

# **The Intersection Family, School and Community in the Education of Immigrant Children**

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When I was graduating from Harvard University this past spring, I was frequently asked what I would be doing afterwards. The assumption was that, with a doctorate in Education, I would be embarking on a new career path. Perhaps the people were correct in asking, for many of my colleagues had fantastic plans after graduation. Some were going to work for the United Nations, others were going to these wonderful countries (that I had never heard of before), and others had these awesome grants to conduct research through great world organizations...So I started developing a complex because I planned to do exactly what I was doing before: teach in Boston. Then a colleague of mine told me, “When they ask you that question, just say that you are going to continue doing the extraordinary work that you have always done, except you will do it much better now.”

The second thing that struck me was the fact that she honored what I did and said that my doctorate would allow me to do my work “better.” I know that I can do my job as a teacher and/or as an academic coach better, because my research topic enables me to look at a student from a holistic perspective. I think about the students’ family life, their experiences in school and in their neighborhoods.

In my research, I sought to find how my participants (12 Cape Verdean young men) understood their experiences within their family, school and community contexts. What I gleaned from my research helps me today, because when I work as a coach in

schools, not only do I look at MCAS or MEPA data, but I also talk to the students and ask them about their home life. For example, I try to know who helps them with homework, who gives them emotional support, and who supervises their activities. Many of these students are home on their own because the parents have to work. Who helps them with homework? Their siblings who are also in the process of learning English. Their neighborhoods tell me a lot as well. Sometimes students get to school angry, scared and frustrated. When asked why, they respond that they were attacked on their way to school. During my research, one particular participant told me the following:

Parents don't listen to the kids, man. They don't, they don't think we're serious. You know we tell them like, I'm afraid to go to school, they like, get to school. I got to walk from Roxbury to come here [school]. I got to go through mad stuff. I've got to go through mad different umm, gang blocks to come here [school]. And, if I tell my mother that, that communication wasn't there. I can come and tell the old man, I'm having trouble getting to school, I need to be dropped off or I need, you know something else. They don't talk to you, you know. (Miguel, 28)

Therefore, the three social contexts, family, school and community (neighborhoods) play an important role in how immigrant children thrive in their new environment. In fact, research shows (Portes and Zhou, 1993) that what resources immigrant families bring with them to the host country, determines how successful they will be in their adaptation to their new social context. These resources are namely, knowledge of the English language, educational level and economic means. Equally important is what they find in their new social context: new language, economic means that help them are many factors in the broader society that cannot be eliminated immediately: racism, poverty, gender profiling, and disproportionate incarceration (Anderson, 1990; Noguera, 2002; Vigil, 2002). However, sociologists suggest change is possible in the long term, if addressed at a micro level. Family, school and community,

as agents of socialization, are integral components of this micro level. Furthermore, research shows that, when breakdowns occur in these three arenas, social problems arise. Hence, they merit a systematic examination; society must work with “facts, not fears” (Vigil, 2002: p. 14).

### **The Family Context**

For an immigrant family, the task of adapting to a new social context is daunting. In order to understand the context in which they live, immigrant families must be socially literate so they can pass on the values, norms (e.g., school norms) and expectations of their new country to their child. Immigrant families bring with them richness in language and culture, respect and love for education, and strong family values and work ethic; however, many of them do not have the social literacy that would otherwise enable any parent to successfully guide his/her child in his/her new environment (e.g. school). Therefore, both children and parents face many issues. One of them is family separation and reunion. For example, six out of twelve participants lived with stepfamilies and had not seen their parent for an average of ten years. This separation and reunion causes a certain destabilization in the home, which can be translated in the following:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth’s despondency in school, which may lead to dropping out</li> <li>• Students’ homelessness or household responsibilities</li> <li>• Overworked/absentee parent</li> <li>• Lack of adequate parental supervision</li> <li>• Lack of communication at home, which may lead to family conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stronger determination to succeed</li> <li>• A maturity beyond their years</li> <li>• Respect for the educational process</li> <li>• Respect for authority figures</li> <li>• Appreciation for the opportunities available in the U.S.</li> </ul>
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It is evident that the ramifications of family separation and reunion can be both negative and positive. A particular participant reported the following about his

relationship with his mother, whom he had not seen for 15 years prior to his arrival to the U.S.:

[W]hen I first came she don't show me a lot of love, and she don't show me a lot of respect. Even though I have to show respect. She don't show me a lot of respect like she was supposed to give to me. (Adilson, 24)

Another participant reported the following:

I was three years old when my father left Cape Verde. I grew up with my mother. In the beginning it was kind of strange because I didn't grow up with him, but we get along fine. (Pedro, 20)

Therefore, a teacher/educator might see a student who appears despondent and depressed and might assume that it's lack of interest in what he/she is teaching.

