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Learning from Undocumented Students: Testimonios for Strategies to Support and Resist

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ABSTRACT

Undocumented students and their families are in the crossfire as the Trump administration has taken an aggressive stance to criminalize, deport, and degrade them. Through the testimonios of three undocumented immigrant college students and graduates, this article sheds light on their memorable moments in high school and college to extract lessons for K–12 and higher education educators. The lessons include how to prepare teachers to make immigrants and current immigration issues visible in the curriculum, ways to create safe spaces for undocumented students to be understood and advocate for themselves, and the critical role of counselors in determining students' college-going futures.

Deportations are not new. The negative portrayal of undocumented immigrants labeled by the government as “illegal aliens” is not new. A border dividing the US from Mexico is not new. Yet, since the 2016 presidential elections, the “Trump Effect” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017) has resulted in a surge of negative rhetoric, hypercriminalization, and actions to harm undocumented immigrants. A ramping up of deportations, a ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim countries, a push for legislation to fund the extension of the wall on our southern border, and repeal of the 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program have all taken place within the first year of this administration.

A Southern Poverty Law Center (2017) survey of teachers across the nation during the 2016 campaign found drastic increases in hate incidents related to migration, religion, race, and sexuality. These were most prevalent in K–12 schools and universities. The overwhelming majority of 2,000

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Three of the four co-authors are undocumented. Only Farah chose to use a pseudonym, whereas Areli and Daniela included their real names. Daniela explained her rationale for this decision: “Throughout the years, I have learned about the power of our stories. The best tool that we have to educate the public and to advocate for our rights and an opportunity to lead a normal life has been to be open about our immigration status and share its challenges and implications. Although the risk of deportation may be looming for many undocumented immigrants under the Trump administration, I do not want to hide again. My lack of immigration status has taken away many opportunities from me. I do not want it to take away my name and my right to self-determination.”

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educators reported increased anxiety among students as well as a more negative school climate. Middle-school students chanting, “Build that wall” (Lermier, 2016) and saying, “If he’s elected, all black people will get sent back to Africa” are but a few examples of how the discourse and actions of the Trump campaign have been normalized and created an environment in which hate speech is acceptable. Since the campaign, these incidents have continued to penetrate our educational institutions and society at large.

There are 1.1 million undocumented children under the age of 18 in the US (Warren, 2013). As per the *Plyler v. Doe* ruling of 1982, they have the right to a free and quality K–12 public education in the US. Approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate high school on a yearly basis (US Department of Education, 2015), whereas others either drop out or never drop in, coming to the country to work and support their families (Lukes, 2015; Martínez, 2009). At the tertiary level, only about 10% of those who graduate high school attend college (American Immigration Council, 2010). Another 5.1 million US-born students are part of mixed-status families with an undocumented parent or sibling (Zong & Batalova, 2017). These undocumented and mixed-status families are concentrated in large cities, but they can also be found in rural and suburban communities across the nation. They have become part of the fabric of their communities as residents, workers, and students. Their presence has been welcomed in some areas and contested in others. Educators may not know of the status of those who sit in their classrooms—and they should *not* ask—but they should know it is highly likely that they have undocumented students or families who are affected by the harmful rhetoric and actions of the Trump administration.

The fear and uncertainty that has escalated for undocumented immigrant communities is something educators cannot ignore. By turning away from this difficult issue, we only exacerbate the problem, as silence serves to sanction those in power (Freire, 1985). Conversely, explicitly addressing the realities affecting students in ways that are respectful, age-appropriate, and centered on the safety and support of their undocumented and mixed-status students and families starts to shift these power structures. In order to hone in on some of the most effective strategies to support communities under attack and resist the anti-immigrant actions of the current administration, we turn to the people who know best: undocumented immigrants who are or were students in our K–12 and tertiary school systems.

