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## Immigrants and Educational Institutions: Family and Student Perspectives Toward School and Education

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**Franklin D. Rothwell II, Ph.D.**

*Immigrants and Educational Institutions: Family and Student Perspectives Toward School and Education*

English Learners (ELs):

- are the fastest growing population of students in the United States
- make up almost 10% of public school students; almost 5 million
- tend to be the lowest performing subgroup on state assessments

I am a principal of a school with over 40% ELs; over 60% identify a language other than English spoken in the home.

Policy decisions that affect the day to day experiences of ELs seem to neglect the voices of the parents of ELs.

## Design

### Qualitative study

38 Participants completed a questionnaire

10 of these participants were later interviewed

Three areas of inquiry– I wanted to learn:

- how knowledgeable immigrant Spanish-speaking parents are about the American school system and American schooling; what they do not understand and what they want to understand better
- what these parents want for their children from the school; what they regard as the most important ways they can support their children's education
- their perceptions about the experiences their children have at school; what they want the school to know about their children

# Key Findings

## *Participants in this study:*

- *struggle to understand the language and nuances of the American educational system, which pose an obstacle to understanding American schooling. Much information is tacitly understood by parents by making comparisons to their own schooling experiences in their native country.*
- *express concern over their children's English language acquisition and how English proficiency functions as a factor in acculturation to the United States.*
- *indicate a preference for their children to remain bilingual but vary in how they expect to foster Spanish language development.*
- *indicate that their feelings of connectedness are largely influenced by how well they feel they and their children are treated, how well they perceive their child is understood, and how invested the staff is in getting to know the child and what parents want from the school.*
- *are aware that in the eyes of others (other families; school personnel) they have a status of being different and in need of more than routine services.*

# Now what?

## Educators:

- must remain cognizant that cultural differences and misunderstandings are inevitable when dealing with parents new to the American educational system.
- must own that it is THEIR responsibility to hear and meet these children's needs.
- as a matter of *social justice*, must create policies and procedures that work to increase these families social agency in the school
- need to explain the goals of different language acquisition programs and the benefits of bilingualism.



Qualitative Study: Experiences of Undocumented College Students  
Marcelo Juica, Ph.D. candidate

# Research interest: Grounded on a personal experience

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- An immigrant in Boston since 1985 (escaping from Chile socialist political environment with family).
- Attended public school and college as an *undocumented individual*; this inspires me to research more about young immigrants in higher education.
- Graduate coursework included research in **Bilingual Education** as well as **immigration social policy issues** related to families and children (led me to work in non-profit for about 20 years, and eventually Public Schools).
- Experience in college as an undocumented individual ( I had no guidance, no support, no scholarship, and no policies that could protect me from being deported; in fact, family members were deported).
- I wanted to focus my dissertation about the experience of undocumented college students *through their voices, perspectives and stories*



# How can undocumented students find success in college?



The study focused on:

1. Their **success** in college
2. **Sociocultural and Socioeconomic factors** that are important to determine a student's successful college experience
3. How they **navigate a complex college system** to find financial aid and academic support
4. The **support systems** they need to be successful in college

# Design for study (methodology)

## Participants:

- **Undocumented** enrolled college students (no papers, DACA or TPS status)
- Students born outside the U.S. (participants from Haiti, Cape Verde, Venezuela, Colombia and other South American countries)
- All attended public high schools in Metro Boston
- Selected from community info sessions: 20 attended info session, 12 Volunteer, 7 completed study
- Bilingual - Proficient in English and other language

## Study design:

- Qualitative in-depth interviews (each student about 4 hrs - over two sessions) about 3-5 months of interviews and transcription work
- Session where recorded, transcribed and analyzed through a coding system using themes and Qualitative Data Analysis software (MaxQDA)
- Design careful and safe protocol to interview students (required by IRB)

# Providing a safe research environment

## Interview Protocol to Ensure Safety

- Students selected and created their names for the study (they could pick whomever they want to be, including their real names)
- Interview sessions where done ONLY in places where they felt safe, where no one could see them or hear their stories)
- No paperwork of any kind with addresses or emails (any description). All screening and intake files are encrypted and locked).
- Researcher explain how the dissertation will be used and that any public presentations or talks, their names would never be used.