Another factor in the lives of immigrant families is what I call "linguistic acrobatics" and it is illustrated below by a quote from one of my participants:

The father [participant's stepfather] understands English. He answers in Creole. Back when I came here he [brother] only spoke English but he managed to pick up while we were talking Creole at home, then he started to pick up little by little. Back then we, my brother came and my sister that we came together, we spoke at home, [with] my other brothers [by] just making gestures. (Adilson, 24)

Therefore, immigrant children contend with a new context that is complex not only culturally, but also linguistically. Because the children do learn English much faster than their parents, and become language brokers for them. While it may appear that the task of translating for parents is detrimental to the children of immigrants, research (Suarez-Orozco, 2006) demonstrates that most of these youth do not resent their parents for it. In addition, they become savvy in terms of navigating their social contexts because they are exposed to different social agencies, government institutions, etc. Furthermore, they become multilingual, which makes them an asset in some sectors of the job market.

Next, I will examine the school context and its role in the socialization of immigrant youth. Teachers, however, may encounter situations where students are taking a little longer in mastering the English language. In this case, it is important to understand that many times these students are “sorting out” the many languages that they are exposed to, in their own heads.

## **The School Context**

### *The Bilingual Program*

Similar to family, schools are extremely important in the socialization of children and in preparing them for the work force (Vigil, 2004). Furthermore, as children grow up, they spend large portions of their days in schools. It is in the educational arena that children, especially immigrants, encounter children from other cultures and come in contact with mainstream American culture (Olsen, 1997). My participants, just like other immigrant children, had varied experiences in their school contexts. For many of them, the bilingual program played an important role during their first years in American schools. In their respective bilingual programs, they received not only academic assistance, but also the emotional support and direction that they needed at the time. In terms of academic support, they reported the following:

What I used to do to learn the language, I would, like every time I was introduced to a new word, I would say, oh, I know what it means, do you know what it means? And then like, yes, I do, and they [other Cape Verdean students] would tell me, and that's how I learned most of the things. (Angelo, 19)

It was very good because they [teachers] take their time when I didn't understand and stuff like that. They helped, especially the Cape Verdean [teachers]. They always made sure that we learn something, at the end of the day we go home and our parents ask us what we learned, we have something to tell them. (Aderito, 24)

Therefore, the participants found teachers who empathized with them because they too were immigrants. They understood the stress that many immigrant children undergo, as they begin to adapt to their new setting (Igoa, 1995; C. and M. Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Furthermore, they understood the importance of incorporating the students' language and culture into their practice (Cummins, 1994).

Emotionally, some participants felt that being with other Cape Verdeans provided them with a measure of comfort and support, not only from their teachers but also from their peers:

I think the whole environment [bilingual class], like you know, I was feeling more comfortable because like after I came here, you know, came to the school and we found Cape Verdean people that the same place that you came from. They came, there was like a relationship, you know, a strong relationship. It was like you know people that you have friends that came from the same place they came from. (Denzel, 21)

The school environment appeared to be very important to the participants, which was consistent with other research findings (Lima, 2000; Olsen, 1997). One of the major complaints that immigrant children had was lack of discipline in the mainstream classroom. They found that disruption and lack of classroom management in their mainstream classrooms impeded their learning. They also felt that many teachers outside of the bilingual program allowed "American"<sup>1</sup> students to ridicule and tease them.

Consequently, the bilingual program was a haven for many of the participants. They spoke about the respect that they and their peers had for their teachers in the bilingual program, which created an orderly climate that was conducive to learning in the classroom.

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<sup>1</sup> My participants labeled any peer who spoke fluent English as "American," regardless of their ethnicity.

*School: A challenge all around*

While some participants had only good things to say about their first experiences in school and in the bilingual program, others remembered their early experiences as very painful. Similar to the immigrant children in Igoa's study (1995), my participants who came to the U.S. very young (at the age of five), recalled being very confused in their new setting. They reported experiencing school failure at a very early age and did not have guidance as they attempted to understand their new school context.

Not surprisingly, the participants who came to the U.S. as teenagers seemed to be better equipped to navigate their school context. In addition, because of their age, they appeared to be able to access resources around them and make sense of their own experiences.

Miguel, who started school in U.S. at the age of five, spoke about his early experiences in school with emotion tinged with bitterness. As he spoke, I could still sense the bewilderment of a child who had no idea of what school entailed, and was extremely fearful:

They were speaking umm... English with Crioulo, but it was just, it was like one day, I didn't know anything about school. The next day I was in school. So fear, you know being nervous, just not... I tried to do the work but I remember umm, asking other kids for help but I was always getting into fights as soon as I got there. (Miguel, 28)

Miguel found himself fighting other kids who were making fun of him because of his lack of English, and his clothes that apparently did not meet his peers' fashion standards. Therefore, as Miguel's and the school culture collided, Miguel struggled to make sense of his new world and found himself frustrated by the linguistic and cultural obstacles put his way. Like Miguel, many immigrant children find themselves depressed

and discouraged because of the two cultures that collide (Igoa, 1995; Olsen, 1995; C. and M. Suarez-Orozco, 2001); the collision many times happens because the school personnel, especially the teachers, are not equipped ideologically, culturally and linguistically to guide the students as they begin the complex process of acculturation (Cummins, 1994; Macedo and Bartolomé, 1999; Nieto, 1999). Unsurprisingly, in a voice still filled with anger and pain, Miguel made a surprising revelation about his teacher:

The teacher used to hit me with the ruler. The teacher used to hit me with the ruler. I got hit with the ruler in the palm of my hand.

