

Forum: Immigration and ESL

(Part 1 of 3)

Immigrants Learning English in a Time of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

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Immigrants bring a wide variety of skills that favor the market productivity and add to the economic life of the country. They contribute to the development of the U.S. economy through the skills they bring to the market (cognitive skills such as abstract thinking, non-cognitive skills such as motivation and initiative, and specific skills such as the ability to operate machinery) and through the small business they own. Lancee and Bol (2017, p. 696) assert that different types of skills are relevant on the labor market: cognitive skills, non-cognitive skills, and specific skills. Likewise, Costa, Cooper, and Shierholz (2014) explain that:

Immigrants have an outsized role in U.S. economic output because they are disproportionately likely to be working and are concentrated among prime working ages. Indeed, despite being 13 percent of the population, immigrants comprise 16 percent of the labor force...the share of immigrant workers who own small businesses is slightly higher than the comparable share among U.S.-born workers. Immigrants comprise 18 percent of small business owners. (p. 3)

Despite being a significant force in the development of the economy and the contribution they make to the demographic diversification and cultural growth of the country, immigrants are currently not welcome in the United States. In fact, in 2016, the United States resettled 97,000 refugees; however, this number dramatically

decreased in 2017 when it resettled only 33,000 refugees (Pew Research Center, 2018). This decrease in numbers is the product of new immigration policies aiming to further restrict who enters the country. Mr. Trump's presidential campaign was full of anti-immigrant rhetoric particularly against Mexicans and Muslims (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). As reported by the Homeland Security webpage:

On March 6, 2017, the President issued a Memorandum for the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of Homeland Security on *Implementing Immediate Heightened Screening and Vetting of Applications for Visas and Other Immigration Benefits, Ensuring Enforcement of All Laws for Entry into the United States, and Increasing Transparency among Departments and Agencies of the Federal Government and for the American People.*

To no one's surprise, after his election, President Trump's administration has issued repressive and punitive policies and has encouraged raids performed by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) throughout the country. ICE manages detentions and the removal of people who have already been arrested for immigration violations. However, recently, ICE has targeted community centers, among

other places, offering education services to the immigrant community, and workplaces where immigrants are known to attend.

This shift in ideology criminalizing immigration has made it more difficult for the United States to honor its humanitarian obligations when the assumption is that refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in general, are potential terrorists. The public, in particular those who lack information and knowledge about the complexities of immigration and the many reasons why people migrate, may end up believing what they hear from official government sources who are against immigration and immigrants. As Olivia Waxman (2018) writes in her report for *Time*, “placing immigration in the national security sector reveals a changed focus on the idea of potential safety threats represented by immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees.” Waxman further explains that:

If immigration is an economic or work-force issue, it would make sense to place it under the oversight of departments that deal with those issues. Placing immigration in the national security sector, however, reveals a changed focus on the idea of potential safety threats represented by immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. That shift didn't start with the attacks of 2001. Immigration had been mixed in with national-security issues during the Clinton administration, too, especially after the first World Trade Center bombing on Feb. 26, 1993 (para 9).

The U.S. government has had mixed feelings about immigration and immigrants at different times in history. At present, a strong anti-immigrant sentiment has resurfaced in the country. There is no doubt that this anti-immigrant rhetoric has been promoted by the current president and the immigration policies issued during his administration.

The new immigration policies are negatively impacting immigrants living and arriving in the United States. The fear caused by these policies

is not just product of enforcing the laws, but is a deliberate tactic of the anti-immigrant strategy of self-deportation. “The Trump administration actions amount to an all-out attack on immigrants and immigrant communities” (Goodman, 2017, p. 152). This anti-immigrant sentiment has generated anxiety and confusion among immigrants who are afraid of being deported. Even immigrants who are legal residents fear losing their jobs or their work permits. They also fear traveling out of the country, there is reasonable doubt of being unable to return to their jobs and lives in the United States if they are denied re-entry at the border or the airport. Immigrants with a green card can still be deported from the United States if they have been convicted of a felony or crime, or if they fail to properly file tax returns, or if they have participated in public welfare programs. For undocumented immigrants, life in the United States is even more complicated. The Pew Research Center (2017) reports an estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States. Undocumented immigrants fear being apprehended and deported and this makes their mobility and participation in community events more difficult. They often isolate themselves and are easy prey for abuse. As Lalami (2018, p. 13) reports:

When undocumented workers are free to work, they provide cheap and unprotected labor. When they are detained in immigration jails, they become sources of revenue for private prisons, where they can be forced into unpaid labor. Either way, they make money for others, while they and their families remain vulnerable to being broken up.

