Context of Latino Students' Family Separation During and After Immigration: Perspectives, Challenges, and Opportunities for Collaborative Efforts

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Abstract

This article discusses the challenges and consequences of family separation and reunification during immigration from Latin America to the U.S. The historical pattern of paternal immigration as well as the recent rise in maternal immigration are discussed. The article addresses the impact of length of separation and how separation impacts family dynamics and school success. Recommendations are given for how schools can address the challenges that students face related to family separation and reunification during immigration including creating and fostering school-based mental health services, teacher training, school–caregiver and school–family partnerships, teacher–student relationships and peer relationships, and other supports.

Key Words: family separation, reunification, immigration, Latino students, academic success, collaboration, relationships, school-based services

Introduction and Significance of the Topic

Representing 25% of K–12 schoolchildren, approximately one out of every four students in the U.S. is a child from an immigrant home; over one-half of

these children are from Latino families (Grieco et al., 2012; Migration Policy Institute, 2013). Many of these Latino students from immigrant families may experience some form of family separation, reunification, and/or may be exposed to further obstacles due to undocumented status. In an era of increasing anti-immigration fervor, little attention is paid in the media to the true consequences of immigration for the children who arrive in this country. The emotional toll caused by this process often has a negative interpersonal and psychological impact on students, which in turn affects their academic progress. Indeed, immigration experiences for Latino children are not only challenging, but are often complicated further by other risk factors, such as language barriers, poverty, and poorly resourced neighborhoods and schools (Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012). Because of these issues, many Latino students continue to struggle academically, as evidenced by their low average graduation rates and test scores (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Zambrana & Hurtado, 2015).

Both researchers and the media often focus on the problems of struggling Latino populations. While these problems are indeed prevalent and provide perspective, few solutions are generally offered; this is the case for most disciplines. In the field of education, the bulk of the literature on Latino students focuses on their academic struggles (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). The research suggests that most schools are not effectively meeting the needs of immigrant students and their families; however, some programs and practices appear to be more promising for those experiencing the stresses of immigration (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Dearing, Sibley, & Nguyen, 2015). With the ongoing discussion on the challenges facing the Latino population, it seems appropriate and necessary to understand the context of the problems; at the same time, more attention is needed on problem-solving and furthering educational opportunities. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to (1) describe some of the problems and unintended consequences of Latino family separation during and after immigration, and (2) offer some strategies that promote school success for Latino immigrant students and for stakeholders working with these populations.

Background on Immigration: A Growing Population

Throughout history, immigrants have left their native lands in search of better opportunities in more economically established nations. Recent data indicates that more than 13% of the U.S. population is foreign-born (Grieco et al., 2012; Schapiro, Kools, Weiss, & Brindis, 2013). Since most immigrants come to the United States in an effort to improve their economic situations, many immigrants have been those of limited economic means, particularly

from countries in Asia and Latin America (Grieco et al., 2012; Schapiro et al., 2013). Due to their proximity to the U.S. and the limited economic opportunities available to most of their residents, countries in Latin America have supplied the bulk of recent immigrants (Grieco et al., 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Schapiro et al., 2013). The majority of Latin American immigrants to the U.S. have come from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean (Grieco et al., 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Because of the large numbers of immigrants from Latin America and elsewhere, children of immigrants have become one of the fastest growing subgroups among school-age children (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Yet despite the perceived and actual economic and lifestyle benefits that are associated with immigrating to the U.S., there are also many unintended problems and negative consequences that frequently occur during and after the immigration process affecting immigrant families (Dreby, 2007, 2015; Rusch & Reyes, 2012).