Although it was many years later, he explained the reasons for which he got hit with a ruler, in very clear details:

I was asking my cousin who was there with me, how to do the homework. But he wasn't trying to help me and I was getting upset, and then he told the teacher that I was you know, I was threatening him, so he told the teacher, so she hit me with the ruler and that was that.

I was surprised by Miguel's revelation because corporal punishment was a practice in Cape Verde when I was in grade school, but was banned many years ago. Therefore, the fact that children still got punished with rulers in U.S. schools was shocking to me. More shocking, of course, was the fact that the teacher could not detect that Miguel was desperately trying to get help from his cousin. Today, many educators encourage children who speak English and another language to help those who are learning English. As a matter of fact, students who speak the same language are encouraged to sit together in groups so that they can share their thoughts and scaffold each other's learning (Shore, 2003). On the other hand, the teacher obviously believed

that Miguel was threatening the cousin, which leads to the question of whether she already had a preconceived notion about Miguel as a learner and as a troubled boy.

This possible perception of Miguel on the part of his teacher is not farfetched, since research shows that boys, especially Black boys who appear to be “troubled” begin to be tracked in terms of behavior very, very early; this tracking results in many boys being suspended, or just like in Miguel’s case, expelled (Cross and Flagen-Smith, 1999; Ferguson, 2003; McDermott, 1997).

In discussing his early experiences in school, Miguel still looking bewildered, whispered as if to himself, “I just was not good at school; I just wasn’t good at it.” He had come to that conclusion in first grade. Consequently, Miguel took a decisive action about it:

I didn’t like school. Cause I was already failing. I couldn’t do any good in there. I was always fighting. I didn’t even want to be in school, I started skipping school when I was in the umm, in the Fifth grade.

Miguel’s growing disenchantment with the educational system is similar to that of many students who find themselves in large urban school systems. Studies show that many students of color, especially boys, experience academic failure very early in their educational career (Ferguson, 2001). Lopez (2002) found that many immigrant boys were educationally neglected in their classrooms; the teacher paid more attention to the girls, who, incidentally, sat in the front row while the boys horsed around in the back. Furthermore, the boys reported that they constantly were harassed by teachers, administrators and school police. Inadequate intervention on the part of the school and the lack of support eventually led the young men to drop out of school. Miguel was no

different; he began to skip school very early in his educational career. Therefore Miguel's and others experiences are consistent with research that shows that educational structures contribute to the conditions that lead many young Black men to drop out of school (Fine, 1990).

Unfortunately, Miguel eventually was expelled from school in first grade and the reason the school gave, according to him, was that he was fighting too much with other children. The expulsion so early in his educational career would set a tone for the years to come. As noted earlier, in the fifth grade he began to avoid going to school. Nevertheless, like so many children who go through public schools, Miguel and three other participants continued to be promoted although, "I wasn't learning anything man..." Miguel continued to fight in middle school and one day was caught with a knife and sent to an alternative school. Thus, Miguel's and other immigrant boys' experiences in school fit are very similar to the experiences of Black boys' educational trajectories in urban schools; the educational and social structures seem to contribute to these boys' frustration in school. This frustration many times is expressed in behaviors that are deemed "oppositional" or "anti-academic" (Ogbu and Fordham, 1986; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Noguera, 2000); in examining the students' experiences, one might question if these "failures" are not created because of perceptions that schools and society have of Black and Latino boys in the inner-city (Grant, 1994; McDermott, 1995).

Therefore, the early experiences of the participants varied to some extent, although they all felt that having someone who spoke their language helped them feel much more comfortable. Not speaking English and looking differently from other children caused some of the participants to feel out of place; the teasing based on these

factors had very serious repercussions and had a decisive role in their later years in school.

### *Teachers as Agents of Socialization*

Earlier, I spoke about the role of teachers and school personnel in the socialization of immigrant children. It is my belief that these teachers and school personnel do not have to be from the same ethnic group in order to understand youth culture and the challenges that these youth face. There are many African Americans and Latinos who, perhaps because of their social class and ideology<sup>2</sup> would not necessarily be cultural navigators for the youth living in the inner city. Rather, I propose that personnel, especially teachers, must have political and ideological clarity, regardless of their race and ethnicity, in order to successfully work with marginalized youth. Bartolome (1994, 2000) defines political and ideological clarity as follows:

Ideological clarity refers to the process by which individuals struggle to identify and compare their own explanations for the existing socioeconomic and political hierarchy with the dominant society's. The juxtaposing of ideologies should help teachers to better understand if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and thus maintain unequal and what should be unacceptable conditions that so many students experience on a daily basis (p.1)

Teachers therefore, regardless of race and ethnicity, must have the courage to examine their worldview and reflect on their own perspective as they look at their students' world in terms of poverty, social oppression and marginalization. As teachers confront their own ideology in relation to the social conditions in which their students live, they attain political clarity defined as,

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<sup>2</sup> The framework of thought constructed and held by members of a society to justify or rationalize an existing social order. It exists as the deep, embedded psychological structures of the personality. It manifests itself in the inner histories and experiences that give rise to questions of subjectivity as they are constructed by individual needs, drives, and passions, as well as the changing material conditions and social foundations of a society (Darder, Torres, and Baltodano, 2002 p. 13).