Regardless of legal status (i.e., documented or undocumented), living as an immigrant has become more difficult nowadays in the United States. Rules and policies that applied to immigrants a couple of years ago do not apply today. Every day new immigration policies and difficult situations arise adding uncertainty,

anxiety, and fear to the life of different immigrant populations in the United States.

A specific example relates to how community-based education centers have been targeted by ICE due to the large number of immigrants attending the programs they offer. Among the services that adult education centers offer, English as a second language (ESL) and literacy classes constitute important services addressing the immediate educational needs of immigrant adults and families. Adult ESL programs serve a diverse array of immigrant students, including young adults, parents, and senior citizens with a wide range of educational background as well (Lukes, 2009, p. 8). Adult learners attending ESL classes come from various population groups; they could be either documented or undocumented immigrants (Wrigley, 2013; Young-Scholten, 2015), refugees (Young-Scholten, 2015), or migrant workers (McLaughlin, Rodriguez, & Madden, 2008). Due to their immigration and legal status, and their work conditions, this group of adult learners is directly impacted by immigration policies. For example, in a recent article published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Field (2017) describes the irregular attendance patterns in adult education programs across the country. The following is a summary of relevant data she provided in her newspaper article on March 22, 2017:

At Louisiana Delta Community College, in Monroe, less than a quarter of the 200 enrolled students are attending class; at Linn-Benton Community College, in Albany, Ore., no one has enrolled in the ESL program since January... In San Diego and San Jose, CA, programs have seen declines of around 15 percent, compared with the fall semester and last year... In Tupelo, MO, the number of Hispanics enrolled in GED and parenting classes fell from 25 to three, following raids in Jackson, 175 miles southwest, and the deportation of four local residents... In Illinois and California, some ESL programs have experienced drops in attendance, while others have witnessed growth... At Triton College, in River Grove, Ill., enrollment is down 15 percent from last spring. But at Moraine Valley

Community College, in Palos Hills, Ill., just 20 miles south, it is up in 9 percent... In Chicago, enrollment in citizenship classes at the Pui Tak Center nearly doubled from January to March; *Centro Romero*, a nonprofit organization in Chicago, gained 49 new students in January and 53 in February, up from a dozen most months.

Regardless of the political climate, learning English continues to be a compulsory need of adult immigrants. However, attending ESL classes has become a hazard for some immigrants who feel vulnerable and perceive attending adult education centers as unsafe.

Analysis of data from the 2012 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) that directly assessed literacy and numeracy across multiple countries indicated that U.S. immigrant adults with lower proficiency in English literacy were more likely to report poor health (Batalova & Fix, 2015). There is a direct correlation between speaking the language and the wellbeing of a community. Thus, weak skills in English translate into inadequate access to health care. In addition, not learning English can lead to social isolation and lack of participation in everyday activities beneficial to individuals and society.

Knowing English means being able to obtain a better-paying job, becoming self-sufficient, having access to services and culture, having a wider access to information and knowledge, developing a sense of belonging, and finding the courage to apply for citizenship. Often, immigrants have families who depend on them and their income. Their children may be attending school and their immediate family members (e.g., spouses, parents, and siblings) have settled in the local community where they have created a new life away from their country of origin. Most immigrants do not wish to return to their homelands; they hope to stay in the United States to make a living, even if this means hiding and limiting their circle of friends and activities to

a small segregated community or neighborhood. Consequently, those who are undocumented are the ones at most risk of being detained, deported, and lose everything they have worked for. Undocumented immigrants are aware of their reality and live in fear. There are plenty of stories of parents who have said good bye in the morning, went to work, and were unable to come back for supper. Being an undocumented immigrant means facing a constant risk of deportation.

Because of the raids performed by ICE, many ESL and adult literacy learning programs housed at community-based centers, churches, and libraries have started to offer workshops on immigration issues and have also invited expert guest speakers (e.g., immigration attorneys, counselors, and immigrant activists) to provide legal guidance and professional counseling to their students. Also, adult educators and program administrators have been forced to face the ethical dilemma of either denouncing or protecting undocumented immigrants attending their programs. For many years, adult educators and programs have welcomed undocumented students in their classes, however, recent anti-immigrant policies and the anti-immigrant political climate have made it more difficult for them to protect this population of adult learners.

