

*Bridging Multiple Worlds: Helping Immigrant Youth From Africa, Asia, and Latin America on Their Pathways to College Identities*<sup>\*</sup>

CATHERINE R. COOPER, ROBERT G. COOPER,  
NANCY M. TRINH, ANTOINETTE WILSON,  
AND ELIZABETH GONZALEZ

**T**hroughout human history, trade and immigration have advanced the spread of technical, artistic, and cultural innovations. For many, the metaphor for U.S. immigration has changed from melting pot to stew, with members of distinct groups maintaining their cultural identity as they add diversity and vibrancy to American culture.

Despite these benefits, immigration also poses many challenges for youth and families. This chapter examines these challenges and successful approaches to meeting them, through the lens of the *academic pipeline problem*. In the United States, the academic pipeline begins in preschool or kindergarten and extends through high school to higher education. We expect all children to graduate from high school, and growing numbers of families also expect youth to go to college to obtain the credentials required for better-paying jobs. As children enter school, the ethnic and gender distributions of each class represent their wider communities. Although there are losses along the way from every ethnic, income, and gender group (U.S. Census, 2000), differential rates

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of dropout or “leaks” from the academic pipeline result in high school and college graduating classes who do not represent their wider communities as many ethnic minority, immigrant, and low-income youth leave school prematurely (Gándara, Larson, Mehan, & Rumberger, 1998). Similar patterns worldwide have made the academic pipeline problem a concern in Brazil, China, the European community, and India (Cooper, 2011).

In addition, in each ethnic group, fewer males than females go to college. For example, from 1975 to 2006, among European Americans, the percentage of males enrolled in 4-year institutions declined from 51.6% to 44%, while the percentage of females increased from 48.4% to 56%. Among Latinos, males enrolled in 4-year institutions declined from 57.4% to 39%, while females increased from 42.6% to 61% (Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008, cited in Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Although a college degree is not the only definition of success, we focus on the academic pipeline problem from childhood to college for two reasons. First, in our increasingly technological world, unequal access to higher education means that university students and well-paid college-trained professionals do not represent their broader communities. Second, the openness of higher education to immigrants is an excellent measure of a society’s support for them. As we will show, many strategies that foster such educational success are interwoven with actions that convey valuing of the cultures immigrants bring with them.

The first section of this chapter describes recent immigrants to the United States from three regions: Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In doing so, we focus on dimensions that researchers see as central for understanding academic pipeline issues among students in each cultural group: their *demographics*, *aspirations and identities*, *challenges and resources*, and *pathways to college*. The second section presents three viewpoints—*capital*, *alienation*, and *challenge*—that help explain both successes and failures of immigrant youth along their pathways to college. In considering what research has revealed about these viewpoints, we highlight a relatively new challenge model, the Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory. Finally, we close by assessing current progress and suggesting next steps for advancing cycles of research, practice, and policy.

## **RECENT IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM AFRICA, ASIA, AND LATIN AMERICA**

### ***Immigration From Africa***

#### ***Demographics***

Over the past 20 years, there have been significant increases in African immigration. In 1995, Africans accounted for only 1% of the total immigration to the United States. By 2006, 3% were from Africa (Terrazas, 2009). Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt, and Ethiopia have accounted for the most immigrants to the United States from Africa. In contrast to the first African diaspora to the United States during the slave trade from the 17th to 19th centuries, motivations for the new African diaspora stem

from both “push” and “pull” factors. Push factors, which motivate immigrants to leave their country of origin, include the desire to escape from economic and political turmoil, whereas pull factors, which draw immigrants to the destination country, include the desire for higher education and better opportunities for their children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

#### ***Academic pathways***

Because the resources required to travel to the United States from Africa are so great, it is mostly skilled and educated immigrants who have migrated to the United States. Those without extensive education and skills have usually migrated to neighboring African countries to escape political or economic turmoil (Gordon, 1998). Because of the costs of coming to the United States, Africans in the United States have the highest levels of educational attainment among new immigrant groups, with 86.4% of African adults holding at least a high school diploma and 42.8%, a bachelor’s degree or higher (Massey, Charles, Mooney, & Torres, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

#### ***Aspirations and identities***

African immigrants to the United States have largely settled in metropolitan areas, including Washington DC, New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Houston. Many immigrants to the United States face issues in adjusting to becoming an American minority group. However, living in urban communities has provided African immigrants with more resources for maintaining their ethnic identities, as well as support groups who identify with their community. For example, children living in neighborhoods with others from their ethnic community may attend the same schools and participate in similar activities. These community connections foster social networks among children and parents and help maintain and strengthen ethnic identity. For African immigrant youth and families who have settled in smaller towns or rural areas where community organizations for Africans are rare, maintaining ethnic identity and customs has been a challenge (Hume, 2008).