Immigration Policy: The Impact of Laws on Immigrant Families

The changing immigration laws and policies have a direct impact on the realities faced by immigrant families. The recent focus on decreasing drug trafficking and undocumented border crossings has resulted in an increased militarization of the U.S. border which has, in turn, changed the patterns of immigration (Dreby, 2015; Massey, Durand, & Pren, 2016). Whereas in the past many individuals would come to the U.S. to work and save money to return to their countries of origin, increased risks and difficulties associated with border crossing have prevented many immigrants from returning to their home countries (Dreby, 2010, 2015; Massey et al., 2016; Slack et al., 2015). The increased costs and risks of border crossing have directly impacted families by deterring immigrants from returning to their homelands and thus further separating families. In addition to policies for border protection, immigration law has also changed to make pathways to legalization for undocumented immigrants more difficult. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act passed in 1996 prevents immigrants who have entered the U.S. unlawfully from readmission for three years, ten years, or even permanently (Abrego, 2014; Dreby, 2010; Enchantegui & Menjivar, 2015). In 2001, the law was modified so that even undocumented immigrants who marry U.S. citizens are required to leave the U.S. prior to gaining readmission after a lengthy separation (Dreby, 2010). U.S. immigration policy has also historically allowed few options for most immigrants from Latin America to enter the country legally (Abrego, 2014). The effects of the militarization of the border, combined with strict legislation and a lack of legal options for U.S. immigration, have resulted in decreased rates of return migration and increased hardships for immigrants

(Dreby, 2010; Massey et al., 2016). Thus U.S. immigration legislation and policies as well as many state policies have further produced a system that increases family separations and deters families from reunification (Dreby, 2010; Enchantegui & Menjivar, 2015; Patel et al., 2016; Slack et al., 2015).

Family Separation Historically: Male Breadwinners in America

One phenomenon associated with immigration to the U.S. has been the separation of families—one or a few family members at a time—during the immigration process. Commonly, immigration has taken place in a "stepwise" pattern where one family member immigrates first and is then followed by others (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Rusch & Reyes, 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). Oftentimes, families do not immigrate as an intact unit due to the limited economic resources available to many immigrants. Therefore, typically, one or both parents immigrate first, and other family members must wait until enough money is saved to finance subsequent waves of immigration within the family (Rusch & Reyes, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). In other cases, children sometimes arrive first and live with relatives or friends while parents and siblings remain in the country of origin. As a result, families who experience separation during immigration tend to be those experiencing higher levels of poverty. This type of migration leads to the transnationalization of families (where some members of the family live in one country, while others remain in the country of origin). The transnationalization of families is often due to structural inequalities that make it impossible for families to sustain themselves in their native country (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002). In one study, Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie (2002) found that nearly half of immigrant children were separated from both parents at some point during the immigration process. Although separation from both parents is fairly common among immigrants, historically, men have led the way in family immigration by finding work and establishing themselves in the new country first (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). After a period of working and sending remittances home to support the family abroad, they would send for wives and children to join them as soon as it was economically possible (Dreby, 2015; Rusch & Reyes, 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Separation of families during immigration can occur with families from many regions of the world. Many Asians experience family separation during immigration, and Haitian immigrants experience family separations at some of the highest levels (Parrenas, 2001; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002, 2008). Despite the fact that family separation is fairly common among all immigrants, it is particularly noticeable among immigrants from Latin America due to their large numbers across the U.S. (Dreby, 2010). This phenomenon appears to be

particularly prevalent among Central American families where as many as 96% of children were separated from their fathers during immigration, according to one study (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). One early example of this type of paternal separation occurred as a result of the *Bracero* Program, which brought low-cost laborers from Mexico as guest workers without their families to work on farms in the U.S. from 1942 to 1964 (Dreby, 2015; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). In some instances, families were able to eventually reunite either in the U.S. or in Mexico. However, family separations during the *Bracero* Program did not always end with family reunification. Since that time, family separation during immigration among Latin American families has continued to occur. Although difficult to measure, incidences of child separation from one or both parents during immigration have been found to impact a significant number of Latin American immigrant children now living in the U.S. (Dreby, 2015; Enchantegui & Menjivar, 2015; Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Rusch & Reyes, 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002, 2011).

Family Separation Today: The Rise of Immigrant Mothers

Recently the demands for service workers have drawn larger numbers of women to immigrate to the U.S. (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002; Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Rusch & Reyes, 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). Female immigrants are typically able to find either legal or undocumented employment as nannies, maids, or restaurant or factory workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002). As more U.S. women take jobs outside the home, the need for domestic workers to take care of their children and maintain their homes has grown. Often these roles are filled by female immigrants who decide to leave their children in their countries of origin to avoid both the dangers of border crossing with children and the additional costs that would be entailed (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002; Moran-Taylor, 2008). Research by Abrego (2009) found that more than half of immigrant children were separated from their mothers sometime during the immigration process. Although immigrant mothers face more difficult economic conditions during immigration, their families in their homeland often thrive economically as a result of the extreme sacrifices immigrant mothers make in order to send remittances home. When compared to fathers, some studies have found mothers who are separated from their children send a larger percentage of their earnings to support their families in their native lands (Abrego, 2009; Schapiro et al., 2013). However, maternal separation has larger negative results on psychological and emotional health for children when compared to paternal separation (Dreby, 2007, 2015; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). In addition, family separation during immigration has been found to have a negative impact on the mental health of the mothers as well (Dreby, 2015;

