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# Helping Immigrants Identify as "University-Bound Students": Unexpected Difficulties in Teaching the Hidden Curriculum

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## **Abstract**

Globalization has brought rapid migration to many regions previously unfamiliar with immigration. In these changing landscapes long-time residents must make sense of their new neighbors, and immigrants must adjust to hosts' ideas about them and develop their own accounts of a new social context. How immigrants are viewed and how they view themselves have important implications for their future prospects-especially in schools, where students are measured against normative models of success. Yet as members of cultural and linguistic minority groups, and often as people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, immigrant students may not be aware of these models that are typically part of the implicit or hidden curriculum. Realizing this, secondary school educators in one American town tried to help immigrant students adopt a normative model of identity, the «university-bound student,» by teaching them explicitly how such a person should behave. Their well-intentioned efforts at teaching the hidden curriculum did not work, however. Immigrant students recognized and valued the identity, but neither they nor their teachers believed that the students could adopt it themselves. Using ethnographic data and discourse analyses of curricular materials and classroom interaction, we describe how this program failed to work. We argue that this occurred in part because the intervention was based upon a conception of culture and identity as static and homogenous. We show how a more complex account of culture and identity –as circulatory, multiple, and heterogeneously evaluated– explains this failure and suggests how such an intervention could be more successful.

## **Disciplines**

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# Helping immigrants identify as «university-bound students»: unexpected difficulties in teaching the hidden curriculum

## Ayudar a los inmigrantes a identificarse como «estudiantes con destino a la universidad»: dificultades inesperadas en la enseñanza del currículo oculto

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### Abstract

Globalization has brought rapid migration to many regions previously unfamiliar with immigration. In these changing landscapes long-time residents must make sense of their new neighbors, and immigrants must adjust to hosts' ideas about them and develop their own accounts of a new social context. How immigrants are viewed and how they view themselves have important implications for their future prospects-especially in schools, where students are measured against normative models of success. Yet as members of cultural and linguistic minority groups, and often as people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, immigrant students may not be aware of these models that are typically part of the implicit or hidden curriculum. Realizing this, secondary school educators in one American town tried to help immigrant students adopt a normative model of identity, the «university-bound student,» by teaching them explicitly how such a person should behave. Their well-intentioned efforts at teaching the hidden curriculum did not work, however. Immigrant students recognized and valued the identity, but neither they nor their

teachers believed that the students could adopt it themselves. Using ethnographic data and discourse analyses of curricular materials and classroom interaction, we describe how this program failed to work. We argue that this occurred in part because the intervention was based upon a conception of culture and identity as static and homogenous. We show how a more complex account of culture and identity –as circulatory, multiple, and heterogeneously evaluated– explains this failure and suggests how such an intervention could be more successful.

*Key words:* identity, education, immigrant education, hidden curriculum.

### **Resumen**

La globalización ha traído consigo la llegada súbita de inmigrantes a muchas zonas donde antes no los había. En estos contextos cambiantes, los habitantes nativos tratan de entender quiénes son sus nuevos vecinos, que, a su vez, se ajustan a la imagen que de ellos tienen sus anfitriones, al tiempo que desarrollan sus propias interpretaciones del nuevo contexto social. Cómo se percibe a los inmigrantes, y cómo se perciben los inmigrantes a sí mismos, tiene importantes implicaciones para sus perspectivas de futuro; especialmente en el ámbito escolar, donde los alumnos se enfrentan a modelos normativos de éxito. Así los alumnos inmigrantes en tanto que miembros de minorías culturales y lingüísticas –a menudo procedentes, además, de estratos socioeconómicos más bajos–, corren el riesgo de que tales modelos, que son aspectos esenciales del llamado «currículo oculto» les pasen desapercibidos. Al darse cuenta, los profesores de un centro de secundaria de una población estadounidense trataron de ayudar a los alumnos inmigrantes a adoptar un modelo normativo de identidad, el de «alumno destinado a la universidad» (*university-bound student*), explicándoles abiertamente cómo se espera que se comporte este tipo de alumnado, pero este intento bienintencionado de enseñanza explícita del currículo educativo oculto fracasó. Los alumnos inmigrantes reconocían, efectivamente, el modelo de identidad en cuestión, y lo valoraban, pero, en el fondo, ni sus profesores ni ellos mismos creían que pudiesen llegar a adoptarlo. Con la ayuda de datos etnográficos, y del análisis del discurso aplicado tanto a materiales curriculares como a intercambios verbales mantenidos en el aula, este artículo describe en qué consistió exactamente aquella iniciativa frustrada. Sostenemos que, en parte, no funcionó porque se basaba en ideas de cultura e identidad estáticas, homogéneas. Y argumentamos que con una visión menos plana de ambos conceptos, tratándolos más bien como realidades cambiantes, plurales, heterogéneas, la iniciativa podría haber arrojado mejores resultados.