To understand and learn from the experiences of undocumented students and graduates, we employ *testimonios*, a methodology that stems from a Latin American tradition that most closely translates from Spanish as narrative testimony or “an act of truth telling” (Beverly, 2000, p. 9). Testimonios, originally based in oral traditions, have been used as a means of subaltern resistance by indigenous communities and in women’s movements in Latin America. The method has been deemed a “powerful ... medium because it

attacks institutions and governments at a practical and a theoretical level” (Smith, 2010–2011, p. 26). Within the context of immigration, “testimonio can serve as a form of symbolic and strategic participation in a legal system that affords undocumented migrants certain due process rights but denies them the civil rights afforded US citizens” (Mangual Figueroa, 2013, p. 559). Testimonios offer the potential to shed light on urgent issues as a way to build consciousness and action. We aim to expand on the work of González, Plata, García, Torres, and Urrieta (2003) to use testimonios of immigrants to educate and inform current and future educators about the lived realities of undocumented students. We also see this approach as a way to ensure that the voices of those most directly affected by this phenomenon are centered to able to speak out rather than be spoken for.

Our approach to the testimonios began with the authors coming together to discuss the most pressing issues related to schooling while being undocumented. Then the three authors who have lived this experience—Tatyana was a refugee but never undocumented—selected an area to focus their testimonio (i.e., teachers, counselors, professors, clubs) that would be illustrative to educators. Then each wrote her own section, which, following the collective revising process, was fully included in this article.

Of the four authors, three are undocumented immigrants who share their experiences in secondary schools and college through testimonios to highlight what educators did to help or hinder them in completing high school and (nearly) earning a college degree. They hail from Mexico, Ecuador, and Egypt, yet they call the US their home. One came to the US in early elementary school and two arrived during their high school years. Two qualified for the DACA program, which has provided them a stay from deportation and a Social Security number for working purposes in two-year intervals. However, this 2012 program is being phased out, with recipients losing their stay from deportation and being unable to renew their worker authorization after it expires within two years. The other author did not qualify for DACA. Two are in the final stages of completing their bachelor degrees, and one earned a master’s degree. Their experiences are only their own, but they can be used as a guide to remind us what educators can do to ensure they are purposeful about providing undocumented students with the educational and socio-emotional supports they deserve, especially in these trying times.

Before the testimonios we offer a caveat: Nearly half of the undocumented youth who arrive in the US in their high school years do not attend, let alone graduate from college (Passel & Cohn, 2009). This is due in part to policies that deny undocumented students access to in-state tuition and/or financial aid. But they stem from larger-scale transnational policies, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which wreaked chaos on local economies across Mexico; limited and nearly impossible access to visas to

immigrate to the US from Latin American countries; travel bans that primarily impact majority Muslim nations; and policies that prohibit belonging or citizenship of undocumented immigrants who are mostly—although not only—people of color. These policies and practices are based in institutional structures tied to white supremacy and xenophobia that stand in the way of undocumented immigrants reaching their potential and fulfilling their dreams (Perez, 2012). Educators certainly can make a large difference in the lives of their undocumented students, both positively and negatively. But we would be remiss to mention that, outside of significant structural and ideological shifts, even the best-intentioned educators are working against the grain to provide the necessary supports for their students.

Now we turn to the testimonios of Areli, Daniela, and Farah, who are the exception to the reality of most undocumented students, who do not make it through the doors of an institution of higher education. In essence, they have endured “not because of the system, but despite it” (González et al., 2003, p. 242). Nevertheless, we believe that understanding and learning from their experiences may lead to changes in actions, that can eventually become the norm for undocumented students in the US.

Testimonios of schooling while undocumented

The three testimonios address the roles of teachers and counselors in secondary schools and professors and student safe spaces/clubs in college. Each author starts with an overview of how and why they ended up in the US, and then reflects on moments in their educational trajectory that stand out as being especially meaningful.

Teaching with trust, inclusion, and dialogue

My name is Areli. I was born in Puebla, Mexico. At the age of 6, I immigrated to the US with a trusted family member to reunite with my mother and father. At that age, I did not fully understand the complexities of migration. I thought I would be visiting my parents in the US and then would return to Mexico within a few months. Little did I know it would take approximately 14 years to make the journey back to the place I once called home.

My awareness of my status started at an early age through various contributing factors. First, my parents made sure I knew that we were not entirely safe in this country due to our immigration status. I knew exactly how I entered the country and that there would be consequences if anyone from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) found out. In addition, having a US-born sibling contributed to my awareness. Although we shared the same womb, our different citizenship status signified that I would face

more obstacles when trying to achieve my goals, both academically and professionally.

