A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRANT ORIGIN CHILDREN

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In the United States, the question of how schools are responding to the educational needs of immigrant-origin student and their peers has never been more relevant. Twenty-six percent of school-aged children today are either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants and in light of increasing political divides over immigration, rising hate incidents in and out of schools, and increased immigration enforcement, their place in schools can feel precarious. Recent studies highlight the impact of current climate on both immigrant students and their peers’ social well-being and academic performance.¹

In this challenging environment, we need creative and effective strategies to address the unique strengths and challenges for immigrant origin students which are defined as the children of immigrants. They can be first-generation (born abroad) or second-generation (born in the U.S. with a foreign-born parent). Both share parents who are immigrants. Some are English Language Learners, and some are not. Finding ways to optimize their successful inclusion into schools is both an economic and democratic imperative.

In the United States, immigration is our past, our present, and our future. The Irish, Chinese, Italians, Germans, Eastern European Jews, and others that once crossed the ocean to what many called the Golden Land, struggled to adapt to live in their new land when they first arrived, just as do today’s “new immigrants.” The concerns about how the old immigrants could and would fit in were similar to the arguments of today. We can only speculate on the way that those that argued that they could never fit in, would respond to the successful inclusion of generations of immigrants.

Indeed, in many ways, immigration is a good news story. A recent study by the National Academy of Sciences focused on the integration of immigrants in the US found that today’s immigrants are integrating as fast or faster than immigrants of the past.² A closer look at schools suggests that we should be doing better, however. While children of
immigrants often enter schools full of hope, too many of their educational experiences leave them isolated, frustrated, or disengaged. Many educators who work with immigrant origin students do not feel well-prepared or adequately trained to work with this rapidly changing student population.

The purpose of this guide is to help bridge research from the academy to classrooms, with the recognition that only by learning from and with each other, can we help our immigrant origin and English Language Learning students reach their full potential.

**How are immigrant origin students and English Language Learners and related?**

Within educational settings, immigrant students and English Language Learners are often thought of interchangeably. While there is considerable overlap, they are not one and the same. Some immigrant origin students immigrate from countries where English is the language of instruction (e.g., Nigeria or the Philippines) though they may speak another language at home; thus, they may enter U.S. schools without facing the hurdle of acquiring Academic English. Other ELL students are second-generation citizens but have not been exposed to English until they enter the school system in kindergarten. The majority of immigrant origin students, however, must learn (at least one) new language as part of their journey to their new land.

Several excellent resources for educators have been developed addressing issues related to acquisition of English academic language. *(Below, we provide readers links to some of those resources).* That topic is beyond the scope of this guide. We have created this guide to help educators begin to consider the various layers of immigrant origin students’ lives as whole children and youth, beyond language learning.
In this guide, together, we consider some common classroom and school dilemmas, and bring a number of strength-based perspectives to understand our students’ lives. We hope that this guide will provide educators with empowering tools with which to work with immigrant students in their educational journeys.

Additional suggestions, resources, lessons, and opportunities for professional learning can be found at www.reimaginingmigration.org

References


Professional Development Resources on English Language Learners


DILEMMAS IN CLASSROOM AND SCHOOLS

In his book Life in Classrooms, Philip Jackson wrote, “there is evidence that the typical elementary school teacher typically engages in 200 to 300 interpersonal exchanges every hour of the working day.” That means that on average, teachers are making about 1500 decisions a day in response to those interactions. With that many decisions to make in a day, we do the best we can based on what we see, know, and understand about a situation. We often have to make judgments, and to take action, before we have complete information. Beyond having to make decisions with partial information, we see the world through our own experiential lenses and perspectives. Further, we cannot help but to be informed by our biases based on previous experience and knowledge. Lacking additional contextual knowledge, we use these perceptual shortcuts to inform our classroom decisions.

In Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird,” Atticus’s tells his daughter Scout, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb in his skin and walk around in it.” The purpose of this guide is to help us do just that.

Below we present a series of common challenges that educators working with immigrant-origin student’s encounter. After reading the short description, consider what you believe is going on. What is going on at the surface? What might be going on that you cannot see? What is at stake in your response? And, what do you think is the best course of action? Consider other factors that may influence your response, including the age of the student, the type of school, attitudes towards immigrants inside and outside of school, etc.

