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Children Crossing Borders:

Immigrant Parents and Teacher Perspectives on Preschool

JOSEPH TOBIN, ANGELA E. ARZUBIAGA, & JENNIFER KEYS ADAIR, 2013

New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation

128 pages, ISBN 978-0-87154-799-6, US\$32.50 paperback

Tobin, Arzubiaga and Adair invite us to listen carefully to the forgotten voices of our very essential members in the field of early childhood education: immigrant parents and teachers. The book is relevant in our current context of early childhood education because the population of immigrant children in the US is on the rise. Thus, the needs to better serve the preschool immigrant children are the very reality of today's U.S. preschools. The authors describe the urgency of this issue, "One in four children under age six in the United States has at least one immigrant parent and speaks a language other than English at home" (p. 2). Despite these increasing needs of immigrant children and families, the authors explain that many directors of the preschools and teachers in the study feel unprepared to work with them. Throughout the book, the authors encourage the readers to position themselves as learners and to attempt to learn from immigrant parents and teachers whose voices have often been marginalized in the field of education.

The purpose of the book, emanating from the larger research study, "Children Crossing Borders" which was initiated together and collaborated with researchers in England, France, Germany and Italy and US, is to bridge the gap between preschools and immigrant parents so that they join together to achieve educational goals for our immigrant children. The authors invoke this purpose by stating that preschools are commonly the first site "where the immigrant's culture of home meets the culture of the host society" (p. 19) and brings the issue to light through discussions of different themes in the book.

The book is organized into six chapters where the first two chapters introduce the intersection of immigration and early childhood education and research context and methods, respectively. The video-cued multivocal ethnography was used as a research method and as part of it, focus group interviews were conducted across the U.S. including Phoenix, New York, Nashville, Riverdale, and Nuevo Campo (Riverdale and Nuevo Campo are pseudonyms). The rest of the chapters discuss the main themes that resulted in the research study including curriculum, language, identity and facilitating dialogue.

The authors mainly address the play-oriented approach in early childhood curriculum and listen to the conflicting ideas from the parents about said curriculum in chapter three. Here, the immigrant teachers' voices were also highlighted emphasizing their dilemma between their professional training in progressive early childhood education pedagogy and their understanding of the culture and expectations of immigrant families. An interesting finding with regard to preschool curriculum is the parents' "conversion narrative" (p. 43). The immigrant parents eventually changed their views by seeing the value in play-oriented preschool education where they at first did not think of it as sufficiently academic and rigorous.

Language is often the biggest challenge for immigrant families when migrating to a new country. Chapter four explores how the immigrant parents position preschools as well as themselves in the process of their children's English acquisition. It also engages us to think more deeply about the social and educational constraints that influence the positions that immigrant parents are taking. The chapter also captures interesting perspectives from teachers with and without recent immigrant backgrounds. Teachers who do not normally consider themselves as

immigrants, the book called them, “non-immigrant teachers” or “Anglo teachers” (p. 64), encouraged the children to say their words in English whereas immigrant teachers did not. This presents not only their distinctive approaches they take when interacting with immigrant children but also the level of understanding and respect towards the immigrant children and their home languages. The authors also mention that teachers in the study across the country did not receive ample training and felt unprepared to work with English Language Learners.

Chapter five on identity highlights the complexity of the diverse immigrant population. Although the previous chapters include comments mainly from Hispanic immigrant parents, this chapter presents narratives from more diverse groups of immigrant parents including Pakistanis, Africans, West Indians, and so on. The authors illustrate the complex lives of diverse groups of immigrants in the U.S. with rich details portraying their values, religious beliefs, resilience, prejudice, suffering, nostalgia, as well as the stress in the processes of navigating the American culture and the education system. In addition, the role of bicultural teachers and staff are discussed as part of their dual-identity. Immigrant teachers in the study expressed their struggle to integrate their cultural understanding with their professionally learned knowledge that is rooted in the Western view of child development.

In the final chapter, the authors bring the promise of facilitating dialogue to life between preschools and parents using the conceptual model of funds of knowledge (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and discuss the challenges in doing so. Some of the reasons, among many, why it was difficult to facilitate dialogue between immigrant parents and schools were scheduling issues, their inexperience to have conversations with teachers, and the language barrier. The book concludes with a reminder in which there is no one best way to promote dialogue between immigrant parents and schools as there is no single best practice for early childhood education. This brings us back to consider multiple possibilities to find local voices and to facilitate productive dialogue that best fits within our own early childhood contexts.

Children Crossing Borders: Immigrant parents and teacher perspectives on preschool encourages the readers to position ourselves as learners to listen carefully to the voices of immigrant parents, which traditionally have been silenced behind more dominant voices. The authors argue, “We need to avoid conceptualizing immigrant parents’ perspectives as a form of ignorance while viewing the beliefs of teachers, policymakers, and experts as knowledge” (p. 9). The voices of immigrant parents might be different from “progressive” early childhood perspectives; however, those voices offer a tool for critical understanding of their lives and their knowledge about the children. Also, the authors cause us to reflect on our policies and the deep tensions with regard to educating young children of immigrants in the U.S. Moreover, they invite the readers to move to a position in which all of us, whether parents, teachers, teacher educators, are learners as well as co-constructors of knowledge (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The book is precise in leading us to hone on these precious voices to meet the needs of immigrant children in schools and teacher education programs.

Throughout *Children Crossing Borders* Tobin, Arzubiaga and Adair have led us to cross the bridge they built among the immigrant parents, teachers and preschools within the broader social, political and cultural contexts in which we all operate. Now the remaining question for the field is how to listen to the voices of young immigrant children crossing the borders everyday between the two worlds in which they live.

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