Upon my arrival in New York City, my parents enrolled me in a public school. I was immediately placed in first grade, where I received pull-out English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction; within a year, I had acquired enough of the language to communicate with others. By fourth grade, I no longer required ESL services because I was deemed significantly proficient in English. Although I was eager to continue learning the language, my acquisition of English came at the expense of slowly losing my home language, Spanish, a language I reclaimed in high school. Throughout my primary and secondary education, I was fortunate to have teachers who supported me to grow as a student and influenced me to strive academically, in spite of my status.

For many years, I lived in the shadows, too afraid to talk about my status and fearful of deportation. I am from a mixed-status family. My parents are also undocumented, but my older brother and younger sister are both US citizens by birth. My status as an undocumented immigrant has proven to be one of the biggest challenges I have had to face, especially in secondary school. I became aware of my undocumented status and experienced the socio-emotional implications that came along with it in fifth grade. My class studied immigration and we visited Ellis Island for a class trip (standard practice of New York City schools). Standing on this iconic location, I knew I was different from my most of my classmates. They were born and raised in the US, they were fully American, yet I felt like an outsider. The media to which I was exposed only contributed to this revelation. I vividly remember the hateful rhetoric I heard from people on the news. The phrases “Immigrants are here to steal our jobs” and the liberal use of “illegal alien” forced me into alienation and silence. I felt voiceless for many years. I did not dare tell anyone outside my family that I was undocumented. My mother’s words echoed in my head, “No le digas a nadie” (Don’t tell anyone). From middle school until the first two years of high school, I avoided any conversation that concerned my family’s migration story. I recall how much I dreaded the topic of immigration in my social studies classes. I remember wanting to be invisible, hoping no one would make hateful comments about recent immigrants. I often wondered, “Do they know I’m undocumented? Would they treat me differently if I told them?”

President Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) brought me a sense of relief and eased the social anxiety of being undocumented. I was granted DACA just after I turned 16. DACA has allowed me to obtain work authorization and a Social Security number and has opened new doors of opportunities. It also gave me a new sense of confidence to move forward with my studies and to speak up about my status. Although the program has positively affected the lives of many beneficiaries, including me,

we must not overlook that it has proven to be exclusive as well as a privilege that is in the process of being taken away from us.

Junior year of high school was the time when my teachers and peers began to talk about applying for college. I knew that undocumented students could attend college, but I didn't know how to navigate the road to higher education. College became my personal odyssey. My parents had made the dangerous journey from their beloved hometown of Puebla, Mexico, to the busy streets of New York to provide my siblings and me a shot at a better life. I wanted to attend college to make my parents proud. Although my parents provided me with moral support, they were not entirely prepared to provide me with the academic guidance necessary to make the transition from high school into higher education. Feeling uncertain about my future, I finally gained the courage to seek help. One of my assignments for my senior English class was to write a college essay. I desperately wanted to write about my experience of being undocumented, but I was fearful about documenting my experiences for others to read. I decided to seek the advice of one of my favorite teachers. Ms. B was an exemplary English teacher who had made a huge impact in my high school career. In her class, I grew tremendously as a writer and developed a love for literature. She was the epitome of a warm demander—an educator who placed strong demands on her students but also provided the social support shown through care and concern (Delpit, 2013). She held high expectations for her students and believed in their potential, while creating a disciplined and structured classroom environment (Bondy & Ross, 2008). She taught me to be accountable for my work, learn from my mistakes, and be fearless and unapologetic about my ideas.

I visited Ms. B during her office hours one day. I initially told her that I needed advice on what to write for my college essay. It took every ounce of courage to walk to her office. Seated across from her, I broke into a sweat. My heart pounded, blood rushed to my ears, and I felt my face become hot. My throat felt tight, and for a brief second, I thought about fleeing the room. But Ms. B's kind smile drove me to finally reveal the secret I had kept for many years. It was a cathartic experience. I told her about my daily fears, my uncertainty, and the dilemma I faced with my identity. She told me that my experience was worth writing about and sharing. She added that my story was one of many stories about undocumented students who were working hard to attend college. At that moment, I no longer felt alone.

