

Re-imagining Immigration in a Country of Immigrants

Nils Jaekel & Elizabeth Fincher

The United States prides itself on being a nation of immigrants, one of diverse backgrounds that came to the country seeking a better life. While this representation of the United States remains a strong pull factor for immigrants, public debate has been contentious and has been further dividing the political spectrum. Re-imagining immigration in a country of immigrants involves examining positive perceptions of early waves of immigration in the United States to the present-day climate of minoritization: from the melting pot to the border wall. As a nation of immigrants, does the melting pot ideology accurately reflect the cultural diversity of Americans today, or does multiculturalism better describe the nation? Considering the future faces of the United States, is the American Dream within reach for immigrants? This article discusses implications for classrooms globally to foster empathy and skills of critical cultural awareness in evolving intercultural relations in education.

*Die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika sind stolz darauf, eine Nation von Eingewanderten mit unterschiedlicher Herkunft zu sein, die auf der Suche nach einem besseren Leben ins Land kamen. Während diese Darstellung der Vereinigten Staaten nach wie vor eine starke Anziehungskraft auf Immigrant*innen ausübt, wird eine kontroverse öffentliche Debatte geführt, die das politische Spektrum weiter spaltet. Eine Neuinterpretation von Immigration in einem Land von Eingewanderten erfordert es, sowohl die positiven Einstellungen gegenüber der frühen Einwanderungswellen in die USA in den Blick zu nehmen als auch das heutige Klima der Minderheitenbildung: vom Melting Pot (Schmelztiegel) zur Grenzmauer. Spiegelt die Ideologie des Melting Pot die kulturelle Vielfalt der heutigen Amerikaner wider oder beschreibt Multikulturalismus die Nation besser? Mit Blick auf die zukünftige Zusammensetzung der amerikanischen Gesellschaft, ist der American Dream für Eingewanderte in Reichweite? Dieser Artikel diskutiert Implikationen für den Unterricht global, um Empathie und Fähigkeiten kritischen*

kulturellen Bewusstseins bei der Entwicklung interkultureller Beziehungen in der Bildung zu fördern.

Introduction

The melting pot imagery of merging all nationalities into one may be obsolete, as other descriptions of the United States as a multicultural or diverse society are more frequently used academically. In a polarized political climate, some U.S.-Americans may not perceive the ideology useful. However, U.S. schools revitalized the American Dream with the melting pot symbolism in the 1970s (Smith, 2012) and in the twenty-first century, as a prominent topic in English as a Foreign Language textbooks.

Vital to American national self-understanding is the knowledge of its populations' background, in which the melting pot has been perpetuated through time. American nationhood origins and diversity are commemorated as the United States has historically sought to establish a sense of unity to prevent economic, social, and political division among its increasingly diverse populace (Smith, 2012). The endeavor to maintain national unity in the face of increasing diversity has led to depictions of "the American immigration experience as a melting pot narrative" (Smith, 2012). What the melting pot narrative resolves is the nationalists' desire for unity and cohesion. In other words, the unique immigration experience and the diversity of the country necessitates a certain homogenization to achieve the goal of national cohesion.

This article revisits how the melting pot concept has provided a way of understanding immigration and defined the country's national identity as a nation of immigrants created by a blend of cultures and ethnicities. Despite significant refutation of this national ideal in extant scholarly literature, the narrative has been utilized over recent centuries to justify U.S. American immigration policy and legitimization.

The United States of America has been a country of immigrants since its founding. People have followed their dream of a good life and freedom in the land of opportunity throughout U.S. history. From its colonial beginnings to its inauguration as a nation, attitudes and views on immigration policy have been ambivalent. The article discusses whether the melting pot metaphor still has traction in the shifting immigration landscape and whether the ideas and ideals that constitute the American Dream as well as its success stories (Clark, 2003) remain a driving force of immigration to the United States today. The melting pot narrative in connection to achieving the American Dream of prosperity has been subject to significant critique, despite its vastly supported conception of American identity and early interpretation of Anglo-conformity (i.e., “Americanization” or an ethno-cultural archetype involving the loss of one’s heritage). Coining the term cultural pluralism in immigrant integration, Kallen (1915) critiques the process of melting different nationalities into a mold as it betrays democratic ideals and also implies that individuals cannot forcibly change cultural practices nor inward beliefs, values, or unalterable ways of being (i.e., ethnicity), stating “the likelihood of a new ‘American’ race is remote enough” (1915, p. 194). Arguing that a more democratic ideal and reflection of a multicultural society exists today, scholars illustrate the great benefits that Americans will reap from the maintenance of distinctive cultures in cultural pluralism (Bourne, 1916; Kallen, 1915) and structural pluralism (Gordon, 1964; Smith, 2015). Nevertheless, immigration advocates, multiculturalists, and restrictionists all use the melting pot symbolism to fortify and globalize the melting pot as fundamental to American identity.

