

Book Review

Lucas, Tamara (1997). *Into, Through, and Beyond Secondary School: Critical transitions for immigrant youth*. Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics. (294 pages)

Reviewed by:

M. Beatriz Arias

Arizona State University

In 1990 Tamara Lucas, along with others, published an important study which identified the structural mismatches between secondary schools and the needs of immigrant students (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990). Almost a decade later, she returns with a framework for the processes necessary to reform secondary schooling for immigrant students. In the intervening years, Lucas has been an avid student of secondary programs and reforms focused on second language learners and immigrant students. In this volume, the author distills her considerable knowledge and experience into four operating principles that are necessary to provide access and educational opportunity for immigrant students.

Into, Through, and Beyond Secondary School is the first volume in a series of four Topics in Immigrant Education, part of a program in Immigrant Education funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to improve immigrant student access to high quality education in secondary school. This volume focuses on secondary schools and immigrant students who arrived in the United States at age 11 and older, and who have had sufficient schooling for whom secondary school is a reasonable placement. It is a significant contribution to the literature on immigrant education, calling for extension of the secondary reform agenda to immigrant students through a synthesis of research and program reviews.

Lucas begins by stating that the education of immigrant students needs to be situated within the context of the educational reform movement. Indeed, most observers of secondary schools have noted that when innovations are applied, they generally do not include immigrant students.

When educators of native English-speaking students restructure schools and classrooms, they tend not to take immigrant students into account, because 1) they do not have the experience and preparation that would make them sensitive to and knowledgeable of the needs of such students, and 2) they assume that because learners of English as a second language are enrolled in special programs that address their need to learn English, they will not be part of the regular school program that is being reconfigured. (pp. 25-26)

Lucas provides examples of programs, which have developed a constructivist approach to learning and teaching for the benefit of immigrant students. We learn of the implementation of this approach at International

High School in Queens, New York, where active learning is a central part of the immigrant students' experience:

When students are actively engaged in problem solving, the chances of meeting their needs are greater than when they are passive learners under the transmission model of pedagogy. (International High School n.d. p. 3; cited in Lucas, 1997, p. 28)

The author documents the benefits of active learning for immigrant students, allowing them to learn in differing ways and reducing the reliance on language. Encouraging learners to be educational decision makers can be compatible for immigrant youth who are already playing decision making roles in the families. She is, however, quick to point out inherent limitations of constructivist teaching and learning for immigrant students from more traditional and non-European backgrounds.

She qualifies a total embrace of constructivist practices due to the fact that some students may not share skepticism regarding teacher-directed, passive approaches to teaching and learning. Also, she notes that there can be difficulties with collaborative activities, when students from different cultural backgrounds have different norms and expectations for interaction. Immigrant students' English fluency may also mitigate their ability to actively collaborate.

The reader is provided with several examples of constructivist teaching practices with immigrant students. The WISE program at New Rochelle High School promotes the role of teacher as collaborator and mentor. Here, immigrant students select a teacher-mentor who works with them on a more individualized program. These personalized efforts underscore the importance of caring adults in the student lives. These adults can help alleviate immigrant student's sense of marginalization and assist with the acculturation process. The importance of teachers who are culturally and linguistically responsive is repeatedly underscored.

One of the most recent reforms in secondary schools has been the restructuring of schools from formal organizations to schools as communities of learners. This transformation usually includes reduction in subject matter compartmentalization, and restructuring to interdisciplinary teams. Immigrant students can benefit from learner-centered schools.

If schoolwork is really organized around students needs, interests and talents" as Darling-Hammond suggests, then immigrant students will find the information, the academic content, the teachers and the personal and academic support that they need in order to learn. (p. 52)

At this point the reader may wonder: "Learner-centered high school communities? How realistic is this?" In the subsequent sections, Lucas elaborates on the framework, which she believes can make the difference in changing traditional secondary schools to immigrant-friendly learning communities. The components of this framework include recommendations to:

- Cultivate organizational relationships
- Provide access to information

- Cultivate human relationships
- Provide multiple pathways

The author's vision extends beyond the traditional role of the school to the network of institutions and organizations, which facilitate immigrant student transitions.

Educators, schools and school systems must come up with creative ways to build collaboration with health and social service agencies, community based organizations, businesses, and institutions of higher education. Such collaborations bring together multiple support systems for immigrant families. (p. 81)

Throughout the volume, Lucas stresses the need to treat immigrant students as whole people, not just learners of English. Yet it is clear that many of the programs focusing specifically on immigrant students are developed to help them only with language acquisition.

In the final chapter of the book, we are provided with reviews of programs which provide a series of pathways for immigrant students, through secondary school and to the world of work and higher education.

In the 1990's we have witnessed a growing body of literature on the context of secondary education for immigrant students. Initially, we were alerted to the structural inequalities for secondary immigrant students by Lucas and the Minnicucci and Olsen studies (1990-1991). Rumbaut and Cornelius' (1995) comparative research revealed the pervasive prejudice and persistent obstacles for immigrant youth in secondary schools. Olsen's (1997) ethnography of Madison High School demonstrated how schools co-create language, cultural, and race relations as immigrant students learned how to become American. Dentler and Hafner's (1997) multiple case comparison identified the characteristics of successful school districts which created flourishing environments for immigrant students in the Southwest.

With this volume, Tamara Lucas provides policy makers and school administrators a framework for addressing the structural inequalities which the literature has identified. The framework is buttressed with many examples of research-based successful programs across the country. This will be a valuable handbook for those who work to improve educational equity for secondary immigrant students.

References

- Minicucci, C., & Olsen, L. (1991). *An exploratory study of secondary LEP programs, vol.5, Meeting the challenge of diversity: An evaluation of programs for pupils with limited proficiency in English*. Berkeley, CA: BW Associates.

- Lucas, T., Henze, R., & Donato, R. (1990). Promoting the success of Latino language-minority students: An exploratory study of six high schools. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60, 315-340.
- Olsen, L. (1997). *Made in America: Immigrant students in our public schools*. New York: New Press.
- Dentler, R. A., & Hafner, A. L. (1977). *Hosting newcomers: Structuring educational opportunities for immigrant children*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Rumbaut, R., & Cornelius, W. (Eds.). (1995). *California's immigrant children: Theory, research and implications for educational policy*. San Diego, CA: University of California San Diego.