

***Poder en las voces y acciones comunitarias*¹: Immigrant young people and their families' transformative engagement with high school**

Leticia Alvarez Gutiérrez
University of Utah

Abstract

This research examines how high-school-aged undocumented immigrant Latinas/os and their families resist being marginalized in schools and in communities. These young people and their families are part of a university intergenerational participatory action research collective, Family School Partnership² (FSP), located within an urban high school in the western mountain region of the US. The theoretical framework for the intergenerational collective research is rooted in Participatory Action Research (PAR). My analysis focuses upon the disjuncture among the dominant notions of family engagement and the exclusionary practices of schools towards Latina/o undocumented students and their families. Findings suggest that despite the plethora of “inclusive” policies adapted by school districts, undocumented students and their families in my study perceived schools as exclusionary, especially with regards to family engagement and equitable educational opportunities. My research chronicles how undocumented students and families revolutionized their feelings and experiences of powerlessness and exclusion into activist transformative school engagement. This article concludes by discussing future directions that schools could take to increase family engagement with Latina/o undocumented immigrant students and their families and the implications for student academic success.

Introduction

[From a parent] *Cuando voy a la escuela, nos reciben con caras de hostilidad, como diciendo, “No perteneces aquí—eres ilegal.” Por lo menos, esa es la impresión que dan por cómo nos tratan...no tratan de entendernos o que nosotros les entendamos, sino luego, luego nos tratan como si no tuvieramos el derecho de estar presente. Es terrible y terrorífico sentir así, porque yo me pongo nerviosa. Por eso no digo mucho sobre cómo me tratan porque tengo miedo que reporten mi familia a la inmigración.*

[From a parent] When we go to school, we are greeted with hostile faces, like saying, “You don’t belong here—you are illegal.” At least, this is the impression they give based on the way we are treated...they don’t try to understand us or ensure that we understand them, instead they treat us like we have no right to be present. It is a terrible and terrifying feeling, because I get nervous and don’t say too much about how they treat me because I fear they will report my family to immigration officials.

—Doña Elisa, FSP Co-Researcher

Doña Elisa candidly describes how school personnel greet and interact with her when visiting her son’s school. Inimical staff, teachers, and administrators regularly communicate unwelcoming expressions—verbally and/or through their body language. Yet Doña Elisa negotiates these unfriendly exchanges by self-regulating her interactions in school for fear that school officials might report her family to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These tense interactions for families demonstrate the nuanced complex ways immigration policies impact family-school engagement. These exchanges further reveal “how race is embedded in education and shows how deeply ‘race’ matters are embedded in the educational structures that are in place. It also shows how power is at the center of belief and behavior” (Hilliard, 1999, p.7).

¹ Translation: Power in community voices and actions.

² Family School Partnership (FSP) is an intergenerational research collective made up of high school students, their families, teachers, community members, and university students in the teacher education licensure program, directed by a university faculty member.

Despite the Supreme Court's decision in *Plyer vs. Doe* (1982)—which ruled that K-12 students, regardless of their immigration status, were constitutionally entitled to a free public education—anti-immigrant educational public policies continue to threaten this landmark decision. For example, Alabama's HB 56—Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act (2011)—is the most xenophobic anti-immigrant bill signed into law. Alabama's HB 56 proposed immigration verification of public K-12 students and their families prior to enrollment and prohibits undocumented students from attending all institutions of higher education. Arizona's HB 1070 (which Alabama used to model its own bill) and Alabama's HB 56 are both extreme anti-immigrant bills; Arizona's HB 1070, in fact, sparked Arizona's HB 2281—the dismantling of Ethnic Studies, particularly targeting Mexican American Studies in the Tucson School District. The bill states: “The legislature finds and declares that public school pupils should be taught to treat and value each other as individuals and not be taught to resent or hate other races or classes of people” and “should not promote the overthrow of the United States government or advocate ethnic solidarity or promote ethnic chauvinism” (HB 2281, 2010). Much like Alabama's HB 56, Arizona's HB 2281 reflects political interests disguised as beneficial educational reform policies that promote equality; however, educational policies such as these are in place to limit historically marginalized immigrant young people's access to equitable educational opportunities.

The presumed immigration status of Latinos (regardless of documentation) often shapes how school officials characterize, relate to, and interact with them, either as youth or academic learners in school. These preconceived notions further shape how schools engage with students' family members and build family-school partnerships.

