

# PREPARING EDUCATORS TO INVOLVE FAMILIES

From Theory to Practice

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## Case 7: Staying on the Path Toward College

### *One Boy at the Crossroads*

by Catherine R. Cooper, Elizabeth Dominguez,  
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#### Characters:

Paulo, sixth grader  
Rachel, community college outreach program director  
Alberto, Paulo's father  
Sarta, Paulo's mother  
Alicia, family friend  
Miguel, Alicia's son  
Nancy, Paulo's math teacher

#### INTRODUCING PAULO

Paulo Dominguez sat around a table with a number of his fellow sixth graders eating potato chips and cookies. He and his classmates listened as a woman named Rachel Marquez talked about a program that would help prepare them for college. All sixth graders in the community were being recruited to submit applications to the program, which was designed to support them through middle and high school in learning the study habits and decision-making skills needed for college preparation and careers. The program, named Más Allá (connoting the meaning "beyond" in English), represented a long-term partnership between the town's community college and the larger nearby university. Its mission is to engage girls and boys into a program that builds long-term networks for academic success and support for pathways to college.

"Your lives consist of many worlds," she began, "and each world contains all the different people or groups in your life, like a family member or a friend, or sports teams, classmates, and church groups." Rachel began passing out colored pencils and paper to the students and invited each sixth grader to think about the different worlds in their lives. As Paulo began to draw pictures of his family, school, and church he thought about his present life in California and his future dreams of working with computers and maybe even designing video games.

Rachel then urged the youths to think about the positive and negative influences in each of these worlds. Paulo looked over at his two best friends making faces and amusing gestures behind Rachel's back. Paulo began to feel self-conscious about following Rachel's instructions, turned his paper over, and started drawing video game characters instead.

As you read this case, consider applying the following theoretical lenses to your analysis:

- **Executive Functioning:** Who are the significant individuals scaffolding Paulo's thought processes? What factors make this a critical period in the development of his ability to self-regulate?
- **Community Support:** How can community programs engage parents to support the learning and development of youth? What community bridging strategies are available to the parents in this case?
- **Ethnic and Racial Minority Parenting:** How are Paulo's parents' parenting practices affected by their past experiences? How do their beliefs influence their goals for Paulo?

When school let out, Paulo walked home. He lives in a small trailer in an RV lot with his parents, older brother, and two younger siblings. His parents came to California as Mexican immigrants.

"If I tell my friends I want to join the college outreach program, they'll think I'm a schoolboy. But Mama always says that if I don't go to college I won't have a good future. My mom loved to go to school, but had to quit school to start working when she was 12. Her mom didn't let her do her homework, even though she really liked to do homework. Instead, she had to do chores. Mama tells me that I need to go to college if I want to get a good job and buy a house. Going to college helps you get a job instead of being a drug dealer or other things that cause you to get in trouble with the cops."

However, Paulo, who was always a good student, had been slipping. His math teacher had recently recommended him for the remedial track, and more and more frequently, he was not turning in homework assignments. When Paulo reached home, his mother was in the kitchen cooking dinner while his father was reading the newspaper at the kitchen table. He had been in the fields picking strawberries since five in the morning. "Hola mi jito (hello my son)," his father said as Paulo poured himself a glass of water, "Como te fue en la escuela? (how was school?)"

#### PAULO'S FAMILY

Alberto Dominguez, Paulo's father, spent his childhood in Mexico and completed an elementary education at a *primaria* (elementary school) in a rural village

