

# **MIGRATION AND EDUCATION: LINKING SCHOOLS WITH THE NEEDS OF LATINO IMMIGRANTS**

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## **Abstract**

This curriculum module focuses on the effects of migration on the school systems in the United States, and the role that administrators can play in making school systems inclusive for immigrant populations. The primary aim is to help school personnel better understand the economic, social, cultural, and family circumstances of immigrants, primarily those who are coming from Latin America, who work and live in the United States, and to learn how to work with these communities in their schools. This module on Migration and Education will address the following topics: 1) the current patterns of migration that bring immigrants to the United States; 2) the relevance of learning about the cultural backgrounds of Latino immigrant, that is, the fund of knowledge approach to ensure literacy for immigrant learners, and 3) parent-school relations. Each focus area will have companion resources including additional readings and materials that could be utilized in a variety of courses, including multicultural education, leadership and administration courses and teacher education courses.

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## Overview

This curriculum module focuses on the effects of migration on the school systems in the United States and the role that administrators can play in making school systems inclusive for immigrant populations. The unit focuses particularly on ways in which administrators and teachers can respond to demographic changes, since responsive leadership can help to facilitate academic success for immigrant students.

Globalization has transformed the United States economy and the demand for low-wage labor is reshaping the communities and the school populations throughout the country. The curriculum module focuses on the economic, social, cultural and family circumstances of Latino immigrants who work and live in new immigration gateway communities. These new immigrant gateways reflect a change of the foreign-born population in the United States, since a much greater number of immigrants live in cities with little history of migration (Singer, 2004). Knowledge about who the immigrants are and why they are in the United States is essential to develop successful teaching practices with this population of students. Understanding culture and migration is crucial to create educational and social programs to improve the schooling outcomes of Latino immigrant children. Identifying barriers that exist within the schools that constrain learning opportunities for this group, the module will help schools identify steps to improve the educational advancement of immigrant children.

The primary aim of *Migration and Education* is to help administrators better understand the economic, social, cultural, and family circumstances of immigrants,

primarily those who are coming from Latin America, who work and live in the United States, and to learn how to work with these communities in their schools. For example, people of Mexican descent now constitute the second largest minority group in the United States. During the 1990's new migration--especially from Mexico--became widespread up and down the Eastern seaboard, and in the Midwest, South, and Pacific Northwest. This change was driven not only by traditional agricultural work, but also by a high demand for unskilled and low-paying service jobs in urban and rural areas. A distinctive feature of the recent Latin American migration is the youthfulness and rural origin of migrants, most of whom come from towns of fewer than 15,000 people with high levels of poverty and low levels of schooling (Cortina and Gendreau, 2003). Two-thirds come without a high school degree since schooling in Mexico is mandated through ninth grade. The low level of educational attainment of many Mexican and Central American parents when they arrive in the United States shapes their economic opportunities and hinders their social and economic mobility. Moreover, the low educational attainment of the adult population is decisive in shaping the integration of their children into the new society. As the Latino immigrant community generally continues to grow in the United States, a core issue we face as a nation is how we can change the existing pattern of incorporation of Latino immigrants from one that tends to isolate them in impoverished areas. Education is key to preventing this problem. Building on existing research, we have identified three priority areas that will be addressed through this curriculum module.

**Objectives:**

This module on Migration and Education will address the following topics: 1) the current patterns of migration that bring immigrants to the United States; 2) cultural backgrounds of Latino immigrants, and 3) parent-school relations. Each focus area will have companion resources including additional readings and materials that could be utilized in school classrooms.

This module aligns with the four tenets of social justice as articulated by the National Institute on Leadership, Disability, and Students Placed at Risk. Class participants will reflect on these four tenets in relation to working with new immigrant populations. They will address the following tenets:

**❖ Developing school cultures that include all students:**

For many immigrants, school becomes a subtractive rather than additive experience. Teachers sometimes do not practice an authentic sense of caring that makes all students feel welcome and encouraged. Capitalizing on what students bring with them from their homes and their countries of origin is a foundation for engaging immigrant students in school. New learning is added to what students already know, when students existing knowledge is augmented rather than stripped away. The case study of students in Wamble County will allow participants to learn about how the sociocultural processes of the school can create additive and learning environments.

❖ **Ensuring literacy for all learners:**

As immigrant students are integrated into schools, teachers must begin to understand the process of second language acquisition and the benefits of using their primary language as a means to help these students acquire academic English proficiency. Encouragement of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in English literacy can be accomplished without abandonment of an immigrant student's home language. Through the lessons, participants will learn about Spanish speakers in English-only schools and begin to understand how to help English language learners become bilingual and multicultural.