The article aims to discuss critical trends of immigration across time, building on the theoretical grounding of intercultural communicative competence (ICC; Byram, 1997) and the acculturation model (Berry, 2005). While the central purpose is to outline the past, present, and future trends of immigration to the United States, it also seeks to relate to immigration in a glocal context, i.e., considering global and local implications con-

cerning intercultural competence. Assimilation has been used synonymously with “disappearance” or “erasure” of cultures in American society through the social construction of homogenized Americanization. The melting pot ideal exemplified the cohesion of Euro-American, prosperous “whiteness” in which the blending of a mass of people results in the loss of cultural origins (i.e., customs, languages). Both historically and presently, this stance on assimilation has been exclusionary to many immigrant groups and defined American identity. A re-examination of national identity that depicts multicultural representation is critical to re-imagine immigration policy and pedagogy as we look to the future in developing intercultural competence.

Cultural Framework

A central theme of the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) framework is the interaction of five factors that constitute the ICC schema. Immigration is a particularly relevant topic in education as it allows us to evaluate our own country’s policies, history, and current circumstances (skills of interpreting and relating; see Byram, 1997). This, in turn, enables us to study immigration in the context of studying the United States, a country that has been portrayed as and identified itself as a country of immigrants. However, in order to dive deeper into the topic, we need to take account of the facts and understand historical developments, current policies, and attitudes (knowledge; see Byram, 1997) to discover how immigration continues to shape our individual and societal contexts (skills of discovery; see Byram, 1997). Relativizing yourself and valuing other people, “different in respect of the cultural meanings, beliefs and behaviors they exhibit” holds an important role in developing one’s attitudes (Byram, 1997, p. 34). These attitudes play a central role when covering themes such as immigration in the foreign language classroom. The focus is not only on understanding how other countries have approached immigration over time, but it is on critically looking inward and to understand the diversity of the societies we live in and to value the different

attitudes represented in our societies. The socio-political nature of the topic enables us to develop and strengthen critical cultural awareness (education). To a large extent, ICC can be viewed as a foundational element in developing independent thinking and citizenship.

A second important model in the context of immigration is John W. Berry's (2005) model of acculturation and the means of assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization in immigration phenomena, defined as interactions, contact, and negotiation among diverse cultural groups, implicate orientations towards adjustment to U.S. culture. Differences in how individuals with varying levels of group identity acculturate are contingent on aspects of conflict, i.e., how well they adapt, and the negotiations required for the betterment of intercultural relations. In 2021, the primary means of immigration to the United States was through family-chain migration. Immigrant adjustment is a complex process; Berry (2005) views acculturation as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (p. 698). Yet, acculturation is fluid among diverse immigrant groups based on intervening factors such as generation status, legal status, country of origin, native language, class, gender, ethnicity, and social status. Equally important in Berry's model are the attitudes of the majority culture's members towards the immigrant culture and immigration in general. The four types of acculturation in his model are (1) assimilation, (2) integration, (3) marginalization, and (4) separation. Assimilation (1) assumes the abandonment of original cultural norms to adapt to the majority culture. Some societies employ policies of assimilation to eliminate diversity, while other societies attempt to exclude diverse populations through segregation or marginalization (Berry, 2005). In contrast, integration (2) implies an accommodation between immigrant origin culture and the receiving country. Immigrants who integrate may experience better adaptations and different outcomes than marginalized immigrants or those who assimilate to U.S.-American culture.

Marginalization (3) is exclusionary, as immigrants have little possibility or interest in the maintenance of their culture of origin (i.e., forced cultural loss) and fewer interactions or relations with others due to discrimination or separation. When immigrants value the maintenance of their heritage culture while also avoiding relations with others, then separation (4) is the outcome (Berry, 2005). In societies that support cultural pluralism (i.e., multiculturalism), means of acculturation tend to not impose strict cultural change or loss (i.e., assimilation) or exclusion (i.e., marginalization or segregation) of immigrants (Berry, 2005).