[T]he ongoing process by which individuals achieve ever-deepening consciousness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacity to transform such material and symbolic conditions. It also refers to the process by which individuals come to understand the possible linkages between macro-level political, economic and social variables and subordinated groups' academic performance in the micro-level classroom (p.1).

Hence, as school personnel, particularly teachers, develop an “oppositional” stance toward injustice, and are able to understand why their students give up on their academic aspirations and give in to hopelessness and despair. This political clarity has the potential to propel the school as a social institution, to develop means (e.g., curriculum in the classroom) to assist students in examining their social conditions and transform them in a way that leads to social well-being (Bartolome, 2004; Vigil, 2004).

In addition, school personnel who have political and ideological clarity begin to distinguish between an ethnic and youth culture. In doing so, they stop viewing these youth's ethnic culture as a deficit and detriment toward academic achievement and acquire knowledge of the conditions in which these young people live, in an attempt to form partnerships with their communities. The families and communities have the “funds of knowledge” or cultural capital,<sup>3</sup> which encompasses belief in academic achievement, work ethic, and hope for a better life (Bartolome, 2000; Noguera, 2003).

As seen in previous chapters, my participants' families came to this country because they wanted to secure an education for their children; according to my participants, their parents believed that an education would lead to a better economic life for all of them. Therefore, in the next section, I explore how the theories inform my participants' experience and analyze areas where their experiences might challenge or

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<sup>3</sup> Cultural aspects of the ethnic group that can be utilized by schools and communities as resource (Moll, 1994).

build on present theories about racial, ethnic and gender identities in different social contexts.

### *Bilingual Programs*

When bilingual programs were still in existence, they served a dual purpose: they fulfilled the academic and socio-cultural needs of newly arrived students (Bilingual Handbook, 2000). They, as agents of socialization, also had as their mission the responsibility to guide students in their integration in their new society (Nieto, 1995). The intervention of the bilingual staff at the particular high school that Adilson attended was timely, for, according to him, his first years in a U.S. high school were very difficult for the following reasons:

I want[ed] to go back to Cape Verde for good. And then while I was staying there [in school] I started to pick it up, and culture. And I had to open my mind so I can fit in the classes, it was different. And I came home, I told my mother I want to go back. The only thing I have to do is deal with the people, the different culture and try to understand [the culture] pick it up, how much I can, pick it up.

Hence, for Adilson school was overwhelming because of the “culture” that he saw expressed at the school through styles of clothing, hairstyle and behavior. Therefore, Adilson also felt pressure to “pick it up,” although he sounded confused about what “it” really was. His encounter with the Hip Hop culture was so disconcerting for him that he wanted to return to Cape Verde. For Adilson, “it” was the following:

[I]t's different, Hip Hop culture, and then I don't want to pick it up, but I have to pick it up, to fit in because if I don't I won't fit in the culture. And I have to dress like them [other students], I have to comb my hair like they comb their hair. I have to do a lot of things I didn't. And I came to understand that's how they work. It's not about classes. You had to learn how to speak English, you had to do what you got to do outside of school, and then to get in the culture, not just come to school, and just blend in with everybody else.

Adilson, therefore, felt overwhelmed by the pressure to learn English, do well academically, and acculturate into the youth culture of his peers. His reference to culture (in this case youth culture expressed in Hip Hop gear) corroborates what research has found: school is the arena in which culture in all its variations is played out; it is also the place where immigrant children encounter the U.S. culture in all its complexities (C. and M. Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Olsen, 1997; Stepick, 1993). Adilson's palpable anxiety over "picking up" what he perceived as Hip Hop culture and presumably the one into which he should integrate is in line with studies that found that immigrant of African descent tend to gravitate toward the Hip Hop, or inner city culture (Ibrahim, 1999). As mentioned earlier, this affinity to the Hip Hop or inner city culture is a consequence of their racialization as Black; therefore, they gravitate toward other Black youth with whom they share blackness and the oppression and stereotypes that are consequences of their blackness in this society (Lopez, 2003).

Adilson referred to the fact that he basically had to change his outward appearance and "blend in with everybody else." He made an interesting point when he differentiated between the dynamics of youth culture and his academics. Not only was he struggling to handle his school work in two languages (Creole and English), but was also attempting to decipher what culture he needed to "pick up." Similar to Adilson's experience, Olsen (1997), found that the students she interviewed felt overwhelmed by the many cultural variations that they were exposed to in school; in addition, they found that learning English was equally overwhelming, which added to their anxiety in their new society and new school.