We encourage you to discuss both these dilemmas, as well as your responses, with colleagues. We suggest that you return to these dilemmas again when you finish the guide.
Look for an appendix where will have paired the dilemmas with books, articles, and responses for the classroom.

### For Further Reading


### Silence

In a class where participation in discussion is essential to both the learning goals and the grade, you notice that some of your immigrant students say very little. When they do participate, they are hesitant and are interrupted by classmates. Sometimes their peers show their impatience by rolling their eyes or simply tell them to speak up or that they don't understand them.

- What do you believe is going on?
- What is at the surface?
- Beyond the description, what other factors might be influencing the situation?
- What is at stake in your response?
- And, what do you think is the best course of action?

### Childhood Memory and Student Presentations

Your school is making an effort to reach out to the community. The centerpiece of those efforts is a childhood memory project. To begin the project, you have assigned an essay about a childhood memory, but a newcomer student does not turn in her work. When you ask for an explanation, she tells you that she just forgot. You offer an extension, but again, she doesn’t turn in the assignment. You ask to see her after class, and she tell you, that she can’t remember anything about her childhood or she wants to forget her past. The essays will be used as part of a presentation to the broader school community in an annual event. Do you ask her to do it anyway, or do you make an accommodation?
**History Matters**

In a history lesson about 19th-century Irish immigration, a student points out that his family came to the country legally unlike “illegals” to today. You have just a few English Language Learners in the class who don’t say anything. One of them puts his head down. What should you do in the moment? How might it impact what you teach?

- What do you believe is going on?
- What is at the surface?
- Beyond the description, what other factors might be influencing the situation?
- What is at stake in your response?
- And, what do you think is the best course of action?

**Breaking Isolation**

You feel that your immigrant students are isolated from their peers; your repeated observations reinforce this perception. You note that students congregate by nationality and language in the cafeteria. Some of your colleagues suggest breaking up the lunch groups. What do you think? What can you do to encourage interactions between newcomers and their peers? When should you stay out of the way?

- What do you believe is going on?
- What is at the surface?
- Beyond the description, what other factors might be influencing the situation?
- What is at stake in your response?
- And, what do you think is the best course of action?
Family Meeting

One of your student’s, the child of immigrants, is one of your star students. While when she first arrived, she struggled academically, now she is discussing college options with you. You decide it would be helpful to set a meeting with her parents to discuss the college application process. Despite phone calls and emails, the family is non-responsive. When you ask the student to speak with her parents, she explain that her parents are very busy. You try to reach out again, but still not get a response. From experience you know that it will be important to involve the parent’s in the college application process. How do you proceed?

- What do you believe is going on?
- What is at the surface?
- Beyond the description, what other factors might be influencing the situation?
- What is at stake in your response?
- And, what do you think is the best course of action?

RECOGNIZING BOTH STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Immigrant families and their children arrive in their new lands with distinct social and cultural resources. Their high aspirations, ability to take perspective, optimism, dedicated hard work, positive attitudes toward school and ethic of family support for advanced learning contribute to the fact that some immigrant youth educationally outperform their native-born peers. On the other hand, many immigrant students encounter a myriad of challenges—economic obstacles, anti-immigrant sentiments, learning a new language, acculturative challenges, family separations, under-resourced neighborhoods and over-burdened schools, and the like—and struggle to gain their bearings in an educational system that may put them on a path of downward trajectory.
CONTEXT MATTERS

As is true for all children, the formative experiences of immigrant children will be shaped by reciprocal interactions between the child and her environment. The interrelated contexts of development within which children and youth are embedded shape their opportunities and have important implications for both educational and well-being outcomes. How students do will vary according to individual characteristics, their culture, and their environment including neighborhoods, schools, and other school settings over the course of time. All children grow within cultural contexts that shape their future selves. For immigrant children, some critical individual characteristics shaping development are the child's age at migration, race and ethnicity, literacy in their home language and in English, exposure to trauma, sexual orientation, and temperament.