Historical and Political Perspectives

U.S. immigration policy has shifted considerably over time from the first colonies, in many of which slavery was the law of the land. While early on, the British Crown controlled immigration, it was soon largely unrestricted for immigrants arriving from Europe. In addition to early settlers, slaves accounted for a significant number of forced immigrants. Between 1514 and 1866, more than 300,000 slaves were sold to the British colonies (Slave Voyages, 2021). During the Civil War, the United States sought immigrants to fill labor shortages and join their troops. However, soon after the war, limiting access would become a major point in U.S. immigration policy. The United States restricted immigration based on race (Immigration Act of 1875, Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the Immigration Act of 1917), political beliefs (Immigration Act of 1903), or lifestyle (Immigration Act of 1903). Asian immigrants would remain a target for immigration policy until after World War II. The rhetoric used in immigration acts, which was denying certain groups their humanity, affected whether immigrants would have the opportunity to live in the Promised Land. The latter term is of course based on Judeo-Christian beliefs and dates back to the Puritan heritage; it thus also hints at who was welcome and who was not. During the time of early immigration policies in the late 1800s, Ellis Island, located close to the Statue of Liberty, became the famous entry point

to the United States. It processed more than 17 million immigrants from 1892 until 1924. On the West Coast, Angel Island served the same purpose from 1910 to 1940 for about 500,000 immigrants from Asia and Oceania. Following World War I, the 1921 Emergency Quota Act limited the number of immigrants from particular countries to 3% of the foreign-born population in the national census from 1910. Immigrants from Northern and Western Europe benefited from a higher quota and likelihood to be admitted to the United States than other immigrants from non-European countries. A labor shortage during World War II resulted in the Bracero Agreement (1942), which was implemented to recruit agricultural laborers from Mexico to fill the rising need for seasonal workers. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 established the principles for immigration regulation that are still enforced today. The law capped immigration for the first time for all and created a preference system based on family-chain migration with legal permanent residents. Three-fourths of admissions were reserved for family arrivals, which is still the case under current policy. The Immigration Act of 1965 drastically changed the immigration system, and powerful demographic forces described below continue to shape current and future generations. After the September 11 attacks in 2001, the U.S. government expanded litigation with immigration enforcement bureaucracy to authorize appropriations for enhanced border security, facilities, and security-related technology to share “alien” admissibility and deportation-related information (Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002). Following the terrorist attacks, the federal government established the Department of Homeland Security (Homeland Security Act of 2002) to reflect national concerns about immigration.

Present immigration policy has since evolved to govern the status of young unauthorized immigrants through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA Act of 2012), while other policy proposals have targeted those from countries with a prevalent Muslim majority (Executive Order 13769, also known as Muslim ban or travel ban). Recent policy proposals aim to reverse U.S. immigration restrictions (2020-2021); mostly out

of necessity, as the number of U.S. green card holders has sharply declined. Current U.S. immigration policy promises to restore the national identity as a country of immigrants. However, current immigration rhetoric begs the question of whether or not the United States acts as a welcoming recipient to both immigrants striving for prosperity in America and those forced to resettle.

American Dream

A significant driving force behind immigration has been the portrayal of the United States as a land where dreams come true, one of opportunity and freedom. In 1931 writer and historian James Truslow Adams coined the term and spoke of “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement” (J.T. Adams, *The Epic of America*, 1931, p. 404). The American Dream incorporates these ideals drawing from the Declaration of Independence, including the pursuit of happiness. The national story of immigration includes the American Dream. Higher ethnic group identity and belief in meritocracy are linked to stronger collective action that may improve the immigrant group’s social position (Wiley et al., 2012). The promise of social advancement is a major motivation to migrate. It leads to the question: Do new immigrants perceive the United States to be a meritocracy or not, and do they perceive assimilation of language and culture as a means to climb the economic ladder?

As a synthetic construct, the American Dream has changed over time, as the reasons for immigration have been different. It entails the materialistic belief in continuous progress, challenging new frontiers, and the belief in the attainability of success, economically or otherwise. The melting pot ideology and the understanding that people have come to the United States to unify as one is also inherent in the American Dream. It builds on faith in the constitutional foundation and the laws that govern the rights provided by it. Hard work, persistence, and dedication are core requirements to succeed in fulfilling your individual American

Dream. Americans pride themselves on the ideal that there is work for everyone and that it is up to you to want a better life.