Undocumented Latina/o young people and their families in this study describe interactions with school officials as often unpleasant, tense, and depleting. Despite these type of interactions, young people and their families take actions to resist deficit discourses about them and engaged in familial engagement that transformed the abrasive interactions they experienced within school.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 49.7 percent of students entering school in 2014 were White compared to 50.3 percent of students who identify as Black, Latino, Asian, or other minority group. By 2022, White students are projected to be 45 percent of the school population (NCES, 2013). Despite these student demographics, K-12 teachers of color are few. In fact, 89 percent of all teachers are White, 7 percent are Black, and 2 percent are Latino (NCES, 2013). Gender gaps continue to persist in K-12, too. Three out of every four public school teachers is female. Current research asserts that students of color perform better academically when taught by teachers of color (Boser, 2011). Boser (2011) reports that students of color who are taught by educators of color perform better academically and are able to relate to teachers of color as role models. Oftentimes, teachers of color have sociocultural knowledge of students lived realities that serve to strengthen teacher-student relationships. In so doing, student-learning opportunities are enhanced as are the academic identities of students.

This study illuminates how undocumented young people and their families collectively resist marginalization in schools and transform family-school engagement practices to avoid the “school-to-sweatshop pipeline” (Cahill, Alvarez Gutiérrez, & Quijada Cerecer, 2015). The school-to-sweatshop pipeline conceptualizes how “policies and everyday racialized cultural practices work in concert to dispossess immigrant students of potential futures” (Cahill et al., 2015, p. 3). This article discusses how undocumented young people and their families collectively transform and redefine family engagement and their respective roles within educational contexts through an intergenerational participatory action research collective, the Family School Partnership (FSP), to disrupt being marginalized in schools. The purpose of this article is two-fold. First, to extend understanding of undocumented students in the U.S. educational system, particularly high school students. Second, to demonstrate how immigrant young people and their families strategize to resist being voiceless and marginalized in school contexts. Young people and their families resist the deficit identities imposed upon them by schools through collective agency in the school and community.

The overarching ethnographic research included participant observations, ongoing planning meetings, and interviews. The research is guided by the following two research questions: First, how do factors outside the family (i.e., anti-immigration discourse and policies, school climate, interactions with school personnel) impact interactions between school personnel and undocumented students? Second, how do undocumented young people and their families collectively transform the meaning of conventional parent involvement? This research

highlights undocumented young people and their families' collective agency and refusal to be ostracized in schools due to their documentation status. Fore-fronting the collective voices, experiences, strategies, and actions taken by undocumented Latina/o students and their families to defy marginalization, this research demonstrates how they negotiate and resist the "school-to-sweatshop pipeline" (Cahill et al., 2015) by transforming family-school engagement practices in school contexts.

Literature Review

In the balance of this literature review, I describe how national immigration policies impact school culture and family-school partnerships. First, I provide an overview of conventional parent involvement programs in school contexts followed by research that focuses on Latino family-school engagement.

Parent Involvement in Schools

Parental involvement in schools has been defined and conceptualized differently across the literature. Approaches to parental involvement that utilize prescriptive roles for parents include Epstein et. al.'s (2009) prominent Framework of Six Types of Involvement. Epstein et al.'s model has six elements that include: 1) parenting, 2) communicating, 3) volunteering, 4) learning at home, 5) decision making, and 6) collaborating with the community. This framework is a comprehensive guide for schools and "re-directs old notions so that family involvement is not viewed solely as or measured only by 'bodies in the building'" (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 14). Yet, this directive framework grants schools power to dictate how families can and should be involved in schools. Families must acquiesce to the school's engagement practices with students and family members. That is, the framework asserts what are acceptable family-school engagement practices. In so doing, the community-based sociocultural resources of undocumented families are disregarded; hence families are marginalized from engaging in school contexts.

Other frameworks advance similar directives for parents. For example, *Schools and Families: Issues and Actions*, published by the National Education Association (Rich, 1987) proposes four models for parent involvement. These include: 1) parents as volunteers, 2) parents as receivers of information about the school, 3) parents working in the school, and 4) parents working with their own children at home. The No Child Left Behind Act also has provisions for Title I schools. More specifically, schools that receive Title I funds must comply with the following requirements: 1) Develop a written parent involvement policy with parents and approved by parents; this policy must include how it will build the school's capacity to engage families, address barriers to their involvement, and coordinate parent involvement in other programs; 2) Notify parents and the community about this policy "in an understandable and uniform format"; 3) Use at least 1 percent of the school's Title I funds to develop a parent involvement program; this money can be used for a wide range of activities—to hire parent liaisons, hold workshops and meetings, provide transportation and childcare, and make home visits. The policy defines parent involvement as activities that "improve student academic achievement and school performance" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 76). However, a lot of these requirements get lost in the midst of high stakes testing, and seem to distance relationships between parents and schools since schools are not legitimizing the practices enacted upon at home to support student academic success.

