

Gaining Support and Spreading Awareness: The Impact of Undocumented Students and Their Narratives

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Background

- Demographic changes in the United States
 - In 2011, 11.5 million undocumented immigrants were reported living in the U.S.
- Demographic changes have led to development of resources across the nation
 - DREAM Act
 - DREAM Activist Website

The DREAM Act

- Development Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act)
 - Bipartisan bill introduced in Congress in 2001 and again in 2009
 - Gives undocumented youth a path toward citizenship under specific requirements
- DREAM Activist Website
 - Immigrant youth led online forum
 - Artifacts: the personal narratives of students, Yahira, Gabe and Israel



Goals of the Investigation

- Identify major themes in the stories of three undocumented students
- Measure effectiveness of the narratives based on the guidelines of narrative criticism
- Measure ability of the narratives to spread awareness and promote support of the DREAM Act

Research Questions

- What are the trends found in the narratives of undocumented students?
- Do the stories have coherency and fidelity?
- Do the stories achieve the goals of the Dream Activist website ?

Narrative Criticism

- Four features of the narrative paradigm by Walter Fisher
 - Humans are innately story tellers
 - Stories are used to organize the world
 - Stories can be adapted
 - Experiences are relived through stories
- Two elements of an effective narrative
 - Coherence—believable progression
 - Fidelity—emotional connection
- Process of a narrative criticism
 - 1) Identify substances for evaluation—characters, events and themes
 - 2) Evaluate form—the development of the identified substances
 - 3) Evaluate narrative using both substance and form

Analysis: Characters

The Dreamer

Traits:

- Strong moral character – unaware of actions as a child

“2 weeks after my birth, we packed a few belongings and migrated into California.” -Gabe

- Active community member
- High achiever

*“I had a 3.5 and played every sport that I could in high school. Shortly after basketball season ended, I started to help out at my local church with a program called young life.”
- Israel*

Analysis: Characters

The Motivational Supporter

- Traits:
 - Hard working and selfless
 - Resilient family member

“My Mom would go from selling sandwiches, Jell-Os and hemmed pillowcases to cleaning houses, business and even military barracks, all in the name of making a living for us.” -Yahira

Analysis: Events

- Exposure to the American education system
 - Language barriers
 - Not being accepted
- Limitations after graduation
 - *“I grew up always knowing; however, it was only until junior year in high school that I really understood the gravity of our situation. I practically gave up on school; why bother with all this work if it’s not going to amount to anything?” -Gabe*

Analysis: Themes

- Poverty and hardship
 - *“From sleeping in one bedroom apartment floors to not having money for clothes. Birthdays, Thanksgiving and Christmas would go by but my father wouldn’t have money to buy us our cakes, presents, or even have parties.” - Israel*
- Hope for change: call to action
 - *“I look at all the opportunities missed, the demeaning jobs, anger and despair and realize that I don’t want undocumented kids just graduating from high school to go through that. This is why we need the DREAM Act.” -Gabe*

Conclusions

- Goal of spreading awareness achieved through described themes and events
- Goal of promoting support for the DREAM Act achieved through characters
- Both coherency and fidelity are present
- The narratives are written as effective and compelling stories

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