One way to think about the relationship between a student and the contexts in which s/he develop was described by Urie Bronfenbrenner in his ecological model of human development. This highly influential model of child development argues that children are profoundly influenced by various intersecting levels of their physical and social environment. At the most intimate macrosystemic level, family, peers and school play an influential role through daily interactions. Exosystemic influences do not have direct contact with the child but, nonetheless, indirectly influence experience; these include things like parent's work conditions or neighborhoods. At the most distal macrosystemic level, economic, policy, or legal conditions, for example, can have profound indirect repercussions on children's lives. All of these levels of the ecosystem are not separate but interact and can have implications for one another. [See figure next page.]
TAKING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) has been defined as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p.110). Teachers who understand their students well through a CRT lens, recognize the social and cultural realities of their lives. They understand how different groups may view interactions between children and adults, and how various ethnic groups’ value communal and cooperative in problem solving. Tara Yosso recommends that rather than viewing students and their families through a deficit lens, by recognizing their myriad forms of “cultural wealth” — aspirational (hopes and
dreams), linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and, resistance — educators can better empower their students. Ultimately, effective implementation of CRT helps promote the academic success, cultural competence and critical consciousness of students.

As educators, when we understand that culture has a role in education, and actively learn about our students’ cultures and beliefs we are letting them know that they are important and valued. Applying a culturally relevant approach allows us to welcome, at times diverging views and perspectives, which in turn, promotes critical thinking skills creating a student-centered learning environment. Moreover, providing instruction that includes both basic and higher-order thinking skills, direct and explicit instruction, oral language development, and student-based collaborative approaches have been found to improve reading and language development. Understanding that our students have diverse perspectives and teaching through culturally relevant approaches not only foster a safe learning environment, but they promote a positive rapport with the students and their families in your classroom.

The six forms of capital that Yosso argues can potentially empower all students are:

1- **aspirational** — the “hopes and dreams” students have; 2- **linguistic** — the various language and communication skills students bring into the classroom; 3- **familial** — the social and personal human resources students have; 4- **social** — students’ “peers and other social contacts” outside of their family resources; 5- **navigational** — a students’ skills and abilities to navigate “social institutions”; and 6- **resistance** — the ability to advocate to attain equal rights and social justice.
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WHO ARE OUR IMMIGRANT ORIGIN STUDENTS?

The children of immigrants are highly diverse in terms of class, racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Beyond that, some are the children of highly educated professional parents, whereas others may have illiterate parents. Some received excellent schooling, whereas others left educational systems that were in shambles. Some escaped political, religious, or ethnic persecution; others are motivated by the promise of better jobs and better educational opportunities. Some are documented migrants, whereas others are unauthorized young migrants. Some join well-established communities with robust social supports, whereas others move from one migrant camp to another, forced to change schools frequently. The pathways and outcomes of immigrant students will vary greatly as a function of both the resources they may bring with them and the context in the new society to which they arrive.

REFLECTION:
What do you know about the identities and experiences of your students?
How might they impact your students’ lives in school?
It might be helpful to focus on one or two specific students to start.

The First Generation

First generation students are born outside of the United States but include a complex array of individuals ranging from those who arrived in early childhood to those who arrive late in adolescence entering school well into their educational careers. Time and circumstances of arrival have clear developmental, acculturative, and linguistic
implications. Arriving at an earlier age, long before puberty, with maximal exposure to the U.S. school system will provide an immigrant-origin youth with an experience that is much closer to that of a second-generation (defined as born in this country with foreign-born parents) students. She may have minimal recollection of her country of origin and is likely to come to speak the host country language with no trace of an accent. Nonetheless, she may share with some of her first-generation peers the burden of not being documented. And she certainly shares the experience with her second-generation peers of having parents who may not readily embrace the new country’s norms. Her parents may have strict expectations and child-raising norms attuned to the ways of the old country.

Newly Arrived First Generation Students
The first generation is particularly complex in its composition. Roughly speaking, it can be broken down into two categories that have deep implications for the day-to-day experiences of childhood as well as for longer-term trajectories for “future participation in society” (see Figure 2 next page).
Refugees. Notably, in the United States, refugees make up a relatively small proportion of our immigrant origin population. Refugee and asylum-seeking students and their families share many of the features of other immigrants. In addition, however, most have experienced some form of traumatic event at some point in their journey—either prior to their migration, during the course of their journey, or after arriving at their receiving context (or in some cases at each of these points). Though not all refugee children and youth respond with emotional difficulties, they are more likely to do so given a higher exposure to stress they may have undergone at the various stages of the migration voyage (see Figure 3 next page).
**Newcomers.** These students are defined as foreign-born students who entered the public schools within the last three years. Many, if not most, are acquiring English and are also adapting to a new land and educational system. They face a series of acculturative stresses and social emotional challenges (see Addressing Social Emotional Issues section below).

