

Educational Considerations Related to Immigration

Beverly J. Irby, Ed.D.
Professor and Chair
Educational Leadership and Counseling
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX 77341
irby@shsu.edu

Keynote Panel
Promoting Academic Success and Accountability Conference 2007
Sponsored by the Texas Education Agency, ISLA, and Region XIII
Austin, Texas
January 9, 2007

Educational Considerations Related to Immigration

Immigration stirs many emotions to both immigrants and non-immigrants, but to those of us alive today, the emotive changes brought about by immigration into our schools have almost all been forgotten in the heat of current debates. The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon (a) our own nation's history and consider the positive outcomes of 19th and 20th Century immigration and (b) the immigrant in today's society related to higher education.

Immigrants and Their Contributions

None of us alive today can remember the last decade of the 19th Century when, as a Nation, we faced the industrial age with an ill-equipped workforce for the machinery. Let's remind ourselves from history—it was the immigrants who changed ill-equipped workforces to trained workers. The immigrants, who were fast coming to the United States, brought with them a model for “the trade school,” the forerunner of American vocational education. Even the New York Times (1891), often berating immigrants as burdens to society, praised the concept of the trade schools of France, Germany, and England as a welcomed addition to the U.S. schools.

None of us can remember the turn of the 19th Century, but it was immigrants who brought permanency to the school nurse and health services in public schools. None of us can remember the first few years of the 20th Century, but that was when civics education was introduced because of immigrant children's need to be acculturated into our society. Around the same time, free English classes were offered to these children and their parents—the forerunner to English as a second language classes. These classes

were offered at night in schools, community buildings, and churches when and where the families could come. (Celis, 2006). We still have this model today.

You may remember more recent arguments from revisionist historians and history teachers to include more immigrant voices and experiences and their contributions in history textbooks (Donlan, 2004). Textbooks give little attention to Jewish history, to the Ellis Island experience, and to a general understanding of the shrinking world (Scales, 2007).

You may remember “Nearly 40 years ago, thousands of high school students, many of them children of Mexican immigrants or immigrants themselves, walked out of five schools in East Los Angeles, demanding better education in demonstrations recently revisited in the HBO movie “Walkout.” The 1968 demonstrations—pointing out inequities in school funding, among other deficiencies—helped produce stronger curricula, more college-prep courses, and eventually the hiring of more Latino teachers” (Celis, 2006). Furthermore, the Texas lawsuit, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), was also brought about by immigrant students. In fact, 400 Edgewood High School students spawned the aforementioned 1973 Texas lawsuit in which their parents sued under the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution due to their finding out that chalk could not even be purchased due to lack of money for classroom supplies. The Supreme Court ruled against the case however, stating that the financing of public schools was a state responsibility. This ruling provided more state aid in Texas to poor schools that often had immigrant children. Many of the lawsuits in the U.S. that are over funding have been framed around the Rodriguez case. According to

Celis (2006), many of the lawsuits in more recent years have benefited suburban, White, middle class children.

Takaki (1993) spoke of many contributions of immigrants to our society. He said
The signs of America's ethnic diversity can be discerned across the continent . . .
Chinatown, Harlem, South Boston, the Lower East Side, places with Spanish
names like Los Angeles and San Antonio or Indian names like Massachusetts and
Iowa. Much of what is familiar in America's cultural landscape actually has ethnic
origins. The Bing cherry was developed by an early Chinese immigrant named Ah
Bing. . . . The "Forty-Niners" of the Gold Rush learned mining techniques from
the Mexicans; American cowboys acquired their herding skills from Mexican
vaqueros and adopted their range terms -- such as *lariat* from *la reata*, *lasso* from
lazo, and *stampede* from *estampida*. Songs like "God Bless America," "Easter
Parade," and "White Christmas" were written by a Russian-Jewish immigrant
named Israel Baline, more popularly known as Irving Berlin. (p.12)

These are but a few contributions immigrants have made to our society, and it is good
that we reflect on what they have done to help make America what it she is today.

Issues for Immigrants and Higher Education

Higher education, with its over 3,800 institutions, holds dearly three important
concepts that form its mission—service, teaching, and research. Thus, it is within this
context that immigrants will be discussed.

