

Chapter 10

Transcending the Challenge at the Library: Disrupting Deficit Perspectives About Latinx Immigrant Families

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest challenges immigrant families face in local communities is the harmful quality of mainstream deficit perspectives about immigration. This chapter focuses on a group of Latinx immigrant families' first experiences with local public libraries' education services within the New Latino Diaspora of the U.S. Southeast, which has been the migratory destination of many immigrant families in the last two decades. It discusses a study that interrogates the efficacy of two acclaimed literacy development programs, Every Child Ready to Read and Prime Time Preschool. These programs were facilitated by public libraries in the state of Georgia and attended by Latinx immigrant families with young children. The study findings illustrate how the families' engagement in the programs disrupted injurious social narratives that privilege whiteness and inhibit the recognition of Latinx immigrants as members of local U.S. communities and mainstream American society.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most harmful social narratives in the United States is that Latinx immigrant parents neither care about their children's literacy development nor share the same educational values as predominantly white, mainstream Americans (National Hispanic Media Coalition, 2012; Santa Ana, 2002). These pervasive social narratives underpin institutionalized deficit perspectives of Latinx immigrant families, which reinforce an implicit sociocultural caste system of educational inequality in the U.S. (Gándara,

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2008). In this chapter, we recognize these social narratives and deficit perspectives as tacit obstacles that local public libraries must navigate in supporting the early literacy education of young Latinx immigrant children and their families.

As described by the Public Library Manifesto of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), a primary mission of public libraries worldwide is to create and strengthen young children's reading habits and to support the education of all members of the community. According to the manifesto, "the services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status" (UNESCO & IFLA, 1994, p. 1). Hence, public libraries are responsible for providing immigrant families equitable access to services. Public libraries are likewise charged with the mission of "fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring [sic] cultural diversity" and "supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes [sic] for all age groups" (UNESCO & IFLA, 1994, p. 2). In other words, it is essential that public libraries offer culturally inclusive literacy education programs for families.

In this chapter, we focus on two library-based family literacy programs, Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) and Prime Time Preschool (PTPS). Each is endorsed by the American Library Association and facilitated by public librarians in local communities nationwide. We argue that one of the greatest challenges to supporting the inclusion of immigrant families in these programs is the knotty and problematic nature of mainstream deficit views of immigrants. As described by Doucet and Adair (2018):

Deficit thinking sets in motion deficit-framing instead of thinking of children, families, and communities as capable, interesting, complex, and knowledgeable. Deficit views justify mistreatment, oversimplification, and stereotyping that devalue home languages and practices. Deficit views prevent us from seeing children experiencing trauma in compassionate and thoughtful ways... When we focus on immigrants as victims, we normalize whiteness because our actions are constituted as being always in response to the dominant, White, native-born other... (p. 4)

Deficit and victimized views of immigrants privilege whiteness and undermine communities' recognition of and compassion for immigrant children's experiences and strengths. Doucet and Adair (2018) observe that these views are pervasive and sometimes difficult for people to see and acknowledge. Our objective is to examine the ways deficit perspectives that privilege whiteness have influenced the materials and pedagogical approaches of family literacy programs like Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) and Prime Time Preschool (PTPS).

The next section of this chapter includes an abridged review of the research literature, which describes the qualities of many literacy programs for families with young children. Some of the scholarship reveals deficit views toward immigrants and minorities. The literature review provides a framework for a study that will be discussed later. The study, set in the New Latino Diaspora of the U.S. Southeast where many Latinx-immigrant families have migrated (Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2015), evaluates the efficacy of the two aforementioned family literacy programs.

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