## Important lessons as a researcher

- Trust & Secrecy must protected at all times
- Recording session must be a conversation (research shared his experience to create trust)
- No note taking, no interview across table, use lavalier microphone (no visible recording machines..this makes them nervous)
- Be human, when it's time to laugh/smile do the same, have empathy about their stories

# Recommendations (what's next)

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- Editing and finishing final version to work with committee on a defense date (graduate).
- Publish academic work and share best practices with others. Possibility of a book project with more interviews in the future. Present at conferences.
- Community level - use my study with schools and non-profit groups to build strong conversations about what is missing in this work. How can we help young undocumented students to find support and not feel marginalized by society.
- Policy level - use my dissertation to inform on this work. The students have important recommendation for higher education that work (scholarships, advocacy, training, etc). Join other researchers on their work (Gonzalez, Del Razo, Perez) and use my dissertation to support higher ed policy for immigrant students in college (support DACA and DREAM Act policies).

# **AN EXAMINATION OF FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN-BORN ADULT IMMIGRANT FAMILY MEMBERS' NARRATIVES REGARDING THEIR CHILDREN'S EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT**

A study inquiring about (a) the ways that Francophone African-born families narrate their life experiences, knowledge, and social connections and relate those to how they are experiencing the efforts of schools regarding their children; and (b) the ways their family's language and literacy practices and environment intersect with the early English language and literacy acquisition of their pre-school aged children.

Kimberly Joyce-Bernard, Ph.D. Candidate, Lesley University

# Contextual and Theoretical Framework

- Disconnect between research and implementation of Family and Intergenerational Literacy Programs
  - *Lack of congruence between home literacies and school literacies*
  
- Barriers faced by linguistically and culturally diverse families
  - *Home-school congruence is a deficit model that undervalues parents (Auerbach, 1995; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990)*
  - *Encounters of “culture of power” (Delpit, 1995)*
  - *Intentional distance placed between home and school*
  
- Gee’s Theory and Method of Discourse Analysis
  - *“Language-in-use is about saying-doing-being and gains its meaning from the game or practice it is part of and enacts” (Gee, 2011, p. 11).*
  - *Theoretical tools of inquiry*
    - Intertextuality
    - Conversations
    - Discourses
    - Social Languages
    - Figured Worlds
    - Situated Meanings

# Methodology

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) advise that the specific procedure employed when utilizing narrative inquiry should incorporate the following: “beginning the story, living the story, and writing the narrative” (p. 3-7).

- Negotiation of Entry: “Beginning the Story”
  - *Selection of French interpreter*
  - *Outreach efforts*
  
- Data Collection: “Living the Story”
  - *Design of protocols*
  - *Procedures for data collection*
  
- Data Analysis: “Writing the Story”
  - *Gee’s theory and method of Discourse Analysis*

# Data is illuminating...

## “Likely Outcomes”

- Immigrant Family Members’ Early Literacy and Language Experiences presents the ways in which the primary Discourse was fostered in the home through
  - *Extended family and community*
  - *Storytelling*
  - *a normalcy of moving from one experience to another that took participants to various geographical places*
- Immigrant Family Members’ Home Practices and Experiences, illuminates the ways in which research participants:
  - *held a high regard for multiple languages*
  - *noted the significance of English speaking interactions with siblings*
- Immigrant Family Members’ Encounters with the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Setting, provides insight into the ways in which research participants:
  - *mainly connected with the ECEC setting during parent-teacher conferences*



# General Implications

- There is a need for more extensive extant qualitative research studies that include the perspectives of underrepresented groups like African-born immigrants.
- Educators, policymakers, and researchers are challenged to create more inclusive, robust, and reciprocal family and intergenerational language and literacy programs that:
  - *consider culturally and linguistically diverse populations of people have differences within*
  - *recognize complex literacy and language patterns that families and children demonstrate*
  - *redistribute power and voice within the educational institution*