Schapiro et al., 2013). The vast majority of parents who immigrate without their children leave them in the care of extended family members. Whenever possible, the maternal grandmother is the caregiver of choice for most immigrant parents (Dreby, 2006). There are frequently unintended consequences that surface later in the immigration process when children are separated from family members who have become their primary caregivers in the absence of their biological parents (Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002, 2008). Despite parents' best efforts to relieve the stress on their children, immigrant youth often experience negative consequences.

Length of Separation: From Short-Term to Permanent

In addition to the large number of children who experience short-term family separation during the immigration process, many family separations last for several years and, in some cases, even become permanent. The length of separation during immigration has been found to vary by country of origin and between mothers and fathers (Patel et al., 2016). For example, Suarez-Orozco et al. (2002) found in one study that 77% of Mexican children who were separated from their mothers during immigration were apart for a period of less than two years; in contrast, 49% of separated Central American immigrant children experienced maternal separation that lasted for five years or more. In general, Central American and some Caribbean immigrants have been found to suffer long periods of parent–child separation (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). The separation of immigrant children from their fathers has been found to last longer than separation from mothers. In addition to being separated from their parents, nearly one-third of immigrant children have reported being separated from siblings during immigration (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Separation of siblings often occurs due to the fact that when parents are able to bring children over to join them they are often brought one at a time (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). Thus, each time a sibling is brought over to be reunited with parents, another family separation occurs as brothers and sisters are torn apart (Rusch & Reyes, 2012). Sibling separation has also been reported as most common among families from Central America and some parts of the Caribbean (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). More frequent and intense problems may develop the longer the periods of family separation extends (Gindling & Poggio, 2012).

The Impact of Family Separation on Children and Their Parents

Among the challenges immigrants face are language barriers, learning a new culture, low wages, fear of deportation, and limited social support systems. However, being separated from one's family is often the most difficult part of

immigration to the United States (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Immigrant parents often attempt to maintain contact with their children from afar through regular phone calls; the exchange of letters; monetary remittances; the sending of gifts, photographs, and videos; social media and videoconferencing; as well as occasional visits home when possible due to finances and legal status (Abrego, 2009; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). By maintaining contact with their children in their native countries, parents try to keep their memories alive and provide support to their children despite their physical absence in the daily lives of their children. Notwithstanding parents' attempts to relieve the stress upon their children due to their absence, children who are separated from their parents due to immigration are often susceptible to attachment difficulties, depression, decreased academic performance, and behavioral problems (Abrego, 2014; Artico, 2003; Lovato-Hermann, 2017). As length of time apart increases, children become more withdrawn and less likely to identify with their parents. Longer periods of separation are also often associated with an unwillingness of children to conform to rules put in place by the parent (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). One study found that delinquent behavior, such as alcohol and drug abuse, was not an uncommon coping skill among older children with prolonged family separations (Abrego, 2014).

The Impact of Family Separation on Academic Success

In addition to the psychological and emotional toll of separation, negative effects have also been found on the educational success of immigrant children separated from their parents during immigration (Dreby, 2007, 2015; Gindling & Poggio, 2012; Lovato-Hermann, 2017). Although many immigrant children succeed in school, those who have been separated from their parents tend to struggle academically when compared to their peers who were able to immigrate with intact families (Dreby, 2015; Gindling & Poggio, 2012). Immigrant children who are separated from their families are more likely to be behind their same age peers in school, creating an "education gap" in which such students are more likely to be older than others in their grade (Gindling & Poggio, 2012; Patel et al., 2016). Due to the lack of academic preparation and interruptions in their schooling, in many cases, children who experienced family separation have needed to repeat a grade (Gindling & Poggio, 2012). Grade repetition has been found to have a lasting negative psychological impact on students (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007). In addition, children who experience family separation are more likely to fall behind (and may even drop out of school) than those children who immigrate with intact families (Dreby, 2007, 2010; Patel et al., 2016). In keeping with findings regarding emotional stress, children who are separated from their mothers may

