

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

### Assimilation, Integration, or Isolation? (Re)Framing the Education of Immigrants<sup>1</sup>

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Events in the past year, such as the Paris riots, the Danish cartoon controversy, and immigration rallies across the United States, illustrate the explosive nature of immigration debates, placing a renewed sense of urgency on matters of immigration. In particular, the recent proliferation of "violent acts" by individuals with immigrant backgrounds (such as the July 2005 London bombings and the November 2004 murder of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands) has increased concern and suspicion about immigrants, resulting in a serious immigration backlash across Europe and the U.S. Though many of the debates arising from these incidents have been sociopolitical or economic in nature, the questions of how immigration affects education and how education affects immigrants are significant, and need to be addressed, both at the macro level by policymakers and educationalists, and at the micro level by teachers, families, and community leaders.

Approaches to addressing the challenges faced by immigrant students in schools, however, continue to be entrenched in the classic assimilationist model. Rather than constructing new ways to accommodate and embrace the added diversity that immigrants bring to educational settings, schools have been viewed as the primary vehicle for "assisting" immigrant students to assimilate. This is exemplified by transitional bilingual education, which dominates the bilingual education paradigm, and devalues immigrants' rich linguistic heritages by forcing students to learn the language of their new home at the detriment of their mother tongue.

Much of the assimilationist perspective can be traced to the work of Robert Park, a sociologist at the University of Chicago from 1914-1936. Park, who was one of the first researchers of immigrant communities in the U.S. (and an immigrant himself), is responsible for two key ideas within the assimilationist camp: the melting pot metaphor and the concept of marginal men. Park (1928) believed that every society was to some degree a successful melting pot, where diverse populations merge, acculturate, and eventually assimilate, albeit at different ranges and in different ways. However, Park also maintained that immigrants were often "marginal" men and women, in that they found themselves between two cultures. On the one hand, Park believed that such marginal individuals were mired in "inner turmoil and self consciousness" (1928, p. 893). On the other hand, marginality was an indication of social innovation and cultural sophistication. Compared to the "indigenous" person, the marginal person was "the individual with the keener intelligence, the wider horizon, and the more detached and rational viewpoint" (Park, 1950, p. 375-376). Park's (1928) writings also introduced the concepts of cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism. Yet, these positive aspects of immigration have been overshadowed by the negative (on which he wrote more extensively). The commonsense appeal of the notion that marginality results in a state of uncertainty and conflict is what has allowed it to dominate the immigration arena for the last century.

Certainly, countries have historically constructed policies for how they view their own national identities, and hence, how they respond to immigrants who settle within their borders. France is a case in point; with its long history of immigration, it has established "a readiness to grant citizenship. But it has a republican conception of citizenship which does not allow, at least in theory, any body of citizens to be differentially identified" (Modood, 2003, p. 102). To be a French citizen means becoming a French man or a French woman and giving up any "pre-French" identity. The Paris riots in October and November 2005, as well as the longstanding "headscarf controversy," cast serious doubt on this attitude.

Such questioning of the assimilation perspective, particularly with regards to its applicability to more recent non-European immigrant groups, has grown in recent years (see for e.g. Alba & Nee, 1997; Conzen, Gerber, Morowska, Pozzetta, & Vecoli, 1992; Gibson, 1988; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1994; Sarroub, 2005). Moreover, globalization has significantly altered the circumstances of immigrants compared to their predecessors, as well as the nature of their social networks. Globalization allows immigrants to maintain stronger ties to their country of origin, through mass media, the internet, cheaper phone systems, and of course, more efficient travel. In effect, new immigrants are more likely to maintain an affinity to their home country and less likely to feel the pressure to assimilate.

Proponents of assimilation have not adequately addressed the impact of globalization on immigration, or the ways in which "new immigrants" and their circumstances differ from their predecessors. As a result, the classic assimilationist model ignores alternative outcomes for immigrants, such as that of isolation and (self-)ghettoization. In a recent poll conducted by the BBC, 38% of the 3000 youth surveyed felt that immigrants should "keep apart" to maintain their own beliefs and culture. The emergence of "parallel societies" in Germany is an example of this isolation, whereby Turkish immigrants have created their own society in parallel to mainstream German society, in order to maintain the Turkish language, traditions, and social mores. Among the concerns associated with isolation is the tendency of the parallel society to stagnate, as immigrants make conscious efforts to hold on to traditions that may have in fact evolved in their home country, since society is, by nature, dynamic. Isolation can thus be considered a defensive reaction to assimilation policies, neither of which is beneficial to the immigration group and host country.

Integration (what Gibson (1988) refers to as accommodation without assimilation) is where a solution may indeed exist. As an additive bicultural strategy, it allows groups to preserve their religious, cultural, and linguistic identities while fully participating in their new home country's political sphere. Though multiculturalism and the metaphor of the salad bowl have been used to describe this phenomenon, integration is far more sophisticated; it acknowledges that there is a dialectical exchange between the immigrants and their new home country, which results not only in changes within the immigration population, but also within the host country (Conzen, et. al., 1992). This process of negotiation occurs between the dominant and the immigrant/minority/ minoritized groups, and also among minority/ minoritized groups, and even within the groups themselves. Integration thus calls into question the assumption that "the host society unilaterally dictates the terms of assimilation and that change is a linear progression from 'foreignness' to Americanization" (Conzen, et al., 1992 pp. 31-32), in the case of the U.S., for example, or from foreign attributes to host citizen attributes, more generally.