In NYCDOE, “Newcomer ELL’s” are identified under CR Part 154. These students have received English as their new language of instruction, as either a component of bilingual education or freestanding English as a new language program for a total of zero to three enrolled school years. Within NYCDOE “newcomer ELLs” include both students who arrived very recently and exhibit little or no knowledge of English as well as US-born students who are at the emerging, transitioning, or higher levels [see How are immigrant origin students and English Language Learner students related? section, page 5.]
REFLECTION:
Many children of immigrants, particularly ELL students, feel isolated from their peers. How could you create supportive relationships within your classroom and school? Can you think of a time when you have helped a student feel included in your classroom? Can you think of a time when you have seen other students reach out to new peers to make them feel successfully included in your classroom? How do you communicate with families? How do you learn about your students’ home cultures/values/expectations, etc.?

SIFE. Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) as implied by the name have not been exposed to consistent formal education. These students have attended schools in the United States for less than twelve months and upon initial enrollment in such schools are two or more years below grade level in literacy in their home language and/or two or more years below grade level in mathematics due to inconsistent or interrupted schooling prior to arrival in the United States. Once a SIFE student is performing at or above the transitioning/intermediate level on the annual English language proficiency assessment, the student's status as a Student with Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education is removed—though the student may continue to be identified as an English language learner.
The Second Generation

The children of immigrants share some common features with the first-generation. Their parents are from a country of origin other than the host country and, as such, bring with them different cultural practices and expectations as well as often bringing another language. While the second generation is protected by birthright citizenship, some of these students live in mixed-status families and as such live with concerns around family deportations and family separations. Further, their families may also not access services to which they are entitled as birth-right citizens (like pre-school, libraries, and health care) as they may not be aware of entitlements or are concerned about exposure.

Second-generation students share many commonalities with first generation students. Some of these shared characteristics are based on the circumstances related to family social economic status, race, ethnicity, religion, and immigration status. Second-generation students, like their first-generation peers may also enter kindergarten without speaking English fluently. They also often contend with anti-immigration sentiments (sometimes referred to as xenophobia) focused towards their families reflected in the media, in neighborhood interactions, in school, and even in the leadership at the highest level of government.

The second-generation, however, are by birthright, automatically citizens (though they may still fear for the deportation of their parents and other loved ones). They typically have more exposure to English and are often more acculturated than the first-generation or their parents. This can sometimes lead to acculturative gaps and tensions within the family.
The second generation faces a greater potential for acculturative gaps

For Further Reading


Suggested Re-Imagining Migration Resources


Where I’m From
https://reimaginingmigration.org/where-im-from/

How Immigration Status Has Impacted One Family
https://reimaginingmigration.org/families-mixed-immigration-status/
Why is social emotional learning critical for students and learning contexts?

A growing body of research has come to show that the success of ALL students — whether or not they are of immigrant origin — is associated with learning environments that nurture social emotional development (SEL). Social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and academic domains of child development are all intertwined, both in the brain and in behavior, and are essential to the learning process. Social emotional development includes several sets of skills that serve to facilitate learning (or conversely impede learning if ignored);

- **Social and interpersonal skills** enable students to navigate social situations, read social cues, demonstrate compassion and empathy for others, work collaboratively with others, and resolve interpersonal conflicts;
- **Emotional competencies** enable students to recognize and manage emotions, understand others’ emotions and perspectives, and cope with frustration;
- **Cognitive skills** include attitudes and beliefs that guide students’ sense of self and approaches to learning as well as executive functioning (working memory, attention control, and flexibility), and inhibition and planning.¹
After reviewing the state of the field on SEL, a Consensus Statement was released by the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development,¹ and noted the following important points:

- Learning cannot happen effectively if SEL issues are not attended to.
- SEL develops throughout the lifetime and is essential to success not only in school but also in the workplace, home, and community.
- SEL can be taught and nurtured throughout childhood, adolescence, and beyond.
- Schools can have a significant influence on SEL.
- Engaging in informed SEL practices can improve teacher effectiveness as well as their well-being.
- SEL development is “an essential part of pre-K-12 education that can transform schools into places that foster academic excellence, collaboration, and communication, creativity, and innovation, empathy and respect, civic engagement, and other skills and dispositions needed for success in the 21st Century.”¹
- Students are most likely to benefit from SEL when training and support is provided to schools, administrators, and teachers and when social emotional learning are embedded in everyday interactions and school culture beyond the classroom.