have lower academic performance than those separated from their fathers (Gindling & Poggio, 2012; Patel et al., 2016). Negative school effects have also been found to be more severe for children whose parents have lived in the U.S. with undocumented status (Gindling & Poggio, 2012). The age of children during separation seems to be crucial when it comes to the educational impact it has on students. In general, older students who are separated from their parents during immigration tend to suffer greater negative effects than do younger children (Abrego, 2014; Artico, 2003; Patel et al., 2016; Schapiro et al., 2013). The largest negative educational impact has been found among those students who were separated from their parents at older ages (late childhood to early adolescence) and were reunited as teenagers (Gindling & Poggio, 2012).

Family Reunification: Not Always Happily Ever After

Despite the difficulties of separation, the challenges of reunification are often even more difficult. During separation, parents and children often long for the day when they will be reunited with one another and dream of living happily ever after. However, families face a variety of challenges that often complicate the reunion. Because of the length of most family separations, many children find themselves reunited with parents who have become strangers to them (Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Schapiro et al., 2013; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). In some instances, children do not even recognize their parents and must deal with building a relationship with a near stranger. Feelings of abandonment and rejection are common among children whose parents have left them for prolonged periods of time (Dreby, 2015; Rusch & Reyes, 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Parents also often struggle to regain their authority as they face children who seem unappreciative of the financial and emotional sacrifices they have made for those children. Younger children may become withdrawn from their parents, while older children may rebel against their parents' authority or act out aggressively. Another challenge that can complicate family reunifications is the presence of new stepparents, stepsiblings, and siblings in some immigrant families (Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Children can face feelings of jealousy at the attention given to their new siblings and family members that they were deprived of during their parents' absence (Dreby, 2006; Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Immigrant children who are reunified with their parents must also deal with separation from their caretakers, who are often extended family members acting as symbolic parents (Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Although family separation can have many unintended negative consequences, in some families, there is a level of increased intimacy and closeness after reunification. Despite the sacrifices associated with family separation and

reunification during immigration, many families often display resilience over time, allowing them to overcome the setbacks they must endure during the immigration process (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Strategies for School Success: Working Together

In discussing the particular needs of Latino students affected by separation during immigration, the research suggests that schools must act as a bridge for both healthy psychosocial development and effective learning (Garrison, Roy, & Azar, 1999; Schapiro et al., 2013). Children who have experienced emotional, psychological, or academic issues need stable relationships at home and/or school, as they spend most of their time in these two places. In many cases, they may need specific interventions, support groups, and counseling services as well. Schools can help by: (a) training and supporting teachers to promote awareness of the prevalence and consequences of separation and reunification; (b) providing or partnering with mental health services and other community supports that provide assistance to immigrant children and their families; (c) developing partnerships with caregivers and/or parents during their immigration experiences to support Latino children and their families; (d) personalizing relationships between teachers and students within an academically rigorous setting; and (e) supporting peer relationships (Conchas, 2006; Gándara, Larson, Rumberger, & Mehan, 1998; Garrison et al., 1999; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Schapiro et al., 2013).

Teacher Training

Given the prevalence of immigration separation experiences for many Latino families, professional development opportunities offered at schools can arm teachers with knowledge and strategies to assist students who may be struggling due to their family situation. Though the literature reveals that Latino children are highly resilient in the face of such circumstances (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002), high incidents of depression and even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for both children and their parents can accompany the immigration experience when families are broken up (Santa-Maria & Cornille, 2007). Teachers who are aware of these possibilities for their immigrant students will understand that such experiences can be normative rather than deviant or exceptional (Zentograf & Chinchilla, 2012).

It is helpful for teachers to understand that immigrant children are often simultaneously dealing with adaptation issues (to a new caregiver, a new culture, a new language), a sense of loss of family left behind, and possible trauma from the immigration experience itself. Potential stressors can include

undocumented status, exposure to trauma during immigration, experiences with discrimination, and negative relationships with caregivers or between caregivers and the estranged family members (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). As school agents who interact with students every day, teachers are in a particularly powerful position to develop relationships with children and their families, learn their unique histories, to provide support, and to refer them for specialized services if needed. During and even after the separation period, children often need opportunities to talk about their immigration experiences and their family members; teachers' use of writing, speaking, and arts activities allow for open and creative student expression in dealing with these issues (Schapiro et al., 2013).