The Declaration of Independence in 1776 proclaimed “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (Declaration of Independence, 1776). This excerpt of the preamble outlines the ideals and philosophical foundation of the nation. It is also evidence that the founding fathers themselves followed their own, Eurocentric American Dream. The ideals outlined in the Declaration of Independence have had a tremendous impact on the identity of the United States since its inception. They are also at the core of why immigrants have left their home country and taken on the often treacherous journey.

From the late eighteenth through the twentieth century, waves of immigration from Europe to the United States were largely drawn by religious freedoms, the promise of political participation, a lack of opportunity in their home country or hunger, like the potato famine in Ireland (1845-1849). Others were drawn by the American Civil War and the opportunity to fight against slavery and a chance to settle in the United States (1861-1865). During other immigration waves, people were fleeing the horrors of World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945). From a Eurocentric view alone, faith, freedom, (economic) opportunity, upward mobility, and personal well-being constitute the core driving forces for immigration.

Immigrants from Asia, particularly China, immigrated for similar reasons. They were drawn to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century by the Gold Rush on the West Coast, the economic uncertainties in China, and for promises of the Declaration of Independence. Asian Americans contributed significantly to the building of the transcontinental railroad, the backbone in conquering the Western frontier. Yet, their American Dream was met with resistance by policies preventing immigration and naturalization of Asians from 1875 to 1965. For many, the American Dream and the ideals propagated by the melting pot never materialized.

From the early days of the first colonies to the westward expansion across the continent, people faced different challenges in their pursuit of the American Dream. The United States has sought to conquer various, changing frontiers. While it used to be the Western frontier until it was declared closed in 1890, or space in the early 1960s, the new frontier might lie in societal challenges such as social and racial justice, and equal access to health care. This raises the question of whether hard-working immigrants who take on low-paying jobs can climb the economic ladder to pursue their American Dream. The reality is that the fruition of one’s Dream is not guaranteed, and history has shown how different parameters, such as a welcome culture, laws, as well as pure chance, can be determining factors. Hard work and ingenuity alone are not sufficient to succeed. For many, it may not have been about their own Dream, but rather became a Dream deferred to the next generation. First-generation immigrants generally earn less than those who have been in the country longer, and while an equilibrium might be achieved for some over time, others never reach wage parity (Wiley et al., 2012). Second-generation immigrants may benefit from the cost the first generation paid in pursuit of the American Dream, which may then be in reach for future generations of immigrants.

These trends also raise equity issues surrounding immigration. Are all immigrants treated equally, or are some preferred or privileged over others? Educated immigrants who land higher-paying jobs may benefit from significant support from their local community. Similarly, immigrants that already have family in the United States may be particularly privileged. They are following their own Dream while not having to face all of the struggles. Refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants, on the other hand, may find their pursuit of happiness and the attainment of the American Dream to be out of reach. This ideal has produced a thriving, diverse society in which hard work is a rite of passage to the Dream. However, from an intercultural lens, a diverse, multicultural America may more accurately reflect the lived experiences of immigration today. Americanism has instantiated a shared spirit of homogeneity in “one America,” a sentiment of conformity to

Anglo cultural standards, and as a biologically determined feature governed by scientific rules of heredity. Adherence to principles of American superiority and Anglo-Saxon Protestant dominance undercut the symbolism of America's democratic ideals, causing its ultimate demise as a vastly accepted symbol of American identity and fomenting tension that characterizes America's response to immigration.

Meritocracy remains a central pillar in U.S. ideology. Those who are able to successfully follow this path may encounter few barriers to success. However, a pluralistic society is often only able to maintain a feeling of national identity and meritocracy by accepting a general disconnectedness among different ethnic and cultural groups. The increasing U.S. immigrant population implies that the American Dream is still alive, and the United States remains a land of opportunity for many in their individual pursuit of happiness. Whether the Dream of individual prosperity comes true depends on how immigrants define this Dream and how experiential factors sustain one's ideals or shift into something entirely different. If the American Dream becomes an empty promise when differing ideals clash across intercultural contexts, then even a steadfast belief in a meritocracy that serves one's advancement depends on whether individual mobility is attainable for all immigrants.

Melting Pot

The U.S. population continues to diversify; thus, it is imperative to explore the driving demographic and political shifts in immigration as an impetus for national cultural identity. The melting pot metaphor (De Crèvecoeur, 1782; Zangwill, 1908), core to US-American identity and its message, holds tremendous power regarding the national imagination of immigration.

