



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1996 Volume IV: Remaking America: Contemporary U.S. Immigration

---

## **Moving Communities and Immigration into the Bilingual Classroom**

Curriculum Unit 96.04.09  
by Pedro Mendia-Landa

As a first generation immigrant to the United States working in a bilingual classroom I work and live with many of the issues confronted by immigrants any place in the world. The same can be said of the children in a bilingual classroom which is often made up of either new arrivals or second generation immigrants. Also, given the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment, expressed in the mass media, there is a clear need to educate and make others aware of who we are. We are them and their past generations of ancestors who built and are building this country. We are those immigrants to whom John F. Kennedy refers as having “ . . . enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life.” (Kennedy, 1964)

Due to the lack of materials for children in the elementary grade levels exploring immigration I embarked on writing this unit. This unit was conceived and constructed as part of a larger unit on communities. Its main purpose is to introduce the process of immigration from a country of origin to another country of destiny to elementary students in the first through fourth grades (for a brief overview of immigration in American history see (Pedraza, 1996)).

The immigration experience of an individual, or group of individuals, from one country to another country consists of a long process. The steps in this process taken by immigrants in deciding to move from one community to another, whether conscious or unconscious, become the cornerstone in the path of any immigrant’s journey to the new country of destiny. One of the objectives of this unit is to create an understanding in children at the elementary school level, as well as anyone else reading the unit, of the steps by which an immigrant arrives from a country of origin to a country of destiny. Children will become aware that there are immigrants in every country; that everyone is an immigrant or a descendant of one; that immigrants have reasons why they move from one community to another or from one country to another; that immigrants arrive to the country of destiny by different means; that immigrants need to make choices about who and what to take on their journey; and that immigrants need to adjust to a new way of life, often without their families and support systems. The unit does not attempt to cover or enter the debate on the different political and social implications of contemporary and past immigration. The unit is set up so that the children and their families, as part of their new community, self discover and share information regarding their heritage and migratory process to their new country.

Bilingual classroom students in our public schools are a primary example of moving communities and contemporary immigration to the United States (for a discussion on contemporary immigration see (Rumbaut, 1996)). They are representatives of a generation of new migrant groups in a distinctly different process of

integration to the new country of origin. The advantage that these students and their parents have, over other linguistic minority immigrant groups, is that of having organizations that speak their own language once they arrive to their country of destiny. The fact that the language of instruction in the school is the same as that of the home, allows the parents to take active participation in their children's education.

Many are the fears stated by American nativists: unless we do something about how fast children of immigrants assimilate to their new culture and unless they learn English, the fabric that holds America together will unravel. However, it is the lack of maintenance of some competence in the language spoken by immigrant parents that will be a loss to the individual as well as the community as a whole. Language represents an asset by which knowledge is transferred from one generation to the other (see (Portes and Schaffer, 1996)). The rapid shift towards monolingualism and assimilation into the majority culture becomes the flame to the melting pot instead of the condiments to the salad bowl. The main goal is to assimilate as quickly as possible without looking at the effects of doing so. Minority groups that fail academically have shown ambivalence about their value of self identity and a sense of powerlessness in relation to the dominant group (Cummins, April 27, 1996).

The school is one of the first societal organizations in which the new immigrants come into contact as they begin to integrate and assimilate into their new culture. The role of parental involvement in the education of their children has been extensively documented as a good predictor of the child's success in the classroom (Baker, 1987) and in the development and maintenance of balanced bilingual competence in bilingual children (Ada, 1993). Due to the nature and complexity of the topic, this unit of study seeks the active cooperation of parents and involves them in retracing their journey from the country of origin to the country of destiny. It makes the link between home, the school, and the parents who are the central participants in their children's transition to a new society. The parents and family become the central core of what the unit is about. They are the transmitters of their ongoing family history whether the family settled here generations ago or are new arrivals to the country. With the help of the parents and members of the community, children take pride and discover that their new community is made up of people like them: immigrants who arrived in this country with few connections, lacking often any knowledge of the language, and with very similar motives for emigration as previous immigrants.

