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Call for Conversations: *Education in the Era of Trump*

Shifting Sands in Florida: Rural Perspectives on Immigration, Education, and Undocumented Youth under the Incoming Trump Administration

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Introduction

People commonly associate the State of Florida with white sandy beaches, bowing palm trees, and balmy breezes—a true tourist destination site. Yet Florida is home to more than 600,000 undocumented immigrants who work in the hidden corners of the state in the agriculture, fishing, and farming industries (MPI, 2016). Largely hidden from the public's view, undocumented immigrants support the State's construction and building industries, competitive horse breeding, and restaurants. Economists predict that without immigrant labor, many states, including Florida, would face devastating consequences (Kurtzleben, 2013).

For undocumented children and families in Florida, the intersection of immigration and education policies has moved both in and out of the public spotlight over the past five years. Undocumented youth between the ages of 18 and 24, referred to nationally as "Dreamers," remain at the crossroad of state and federal policies. In fact, the US government's failure to establish a sound and workable immigration policy that provides legal status to undocumented immigrants and

their children continues to threaten the very fabric of the US economy. The lack of clarity regarding immigration and education policies for undocumented youth, who were not born in the US and therefore lack US citizenship, has incited fear and confusion among educators, families, counselors, and community agencies across the State. Recent news media (Mitchell, 2016) suggests that the Trump administration, set to take office on January 20, 2017, may move swiftly to eliminate President Obama's 2012 executive order that established the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA, USCIS, 2017), compromising the safety and well-being of thousands of youth and families.

Brief Historical Overview

Since its inception in 2012, the DACA program has provided a legal place-hold for Florida's Dreamers to gain temporary authorization to live and to work in the US for a period of two years, subject to renewal. In order to receive a DACA card, immigrant youth must meet several important requirements, including: arrival in the US before the age of 16; enrollment in or graduation from a US high school, or holding a certificate of high school completion; residence in the US for a specific number of years; and no convictions of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or representing a threat to national security or public safety (USCIS, 2017). DACA applicants must pay a $465 fee for each application or renewal, a significant amount of money for low-income families. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that at the time of the Dream Act, about 72,000 of Florida's youth were eligible to receive a DACA card (Hipsman, Gómez-Aguiñaga, & Capps, 2016). By 2016, four years after

the implementation of DACA, approximately 35,000 of Florida's immigrant youth had applied to the federal program in order to work legally or to attend college.

In the early stages of the implementation of the DACA program (2012), Florida's Dreamers who wanted to attend college faced the added challenge of having to pay international tuition rates. This essentially made attending college prohibitive, as international tuition is at least three times the cost of in-state tuition in many of Florida's public institutions of higher education. Prior to DACA, non-US born college students were considered "international" for tuition purposes. At the time of the DACA program's roll out in Florida in 2013, however, it became clear that several universities and colleges in south Florida, where the number of undocumented youth is greatest, had found ways to circumnavigate the international-tuition policy. For example, some colleges and universities in the urban centers such as Miami and Orlando provided a tuition "waiver" to students that covered the gap in cost between international tuition and in-state tuition. Their argument was that there was no way to 'turn off the faucet' of the large number of undocumented youth who wanted to attend college and who had graduated from a Florida high school.

In early 2013, the question of allowing in-state tuition for DACA card holders was brought before the Florida House and Senate for consideration. Students around the State, including those from our institution at the University of Florida who fought for tuition equity, #gatorfortuitionequity (Schweers, 2013), organized and traveled to the state capitol, Tallahassee, advocating for in-state tuition for DACA card holders and a state-wide policy that supported students who wanted to

go to college. Proponents of such a policy noted the economic benefits of generating additional tax revenue from educated and working DACA recipients, while opponents noted the burden of cost for the government and taxpayers by extending the in-state tuition benefit to DACA recipients. Eventually, the organized students managed to influence legislators such that state higher education tuition policies allowed for in-state costs for DACA holders.

Current Issues and Challenges in Rural Florida

The north central Florida community in which we work is best characterized as rural and agricultural in nature, with immigrants entering and leaving the community based on seasonal crop labor demands. In the community, immigrant Latinos are employed at plant nurseries, on horse (training) farms, and on dairy farms. They also engage in seasonal labor by harvesting peanuts and watermelon, and baling hay. While a handful of Latino families have been in the community for more than a decade and participate in church, school, and social events (such as fall harvest fairs), many are newer arrivals principally from Mexico and Guatemala, making this particular setting what has been described as a "new Latino destination" (Suro & Singer, 2013). Census (2015) data indicate that 87% of the county population is White, and about 9% is Latino. Approximately 7% of the population speaks a language other than English in the home, and the average family income approximates $20,000/year (Census, 2015).

Our work in the community over the past decade has illuminated several social issues that characterize and affect families' emotional well-being and safety in rural

Florida (Staccciarini, Wiens, Coady, Schwait, Pérez, Locke, LaFlam, Page, & Bernardi, 2011). First, families and children face extreme social isolation. For undocumented immigrants, social isolation intersects with limited public transportation that might otherwise facilitate social and emotional support networks. In particular, data from our earlier work revealed that members of the community felt largely "unheard" (Stacciarini et al., 2011, p. 490) or invisible in the rural community. The social isolation and rural nature of the community meant that, secondly, mental health concerns could not be addressed, as families preferred to stay outside of the spotlight and invisible from public sight. Undocumented immigrants will drive to local clinics when absolutely necessary, but preventative health, dental, and mental-health care are not possible, because undocumented immigrant families cannot risk potential deportation after being pulled over when driving (see Coady & Sorel, 2013). Further, community members in our work between 2010-2014 noted that beyond issues of transportation, English as a Second Language (ESL) services, library support services, and culturally-sensitive health related interventions were absent (Coady, Coady, & Nelson, 2015)..