According to Adilson, his anxiety was allayed by his bilingual teachers who told him to, “go step by step.” Looking back to his early experiences in his bilingual classes, Adilson believed that teachers “right in the classroom can see who can fit in different cultures.” He concluded that if teachers had the insight to know which students were trying to do their best academically, they could also see who was trying too hard to fit in the new culture. He added that the clue was,

[T]he first day [of school] you come [with] all tight [clothes], and the next day, and few days later you want a jersey because you see them [other students] in jerseys. You have the jersey but you still have tight pants, you have to go little by little.

The combination of the jersey with the tight pants is an excellent visual example of two cultures (Cape Verdean and youth cultures) wrestling with each other. It also shows that indeed the acculturation process happens “little by little;” this is reflected by how the outward manifestations such as clothing or hair style are internalized, a process that has received little attention by the immigration literature. In Adilson’s case, his teachers noticed his intense desire to acculturate into his school’s and community’s youth culture and gave him the following advice:

Don't push yourself too far; don't push yourself too hard to get in that position. It might be a good position, it might be a bad position but don't push too hard. Don't focus on that, focus to what, your grades and later on apply to college. You go to college.

The teacher, therefore, noticed Adilson’s anguish and anxiety concerning his ability to fit in with his peers. Knowing that many youth find themselves confused by the various definitions of culture, the teacher advised Adilson to be selective in what he wanted to acquire from this society. S/he, advised him to concentrate on his academics and prepare himself for college. Clearly, for this teacher, one aspect of this society that Adilson

should emulate is the value of education, which leads to a better life (C. and M. Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Therefore, it seemed that this teacher had the political and ideological clarity necessary in a navigator, which enabled him/her to assist his/her students in seeing the difference between an ethnic culture and a youth culture (Bartolome, 1994; Carter, 2005).

### **The Community (Neighborhood) Context**

#### *Social Mirroring and Stereotypes*

As suggested in the literature, the community (neighborhood) into which the immigrant family immigrates plays an important role in the integration of the immigrant family in the host country (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Vigil, 2004). According to the literature, race, ethnicity and gender are extremely important in the adaptation of these youth in their new society; how race and ethnicity of a particular group are perceived in the host country, determines how the children and youth will thrive (Lopez, 2003; Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

In line with the literature, one of the factors that seemed to permeate my participants' lives was race, ethnicity and gender, and how they perceived themselves and were perceived by others (Lopez, 2002; C. Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Vigil, 2004). The participants, therefore, discussed the facets of their lives that had been impacted by race, ethnicity and gender.

#### *Styles and Stereotypes*

One of the issues that the participants discussed with me was their styles of dress. As we saw earlier, I classified their styles as “preppy,” “Hip Hop,” “Hip Hop Rasta” and “Cape Verdean.” The first two definitions of the styles came from the participants’

descriptions of themselves. Those participants who had on the Hip Hop gear felt that they were perceived as thugs and as African Americans. From their responses, I gathered that the message they received from other Cape Verdeans was that being a thug and African American were synonymous. They continuously declared that this did not bother them because they knew who they were; however, they added that they dressed in that fashion because they did not want to be teased by others or considered gay. Furthermore, some of the participants also understood that their looks caused them to be stopped by the police; interestingly enough, those who were new in the country did not call it racial profiling and seemed to accept the stopping by the police as a normal occurrence; however, those who grew up in the U.S. were very angry and denounced the stopping as harassment, ethnic and gender profiling.

The participants who exhibited the Hip Hop Rasta style had also been stopped by the police, but seemed more pragmatic than angry at the occurrence. They also spoke at length about the African identity and linked it to the historical and political context of Cape Verde. Furthermore, their view of Hip Hop had a decidedly political edge, as they explained that the Hip Hop movement was related to consciousness and freedom. Although the participants felt that people identified them as African American because of their phenotype and style of dress, they, too, said that they were Cape Verdean and African.

The participants in the “preppy” and “Cape Verdean” categories felt that many newly arrived Cape Verdean young men dress in the Hip Hop style because they feel the need to fit in. Their view point corroborated what the others who dressed in the Hip Hop gear had said. Some of the young men in these two categories were teased at times, but

they felt that they had to resist peer pressure and be themselves. Some of them clearly stated that dressing in the Hip Hop style was not part of their culture and did not feel that they needed to adopt it in order to fit in. They also mentioned the danger of being stopped by the police and being taken for a thug because of that particular style. The “preppy” and “Cape Verdean” styles however, seemed accepted by the stakeholders and gatekeepers who endorsed the more conservative style and treated the participants much better than the others who sported do-rags and bandanas. Hence, the participants were judged by their looks, but seemed to have a strong sense of who they were ethnically and racially.

When discussing their community, all of the participants mentioned violence in the Cape Verdean community and deportation. Only one participant mentioned gender profiling from a broader societal standpoint. Nonetheless, they all knew a young man who had been killed, was in jail, or had been deported. The fact that virtually all deportees or youth involved in crime were male, did not escape them entirely. This awareness led to a discussion about gender dynamics within the Cape Verdean family, but not in society in general. Some of the participants admitted that, the “freedom” that the boys enjoyed within the family, as opposed to girls, was in fact detrimental to the boys. It was elucidating to hear them explain that this “freedom” contributed for boys to be distant from the family fold; consequently, boys did not enjoy the protection that girls enjoyed from family members, nor did they benefit from the advice that the girls received from their elders. The idleness that the boys experienced for not having chores in the U.S. was conducive to too much free time on the streets. Hence, the participants realized that,

what they considered “freedom” was actually causing boys to engage in behaviors that ultimately cost them a fulfilling life in their new country.