These frameworks for family involvement direct the way(s) in which parents are able to engage in their children's schooling. For example, parent-teacher conferences, parents assisting children with homework, schools soliciting parent volunteers—all exemplify how schools direct the ways in which parental involvement manifests in school contexts (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). When schools guide engagement practices it also establishes clear parameters of whose knowledge and cultural practices are validated in school and are embedded within mainstream definitions of parental involvement. Given such constraints, parental involvement becomes a unidirectional relationship. The school in this relationship holds power over the type of roles parents/family members undertake. Moreover, schools that subscribe to traditional parent-school involvement models set limits on immigrant families and their respective agency, as they do not recognize them as knowledge producers and experts in their cultural learning practices. That is, U.S. schools limit the role that undocumented immigrant families can have within school contexts as parameters of parental involvement are designed to

assimilate students and their families to current educational organizational structures and practices rather than engage or harness their cultural practices and values. Valdés (1996) so clearly states:

Relationships between parents (families) and schools do, in fact, reflect the structural locations of these individuals in the wider society. Simply bringing parents (families) to schools will not change the racist or classist responses that teachers or other school personnel have toward them and their behaviors. Parenting classes alone will not equalize outcomes. (p. 39).

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the family engagement paradigm embraces familial and community-based sociocultural structures and resources that legitimize the funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) undocumented families bring to school contexts.

Latino Immigrant Family Engagement

Latino family's concept of education (*educación*) includes having a moral, social, and personal responsibility to the family and community (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999); however these funds of knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) are often misunderstood and not legitimized within U.S. K-12 schools.

Family engagement strengthens the relationships and interactions that teachers and other school personnel build with students and their families, which in turn strengthens the communication regarding students' academic goals. Yet, the asserted decline in immigrant family involvement in secondary schools may partially stem from schools embracement of traditional developmental paradigms that position students and their families around mainstream developmental identity paradigms (Erikson, 1968). For example, these frameworks assert a fixed notion of student identity that is confined to a developmental stage whereby independence and autonomy are seen as healthy pathways to adulthood. Unfortunately, these developmental paradigms conflict with the fluidity of identity or the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences that exist between Latino families and school personnel (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2014; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Cammarota & Romero, 2006). For example, school personnel who prevent family engagement in schools too often see the perceived immigration status of the students and families in deficit ways.

School personnel often have preconceived biases regarding Latino families' interest in education. These deficit notions often stereotype Latino families and characterize them as not caring about school; this non-caring is then equated to students' low academic performance (Alvarez Gutiérrez 2014; Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Quicho & Daoud, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999); these deficit notions do not hold the school accountable for the low academic performance of their students.

Meanwhile a growing body of research (Chávez-Reyes, 2010; Delgado Gaitan, 2012; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Lopez et al., 2001; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999) has shown that conventional definitions of family engagement in schools often "exclude particular communities in meaningful and empowering ways, contributing instead to ongoing marginalization based on race, ethnicity, class, language, and immigrant status" (Carreón et al., 2005). Latino families often feel undervalued and dismissed by teachers and school personnel (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2014; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Martinez et al., 2004; Carreón et al., 2005), especially when they are not fluent English speakers. Moreover, they may define education differently as well as have other expectations about their role as adults in the educational process of young people (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2013; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

In the following section, I describe the theoretical framework, PAR, which serves as an important tool to empower and foment the agency of marginalized communities.

Theoretical Framework

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative process intersecting research, education, and action, explicitly oriented towards social transformation (Hall, 1981). PAR recognizes the plurality of knowledge in various institutions and communities. "Those who have been most systematically excluded, oppressed or denied carry specifically revealing wisdom about the history, structure, consequences and the fracture points in unjust social arrangements. PAR therefore represents a counter-hegemonic approach to knowledge production"

(Kendon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007, p. 9). PAR challenges hegemonic conceptions of where social problems originate, and awakens a sense of injustice (Deutsch & Steil, 1998). PAR is appropriate to help re-conceptualize undocumented young people and their families' engagement with education.

"PAR commits to human rights, social justice, and scientific validity" (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012, p.182) through a cyclical process of exploration that "softens the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed" (Freire, 1994, p. 26). The cyclical PAR process is fluid and includes: 1) Questioning and identifying a particular issue; 2) Analyzing and reflecting upon and investigating the issue identified; 3) Creating an action plan to address the problem; 4) Implementing and refining the plan of action (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; McIntyre, 2008). PAR does not guarantee that resistance will take place; however, it does "help students and families participate and examine vital issues that affect their experience on a daily level" (McLaren, 2003, p. 85), especially as these experiences are impacted by their immigration status.

The PAR project discussed herein is an inter-generational collective, FSP, in which a set of activities were linked together that promoted change through various actions, such as: testimonios, letter writing, legislator phone calls, rallies at capitol, after-school teacher appreciation events, meeting with administrators, clothing drives, raising funds for refugee families, and other community-centered activities, to name a few. These activities became pathways of inquiry; thus creating opportunities for reflection, investigation, and the co-construction of knowledge between co-researchers.