In the same community, we conducted a study of teacher professional development interests and home-school partnerships in a rural Florida school district (Coady et al., 2015). We used semi-structured interview techniques with Spanish-speaking immigrant mothers and also surveyed teachers of English learner children in the rural school district. Ninety-eight teachers responded to the survey, which asked teachers to identify the most pressing issues and areas in which they wished to receive professional development. Semi-structured interviews with five

mothers were conducted in Spanish at local churches, as prior work indicted that churches provide safe spaces for undocumented immigrant families (Marquardt, Steigenga, Williams, & Vasquez, 2013). Parents were selected based on their children's status as English language learners. However, we found that all of the parents were English learners themselves and were also undocumented. That study found that the most pressing issue for participants was addressing immigration, and the second most important issue was helping their children in school. In contrast, teachers noted that they wanted to learn how to modify their instruction for immigrant families, especially English Learners (ELs), followed by the desire to effectively communicate with families. Overall, data from our work in the community indicate that undocumented parents wanted to communicate and connect with schools and teachers and sought to reconcile their immigration status. However, they were unable to do so in the absence of comprehensive immigration policy.

Preparing for Change under the Trump Administration

Before the November 2016 election, immigrant families with whom we work were indicating informally that they were concerned about their status under a potential Trump presidency, who built his political platform on anti-immigration sentiment and construction of a physical wall that would separate people – the opposite to what families and teachers expressly stated would be most helpful. That concern was made real post-election.

Almost immediately, families in our network began to express their fears to the Migrant Education staff, who provide support for agricultural workers' children in public schools. Families noted that they were afraid that an immigration "sweep" at the local Dollar General store, where most immigrant families shop, would occur. In addition, the number of families and children attending the evening homework and tutoring program in the rural schools declined dramatically, despite free transportation that is offered to families who wish to attend.

With our partners, Rural Women's Health Project (RWHP, 2017), we are gearing up to identify immediate, albeit temporary solutions, to families in four key ways. First, RWHP and the Office of Migrant Education are collaborating to provide workshops to educators who work directly with undocumented families. The topics include safety readiness measures such as facilitating legal powers of attorney for the care of their children; providing their children, relatives and friends with emergency contact numbers that are memorized in the event their cell phones are confiscated; and elaborating plans of contingency for medical care and living expenses. All of these actions would be essential, should undocumented parents be identified and held in deportation centers.

The second temporary measure is to reinforce existing and build strong new networks between our university personnel and families. As we embark upon a new federal grant, Project STELLAR (Supporting Teachers of English Language Learners Across Rural Settings), which will provide professional development to teachers and educators of EL children, we will prioritize social and emotional supports and networks with undocumented EL families living in rural communities.

Advocacy must start with relationships and trust. Our project will address these issues by preparing educators to use high-quality instructional practices for English language learners in rural settings. We also aim to improve the achievement for ELs, and that includes understanding the background and context of our EL families who are undocumented and immigrant (Coady et al., 2016). Furthermore, home-school-community partnerships will be prioritized as they play a central role in learner success and student achievement (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2003).

Third, university graduate students and faculty will attend a "safety preparedness" training and workshop held in the rural community itself. The goal of the workshop is to train rural educators to remain calm, inform, guide, and motivate immigrant families with actions to increase their family's safety. Learning concepts for the workshop will include:

- the current plan of the incoming presidential administration about immigrants;
- the actions families can take to increase their physical and emotional safety; and
- how a special Power of Attorney can help families plan for their children's care.

Finally, we will continue to include issues of immigration in the preparation of high quality teachers to enable them to understand and navigate the broader

sociopolitical context (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2016; de Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013). We consider this to be of critical importance for the transitions expected in the new 'era of Trump'. Teacher training education programs for both preservice and in-service teacher will need to address issues such as an overview of various immigration programs and policies, including DACA; the realities of undocumented families who cannot access basic necessities of drivers' licenses, health care, and mental health support due to immigration policies; the economic contributions of documented and undocumented immigrants to the US; and the origins of immigration, namely why families risk leaving their home countries to live in the US. These conversations should become part of every teacher education program, as immigration and education will continue to intersect in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

The future for Florida's Dreamers and undocumented families is uncertain. Conservative positions and political rhetoric continue to characterize the State's policy toward immigrants, and the possible repeal of the DACA program will mean that more than 35,000 Dreamers may lose the ability to work legally or to attend our State's colleges and universities. Even worse would be the exposure that Dreamers face after having applied for DACA cards and being marked in federal databases. This is a real risk, as families are increasingly vulnerable in the current anti-immigrant climate. We hope to network with our colleagues and friends across the US to build our own support networks and to share ideas and strategies to support our rural, undocumented, immigrant families.

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Author Bios

Dr. Maria Coady is an Associate Professor of ESOL and Bilingual Education. She received her doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Colorado, Boulder, where she was a US Department of Education Title VII Fellow. Her work investigated bilingual education programs both in the US (focusing on bilingualism and biliteracy development, namely in writing) and in Ireland. Dr. Coady prepares both in- and pre-service teachers to work with English Learners (ELs). She has directed multiple bilingual and biliteracy programs in rural north central Florida and provides outreach and advocacy to parents/caregivers of children in the process of learning English.

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