*Palabras clave:* identidad, educación, inmigración, currículo oculto.

## Introduction

Globalization has brought the rapid movement of people and ideas, often to places that had not previously been immigrant gateways. This rapid migration to countries and regions unfamiliar with immigration has challenged both immigrants and host communities in Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; Wortham, Murillo & Hamann, 2002). Confronted with unfamiliar immigrants, hosts assign identities that characterize who newcomers are and what roles they play in the community. In unfamiliar social and cultural territory, newcomers encounter a range of often unfamiliar identities available for them to take up. Sometimes the identities used to characterize immigrants can create problems. For instance, people can identify immigrants in ways that oppose them to mainstream hosts and cast them as likely to undermine the society (Hall, 2002; Murillo, 2002). Immigrants themselves, especially youth, can find themselves caught between identities traditionally associated with their home culture and those associated with the host society (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998).

Such problems manifest most saliently in schools. Schools generally have one model of a successful student, and they often use this model to identify students as either meeting the standard or deviating from it. Immigrant students are commonly identified as failing to reach this normative ideal, with educators expecting failure or worse (Valdés, 1996). Immigrant students, as cultural and often linguistic minorities, may not be fully aware of the middle-class normative ideal or how to adopt it, since it is usually part of the implicit or hidden curriculum (Olsen, 1997) and many immigrant students come from socially and economically marginalized communities.

Recognizing these problems, many educators try to help immigrant students adopt identities that align with the school's ideals. This article describes one such attempt, in which American secondary school educators explicitly taught working-class immigrant students how to become «university-bound students.» As in many other countries, most U.S. secondary schools expect successful students to adopt this identity. This school tried to make the appropriate behaviors explicit so that immigrant students could adopt them. Their plan did not work, however. The immigrant students recognized and valued the identity, but neither they nor their teachers believed the students could adopt it themselves. We describe

how this happened, arguing that educators would need to adopt more complex accounts of «identity» and «culture» to make such an intervention successful.

## Identity in motion

Once perceived as a singular, fixed entity at the heart of every individual, scholars now conceive of identity as a plural, dynamic social construction. Individuals and groups in a globalizing world identify themselves differently over time and across contexts, such that identities are often hybrid, partial and emergent. The educators that we worked with did not adopt this more contemporary account of identity, however, and their unrealistic account of identity helped to undermine their well-intentioned intervention. In order to help educators in their work with immigrant students, then, we need to understand «identity» better.

A person acquires an identity through acts of social identification, acts that involve the interpretation of signs. Signs of identity include physical characteristics, attitudes, behaviors, speech patterns and social associations. A person becomes identified as one social type or another when people interpret a sign as indicating a socially recognized type of person (Agha, 2007; Goffman, 1974). For example, a Mexican immigrant teenager may attend school sporadically and his teachers may infer that he is unlikely to be successful in school and later life. Or that teenager may wear the baggy pants often worn by rebellious adolescents and teachers may infer that he is not interested in school. We will call these images «models of identity,» characterizations of the dispositions, moral strengths and weaknesses, typical behaviors and life prospects of a person or group. Models of identity circulate in speech, texts and media, and people rely on them to identify themselves and others (Agha, 2007; Agha & Wortham, 2005; Silverstein, 1998; Urban, 2001; Wortham, 2005). Importantly, identity is *inferred*. Membership in a group does not automatically assign an identity to an individual. People must infer that certain signs point to models that identify someone. For any given individual and any given action, many models might identify the person in question. In globalized settings, in which new immigrants have brought alternative models and longstanding residents struggle to identify unfamiliar newcomers, the number of potentially relevant models of identity has increased.

Schools do crucial work circulating and evaluating models of identity, because they have the authority to characterize some identities as «educated» and «appropriate» while labeling others «uneducated,» «inappropriate» and even «deviant.» Such evaluatively-loaded models often circulate implicitly through the «hidden curriculum»– sets of practices in which students learn tacit lessons about how they should behave and which types of students are admirable (Dreeben, 1967; Jackson, 1968; Grant, 1995). Children from lower social classes or non-mainstream cultural backgrounds often have limited access to the hidden curriculum, because their families are not familiar with it. Mainstream students often understand how to behave in accordance with the hidden curriculum because they have been socialized into it through early experiences in and out of school, and they thus perform more successfully in accordance with the school's expectations. Some schools, however, try to minimize inequality by giving all students the same «cultural capital» (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) –by explicitly teaching middle class behaviors to working class or non-mainstream students. Recognizing that educational attainment is lower for foreign-born Latino students than for any other group in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), educators in the school where this study was conducted tried to give immigrant students the cultural capital to be «university-bound» by explicitly teaching them how to adopt that identity.