Recently, instructors and program administrators have created materials such as identification cards with key phrases in English and handouts with relevant information that their students can use if they face detention or are interrogated on the street by police officers or immigration officers. Another aspect of the efforts in helping students feel safe attending ESL and literacy classes has been geared towards educating immigrants about human rights and their legal rights. Therefore, the recent anti-immigrant and political climate has created more work for program administrators,

instructors, and volunteers working at adult education centers, community-based programs, churches, and libraries. Nevertheless, more work does not necessarily means obtaining more resources or a larger budget to offer adult education services to the community.

Likewise, adult educators and program administrators have realized the importance of providing resources and support for the emotional needs of their learners. “The immigration process is unquestionably linked to major adjustment stressors” (Perez Foster, 2001, p. 154). In general, immigrants face emotional and physical challenges before deciding to leave their countries, during their immigration journeys, and after immigration. For example, anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have been associated with immigration trauma (Perez Foster, 2001). Leaving what is familiar behind, leaving their relatives behind, or leaving their countries due to war or persecution are examples of the causes of the trauma they face before immigration. Arriving in a new country is also a shock for many. Experiencing the new culture, speaking a new language, making new friends, getting a job and surviving the new place can be challenging as well. Therefore, more than ever, adult educators are now feeling the pressure to understand how to best serve their students within the present political and social conditions they face outside the classroom.

As Pratt-Johnson (2015) noted: “In recent years, laws that appear calculated to harass or punish immigrants –especially undocumented immigrants and their families- have been passed in many states, such laws also provide a source of on-going stress and anxiety for English learners and their families” (p. 144). A learner who does not feel safe in the classroom will hardly be able to concentrate, study, or participate in

adult education or language learning. Through the ESL and literacy classes, immigrant adults should be able to acquire essential tools such as communication strategies to share feelings, ideas, and doubts with other people. Above all, they should feel safe and engaged in learning (Buttaro & King, 2001).

Furthermore, community and adult education centers have realized the need to offer additional civics classes and citizenship classes since many of their students have decided to become American citizens. According to recent Bureau of Immigration statistics reports, there are around 13.1 million permanent residents living in the United States. Of these, 8.8 million are eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship (see <http://dhs.gov>). Following the immigration bans implemented by President Trump's executive order, many students attending ESL and literacy programs decided that applying for U.S. citizenship would be more efficient than renewing their green cards or work permits. However, according to the quarterly report issued by Homeland Security, "approximately 264 thousand aliens obtained lawful permanent resident (LPR) status in the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18 Q1). They represent an almost nine percent decrease from the same quarter in FY 2017." In other words, even if more immigrants decide to become U.S. citizens, this does not necessarily mean they will be able to reach their goal. Becoming a U.S. citizen is a long, expensive, and complex process.

As a result, adult learning centers have started to organize workshops to help their students with citizenship applications and are also offering free classes to help applicants prepare for the U.S. citizenship test and interview. There are many materials available online to study and prepare for the citizenship test (test and interview DVDs, study guides, U.S. history cards, citizenship test

apps, etc.). Nevertheless, not knowing how to use the computer or lacking confidence about how to file the citizenship application online are barriers for some immigrants and could become a service provided by adult education centers. The application form and the application process are long and a bit intimidating if the applicant lacks in computer literacy or does not understand, read, or write English. Being able to prepare their U.S. citizenship form online (Form N-400) could save immigrants a lot of money and could help them avoid hiring an immigration attorney, which adds to the already high cost of the citizenship application.

In conclusion, becoming an immigrant to the United States whether documented or undocumented, is more complex and less attractive at present. A strong anti-immigrant sentiment has resurfaced in the country making immigrant life more difficult. Immigration policies are a moving target and are negatively affecting individuals, families, and entire cities. The work of adult educators and literacy educators has doubled. They cannot just teach language, or math, or literacy. They must teach the whole individual and assist immigrants in identifying resources and providing for their emotional needs. More than ever, adult immigrant learners need to be resilient and persistent if they wish to learn English and succeed in their immigration journeys. However, learning English will not be enough; they will also need to learn how to deal with immigration trauma, learn about their legal rights, and make informed decisions about where to study, work, and live. Achieving the *American Dream* has become harder than ever; only those who are resilient and resourceful will succeed. More than ever, adult immigrants need to make use of their talents, human capital, and social capital to be able to stay and prosper in the United States.

