students at the secondary level) regularly, especially when they are making remedial educational placement decisions that have the potential to limit their child's academic trajectory. In fact, parents have the right to receive accurate information about their child's educational placement in their primary language and to contest decisions with which they disagree (Young & Helvie, 1996; Wright, 2019). Historically, when empowered to do so, parents of bi/multilinguals have been key levers in advocating for improved programs and opportunities for their children (e.g. *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), *Aspira of New Yor Inc. v. Board of Education*(1975). Therefore, schools with an equity lens should make it a priority to increase parental engagement opportunities and empowerment for immigrant, refugee, and linguistically minoritized families. This could include things like family literacy programs, special events, and ensuring that the parents of culturally and linguistically diverse youth have a voice on key school and district committees (Wright, 2019).

Daniela

Daniela was an 18-year-old senior attending the same large, urban comprehensive high school as Milagros. Her family immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico when she was seven years old. Daniela's (Dani) narrative centered around her mother as a source of strength and inspiration for her. Having only completed through the second-grade in Mexico, her mother was very strict about school work and attendance. She put it this way:

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> My mother plays a big role because she motivates me to do better in school and to do better for myself…. one thing that she always tells us is that she doesn't want us to be working like she is… cleaning bathrooms or... scrubbing floors for other people… She wants us to make her very proud. And she is always supporting us in our education….she wants us to… go to college, whether it's community college or any vocational school or anything.

In high school, Dani was placed in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program where she pursued IB certificates in English, Math Studies, Anthropology, and Theory of Knowledge. She also completed an extended essay and was very involved in extracurriculars as a member of the National Honor Society, secretary for the Key Club, and vice president of FBLA.

Her junior year, Dani started to suffer from what she called a "small depression." Her grandmother, who she described as "like a second mother," passed away and she was struggling with the fact that she was unable to return to Mexico to see her before she passed. She also began coming to a deeper understanding of the post-secondary challenges she would face due to her undocumented status. She said, "I've been working so hard and for me not to get to go to a college, because my mom can't afford it."

She began to realize that nearly all of the scholarship and financial aid programs where she lived required US citizenship. She recalled applying to scholarships that would only cover a fraction of the cost of college to which hundreds (sometimes thousands) of other students had also applied. Deeply saddened and unsure of what the future held, Dani sought support from her friends, her bible study group, her AVID teacher, and her college counselor.

She referred to the college counselor as "the most influential person in high school" because she focused on "coaching us… individually, one by one. And she also put us in this…

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Diversity Literacy Program…. where… you attend workshops to try and get another scholarship.” She said the college counselor “knew that I’m a minority” and focused “a lot on making sure you go to that university… or even… community college.”

Nearing the end of her senior year, Dani’s school counselor informed her of a new scholarship program at a local private, four-year university with no citizenship requirements. As a part of this program, Dani applied to receive tutoring from one of the university centers and upon completion of the fifty hours and the application, she was offered a full tuition scholarship.

Excited about the future, Dani planned to study either biomedical engineering or business, emphasizing that that she hopes to eventually go on to graduate school and find opportunities to use her skill set to give back to those in both her local and global communities. Reflecting on the future, she ended by sharing that her hope was, “… really just to make my mom proud… I want her dream to become true… and I also want to do it because I want to… impact society by doing something good.”

Implications for educators. Educators and parents know well that parent engagement matters. At both the primary and secondary levels, research also confirms the importance of parental influence on their children’s educational aspirations, attitudes toward school, attendance, achievement, and graduation rates (Caspe, Lopez, & Wools, 2007; Jeynes, 2012). As Dani’s experience highlights, parents of immigrant and low-income youth, have high expectations and post-secondary aspirations for their children, yet at the same time often lack the structural understanding of how best to help their children navigate educational opportunities (Gándara & Contreras; 2009). Despite this challenge, parents from minoritized and low-income families often play an important role in helping their children foster a belief in their abilities to overcome obstacles through narratives about hard-work and sacrifice (Pérez Huber, 2009;

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Bartlett, 2007) and support their children in ways that are not immediately recognized by schools (Dyrness, 2011). Parents, then, provide essential forms of social capital for their children. This confirms what social capital scholars have long suggested (Coleman, 1988)—namely that even more than the educational attainment of parents themselves, the level of family support for a child contributes to their educational success--and offers an encouraging narrative from parents from across the socio-economic spectrum.