In his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) John de Crèvecoeur described America as a new nationality, formed by the people who migrated there. He saw American nationality as unique because it included many different ethno-cultural

backgrounds, or "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men" (De Crèvecoeur, 1957, p. 39). He further observed that by virtue of people of diverse backgrounds living in close proximity they shared experiences, which helped them to assimilate and form a new identity. Americanization and assimilation are described by the process of "melting together." Americanization means that an individual encounters assimilative forces and loses one's previous cultural identity; assimilation is a process in which social pressure causes people to absorb a mostly white, Anglo-Saxon culture and heritage. This phenomenon is the story of many American immigrants; however, does this notion that all immigrants become Americans, driven on the crucible of democracy, reflect the lived experiences of immigrants today?

The controversial yet dominant metaphor of the United States as a melting pot of diverse immigrants forged into twentieth-century, mainstream society in a play by Israel Zangwill, *The Melting-Pot* (1908). The play promoted assimilation as integral to Americanization. The melting pot ideal seemingly represents America in strictly cultural terms, disregarding disparities in systematic assimilation between racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. Immigrants who fled religious persecution hold onto hope and aspirations in the United States amidst the struggle and strife of poverty and anti-Semitism, to which conformity to Anglo cultural standards as a symbol of American identity creates tension in a proclaimed land of religious freedom. As immigrants grapple with their sense of faith, language, and identity in a place with Anglo-dominant principles of superiority, the result is shifting demographic character leading to cultural pluralism. According to Zangwill's portrayal of the national myth (1914), the message is to embrace the uniqueness of American identity in shared multicultural experiences as a process of amalgamation, not assimilation. Nevertheless, rather than a crucible of promise, the melting pot has been an instrument in division and a rationale for restriction in immigration. Horace Kallen also contributed to defining the identity of American nationhood in an attempt to rebrand

the melting pot to a cultural pluralistic philosophy in his 1915 essay in the *Nation* (Kallen, 1915). The prior sentiment in the *Nation* conveyed that new immigrants threatened the balance in the country by introducing too many lower-class workers, males, and hard-to-assimilate elderly people; concluding in an 1891 essay that the European influx “is not related to us in race or language, but has habits of thought and behavior radically foreign to those which have so far prevailed in the US” (The New Immigration, p. 210). The resonant metaphor in the 1890s was to “shut the golden door” or increase immigration restrictions, and it was reimagined in Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s poem “Unguarded Gates” (1892), connoting protection against intruders (Prchal, 2007). Both the melting pot and the golden door imagery continue to have a profound historical impact that resonates in immigration debates today.

At the turn of the twenty-first century during comprehensive immigration reform, President George W. Bush asserted that it is America’s duty to “uphold the great tradition of the melting pot that welcomes and assimilates new arrivals” (Bush, 2007). Bush perpetuates the notion of the enduring strength of the melting pot imagery when he states that “our nation has been strengthened by generations of immigrants who became Americans through patience, hard work, and assimilation” (Bush, 2007). The number of immigrants peaked in the early twenty-first century, representing almost 15% of the U.S. population, and the influx of immigrants is projected to continually rise (Pew, 2015). Immigration scholarship defines contemporary migration phenomena as a “momentous social force, compelling Americans to face the challenge and opportunity of integrating and harnessing the energy of the greatest number of immigrants in the nation’s history” (Suárez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008, p. 1), which is reflective of the early waves of U.S. immigration when aspirational attitudes drove migration. Throughout U.S. immigration history, the melting pot imagery supported the resupply of an ever-growing powerful labor force. The United States as a nation built on promise has exalted individualism since colonial times but ultimately relies on the strength of its diverse community.

Who is America, as a family, a state, and a nation? Over the course of its history, the United States seemingly has redefined its national identity while cultural and political roots have stood firm. A part of the identity of an American immigrant is to re-imagine a future life for oneself, mirroring the U.S. immigrant experience throughout history. This concept came to the fore during the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign and remained current in the 2020 U.S. presidential election cycle. Immigration policy and rhetoric shape the perceived identity of the nation’s people, as well as drives inequities among diverse socio-cultural groups. Many Americans, especially people of color and newcomers, have seen people in power putting those they decide worthy of becoming American against the excluded or minoritized, thus deepening the gap between privilege and expandability. To contextualize the relationship between social class and ethnic identity in the United States, it is imperative to understand how the nation’s founders defined its people and civic purpose and what it means in the twenty-first century.