But this school's intervention treated culture and identity as static and homogenous. The educators assumed that «university-bound student» was a model of identity that was reliably indicated by certain signs of identity and that would be understood similarly across groups of people. They assumed that it could simply be shared with and adopted by the immigrant students. But models of identity are not recognized or valued homogeneously across a society. Any model circulates differentially across groups and thus has what Agha (2007) calls a «social domain.» Only some people habitually interpret experience using any given model, and different groups value models in different ways. Normative models based in middle class experiences are often taken to be universally understood and valued in the same ways, but in fact they are not because the range of models in circulation and the values attached to them differ across socio-economic and cultural groups. For example, a working-class Mexican immigrant teenager who attends school sporadically because he must work to support his family may be identified by teachers as a likely dropout but by his parents as successful. A lack of commitment to the school's values –like a student's desire

simply to pass without regard for understanding the subject matter– might be evaluated positively by pragmatic parents. The educators we worked with were incorrect, then, in assuming that everyone would use the model of a «university-bound student» in the same way to interpret and evaluate students' behavior. Others, like students and their parents, sometimes used alternative models –like «dutiful son» and «productive worker».

As models of identity circulate, people position themselves in various ways with respect to any given model. Despite the power and relative stability of an institutionally-sanctioned model like «university-bound student,» people can take different stances toward it. Some students tease too-successful peers, for instance, casting them as socially undesirable, physically inept and unprepared for «real life». Some working class people may see academic success as impractical, while others see the personal costs of «successful» students' careers (like limited time with family) as too high. Mainstream middle-class people may assume that «university-bound student» is obviously a desirable and achievable thing, but in fact people position themselves in various ways with respect to this model.

Identities, then, are in motion, multiple and heterogeneously evaluated. As signs and models of identity move more quickly and more extensively in our globalized era, the process of social identification has become more complex. A given behavior can be interpreted using various models of identity, with more models of identity available than in earlier times and with newcomers habitually using different models. People of various backgrounds may also position themselves differently with respect to widely-recognized models. When teachers present a set of behaviors that characterize university-bound students –expecting that immigrant students can adopt these behaviors and increase their success– they fail to anticipate how people may use different models to interpret «university-bound» behaviors and how people may position themselves differently with respect to the model of a «university-bound student». They also fail to distinguish between the ability to recognize a model and the ability to enact it oneself (Agha, 2007). Knowing what a particular kind of person looks or acts like does not necessarily mean that one can enact those behaviors oneself. We do not conceive of these «failures» as necessarily limitations in individual teachers' understandings, but as limitations of the popular conception of identity (as stable, homogeneously valued) with which educational programs are designed.

## The university-bound student: a model of success

The «university-bound student» model of identity circulates widely in the U.S. It is embedded in popular discourses and promulgated at school in many ways –by curricular materials, in teacher training, by community organizations, by government legislation, in financial aid materials. The broad recognition of this model and the generally high value placed on it reinforce this image of what a successful high school student does, says and aspires to, such that alternative models for success beyond high school have become almost invisible. This aspect of secondary education contrasts with that found in many European countries where institutionalized tracking mechanisms separate students into university-bound and vocational tracks in much more explicit ways than are common in the United States. The children of low-skilled labor migrants are often guided into vocational tracks early in secondary school, in Germany as early as age ten (Holdaway, Crul & Roberts, 2009) and therefore presumably receive less exposure to the «university bound» model of student identity. Moreover, while they still carry lower prestige than their university-bound counterparts, certain vocational tracks in Europe such as the *formación profesional (grado superior)* in Spain are growing in status (L. Martín Rojo, personal communication, February 10, 2010), thereby offering alternative models of post-secondary success.

In this article we describe the «university-bound student» model of identity as it appeared in the town of Marshall, where we have been conducting a five-year, ongoing ethnographic project. Data for this analysis were collected through participant observation in classrooms and around Marshall High School, videotaping of classroom sessions, interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and other school personnel and the collection of documents like worksheets from classes and college counseling publications. Our ethnographic analyses follow Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) and Maxwell (1996), iteratively drawing patterns out of fieldnotes, documents, video and interview transcripts. Our discourse analyses follow Wortham (2001, 2003, 2006), attending systematically to how participants position themselves with respect to various models of identity.

