

DEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAYS THROUGH MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

*Rethinking Contexts
and Diversity as Resources*

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Soledad's Dream: How Immigrant Children Bridge Their Multiple Worlds and Build Pathways to College

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Soledad¹ was born in central Mexico and came as a young child with her family to live in California. Both of her parents went to elementary school (*primaria*) in rural Mexico. Now living in a rural California community, her father has worked painting houses and her mother cleaning businesses as they dreamed of college and professional careers for their children. We began to hear Soledad's unique story at age 11, when she wrote an application essay in Spanish for a community college outreach program about her ideal job, her resources, and her obstacles: "I would like to write stories that will teach children many things, like becoming interested in reading. I want to help my community by finding economical resources so that the children don't leave their studies and other things. . . . My obstacles are that I have cerebral palsy. Another obstacle is the English language." At age 13, in the outreach program's Summer Institute activities, Soledad wrote the following in English:

I want to be a writer and a DJ at a radio station. I have decided to go to [UC] Berkeley. I want to go to Berkeley because it has a program for disabled people and I have problems like that. The college is close but not too close. . . . My challenges are my disability, working to pay for college, and having problems

¹Soledad's real name is used at her request, but all other children's names in this chapter have been changed to protect their privacy.

in college. . . . My resources are my teachers, college, books, and DJs of other radio stations.

At age 15, Soledad read five of her poems, in English and Spanish, on her first radio appearance and encouraged her listeners to become writers themselves (see Fig. 11.1). By age 16, she had started her own weekly show, on a university public radio station, entitled "Teen Power/Poder de Juventud," that features an eclectic blend of Latino music, soccer score an-



FIG. 11.1. Soledad Rosas (on right), reading her poems on her first radio show, with the guidance of graduate student Cathy Angellilo.

nouncements, guest interviews, and call-in participation. And at 19, Soledad continued her show while completing her first year as a student at the local community college. And she cotaught a summer class for youth on radio broadcasting, through which she taught younger students and sought a host to take her show when she leaves for a career in commercial radio.

Like Soledad and her family, generations of immigrant families come to the United States with dreams of a better life for their children. Although some immigrants come as refugees from war with goals of survival (see García Coll, Szalacha, & Palacios, this volume), many also come primarily with dreams of education and a better life for their sons and daughters. Immigrant parents have described schools as the "hills of gold" for moving up from their lives of hardship and sacrifice (Azmitia, Cooper, García, & Dunbar, 1996; Cooper, García Coll, Thorne, & Orellana, this volume; Rumbaut, 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). As Soledad explained, her dream "to help my community by finding economical resources so children don't leave their studies" grew from her mother's stories of Mexico, where she left school for work to help support her family.

How might diversity and context function as resources for children of immigrants like Soledad as they build pathways through childhood? First, we consider diversity, contexts, and pathways through childhood in terms of the "academic pipeline problem." This chapter considers the role of diversity and contexts as resources for children's emerging identities by asking how children of Mexican immigrants—the largest group of immigrants in the United States—navigate across their worlds of families, peers, schools, and community as they build pathways through childhood to college and careers.

DIVERSITY AND EQUITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION: THE ACADEMIC PIPELINE PROBLEM

Children's pathways through school can be seen as moving through an "academic pipeline" from childhood through school to adult family, work, and community roles (Gándara, Larson, Mehan, & Rumberger, 1998). However, despite the fact that communities value equal access to education and each cohort of children entering school represents its community demographics, low-income, ethnic minority, and immigrant youth leave school in higher numbers and are less likely to attend college than middle-class and ethnic majority youth. Thus, as each community's cohorts reach age 18 and make the transition to college, they have become demographically unrepresentative of their community.

This academic pipeline problem has emerged in many nations as immigrants, refugees, and guest workers remain in host countries and send their children to school. And, it is especially likely when parents have not at-