Upon entering the United States, Black immigrants from the Caribbean and West Indies (Afro-Caribbeans) may face difficulties in keeping their ethnic identities while being considered Black Americans. Because of the history of discrimination and negative stereotypes against Black Americans in the United States, Caribbean, and West Indian immigrants may strive to separate themselves from a Black American identity. For second-generation immigrant youth, this poses a challenge. They may not have a noticeable African accent like their parents and may also have more social contact with Black American peers than do new immigrants. In exploring their ethnic and college identities, these youth follow one of two different pathways. Some identify with their Caribbean or West Indian roots to forge a distinctive ethnic identity and sense of higher status compared to Black Americans, while others assimilate, with increased exposure to American culture, to distinguish themselves from their parents’ immigrant identity (Waters, 1996).

***Challenges and resources***

As with Asian and Latino immigrants, some African immigrants have come to the United States seeking refuge from homelands ravished by war or political turmoil. A poignant and captivating example is that of the 3800 Sudanese refugees popularly known as the “lost boys of Sudan” (a group that included 89 girls), who experienced exceptional trauma from war and upheaval (Luster et al., 2009). Overall, an estimated 25,000 youth fled on foot from the Sudanese civil war that began in 1983 to refugee camps in Ethiopia. They were forced to return to Sudan and then fled to Kenya. Most remain in refugee camps in Kenya, the Sudan, and Uganda. Of the 3,800 youth who accepted humanitarian offers to come to the United States because their parents were considered untraceable or deceased, 500 minors were placed in foster care (Bates et al., 2005). Foster families were selected through agencies in 38 U.S. cities.

Studies of the Sudanese refugee youth placed in Michigan provide some of the most extensive research available. They recount suffering and loss as well as inspiring resiliency in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds (Bates et al., 2005; Luster et al., 2009). This research also illuminates the roles of foster families and caseworkers with community agencies. The youth relocated at an estimated average age of 15. They experienced challenges in learning new customs and a new language, adjusting to foster families and schools, and managing post-traumatic stress (Bates et al., 2005). Because they had cared for themselves for years in Africa, foster care posed problems, with cultural conflicts (such as about sending money home) and adapting to parental authority, particularly for older youth.

Like unaccompanied refugee youth from Cambodia and Vietnam, about half of the Sudanese youth in Michigan changed their foster family placements (Luster et al., 2009). However, foster parents who showed patience, flexibility, and openness to communication were more effective in helping ease this transition toward positive pathways for these youth. The youth also sought help from local churches, where adults could speak with them about their readjustment. With support from foster families, schoolteachers, and church leaders, many were able to overcome these great challenges and succeed both academically and socially by integrating into their U.S. communities, while giving back to their families and communities in Africa. In the Michigan sample (Luster et al., 2009), 72% enrolled in 2- or 4-year colleges. Similarly, of 150 youth who settled in Jacksonville, Florida, half started college (Bollag, 2008).

***Immigration From Asia******Demographics***

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Asian immigration to the United States increased 50%, from 6.1 million to 9.3 million, between 1995 and 2006. The leading sending countries included China at 1.3 million, the Philippines at 1.2 million, India at 1 million, Vietnam at 863,000, and Korea at 701,000. Southeast Asians—including Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong—are more recent groups to migrate and settle in the United States. South central Asians,

from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, and Pakistan, have had the greatest increases, from 940,000 in 1995 to 2.2 million in 2005.

As with African and Latin American immigrants, some Asians voluntarily left their home countries, while others left involuntarily. For example, many immigrants from Korea and, more recently, from India, came to the United States for educational and career opportunities. In contrast, many Southeast Asian refugees left their countries to escape war, political unrest, and death. For example, Vietnamese refugees began arriving in the United States after the fall of Saigon in 1975. This first wave included mostly educated professionals and middle-class families; later waves were mostly farmers and less-skilled families from rural areas (Centrie, 2004). Parents in the first wave were familiar with the French school system in Vietnam and could translate this knowledge to help their children succeed in U.S. schools (Kim, 2002). Although parents in later waves had less formal education, they were able to learn about U.S. schools from parents and families who had arrived earlier (Menjivar, 1997).