In turn, therefore, schools must provide opportunities for multidirectional, multi-form parental engagement. That is, schools need to recognize the strengths, skills, and funds of knowledge learned and experienced at home as places that will help translate to improved academic engagement and achievement in school (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In short, teachers must also learn from parents, families, and the communities of immigrant and language minoritized communities (Milner, 2017; Dyrness, 2011) and learn to "see" the ways in which families have different forms of parental involvement that may not conform to expected notions often found in schools. At the same time, in collaboration with community organizations, schools must aid students and their families in understanding the educational pathways, coursework requirements, and other institutional barriers they will face as they navigate coming of age.

As Dani's school counselor exemplifies, this involves explicitly acknowledging the ways that student backgrounds and markers of identity influence their need for explicit information on post-secondary opportunities, community-based organizational supports, overcoming discrimination, and maintaining socioemotional well-being (Santos et al., 2018). For students who are undocumented, there is a need for schools to create safe spaces for students to openly discuss the unique challenges they face as they prepare to transition to adulthood. A key part of this process is ensuring teachers and administrators receive professional development on ways to

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increase institutional and community support for undocumented students. One program modeled after LGTBQ+ “Safe Zones,” is the establishment of “Dream Zone” resources for students and “ally” trainings for educators and peers (DREAMzone, n.d.). Like Dani, many undocumented high school students internalize the encouragement of their teachers and have a desire to attend college in pursuit of upward social mobility. However, the reality is that Dani’s ability to transition directly to a four-year college is more the exception than the rule. In fact, only a small fraction of the nearly 100,000 undocumented students that *graduate* from high school each year go on to attend college because they do not qualify for sufficient financial aid and scholarship programs (Terriquez, 2015). Therefore, beyond creating safe spaces and building networks of allies, undocumented students need advocates willing to push for more comprehensive immigration reform at the state and national level. Policies at the school and district levels coupled with comprehensive immigration reform are both crucial to recognizing undocumented students as the contributing citizens of our communities that they are, and aspire to be in their adult years.

Yusef

Yusef, a Black Sudanese young man, was the son of a well-regarded epidemiologist and emigrated when he was eight years-old because his father had been recruited by a U.S. institution. Yusef self-identified as a Black African man, but his name and being a Muslim connoted a different identity to both his peers and teachers, a process that proved taxing for Yusef, especially when the misunderstandings were from teachers:

> I classify myself as African. If you asked me what identity in terms of where my parents are, they are Africans. They are not Arabs. . . . Teachers would automatically assume that

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> I was Arab and that was one thing that was really frustrating for me: all of them mistaking me for an Arab immigrant. And I am not an Arab, I am an African immigrant.

Yusef grew up in a home where education was central and recalled that "[his] parents instilled the love of learning in [him] even before they had necessary identification documents." In the United States, his mother got the family library cards using her national passport. As he transitioned to high-school, Yusef became engaged in peer groups whose social lives seemed detrimental to academic success. After he gradually distanced himself from the advice of his parents who pleaded that he maintain academic achievement, he was once nearly arrested at a party where underage drinking and the use of recreational drugs drew police intervention. Being able to run away and be picked up by his father affected him tremendously, he shared, "I knew, like there was nothing that would crush my parents more than after all of that sacrifice, than if I just ended up going to a community college after my sister had gotten a full tuition scholarship to a university in D.C." Coupled with the impact of indebtedness toward parents (Kang & Larson, 2014), which is a common theme in immigration narratives, Yusef also benefited from the presence of some involved teachers, even if he had had mixed experiences with others. He recalls one teacher in particular who directly pointed to the shifts she had noticed in his behavior and academic involvement: "I remember until this day how she came up to me and she said 'We are noticing that you are changing' and 'don't change who you are. Stay with the friends that you have."

Finally, during this time he connected with an Indian friend who also practiced Islam and with whom he felt he had a lot in common, as an immigrant and as a Muslim young man. He concluded: "I realized that I had to get my life together. . . . Like at a point where my life changed forever." Together, they became immersed in spiritual teachings—"I spent the next two

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years of my life studying this religion"—and invested in their education. Although he became isolated from his previous friendships, his academic redress culminated in his acceptance at a highly-selective, liberal arts college.