The unit strives to reinforce and implement cooperative learning strategies where the role of the teacher is that of a co-learner and facilitator and the role of the student is that of an active constructor of meaning instead of a passive recipient (see (Kagan, 1990) for a thorough look at resources for teachers in cooperative learning). The role of parents and community are at the core of the unit. Without the explicit and continuous involvement of parents and family as role models of immigrants the unit needs to be modified and include first hand experiences with the process of immigration elsewhere in the surrounding community. The classroom is then viewed as a micro-society where the children experiment and reflect on the different roles that will enable them to become an integral and active member of the society to which they are new arrivals. The topic of exploration is immigration.

Children at the elementary level are in the process of making sense of their surroundings and already have developed certain understandings of who they are, as well as a sense of belonging to a family unit. Later on they will focus on the relation of self to family, self to school, family to community, and finally the relationship between self and community. These understandings, though with variations, are general across nationalities and cultures, and part of the normal formation of self. It is within the context of this general developmental understandings that the topic of immigration is introduced to children at the elementary grade level.

By the time children reach kindergarten or first grade they are beginning to understand that each person is a unique human being. Children, in their egocentric view of the world, understand the feeling of what a home is, and already are familiar with family traditions as well as religious rites (Feder-Feitel, 1995). Children in grades two to four can understand the feelings of loss and gain upon leaving one's home and the reasons why they have to move. At this developmental level they are able to choose personal items they would take with them if they had to move to a new community or country.

This unit has been developed with second graders in mind but can be modified to meet the needs of younger and older elementary students given the needed understanding of the developmental stage of the child as stated earlier.

## Course Outline

---

### Introduction

This is an eight day unit designed to introduce students to the experience of migration from one place of origin to one of destiny. This unit should be part of a theme on communities around the world. This unit assumes that children have been introduced to simple mapping skills in using a floor plan, neighborhood map, looking at the United States on a map and a globe, and finding directions. As each of these mapping skills was introduced, in conjunction, the concept of location, characteristics of place, relationship among places, movement, and regions would be developed. Thus, the definition of neighborhood, as parts of a community, where people live, work, and play; the way neighborhoods change over time; transportation of various kinds; and how communities vary in size and in the kinds of work that people do is something that the students have already been introduced to and understand (Parker, 1989). The previous concepts of communities and mapping skills are introduced and later reinforced using the countries and nationalities represented in their families and the classroom.

The way to empathize with and understand what the process of immigration means is through personal contact with someone who has gone through the experience. The use of literature can enhance and bring the first hand experiences of other children and immigrants into clear perspective. It also serves as a stepping stone to look at the process of immigration and meets the objectives stated earlier in the unit. Each of the following multi-structured lessons include an overview suggested grade level, curriculum focus area, materials, academic skills involved, and cooperative learning structures used. The lessons assume that the teacher and children are already familiarized with cooperative learning structures and working in cooperative groups.

### Day 1

On day 1 the unit begins by singing a song based on the traditional poem "José se llamaba el padre." The poem tells us about the family members of a Puerto Rican family and their descendants. This song is followed by the picture story by Lada Josefa Kratky (Kratky, 1993) with the same name based on the same poem. In the picture story we read how Julia, a Puerto Rican school girl, who lives in New York, gets to meet her grandparents, great grand parents, and great great-grandparents through a picture album. Through out the story we see in real life pictures how Julia's family was transformed from its origins in Puerto Rico to New York City where, Julia, our narrator presents us to her family. We meet her great great-grandparents, Juan and

Juana, great-grandparents, Mar'a and Mario, grandparents, Ramonita & Ramón, and parents, José & Josefa. We read about the kinds of jobs they did, the lifestyles they shared, the customs they had, etc. The transformation takes us from Juan's life as a farmer, in the countryside, to José's life as a trucker and Josefa's employment as a librarian in New York.