❖ **Creating cultures of empowerment:**

New immigrant populations, like people from other backgrounds, are proud of their cultural identity. But 'identity' is not static. It is reinforced through community and social practices that often disappear as groups migrate. Language, fiestas, cuisine and religion are some of the ways of reaffirming and transmitting a sense of strong cultural identity. It is imperative to acknowledge and support community processes that reinforce a sense of cultural agency. Through the Wamble County case study, participants will see how teachers in one school missed opportunities to capitalize on students' cultural backgrounds. The case study will also help them think constructively about how to change the environment of the schools they work in each day.

**❖ Ensuring that families and community perspectives are at the heart of the school:**

When new immigrants arrive in communities, schools are one of the primary spaces where they begin to interact with other members of the community. Increasing positive relationships between parents and teachers is often difficult for both groups when language, culture and linguistic barriers exist. Yet, when given an opportunity, immigrant parents are eager to be involved in their children's academic lives, if they are made to feel comfortable in the school. Participants will learn how teachers can make both students and parents more comfortable in their schools, thus fostering engagement from all members of a school's community members.

**Instructional Agenda**

This module is designed to increase the working knowledge of educators regarding the educational needs and characteristics of immigrant populations. The goals are: 1) to make explicit the current patterns of immigration that bring immigrants to the United States; 2) to understand the cultural backgrounds and needs of Latino immigrant students, and 3) to assist future leaders in determining how to make both immigrant parents and children feel welcome in the public education system.

**Guiding Questions for the Module:**

1. What are the recent immigration trends and pathways that bring immigrants to the United States?
2. How can school leaders capitalize on these students' experiences from living in another culture? How can they approach immigrant students from an additive rather than deficit perspective?
3. How can understanding the characteristics of immigrant populations help educators meet the educational needs of immigrant populations?

**Estimated Total Time:**

This module consists of reading and writing assignments to be completed over three class periods:

1. Class 1:
  - a. PowerPoint presentation on newcomers in the schools
  - b. Participants will conduct group discussion on the immigrant populations in their school systems and teachers' knowledge of immigrant students' backgrounds.
2. Class 2:
  - a. Students will read the case study on Wamble County, North Carolina, and discuss the concept of "funds of knowledge."

- b. Students will discuss “A Home on the Field” and the lessons that can be learned from author Paul Cuadros who worked with Latino immigrant students on the soccer field.
  - c. Participants will submit a reflective essay about how they can work to understand something about each student in their class.
  - d. Participants will be assigned to visit one of their schools and look for ways in which the schools make immigrant students and their parents welcome.
- 3. Class 3:
  - a. Students will discuss the findings from their inquiry research process.
  - b. Students will discuss the ways in which the school systems could make immigrant families feel more welcome.
  - c. The class will create a best practices list of ideas that could be implemented in their school systems.

## Reading Materials

### 1) Introduction to Unit

### 2) New Immigrant Gateways

- ❖ Singer, A. (2004). *The rise of new immigrant gateways*. Washington, DC: Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, The Brookings Institution.

### 3) Funds of Knowledge

- ❖ Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, D. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.

### 4) Case Study on Latino experiences in a rural elementary school

- ❖ Lopez, J., & George, C. (2005). *Latino experiences in a rural elementary school in North Carolina*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

### 5) A Home on the Field

- ❖ Cuadros, P. (2006). *A home on the field: How one championship team inspires hope for revival of small town America*. New York: HarperCollins Inc.

### 6) Dismay and Disappointment: Parental Involvement of Latino Immigrant Parents.

- ❖ Ramirez, A.Y. (2003). Dismay and disappointment: Parental involvement of Latino immigrant parents. *The Urban Review*, 35 (2), 93-110.

## Instructional Process

### Class 1:

- Introduce purpose of the module (see overview, goals and objectives)
- Students should have read Audrey Singer's *The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways* and Moll et al.'s *Funds of Knowledge for Teaching*.
- Begin class by sharing PowerPoint presentation on Migration and Education and by encouraging participants to think about information provided in the Singer article.
  - Discuss where immigrants are coming from in Latin America to the United States.
  - What languages are immigrants speaking when they arrive from their countries of origin?
  - Discuss the U.S. cities in which immigrants lived 50 years ago and today.
  - Discuss why families are migrating to the United States (emphasize the complex factors that influence migration).
- Give a brief lecture on the important aspects of Luis Moll's funds of knowledge article.
  - Ask the class to clarify what the term "funds of knowledge" means.
  - Give examples from the article of what teachers found when they went into the homes of children and how they used it in their classroom teaching lessons. Ask teachers/administrators to share examples of how

they or other teachers they work with incorporated students' family backgrounds into their curriculum.