Implications for educators. Yusef's academic journey appears as a happy culmination of the pathway to college examined by the 'bridging multiple worlds' model and, although it is indeed significant that he succeeded in this manner, his narrative may otherwise conceal the obstacles overcome in the process. Yusef found himself affected by a type of "multiple marginality" (Vigil, 2002), where the negative perceptions of his racial, ethnic and religious positioning (Abu El Haj, 2015a), as well as his particular social affiliations with peers engaged in unlawful behaviors, interacted to produce possible cumulative effects of marginalization and a path of downward assimilation— being absorbed into a socio-economic underclass, rather than attaining social mobility (Haller, Portes & Lynch, 2011). The perils of "fading to black," in a racialized social structure are well recognized (Kasinitz, Battle, & Miyares, 2001). That is, when dominant culture categorizes Black immigrant and refugee youth only by their Black race, they experience the loss of their distinct national and ethnic origins as they simultaneously encounter the nefarious effects of racism. As Yusef puts it, "people associate white culture with education and manners like being quiet and not being rowdy, and being successful." To counter this, higher socio-economic status Black immigrants tend to foreground their immigrant status and national origins by engaging in "ethnic distancing" (Waters, 1999). Yusef attempted this as well, conceding that he "exaggerated [his] Africanness" because he also did not want to associate himself with national and ethnic identities that are negatively associated with danger in post-9/11 United States.

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Fortunately for Yusef, he was able to draw upon his beneficial socio-economic status, parental involvement and spiritual identification, resources in whose absence other immigrant and refugee youth of color may find successful educational pathways more elusive. Although his teachers were not ill-intentioned, some may have been ill-informed about the particular geo-political, ethnic and national dynamics that informed Yusef's background. This is understandable, because teachers have to consider a wide range of diverse backgrounds and they may not always be immediately well-attuned to such details in the lives of their immigrant and refugee students. However, teachers can demonstrate care to parents and students alike by showing a genuine and sustained interest in them as learners and people through activities such as investing in authentic relationships, building mutual trust, and committing to participate in their students' communities (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Milner, 2017). In turn, such relationships can translate into the classroom and school, as students gain a sense that their complex range of identities is understood by teachers, and as teachers become advocates for the students whom they can now understand better. Yusef explained the impact such teachers can have:

> It was those teachers that gave me a regard. You know, like they saw promise in me instead of just assuming that I made mistakes, sat me down and, really, they said positive things to me. Those positive things left in me something... Instead of just reprimanding me, it was like 'you are so much, like I see promise in you, don't do this . . . It was just like the way they interacted with me and the attention they gave me, how they treated me.

Conclusion

The vignettes presented reveal narratives in which the social positions of the immigrant and newcomer youth along lines of race, class, gender, legal status, language, religion, and

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(perceived) ability differences intersect with the various contexts of reception immigrant and refugee students experience in their schools and communities. Although the institutional, individual, and regional contexts varied, in each case the extent to which the schools implemented asset-based versus remedial approaches in welcoming, assessing, and placing newcomer and immigrant students in programs that met their needs was central to the students' experiences. In each counter-narrative, we heard numerous storylines of hope, namely the existence of important networks of support both within and outside of school walls. Yet our narratives also raise caution about the instruments and structures in place to support immigrant and refugee students and families, some of which have become double-edge swords that marginalize and work against their interests, rather than acting as springboards toward the creation of more culturally proficient, inclusive, and equitable school communities (Olivos, Jiménez-Castellanos & Ochoa, 2011). In light of the Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory, where there is interest in how these domains affect the students over time, educators need to continually reassess the place of initial assessments, instruments and approaches, in the spirit of student-centered and equity-rooted principles. Even when occurring inadvertently, negative contexts of reception affect the identity construction and long-term trajectories of newcomer and immigrant youth as they attempt to negotiate a deeper sense of belonging in our schools and communities. As educators, we must consider and resist how the wider structural inequities and discourses about newcomers make their way into classrooms and affect the ways the students and families are perceived, understood and supported by their schools.

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