

## **Children of Immigration, (2002)**

**Suárez-Orozco, Carola and Suárez-Orozco, M. Marcelo.  
Harvard University Press, 306 pp.**

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This book explores the question of why it is that while most immigrants enter the United States with optimism, many of their children are at risk of being marginalized and deprived of opportunities for a better future (p.3). The authors examine the social attitudes, opportunities, barriers, as well as the psychological experiences of immigration, and analyze how these factors may affect children and their families. The book presents a well-organized and detailed research-based portrait of immigrant children and their families. Because both authors are immigrants and have lived and studied in the United States, they seem to have a good idea of the obstacles that these kids must overcome in order to go through the process of acculturation in a new country.

According to the authors, many children of immigrants enter the United States due to several reasons. They hold either documented or undocumented status in the new country. The dream that their children may have a better future drives parents to immigrate in the first place. But age, language skills, and the enormous pressures to support the family financially limit the opportunities of many immigrant parents. This book explains the psychological and social implications of immigration in great detail.

The legal status of an immigrant child influences his or her experiences and opportunities. One of the most demoralizing aspects of undocumented status is its effects on the educational aspirations of immigrant children. The authors argue that most immigrant children, including those without legal documentation, enter the country with high hopes of becoming well-educated. However, there are a large number of immigrant children who must attend schools that are overcrowded, understaffed, and that have outdated curricula. Many of these students cannot enter the postsecondary system or obtain financial aid because they lack full legal status.

*Children of Immigration* suggests that immigrants have generated extreme anxieties among the American people. While some claim that immigrants are a burden to the U. S. economy, the authors demonstrate that they contribute far more to the economy than they utilize in services (Passel, 1994; Fierman, 1994; Francese, 1994). They also point out that leading American economists have a positive opinion of the economic implications of immigration. While some people in the United States worry about the costs incurred in educating immigrant children, in the long term the costs of not educating them can be even greater. Since the majority of undocumented children will remain in the country, and many of them will eventually become citizens, it is important that these children receive full access to schooling and health services.

In terms of language, there is a belief among the American people that immigrants refuse to learn English. But according to the authors, research shows that the longer the children are in the country, the more likely they are to distance themselves linguistically from their parents and eventually lose their native language (Portes and Hao, 1998), given that the children learn English more quickly than their parents. In fact, they are often placed in situations where they must advocate for them. The result is that their parents usually find themselves at a great disadvantage in guiding their children in the new land.

While some children of immigrants identify with the dominant culture, others develop an adversarial attitude toward it, rejecting the institutions of the dominant culture. These kids are more likely to drop out and, consequently, face unemployment. They may also be drawn to gangs, since gangs often offer them a sense of belonging.

The authors also discuss the subject of bilingualism and bilingual education. While some Americans are in favor of bilingual education, others are opposed to it. Because bilingual programs are ambivalently supported throughout the nation, they do not offer the courses that immigrant students need to prepare for college. There is the tendency that once a student enters the "ESL" or "bilingual track", he/she will have difficulty switching to the college-bound track. Under such circumstances, many immigrant high school students may not continue their education.

This book is relevant and useful to practitioners working with children in school settings, health care settings, and social agencies, as well as scholars in immigration studies, cultural psychology, and anthropology. The book could be of great help for educators, especially in the United States. Since schools are sites of cultural special contact between new arrivals and American citizens, educators must be aware of the barriers that immigrant children face. If teachers understood these kids' needs better, perhaps they would not show such negative attitudes toward them.

#### Reference

- Portes, A. & Hao, L. (1998). *E pluribus unum: Bilingualism and loss of language in the School generation. Sociology of Education 71: 269-294.*