Methods

Community Context

This study was conducted in Salt Lake City, Utah, located in the Rocky Mountains with close to 200,000 residents. While the state of Utah has been notorious for passing anti-immigrant policies (i.e., HB 497, *Show me your Papers Please*), it is also 1 of 18 states that has provisions allowing in-state tuition for undocumented students (HB 144).

Latinos make up 1 in 7 people in Utah and 36.2% of immigrants in the state are naturalized citizens. Locally, the demographics comprise one of the largest ethnically and culturally diverse populations in the state with over one-third of Salt Lake City's population being ethnic minority, and 65% of this one-third are Latinos. Salt Lake's residential areas are segregated by race with the majority of ethnic minorities residing on the city's Westside, which is often characterized as the "hood" part of town by many city dwellers who do not dare cross west of the railroad tracks. The Westside³ is thus marked as "dangerous" due to the high number of immigrants, refugees, and other people of color residing in the area. One of the few times that individuals from the Eastside are spotted in large groups on the Westside is on the sidewalk outside of a well-known, locally-owned Mexican restaurant, waiting to be seated for dinner.

The youth co-researchers in this study attended Victory high school, the largest of the five high schools in the Salt Lake City School District (SLCSD) and the most ethnically/racially/linguistically diverse. The student enrollment at Victory High School (pseudonym) at the time of the research was approximately 2500, of which 60 percent were minority students and 73 percent were identified as economically disadvantaged. Overall, the graduation rate in the state is 86 percent, and the SLCSD graduation rate is 77 percent; however, the graduation rates for Latino English Language Learners at Victory range from 61 to 72 percent. Interestingly, the graduation rates for students in high schools with low diversity range from 95 percent to 98 percent. Due to these graduation discrepancies, state officials propose to reach a 90 percent graduation rate across the state by the year 2020.

Participants

Participants of the study resided in Salt Lake City less than 7 years, but did not possess the required documentation to be in the U.S. There were 21 co-researchers who ranged in age: ten were high school

³ The author resides in this area.

students (6 females, 4 males) who were between 15 to 18 years of age; three were in middle school students between 11 to 13 years old (1 female, 2 males); and eight (4 females, 4 males) of the co-researchers were family members (e.g., parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents) who were between 34 to 42 years of age. Sixteen members of the participating co-researchers were from various states in Mexico, and the other five co-researchers were from other countries in Latin America (i.e., Costa Rica, Peru, and Venezuela).

Procedure

Participation in the intergenerational PAR project was voluntary. Together, the collective agreed to meet weekly for the first couple of months for continuity and then scheduled meetings twice a month on Saturday mornings (9am - 12noon) at the local community recreation center. Teachers met with families mainly during the meetings at school.

Our meetings were held in the community recreation center on the Westside of the city, close in proximity to the high school and to students' homes. Each meeting began with a continental style breakfast and ended with lunch provided by the SLCSD. During our first meeting, we each introduced ourselves, engaged in a number of culturally-relevant team-building ice-breakers that provided opportunities for participants to share their identities as family members, youth, and/or students who were actively engaged in the production of new knowledge and who all shared the commonality of having a relationship with a U.S. school system.

During our initial discussions, we engaged in politically and culturally relevant interactive *pláticas* (discussions) that included the foundational components of the FSP PAR project and listened to their educational and social concerns. While families expressed unfamiliarity with U.S. educational and political systems, they were also weary to be involved because of their documentation status. Yet, after the first month of weekly meetings, the collective brainstormed and agreed that they wanted to address the following questions: 1) What can we do to be more engaged with the school, but on our terms? 2) What are possibilities to re-define how immigrant families engage with schools?

Data Analysis

PAR methodology was utilized for this study and drew upon a larger corpus of data. The analysis focused on the disjuncture between the dominant anti-Latino immigrant discourses and the everyday experiences of young Latino undocumented immigrants who attend Victory High and their families' engagement with the school. Data collection included co-researchers' semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, field notes, analytical memos, journal entries, and participant observations. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, the co-researchers (young people and families) and I coded all the interviews to identify salient themes, patterns, and relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Mapping was also used to ensure that the thematic analysis was clear and defined. During the second phase of the data analysis, the co-researchers and I participated in focus groups to discuss and provide feedback on the co-constructed thematic categories and interpretations of the data. This collaborative process provided a space for the co-researchers and I to discuss our understandings of the data and re-construct knowledge. As a result of this collaboration, new practices of awareness were co-constructed with the co-researchers (youth and their families).

In the next section, I describe how the FSP Collective proactively resisted their invisibility and refusal to be silenced in the school by "talking back" to the marginalization that they experienced due to their documentation status. Second, I discuss a subsequent action taken by FSP to counter being silenced and thought of as invisible in the school, specifically how we integrated a PAR project entitled *Voices of Diversity* into the curriculum.