#### ***Aspirations and identities***

Across groups, many immigrant parents share the dream of coming to the United States so their children can have a better future. Most parents aspire for their children to attend college and attain stable white-collar careers. Many Asian immigrant parents have seen academic achievement as key to upward mobility and strongly encourage their children to make good grades to prepare for college. Journalists (Greenwald, 1985; Sundaram, 2008; Viet, Jean-Francois, Milarsky, & Do, 2006) as well as scholars (Caplan, Whitmore, & Choy, 1989; Centrie, 2004; Rumbaut, 1995) have reported that despite families' recent arrivals and many parents lacking a high school education, many Vietnamese immigrant families have overcome poverty through hard work and their children have achieved academically. For example, on the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Vietnamese and Chinese immigrant students scored highest in mathematics (Levels, Dronkers, & Kraaykamp, 2008).

Behind this success, however, challenges may also emerge from the stress of reshaping and renegotiating individual identities and family dynamics. Some Asian youth feel pressures from their parents' exceptionally high expectations for academic success. Many immigrant parents, including recent Southeast Asian immigrants, face challenges of not speaking English well and dealing with non-transferable education credentials from their home countries and having to accept lower-paying jobs and loss of social status. Because men may have needed to take lower-paying jobs, women have been more likely to enter the work force when they traditionally have not worked outside the home. These challenges have changed family dynamics by creating a more egalitarian relationship between husbands and wives. These changes, in turn, have shaped the identities of each family member, including youth. More generally, like immigrant youth worldwide, many Asian immigrant youth develop ethnic identities that reflect their *integration* of the cultural traditions of their ethnic heritage with

values and practices from their new country, while others reflect their *assimilation* to mainstream values, *separation* from these values, or *marginalization* from both traditional and mainstream values (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; see also Centrie, 2004; Kibria, 1993; Zhou & Bankston, 2000).

### ***Academic pathways***

Some Asian immigrant groups have experienced unusual academic success. For example, Vietnamese youth have experienced greater academic success than Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian youth (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008). The Vietnamese may have had easier transitions into American schools because schooling in the United States resembles the system set up by the French during their colonization of Vietnam (Kim, 2002). Vietnamese parents may have been more familiar with formal schooling and thus able to provide resources for their children.

### ***Challenges and resources***

Settling into a new country can bring many changes and challenges for individuals and families. Children often quickly learn English and are influenced by American ideals at school and through media such as the Internet. Parents, on the other hand, are slower to learn English and tend to hold on to traditional values and practices. As a result, immigrant parents and children may experience cultural disagreements that put a strain on family dynamics (Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo, 2000; Lee & Liu, 2001). Although parent–adolescent disagreements are not unique to Asian immigrant families, they may be especially shocking and less acceptable to parents who teach their children Confucian values of respect for elders and family harmony (Caplan et al., 1989; Kibria, 1993; Zhou & Bankston, 2000).

The resources of larger immigrant enclaves can be seen among the Vietnamese who settled in San Jose, California, or the Chinese who settled in New York City. In each of these communities, immigrant families have access to resources such as language schools and cultural youth groups (Min, 1990). While children learn English in school, these large ethnic communities are so self-contained that adults do not need to learn English. For example, in these enclaves, many stores, restaurants, medical offices, schools, and banks have bilingual personnel who speak the language of that ethnic community. Language schools set up by community cultural centers or religious institutions can become resources for children and adolescents to learn their home language and culture. Places of worship, such as Cambodian temples and Vietnamese churches, can help maintain and teach cultural traditions and practices to younger generations. These institutions can also provide safe settings for creating informal social networks, where members can share information about navigating the U.S. school system, job opportunities, or how to raise obedient children in a more individualistic society (Lu, 2001). However, access to these resources varies across Asian groups and the socioeconomic status of communities. In particular, cities and regions with high densities of a particular Asian immigrant group often come together to build resources that help new immigrants and future generations (Min, 1990).

## **Immigration From Latin America**

### ***Demographics***

In 2007, Latino immigrants made up about 40% of the foreign-born population, making them the largest immigrant group in the United States (Taylor, 2009). Immigrants from Mexico made up most of the foreign-born population (30.9%), with immigrants from El Salvador (2.9%), Cuba (2.6%), and the Dominican Republic (2%) comprising smaller percentages. Mexican immigrants make up 7 million of the 11.9 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2009). For undocumented youth, issues of legal status present barriers to their higher education and future employment prospects, as well as ongoing anxieties about deportation (Cooper & Burciaga, 2011).

Latinos are typically seen as a single group, but there are important differences among them in their reasons for immigrating to the United States. In general, the journeys of Mexican immigrants have been motivated by the push of economic hardships in their native country and, until recently, the pull of an attractive labor market offered by the United States (Alba & Silberman, 2009). In contrast, political turmoil forced most immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Cuba into migration. Cuban immigrants have been more favorably received, based on U.S. resettlement policies that assisted them as escapees from communist regimes, than were immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala (Portes, 2007). These differences hold important implications for how immigrants and their children adjust to and succeed in the United States.