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Forum: Immigration and ESL*(Part 2 of 3)*

How Policy Changes Affect Local Immigrant Learners

Susan Finn Miller

“Teacher, what’s going to happen now?” This was a question nervously posed to me by an adult learner in my English as a Second Language (ESL) class on Wednesday, November 9, 2016, the morning after Donald Trump was elected president of the United States.

Civics education is an important component of what we do in adult ESL classes. Therefore, in the fall of 2016, although most of the adults in my class were not yet citizens, and, therefore, not eligible to vote, I wanted the learners to understand the upcoming election and especially the significance of red and blue states as reflected in the electoral college. While learners had strong political opinions about who they wanted to win the election, my stance was always strictly nonpartisan. Over several days, learners worked in small groups to research the number of electors in each state, and they learned that the candidate who won at least 270 electoral votes would become president of the United States even if that person did not win the popular vote. Students learned that in 2000 Al Gore lost to George W. Bush, even though Gore had won the popular vote that year. In 2016, we saw electoral college history repeated.

While Clarena Larrotta has offered a national perspective on the impact of recent immigration policies on the lives of the adults we serve

in literacy programs, my goal is to share the experience of one community.

Since 1991, I have worked in a local adult education program in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, teaching English to immigrants and refugees. Like many adult literacy practitioners, I have met people from around the world in my classes, many of whom have faced unspeakable tragedy and pain in their lives before coming to the United States. For many decades, our country, through the goodwill and generosity of our citizens, has been a refuge to those in need.

In fact, my city has a long history of welcoming those fleeing danger and persecution. There is a large community of Mennonites and Amish whose ancestors found a new home in this area seeking religious liberty centuries ago. Because welcoming the persecuted is part of our heritage, many people currently living in Lancaster share a conviction that helping those in need is a moral imperative.

In January of 2017, the BBC featured Lancaster in an online video calling my city the “**Refugee Capitol of the U.S.**” As reported by the BBC, “Since 2013, Lancaster has taken in over 1,300 refugees,” which is “20 times per capita more than the US as a whole.”

Among our more recent arrivals are families from

Syria and Somalia, two countries whose people are now banned by our government's travel restrictions. Tragically, Syrians and Somalis who have already settled in our community fear they may never again see some of their loved ones who were left behind. In addition to these travel restrictions, the current administration is also seeking to end the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program, which has provided legal protection for individuals from certain places who have experienced tragedy due to extreme violence, war, or natural disaster. Many thousands of individuals from Sudan, Haiti, El Salvador, and Nicaragua under TPS, who have been living in our country for decades, may now face deportation.

I have met and taught hundreds of individuals from these countries in my ESL classes over the years. I know a woman, who at 19 – fully aware of the dangers – walked to the United States from El Salvador. There was a man from Somalia in my class whose response to the oral language assessment question “What do you like about Pennsylvania” was “There is no war here.” I know a woman who was late for a meeting with me because she had to wire \$20 to her daughter and grandchildren back home because they hadn't eaten in three days. I've encountered individuals from Haiti who lost everything, including family members, to the devastating 2010 earthquake.

I've met many refugees and immigrants who have been traumatized by violence, poverty, and natural disasters, and yet the enormous stamina and resilience most of them demonstrate is a testament to human potential and strength. I know foreign-trained physicians from Haiti, Cuba and Iraq who are now providing much needed health care here in the U.S. A brilliant former student from Iran received an award for the highest score on the GED and is now attending college pursuing a career in health care. There are many refugees, for

example from Nepal and Myanmar, who volunteer their time in our public schools because they want to give back. There are untold numbers of hard-working immigrants who have started their own successful businesses.

In our community, we've heard of raids in workplaces, and immigrants being deported. We worry that raids might even happen in our classrooms. Learners who had TPS status for many years are concerned about their families being turned upside down if they are forced to leave. How do families who have children who were born here and are U.S. citizens handle such chaotic disruption? What of the rights of natural born citizens? Also heartbreaking are stories we hear from those who dreamed they would one day have the opportunity to be reunited with family members by sponsoring them to come to the U.S. Those dreams have been shattered.