Teachers can also benefit from an awareness of the cultural differences that may exist between the collectivist culture of many immigrant students and families and the more individualistic culture valued in U.S. schools (Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011). By being aware of these differences teachers can plan for opportunities for students to work collaboratively and be available to support one another (Hiatt-Michael, 2008; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). Restorative justice practices, such as community-building circles, are another strategy that can provide an ideal opportunity for students to talk about their immigration experiences in a safe setting (Pavelka, 2013). The literature also suggests that teachers keep an open line of communication with any available mental health professionals at their school site or in their community in order to provide the best care for each child, particularly because earlier intervention is more effective (Santa-Maria & Cornille, 2007). The key is to be made aware of these struggles that immigrant Latino children experience and to collaborate with services within the institution and/or the community that can assist students' positive acculturation to the U.S.

School-Based Mental Health Services

Evidence from the literature suggests that, while Latinos seek and attend mental health services less frequently than their counterparts from other ethnic or racial groups, they are much more likely to access such services when they are offered within the school site (Adams, 2016; Garrison et al., 1999). So-called "wraparound" services—including mental health services provided at schools—can be immensely helpful to immigrant students and their families. Due to limited personal and financial resources, many schools have successfully partnered with community organizations to enable such services to be provided at the school site either during school or during afterschool programs (Vaillancourt & Amador, 2014). Such services should ideally be staffed by individuals with specific training in the culture from which the immigrant

students come; therapies that emanate from a dominant cultural worldview can prove unhelpful to students dealing with separation and reunification issues (Garrison et al., 1999; Zentograf & Chinchilla, 2012). Ideally, therapists also would be aware of gender differences related to mental health issues, as Latinas in general report higher depressive symptoms, but Latino males report greater degrees of estrangement from caregivers both during separation and after reunification (Garrison et al., 1999; Lovato-Herman, 2015; Schapiro et al., 2013). Depending on their needs, individual, group, and family therapies can be invaluable services (Garrison et al., 1999; Santa-Maria & Cornille, 2007); specific interventions can include "psychosocial support, culturally sensitive cognitive behavioral therapy, and narrative therapy" (Santa-Maria & Cornille, 2007, p. 29). Provision of therapies in Spanish may be helpful as well, particularly in group or family settings.

School–Caregiver and School–Family Partnerships

Schools that work effectively with Latino immigrant populations find ways to meet the needs of their families in order to work cooperatively with them (Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Grant & Ray, 2010; Paik & Walberg, 2007; Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011). Rather than blaming parents and other caregivers for nonparticipation, these schools look inward, assume responsibility, and work with families to remove the barriers to integration with schools (Auerbach, 2011; López et al., 2001). During challenging times of family separation, teachers and parents or family members can develop school–family partnerships to build a bridge for healthy communication for children's well-being and academic progress (Grant & Ray, 2010; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005)

However, simply offering information sessions and inviting parents and caregivers of Latino immigrant students to attend has limited impact; schools that develop mutually trusting relationships with immigrant families find that they are much more effective at engaging a broad range of parents and other caregivers (Giles, 2005; Patrikakou et al., 2005). Schools with effective family partnerships recognize that educational structures and personnel can help or hinder healthy relationship-building (Epstein, 2005). These schools bridge the divide between parents and the institution by hiring bilingual staff and/or faculty who can initiate positive communication with caregivers and assess the barriers they experience, thus allowing schools to develop strategies to meet those needs (Grant & Ray, 2010; Tang, Dearing, & Weiss, 2012). Such strategies may involve holding meetings at times that are more convenient for Latino immigrant families; communicating in Spanish at meetings, events, and through newsletters and messages; developing a bilingual homework program

involving parents; providing workshops for parents (e.g., English classes, college knowledge workshops, etc.); and working with the public, private, and business sectors to meet material needs of families (Auerbach, 2011; Delgado Gaitan, 2004; López et al., 2001; Paik & Walberg, 2007). Such efforts can involve parents and caregivers more fully in the lives of students, building relationships in a way that can alleviate some of the stresses of separation and reunification.