Marshall is a suburban community of about 30,000 in a large U.S. metropolitan area. Once mostly white and African American, the town is now home to a rapidly growing number of Mexican immigrants who have come to the area

seeking employment. Most have come from working-class, rural communities in Mexico, and many work in landscaping, construction, or service-sector jobs in the wealthier suburbs around Marshall. The Mexican immigrant community in Marshall has grown from under 0.5% of the population in 1990 to about 20% in 2007. Marshall now faces high rates of poverty, crime and low educational achievement, concentrated in the black and Mexican populations. Like some of the other students at Marshall High School, the Mexican students are part of an economically and socially marginalized community. It is their status both as immigrants and as people from working class backgrounds that made them less likely to adopt normative models of identity in U.S. schools. In this article we describe a program at Marshall High School called the «Advocacy Session» that encouraged Mexican immigrants to identify themselves as «university-bound students». In this program educators explicitly discussed the behaviors and attitudes of a university-bound student, hoping that Mexican immigrants would adopt this identity.

A particularly coherent exposition of this model of identity appears in a brochure that was circulated at «University Night» at Marshall High School (an evening where educators taught students and parents about university). The 25-page brochure, published by a national student aid organization in both English and Spanish, captures the university-bound student model that teachers discussed in Advocacy Sessions. Entitled «Guide Your Child to Success,» the document maps the traits of successful university-bound students and their parents. The cover reads: «Guide Your Child to Success: Improve Your Child's Future Through Higher Education» –presupposing that success requires higher education and is something to be reached in the future. Success could just as well have been defined as an achievement located in the here and now or in some other social space– like home life, work life or community life<sup>3/4</sup>but the co-occurrence of «success,» «future» and «higher education» locates success in the future, subsequent to university. The parallel prepositional phrases «to success» and «through higher education» suggest that success and university normally go together. Students' aspirations –as the brochure says, «their dreams» the «anything they want to be»– are all described as involving «education after high school.» Furthermore, descriptions of the education that occurs after high school mention «university» three times as often as they mention alternatives like «business, career, or technical school» and «two-year community college». Future success,

the brochure implies, requires a four-year university experience rather than a vocationally-focused education.

In addition to defining «success» as involving university, the brochure maps out the traits and behaviors of successful students –the signs of identity that mark a future university student. Abundant uses of the imperative mood show how this sort of student and his or her parents behave: they «save for university», «make a file [for university admission information]», «meet deadlines», «use the internet», «review assignments and homework», «keep in touch with the school counselor», and «contact the admissions office». Parents of such a student encourage particular ways of doing schoolwork: they «set a time every day after school for studying», «have a place for [the] child to study in a well-lighted area with a desk or table where he or she can spread out materials and work», «eliminate all distractions such as TV, loud music... etc.». According to the brochure, this kind of student takes the right courses, participates in extra-curricular activities, volunteers, becomes a candidate for school office and works part-time. Beginning as early as age 12, he or she plans, takes standardized tests, visits universities, seeks financial aid and works to save money for university. The university-bound student is thus a person who understands that success requires university attendance, who desires this and who behaves in the prescribed ways to reach that end. The brochure provides a map of how to become this sort of person –a map of steps that both the brochure and the teachers expect may be hidden from working class and immigrant students. While all students may learn to recognize this model of identity and the signs that indicate it, many of these behaviors are more possible for some kinds of people (e.g., those with parents in their home, with no need to work extensively after school, etc.) than others– a fact not mentioned in the brochure.

## **Advocacy sessions: circulating the university-bound student model**

In weekly «Advocacy Sessions» at Marshall High School, educators deliberately exposed students to this often-implicit model through explicit discussion. Educators tried to help immigrant students recognize and value the university-bound student model of identity, and they asked students to adopt behaviors

that signal it. The Advocacy Session is part of a school reform package adopted by many schools across the U.S., designed to help students achieve academic success by becoming university students (Klem, Levin, Bloom, & Connell, 2003). Students are assigned to a small group of students and a teacher with whom they meet once a week. Activities focus on time management, study skills, the university search, character development and values. Most sessions at Marshall High School included the use of worksheets, some translated into Spanish and others translated on the fly by the teacher<sup>1</sup>. Worksheet titles included: «Self-description inventory: Study habits,» «Students' misconceptions about preparing for and attending university,» «Attentional Profile Survey: Pay attention to the right things,» «*Mi expediente académico*» and «*17 formas de estudiar mejor,*» all of which promoted particular behaviors, attitudes and aspirations focused on attending university.

Although the materials used for Advocacy Sessions did not explicitly state that university is the only route to success, many teachers stated this explicitly, as illustrated in the following fieldnote.

What's important is to find a job that you are suited for and get the training. The only way you can do that, if you really think about it, is to get a degree. One student asks, what happens if he's not smart enough to get a scholarship? [The teacher] says that there are loans for everybody. And if you don't have the degree you don't have any money at all. You work at Burger King. This is a reality. This is the way it works. She says that it's definitely true, that she knows a family who all have degrees and make a lot of money and all of their kids married well.