Unfortunately, those making immigration policy are blind to the many powerful ways immigrants contribute to our communities. These new immigration policies, in addition to the overwhelming stress experienced by those with uncertain status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the horrific treatment of families seeking asylum at the border where children, including even infants, have been separated from their parents, are transforming the United States from a country that has long reflected the words etched on our beloved Statue of Liberty to one that cowers in fear and lashes out cruelly to those who are different.

With the critical distinctions that Native Americans were here long before any Europeans arrived and many Africans were brought here in chains to be enslaved, the United States is a nation of immigrants. A majority of us can harken back to ancestors who came here seeking

safety, freedom and a better life. While each new group of immigrants has often faced persecution, diversity has made our country strong and, dare I say, “exceptional.”

I’m proud to report that, in Lancaster, leaders from government, business and civil society have recognized that immigrants enrich our community and are necessary to keep us economically strong. In 2017, Lancaster was one of 25 cities to receive technical assistance from the New American Economy and Welcoming America. This award included a research study to explore the impact immigrants and refugees have had on our community. Through the Gateways for Growth study, we learned that these new residents “contribute over **\$1.3 billion** to our annual GDP, this translates to **\$155 million** in state, local, and federal taxes paid, bringing **\$440 million in yearly spending power** to our community.” Immigrants are also “more likely to be self-employed and are responsible for creating or retaining over 1,000 manufacturing jobs” in our community.

As noted by John Feinblatt, President of the New American Economy, “While Congress debates the value of immigration, in city after city, the evidence is already in—immigrants revive neighborhoods and drive economic growth.” Local leaders in Lancaster, including the president and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, have echoed this sentiment with conviction and enthusiasm during public gatherings and in newspaper op eds.

Due to the understanding and vision of local leaders that immigrants are needed to keep our economy strong as well as the compassion of much of the faith community and others in our area, I believe that we will weather this current hateful storm. As noted in the Gateways for Growth report “immigrants and refugees are part of our

community’s DNA.”

It is abundantly clear that this new political landscape has created challenges for adult educators and the learners we serve. While we need to be respectful of diverse points of view, many of us are understandably deeply concerned. Thankfully, several years ago, our community formed a coalition of local organizations to support immigrant and refugee integration. This coalition, which meets regularly, represents refugee resettlement agencies, providers of health care, adult and K-12 education, housing, and employment services as well as representatives from the various immigrant groups and the faith community. There is even a volunteer group that restores computers to donate to immigrants and refugees in need. Through our coalition, we are seeking to educate both those at risk from the new immigration policies and those of us who work with immigrants and refugees. Workshops on the legal rights of immigrants living in the U.S. have been offered to immigrants and the general public. We are learning how to legally protect the most vulnerable.

On November 9, 2016, like most of our country and the world, the learners in my ESL class were shocked when Hillary Clinton lost the electoral college. Despite my deep sense of foreboding about the future, I realized how important it was for me to convey to the class the principle of the peaceful transition of power, which is perhaps the single most essential key to maintaining a stable democracy. That day in class, we listened to excerpts of President Obama’s speech as well as Hillary Clinton’s concession speech. In their words, both Obama and Clinton highlighted this quintessential aspect of our democratic system.

I told the students that it was not possible to predict exactly what the future would bring

with this new president. However, almost immediately we began to see the hateful rhetoric toward immigrants and refugees turned into policy. In response, there has been an enormous groundswell of activism across the nation, as well as in our community, among those who are standing up for what is right and good.

On November 8, 2016, our country changed in dramatic ways; however, given the vision and compassion of the American people as well as

the ingenuity, strength, and resilience of the immigrants and refugees who have been woven into our communities, I have to remain hopeful that goodness will prevail. I have said many times that each day seems to bring a new heartache, but despair is not the answer. The antidote to despair is to work with others to actively advocate for what is right. Thankfully, over the last two years, we have seen that joining together with those who share our values has become commonplace across the country. We must be steadfast in these efforts.

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Forum: Immigration and ESL*(Part 3 of 3)*

Showing Up for Immigrant Learners (and Each Other)

Andy Nash, World Education, Inc.

We are witnessing a mounting campaign in this country to blame immigrants and refugees for our economic insecurity, rampant violent crime, and a diminished social safety net. Under this banner, our government is using immigration policy to turn away asylum seekers and refugees, separate children from parents, and threaten the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) of communities that have lived in the United States for a generation and consider this their home.