Results

Cultivating Mobilization

FSP co-researchers were excited about the possibilities of engaging with teachers, administrators, and school staff in new transformative and productive ways. Central to our work was learning how the school as an organization functioned. We also wanted to better understand the roles of personnel within the school while also learning what the roles and rights were of the families of high school students.

Given the group's interest, it was timely to partner with the SLCSO along with the university students in a graduate course I developed to support the families' interests in learning more about their roles and rights in schools, despite their immigration status. Based on our research, we developed a one-day conference entitled, *Familias, Estudiantes y Escuelas: Enlazando Conocimientos a Través de Colectivas* (Family, Students and Schools: Bridging Knowledge through Partnerships), as an "action" to address family and students concerns. The conference took place at the university and included topics that fostered dialogue among families, students, educators, and communities. Despite a huge snowstorm that occurred the morning of the conference, there were approximately 150 attendees. Workshop titles included: "Breaking Down Racial and Ethnic Barriers," "Surviving Life after High School," and "Navigating the Ins and Outs of the U.S. School System," which was presented by SLCSO Assistant Superintendent of the Equity Department.

The FSP collective organized interactive workshops for a day of learning and reflecting on the topics. Given the linguistic diversity within FSP—Spanish, Karen, Arabic, and Somali—translators were present for each workshop. In fact, one of the most powerful outcomes of the conference resulted from the communication across linguistically and culturally diverse communities (e.g., Spanish speakers and Arabic speakers). Educators and participants became aware that many of the same concerns were shared across the communities.

Central to the FSP participatory research group were concerns on successfully navigating the U.S. political system, particularly due to their immigration status and everyday fears of being deported. After much discussion, it became evident that partnering with a local non-profit organization, *Comunidades Unidas*, would be the best solution. The partnership with *Comunidades Unidas* would provide opportunities to build co-researchers' leadership skills through a series of training sessions aimed at empowering participants so that they can mobilize themselves around issues that affect them. *Comunidades Unidas* utilized the Democracy Schools of Utah (DSU) Program for leadership training. This consisted of two phases which the collective completed: 1) The Democracy Schools curriculum, and 2) civic engagement activities. The activities provide hands-on experiences related to government processes, put community organizing into practice, and empower the undocumented to make their voices heard through letter writing campaigns, legislative visits, phone trees, petition signing, and the like. Through these mobilizing efforts and exchange of knowledge, participants were empowered to seek clarification of and question school policies. Patricia, a mother of two high school students, shared her experience this way:

Ya me siento más equipada para enfrentar los problemas que suceden en la escuela porque ya sé mis derechos como mamá de dos muchachitas que quieren ir a la Universidad. Ya no tengo tanto miedo porque sé mis derechos y sé con quien hablar en la escuela. También siento que tengo más sabiduría sobre el sistema político en los Estados Unidos y aunque sea indocumentada, ya me siento fuerte para compartir esta información.

Now I feel more equipped to deal with the problems that happen in school because I know my rights as a mother of two girls who want to go to the university. I am not that afraid anymore because I know my rights, and I know who to talk to at school. Also, I feel that I have more wisdom about the political system in the United States and even though I am undocumented, I feel stronger to share my knowledge with others.

Judie, Patricia's daughter, shared the following about cultivating their mobilization:

Me siento mejor porque sé mis derechos en la escuela y mi mamá sabe con quién hablar si hay algún problema. También ya sé exactamente cuales clases se requieren para asistir a la universidad. Veo que mi mamá se siente fuerte, y yo me siento fuerte. Hemos compartido esta información con nuestros conocidos en la comunidad y por eso quieren venir a nuestras juntas.

I feel better because I know my rights in school and my mom knows who to talk to if there is a problem. Also, I know exactly what classes are required to enroll in the university. I see my mom feel strong, I feel strong. We have shared this information with our acquaintances and that is why they want to come to our meetings.

The co-researchers expressed that in addition to feeling more knowledgeable, confident, and empowered, they also realized the relationships with FSP members were strengthened. Many FSP members began to view the FSP collective as an adopted family. Many of the co-researchers commented how family members who lived outside of the area did not have a network of trusting friends, making this collective very important. They knew they could count on each other. The inter-generational FSP collective embraced the ethic of care, solidarity, cultural pride, and a commitment to each other while placing research and action within the community. Lucy shared: “*Ustedes son la familia que no tenemos aquí. Siento que hay confianza y cariño entre todos nosotros. [You are the family we don’t have here. I feel the trust and care among all of us.]*”