### *The Environment*

The participants spoke at length about their neighborhoods, describing them as drug –infested, dilapidated streets where unemployed neighbors hung around. They cited instances when they were attacked and robbed, or were nearly killed by a bullet. The age of arrival seemed to play a role in how they dealt with the drugs and violence within the neighborhood. Those who came very young conceded that their “environment” had the better of them: they felt that, although their parents did the best to raise them well, they were enveloped by the activities that were happening in their neighborhoods. One of them reported that, while the parents were working two jobs, they skipped school and hung out with other boys all over the city.

Given the environment they live in, they reported that they found that they were forced to retaliate and engage in violent behaviors in order to protect themselves. Consequently, they engaged in gang warfare, became involved with the judicial system, and found themselves on the list to be deported to Cape Verde.

Those who came as teenagers also described their neighborhoods in the same terms as the others. Because they were older when they came to the U.S., they seemed better equipped emotionally and psychologically to resist the environment in which they found themselves. In addition, they devised strategies that enabled them to not only survive but thrive, in spite of the poverty, drugs and violence that surrounded them.

## *Urban Insulation*

As mentioned earlier, I use the term *insulation* and not *isolation* to describe one of the strategies that my participants employed, because they do not isolate themselves from life; rather, they found ways of protecting themselves by involving themselves in positive activities, and by actively not forging a life in their neighborhoods.

*Table 1: Strategies Employed by Participants*

<i>Family</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Neighborhood</i>
The connection with caregivers in Cape Verde	The bilingual program provided initial guidance in the socialization process	Political and cultural activities that enabled them to know who they were
A sense of responsibility and respect toward parents' sacrifice	There were teachers who were discerning enough to see when they were struggling with the acculturation process	Friends with whom they share language and culture
Advice from parents		Avoidance of situations/locations where they can be discriminated against
Maintenance of native language and culture within the home	Some of them changed school in order to secure a better education for themselves	Avoidance of conflicts with authorities such as the police
Isolation within the house for fear of being attacked		Participation in political and cultural events in the community
Strong sense of Cape Verdean and African identity		Membership in a center that provides support with integration in the home country
Knowledge of their own history and culture		

## **The Role of Leaders and Community Resources**

### *Historical Leaders*

*I'm simply an African man who wanted to pay his debt to his people and live with the context of his time (Amilcar Cabral)*

Many of the participants whom I interviewed were very happy to mention Amilcar Cabral, the leader for the independence of Cape Verde. They quoted him numerous times as a personality to whom they looked up because of his commitment to his people, to the extent that he gave his life in the process. They spoke of Amilcar Cabral as their leader and the source of their ethnic identity. They also spoke of Malcolm X as one of the American leaders who inspired them to look at their world with a more critical eye.

Those participants who grew up in the U.S. resented the fact that they had to learn about Amilcar Cabral and other Cape Verdean leaders so late in their youth. But, they delved into research and discovered a history that had been obscure to them for many years. I was touched by their enthusiasm and hunger for knowledge. For them, knowing about both Cape Verdean and American leaders seemed to give them hope in restoring the dignity that they lost on the streets. Getting to know themselves through their history, being in touch with their “roots” seemed to reinforce in them the belief that they are “good” and “hardworking” because Cape Verdeans are a “good” and “hardworking” people. That rediscovery of who they were as a people and as individuals in some ways seemed to inspire them to reexamine their lives and find strength to honor themselves, their families and their people. In reexamining themselves, they believed that they could change the course of their lives. One particular participant believed that he could redirect the course of his life; recently, he asked the community forgiveness for what he did and vowed to “pay back” the debt that he felt he owed his people for the pain he believes he inflicted on them with his past action.

As he and others work with gang members to restore peace, he spreads a message of courage and hope: there is a rainbow at the end of the storm and the rays of light will continue to brighten the way to a bountiful future.

### *Community Leaders and Resources*

Out of twelve participants, nine attended the teen center where they participated in cultural events and received help with homework. Some of them were also counselors or counselors-in-training at the center. The center, located in the heart of the Cape Verdean, African American and Hispanic community, pledges, in its mission statement, to serve youth of color who are labeled “at risk.” Many Cape Verdeans who just arrived from Cape Verde also attended the center. This led me to believe that, by “at risk,” the center might have implied, youth who, by virtue of living in certain neighborhoods and environment, could potentially engage in behaviors that were detrimental to their well-being.