Turning us against our immigrant neighbors is not a new trend. It is an example of a time-tested divide-and-conquer strategy that is quite effective at redirecting legitimate grievances (low wages, unaffordable health care, etc.) away from the powerful who benefit and toward an easily identifiable (by accent or skin color) “other.” And the result of this targeting, as Larotta notes in her piece, “Immigrants Learning English in a Time of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment,” is that many immigrant groups are reporting increased incidents of intimidation and harassment, and many English language learners who come to our programs describe living in fear.

Educators everywhere are trying to figure out how to address this new reality – how to make sure that all students feel safe and able to learn, how to encourage critical thinking about daily events, and how to break

down the manufactured fear of black and brown immigrants that keeps us from coming together to build alliances. None of us wants to be the frog in the proverbial pot that waits as the temperature slowly rises until it’s too late to do anything.

There are things we can do. Some involve challenging the conditions that fuel immigration - the poverty, repression, and danger that drives people from their homes - and others focus on creating the conditions *here* that nurture connection to one another and discovery of the commonalities and differences in our experiences.

In adult education classes, we can demonstrate our commitment to creating safe learning spaces for all, and to thinking critically with our students about the causes and effects of this ongoing campaign. Below, I share and build upon some of the promising practices I’ve seen implemented in adult ABE and ESOL programs.

For Classroom Teachers

In the classroom, we need to think first about immediate harm reduction, and then we can plan for a curriculum that includes serious practice of the critical analysis skills highlighted in our rigorous learning standards.

Build safety through community. Immigrants

attend all kinds of adult education classes, not just English language classes. Many teachers include activities that engage students in sharing their experiences and finding their commonalities – not just personal characteristics such as how many sisters they have but talking about how an issue touches their lives on a daily basis – getting their kids to eat, finding a living-wage job, dealing with weather (climate change) disasters. Sharing experiences puts the voices of students at the center, developing their agency in naming, discussing, and analyzing issues and ideas. And building relationships with real people is a powerful inoculation against hate.

There are practical ways to do this kind of community-building that also attend to language learning, with all the related grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary building. You can find wonderful examples in the archived webinars of the Immigrant Learning Center¹ and the New England Literacy Resource Center². See also *The Change Agent*³ and Welcoming America's toolkit for adult educators⁴.

Teach analysis of the big picture. While it's important to note current events as they are happening, educators don't have the capacity to respond to daily upheavals – nor is it helpful to focus on what drains and disheartens. We can instead help students step back and study an issue more deeply by organizing instruction into thematic units that encourage students to name their concerns, ask and investigate their own questions, and develop the language skills to express informed opinions. This would include opportunities to consider “why” questions – why this? why now? – that honor the ability of students at any level to draw on their learning and their life experiences to analyze what they see.

Here's a quick mention of some topics, skill areas, and questions you might include in a unit:

- Media literacy: What is reliable news? What is fake news? Why is there fake news? How do we distinguish objectively descriptive from subjectively persuasive language and evaluate the bias of a text/source? (Resources: Mind Over Media⁵, The News Literacy Project⁶, “Don't Get Duped”⁷)
- History: People created our institutions and systems (our schools, our economic system, etc.) and people can change them. History offers up many examples of how communities and social movements have been able to advance justice in the past and can do so again. History also helps us understand the origins of current policies, attitudes, and behaviors. But since that history is usually written by the “victor,” we need to check multiple sources and remind students to consider: Whose perspective is reflected here? Whose is missing? (Resources: Teaching for Change⁸, Zinn Education Project⁹)
- Critical analysis: How is a problem defined by different stakeholders? What questions do we need to ask in order to fully understand an issue (e.g., Who benefits? Who is hurt? Who is making money?)? (Resources: Right Question Institute¹⁰)

In developing a unit on Immigration (for ESOL or ABE), in addition to all the level-specific lessons we might do about the fact that people throughout history have been on the move (using maps, graphs, images, and other visuals to support learning), we might consider the categories above to help frame class discussions and activities:

Building community: What do you know about your own family origins (Native American, immigrant, refugee, or enslaved)? What is a question you have about your family origin?

History: Why do people come here? What is

happening in their countries? (Extra credit: What role has the U.S. played in their countries? In your own?)

Critical analysis: How do asylum-seekers describe their reasons for coming to the border? What does the administration suggest are the reasons? What does the evidence suggest?

Media literacy: How is terminology used (asylum-seekers vs. invaders) to influence a reader about immigration? What other language devices are used to persuade readers?