The story of "José se llamaba el padre" allows for the introduction and elaboration of the immigration process on Julia's life. This is a family to whom children can relate as they search and rediscover the family they belong to. Since not everyone shares the same kind of nuclear family as portrayed in the book, it is left to the discretion of the educator to modify the following activities to conform to the individual family unit of the students. Thus, teachers might choose to only search the maternal or paternal relatives of those children who live in households headed by a single parent. The rest of the activities would then be followed for one or the other side of the family. Adoptive and foster children could view the immigration process through their adoptive and foster family.

On this day, the children take home a letter to the parents explaining how they are starting a unit on "families and communities around the world where we have close kin." They are asked to fill in two genealogical trees, one for each side of the family, where they will write just the name of the relative going back three generations. They are also asked to send pictures of some of those relatives.

At this time children begin to find out who they are in relation to their family. They sort out how each one in the family is related to one another and use the labels for brother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin, niece, nephew, etc. They find out about how many brothers and sisters each of the parents have. They discover "new" names for parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents since these individuals are often called by loving familiar labels rather than their given names. Here learning takes place, not in the school, but in the house.

It is important that the children have the time to process and respond to the different information presented on immigration and their families. It is for this reason that the children keep a "traveling log" throughout the completion of the unit. The children write and make observations in these logs as they find information about themselves and their families, and as they travel, generation by generation, in their family history from a country or community of origin to one of destiny.

## **Day 2**

On day 2 the children reread the story "José se llamaba el padre" and focus on the town and country of origin of Julia's relatives. More often than not one of the factors that facilitates emigration to another country is the kind of social networks that the immigrant has access to. This immigration network of relatives and friends serves as a source of information and hub for newcomers. It is not surprising to find many people from the same town emigrating and working in the same place and country (for information on social networks, see (Pessar, 1995)). On this day, the children are given two blank genealogical trees and instructed to copy the names of their relatives on them. This information has already been obtained the day before. Children familiarize themselves with the names of their three previous generations. The task for day 2 is to take home the trees with the names and interview their parents to find what region, town, country each of those members in the family originated from and if they knew someone in the country or community that they migrated to. If they cannot find the name of the town, the parents will be asked for basic coordinates to locate it (i.e. near the capital, or south of such and such a town).

Once the children have completed the task of finding the names of each relative's town of origin, they are asked to have their parents locate the name of each of the towns in a map of that country of origin (maps of

Puerto Rico, the United States, and the World will be provided to them by the school teacher). Each of the family generations is color coded and distinctly marked in this map which will show their classmates where their family members used to live.

### **Day 3**

On day 3 children share their maps and facts with their group and class. As a class the students locate in a map the different students' nationalities in the classroom. In groups they sort the information by generation. First we look at the parents. Are they first, second, or third generation immigrants? In what country were they born? What are the names of the towns? Do they still live there? Did they already know anybody in the place they migrated to? The children answer these questions and discuss in groups the difficulties they had looking for the information. Through the activity children are challenged to identify and explore the role that such social networks played in their family migratory history. The teacher provides the students with time to write some of these observations down in their "traveling logs." In cooperative groups they would repeat this procedure with each of the generations. They would begin with the country of birth for the first generation and end with the fourth generation. Each member of the group would transfer the location of each of their relatives country and town of origin onto a larger map following some simple rules. (i.e. the names of all the parents in blue, the grandparents in red, great grandparents in yellow, etc.). Each of the groups would follow this activity by presenting their findings to the rest of the class. As a class they graph and locate all the countries of origin in the classroom. The same is done with the names of the towns.

According to (Taylor, 1994) there are three major factors that influence economically motivated migration: demand-pull factors that bring immigrants into another country; supply push factors that encourage immigrants to leave their countries; and networks of friends and relatives that helps them in the search of new jobs and communities. Through the following activities the teacher indirectly assists the children to come up with each of these factors in their own words.

On this day the children reread the story and focus on the jobs that each of the family members do in "José se llamaba el padre." Some of the questions we want to answer are: Why do people work? What do you need to know to do that job? What happens when there is no work in your community? Are there any differences in the kind of jobs that people do? Who can and can't do a job?. Children rewrite the names of their relatives in the blank genealogical trees and at home they attempt to learn the types of jobs their relatives did and the reasons why (where applicable) they moved to a different community or country.

