

## Chapter 12

# Working With Immigrant Children in Schools: Practical Skills for Teachers

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### ABSTRACT

*Before one gets into a classroom to teach, he or she needs to have acquired some basic teaching skills. Teaching in a conventional classroom seem simple, although may sometimes be difficult. However, teaching children from diverse backgrounds can be challenging. No matter the number of years of experience a teacher may have, teaching immigrant children with limited language skills and in some cases weak foundation in formal education is a challenging task. This chapter critically examines immigrant children and their education, some of the challenges that hamper their learning, and some practical skills that teachers will need to effectively teach them. Teachers need to understand the complexity and diversity of children under their care, appreciate the circumstances in which immigrant children live, make the necessary efforts to retrain or acquire some additional skills to enable them to become competent to effectively support learning of the increasing immigrant children population that continue to flood their classrooms.*

### INTRODUCTION

Education is a universal right for every child and an opportunity for children to develop their skills and potential in life. In order to reach this potential there is the need for every child to have a chance to attend school at least at primary, elementary and up to secondary levels. Governments are making efforts to improve education to enhance equity, equality, accessibility and affordability through policy formulation and financial investment so that every child, be it immigrant, children of different colors, race, gender, disability, etc. could benefit from education provision. Educational researchers are also

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8283-0.ch012

looking at how best to facilitate and support teaching and learning in our schools. Usually a missing link in the discussions is about education of children in countries, especially developing nations is education of immigrant children.

Many developed nations including the U.S have comprehensive policies and programs for education and social integration of immigrant children. However, education policies of many developing nations are silent about immigrant children. Even though many of those nations have comprehensive universal primary education policy, these policies fail to capture immigrant children as one of the diverse groups who require special consideration and attention in education and society. Many countries are trying to ensure equity, inclusivity and respect for diversity in their education and social settings through formulation of policies and laws on anti-discrimination, disability and inclusive education. Nonetheless, conscious effort is needed to ensure inclusion of children of immigrant parents in all these policies. This will help to expand both the notion and practice of diversity in our countries and the world. It is important to highlight on the issues concerning education of immigrant children and how teachers especially those in developing countries, could be supported so that they can serve the learning needs of immigrant children in their schools.

Attention to issues of immigrant children is indispensable in this modern day because it is only factual that immigration, through its many forms is affecting education in many countries. It is altering demographics of students' population. Not all students in every classroom come from the countries they study. Some students are immigrants who arrive with their parents. Every child must be given education, so children should be given the opportunity to attend school, whether documented or undocumented immigrants. It is not advisable to leave any child behind as stated in the USA children education policy framework. This is because lack of education has implications for the development and well-being of the individual, society and global community.

Working with immigrant children in schools is not just about adoption of multiple teaching strategies or reinventing the wheel in teaching, but how best teachers re-orient their minds and understanding about immigrant children in terms of who immigrant children are and the peculiar situation in which immigrant children live and study. It is also about understanding how they could be integrated well into a totally new and different educational system in which instruction is delivered with a language and accent that such children are not used to or may find it difficult to comprehend. Immigrant children may not have adequate linguistic and curriculum foundation. Therefore, using conversational teaching approaches may seem plausible for teachers but may not be helpful to such immigrant children, whose situation demand special consideration. It is on the basis of this that some critics argue that despite the fact that immigrant children may come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they very likely to be taught by teachers of mainstream backgrounds with limited skills and knowledge of teaching culturally diverse children (Ljungberg 2005 as cited in Suárez-Orozco, Martin, Alexandersson, Dance & Lunneblad, 2013).

The circumstance surrounding immigrant children makes it very difficult to apply only conventional teaching methods that could benefit children born to parents of a host country rather than immigrant parents. Crul, Holdaway, de Valk, Fuentes & Zaal (2013, p. 39) pointed out that "because many migrants to the United States and Europe have limited formal education, school systems are challenged to avoid the reproduction of inequality in the second generation and to enable the children of immigrants to enjoy the opportunities available to their native-born peers". The special circumstance of immigrant children demands special attention by educators and other relevant school personnel. This is because of the multiple needs of the immigrant child. For instance immigrant children would be trying to adjust to the culture of their new location and new school system; making efforts to learn a new language with

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