Therefore, the activities at the center are focused on keeping youth engaged after school hours and in the summer; the activities range from homework help to cultural and other social events. The center provides counseling and focus group discussions in which boys and girls talk about issues that affect their daily lives. Although some of the participants are in college, they participate in the center during the summer. The participants who go to the center described the role of the center and the leaders in their experiences in the U.S. I was interested to see how the existence of the center was communicated in the community and what the participants thought about the activities:

Friends told me about it [center]. I used to mostly to stay home. Friends used to tell me about it. So I came here and they said there were people that was offering help on homework, so I came here and started playing sports. That's something that I like so I decided to join.

Many participants said that they heard about the center through friends at school. They also believed that what kept them out of trouble and on the right path was the camaraderie that they found with other peers at the center and the support they received from the counselors there. I asked the participants to describe the experience at the center that made the greatest impact in their lives and helped them to discern what was positive or negative in this culture. One particular participant related what a leader in the center told him about being “American” and about making choices in this society:

They're telling me look, he's American, but look what's he's doing, look where he end up. Jail or a hospital. And they don't want me to do the same thing. So they be like you do this, you go here, you do this, you go here. So, I've got to make a choice. And they don't seem to be talking about what's good and be taking me to the prisons to see other people there.

The participant told me that the trip to jail had a great impact on his life because the inmates shared how and why they found themselves incarcerated. The participant vowed to himself that he would never find himself in that situation.

As mentioned earlier, many participants felt very isolated in their own neighborhoods because, according to them, the parents, could not or would not take them anywhere. The participants speculated that the parents worked too much, or were just not in the habit of going out. The center, therefore, filled that void because many participants named places that the center took them to. For many of them it was the only opportunity they had had to venture outside their immediate community. The participants named a few people who they consider true leaders of their community for the following reasons:

They help Cape Verdeans a lot. They help kids with school work and they help kids with different problems in society.

The participants saw the leaders in the center as people who listened to them without judgment and steered them toward a path that led to a safe and fulfilling life.

They felt that the best way to keep youth out of trouble is to

[e]ngage the youth like in a type of positive action, you know, to get to go play basketball, you know, be in tournaments. Places like the Teen Center where you can go after school, just something to keep them out of the street, you know.

Therefore, the participants who were part of the center understood what worked for them and what kept them “insulated” from the environment that they perceived as unsafe and unhealthy. In going to the center, they received not only academic and emotional support, but also guidance as to how to make sense of their new society. Thus, one of the participants expressed the following wish (translated from Creole by interviewer):

I hope that the centers will be there to support young people; I hope the young people will have an incentive to participate in these programs so they can take advantage of the best that this society has to offer.

Therefore, my participants knew what worked for them and what would work for their counterparts. Their sophisticated analysis of their lives and the brave manner in which they faced the issues that surrounded them was amazingly profound and touching.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### *Family Separation and Reunion*

As depicted in the literature, Cape Verdean families, like other immigrants, come to the United States in search of what they deem “a better life. For my participants and their families, this better life means better economic situations and the possibility of providing an education for their children (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Similar to other immigrants, most of my participants did not accompany their parents on their journey to the United States. In fact, with the exception of two participants, all of them had been separated from their parent(s) for many years, remaining in Cape Verde in the care of other family members. According to my participants, the excitement of coming to a new country (America), and the joy of reuniting with their parents obfuscated any signs of future conflicts. All too soon, however, the repercussions of years of separation, and their introduction to stepparents and siblings, impacted the relationships within the home. Although most of them did not have a close relationship with their parent(s), the participants reported that they considered their parent “a friend.”

In some instances, the relationships were strained and communication between participant and parent was very limited. Given that the family is the first context in which a child or youth becomes socialized in the world (in the case of my participants, in a new country), communication is extremely important. It is parents who pass on to their children the social norms that enable the child/youth to navigate the social context within which they live (Vigil, 2002). Many of my participants reported that they did not rely on the parent in the United States to guide them as they acculturated into their new society. Instead, they were in constant contact with their former caregivers in Cape Verde who gave them advice and encouragement. Another factor that impacted relationships within the family was the English language.

### *Language and the Immigrant Family*

The literature shows that many individuals who immigrate to United States do not hold professional jobs or college degrees and do not speak English (Portes and Zhou,

1993). As depicted in the literature, my participants' fluency in English was more advanced than that of their parents, regardless of length of time they had lived in the United States. Because the participants attended school, socialized outside the home (e.g., at the teen center) and watched television in English (and not in Spanish, like most of the parents), they learned English, while the parents did not. Consequently, within the household, most of the participants became the language brokers (Waters, 1999). They reported that they regularly acted as translators for their parents, intercepted letters from school, chose what information to share with their parents, and translated bills as well.

### *Bilingual Programs*

“Homespace” defines a context within a school where students feel protected as they learn to navigate their world inside and outside of the educational arena (Ward, 1996). Within their sprawling urban high school, some participants who came to the United States in their teens reported finding support from their teachers and peers. They felt that, to some extent, their bilingual program was a “homespace” in that it provided support for them during their integration into the host country.

My participants discussed their experiences in school at length and emphasized the role of their teachers in guiding them, helping to decipher the many cultural nuances of their new environment.