### **Day 4**

On day 4, children share the information pertaining to each relative's employment first with their groups and later with the class. Each group writes a list of the jobs their relatives did and the reasons why they migrated if that was the case. The groups list the jobs performed, sorted by each of the generations. Are there any differences in each generation between the jobs that the women and the men do? What might be some of the reasons? Do more women work in the second or the third generation? What kind of jobs did our great grandparents do? What are the differences in the kinds of jobs obtained in the past and now? Why did people have to leave their communities and countries three generations ago? What about one generation ago? What are the similarities and differences you start to see between your family, Julia's, and the ones in your group?

The main objective is not only to have the students discover patterns that would help them understand how their relatives went through the process of immigration from one community or country to another, but also in searching for answers to questions regarding their own families and this process.

The individual groups would follow by presenting to the class a list of the most common jobs in each generation and the reasons they gave to move on elsewhere. A list with all the reasons why people in their families had to emigrate to a different community or country is written for the whole class. The ideas of differences and similarities of experiences among the different families in the classroom is discussed and added to the class findings.

The idea of upward mobility would then be introduced to the class in the discussion of the range of jobs immigrants obtained in the past and now. The lives of some children of immigrants who went onto have important positions in government (e.g., John F. Kennedy) and industry (e.g., Lee Iacocca) could be used as examples to introduce the concept.

The class at this time would reread the story of “José se llamaba el padre” and would look at how they arrived to the new country and what they took with them. Before the children go home, they fill another two genealogical trees with the names of their relatives to find out how their relatives migrated to the country or community of destiny and some of the most important things they took with them. They also draw a two sided picture. On the left hand side they draw what their house looked like in the country of origin and in the right side their house in the country of destiny.

## **Day 5**

On day 5, children share the information regarding how they migrated first with their groups and then with the class. How did the majority of the relatives of the migrating generation travel to the country? What are the most important things they brought with them? What did they leave behind? Each of the groups compiles the information in three lists to present to the class. As a group they discuss some of the reasons why their ancestors took certain items and left others behind. The children individually write down in their “traveling logs” what they learned about how their family traveled to the new community and what they took. The teacher would then discuss with the students past and contemporary ways of travel by immigrants: how the Europeans needed to take long trips on boats to cross the Atlantic Ocean and the perils of Mexicans having to journey by foot across the border. In talking about contemporary ways such as the plane, the teacher would make reference to the fact that some desperate immigrants now risk their lives by navigating long distances on boats, rafts, etc. such as in the case of Haitians, Dominicans, and Cubans. Finally they would compile as a class a list with all the this information.

Children, individually, make their own list of the 10 most important things to bring with you when you move to a new country and the reasons to do so.

## **Day 6**

In order for the children to understand that this nation is a nation of immigrants, on day 6, the children, in cooperative groups, create a questionnaire that they use to interview someone in the school, or home community such as the custodian, cafeteria worker, grocery owner, neighbor, etc. The questions are based on the genealogical tree information brought from home to school throughout the week. The children select the most important questions and make up the questionnaire as a group. They follow up, by interviewing at least one person, and writing the responses to their questionnaire to present to the class on day 8.

Children role play what it is like to arrive to a new country based on what they know of their experience. They use all the information gathered through out the week. As part of the culminating activity, the children make a book of their relatives and title it with their father’s or mother’s name as in “José se llamaba el padre.” The



personal narrative is added to their final book.

### **Day 7**

For many immigrants, Ellis Island, an immigration center opened in 1892, became the first stop on their journey to America. On this day the children discover similar stories to theirs and that of their families by exploring the Electronic Ellis Island: a virtual heritage museum in the World Wide Web. The students are to log to the Virtual Ellis Island Museum (see computer resources) and are asked to read and print for the class at least three stories, written by children from different countries about their families' immigrant history. They need to answer the following questions when reading the narratives: Who is writing the story? Who is it about? From what country did they emigrate? When did they emigrate? Did they arrive at Ellis Island? Why did they emigrate? Where do they live now? How does it compare to the experience of their family? Are there any similarities?.