Ms. B was the first person I spoke to about my status. I chose to come out to her for various reasons. She demonstrated authentic caring and made it evident that she understood the immigrant experience and the social injustices faced by minority groups. In class, she spoke about her identity and her family's background. She attempted to get to know her class by having us write our life stories. Not only did she read all of them, she provided personalized comments and questions about what we wrote. For an extra

credit assignment, we were given the opportunity to respond back to her questions. Ms. B was aware and understanding of the many challenges immigrant students face in the classroom, including having to learn a whole new language. Most importantly, she was the first teacher to assign a required reading written by a Latino. I was astounded when she announced that we would be reading Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*. Through this literary choice, Ms. B communicated that the stories of minority groups, including my own, were valuable.

Ms. B was one of many teachers who inspired me to pursue a career in education. I plan to graduate from Brooklyn College by 2018 with a bachelor's degree in childhood education with a bilingual extension and become a certified teacher in a New York City public school. If new legislation or a program similar to DACA is in place, I plan to use my experiences of being undocumented to be an empathic teacher. Like Ms. B, I hope to create a positive classroom environment that fosters acceptance, understanding, and empowerment to educate future generations of children, so they can strive to reach their greatest potential.

Counselors as making or breaking futures

My name is Daniela. During my childhood, I used to help my parents run their small business in Ecuador. I saw how their office supplies store only brought in a few dollars each day, not nearly enough to sustain a family of four. My parents, both college graduates, had a difficult time making ends meet in our country of origin. They had a tough question to confront: "What do we do to offer our children an opportunity for a better future?" They thought of the US. As a result of major economic and political crises, millions of Ecuadorians were forced to migrate in search for employment opportunities. Among them was my father, who departed to the US in 2001. He found a job, settled in Queens, New York, and prepared for my mother, brother, and me to join him. I remember talking to my friends in Ecuador about my trip to the US. I did not say good-bye to them, because I knew the trip would be short and I would return the following year or some time before high school graduation. I did not think it would take 16 years to see them again.

After landing at LaGuardia Airport at the end of August 2001, I was disoriented for the next few weeks, if not months. I felt as though I was in the midst of the Tower of Babel, among indistinguishable languages and unknown faces and expressions. A high school in Queens that, according to my father, had a good reputation did not allow me to enroll because I did not speak English (this is an illegal practice that continues to take place). The administrator suggested I attend a special school for newcomers instead, one that focused on providing English language support to newly arrived

immigrant students. This school eased my transition into my new country. Lessons that incorporated basic skills—such as how to read a subway map, intensive English periods, and bilingual programming—helped me adapt to life in the US quickly, and even led me to believe that I could thrive. Six months after my arrival, I was taking ESL and statistics college-level courses after school, in an attempt to take advantage of any available educational opportunity in my new land.

I decided to return to the high school that had rejected me initially, and this time, I was allowed to register. Why did I return? When my parents told me I would be moving to the US, they said it would be only for a couple of years. The goal was for me to learn English, as it would be a valuable skill in my future career. I thought that going to a school geared to US-born students would more fully immerse me in English and allow me achieve my goal sooner, which in turn would accelerate my return to Ecuador. I missed my mom, who at the time had not been able to join us yet. I finished 12th grade in 2003 at this school, and my mom arrived at our new home just in time for graduation.

My parents, having dreamt of a US college education for themselves, wanted me to bring that dream to fruition. Foregoing college was not an option. However, as a rite of passage for every undocumented young immigrant, the reality of my legal status hit me when I began applying for college. Being the oldest child, I had to figure out the process on my own. I thought a large, urban public university would be the best option because of its affordability. As I was filling out the college application, I realized I had to fill out the Social Security number field, which I did not have due to my undocumented status.

In search of answers, I asked my high school counselor how to fill out the application if I did not have those nine numbers. I had to come out to her as undocumented, so she could understand my dilemma. It was my first time disclosing my immigration status to anyone at school. I did not feel fear or shame about my status. I simply wanted to go to college, and I was willing to exhaust all my options in order to achieve that goal. I still recall the shock on her face. I always wondered if I was the first undocumented student she had met. She responded, “I do not know what to do in your case.” She then instructed me to “go find out and come back and let me know how it went.”