- Emphasize that this concept can be used with any children, not only immigrant students.
- Note the asset orientation of funds of knowledge; careful mediation keeps the exercise from becoming a means for proving stereotypes that low income children live in deprived environments.
- Facilitate class discussion on what types of knowledge teachers and administrators in their particular schools have about the communities of origin that children come from in their school communities
  - Ask the class why it is important to know something about every child in the classroom setting.
  - Discuss what participants know about the traditional (American-born) communities in their schools (family backgrounds, siblings in the schools, where parents work, what types of neighborhoods children live in, etc.)
  - Ask participants if they can answer questions about all the children in their schools, including questions about where they live, who lives in their homes, what type of health care they receive, the gender roles in their homes, the roles of children and siblings in their homes, how learning occurs in their homes, how their families interact with schools, what childcare is available after school, what chores children are responsible for, etc. Why is it important that they know this information?

- Ask participants to share what skills/ideas/background their own families had growing up and if they recall whether teachers incorporated their backgrounds into the classroom. What are the strengths of their individual families that teachers could have utilized?
- Assign the book, *A Home on the Field*, for the next class.

## **Class 2:**

- Begin class with reflective discussion about what lessons were brought forward in Paul Cuadros' book, *A Home on the Field*. The following questions could be posed:
  - How can we use this book to think about what it takes to be part of a team in a school system?
  - How did Cuadros rally the team and the community to work together for a common purpose?
  - What kind of vision and passion did he have for his soccer players? What types of obstacles did his kids face as Latino immigrants?
  - What type of vision and passion are necessary for a leader/principal in the school?
  - What did the blue lines on the football field symbolize to Coach Cuadros (i.e., resiliency of students, power of community, the segregation of communities, success for all students)?

- What types of spaces are we creating in our schools where students can co-exist with each other in positive ways?
  - If sports created attachment to teammates and place, as well as school pride, what are other strategies or ways for helping Latino newcomers develop such feelings and attachments?
  - Are any of the tensions in Cuadros' book similar to the tensions in your school? How are new communities of students treated in your school?
- After the discussion, assign each participant to write a 3-page reflective essay on how they work to create or can aim to create understanding about a new group of students in their school community. (Assignment is due next week).
- Provide an overview of the Wamble County Case Study.
- Instruct participants to form small groups to read and discuss the case of Wamble County. Ask participants to focus on the questions at the end of the case study in a small group discussion.
  - The final question posed in the case study requires you as the teacher to help students by researching the appropriate resources they requested.
- For homework, assign participants to visit a classroom in their school and look for ways in which schools have made immigrant students and their parents welcome in the schools.
  - Are signs posted in different languages?
  - What is used to decorate the walls in classrooms and outside spaces (children's art, flags from their countries of origin, etc.)?

- Have teachers created lessons plans using students' backgrounds?
  - What types of books can be checked out in the library?
  - Who can speak to parents if they do not speak English?
  - What type of program is available to new English language learners (newcomer classrooms, bilingual education, English immersion)?
- During class on Monday participants should be prepared to do one the following in addition to sharing the results of their inquiry research:
  - Provide an example of how the schools could provide more culturally inclusive space.
  - Research and share background information about one of the immigrant student groups in their school.
  - Provide a list of books the library could add to their collection for English language learners.
- Assign participants to read the Ramirez article on parental involvement.

### **Class 3:**

- Participants will discuss their findings from their short inquiry research in the schools as well as their response to one of the three additional questions (see above).
  - What conditions did they find that were enabling immigrant students?
  - What conditions did they find were creating barriers to learning for immigrant students?

- What structures and protocols did they find in the school that privilege American-born parents and children?
- Facilitate a discussion on ways in which schools systems could make immigrant families feel more welcome. Include ideas that were shared in the Ramirez article about how parents tried to get involved but felt unwelcome in the schools.
  - See Handout A for suggestions and ideas beyond what participants might suggest. (This handout can be given to participants after the class discussion.)
  - Discuss whether suggestions made by the class and in Handout A are realistic and how administrators can lead the charge on such issues.
- For a final activity, the class will create a best practice list similar to ideas in Handout A that could be implemented in school systems when working with Latino immigrant students.
- The teacher for this module will compile these best practices into a succinct document to be emailed to class members after the unit ends.

### **Student Assessments and Assignments**

- Participants will respond orally to questions posed throughout each classroom presentation.
- Participants will complete all readings assigned.
- Participants will submit a 3-page reflective essay that explores how they (as an administrator) work to create or can aim to create understanding about a new group of students in their school community.
- Participants will complete a 2-hour inquiry research observation into the environment and reception of immigrant students and their families in their schools.
- Participants will offer suggestions for best practices to improve the reception of immigrant students in the schools they work in.
- Participants will help create a final class document that makes suggestions for improving the link between immigrant families and the school systems that work with them.

### **Handouts and Supplemental Material**

- Handout A: Suggestions for Success
- Case Study: Disconnect and Southern Drawl
- PowerPoint Presentation: Migration and Education



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