### ***Aspirations and identities***

Many immigrant youth and their parents arrive with a sense of *immigrant optimism*, marked by high hopes and aspirations for the future (Fuligni, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Most Latino children recognize that their parents have immigrated to the United States to provide them and their family with better economic and educational opportunities and/or a life free of political turmoil (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Parents' sacrifices and dreams can motivate youth to develop positive academic attitudes and high aspirations.

However, students' high aspirations for academic achievement are not always matched with high expectations. This gap between what immigrant children hope and what they actually expect to attain is evident among Latino children. In one study, although 48% of second-generation Mexican youth hoped to earn an advanced degree, only 25% expected to attain this goal (Portes, 2007). These discrepancies may indicate disillusionment about their potential in their new country, given the poverty they face, less-than-optimal schools they attend, and, for some, the need to earn money to support their families.

### ***Academic pathways***

The academic performance of Latino youth is marked by high dropout rates and low college-going rates, with 53% of Latino students who enter high school graduating, compared to 75% of White students. Of those who graduate, only

54% go directly to college, compared to 74% of White high school graduates (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Latino immigrant groups differ: 63% of Cuban male students graduate from high school, compared to 47% of Mexican male students and 36% of Salvadorian male students (Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solorzano, 2009). These differences can be traced in part to higher education levels of recent Cuban immigrant parents compared to Mexican, Nicaraguan, and other Latino immigrants.

### ***Challenges and resources***

No single factor operates alone in constraining or opening the college pathways of Latino youth. For example, it would be misleading to think that by increasing students' English-language proficiency alone or helping immigrant parents become more involved in their children's education, Latino immigrant youth will catch up to their White peers. Their challenges range from learning English to their citizenship status. Research has also revealed how modest "college knowledge" of students and their parents, limited resources available to those living in poor neighborhoods, and attending poor public schools are all related to low college-going rates among Latino immigrant youth (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Despite these obstacles, many Latino youth draw on family and community resources that support their college identities and increase their likelihood of beating the odds and attending college. For example, studies of predictors of academic resiliency among undocumented Latino college students—as indicated by building pathways to college in the face of these numerous obstacles—reveal that parents' valuing of school and students' community volunteering and extracurricular activities may buffer against fears of deportation, long work hours, and feeling rejected because of their legal status (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Schools and programs that provide information about college can contribute to higher college-going rates among Latino students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). A college-going school culture may also help link students' high aspirations and their expectations of what they can achieve. More generally, to sustain the college aspirations of Latino immigrant students and their families, resources are needed to help them perceive their goals as attainable.

### ***Differences and Parallels Across the Three Immigrant Groups***

Comparing these three immigrant groups reveals important differences and parallels. Despite powerfully distinctive experiences in each immigrant group, immigrant families from Africa, Asia, and Latin America all face challenges of adapting in a new culture as they guide their youth through school. The resources they bring with them (such as parents' aspirations, their experiences in formal school settings) and those they find in the United States (such as compatible immigrant enclaves and supportive educational and community institutions) have important implications for their youth's educational experiences and pathways. Educators can usefully learn about such histories and map both

resources and challenges among the families of their students. In the section that follows, we explore three models for understanding these effects. Variations within and among immigrant groups help provide the evidence for assessing the explanatory power and limitations of each of the models examined.

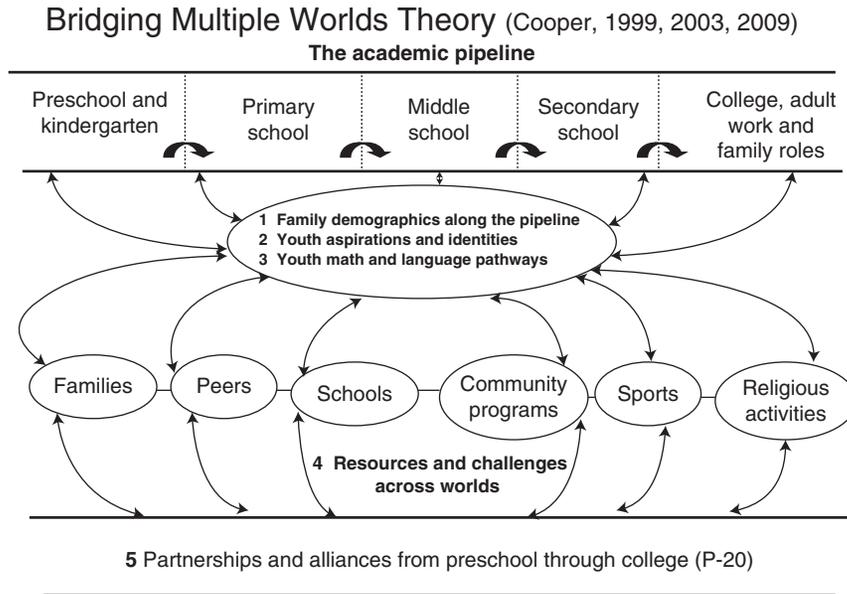
### **CAPITAL, ALIENATION, AND CHALLENGE: RESOURCES AND CHALLENGES FOR IMMIGRANT YOUTH BUILDING PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE**