I was 16 years old at the time, still learning a language that two years earlier had been foreign to me, while navigating streets and subway lines of New York City, keeping my eyes wide open to ensure I would not miss my stop and end up lost. This counselor’s words did just that. They disoriented me once again. For a while, I thought my dream of going to college would not happen. The thought of returning to Ecuador crossed my mind. My father suggested asking for help from a counselor in my first school. I was excited to return to the place that had nourished me and given me the

confidence to believe I could thrive in this new country. At the same time, I felt regret for having left this school. Although I was no longer a student there, Mr. P, the counselor in charge of assisting senior students gladly helped me fill out the application and select schools, and educated me about in-state tuition rate and the Peter Vallone Scholarship available to undocumented students in New York. He explained that I did not need to fill in the Social Security numbers and instead could provide an affidavit stating my intention to legalize my status. This requirement always seemed somewhat superfluous to me. Every undocumented person wants to legalize his or her status. Alas, if only we had a legislation that could open that path. Weeks later, I received letters of acceptance from three schools in this large university system.

To this day, I thank Mr. P for his diligent support and encouragement. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration, and I recently completed a master's degree in urban policy analysis. I am indebted to one outstanding counselor and the several amazing educators and school administrators who saw potential in me and guided me through this journey.

Spaces to dream and professors who go beyond content teaching in higher education

My name is Farah. My journey began when I migrated from Egypt to New York City in 2008. My dad came to America with a dream for his daughter to have a quality education. I was 15 years old when I boarded a flight to the “land of opportunities and dreams,” as Egyptians commonly refer to the US. Ten hours later, I was at JFK International Airport among crowds of people of different colors, styles of dress, and languages. After graduating high school in New York, I was accepted to college, taking another step toward fulfilling my father's dream. But I was harshly confronted with the complexity of my immigration status when I received my first semester's tuition bill for a whopping \$14,000. This was the cost for international students at my public university. I vividly recall how this incident—which I was eventually able to resolve—fully helped me grasp the consequences of being an undocumented student.

Another obstacle presented itself when I decided to major in education. I learned that not only did my immigration status bar me from federal or state financial aid, it also confined the academic majors I could complete. This is especially true for people like me, who do not qualify for DACA, the program enacted by President Obama in 2012, which is currently being phased out by the Trump administration. I have come to learn that in my context, without DACA, I am barred from student teaching, which requires being fingerprinted and submitting a Social Security number to the New York City Department of Education. This requirement stands in

the way of completing the requirements for my degree. And this is grounded in the DACA guidelines that specified when one first sets foot in the US (by June 15, 2007); I arrived a year too late, in 2008. The obstacles I encountered led me to seek out help from faculty who understood these issues. That was how I was directed to the faculty advisor of the Dream Team. “I am going to quit. I can’t do it.” Such negative thoughts were going through my mind prior to my meeting with Professor Kleyn after numerous semesters passed when I had no outlet to share my experiences and talk about academic struggles I was facing because of my immigration status. I recall saying, “Surely, I can’t be the only one.” And as I always knew, but had yet to see, there *was* a community of undocumented immigrants and allies on campus called the Dream Team. This student club is dedicated to the cultivation of relationships to empower and educate different immigrant groups within the university community.