Most Americans understand that the United States’ founders unanimously adopted the Latin phrase “e pluribus unum” – “out of many, one” as a secular national motto (1782). The idea of “one America” is embedded in society’s standardized ideology in an enduring aspiration for a common language and culture. This exemplifies how the melting pot imagery has been perpetuated as a normative, standardizing ideology. Quite differently, a recent reaffirmation of the 1956 motto “In God We Trust” by Congress stems from the legacy of modern American conservatism. During the Eisenhower administration (1953-1961) religion was propelled into the public sphere by adding the phrase “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance (Kruse & Wilcox, 2015). The assumption that the United States were and always will be a nation under God dates back no further than the 1930s when corporate America united in opposition to FDR’s New Deal to create an axiom for a Christian America. But whose God does this motto include? How does a nation of immigrants that values religious freedom represent itself to new arrivals, based on the venerable E Pluribus Unum, to define American society today?

The future identity of America as 'one nation' has been historically developed by and for immigrants, yet the nation's understanding of immigration continues to change. For example, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has changed its mission statement to eliminate a phrase defining America as a "nation of immigrants" (2018). Eleanor Acer, the director of Human Rights First's Refugee Protection program defended the rebranding: "Our nation is one built by immigrants - removing this language does nothing to change that fact" (Gonzales, 2018).

Re-imagining the Future Generations of Immigrants

The formation of a nation's identity may rely on assimilation, which has long been promoted as a benefit to any society as immigrants can strengthen the workforce and fill labor shortages. Migration is promoted by work opportunities, family reunification, as well as causes that force people to seek refuge (war, climate change, persecution in one's home country). Successful assimilation contributed to changing market needs and further development of the receiving country. The majority of lawful, permanent admissions to the United States are family-based and employment-based preferences. However, labor migration may be temporary, leading to different levels of investment and acculturation. Investing in the labor skills of new arrivals increases their average earnings and provides a pathway to permanent citizenship. Increased social tension or separation can affect a person's belief in the benefits of meritocracy; therefore, motivation to integrate or social tension can cause tribulations.

Over time, legal proceedings over immigration preference have enabled diverse immigrant families to create new lives in the United States but contrarily hindered integration for other diaspora group members whose legal status is unresolved. While Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants are among the oldest and newest inhabitants in the United States, the number of Mexican immigrants from rural Mexico has increased dra-

matically since the 1990s (Pew, 2012). Shifting immigration policy changes the U.S. workforce, yet dependence on immigrants for a booming economy persists.

The United States is at a crossroads with regard to its future immigration policy and its identity as a country of immigrants. For decades, the debate surrounding immigration has been increasingly heated, divisive, and further polarized the nation. The demographic changes occurring in the United States, in part a result of the resurgence of immigration to the US since the 1970s, as well as racial and social tensions have exacerbated this division further. The past election cycles and the rhetoric employed serve as ample evidence that both sides of the political spectrum see the need for action. It has been on the political agenda for years, but clear majorities have yet to emerge.

Under Presidents Obama and Trump, executive actions rather than laws defined immigration policy, as the United States, particularly during the Trump administration, reduced the flow of immigration. Proposals to increase protection of young unauthorized immigrants protected under Obama's DACA Act were negated in 2017. Young arrivals residing in the U.S. who benefited from this policy were at risk of losing work benefits and the right to a pathway towards citizenship. The attainment of lawful citizenship status continues to be a critical trend.

According to public polling (Pew, 2020), a U.S. majority agrees in prioritizing the increase of available border patrol to process unaccompanied minors quickly. This prioritization differs among partisan preferences, from making it more difficult to be granted legal status in the United States to increasing humanitarian aid in Central American countries, where many asylum seekers originate. General public concern over unlawful immigration declined; however, since spring 2020, more Americans view unlawful immigration as a national problem to be addressed (Pew, 2020). Anti-immigrant fearmongering at the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States in

March 2020, may have enhanced the immigration concern among the general public. What is vexatious about anti-immigrant sentiment is its impact on the U.S. economic and demographic future that is actually driven by immigration.

An outlook on the path that U.S. immigration will take is not as easy to make as for other Western countries and political organizations. The European Union is also debating changes to their policies and strategies to mitigate crises at their borders. Unique to the United States is its image as a country of immigrants and the changing demographics. Notably, demographics shifted as immigration reform policy promoted employment-based preference over time. Nevertheless, family-based preference remains the predominant type of immigration to the United States (family-sponsored 20%, and immediate relatives 46%; see fig. 1). With roughly two-thirds of new legal immigration resulting from immediate family or family-sponsored migration, demographic changes will continue to shape America's future. Children and youth make up about 33% of U.S. resettled immigrants, for which prior education, age, migration history, and expectations for new homes vary considerably (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). Projections suggest that by 2065, 18% of people in the United States will be first-generation immigrants, and an additional 18% second-generation, U.S.-born inhabitants with foreign-born parents (Pew, 2015). The American Dream is undoubtedly still alive, and more than ever are people pushed away from dire circumstances in their home countries and drawn by America's promises. The future depends on if and how new arrivals assimilate to American culture or if local cultures across the United States continue to shift to a cultural pluralistic society.