### *The Community (Neighborhood) Context*

Out of twelve participants, nine attended the teen center where they participated in cultural events and received help with homework. Some of them were also counselors

or counselors-in-training at the center. The center, located in the heart of the Cape Verdean, African American and Hispanic community, pledges, in its mission statement, to serve youth of color who are labeled “at risk.” Many Cape Verdeans who have just arrived from Cape Verde also attended the center. This led me to believe that, by “at risk,” the center might have implied, youth who, by virtue of living in certain neighborhoods and environments, could potentially engage in behaviors that were detrimental to their well-being.

Therefore, the activities at the center are focused on keeping youth engaged after school hours and in the summer. The activities range from homework help to cultural and other social events. The center provides counseling and focus group discussions in which boys and girls talk about issues that affect their daily lives. Although some of the participants are now in college, they take part in center activities during the summer. The participants who go to the center described the role of the center and the community leaders in their experiences in the United States.

### *Working Together: Families, Schools and Neighborhoods*

As mentioned before, these three agents of socialization must communicate with each other. It seems that these three contexts each play a pivotal role in how immigrant youth fare in this country. Yet, they seem very disconnected from each other. Vigil (2004) suggests that,

[F]amilies, schools and the community [represented by law enforcement] have collectively failed to develop the connections, engagements and involvements necessary to ensure that its members will conform to society’s beliefs and value system.

When immigrant families feel that they can access the school, without fear, and that there are people who can translate and advocate for them, then they will be better able to follow their children’s academic trajectory. If schools feel that the issues that parents are dealing with are beyond their ability to support and assist them, then they can connect the families with social agencies and law enforcement within their respective community, which can guide them in helping their children. The table below lists additional recommendations:

Family	School	Community
<p><b>Families must be aware of the following, upon arrival:</b></p> <p>Child rearing practices in the U.S., especially laws related to discipline</p> <p>The need to maintain communication with their children</p> <p>The need to maintain their native language at home in order to be able to speak to their children</p> <p>U.S. norms related to school (e.g., parental involvement, special programs)</p> <p>The existence of agencies that provide translation/interpretation services, instead of relying on their children</p> <p>Social dynamics within their neighborhoods (gangs, violence, drugs, etc.)</p>	<p><b>Schools should provide the following to immigrant parents and their children:</b></p> <p>Translation/interpretation of information in the parents’ native language</p> <p>Programs that are adequate for immigrant children (e.g., Sheltered English Instruction)</p> <p>Curriculum that guides immigrant children in the process of integration in a new context</p> <p>Connection with community resources</p> <p>Orientation for parents/teachers in regard to cultural norms both from the U.S. and the immigrant population’s home country</p>	<p><b>The community (neighborhood) should provide the following to the newly arrived immigrant families:</b></p> <p>ESL classes taught in the context of social literacy (social norms of their new society)</p> <p>Translation/interpretation services through social agencies</p> <p>Homework centers with curricula aligned with the public schools that the children attend</p> <p>Orientation for institutions such as the law enforcement, the courts, and hospitals concerning ethnic groups</p> <p>Programs for the youth that will help them integrate successfully in the U.S.</p>

<p>ESL classes available to adults</p> <p>This information should be provided by respective consulates, upon the families' arrival to the U.S. It can be disseminated in a reader-friendly manual or a video in the families' native languages</p>		<p>A strong ethnic enclave that invests in its own social and economic infrastructure in order to provide resources for its newly arrived members</p>
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*Searching for Rainbows: Dreams and Aspirations of a Generation*

A rainbow for Cape Verdeans signifies hope; hope for a more bountiful future. The rainbow usually appears in the sky after a storm to remind nature of its promise for temperance and respite from the tempest. A friend also reminded me that a rainbow is made of rays of light. In the course of writing my participants' story, someone looked at my outline and the scribbles around my study and said: "Why aren't you telling the positive side? Why is it so negative? You have to tell about those young men who are doing well."

Perhaps I was ignoring the rays of light and the sunshine after the storm. I am not sure that the intention is to focus on the negative. A lot of us, in the community, feel a pressing need to "zero in" on the "problem" and find solutions. In the process of trying to "fix" the problem, we tend to forget the young men who are working, going to school and participating in activities that promote their culture. I also feel that it is so easy to talk about what is "wrong" or what is "damaged" about a people or a group and to neglect to discuss them holistically, with all the emotions that embody them (Weis and Fine, 2000).

Most of my participants were hopeful about the future, because they had a specific goal that they wanted to reach. They also recognized that they had the support of people in their family and in their community. This support translated into guidance, advice and belief in the participants. They felt, therefore, that they had to honor the faith and trust that their family members and mentors had in them.

Those who had been involved with the judicial system felt that they had learned from their experiences and were working toward piecing their lives together. Some were going to school and were working in the community to raise awareness about violence. Others were fighting the deportation process and hoping to have a second chance in life.

Although they were at different stages in their integration in their new country, my participants expressed a strong desire to work toward their goals and become successful in the United States. The rays of light that were their lives and the lives of others who inspired them, made the rainbow in the sky shine even brighter and gave them hope of fulfilling their parents dream of searching for and finding a “better life.”

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