This teacher juxtaposed the trajectories of those who do and do not go to university. A university degree leads to financial as well as personal success for the degree holder and his or her family (even including one's children marrying «well»). Without a degree, a person faces the «bleak outlook» alluded to in the brochure: working at Burger King and «not having any money». Guest speakers

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<sup>(1)</sup> In an effort to make the material in Advocacy Sessions more accessible to Mexican immigrant students, the school grouped Spanish-speaking students together for these sessions and assigned them to teachers who spoke Spanish (fluently, although not as their dominant language). Discussion in these groups generally occurred in Spanish, but both students and their teachers would sometimes mix English words or phrases into the conversation. Our transcripts present teacher and student speech exactly as they were spoken, in Spanish and/or English.

at two Advocacy Sessions communicated similar messages. One listed benefits of getting a university education: higher salaries, better quality of life, better health and even «political stability» and «democracy». Another explained that university degrees were necessary in order to support one's parents in their retirement. Both speakers juxtaposed university with delinquent behaviors like «vandalism» and «gang membership», suggesting that alternatives to university were dangerous and unproductive. In these ways educators equated «success» and «university» and encouraged students to recognize the university-bound identity as valuable.

Activities in Advocacy Sessions explicitly described the behaviors and attitudes that students should adopt in order to become a successful person. One handout, entitled «17 formas para estudiar mejor», listed physical and mental behaviors including «asiste a clases, haz un horario regular de períodos de estudio, establece una area regular de estudio». Similarly, «Self-Description Inventory: Study Habits» described appropriate and inappropriate studying behaviors: «I study by a schedule and stick to it [good]; I usually study with a radio or music going [bad]; I always try to summarize what I have just read [good]; I usually wait until evening to study [bad]; I usually take notes with complete, well-written sentences [good]». One day a student inquired about the purpose of Advocacy Session. The teacher responded, «Es como [una] orientación a las normas académicas». This response indicated that the program acquaints students with normative behaviors and promotes a particular model of identity. His use of *orientación* presupposed that these immigrant students are unfamiliar with such academic norms. As an explicit introduction to what usually lies in the «hidden curriculum», Advocacy Sessions were the school's effort to explain the university-bound student identity-with the hope that immigrants could learn to be such students themselves.

## Students and teachers respond to the university-bound student model

The Advocacy Session curriculum assumed that teachers and students would value and aspire to the university-bound student model. As we have argued, however, people always position themselves with respect to a model of identity and they sometimes position themselves in unexpected ways. At Marshall High

School, teachers' and students' responses to the university-bound student model were ambivalent and complex. Both students and teachers generally valued the university-bound identity, and in fact a number of students cited a university education as a major goal. But teachers and students alike also identified barriers that would keep these immigrant students from successfully adopting the identity. Students themselves tended to do this overtly, openly challenging the message that they could be university students even if they wanted to –and sometimes even adopting alternative models of success. Teachers admitted the existence of barriers, though only implicitly in their conversations with students. Overtly, they maintained that students should think of themselves as bound for success through university.

Teachers encouraged students to think of themselves as university-bound while tacitly acknowledging the two major obstacles: students' lack of legal immigration status and their inability to pay (even public universities in the U.S. charge substantial tuition). Students accepted the value of a university education, but they more openly discussed why this was impossible for people like them. Teachers frequently mentioned one recent high school graduate who received a scholarship to a nearby university as proof that Mexican immigrant students could achieve a university-bound student identity. When we spoke to this student, however, she said she was the only immigrant student from her graduating class to go to university and that others did not do so because they were undocumented. Most Mexican immigrant students at Marshall High School did not have immigration documents and were therefore not eligible for financial aid. They could enroll in university, but they would have to pay much higher tuition rates than documented state residents. Teachers nevertheless encouraged students to accept the burden of working to pay full tuition on their own. One teacher cited a recent graduate who plans to work his way through a local university:

S4: Nosotros estamos aquí. Vamos al colegio<sup>2</sup>. Tal vez mi papá tiene que trabajar otros tres turnos para pagar el colegio. No tengo papeles. Qué voy a hacer? Si tú...

T: Wai- wai- wai- wai- wait. Tú puedes ir.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Although the Spanish word *colegio* usually refers to secondary school, students at Marshall High School used it to refer to university because of its similarity to the American English word "college," which is a type of university.

S4: Entonces...

T: Tenemos Ignacio P. Ya lo aceptaron. Okay?

S1: Okay, sí. Pero el problema sabes cual es Miss? Miss...Pero sabes el problema de eso, de lo que (Ud.) está hablando? El problema es que mucho- muchos Latinos no saben eso. No tienen- no saben. No tienen ninguna información

T: ¡Te estamos diciendo! Te tienes que esforzar para que tengas su papel y puedas estudiar

S: Yeah right

T: ¿Verdad?