Practical Implications for the Classroom

A critical role of the foreign language (FL) classroom is to assess and demystify the overly positive, Eurocentric imagery of immigration to the United States that is still prevalent in many English textbooks. Teachers need to go beyond the

textbook and draw on current authentic resources to contrast historical events with current developments in the United States. Building on Byram's framework, the FL classroom needs to embrace critical comparisons of U.S. immigration history and current policy to one's own context. How are other countries approaching immigration? What has public rhetoric surrounding this complex topic been?

The ICC framework guides engagement in such rhetoric so that language learners can better navigate critical issues. ICC skills supersede the international context of language classes and are just as well aimed at understanding local culture and bridging cultural differences. Skills of interpreting include reflecting on attitudes and developing knowledge about one's own culture to make individual connections across social contexts. Curricula that provide a diverse perspective inform what learners need to know to interpret immigration topics and social justice issues globally. FL classrooms must offer a multicultural perspective in curricula inclusivity that can contextualize abstract ideas and frame them in learners' lived experiences. A shared authority classroom emulates Byram's political education model to include all learners as valuable re-

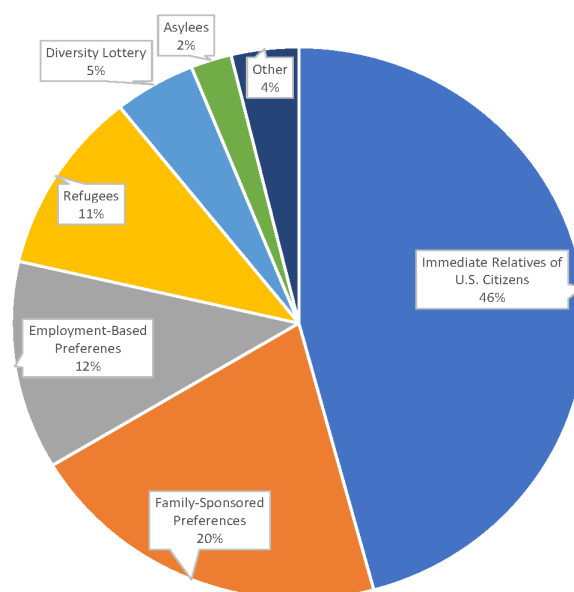


Figure 1: New lawful permanent residents by category of admission in 2017, Department of Homeland Security, 2018.

sources with equitable authority in discourse using multicultural curricula. Learners gain skills to work with others, solve problems, support peers, and have more authority in their learning, which creates mutual trust and shared responsibility. A shared authority culture allows learners to engage with content to think and rethink their beliefs and develop metacognitive awareness, a crucial part of empathetic relations in an ICC approach.

Cultural perspectives are furthered when narratives about immigrants and their experiences are reiterated in curricula, media, and within community networks. Social justice issues are better understood and examined through narratives that embrace critical trends (i.e., unlawful immigration). When unlawful immigrants are assumed to be criminals, bringing disease across borders, such ideas should be critiqued and countered by combining critical media literacy with skills of discovery. Interactive discovery shows how immigration issues impact a learner's world and foster an intercultural understanding that goes beyond the classroom.

FL classrooms must also discuss counternarratives (i.e., stories not often told) of immigration to develop empathy through alternate points of view. Narratives that reflect the past, present, and future realities of immigrants, cross-culturally and internationally, are a way to develop an informed perspective. Counternarratives in texts, poetry, literature, and anecdotes create a discourse that develops an empathetic and informed lens to consider the systemic effects of immigration law, such as U.S.-Mexican immigration and its long-term prevalence in the United States. Reflection on intersections of history, immigration, and narratives can add significant points of view. For example, immigrants detained at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay used words that they etched on the barrack walls to share their thoughts and feelings as critical expressions to combat isolation, silence, and alienation. Teachers interested in this topic will find a rich resource in Angel Island Immigration Foundation's "Writing on the Wall" project at <https://www.aiisf.org/poems-and-inscriptions>.

