

Introduction

This book is a research-based but practical guide for new teachers and their more experienced colleagues who are searching for support as they work with students whose linguistic and cultural background is different from their own. The book is also an introduction to immigrant education for school administrators and educational planners in communities or regions that are in the process of developing plans and programmes for newcomer students.

The book provides plentiful examples of successful or promising practices developed in Canadian schools that can be adopted or adapted by educators in Europe, North America, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, including those that have only recently begun to experience the impact of immigration in their communities.

Although the focus is on first-generation immigrant children (students who were born in other countries), many of the recommended approaches and instructional strategies described in this book can be used or adapted for use with second-generation children (native-born children whose parents immigrated from other countries) and historical linguistic and cultural minorities, such as children from Aboriginal communities in North America or children of Roma background in Europe.

Who Should Read This Book?

This book is intended to meet the needs of educators in schools where linguistic and cultural diversity and the presence of immigrant students are relatively recent phenomena. Although most of the examples are drawn from schools and classrooms in Canada, they are intended as models for adaptation in other contexts.

There is a strong emphasis in this book on the acquisition of academic English and the long-term process of second language development. This because, even though in the early years of schooling many second language learners (L2Ls) seem to do relatively well, they often experience the dreaded ‘fourth grade slump’. This term refers to the difficulties that many students – especially L2Ls – encounter when the curriculum becomes more demanding, with increasingly complex language and challenging concepts. They may ‘demonstrate grade-level reading performance in the primary grades (1 through 3) but begin to fall significantly behind grade norms starting at grade 4, with the discrepancy growing larger with each succeeding grade’ (Cummins *et al.*, 2007: p. 53). There is also a focus on newcomer students from other countries who may arrive at any age, with or without any previous experience with the language of instruction, but with a need to continue their education and catch up with age peers in language proficiency as quickly as possible.

The book is intended for mainstream classroom teachers, specialist language teachers, school administrators, and educational policy planners. Section 1 provides

useful background information for everyone. Section 2 is oriented towards educators involved in planning at the school and district level, including classroom teachers who need to provide input or participate in discussions at this level. Educators in faculties of education will also find some of this information useful. Section 3 is about daily classroom practice, and will be of most immediate relevance to classroom teachers, although school administrators, curriculum leaders, and teacher educators will find the information useful in planning staff development and evaluating teacher performance.

Why Do We Need This Book?

Throughout human history, people have moved from region to region and across continents to find safety or to improve their lives. However, in recent years the movement of people across political borders has increased dramatically. In addition, the diversity of the newcomers has increased, with the result that many teachers are now faced with the challenge of teaching children whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are very different from their own.

Some countries, such as Canada, Australia, and the United States, have a long history of recruiting and resettling newcomers in order to expand the economy and help develop the country. For example, Canadian immigration policy has an annual immigration target of about one per cent of its existing population. There are well-established government programmes for selecting, resettling, and integrating immigrants. School systems in many parts of the country provide instruction in English or French for newcomer students, depending on whether the school uses English or French as the language of instruction. Many schools and school districts also offer other programmes and services, such as orientation programmes and peer tutoring, to support newcomer children and youth. Also, there is increasing recognition of the needs of second-generation children whose first major contact with the language and culture of the wider community occurs when they first start school.

Most immigrants to Canada move to the large urban areas of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, as well as smaller cities across Canada. There are well-developed programmes to support newcomer children in the school systems of these cities. However, there are many communities across Canada that are receiving significant numbers of immigrants for the first time.

Other countries, such as Spain, have traditionally been source countries of immigrants to the Americas, and only recently have begun experiencing the movement in reverse. As a result, governments at all levels are in the process of developing plans and programmes to manage the flow of newcomers and integrate them into their new environment. There is debate about the best way to receive and integrate newcomers, and in some areas about the best instructional approach in an educational system that is already bilingual. For example, in the Basque Country the objective is for all students to become bilingual in Basque and in Spanish. In Catalunya the language of schooling is Catalan, but outside school the dominant language in the community is Spanish.

Balancing the demands and needs of two linguistic communities becomes more challenging with the arrival of new communities speaking a variety of different languages.

What Is In This Book?

This book contains practical advice on the education of immigrant children and adolescents based on my more than 30 years of experience in multilingual and multicultural education as a teacher, educational adviser, and teacher educator in Toronto, which is, according to the United Nations, the most multilingual and multicultural city in the world. More recently I have been working with educators in Spain as well. This experience has enabled me to see many examples of effective practice in multilingual, multicultural schools and classrooms (and less effective examples, as well).

Canada is a country with a long history of immigration and well-developed programmes for newcomers, while Spain has only recently been dealing with large-scale immigration and its impact on schools. Canada enjoys a reputation for its well-developed programmes for immigrant resettlement, for its support programmes for immigrant students, especially in the larger cities, and for the apparent success of immigrant students as evidenced by their performance on PISA assessments (OECD, 2006). However, many programmes have been eroded by budget cuts in recent years – just at a time when many newcomers are arriving in smaller communities across the country that have not had much experience with immigration until recently. Meanwhile in Spain, a country where immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon, the proportion of newcomer students in schools in some regions, such as Catalunya and Madrid, has increased dramatically. There is an urgent need to develop programmes and train teachers for this new reality. My conversations with educators and school observations in Spain have helped me to understand the context in which they teach and their need for practical research-based advice on how to proceed.

