Chapter 16
Protective Factors Immigrant Children Bring to the Classroom

Jacqueline Onchwari
University of Minnesota – Duluth, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on strengths and protective factors immigrant children bring into the classroom. If well nurtured, these strengths can enhance immigrant children's positive outcomes and those of future generations. The "immigrant paradox" is a phenomenon used to describe the positive outcomes of immigrant children despite developmental risks associated with their relocation and adjustment. Unfortunately, the effects of these protective factors reduce with later generations. This incredible loss is a gap that educators could fill. Using strategies that give immigrant families and children "voice" is critical in breaking through the barriers, stereotypes, attitudes, and under-information that come between the educators and the immigrant children in their care. Some strategies that have proven effective in accessing immigrant children's strengths are suggested in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

As a first generation immigrant to the United States of America and a teacher educator, I write on the topic of immigrant children's educational trajectories from the dual perspective of a parent and a scholar. I have two children in the public schools in a predominantly white community, and

therefore have had to confront issues that affect their education and life as immigrants. One of my children is a first generation immigrant (born in our country of origin) while the other is second generation (born in the US). One of the factors that I perpetually find a need to advocate for, as a scholar, is the need for teachers, children's peers and other people in children's lives, to have a balanced view of what immigrant children bring into the classroom. It is an established fact that immigrant children and their families have to deal

with acculturation, a process research has found to be stressful. It is also true that many immigrants are equipped with significant resilience, which, if acknowledged and nurtured, can support them to adjust smoothly. In her widely viewed powerful talk titled *The danger of a single story*, Chimamanda Adichie (2009) calls the notion of looking at both positives and negatives of a people as "a balance of stories".

The experiences I have had in the schools with my children and those of other immigrant acquaintances have further confirmed that immigrant children's strengths are often under-acknowledged and underutilized. For instance, witnessing an acquaintance's otherwise cognitively capable child be recruited for special education, and hearing a parent complain about being asked, during the school's open house, if her child used special education resources, are signs that stereotypes indeed do rule. Eventually children underperform and live up to the expectations of the stereotypes (Dray & Wisneski, 2011). Dray also reports that minority children are questionably over-represented in special education. I clarify that I believe that immigrant children do come to the classroom with some challenges, but their strengths could be used to overcome or reduce the effects of the challenges (Chun & Chung, 2011). In this chapter, I highlight on strengths and protective factors in an effort to draw attention to the, often unnoticed, positive attributes immigrant children have in abundance.

BACKGROUND

In light of my opening paragraph it is not surprising that a lot of existing literature addresses the plight of immigrant children and their families from a deficit perspective (Maiter & Stalker, 2011). The overwhelming use of demographic data like poverty guidelines, high stakes test scores, and other cut-and-dry poverty guidelines imposed on developing countries to describe the otherwise rich experiences of many of the immigrant children

from their motherland, often lead to gross mislabeling of children. In addition, studies often tend to explore the problem once it has occurred, hence missing the processes that lead to the problem. Many immigrant children have had and continue to maintain a socially rich and supportive environment in the new land (Ceballos & Bratton, 2010; Hei-Sung, Brown, Mitchell, & Shiraldi, 2008; Chun & Chun, 2011). While it is indisputable that acculturation can be stressful and that poverty, often associated with many immigrants, can have a debilitating effect on immigrant children, the social and cultural capital these children bring into the classroom should count for something in their educational trajectory. So the question is, how can these strengths be used to further enrich the immigrant child's success?

This chapter looks at the child's outcomes from a holistic perspective, that is, physical, cognitive, emotional, and social developments. All these developmental aspect are interdependent on each other. This chapter, therefore, will not be limited to specific academic outcomes.

Who are the Current Immigrant Children in the US?

Today's United States immigrants come from diverse origins and migrate for different reasons (Robb, Dunkley, Boynton, & Greenhalgh, 2007; Jensen, 2007). They also arrive with different levels of education, experiences and resources. Children of immigrants therefore bring with them a lot of advantages and, perhaps, disadvantages stemming from these diverse cultural and familial environments from their home countries. Upon arrival in the US they negotiate and merge their previous experiences with those in the new land in varied ways, leading into very divergent outcomes. It is important to note that immigrant children, as defined by Borjas (2011), are those who are foreign-born and migrate to the United States with their foreign-born parents, often referred to as "first generation immigrants", and

Related Content

Did We Become a Community? Multiple Methods for Identifying Community and Its Constituent Elements in Formal Online Learning Environments

Richard A. Schwierand Ben K. Daniel (2007). *User-Centered Design of Online Learning Communities (pp. 29-53).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/did-become-community-multiple-methods/30655

The Interactive Relation between Religious TV Programs and People in Turkey

Ramazan Bicer (2013). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 76-84).*

www.irma-international.org/article/the-interactive-relation-between-religious-tv-programs-and-people-in-turkey/78912

Education as the Practice of Freedom: Writing Truth Into the Curriculum Across the Globe

Marva S. McCleanand Marcus Woolombi Waters (2018). *Equity, Equality, and Reform in Contemporary Public Education (pp. 223-244).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/education-as-the-practice-of-freedom/201419

An Exploration of Students' Participation, Learning Process, and Learning Outcomes in Web 2.0 Computer Supported Collaborative Learning

Chun-Yi Shenand Chen-Hsien Wu (2011). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 60-72).*

www.irma-international.org/article/exploration-students-participation-learning-process/53550

Exploring University Students' Self-Directed Learning in Online Learning

Lin Chenand Norzihani Saharuddin (2024). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 1-17).*

www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-university-students-self-directed-learning-in-online-learning/342605