What are some of the typical social emotional challenges most relevant to immigrant origin students?

Migration is a transformative process with profound implications for the family as well as the potential for lasting impact on social emotional development. By any measure, immigration is one of the most stressful events a family can undergo, removing family members from predictable contexts—community ties, jobs, and customs—and stripping
them of significant social ties—extended family members, best friends, and neighbors. New arrivals that experienced trauma (either prior to migrating or as events secondary to the “crossing”) may remain preoccupied with the violence and may also feel guilty about having escaped while loved ones remained behind. Those who are undocumented face the growing realities of workplace raids that can lead to traumatic and sudden separations.

The dissonance in cultural expectations and the cumulative stressors, together with the loss of social supports, lead to elevated affective and somatic symptoms. Due to their own struggles in adapting to a new country, many immigrant parents may be relatively unavailable psychologically, posing a developmental challenge to their children. Immigrant parents often may turn to their children when navigating the new society; they are frequently asked to take on responsibilities beyond their years, including sibling care, translation, and advocacy, sometimes undermining parental authority. Additionally, immigrant children and youth face the challenges of forging an identity and sense of belonging to a country that may reflect an unfamiliar culture while also honoring the values and traditions of their parents. Nonetheless, many immigrant-origin children demonstrate extraordinary resilience and resourcefulness as they navigate their developmental journey.

Parental education matters tremendously for children’s academic pathways. Children with more educated parents are exposed to more academically oriented vocabulary and interactions at home, and younger children tend to be read to more often from books that are valued at school. These parents understand the value of and have the resources to provide additional books, home computers, Internet access, and tutors that less educated parents cannot supply. They are also more likely to seek information about how to navigate the educational system in the new land.

Unfortunately, many immigrant parents have had limited schooling. Moreover, low parental education is often compounded by parents’ limited skills in the new land’s
language, which are related to the support children receive for learning the language of instruction at home. Such disadvantaged backgrounds will have implications for the students' educational transition—unsurprisingly, youth arriving from families with lower levels of education tend to struggle academically while those who come from more literate families with strong language skills often flourish. It is worth noting, however, that these patterns do not hold true for all immigrant families and communities. There are many examples of immigrant parents who provide educational socialization in the home despite having a low level of education themselves. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the numbers of students, today as in the past, who have had dramatic academic success despite their parents' low levels of formal education.

Immigrant parents, however, often do not possess the kind of “cultural capital” that serves middle-class mainstream students well; not knowing the dominant cultural values of the new society limits immigrant parents' abilities to provide an upward academic path for their children. Oftentimes parental involvement is neither a cultural practice in their countries of origin nor an activity that their financial situation in this country would permit. They come from cultural traditions in which parents are expected to respect teachers’ recommendations rather than to advocate for their children. In addition, not speaking English and having limited education may make them feel inadequate. Lack of documentation may cause them to worry about exposure to immigration raids if they were to have contact with their children's school. Moreover, low-wage, low-skill jobs with off-hour shifts typically do not provide much flexibility for parents to obtain childcare and attend parent–teacher conferences. The impediments to these parents’ abilities to come to the school are multiple, but they are frequently interpreted by teachers and principals as the parents’ “not valuing” their children's education. As educators, it is our responsibility to build the bridges between home and school and find ways to enlist the support of
immigrant parents for their children's success where appropriate. There are successful implementations of meaningful immigrant parental engagement models. See https://uclacs.org/ for an example.

REFLECTION:
How can your school community, and you as an educator, engage immigrant parents in the life of the school and the academic success of their children? What resources and assets do they bring that would benefit your school community? And how could you seek to uncover these resources?

What promising school-based practices have been identified to facilitate social-emotional learning for immigrant origin students?

Valuing Multilingual Multicultural School Culture

It is well established that a safe environment is vital for learning for all students, but findings from our case studies pointed to ways to address safety and belonging that specifically support immigrant students and their families. One of the impediments to learning a new country is entering a context where students feel unsafe or that they don't belong. These feelings can lead to low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety that can combine to create an “affective filter” that can shut down the language learning process. While not sufficient by itself, a positive affect facilitates language acquisition to take place.