The FSP collective transcends all social categories because the end goal is to achieve social justice and equity while offering what the collective referred to as a *refugio comunitario* (communal safe haven) that has allowed them the space to disrupt anti-immigrant discourses, racist and oppressive educational and social acts that perpetuate the school-to-sweatshop pipeline (Cahill et al., 2015). Central to the co-researchers becoming integrated were elements of “*familismo*,” which refers to the “roles on dependence and reliance on others for emotional support, and one’s sense of obligation to others” (Cuéllar, Arnold, & Gonzalez, 1995, p. 341). This group created a sense of *familismo* that included feelings of loyalty, solidarity, and attachment among its members (Alvarez, 2007). While operating within the confines of reciprocal trust and respect, the collective functions within the scope of power relations of knowledge holders (e.g., young people, family, faculty, community members, and the like). And the *familismo* they had for one another extended to members of the refugee community. More specifically, after talking with a few teachers, FSP collective members learned that some refugee families were in dire need of food for Thanksgiving and many children needed winter coats. The collective quickly mobilized and put an action plan together to raise money and organize a clothing drive. To fundraise, families prepared a menu, cooked food, and sold lunch plates at a luncheon sponsored at the recreation center. The collective also organized an auction at the luncheon. Family members brought items from home (i.e., radios, piñatas made by the collective, stereo speakers, games). Through these fundraising activities, FSP co-researchers raised \$250 dollars. All of the monies were used to purchase grocery gift cards for refugee families.

The FSP Collective also organized a coat drive. Members worked with local coffee shops, bakeries, and grocery stores around the neighborhood to solicit gently used or new coats. FSP Collective members organized and planned a rotation schedule so that all members could participate and be involved in the coat drive. Once the coats were collected, an FSP member took the coats to the school and neatly placed them in a classroom so students could select a coat. The collective delivered the gift cards with the coats selected by the refugee high school students. After the experience, Lulu, a senior, stated the following:

Hay personas más necesitadas que nosotros y es nuestro deber como comunidad de ayudar. No es que nosotros tengamos mucho, pero entendemos la situación de la comunidad refugiada. Fue una experiencia inolvidable ya que fue muy claro que esto fue la mejor decisión para ayudar en la comunidad. Y aparte, en la escuela fue claro que nosotros organizamos esta recaudación de fondos, así que se vio nuestra presencia más que nunca. Nos sentimos con mucho orgullo ser parte de este grupo familiar.

There are people who are in more dire need than we are and it is our duty to help. It is not that we have a lot, but we understand the situation among the refugee community. It was an unforgettable experience and it was clear that it was the best decision to help in our community. Besides it became clear in the school that we raised funds and our presence was seen more than

ever in the school. We feel very proud to be part of this familial group.

Juan, a grandfather of an 11th grader stated the following:

Ya no nos pueden ignorar, no nos pueden callar o tratarnos como si fuéramos invisible en la escuela solo por ser indocumentados. Muchos maestros nos dieron las gracias por organizar la recaudación de fondos y abrigos. Yo pienso que nunca esperaba la escuela que hubiéramos podido haber hecho esto porque nos tratan como si no fuéramos parte de la escuela, pero ya las cosas cambiaron.

They cannot ignore us anymore, or silence us or treat us as if we are invisible in the school simply because we are undocumented. A lot of the teachers thanked us for organizing the fundraiser and gathering coats. I think the school never expected that we could have pulled this off because they treat us as if we are not part of the school, but things have changed.

The FSP collective was patient yet attentive in learning how the school leadership functioned and how the political system worked in order to actively engage. They were also strategic, organized, and efficient as leaders. This demonstrated to school officials that despite their documentation status, they are upstanding citizens that can contribute to the larger school community. This strategy of supporting the refugee community was a powerful accomplishment on part of the undocumented community. Aside from being a huge success, it disrupted the ongoing media reports of undocumented individuals being “gangsters, taking resources from Americans, and taking jobs.” This community service action proved to the school community that the FSP inter-generational collective was actively seeking change and contributing to the community.

Following the fundraising and coat drive, the families with the support of two ESL teachers requested a Family Resource Center in the school. The resource center was conceptualized as a space to disseminate information, referrals, distribute food, clothing and a space for families to use during and after school. The FSP collective decorated, painted the room, and created art to put up on the wall. They also had food at the grand opening. For parents and families, this was an excellent way to voice their presence and demonstrate their tenacity for supporting the education of their youth and engagement with the school.

These types of activities are not considered mainstream parental involvement activities. As a result, the principal criticized the FSP Collective. During a meeting with district office members, the principal stated that “the FSP collective was bringing in activism into the school and the school did not need this type of family engagement.” It became clear that there was a fear that the undocumented families were strategically and systematically organizing change within the school and community.