Service. In the arena of service, one cannot discount the mission of land grant
institutions which in general state that the university is to take care of and educate the
citizens of its respective state. For those states that are impacted by growing numbers of

immigrants, this mission of service is critical to its economic well being. However, with rising costs of a college education and the increasing numbers of immigrants, and thus, access to a college education, the land grant institutions' missions to their respective states' citizenry will be in jeopardy if it is not already. Access is a service responsibility that institutions of higher education should be involved in solving; access is a PK-16 issue. Over 15 years ago, Eaton (1992) pointed out barriers to higher education. She stated, "Absence of money, racial and gender bias, lack of preparedness, and absence of motivation can all constitute access barriers" (p. 153).

College enrollment hit a record level of 17.3 million in fall 2004, and enrollment is expected to increase by an additional 12% between through 2014 (NCES, 2005). Texas had 1,192,243 students enrolled in college in Fall, 2005 (State Comptroller, 2005). Even with these numbers, access remains an issue for immigrant students whose families first do not know how to navigate the system, do not even know how to advise their children on education, and do not have the resources to provide a college education. At a public institution, the average cost in 2005 was \$10,810, in 2006 it was \$11,351, and in 2010 the costs are projected to be \$13, 797 with costs rising an average of five percent each year ("What's the Cost of College?", n.d.)

Money matters. The majority of our Hispanic immigrants were in the year 2000 between the ages of 20 to 35, and according to the U.S. Census in 1999, the median household income for ages 25-34 was at \$42,174. Access is impacted because the higher the income, i.e. >\$100,000, the higher the SAT scores with Verbal at 557 and Math at 569, and the lower the income, i.e., \$40,000-\$50,000, the lower the SAT scores with

Verbal at 501 and Math at 503. The lower the income goes the lower the SAT scores drop and visa versa (Cassie, 2006).

High school graduation matters; retention matters. Among students who are first-generation foreign-born and U.S. born Hispanics, only 42% attain a high school education; however, only 8.8% of those graduate from college; this is compared to 89% non-Hispanics who complete high school and 35% who graduate from college (U.S. Census, 2000). As immigrants matriculate to college, only a few graduate. This has to do with retention, a critical issue for universities.

According to the National Education Association (n.d.), annually, “over 50,000 undocumented students who have lived in the United States for at least five years graduate from U.S. high schools. Among these students are class valedictorians, straight-A students, and idealistic youth committed to bettering their communities. Current federal law restricts states' ability to provide in-state tuition or higher education assistance to these students, who often have no recourse to regularize their immigration status. As a result, many of them are unable to pursue higher education. The current law denies students with tremendous promise the opportunity to excel. In fact, many promising students drop out of school because they know they will be unable to continue on to college. The loss to these students, and to society as a whole, is significant.” Additionally, “the 109th Congress failed to complete reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), leaving the 110th Congress to start over in crafting reauthorization legislation. NEA supports HEA reauthorization in a manner that addresses access to adequate financial aid resources, equality of access to postsecondary educational opportunities, support for comprehensive and high quality teacher preparation programs,

and a focus on the benefits to the economy and society of a strong system of two- and four-year degree-granting institutions. Priorities include:

- Providing financial assistance sufficient to enable all students to pay for postsecondary tuition and other appropriate expenses;
- Emphasizing needs-based financial aid through grants rather than loans;
- Expanding and improving teacher preparation programs to ensure that teachers entering the profession are highly qualified;
- Providing loan forgiveness to students who become employees in public education institutions;
- Protecting academic freedom;
- Providing support to low-income high school students to make a successful transition to postsecondary education through programs such as GEAR-UP and TRIO.” (NEA, n.d.)

Because of many of the issues forenamed, immigrants have turned to the community college and consider it “the ideal starting place in a new country for learning English, redeveloping or updating skills brought from their home countries, or for developing technical skills which will enable them to acquire jobs in the United States. These immigrants view the community college as ‘the place’ to enter into an often confusing cultural system and hostile society” (Siedman, 1995, p. 247). Thus, community colleges become an avenue for access with open enrollment policies, flexible hours, and much less expensive tuition and fees than their four-year counterparts.

Teaching. Teaching goes far beyond teaching the subject matter. A consummate teacher is much like Helen Keller’s teacher, Annie Sullivan—one who saw the diversity for what it was, one who embraced diversity, one who was kind to diversity, one who pushed for excellence, one who mentored, one who cared, one who taught using teachable moments and a second language, and one who never gave up. This is what university professors of immigrants and future teachers and administrators who will be working with immigrants are called upon to do. Professors may help immigrants to gain loans, scholarships, work study, proper documentation, study help and tools, navigational tools, and to understand general cultural norms. Additionally, it is University professors who can assist in the recruitment of new teachers to the profession who could serve as role models for minority and immigrant students.