The idea of the affective filter can extend to a student’s entire schooling experience. A school culture that attends to the social emotional needs of their students creates an atmosphere where students feel validated and cared for. A bicultural community culture
begins with the expression of a belief system that manifests itself in creating a community that fully embraces the immigrant experience. A school culture that normalizes the immigrant experience for both students and their families is essential to successfully implement academic programs. A common theme across promising sites is explicit attention to creating a school culture that emphasized belonging and community by normalizing and embracing bilingual and bicultural identity development.

**Cultural Belonging**

Schools should intentionally nurture strategies to foster a sense of cultural belonging. A basic symbolic approach is to display student work and hang flags and other representations in hallways and classrooms in multiple languages and cultures. Hallways should be allowed to echo many languages, spoken by both students and adults; while English is clearly to be encouraged, native language use should not be frowned upon. Multicultural community culture can be especially salient in schools with bilingual or dual language programs where many of the faculty come from the same language backgrounds as their students. Even when faculty and staff do not reflect the identities of their students, there are many things school staff can do to reinforce a sense of belonging. Respecting and valuing student and familial heritage in a welcoming way can go a long way to establishing rapport and making students feel a part of the fabric of the school and classroom. This starts with our basic perception of our students: Do we view them, their histories and cultures as deficits or assets? Do we find ways for our students to share their stories with their peers and school staff? Do we allow students to consider issues in ways that allows them to bring their identities and cultural background into the classroom or is it discouraged? Are we able to linguistically code switch, when appropriate, to establish rapport and facilitate understanding? Whose holidays are recognized by our learning
community? In our resource section, we have highlighted a cultural responsive teaching checklist to encourage reflection on classroom and school-wide practices.

Curriculum Matters

Much of what we have discussed to this point is about classroom practices and school culture. As important as these are, culturally responsive teaching and social and emotional learning practices should be reflected throughout the curriculum as well. What we teach, as well as how we teach, sends strong messages to students about who belongs and who does not. Literature teachers often talk about books as windows and mirrors for our students, windows into new worlds and mirrors which they can use to reflect on their own identities and place in society. While we might start by finding ways for students to share their own stories, these exercises can be easily dismissed if they are not connected to the broader curriculum.

We should make sure the literature that we choose to include in our classrooms is selected to provide opportunities for students to see themselves and learn about the experiences as others. If your school has a librarian, this can provide an opportunity for collaboration. The histories we teach, and our approach to curriculum as a whole, matters as well. While migration is central to the human experience, teaching about immigration is often relegated to one of two lessons a year. It is worth rethinking our approaches to teaching about migration. As we have written elsewhere, “Immigrant stories are narratives of resilience, grit, and optimism. They are quintessentially American stories that invite classroom dialogue about themes that can be found throughout our nation’s history and literature. Indeed, the story of migration is the story of our shared experience of humanity.”
Narratives and stories are ever so important for understanding reoccurring and shared experiences of migration

While this guide is primarily focused on immigrant-origin students, helping their peers better understand the role that migration has played both in our national narrative, and in human history, is important as foundation for creating a shared future and building empathy and connections between student's whose families have migrated to the United States in the past and the present.

**Embracing Parents and Caregivers**

Schools in the US also emphasized the importance of parents as an integral part of developing an inclusive multicultural culture. The schools invited parents to attend workshops, seminars, and discussion groups about topics of interest to them. One bilingual school created dedicated weekly, Spanish-language discussion groups to support parents and family adjustments to life in the US. Such events recognized challenges faced by parents and provided them with important tools to help their children navigate their schooling. As attested to by participating parents, these responsive practices sent clear messages that the school embraced parents and their children by creating welcoming and open spaces for them. [See https://uclacs.org/ for an exemplar]
Strategic Community Partnerships and Supplemental Programming

Community school partnerships bring together diverse groups of service providers, including schools, community-based organizations, universities, health and human service agencies, community members, and youth groups. Research indicates that their shared goal of magnifying opportunities for students may strengthen the effectiveness of schools. Health and social supports may be especially important for immigrant families who may not know how to access government benefits or are fearful of seeking assistance because of documentation status or other reasons. Social supports may also bridge the perceived gap in parental involvement that is more often a product of cultural mismatch and misunderstanding than lack of parental interest in their children’s education.