Guiding questions for teachers should be based on students' lived realities with both historical and global perspectives in mind. Language learners build on cultural knowledge through connecting to prior learning and background experience. For example, making connections to European culture to bridge diverse, global perspectives to one's own culture is necessary. Open-ended questions are key to guide critical classroom discourse. The ultimate question may be, if the United States can continue as it has without immigration reform. What might the situation be like forty years from now in the United States and in our own context, and what do we want them to look like?

The following narrative discussion questions foster empathy and intercultural competence:

- Who tells the story and why? Why do some not get to tell their story?
- How might the story be different if it was told by someone else (immigrant or non-immigrant)?
- What is the author's point of view and why does it give only a partial account?
- What connections do you make with a person's thoughts and feelings in a story?
- What motivates a person to leave his or her country? Compare two accounts of immigrating to (your country) from a cross-cultural perspective.
- How welcomed might a person feel when they arrive in the new country? What challenges might they face? What successes?
- How does the history of immigration in the United States compare to your country and to the current circumstances?

FL classrooms act as an important intermediary in immigrants' reception and provide context to the development of critical cultural awareness. Teaching civic-mindedness with immigration topics using the ICC model involves the capacity to respond to a situation or circumstance, a media report, or a new refugee crisis, to make complex topics accessible across disciplines and ages. As learners develop positive intercultural relations, they must see through various cultural lenses that expand their horizons beyond the social class or gender-centric viewpoints they

may encounter in their home communities, media, or prior schooling. Educators have a unique opportunity to equip students with civic skills, appropriate language, and critical thinking skills that enable learners to function in and contribute to a diversifying country. Increased critical cultural awareness moves beyond a local perspective to consider the cultural values all immigrants bring. Framing ideas within an ICC model includes immigrant narratives as an integral part of a language curriculum.

Literature

- Adams, J. T. (1931). *The Epic of America*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013>
- Bush, G. W. (2007). *State of the Union. Vital Speeches of the Day*, 73(3), 94.
- Clark, W. A. V. (2003). *Immigrants and the American Dream: Remaking the Middle Class*. Guilford Press.
- De Crèvecoeur, M. G. J. (1782). "What Is an American?" Letter III of Letters from an American Farmer.
- Department of Homeland Security (2018, November 6). <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/visualization/2017>
- Kallen, H. M. (1915). *Democracy Versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality*. *The Nation*, 100 (2590), 190–194.
- Kruse, K. & Wilcox, B. (2015). *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*. Basic Books.
- Migration Policy Institute (2015, October 15). *Fifty Years On, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act* Continues to Reshape the United States. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/fifty-years-1965-immigration-and-nationality-act-continues-reshape-united-states>
- "The New Immigration." *Nation* 17 Sept. 1891: 209–210.
- Gonzales, R. NPR (2018, February 22). *America No Longer A 'Nation of Immigrants,' USCIS Says*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/22/588097749/america-no-longer-a-nation-of-immigrants-uscis-says>
- Pew Research Center (2012, April 23). *Migration Between the US and Mexico* <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2012/04/23/ii-migration-between-the-u-s-and-mexico/>
- Pew Research Center (2020, August 20). *How US Immigration Laws and Rules Have Changed through History*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>
- Pew Research Center (2015, September 28). *Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to US, Driving Population Growth and Change Through 2065*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/>
- Prchal, T. (2007). *Reimagining the Melting Pot and the Golden Door: National Identity in Gilded Age and Progressive Era Literature*. *Melus*, 32(1), 29–51. <https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/32.1.29>
- Slave Voyages (2021). <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>
- Smith, D. M. (2012). *The American Melting Pot: A National Myth in Public and Popular Discourse*. *National Identities*, 14(4), 387–402. doi:10.1080/14608944.2012.732054
- Suárez-Orozco, C. & Carhill, A. (2008). *Afterword: New Directions in Research with Immigrant Families and their Children*. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2008(121), 87–104. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.224>
- Wiley, S., Deaux, K. & Hagelskamp, C. (2012). *Born in the USA: How Immigrant Generation Shapes Meritoc-*

racy and Its Relation to Ethnic Identity and Collective Action. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(2), 171–180. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027661>

Zangwill, I. (1908). *The Melting-pot: Drama in Four Acts*. Macmillan.

Zangwill, I. (1914). *The Melting-pot: Drama in Four Acts* (New and rev. ed.). Macmillan.