The Dream Team was especially helpful after the 2016 elections. I remember walking into class the day after Trump’s presidential win feeling riddled with troubling thoughts and heart-wrenching emotions. I was waiting for the moment my professor would ask the class about our thoughts and opinions on the current political situation. To my disappointment, that never occurred, and no one in class had the courage to initiate a discussion about what was happening; everyone was too afraid to share their feelings in case it might interfere with someone else’s. I had troubling and confusing emotions I direly needed to address. Feeling stranded, unable to communicate everything that was going through my mind and heart, I finally received a message from the Dream Team that we were going to plan a “You Come First” event, where everyone would have the chance to share their personal input regarding the current political situation. I walked into the meeting room a few days later, realizing that my feelings were valid when I saw my friends—the members of the Dream Team. Despite our race, color, religious, gender, and age differences, we all had this sudden realization that we are more similar than we had ever thought. Everyone started sharing their emotions, thoughts, and fears. We voiced our frustrations and let out our hidden anger. We were all disappointed with America’s choice, and I personally had addressed how puzzling it was for me to be treated with absolute respect by those who voted for Trump to be the next president of the US, meanwhile he personifies everything against the individual I am: a Muslim, Middle Eastern woman and undocumented immigrant. The “You Come First” event had created a space for undocumented students’ voices to be heard and their immigration statuses to be openly shared. Connecting with people has helped me relate to others, to have compassion, to learn about other students’ deepest scars and ultimate happiness, to travel different worlds

through their stories, to experience different emotions, and to realize that my longings are valid and universal.

In spite of the obstacles I am facing, I can still say that beyond the Dream Team, my college years have been filled with thoughtful and influential professors who have had a great impact on me. These relationships have been the key to achieving my sense of belonging. I have always been open with my professors about my background, although my hijab visibly positions me as a Muslim woman. At the start of the term there is often an activity asking students to write something about ourselves we'd like the instructor to know. I often share about being born and raised in Egypt, about how I have not taken up the mainstream culture of the US, and that I am an undocumented student who views college as a blessing I would never take for granted.

“Professors and students learn from one another.” Although this statement may sound cliché, it is exactly what happened with my Orthodox Jewish professor of calculus. Office hours with Professor Z weren't merely focused on assignment questions or final exam revisions. He was always open to talking about life and religion. The first thing he asked me whenever I visited him was, “Is your question about life or math?” And I would always say, “Both.” Little did Professor Z know he had opened a safe space for me to voice my fears and worries as a practicing Muslim in a dominant culture that perceives my religion as anything but peaceful. Professor Z always asked me questions about my religion. He showed great respect toward it, and he was persistently curious to know and learn more about it from me. He knew that I pray five times a day, for example, so together we Googled questions like, “Why are the prayers in Islam performed at certain set of times of the day?” These were questions I hadn't thought about before. He certainly triggered my interest to expand my logical thinking about certain topics in my religion. I was taught a valuable lesson in Professor Z's class other than integrations. I learned and experienced the real meaning of acceptance and respect of different ideologies and beliefs in his classroom. Professors like him have evoked my strong determination to never give up on myself. They have restored my faith in hope and humanity, despite the recent political turmoil. As an undocumented student, I believe I am capable of conquering all difficulties and overcoming any substantial adversities to embrace my educational journey. I will always cling to this hope, because America has presented me with the precious gift of education, and I will continue to fight for my dream of graduating with a childhood education degree.

Learning from testimonios

No educator—regardless of intentions or actions—can be the “savior” to undocumented immigrants and right all the wrongs they have lived in this

nation. Teachers alone cannot overcome the white supremacy that has become institutionalized to suppress the full participation of minoritized individuals historically, and especially with the election of Donald Trump. However, educators can take meaningful and powerful steps to resist these structures, support undocumented students, and push for larger changes in partnership with the communities they serve.

The three testimonios presented here offer educators a greater understanding of the diverse range of immigrant experiences, even under the umbrella of being undocumented. They also provide lessons for different sectors of education, to better prepare teachers to support immigrant students and families while being cognizant that the people we are educating as future teachers may be undocumented themselves. Below, we connect the testimonios to actions that have always been necessary to ensure an equitable education of immigrant students but are especially critical to the socio-emotional, educational, and overall futures of students who are among the most vulnerable under the Trump administration. We start with lessons for K–12 settings, move into the role of high school and college counselors in educational transitions, and end with implications for higher education institutions—and specifically schools of education—to better prepare teachers to support undocumented families.

Supporting undocumented students and families in K–12 schools

As per the *Plyler v. Doe* case (1982), all students must be granted access to a public K–12 education in the US regardless of their immigration status.¹ However, Daniela being turned away at the first school she tried to attend shows that we still have a long way to go before schools accept all students. Rejecting any student because of language or immigration status goes against the obligations of schools and the policies they must follow. But simply accepting students is also insufficient, without providing the necessary services and relevant education they require. And all educators, regardless of their political leanings, must do their best to support and educate the students in their schools and classrooms.