S4: Pero en este caso, ellos van a (usar) beca, no?

T: No. Él tiene que trabajar. Si no tienes papeles no te dan beca.

S?: Si no me dan beca...

S1: Préstamo

T: Tienes que trabajar, y eso es lo que va a tener que hacer Ignacio. Él va a tener que trabajar todo el día para entonces tener suficiente dinero para poder pagar sus clases. Él lo sabe.

S5: Hay muchas cosas que le dan trabajo en la escuela

T: Work study

S5: Y trabaja y paga su propio colegio

T: Pero no van a llegar allá si no pasan sus clases aquí:: y te dan tu diploma. No te dan tu diploma, no vas a llegar. Okay, por eso estamos aquí nosotros para ayudarlos.

Here the teacher stresses that no obstacle is significant enough to keep the students from pursuing a university education –not their undocumented status, not the prohibitive cost, nor lack of access to information–. The description of university life for an undocumented student sounds stressful and exhausting: working much of the day in order to afford tuition and presumably studying in the evenings. Given this description, and despite her insistence that university is possible, the teacher seems tacitly to be acknowledging that it is unlikely for immigrant students to make it. One of the guest speakers to Advocacy Sessions communicated the same message. She presented an imposing list of «barriers keeping Mexican students from going to university,» including teen pregnancy and insufficient funds, but she concluded by insisting that none of these was a valid reason for failing to attend university. The teachers thus communicate an

ambivalent message: explicitly, they emphasize the university-bound pathway as desirable and even essential, but implicitly they recognize how difficult it will be for these students to adopt the identity.

Students generally accepted teachers' claims about the value of university. In the excerpt above many students gave reasons why getting to university would be difficult, but none questioned the value of higher education. Two students even joined the teacher in suggesting ways to pay for university when scholarships were unavailable, and one student suggested that his father would be willing to take on extra work. Another student expressed his belief that «*puedes hacer lo que quieres*» with a university education. Still, he said that he worried about getting a good job because, even with a university degree, employers would ask for his immigration documents.

In the following excerpt another teacher explicitly refuted but then tacitly confirmed students' claims that their lack of documents would prevent them from attending university. The class was about to begin a worksheet entitled «*Students' misconceptions about preparing for and attending university*»:

T: Ah a la página 82 ((sighs, looking over the worksheet)) ((quietly under his breath)) this is so: inappropriate ((in a normal voice)) bueno vamos a hacer esto porque nos dicen que tengo que hacerlo pero dejo a ver si Mr. Branch nos dejó algo momentito momentito ((leaves the room and returns))

T: bueno vamos a continuar con esto y aquí dice la primera actividad (26 sec) bueno abran a la página 81 (4 sec) vamos a hacer de uno a diez (2 sec) la falta de información para preparar y asistir a una escuela después que se gradúan. La primera razón es no puedo pagar para prepararme después del high school no tengo que pagar para prepararme después del high school  
S1: que página

T: eighty-one eighty-one (3 sec) vamos a suponer que yo quiero ir... a prepararme para hacer algo eh un trabajo técnico o ir a la universidad y mucha gente dice bueno yo no tengo los recursos para pagar prepararlo y aquí dice que muchos estudiantes y padres verdaderamente no saben cuanto cuesta la universidad o: la preparación después del high school. La dos. (3 sec) Necesito ser estre... una atleta estrella o ser un estudiante estrella para conseguir asistencia financiera. Pero la verdad es la mayor parte de los estudiantes reciben ayuda financiera para

S1: ((looks up)) menos los Mexicanos (1.5 sec)

T: no that's not true. En las escuelas privadas le pueden dar dinero a quienes se le quiera dar

S1: no es así

T: ¿ah Ud., cómo sabe?

S1: porque varias personas han intentado entrar

T: ¿a qué escuela?

Contrary to the worksheet's implication, receiving financial aid was the exception rather than the norm for immigrant students, and S1 openly claimed that Mexican students were not likely to get aid. Denying her claim, the teacher asserted that they can get aid from private universities (which is true only if the student is academically strong). To convince them, he spoke later about a student who was undocumented but was an exceptional student and received financial aid from a private university. When he finished, another student said under his breath, «*Yo creo que tenía papeles*» –that is, she must not have been like us-. While on the surface the teacher claimed that most students, even unexceptional ones, receive aid, he tacitly admitted that these immigrant students would not get aid from public universities. Furthermore, his anecdote implied that, while other students need not be exceptional to gain access to university, undocumented students must. His comment at the beginning of this excerpt, in which he muttered that the activity is «so:: inappropriate» for his students, also implied that these students are not likely to get to university. We know from previous interviews that he perceived a mismatch between the Advocacy Session materials and his students' situations. In this session he commented on the mismatch between the concerns attributed to students in the worksheet (e.g., I have to be a stellar athlete or student to get financial aid) and his students' more serious concerns about undocumented status. He opposed himself to the exercise, administering it only «*porque dicen que tengo que hacerlo*», because he believed it was not relevant to these students. Both teacher and students thus highlighted reasons why immigrants were not university-bound and positioned themselves ambivalently with respect to the idea of these students attending university.