In the face of the academic pipeline problem, models of the forces shaping immigrant youth's identity pathways point to three explanations that we call capital, alienation, and challenge (Cooper, 2003; 2011; Cooper, Domínguez, & Rosas, 2005). Social capital theories proposed by sociologists point to the process of cultural reproduction, in which, for example, youth whose parents have gone to college are more likely to develop college-based career identities than those who have not (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Theories of youth alienation and belonging proposed by educational anthropologists suggest that immigrant, low-income, and ethnic minority parents often hold high hopes for their children's school success and moving up to a better life, but poverty and discrimination can dim their high hopes, while their children develop feelings of marginalization and oppositional identities. These youth may disengage from school as a way to defend against failure and seek other pathways for their economic and cultural identities (Ogbu, 1991; Vigil, 2004). Finally, the challenge model has emerged from evidence that under some conditions, experiences of immigration, poverty, and discrimination can motivate youth to succeed on behalf of their families and cultural communities and foster positive identity formation (Cooper, 1999; Erikson, 1950; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998). It is these conditions that we have worked to understand.

#### ***Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory***

The Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory is a challenge model that focuses on how culturally diverse youth navigate across worlds of families, peers, schools, and communities on their pathways through school to careers and adult family roles (Cooper, 1999, 2003; 2011). As shown in Figure 15.1, the model traces five dimensions over time:

1. *Demographics* of youth who continue and those who are missing along the academic pipeline;
2. Youth *aspirations and identity pathways* for college and careers;
3. Their *math and language academic pathways* through school;
4. Their *challenges and resources* across multiple worlds; and
5. *Cultural research partnerships* between universities and communities that boost and connect resources to support youth pathways over time. These partnerships can bring together researchers, educators, policymakers,



**FIGURE 15.1.** The Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory examines how youth develop their identities as they navigate pathways from childhood through school. This model traces five dimensions over time to ask how ethnically diverse youth build their pathways to college and careers without giving up their ties to their families and cultural communities.

and community members with immigrant youth and their families to open pathways to college by boosting the resources youth draw across their cultural worlds.

### **Key Findings From Studies of Immigrant Students From Latin America, Africa, and Asia**

Our work is designed to advance research, practice, and policy with common tools for scientists, policymakers, and educators as well as youth and families in multicultural societies. This section of the chapter highlights key findings from longitudinal studies across cultural communities, particularly with Mexican immigrant youth and families in the United States and from related research on immigrant youth from Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

#### **Demographics**

Looking at the demographics of immigrant families along the academic pipeline, two longitudinal studies with Mexican immigrant families revealed that most of the participating parents had received their formal education in rural Mexico. Most had less than a high school education, and many had a primary school education (*primaria*) or less.

In one study, our research team interviewed 60 Mexican immigrant parents and their children in their homes about their goals and aspirations for their children's future over several years (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Azmitia, Cooper, & Brown, 2009; Mena, 2002). We were especially interested in how parents defined the good moral path of life or, in Spanish, *el buen camino de la vida*, and how parents guided their children to stay on the good path or return to it if they had slipped onto the bad path, *el mal camino* (Cooper, Brown, Azmitia, & Chavira, 2005). We followed these youth and families from primary through secondary school. Most mothers were employed in modest occupations like picking strawberries and cleaning hotels, yet these same mothers' aspirations for their children were to attain careers as doctors, lawyers, and other professionals as part of guiding them along the good moral path of life.

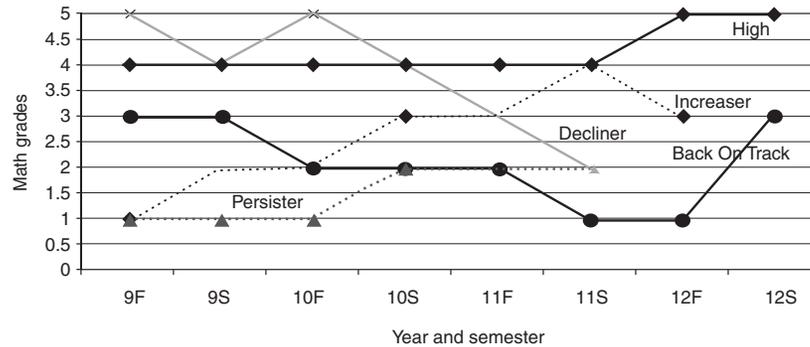
### ***Aspirations and Identity Pathways***