Across schools, principals, teachers, parents, and students attest to the importance of leveraging local community-based providers to form partnerships and combine resources to serve immigrant families in a streamlined, integrated way. Notably, every school we studied had at least one community partnership whose primary purpose was to address an academic, social or family need.

Community organizations and after school spaces are important—and often under-utilized—resources and allies for immigrant families and schools
A willingness to address social, familial, and health needs in the form of a community school model can go a long way to optimizing success for students. Some successful schools offer on-site English as a New Language (ENL) instruction for caretakers, and others provide school-based health care. By taking the time to walk families through the process and provide services in a safe space, the partners worked together to bring services to their immigrant families in a one-stop shop. Creative partnerships with local nonprofits can serve to help deliver health, mental health care, dental, legal and or other services as an invaluable way serving students and their families. As a result, qualified students schools are able to participate in social programs that immigrant parents may be either unaware of or afraid to access on their own.

**Bicultural Instructional Leadership**

Another salient theme that emerged across our research has been the importance of instructional leaders who had a skillset that prepared them to serve newcomer students. Immigrant-oriented administrators at many of the schools we studied had strong instructional backgrounds in bilingual or second language instruction. Many are bilingual or of immigrant origin themselves which provide them with insights into the educational experiences of immigrant students and a deep commitment to addressing their needs. As one principal summed it up, “the more we understand our students, the more we can guide them.”

Effective principals articulated comprehensive school-based policies and procedures on how to introduce and integrate newcomer students into their schools that went beyond legal or district requirements. They laid out formal procedures for the practices we described from intake to ongoing assessment, and many provided professional development to keep faculty and staff current on emerging practices and research. Second,
many tended to be very hands-on in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. They maximized the strengths of their faculty through requiring teamwork among teachers and included scheduling time for teachers to adapt and develop original curriculum that aligned with their vision of high-quality instruction for their newcomer students. They invested time and resources on teacher development, nurturing instructional leadership among the faculty. Successful principals build relationships with their local government representatives, district leaders, local businessmen, and sometimes even journalists to advocate for funding, resources, and to raise awareness of the needs of their immigrant students.

What promising classroom-based practices have been identified to facilitate social-emotional learning for immigrant origin students?

**Negotiating Cultural Transitions**

In school contexts that are effective in serving their immigrant origin students, administrators, faculty and staff assert that a number of transitional strategies are essential for minimizing isolation, post-traumatic growth, encouraging relationships, as well as facilitating a sense of school belonging. As new students come in, cross-subject teams should meet to discuss new students, and how to best integrate them into the learning community. Teachers should make every effort to reach out to parents, caretakers, or guardians to take a detailed educational history (see SIFE call-out box p. 16 for example). Parent-teacher conferences are another opportunity to reach out to families though it is important to be flexible in the strategy including phone and Skype meeting during flexible hours. Any information gleaned from these conferences is then shared when teachers meet across the teams working with each student. While it can be sometimes frustrating to arrange meetings, it is a worthwhile investment in the school/family relationship. It is
important, however, to not interpret failed attempts at securing meetings as a lack of interest on caretakers’ part—it is often related to other factors like inflexible work schedules, unfamiliarity with U.S. school/parent involvement expectation norms, or worries around detention or deportation exposure in a volatile political era.

Advisory groups can play a particularly important role, especially in middle school and high school to help students to adjust to their new school under the guidance of an advisor who is looking out for them. One of the guidelines for forming advisory groups is to have newcomer/beginning learners of English in the same group as at least one student who shares the same native language and is also proficient in English so that the more advanced English speaker can translate. In advisory groups, students are encouraged to talk about a range of topics ranging from difficulties with a class and missing families and friends back home to relationship issues. Students are particularly encouraged to share their personal experiences both in their old and new countries and in their transition from one to the other.

Advisory groups can be effective spaces to discuss emerging issues and to bond with peers and teachers
REFLECTION:

What messages are being sent in your school about who belongs? What do you feel you and your colleagues do well about creating an inclusive community? In what ways would you like to improve?