Teachers and students also used different models of identity to interpret student behavior. Teachers often identified these immigrant students as unlikely to be university-bound, because they behaved in ways that were inconsistent

with the model. For example, they did not generally do volunteer work, engage in extra-curricular activities, or study in silence at a desk at home.

After the bell rings, Mr. Santos tells me that [Advocacy Session] is «acculturation» for them. It is a lot less applicable for their lives than for the American students. The program expects every minute to be planned (in their lives), but «they don't want to». «They don't want to live like Americans.» You notice that the ones who said they have desks, they're the ones who do really well. The ones who have TV on, the radio on, they don't do as well.

To Mr. Santos, studying with the TV on or the radio signaled not only a lower-performing identity but also an un-American one. Here he framed these differences as a choice students make—wanting or «not wanting» to «live like Americans», but on other occasions he acknowledged that many immigrant students live in constrained circumstances.

He talks about «the desk thing», the conversations that he's had to have with the students in other activities where he has to poll them about having a desk. The school wants them to have a dedicated space for studying, where it's quiet. But the students live with other people, the TV is on, there is cooking, there are little kids. The idea of having a dedicated space like a desk for homework is not real to them.

In this excerpt the teacher acknowledges that students' school-related behaviors are constrained by living situations that differ from those assumed in the university-bound student model. In his students' homes, they do not have the luxury of setting aside quiet spaces for young people to study. Many of the immigrant students reported studying in crowded places where the TV was on, and they did not normally have control over the situation. Others said that they did not have time to study and could not afford a desk. Although Mr. Santos acknowledged this in conversations with us, he did not discuss this with the students. Despite their occasional acknowledgment of students' inability to engage in these behaviors, when they spoke with students teachers nonetheless emphasized the importance of university-bound behaviors.

Students also interpreted behaviors associated with the university-bound identity as belonging to other kinds of people. Doing «community service», for example, was often cited in the materials and by teachers as important for university admission, but the students did not value or even recognize community service in this sense. When a teacher mentioned the term one day, students asked what it meant. A student asked if those were the people in yellow jumpsuits cleaning the street (prisoners on work-release), and another explained that when you were convicted for driving drunk they gave you community service as a punishment. For these students community service was not a sign of a university-bound student identity, and certainly not something you did to pad your resumé. Similarly, Advocacy Session materials often cited participation in clubs, sports and other activities as an important sign of a university-bound student. Most of the Mexican students worked after school, however, and did not have time for such activities. Unpaid work and extra-curricular activities were not behaviors that signaled a successful student identity for them.

Sometimes students described alternative models of success during Advocacy Sessions. For some students high school graduation was itself a significant success. In one discussion of what students wanted from high school, a student described her classmate's choice to attend as follows: *«Él quiere venir a la escuela y no le gusta trabajo pesado pero viene a la escuela para superarse como persona y ser bien en la vida y no tener que estar trabajando todo el día»*. Other students then cheered loudly. For this student and those who cheered her, going to high school itself was a big accomplishment. It not only allowed students to avoid doing strenuous manual labor in the present, but it also provided them with more flexibility in future employment and would enable them to be better people. For many students, then, their struggles to stay in high school while also working for money were worth it, as insurance for their futures. One student explained what he believed to be the reward for attending high school.

Pues, al rato no me gustaría que mis hijos estuvieran haciendo lo que yo hice o lo que yo hago... Porque si yo puedo hacer algo ahorita es para que al rato mis hijos no hagan lo mismo que yo –o sea– lo que es trabajar de dishwasher, lo que es trabajar en la cocina, cocinando que te quemas (he shows me burns on his arm) ... Y a parte de esto, no me gusta que, que las personas te traten mal a ti por el simplemente que eres inmigrante, por el simplemente que no puedes hablar inglés, por varias cosas que pues, y yo

pienso que estudiando y teniendo por lo menos un oficio, pues, te ganas el respeto de muchas personas.

Many Mexican students thus saw high school attendance as an important end in itself. For this student, a high school education was an important step in assuring prosperity for his family –even though teachers ascribed this power only to a university degree. A number of students also said that, in their families, work was more highly valued than school. Some said they would be seen as *«flojo»* for coming to school, because work, not school, was the purpose of being in the U.S. While most students recognized the university-bound model as valuable, then, they also envisioned alternative routes to success, including both high school graduation and full-time work instead of school. For many students successful behaviors were not the same as those assumed in the university-bound model, and behaviors that were interpreted as unsuccessful by teachers nonetheless signaled successful identities for some students.