While it is unlikely that all of the programmes, services, or instructional approaches recommended in this book are in place in any one school, each is in place somewhere and is included in this book as a model to adopt or adapt in other areas.

Collaboration and Advocacy

Many of the services described in this book, such as translation and interpretation services or newcomer reception centres, are the result of many years of collaborative advocacy work between educators and community organisations that serve immigrants. These services may not be available in your school district now, but you can point to them as examples that seem to be working in other areas in support of advocacy work that you might engage in with community organisations in your own area.

The content is organised in three sections:

Section 1: Getting Started

This section provides an overview for teachers and administrators of the social, academic, and linguistic needs of newcomer children and youth, and outlines some ways of helping to orient them to their new environment. There are also some ideas for creating good relationships with parents so that they can support their children's education.

Section 2: Planning: A Whole-School Approach

The presence of immigrant children in a school system must be taken into account in every aspect of educational planning. Chapter 3 is about the challenge of learning a new language for school, as well as some of the factors that should be taken into account when planning language support for newcomer students. Chapter 4 provides a framework for differentiated instruction for students at different stages in learning the language, and offers some examples of assessment tools and criteria that can help teachers to track each student's linguistic development. Chapter 5 is about accountability and the academic performance of immigrant children, and provides an action plan for schools and school districts. This chapter will be useful for those educators involved in planning educational policy, designing teacher education programmes, or developing procedures for data collection and accountability.

Section 3: In the Classroom

This section provides practical suggestions and examples for teachers who need strategies for welcoming newcomers to the class, supporting their language learning, and enabling them to participate successfully in classroom activities adapted to their needs. There is a strong emphasis in this section on using students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as assets that support their own learning and enrich the cultural knowledge of all students.

Sources and Resources

In order to make this book useful to educators who have an immediate need for basic background information and some practical suggestions, I have chosen not to use an academic style. Instead, I have included some key quotations and references in shaded text boxes. I have also used unshaded text boxes to explain, expand on or illustrate something in the main body of the text. There is an annotated list of sources and resources at the end of each chapter for those who wish to read in more depth or follow up in some of the academic literature.

Note: While all URLs for internet sources were correct at the time of revising the final manuscript for this book, internet addresses change frequently. It may be necessary to use a search engine to find some sites or documents.

A Note on Terminology

The focus of this book is on students who are learning the language of instruction – often referred to as their ‘second language’ or ‘L2’. This term is inaccurate, since for many of these students the language of instruction may be their third or fourth language. However, this is the term in common use, as is the term ‘second language learner’ (L2L). These terms and acronyms will be used in this book as a shorthand for ‘language of instruction’ and ‘students who are learning the language of instruction’. Their primary or first language (sometimes referred to as their mother tongue) is their L1.

In some countries, especially the UK, the term ‘bilingual pupils’ is often used. This too is problematic, because ‘bilingual’ can be interpreted very differently, depending on the context. In common usage it may mean ‘able to speak two languages’, whereas for educators it is more likely to mean ‘able to function like a native speaker of the same age in both languages’. The students who are the focus of this book are not (yet) bilingual in the second sense of the word, although they may, with appropriate support, end up as fully-functioning bilinguals. Another problem is the political meaning of the word in bilingual countries such as Canada, where ‘bilingual’ usually means proficient in the two official languages, English and French. And in the United States ‘bilingual’ usually refers to a specific kind of language support programme where the student’s own languages are used alongside or as a bridge to English. In this book the term ‘bilingual’, when used, will be carefully explained.

In English-speaking regions, L2Ls are often referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs). These students may be receiving support from an English as a Second Language programme (ESL). In British Columbia, Canada, educators have opted for the more accurate term English as an Additional Language (EAL), but ESL remains the more common term in general use. So, in this book, when referring specifically to examples from schools where English is the language of instruction, the acronyms ELL and ESL are used.

The term ‘community languages’ in this book refers to languages other than the school language that are spoken in the local community.

A Word of Encouragement

The task of educating newcomer students whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are different from those of the school may seem overwhelming. The challenges include:

- how to welcome and integrate newcomers who arrive at all ages and at all times of the year;

**I wasn't
trained
for this!**

- how to adapt the curriculum and provide differentiated instruction for children at various stages of proficiency in the language of instruction;
- how to incorporate linguistic and cultural diversity into the curriculum and into the learning environment;
- how to involve immigrant parents in the education system.

These are major challenges, especially since most teachers have not received significant preparation for teaching in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity. But, to put things into perspective, the challenges facing immigrant children and youth, and their parents, are even greater than those facing teachers. We owe it to such children to overcome the challenges that face us as educators, in order to help them meet theirs. In this way educators can help newcomers to realise their aspirations for a brighter future, and at the same time help to ensure a healthy future for the entire community.

This may sound like a daunting responsibility – but most teachers didn't choose teaching because it seemed like an easy job. Most teachers have the compassion, the imagination, and the passion for teaching that is needed in a profession where the one thing we can be sure of is constant change.

The suggestions in this book are intended to help you and your students to meet the challenges that you face.

References

- Cummins, J., Brown, K. and Sayers, D. (2007) *Literacy, Technology, and Diversity: Teaching for Success in Changing Times*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). (2006) *Where Immigrant Students Succeed – a comparative review of performance and engagement, in PISA 2003*. Paris: Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), OECD. Accessed 16 November 2011 at: <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/2/38/36664934.pdf>