The implications of these dynamics have not been adequately explored in the fields of comparative education and international educational development, despite their potential to shed light on education at the intersection of an array of social, political, and economic concerns. This issue of CICE makes a contribution towards this end by exploring questions on education and immigration: to what extent is it reasonable to expect immigrant students and families to adapt to schooling in their new countries, and to what degree should schools and school systems be held accountable for adapting to the needs of immigrant students? What kinds of alternatives exist to classic assimilation models? How do perceived educational opportunities influence immigration patterns? How is cultural diversity manifested and managed in classrooms and schools across the globe; with what effects? And finally, what impact do particular models of immigration have on the education of immigrants? The diverse collection of articles herein thus engages a range of issues from a variety of geographical standpoints, in effect, calling for a reframing of assumptions that dominate current immigration debates.

In **The Role of Gender in Immigrant Children's Educational Adaptation**, **Desiree Qin** stresses the importance of considering the construct of gender in studies of immigration. Based on findings from a longitudinal U.S. national study, Qin contributes to a growing literature on gender differences in educational attainment of immigrant students by focusing on the experiences of Chinese immigrant boys and girls in the U.S. Her research confirms previous findings that girls outperform boys academically, and attributes this to several factors: (1) changes in parental expectations after migration; (2) differences in socialization; (3) relations at school; and (4) the gendered process of acculturation and identity formation. Her research calls for further exploration into why and how gender, in particular, makes a difference in the educational choices and performances of immigrant children.

The issue of including "refugees" under the immigrant umbrella is problematized by **Jacqueline Mosselson** in **Roots and Routes: A Re-Imagining of Refugee Identity Constructions and the Implications for Schooling**. Her paradigm, *Roots & Routes*, approaches the issue of immigration from a holistic perspective and considers how the refugee women in her study view their past and future in order to create a new (fluid) identity for themselves. A second hypothesis that she discusses is *Masks of Achievement*. Here, Mosselson suggests that refugee students' high academic achievement can be a tool to hide depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and feelings of isolation. Taken together, the *Rootes & Routes* paradigm and *Masks of Achievement* can assist educators in understanding and addressing the unique needs of refugee students.

In **Education and Emigration: The Case of the Iranian-American Community**, **Sina Mossayeb and Roozbeh Shirazi** explore the correlation between perceived educational opportunity and immigration from Iran to the U.S. The authors present empirical data to support an extension to prevailing accounts of unfavorable sociopolitical conditions in Iran as push factors for emigration, to include the perception of educational opportunity, as a significant coexisting pull factor for immigration to the U.S. Their research serves as a doorway for future studies on what drives individuals to leave a country, and also, what conditions might encourage them to return.

**Metchild Gomolla** discusses the impact of the standardization movement across Europe on immigrant students in **Tackling Underachievement of Learners from Ethnic Minorities: A Comparison of Recent Policies of School Improvement in Germany, England, and**

**Switzerland.** She then presents specific interventions from three countries that respond to state legislature which seek to tackle the growing inequities in achievement and opportunities between immigrant and non-immigrant students. Her findings suggest that a whole-school approach is needed to effectively level the playing field between immigrant and non-immigrant students.

Cosmopolitanism, as an alternative paradigm from which to approach immigration issues, is explored by **Jeffrey Walker** and **Ana Serrano** in their essay, **Formulating a Cosmopolitan Approach to Immigration and Social Policy: Lessons from American (North and South) Indigenous and Immigration Groups**. In addressing the impact of globalization on immigration, Walker and Serrano advocate cosmopolitanism as a more positive and inclusive alternative to pluralist and assimilationist perspectives of immigrant education. As an example, of cosmopolitanism, they draw on the experiences of the Otavalos, an indigenous Ecuadorian group that has used its traditions to gain educational and commercial success.

Finally, in their commentary, **Globalization, Immigration, and the Education of "New" Immigrants in the 21st Century**, **Margaret A. (Greta) Gibson** and **Anne Ríos Rojas** discuss the impact of globalization on immigration. They then briefly address each of the articles, providing areas for reflection and extension.

Reframing the debates surrounding the education of immigrants in more positive terms is no small challenge. In the introduction to their edited volume, *Imagining multilingual schools*, Garcia, Skutnabb-Kangas, and Torres-Guzmán (2006) suggest:

To design spaces and both deconstruct and then construct ways for multilingual schools requires a situated view of languages and their speakers and identities, and attention to these different conditions. But especially, it requires attention to the power relations that maintain negative educational models, as well as the ensuing unequal social and political relations which represent linguisticism. (p. 20)

A starting point for educationalists and policymakers to reframe this debate, then, may be to engage the imagination to think outside of the "assimilation box" and to challenge the deep rooted assumptions in societies that focus on the negative aspects of immigration. The collection of articles in this issue of CICE brings to light issues that require further scrutiny; in doing so, they provide a variety of starting points to reframe the debates on the education of immigrants.

## Notes

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