For Further Reading


Suggested Re-Imagining Migration Resources


Names, Identity, and Immigration https://reimaginingmigration.org/names-identity-and-immigration

Educator Spotlight: Teaching the Arrival https://reimaginingmigration.org/educator-spotlight-teaching-the-arrival/


Teaching the Poetry of Angel Island https://reimaginingmigration.org/teaching-poetry-angel-island/


The Quinceañera Protest, https://reimaginingmigration.org/the-quinceanera-protest

I Learn America https://reimaginingmigration.org/i-learn-america
POST READING DISCUSSION ABOUT THE DILEMMAS

Earlier we introduced 5 dilemmas with supporting questions for each. We suggest revisiting them now. Consider how your responses to each of those cases might be informed by what you have read. These dilemmas, of course, are complex, and have not quick or simple solutions but we hope that this guide has provided you some new-found insights and strategies.

Below we provide some thoughts about themes that each dilemma revealed (and you may have thought of others) as well as some curricular resources that might be helpful as you navigate each of these and other similar dilemmas both in and out of the classroom.

### CLASSROOM DILEMMAS: DISCUSSIONS & RESOURCES

#### Silence Dilemma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes that Emerge?</th>
<th>Related Children’s Literature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intergroup understanding</td>
<td>My Name is Jorge: On Both Sides of the River (1999) by Jane Medina and Fabricio Vanden Broeck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential misidentification for special education referral</td>
<td>One Green Apple (2006) by Eve Bunting and Ted Lewin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social emotional learning challenges</td>
<td>The Quiet Place (2010) by Sarah Stewart and David Small</td>
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<td>Lowji Discovers America (2005) by Candace Fleming</td>
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<td>Girl in Translation (2010) by Jean Kwok</td>
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<td>The Arrival (2006) by Shaun Tan</td>
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<td>How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents (1991) by Julia Alvarez</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the What (2006) by Dave Eggers</td>
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<td>When I was Puerto Rican (1993) by Esmerelda Santiago</td>
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#### Childhood Memory and Student Presentations Dilemma

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<th>Themes that Emerge?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Learner/Language accommodations</td>
<td>Islandborn (2018) by Junot Diaz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intragroup isolation</td>
<td>My Shoes and I (2010) René Colato Laíñez</td>
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<td>Social emotional learning in relation to Newcomers</td>
<td>Angel Child, Dragon Child (1983) by Michele Maria Surat</td>
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<td>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote (2013) by Duncan Tonatiuh</td>
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<td>Yuvi’s Candy Tree (2010) by Lesley Simpson and Janice Lee Porter</td>
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<td>Esperanza Rising (2000) by</td>
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For more resources visit the Re-Imagining Migration website

https://reimaginingmigration.org

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<tr>
<th>History Matters Dilemma</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intergroup understanding</td>
<td>All the Way to America: The Story of a Big Italian Family and a Little Shovel (2011) by Dan Yaccarino</td>
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<td>Social emotional learning challenges</td>
<td>The Bread Givers (1925) by Anzia Yezierska</td>
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<td>Immigration and Identity: Jewish Immigrants and the Bintel Brief Study Guide (2018) from Re-Imagining Migration</td>
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<td>Different Mirror for Young People (2012) by Ronald Takaki and Rebecca Stefoff</td>
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<td>Keeping Quilt (1988) by Patricia Polacco</td>
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<td>Stepping Stones (2005) by Margriet Ruurs and Nizar Ali Badr</td>
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<th>Breaking Isolation Dilemma</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intragroup Isolation</td>
<td>Here I Am (2015) by Patti Kim and Sonia Sánchez</td>
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<td>Social emotional learning challenges</td>
<td>Love, Hate, and Other Filters (2018) by Samira Ahmed</td>
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<td>The Namesake (2003) by Jumpha Lahiri</td>
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<td>Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team that Changed a Town (2012) by Warren St. John</td>
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<td>Lowji Discovers America (2005) by Candace Fleming</td>
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<th>Family Meeting Dilemma</th>
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<tr>
<td>Family Inclusion</td>
<td>The Book of Unknown Americans (2014) by Christina Henriquez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Children</td>
<td>In the Country We Love (2016) by Diane Guerrero with Michelle Burford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning/Language Accommodations</td>
<td>The Best We Could Do (2017) Thi Bui</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration status</td>
<td>Enrique’s Journey (2007) by Sonia Nazario</td>
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