In a second line of research with Mexican immigrant families, we drew from a 15-year partnership between the University of California and a college preparation program (Cooper, Domínguez, & Rosas, 2005). The program awards scholarships and offers support to help students from low-income, mostly Mexican immigrant families, stay on track toward college. The partnership collected long-term data from over 150 students from the time they entered the program at age 11 through high school graduation at age 18 and follow-up at age 25. Data included application essays, interviews with students and parents, school transcripts, and a web-based follow-up survey. When youth applied to the program, they described their career dreams in the same way as the Mexican immigrant parents in our earlier studies (Azmitia et al., 1996). These youth wanted careers as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and technically skilled workers (as well as soccer and football stars), with most of their career aspirations based on college preparation.

As this partnership followed students' long-term pathways, the director, scholarship donors, and community college leaders defined students' success broadly to include graduating from high school; attending college—whether community colleges, technical schools, or universities; or entering military service (Cooper et al., 2005; 2011). In the early years of the program, about half of the students enrolled in community college and about 5% in 4-year universities after graduating from high school. Just under half finished high school but did not attend college immediately, and some enrolled later. Five years later, a new pattern emerged. About one-fourth enrolled in community college, one-fourth went directly to 4-year universities, and one-half finished high school. This indicates growing effectiveness of the program.

### ***Math and Language Academic Pathways to College and Careers***

In our long-term studies, we have graphed each student's pathways of classes and grades in math and language each semester as they move through school.



**FIGURE 15.2.** Studies of highly selective, moderately selective, and inclusive settings reveal five prototypic math pathways: high, declining, increasing, “back on track,” and persisting with low grades (Cooper, Domínguez, & Rosas, 2005). Each line on this graph shows one student’s pathway.

Source: Reprinted with permission of Taylor & Francis.

As shown in Figure 15.2, students’ pathways typically follow one of five patterns: consistently *high* (most likely to lead directly to 4-year universities), *declining* (seen as youth take increasingly difficult classes in moving through school), *increasing* (often seen among immigrant youth learning English), *back on track* (declining then increasing), and *persisting* or consistently low. This coding is based on quantitative criteria for each pathway. We use this set of pathways in group-level statistical analyses and to select students for more extensive longitudinal case studies (Cooper et al., 2005). We also engage youth in mapping their math and language pathways (Cooper, 2011).

In a follow-up study of partnership students as young adults, we are examining how they reconcile idealistic early career aspirations with realities of their academic skills and life challenges. For some students, high career aspirations were not always matched by their mastering the academic skills required for these careers. Others kept their long-term career dreams even while their academic skill levels and need to support families required them to work at more modest jobs. We are examining *back on track* pathways of youth who left school because of early parenthood, prison, military service, or needing to work to support their families and then returned to school. “Second chance” policies, which allow youth and adults to re-enter school at secondary and tertiary levels, appear to be important resources for immigrant youth (Crul & Schneider, 2009).

### **How Do Immigrant Youth Bridge Challenges and Resources Across Multiple Worlds?**

To look at how students navigate challenges and resources across their cultural worlds, we have asked them, “Who helps you?” and “Who causes you difficulties?” across a range of topics. For example, when we asked students in the

program who helped them stay on track to college, one Latina middle-school student wrote (Holt, 2003):

My mom loved to go to school, but had to quit school to start working at the age of 12. Her mom didn't let her do her homework and she really liked to do homework. . . . She tells me I need to seize the time that I have to go to college and not drop out of school.

A Latino middle school student wrote:

My parents told me to go to college because if I wanted to get a house I had to get a good job. Going to college helps you get a career instead of being a gangster, drug dealer or other things that cause you to get in trouble with the cops even though you get good money in a dangerous way.

These quotes illustrate one of the most important findings of our longitudinal studies: immigrant students continue to report, from childhood into young adulthood, that their parents remain central to their staying on track to college, not in spite of parents' modest formal education but because of it (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008). Successful students drew emotional and instrumental resources by bridging across their worlds while keeping ties to their families. As students progressed through this program, whose activities link families, peers, and schools into a college-going convoy, they increasingly listed their mothers as helping them go to college and peers as helping them with schoolwork. As young adults, they continued to name parents and peers as top resources, as well as teachers, counselors, the program director, and tutors. Such personal and institutional ties illustrate what the sociologist Putnam (2000) has called *bonding* and *bridging* forms of social capital, respectively. These findings challenge widely held myths that Latino immigrant parents hold low aspirations for their children's education and so interventions are needed to raise their aspirations (Valencia and Black paper is 2002).