Diversity Voices

The second action that the FSP collective took to disrupt their marginality in the school was an art project that provided undocumented students and families as well as other English Language Learners the opportunities to share their immigration stories. Utilizing participants’ narratives excerpted from their immigrant story, I theorize how the FSP intergenerational collective community created an action product to question exclusionary immigration policies and marginalized school practices. In this process of making art through storytelling, co-researchers learned how the school as an organization, and the personnel who comprised the school organization, treated undocumented students enrolled at the school, their parents, and family members. Central is how they each were positioned as undocumented youth rather than as engaged academic learners or families invested in the learning processes. For example, Sammie, an 11th grade student, said it best:

They [school officials/teachers] think we [Latinas/os] have not earned the right to be in school or in this country... in my history class we were talking about the constitution and immigration came up...the teacher asked if undocumented people should be deported. Most of the students said yes, and a few made racist comments but the teacher just laughed and looked at us. It made

us feel uncomfortable, but we didn't want to say anything; we just wanted the topic to change because we knew everyone was staring at us...sometimes we laugh about it and say that they are acting like ICE agents and it scares us.

Sammie's experience highlights the nuanced and unintentional ways that being undocumented manifests in school and impacts the identities of undocumented students as academic learners engaged in the learning process. These unintentional ways reinforce anxiety and fear, which diminishes young people's feelings of belonging. Feelings of belonging are important for young people's success, including caring relationships with teachers and peers, yet this was not occurring. Similarly, Jacobo describes how "they [teachers] think just because we don't know English we are not smart, but we are and we have great ideas." Juan Jose, a father of two high school and two elementary students, describes it this way:

Esto nos asusta. Queremos que estén seguros nuestros hijos en la escuela pero cuando vamos, nos tratan como que si fuéramos marcianos.

This scares us. We want our children to be safe in school but when we go, they treat us as if we were Martians.

Both undocumented students and their families described the way in which the school formed a precarious relationship with them. The FSP co-researchers shared how they felt excluded from the school learning community and educational opportunities to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities because they were often treated and perceived as not deserving of the public education services due to their undocumented status. Despite these interactions, family members continued to visit schools, continued to interact with school personnel and persisted to seek answers to questions regarding their children's educational journeys.

Moreover, the co-researchers agreed with Señora Ampí when she expressed that these chilling feelings also trickle into the classrooms about how undocumented immigrants are perceived. Señora Ampí and her son Marco shared the following:

Estoy preocupada porque la maestra de mi hijo le dijo que no siga investigando la universidad porque no calificaba para la universidad ya que era indocumentado. Pero ahora nos está diciendo usted que ¡sí califica! Esto no es justo; mi hijo es buen estudiante y merece seguir estudiando. No entiendo por qué la maestra le dio la información incorrecta.

I am worried because my son's teacher told him that he should give up researching the university because he didn't qualify to go to the university because he was undocumented. But now you are telling us he does qualify! This is not just; my son is a good student and he deserves to keep studying. I don't understand why the teacher gave him the wrong information.

Marco followed up with:

Sí, mi maestra me hizo sentir bien mal porque siempre me estaba ayudando, pero cuando le dije que era indocumentado, allí paró toda la ayuda. A lo mejor no le hubiera dicho nada para que siguiera ayudándome. Pero no pensé que ella se molestaría. Ahora voy a clase y nunca hablamos sobre becas o la universidad. Por eso le dije a mi mamá que teníamos que ser parte de FSP.

Yes, my teacher made me feel really bad because she was always helping me, but when she found out I was undocumented, the help stopped. I didn't think that this was going to bother her. Now I just go to class and we never talk about scholarship or the university. That is why I told my mom we needed to join FSP.

Señora Ampí's and Marco's narratives illuminate how the student's immigration status took precedence

over their identities as students. In doing so, their role as academic learners engaged in the production of new knowledge was dismissed and made invisible. Despite such challenges, the FSP intergenerational collective was determined to find a space for students and their families to engage in the educational discourse while navigating their educational journeys. In so doing, the FSP collective was also working toward disrupting the nuanced ways that undocumented status trumped their engagement with the school. After ongoing discussions and reflections about the unfriendly school climate towards Latino immigrants (regardless of their immigration status) and researching the rights that the co-researchers had in the educational setting, the collective decided to disrupt the imposed invisibility and silence by talking with the ESL teachers and incorporate their immigration experiences through art.

More specifically, high school students presented their poems, collages, drawings, and short stories about their journeys as immigrants and refugees. A junior from Guinea in West Africa hopes to do her part to fight discrimination and make the world a better place. She wrote and read aloud at the Voices of Diversity:

If you really believe that love is what puts families together, then you must believe that love can change into paradise, especially for education.

One of the ESL teachers stated:

We often see our ELL students as lacking things. They lack English or they lack money or lack cultural understanding. However, the reality and the truth is these students are incredibly intelligent, skilled... and they are making the community richer.