And just as teachers are not always aware of the undocumented students in their classrooms, their students may also not know about their status. Milestones during adolescence, such as the college application process, often serve as a catalyst for students to become aware of their status and the implications of it. However, Areli grew up with an awareness about being undocumented from a young age. This phenomenon is discussed less frequently, but it is common among elementary school students whose political

¹Some states have tried to push back against the *Plyler v. Doe* decision. For example, Alabama's Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act of 2011 required schools to verify students' immigration status. However, this section of the bill has subsequently been blocked.

status and consciousness are developed during their childhoods (Gallo & Link, 2016; Mangual Figueroa, 2017). This creates somewhat of a tightrope walk for teachers, who must caringly navigate this heterogeneity while being age-appropriate in sharing information with students who may or may not be cognizant of their status. In a classroom setting this means students should never be obliged to share their own stories, while making stories of people like them visible. It also means teaching in culturally sustaining ways by including literature written by people from similar backgrounds (Paris & Alim, 2017), as Areli's surprise with a text by Ernesto Quiñonez shows. Talking about issues related to being undocumented can be eased by starting from children's literature, which allows the focus to be on the characters, rather than on the students. Beyond literature, films such as *Living Undocumented: High School, College, and Beyond* (see livingundocumented.com) and outside speakers can highlight the diversity of the immigrant experience and communicate the value of all people who make up this country. On a larger scale, this means bringing up issues related to undocumented students regularly and widely, rather than only addressing them with particular students. This approach assumes that everyone benefits from having these discussions and access to information, as immigration is a societal issue, rather than one just for people of a particular status.

No student should go through our education system without learning about immigration. In New York City, many teachers take their classes to Ellis Island, as Areli shared. But we must go beyond Ellis Island to teach about current immigration issues, policies, and debates. However, this must be done with great care to avoid students feeling singled out or under attack. This requires knowing and watching students carefully to see how the content is affecting them, and pulling them aside to check in on them when needed. In this case, teaching and critical care, based in educators' sociocultural and political understandings, must go hand in hand (Rolon-Dow, 2005).

What we teach matters just as much as how we teach. Areli and Farah show how educators simply creating spaces for students to share their stories or backgrounds creates an opening for better understanding and dialogue (although requiring this may be triggering for some students). What stands out from both testimonios is that students were given the choice to write about their experiences and background, sometimes even after a teacher modeled by sharing about themselves. Farah's professor created a brief first-day-of-class activity asking students to write something about themselves they wanted the professor to know. There was no requirement for sharing immigration status, but the opportunity to do so was one Farah took. These approaches can give critical information to educators in terms of how to connect with and support their students as individuals as well as via the curriculum.

Finally, we must be vigilant and responsive to current events and how they are affecting our immigrant families. Farah came to school desperate to reflect on the presidential election, but her professor continued teaching as if it was “business as usual.” Educators at all levels must be aware of changes in the political climate, consider the impact on students, and make teaching moves that are responsive to these ever-changing realities. Learning, no matter how well planned out, cannot happen until we address the larger issues and threats facing our students, whether based on immigration or the many other social and human differences that are under attack.

High school and college counselors easing transitions

Certain milestones in the lives of undocumented students are especially difficult, and the college application process is at the top of that list. Daniela’s case of exposing her status to achieve her parents’ dream was a defining moment in her schooling. Yet, to be told to find out about the process for applying to college without a Social Security number on her own and report back to the counselor about her findings was crushing. Fortunately, she had additional resources, but what about students who are on their own? Counselors can be gatekeepers to the futures of undocumented immigrants, especially in the absence of families that can help them navigate the challenging college application process.