Find each other. It can feel disorienting to work in a field that has become almost solely focused on workforce preparation in a time when basic human dignity and connection are on the line. To keep moving forward, concerned educators need to support one another as we continue our own self-education, speak up where we can, share resources, and reflect on the assumptions underlying our work. What are the implications, for example, of defining the purpose of adult education to be almost exclusively well-being through individual employment? What will we do when we're expected to turn away students based on a newly criminalized immigration status?

We can help each other grapple with these perplexing questions and find the courage to follow the internal moral compass that points us toward protecting the rights of our immigrant (and otherwise targeted) friends. (Resources: LINCS discussion boards, Facebook groups, local immigrant and racial justice groups).

For Program Leaders

Program leaders have a crucial role to play in communicating support for all students.

Explicitly demonstrate solidarity with vulnerable students. Adults who are at risk of being targeted

(immigrant, LGBTQ) anywhere in the community need to know that the program is a safe space. Leaders in many programs are making it clear (through banners or public statements) that hate is not welcome in their programs and that all residents are invited there to study and learn. Such declarations set the tone of the program and model how to speak up in solidarity with our neighbors.

Organize program-wide projects. Celebrations of any sort that bring students together informally to learn, mingle or break bread do a lot to build community and dispel fears. And as Larotta suggests, creating space for program-wide learning (bringing in speakers to talk about community resources, events, or issues; organizing student-researched voter education campaigns; hosting “Know your Rights” workshops and legal clinics; or hosting an awareness event about the upcoming Census 2020 – the importance and the risks) opens up opportunities for students to interact about a topic of common interest. Very important is introducing students to community organizations, both service organizations that can help them build their support networks and activist/advocacy organizations they can join to organize collectively for themselves.

For Adult Education Advocates

Advocate for inclusive services. Funding sources each come with their own rules and regulations. At a time when federal and some state funders are looking for ways to limit the access of our immigrant students to all kinds of services, it is incumbent upon us to push back on those restrictions and to seek out other funding that allows us to continue full services to all residents of our communities. The recent proposal to broaden the way the government determines who may be a “public charge” (and therefore ineligible for public services) is just one example of efforts

to vilify and exclude current and future language learners from our programs.

Build alliances. Adult education advocates have historically been guided by the maxim that we need to focus our advocacy message exclusively on adult education funding. And while that targeted message has yielded certain results, the practice of staying in our advocacy silos competing for funds has not advanced a united cross-issue movement that reflects the intersectionality of our students' (and our) struggles. Adults are not just immigrants or students or parents or patients or workers, and now more than ever we need to build alliances with all the movements working to help people get free. The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education, for example, has allied with labor organizations on the *Fight for \$15* and with

immigrant rights organizations on many issues; and conversely, those organizations have added adult education funding to their own priority lists.

Conclusion

I would like to be part of an educational community that helps one another find the courage to creatively resist unjust immigration and economic policies where we can. I don't want to have to look back one day and wonder what I was doing as xenophobia was being used to destroy lives and entrench the powerful. I am so grateful to the adult education coalitions, justice organizations, and individual educators who are refusing to be too busy to respond to these dangers. I hope we can all find ways to show up for our immigrant learners and each other.

For More Information

- ¹ Immigrant Learning Center (www.ilctr.org/promoting-immigrants/ilc-workshops/)
- ² How to be an Effective Ally to Adult Students, The New England Literacy Resource Center (<https://bit.ly/2AyjzaU>)
- ³ The Change Agent magazine for teaching resources and compelling student writings (changeagent.nelrc.org).
- ⁴ Welcoming America's *Instructors' Toolkit for Building Bridges Across Communities* (<https://www.welcomingamerica.org/content/instructors%E2%80%99-toolkit-building-bridges-across-communities>)
- ⁵ Media Education Lab's Mind Over Media webpage (<https://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/>) offers teaching resources to support students to think critically about propaganda and the messages all around them.

- ⁶ The News Literacy Project, (<http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org>) is a national education nonprofit offering nonpartisan, independent programs that teach students how to be critical media consumers in the digital age.
- ⁷ Alicia Shepard, Don't Get Duped, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/2016/12/12/savvy-news-consumers-guide-not-get-duped>)
- ⁸ Teaching for Change (teachingforchange.org)
- ⁹ Zinn Education Project (Zinnproject.org)
- ¹⁰ Right Question Institute (rightquestion.org)