The student writings, often in two or three languages, hung on colored butcher paper throughout the performance hall. Some of the students shared the stigma they experienced because of their cultural dress while others shared the heartbreak of being separated from family members because of immigration laws targeting Latino immigrants. Sergio, an 18-year-old senior, spoke of fleeing drug violence in Chihuahua, Mexico, to find safety. As a 10-year-old boy, he escaped a kidnapping and when he was 13, his uncle was shot and killed crossing the street. A year later, his family immigrated to Utah State. As a high school freshman, he played on the soccer team but felt like an outsider when the white players referred to him as “wetback” and “beano.”

Following the Voices of Diversity art project, the FSP collective requested to meet with the principal; however, no response or acknowledgement of the request was given. The collective decided that writing a letter would be the best way to communicate with the director of the school, given the lack of response. The drafting of the letter amongst the co-researchers was completed in small inter-generational groups (e.g., high school and university students, family members and teachers/university professor). It was decided that the collective would divide themselves into four different small groups, and each group would address one of the following points in the letter:

1. Hire a full-time counselor who is bicultural and bilingual (Spanish/English) and culturally aware of the Latino community’s needs.
2. Make accessible special and advanced programs for students who are English Language Learners.
3. Support and approve the student group Latino Student Alliance.
4. Open the Family Resource center for families and community members.

After the principal read the letter, I (as a university professor/researcher) was asked to meet with the administrators to explain the “activism that was taking place from Latino immigrant families.” Once I discussed the purpose of the FSP Collective’s letter, the co-researchers were allowed to enter the principal’s office to share their concerns. After the meeting, several members described feeling empowered. Jose, a father, said “*finalmente sentí que nos escuchó el jefe* [I finally feel that the boss heard us].” Nayeli followed up with: “Did you see their faces? I think they were shocked that we were so well prepared.” A university student expressed: “That was a powerful meeting to be a part of, thank you!” A strong allied teacher said: This has never happened in my time here. You are all amazing, you got the ball rolling! A month after the meeting with the administrators, the Latino Student Alliance group was formally approved as a student group at school through the district. Many

of the other issues, however, were not addressed.

The FSP intergenerational collective continued to gather and strategize to make substantial structural and practical changes in the school. Yet, additional obstacles and roadblocks were created. Despite the school leadership's reactions, and the emotional depletion experienced by the FSP co-researchers, FSP members continued to meet to strategize on alternative way(s) to work with the school as well as way(s) to sustain their/our voices, presence, and knowledge production as a collective group. Therefore, regardless of the small structural changes made, the co-researchers were empowered by their collective actions, and realized that they have the agency to make an impact despite their undocumented status. In the end, the collective provided a space to be heard and take action to disrupt the voicelessness, invisibility, and overall marginality imposed on undocumented immigrant young people and their families

Implications

In sum, this research extends our current understandings of how undocumented students and their families, *together*, experience liminal educational citizenship in U.S. high schools, and how, in turn, they disrupt this positioning through their role as active agents of change by refusing to be marginalized, silenced, and rendered invisible. By doing PAR research, taking action on our findings, and raising up concerns that are too often unheard, families disrupt this positioning through their role as active agents of change by refusing to be silenced. More specifically, the research illuminates how undocumented young people and their families are invisible in the interactions, feel included or excluded in the high school educational context, and the specific ways they transformed their engagement with the school. When young people and their families are given clear and positive messages about their worth and abilities, they succeed. However, when young people and their families are bombarded with undeserving and exclusionary messages, they may internalize that they are outsiders and undeserving, thus they begin to believe it is normal for them to be surveilled (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2014; Alvarez Gutiérrez & Rios, 2012). The results of the PAR project suggest that undocumented young people in high school and their families disrupted their liminal school engagement. As Rosita, a mother, stated:

Estamos en un país nuevo, escuelas nuevas, comunidades nuevas, sistema político diferente, idioma que no hablamos o entendemos, pero colectivamente hemos podido cumplir el cambio que necesitamos para apoyar a nuestros jóvenes en la escuela. Y ahora sabemos nuestros derechos y sabemos que la escuela no puede por ley discriminarnos solamente por ser indocumentados. Este refugio ha sido nuestro lugar de aprendizajes, pensamientos y acciones. Mi hijo y yo somos diferentes personas por esta experiencia familiar.

We are in a new country, new schools, communities and a different political system, a language we are not fluent in or often don't understand, but collectively we have been able to achieve what we need to support our young people in school. And now we know our rights and know that the school cannot discriminate against us simply because we are undocumented. This safe haven has been a place of learning, thinking and actions. My son and I are different people because of this familial experience.

More university-community-school partnerships like the FSP Collective are needed across the country to help undocumented immigrant students and their families create spaces for change and springboards for positive action.

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