The extent to which counselors are educated about supporting undocumented youth, in terms of both the everyday socio-emotional well-being of students as well as the college application process, is critical to students’ success in a system where they are always swimming upstream. If Daniela had not sought out another path, it is possible she wouldn’t have gone to college, as opposed to being a graduate from a master’s program. When it comes to applying for college, it is preparation and the ways that counselors keep up to date on current and changing policies that will determine students’ futures. From how students fill out a public or private college applications without a Social Security number to availability of in-state tuition and financial aid policies, to pending legislation and programs at the state and federal levels, counselors must possess detailed knowledge and share it with all students. Waiting for a student to come out as undocumented (especially in the current anti-immigrant climate) may be too late.

The K–12 terrain for educational policy is controlled at the federal level through *Plyler v. Doe*, which has succeeded in providing access to public education for undocumented students, although the quality of schooling remains dubious (Gonzales, Heredia, & Negrón-Gonzales, 2015). However, higher education is a patchwork of state-level policies and approaches in which university employees have uneven awareness about the unique needs of undocumented students and require relevant training (Nienhusser & Espino, 2017).

In New York and 20 other states (at the time of this publication), undocumented students can attend public universities while paying in-state tuition (albeit, far fewer states allow them access to public financial aid). In order to receive this rate, Daniela had to sign an affidavit at her university, affirming that she was planning on changing her status as soon as possible. This educational hoop implies that students actually have a choice in this matter. Yet they are constantly being asked to declare loyalty or commitment to a country that takes advantage of them and their families while systematically barring them from equal opportunity and full participation.

Reaching undocumented students and preparing teachers in higher education

Only a small fraction of undocumented students make it to college, and those who do often feel alone and isolated (Perez, 2012). Safe spaces like student-led Dream Teams give undocumented students and their allies a place they can go to be with others who share their unique and often difficult situations, a space where they can be understood without explaining themselves and organize for the rights of undocumented immigrants at their school, or on the state or national level. And although Farah experienced her first Dream Team meeting in college, many such clubs have started to emerge at the high school level to give students even more agency and connectivity with others like them.

Universities must also consider how they are preparing teachers to support and educate undocumented students. Teacher candidates must learn how to teach, but they cannot become strong educators until they have a strong sense of who they are. As Areli showed us, Ms. B often shared her own background and history with her students. Ms. B's foundation and security in who she was made Areli, and probably other students as well, feel they could share their stories. Therefore, schools of education must give teacher candidates spaces to explore and struggle with their own backgrounds and think through how they will share who they are with their (future) students. Because teaching is based on relationships, educators must be open with students about who they are, so students can do the same in return. This openness is especially critical for undocumented students, who seek out trusted educators to confide in for support and information related to their status.

Educators learning about themselves is a starting point, but schools of education must also educate teacher candidates about immigrants, and the subgroups among them (Jeffries & Dabach, 2014). The differences between undocumented immigrants, refugees, and legal permanent residents is something teachers should understand. And even among undocumented immigrants, we have those who still have DACA as well as those who did not qualify for it (although this difference will no longer be in effect once the

DACA program is completely phased out). Opportunities to teach about current immigration issues, policies, and practices to candidates across programs are also necessary to equip them with an understanding of the current context. This means learning both about the history of immigration and about current policies and program actions—or the absence of them—and how they affect students and families. Within the current context this includes looking into the meaning behind sanctuary designations of states, cities, and/or universities; understanding what ICE can and cannot do; and learning how to teach families about their rights and plan for worst case scenarios, such as deportations.

Schools of education must recognize that undocumented students are part of their programs. Those like Areli may be poised to complete their degrees and, depending on the expiration date of their work permit, to become powerful teachers who bring an important perspective to our classrooms, even for the short term. However, there are others who were never able to qualify for DACA and who are stuck and unsure of whether they will be able to graduate and work in their fields. Colleges must make information about programs that lead to state certification accessible to all students, so they can determine their futures with as much information as possible.

Finally, students who are undocumented should not be defined by their status. They are intersectional human beings, and they need space to be their full selves. Professor Z spent office hours with Farah speaking not only about math but about her Muslim religion, which is also under attack by the Trump administration. Being undocumented is only one part of who students or their families are. We cannot define any individual by their immigration status. We must listen to each person's stories and experiences. We must create spaces and structures that allow students to reach their full potential, and to achieve the goals for themselves that they and their families—rather than the government—have imagined.

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