Using these narrative as samples, the students proceed to work on their own. The children use the information gathered throughout the previous days concerning their immigrant roots and write about themselves and their families. The personal narrative is added to their final book.

### **Day 8**

On this day, children present to the class oral reports of their narratives from the previous day as well as the interview of a member of the community. They present it first to the members in their group who make suggestions regarding the presentation. Children make any necessary changes and, from each of the groups, one of the personal narratives and one of the interviews is selected to be presented to the whole class. This interview and personal narrative become part of their book created on day 6.

The children are given time to work on their "traveling logs" to write down their observations on the questionnaires and the personal narrative.

Finally, the children compile all the genealogical trees, maps, drawings, interviews, lists and personal narrative into the final book—a book about themselves, their ancestors, and community retelling their story from a country of origin to a country of destiny.

## **References**

---

Ada, Alma Flor and Josefina Villamil Tinajero; Ed. (1993). *The power of two languages: literacy and biliteracy for Spanish-speaking students* . New York, Macmillan/McGraw-Hill.

Baker, David and David Stevenson; (1987). "The family-school relation and the child's school performance." *Child Development* 58(5): 1348.

Cummins, Jim (April 27, 1996). Ninth round table on bilingual bicultural education . *Brave New Schools: the future of cultural diversity and educational reform* , University of Connecticut , West Hartford,

Feder-Feitel, Lisa (1995). "Teaching about immigration." *Creative Classroom* (November-December): 66-70.

Kagan, Spencer (1990). *Cooperative Learning. Resources for teachers* . San Juan Capistrano, California.

Kennedy, John F. (1964). *A nation of Immigrants* . New York, Harper & Row. p.3.

Kratky, Lada Josefa (1993). José se llamaba el padre. *Naranja Dulce* . McMillan/McGraw-Hill.

Parker, Walter; Barry Beyer; Jean Craven and Mary McFarland; (1989). *El mundo que nos rodea: vecindarios y comunidades* . New York, MacMillan/McGraw Hill.

Pedraza, Silvia (1996). Origins and destinies: immigration, race, and ethnicity in American history . *Origins and destinies: Immigration, race, and ethnicity in America* . Belmont, California, Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Pessar, Patricia (1995). *A visa for a dream: Dominicans in the United States* . Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

Portes, Alejandro and Richard Schauffer (1996). Language acquisition and loss among children of immigrants in *Origins and destinies: Immigration, race, and ethnicity in America* . Belmont, California, Wadsworth Publishing Company. 432-443.

Rumbaut, Ruben (1996). Origins and destinies: immigration, race, and ethnicity in contemporary America in *Origins and destinies: Immigration, race, and ethnicity in America* . Belmont, California, Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Taylor, Edward; Douglas Massey; Joaquin Arango; Grame Hugo; Ali Kouaouci and Adella Pelligrino; (1994). Theories of international migration: a review and appraisal in *Migration and trade: challenges of the 1990's* .  
gopher://dual.ucdavis.edu:70/00/Migration\_News/Working%20Papers/ciip

## Bibliography for Teachers

---

Chavez Leo R. (1992). *Shadowed lives: undocumented immigrants in American Society* . HBJ.

Excellent study of Mexican migration movement in southern California. A must read to understand the resolution of migrant and immigrant workers.

Feder-Feitel, Lisa (1995). "Teaching about immigration." *Creative Classroom* (November-December): 66-70.

Brief article on the experiences of children and immigration. Very informative.

Kagan, Spencer (1990). *Cooperative Learning. Resources for teachers* . San Juan Capistrano, California.

A central part of my teaching resources and strategies, planning, implementation, and day to day leaving as a teacher come from the book. A must have on cooperative education.

Parker, Walter; Barry Beyer; Jean Craven and Mary McFarland; (1989). *El mundo que nos rodea: vecindarios y comunidades* . New York, MacMillan/McGraw Hill.

