Guest Editorial Introduction: Special Issue on Immigration and Education

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One does not have to look far to see that immigration has once again found its way into the national spotlight. Many of the issues are not new. Media sources continually tell us that immigrants are taking “our” jobs, blaming them for the state of the economy and bringing their “foreign” languages and cultures into U.S. society (Chavez, 2008; Fernandes, 2007). A look into almost any school across the nation would point to the students’ increased linguistic and cultural diversity, which is either viewed as enriching or harming our school systems and society at large (García & Cuellar, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008). The never-ending struggle to create federal policies that will determine the paths of millions of undocumented immigrants who call the United States their home continues to cycle in and out of political debates.

As these ideological and political battles wage on, the urgency of the education of immigrant students cannot wait. Their access to educators who are knowledgeable about their backgrounds and informed about relevant pedagogy and policies cannot wait. Their opportunities to thrive in P–12 schools and continue to grow in college and beyond cannot wait. Furthermore, the future of a nation that relies on the contributions made by its immigrants cannot wait. This special issue of The New Educator is one step in the process of improving the sociopolitical context and pedagogical practices for immigrant students. While the focus of this issue is primarily within the United States, immigration is a worldwide phenomenon, and, to that end, we have included a case from Europe to contextualize understandings of global migration flows.

This special thematic issue of the New Educator begins with an overview of current immigration trends and the educational experiences

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of immigrant youth (Irizarry & Kleyn). The articles that follow look at the identities of immigrant students (Bigelow), views of immigrant families about learning languages (Torres-Guzmán, Etxeberria, & Intxausti Intxausti), teacher preferences toward immigrant students (Dabach), and U.S. policies of the past and those vying to shape the future (Varela). Taken together, these articles paint a picture of the various and competing interests and outcomes of the education of immigrant students in the United States and beyond. The sequence of articles is arranged to first provide the reader with an overview of context for immigration and education in the United States followed by in-depth views into the experiences of students, parents, teachers, and policies in the United States and internationally to consider how immigration impacts varying educational contexts.

In the first article, “Immigration and Education in the ‘Supposed Land of Opportunity’: Youth Perspectives on Living and Learning in the United States,” we provide an overarching look into the diverse immigrants who make up the United States, the programs schools make available to them, and their educational outcomes. Then, we feature the experiences and voices of immigrant youth to highlight the challenges they face learning in a new language and culture as well as the agency they exhibit in the face of the racism, linguicism, and xenophobia that often stand in the way of their futures.

The second article by Martha Bigelow, “(Con)Texts for Cultural and Linguistic Hybridity among Somali Diaspora Youth,” considers how immigrants of Somali Muslim backgrounds express their identities in and out of schools. Through the examination of texts produced by three young men, Bigelow reveals some of the realities and challenges of being minoritized and often misunderstood. The analysis of these texts show the ways in which these youth move between and within cultures to carve out spaces for cultural, linguistic, and religious hybridity as they work out competing internal and external perceptions of themselves and their prescribed group.

The third article, “‘El Euskera a mi me gusta’: Parental Attitudes of Basque Country Immigrants” moves outside the United States and into Spain, a nation that has also experienced large waves of immigration with varying degrees of success. María E. Torres-Guzmán, Felipa Etxeberria, and Nahia Intxausti Intxausti take us into the Basque Country, a region of Spain where Euskera, a language once on the verge of extinction, and Spanish share official status. The study considers how immigrant parents, whose children are learning one or two additional languages in their new country and in schools, feel about different aspects of being faced with Euskera.

In the next manuscript, “Teachers as Agents of Reception: An Analysis of Teacher Preference for Immigrant-Origin Second Language Learners,” Dafney Blanca Dabach illustrates the range of preferences shown by secondary educators for instructing immigrant-origin students labeled as “English Learners” (ELs). This study positions teachers as key figures within
the context of reception of immigrant students that frame their larger experiences in schools. The article contributes a theoretical orientation towards investigating those within the host society as well as a grounded empirical analysis within teachers' work contexts in California secondary schools.

In the final article, “Creating Opportunities for Undocumented Youth: A Review of the Literature,” Alejandra Varela offers a thorough literature review documenting the historical antecedents and present-day policy initiatives aimed at curbing opportunities for undocumented immigrants in the United States. Using critical theory as a framework, she explores how undocumented youth are positioned by public policy as well as the ways they respond to this positioning. The article provides a comprehensive look at the seminal court cases that have shaped educational opportunities for undocumented students throughout the educational pipeline from kindergarten through college and concludes with a call for the citizenry of the United States to live up to the ideals upon which the country was founded and to create a pathway for undocumented youth to “normalize” their immigrant status and to provide greater access to postsecondary education.

This issue ends with two book reviews of seminal works that have been released relatively recently to shed light on the education of our immigrant students. First, Nelson Flores reviews *Learning a New Land: Immigrant Students in American Society* (Harvard University Press, 2008) by Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, and Irina Todorova. The book centers on a multi-year study that analyzes the experiences of immigrant youth in the United States from key sending countries to better understand their experiences and educational outcomes over time. Eileen Gonzalez offers a review of Patricia Gandara’s and Frances Contreas’ book, *The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies* (Harvard University Press, 2010). The text uses demographic data and case studies to document the grave status of education for millions of Latinos in the United States, many of whom are immigrants, and the implications that the undereducation of the nation’s fastest growing group of school-aged children will have on the country.

REFERENCES