For those cases where schools become aware of students experiencing separation, the schools might consider offering technological resources to keep in contact with family members who remain in the country of origin, which can help provide a sense of cohesion and stability (Schapiro et al., 2013). When possible, family sessions with schools' mental health professionals can assist with issues of adjustment, which are especially common when reunification occurs after a protracted absence (Garrison et al., 1999; Schapiro et al., 2013; Zentograf & Chinchilla, 2012). Schools can also offer information to parents to help them navigate the educational system, understand the centrality of education to upward mobility in the U.S., inculcate the habits at home that lead to higher achievement, and access the resources and opportunities to encourage students' academic success (Auerbach, 2011; Delgado Gaitan, 2012; López et al., 2001).

The network of relationships between families and schools resulting from such practices can be very helpful to draw caregivers and parents into children's lives in positive ways and ease some of the stresses of adjustment after immigration, including those related to family separation and reunification experiences. Schools benefit from positive family–school connections as well; the positive view of families created by these effective partnerships can become reflected in raised expectations for Latino children—a schoolwide belief that every child is capable of excellent work (López et al., 2001).

Teacher–Student Relationships

Relationships with key agents (e.g., teachers, counselors, etc.) at school can provide immigrant students with people to whom they can go for both academic and interpersonal issues. Specific structures that increase the length and depth of contact between students and teachers allow for teachers to understand and meet their students' needs more effectively (Conchas, 2001; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Pollock & Amaechi, 2013). Such structures could include looping, in which a teacher will teach the same students two or more years in a row; academies, in which a group of teachers "share" the same students as a school-within-a-school; and professional learning communities (PLCs), in which teachers are given significant time to plan, collaborate, and engage in

professional development activities together. Teachers who are afforded more time with students and who are trained to be intentional in developing relationships with students can learn their unique stories and subsequently provide classroom supports through lessons that allow students to express their experiences, group work that facilitates friendships with other students, and their own expressions of care, concern, and support (Conchas, 2006; Zentograf & Chinchilla, 2012). As teachers understand their students more fully and work together to raise student achievement, they can help develop engaging lessons that utilize students' existing knowledge and celebrate their unique strengths (Cooper, Gonzalez, & Wilson, 2014; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

One of the greatest ways a school can serve immigrant students is to provide them with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to develop a sense of purpose and efficacy in their lives as well as open doors to upward mobility. The literature consistently ties overall academic achievement, and especially English literacy skill development, with positive adaptive processes (Schapiro et al., 2013; Zentograf & Chinchilla, 2012). One key way in which schools support such academic achievement is through engagement in rigorous work with high expectations for performance. Cooperative learning within the classroom is another strategy that can assist immigrant students in positive adaptation, as it enables supportive peer relationships that can assist with academic and social development. These strategies, while helpful for all students' learning, can have added impact for students experiencing immigration separation who face additional barriers to full engagement in schools (Slavin & Calderón, 2009.

Peer Relationships and Other Supports

The literature on the trauma of family separation and reunification consistently points to the promise of peer support groups in assisting students to process their experiences in a healthy way (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Schapiro et al., 2013; Zentograf & Chinchilla, 2012). These can potentially occur both in clinical sessions, where students with similar immigration experiences meet together, or in classrooms, in which students are grouped more heterogeneously for learning activities. Cooperative learning has benefits in terms of both academic learning and social development; additionally, research indicates that interactions with native-speaking peers can assist more rapid English language development, thus removing a key barrier to adaptation (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Valenzuela, 2005). Additionally, access to clubs and other such structures promoting positive ethnic identity through relationships with coethnic peers can act as a protective factor for immigrant students against discrimination, another significant stressor and barrier to positive adaptation for immigrant children (Silver, 2015). Peer relationships are

particularly important in supporting immigrant students' sense of belonging and awareness of how to navigate life in the U.S. (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Schapiro et al., 2013).

Conclusion

For children, the process of immigration can take a heavy toll both interpersonally and intrapersonally, often with negative academic consequences. Schools have the power to act as a positive influence in the lives of newly immigrated students and their families through concerted efforts both inside and outside the classroom. Within the classroom, a high level of expectation coupled with highly relational teachers, positive peer relationships, and supports for knowledge and skill development are helpful to students. Outside the classroom, school–family partnerships and collaboration with other supportive programs and/or community resources all create an environment focused on meeting the needs of students and their families. Such efforts help in removing the barriers to successful integration into U.S. schools for immigrant children and also increase the chances of better social/emotional adjustment for students experiencing the stresses of family separation and immigration.

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