Social studies teacher's guide on neighborhoods and communities. Has many activities and lessons. In Spanish.

Mills, Nicolaus (1994). *Arguing immigration: The debate over the changing face of America* . New York, Simon



and Schuster.

Provocative pieces on issues on immigration such as cost and benefits, race and ethnicity, etc.

## Bibliography for Students

---

The following list of books in Spanish explore some aspect of the theme on communities.

Arboites, Luis (1989). *El campo y la ciudad. Mexico* , Editorial Patria.

Chlad, Dorothy (1985). *Cuando viajo en auto* . Chicago, Children's Press.

Ostos, Suana Martinez (1987). *El comercio. Mexico* , Editorial Patria.

Spier, Peter (1987). *Gente* . New York, Lectorum Publications.

Usborne, Peter (1981). *Carreteras* . Spain, Editorial Molino.

The immigrant face:

Freeman, Russell (1980). *Immigrant Kids* . Scholastic Inc.

Kratky, Lada Josefa (1993). José se llamaba el padre. *Naranja Dulce* . McMillan/McGraw-Hill.

Levine, Ellen (1993). . . . *If your name was changed at Ellis Island* . New York, Scholastic Inc.

An excellent non-fiction book on the immigrants history and experiences throughout its history. Can be used as read aloud.

## Computer Resources

---

Alderwood Elementary School. *Electronic Ellis Island: A virtual Heritage Museum*

<http://wwwald.bham.wednet.edu/museum/museum1.htm>

One of the areas in the Electronic Ellis Island Virtual Museum. Great place to read about other children's immigration histories.

University of California, *Migration News*

<gopher://dual.ucdavis.edu>

Migration News summarizes the most important immigration and integration developments of the preceding month. Topics are grouped by region: North America, Europe, Asia, and Other.

Channel International, *Ellis Island: Through America's Gate*

<http://www.i-channel.com/ellis/index.html>

A great start to the history and relevance in American history of one of the major ports of entry to America during the second wave of immigration.

Department of Education, National Center for Research on Cultural. *Diversity and Second Language Learning*

<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/Cntr/cntr.html>

Good source of information on the topic of diversity and second language.

Department of Education, *National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education*

<http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/>

As a clearinghouse they disseminate all information regarding bilingual education. Good source of lesson plans.

Gellis, Andrew (Fall 1995). *Across the sea of time* . Sony pictures.

Well accompanied with a great number of teaching strategies and integration activities in all areas of the curriculum.

Kosten, Arthur, *The European Research Center on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER)*

<http://www.ruu.nl/ercomer/wwwvl/wwwvlmer.html#journals> and newsletters

Hosts a world-wide web virtual library on migration and ethnic relations issues. Great source of available information.

LatinoLink Enterprises Inc., *LatinoLink*

<http://www.latinolink.com/>

An excellent site to visit due to the wealth of information on activities and on Latino groups around the web. Well organized by topics, offers other links to similar groups.

Norm Matloff, *Immigration Forum*

<ftp://heather.cs.ucdavis.edu/pub/Immigration/Index.html>

Good collection of articles on various aspects of immigration by several categories such as welfare use by legal immigrants, negative impacts of immigration on minority groups, discrimination against (and by) immigrants, economic impact of immigration, etc.

Programs in International Educational Resources. *Programs in International Educational Resources*

<http://www.cis.yale.edu/pieris>

An excellent and extensive resource collection of audiovisual and printed materials available for free loan to educators who teach at the college and K-12 level.

Services Saskatchewan Internet Educational, *The evergreen curriculum*

<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/evergrn.html>

Contains a good social studies module for grade four titled immigrants and settlers.

Siemborski, Robert and Jonathan Lee. *The American Immigration Home Page*

<http://www.bergen.gov/AAST/Projects/Immigration>

This World Wide Web home page was started as part of a school project for a 10th grade American History Class. It is divided in seven categories: reasons for immigration, who were/are the immigrants to the U.S.?, destinations/ places where they settled, etc. Each of these categories is further subdivided by each of the four waves of immigration to the U.S.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>