### **Cultural Research Partnerships**

Beyond immigrant students' identities and social networks, cultural research partnerships involve organizational changes fostered by university partners working with schools, private foundations, and community organizations, including religious organizations. Although programs for immigrant students along the academic pipeline often address specific transitions such as entering school or enrolling in college, educational leaders increasingly want to align and connect short-term programs with community organizations, immigrant families, and youth into systems aligned from preschool through graduate school in what are called *P-20 alliances* (Cooper, 2011).

Similarly, in Europe, partnerships support "long route" pathways, through which immigrant students find support to navigate to universities from vocational

schools (De Bresser, 2009). Support programs in higher education for immigrant students are being developed in the Netherlands (Tupan-Wenno, 2009).

### **PROGRESS, USEFUL STRATEGIES, AND NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND POLICY**

The goal in the United States and many other countries is to increase the degree to which immigrant youth succeed in progressing through the academic pipeline and become contributing members of the society to their own benefit and that of their societies. The evidence presented in this chapter supports the view that attaining this goal is fostered with educational systems and practices that allow youth to retain their connections to the culture of their families while obtaining skills to participate effectively in their broader societies. The importance of these cultural connections can be seen in the history of immigrant communities in the United States that have created programs to preserve or even restore aspects of their home culture, such as social clubs, after-school programs, language programs, and soccer teams. Although not immigrant cultures, the language revival work by tribal colleges for Native Americans and the Kaiapuni School in Hawaii illustrate the same felt need (Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, 2005; Yamauchi, Lau-Smith, & Luning, 2008). Progress toward linking academic success and cultural connections depends on advancing cycles of research, policy, and practice. Ongoing research provides crucial information about challenges that immigrant groups face and strategies for dealing with them, as well as empirical support for policy changes. Cultural research partnerships find that these insights are both unique to specific immigrant and cultural communities, and in many cases, common across communities (Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, 2005). Policies can provide resources and structural changes that move advances in research into practice. New opportunities to assess what is working can open new research that builds even more effective practice.

Three features of cycles of research, policy, and practice are particularly effective. The first is *intergenerational partnerships* in which immigrant youth and their families are respected as participants and researchers. The second is *interdisciplinary* work that maps conditions for success by aligning capital, alienation, and challenge theories. Third, building *intercultural* teams of researchers who work with multiple cultural groups and nations allows them to map parallels and variations across cultural communities.

Examples of intergenerational partnerships that highlight such cultural parallels appear in Figures 15.3 and 15.4, with Cambodian and Mexican immigrant college students serving as *cultural brokers* in their respective cultural communities. Researchers find that students keenly feel the challenges of *gatekeeping*, such as when teachers and counselors discourage them from taking college-prep math and science classes or try to place them in noncollege tracks. Cultural brokers—whether teachers, families, program staff, siblings, or friends—support youth bridging across these barriers on their pathways to college. Students have



**FIGURE 15.3.** “Ask us about college.” Cambodian immigrant college students and families serve as cultural brokers at a Cambodian New Year celebration at their Buddhist temple by providing materials about college in English and Khmer.

© Catherine Cooper.



**FIGURE 15.4.** “Ask us about college.” Mexican immigrant college students and families serve as cultural brokers at a celebration of *Guelaguetza*, an indigenous tradition from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, by providing materials about college in English and Spanish.

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called such activities “looking up and giving back,” as they look ahead to attaining their own goals, which include serving their communities.

The Bridging Multiple Worlds Alliance (BMWA) is a growing network of regional, national, and international partners with the common goal of advancing knowledge about the academic pipeline problem and using this knowledge to improve practice and policy, thereby helping culturally diverse youth build pathways to college. The BMWA provides tools to enhance inclusion of youth, their families, and their communities as partners in both research and practice. For example, the activities shown in Figure 15.5 ask youth “What are your worlds?” and “What do people expect of you from your worlds?” (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, & Lopez, 2002). Researchers and community programs have used these across a range of cultural communities. The BMWA has collected and developed tools for quantitative and qualitative data at each of the five levels in the Bridging Multiple Worlds Model, activities for schools and programs, and templates for graphs and longitudinal case studies. Readers are invited to explore these tools at no cost at [www.bridgingworlds.org](http://www.bridgingworlds.org).