Teachers were caught between an awareness of these alternative routes to success and the barriers their immigrant students faced, on the one hand, and an obligation to follow the school's emphasis on «university-bound students» on the other. In this situation teachers continued to present the university-bound student model as the goal, but they also tacitly acknowledged that many students were unlikely to reach it. Teachers gave varying explanations for why immigrant students did not adopt the behaviors of a university-bound student. Some told us that individual students were not studious and did not regard education as a personal priority. Others blamed the students' culture, claiming that Mexicans were «not education-oriented». Teachers also claimed that the curricular material for Advocacy Sessions did not fit their students' circumstances, and they blamed the school for failing to prepare immigrant students adequately for university. We argue that the program failed to teach the hidden curriculum in significant part because it assumed that identification as a «university-bound student» could occur simply through instruction in what that identity involves. For students as well as teachers, this led to consternation regarding the purpose and worth of these activities. As we have seen, the immigrant students –although able to recognize this model and even value it– did not adopt this identity and imagined alternative models of success for themselves.

## Conclusions

Like schools in many parts of the world, Marshall High School is trying to help immigrant students achieve a particular vision of success by helping them to go to university. Advocacy Session is designed to accomplish this mission by teaching students to act like the kind of person who will construct a «university-bound student» identity and go on to university. Students and teachers discuss why university is important for success and how students get to university, thus laying out the desired model of identity and the behaviors that will get a student there. But it turns out that few immigrant students take up this model of identity.

We have argued that this happens because the Advocacy Session curriculum misconstrues «identity.» It assumes that students lack cultural capital, that they do not know the behaviors that lead to university admission and the details of what a university student is like. It also assumes that, once immigrant students recognize these behaviors, they will adopt them. On this view «university-bound student» is a stable model of identity, reliably indicated by a set of behaviors and universally valued. We have shown, however, that these assumptions are not true. Sometimes the behaviors described in the curriculum as indicators of a university-bound student identity are not the only ones valued. Working for money even when that means less attention to schoolwork may indicate diligence and loyalty to the family, for instance. Doing homework in a noisy space among many activities may indicate family closeness instead of inattention to schoolwork. Furthermore, not everyone values university-bound identities in the same way. Graduating from high school with no plans for university can indicate academic success for some, and further education can be seen as unrealistic or unnecessary.

Furthermore, *recognizing* a model of identity is not the same as *being* that kind of person. Many of these immigrant students wanted to be university-bound but could not adopt the behaviors that would lead them there. They did not perform community service or attend after school activities because they worked for money on evenings and weekends. They could not seek most forms of financial aid because they were undocumented. Explicit discussion of how to be a university-bound student helped students to recognize and desire the identity, but it did little to remove barriers to behaving that way. In fact, the curriculum may have made them less likely to reach for a university education. In describing the specific attitudes and behaviors of a university-bound person the Advocacy

Session is similar to other guides for social behavior, like etiquette manuals that explicitly describe how to be a refined upper-class person. Agha (2007) explains how such etiquette manuals presuppose not only the target identity (a refined person) but also the type of person who would have need of such a guide –that is, someone who does not naturally have the refinement described by this model. Such manuals ironically make it easier for people to recognize a desired model of identity while also making it less likely for them to become such a person—because they imply that anyone who needs such a manual is in fact not the sort of person who could achieve the desired identity. Similarly, Advocacy Sessions drew attention to the fact that immigrant students are unlikely to become university-bound students.

The school's well-intentioned attempt to teach immigrant students the hidden curriculum of university access did not succeed, with only a few exceptions. In order to have more success, such efforts to help immigrant students must adopt a more complex conception of identity. Educators and the curricula they use must do more than describe a model of identity and the behaviors that indicate it. They must also anticipate how students may construe the same behaviors using different models of identity and how immigrant students and parents may value models of identity differently. They must appreciate how students need both conceptual and material assistance to enact a desired identity. A more successful program to help working-class immigrant students negotiate post-secondary options might include a wider range of models of successful identity, some more consistent with identities prevalent in students' own communities. It might portray identities as complex, hybrid, and shifting, a conception more likely to be congruent with students' experiences in migration. It might use this conception to help students productively analyze the fit between their various contexts and communities and their desired future identities, as well as understand the tensions that arise in moving between communities and across identities. A more successful program would also acknowledge material barriers to students' engagement in university-bound behaviors and would include measures to overcome these barriers. Such challenges are particularly complex in areas of new and growing migration, and educators who work with immigrant students must move beyond simple correlations between desirable identities and scripted behaviors.

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