To face the economic concerns tied to educating our citizenry, it is imperative for university faculty to work with a PK-16 mentality and for school district personnel to do the same. Working together, they can ensure that “America’s students leave high school equipped with the high-level thinking, learning and global understanding skills—as well as the sophisticated information, communication, and technology literacy competencies—to live and work in an increasingly interconnected 21st century global community” with a “properly designed curriculum, coupled with a flexible, comprehensive and improved assessment and accountability system...” (NEA, 2006).

Research. Universities are places where knowledge is produced. It is the place where metacognitive behavior abounds. Scientific research, based in metacognitive activities, is imperative to advance our society. In the social sciences, professors are called upon to study people, learning, cognition, and other human conditions and

behaviors. Professors' research in the field related to immigration and education should be rigorous, trustworthy, and credible. For example, children who are English language learners deserve the best research to produce the best programs possible, and heretofore, much of the research that has been produced is riddled with methodological flaws. It is important for professors of history to write history giving voice to immigrants and their experiences. It is incumbent upon the professors to produce, conduct, and report research *not* without consideration of issues of colonization and *with* consideration of "who" the researched are.

Concluding Thoughts

While immigrants have and will continue to make significant contributions to our society, they can only make the best contributions with an education that is also the best that together higher education and PK-12 education can make together. Together we must create what has been discussed in this short paper—a system of social justice. Shockley-Lee and McKerrow (2005), aptly defined social justice and in the case of higher education and immigration, this definition applies. They stated, "Social justice is defined not only by what it is but also by what it is not, namely injustice. By seeking justice, we anticipate the ideal. By questioning injustice we approach it. Integrating both, we achieve it. It is one thing to agree that discrimination is wrong. That is the easy part. It is another to make a conscious choice to confront the discrimination that emerges from everyday interactions in organizations and communities. That brings out another element of social justice—the necessity of courage. And so, it seems that social justice requires interactions among a well-developed theoretical /historical viewpoint, a penchant for activism, the choice to meld the two and the courage to do it." It will take an active

agenda with courage from those in higher education to move forward the education for those who are coming to seek a better opportunity and a better education within the walls of higher education institutions.

References

- Cassie, R. (2006). SAT scores tied to income level locally, nationally. The Examiner. Retrieved on January 1, 2007, from http://www.examiner.com/a-254205~SAT_scores_tied_to_income_level_locally_nationally.html?cid=rss-Baltimore.
- Celis, W. (October 4, 2006). The forgotten history of public education. Education Week. Retrieved on December 15, 2006, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/>
- Donlan, L. (2004). Stories of our nations, footprints of our souls. Retrieved on December 15, 2006, from <http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0407/textbook.html>.
- Eaton, J. S. (1992). The evolution of access policy: 1965- 1990. In American Higher Education: Purpose, Problems and Public Perceptions (pp. 65-114). Queenstown, MD: The Aspen Institute.
- NEA. (n.d.). Higher education and immigration. Retrieved on January 1, 2007 from <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&q=DREAM+Act+%2FAmerican+Dream+Act+%28S.1291%2FH.R.+5131%29>.
- NEA. (August 4, 2006). NEA outlines role of NCLB in preparing students for college and beyond. Retrieved on December 31, 2006, from <http://www.nea.org/newsreleases/2006/nr060804.html>.
- NCES. (2005). Digest of Educational Statistics. Institute of Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved on January 2, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d05/>
- Scales, P. (2007). Ellis island and the immigrant experience. Librarian at Random. Retrieved on January 2, 2007, from <http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/librarians/patscales.html>
- Seidman, A. (1995, May/June). The community college: A challenge for change. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 19 (3), 247-254.
- Shockley-Lee, S., & McKerrow, K. (2005). Preface. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*. Retrieved on December 10, 2006, from <http://www.openj-gate.com/include/redirect.asp?JCode=80161&Source=1&type=J&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Eadvancingwomen%2Ecom%2Fawl%2Fall2005%2Fpreface%2Ehtml>
- State Comptroller. (2005). Fall 2005 Preliminary Headcount Enrollment “All Institutions of Higher Education by County Location.” Retrieved on January 3, 2007, from <http://www.window.state.tx.us/comptrol/wwstand/wws0512ed/wws0512e.pdf>

Takaki, R. (1993). *A history of multicultural America*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company.

“What’s the Cost of College?” (n.d.) The Princeton Review. Retrieved on January 2, 2007, from <http://www.princetonreview.com/college/finance/articles/save/2006/10/04/06celis.h26.html>.