Engaging youth in gathering data with BMWA tools is one effective way to enhance their success in the academic pipeline. There are many possible explanations for this effect. For example, tabulating their resources and challenges may help them reflect about how to maximize benefits from their resources and minimize costs of their challenges. Examining their own academic pathways in the context of educational requirements to attain their aspirations may motivate academic effort. Demographic data on the academic pipeline problem are powerful tools for persuading a variety of constituencies there is a problem to be addressed, in addition to providing a useful metric for tracking successes and failures in addressing it. Students who examine these issues at a younger age may be more likely to serve as both cultural and intergenerational brokers as they grow older.

Mapping challenges and resources for immigrant students’ pathways to college reveals that evolving models of capital, alienation, and challenge offer complementary views. Aligning cultural, structural, social, and personal levels of analysis is especially productive for understanding immigrant youth and their families as social actors and potential assets, not simply as outcomes who are considered to be deficient, “at risk,” or incomplete in their assimilation.

For practitioners working directly on the pipeline problem, intergenerational networks can be created when immigrant college students connect youth and elders. As we have seen in the “ask me about college” activities, successful immigrant youth can bridge the values of home and mainstream cultures. Materials in immigrant families’ home languages can support intergenerational bridging of cultural, college, and career identities. In accordance with the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, schools in all states collect and report home languages of their students. A survey of such reports in six U.S. states revealed that 150 languages are spoken, with surprising similarities across states (Trinh, Tsai, & Cooper, 2007). Materials about pathways to college in 19 languages besides English are available at [www.bridgingworlds.org](http://www.bridgingworlds.org). These materials assist youth

**What are your worlds?**

Circle the worlds you participate in and write in important people you interact with in these worlds. You can add worlds. Write their relationship to you, such as mother, father, sibling, friend, coach, priest, counselor, or principal. These people can be positive influences in your life or may cause you difficulties.

Family		Myself
	Neighborhood	
Friends		
Program	School	Church or Mosque
Music	Video games or Internet	Sports

**What do people expect of you in your main worlds?**

From the page above, think about the goals, expectations, and values that important people in your worlds have for you. Then from the list below, write inside each world you circled up to 6 expectations (you may write the numbers rather than the words).

- | <b>Positive</b>                       | <b>Negative</b>                  |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Work hard                          | 17. Be lazy                      |
| 2. Stay in school                     | 18. Drop out of school           |
| 3. Do well in Math                    | 19. Do poorly in Math            |
| 4. Do well in English                 | 20. Do poorly in English         |
| 5. Be a good student                  | 21. Be a poor student            |
| 6. Be confident                       | 22. Be unsure of myself          |
| 7. Go to college                      | 23. Do not go to college         |
| 8. Work right after high school       | 24. Be unemployed                |
| 9. Be rich                            | 25. Be poor                      |
| 10. Have a family in the future       | 26. Have a family too soon       |
| 11. Help others financially           | 27. Not help others financially  |
| 12. Be successful                     | 28. Fail                         |
| 13. Be honest                         | 29. Be dishonest                 |
| 14. Have respect for others           | 30. Be disrespectful             |
| 15. Be responsible for my own actions | 31. Be irresponsible             |
| 16. Other: _____(write in world)      | 32. Other: _____(write in world) |

**FIGURE 15.5.** What are your worlds? These sample questions from the Bridging Multiple Worlds Survey ask students “What are your worlds?” and “What do people expect of you from your worlds?”

in navigating across their cultural worlds and are useful for cultural brokers of any age.

For policy investments, private foundations and private–public partnerships can be key partners in working on the academic pipeline problem because of their autonomy and nimbleness (Cooper, 2008). They are taking on new roles by helping build knowledge to advance research and practice as well as guide further investments. Systemic work on supporting immigrant youth on their pathways to college is a relatively new field, so both noble failures and successes are important. Foundations are supporting learning communities

as safe spaces to consider sensitive issues such as undocumented youth and both fragile and sustainable innovations.

The incorporation of immigrant youth in the educational and ultimately the occupational and civic systems of receiving countries has been the focus of foundation investments that collaborate to address issues of discrimination and equal opportunities. Further, comparative international research and projects with immigrant youth such as TIES (The Integration of the European Second Generation) project ([www.tiesproject.eu](http://www.tiesproject.eu); Crul, 2002; Crul & Schneider, 2009) are proving valuable for guiding public–private investments to support immigrant youth.

## CONCLUSIONS

Recent immigrants to the United States from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are distinctive in many ways and yet also show surprising parallels in demographics, aspirations and identities, and the challenges and resources that shape pathways to college. Capital, alienation, and challenge models, including the Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory, each help explain how these youth build pathways to college. Given current global economic challenges, our next steps for research, practice, and policy will involve designing and supporting the fragile bridges toward sustainability described in this chapter over the lean years ahead. Strengthening cultural brokers and partnerships, both within cultural communities and across them, will be crucial assets.

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