

## CHAPTER 2

### *Welcoming Newcomer Students*

**AS WE HAVE DESCRIBED** in Chapter 1, an increasing number of immigrant families have experienced trauma prior to and during their journey to the U.S. Many are dealing with the aftermath of harrowing events including violence, extortion, and extreme poverty. Once they arrive in the U.S., challenges continue as they struggle to earn a living, find housing, and put food on the table. Further, xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments that are currently on the rise in the U.S. are contributing to the fear, mistrust, and psychological distress felt among immigrant communities (Langhout et al, 2018).

Many newcomer students suffer emotional challenges and economic insecurity as a consequence of having been separated from family members due to deportation or detention of a caregiver/parent and/or having to flee desperate situations in their home countries. The threat of deportation can also contribute to anxiety and psychological stress among youngsters. As researchers have found, immigrant children who have witnessed or heard about immigration raids often feel abandoned, isolated, fearful, traumatized, and depressed (Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2017). Researchers have also found that the threat of deportation may lead to poorer school performance on the part of immigrant children (e.g., Brabeck & Xu, 2010).

Because many newcomer children are separated from their caregivers/parents or forced to emigrate alone or with someone who is not a parent, immigrant families do not necessarily fit the traditional mold of parents and children. Once in the U.S., newcomers' caregivers may be older siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, or family friends, and they may not know these individuals well or even at all. Newcomer children may be missing a parent or close relative that they left in their home country and struggling with their role in new or reconstituted family units.

In this chapter, we will describe what advocacy-oriented teachers need to know and do to make sure that schools and classrooms are safe, nurturing, and welcoming environments for newcomer students and their families. The chapter will address the following topics:

- Newcomers' initial welcome to school;
- Newcomers' rights and protections;
- Learning about newcomer students;
- Addressing newcomer students' socio-emotional circumstances and needs; and
- Establishing a welcoming and nurturing classroom and school community.

## **Newcomers' Initial Welcome to School**

Imagine dropping your child off at an imposing building that, while called a "school," is unlike the schools you or your children attended in your home country. Hundreds of children roam the hallways and a huge asphalt yard, shouting in a language you cannot understand. A bell rings and the students file into 30 different classrooms. School personnel speak to you in an unfamiliar language and ask you to sign papers you cannot read. You drop your child off in one place—an office—but you do not know where to find your child at the end of the day. You know children are required to go to school and you hope your child will learn English and adapt quickly, but you are nervous leaving your child in such an unfamiliar environment. Imagine how your anxiety would be compounded if you had already been separated from this child for months or years while you were in immigration detention centers or were in the process of obtaining legal documentation (and had yet to obtain this documentation). You may wonder, "Are these American strangers to be trusted?"

When a newcomer family arrives at a school, school personnel and teachers can engage in a variety of practices to welcome them and ease this transition. Caregivers/parents and students must be greeted warmly and given an orientation to the school in their native languages, if they do not speak English. During this initial orientation, we advise school personnel to do the following:

- Learn and use a few phrases, including greetings, in newcomers' home languages when meeting newcomer families and students. In the case of those languages for which you do not have access to translators, try using the Internet to come up with some appropriate phrases.
- Make it clear that you are eager and happy to have caregivers/parents and their children as members of your school community.
- Inform caregivers/parents where they can obtain translation services (e.g., from the district). (See the section in Chapter 9, "Communicating with Caregivers/Family Members," regarding tips for getting support with translation.)
- Provide caregivers/parents and students with a tour and an explanation of school norms and expectations that may be unfamiliar, including:
  - Pick-up and drop-off procedures;
  - Whether or not students are expected to wear uniforms;
  - Whether meals are available to students and what can be done to reduce or waive the cost of meals;
  - What services are available at the school (e.g., after-school care, medical, dental, counseling);
  - School policies regarding student behavior; and
  - How to contact teachers and office staff.
- Introduce caregivers/parents to their children's teacher(s) and school-community liaison(s). We have worked with teachers who visit students and their families at home prior to or soon after they are enrolled. (See the section, "Making home visits," in Chapter 9.)
- Pair students and family members with other members of the school community. A newcomer student can be paired with a peer buddy who can, for example, give the newcomer student a tour of the school, help orient the student to the school, find classes and the bathroom, and/or negotiate the cafeteria system. The school can also recruit families to be buddy or host families for newly arrived families to help orient them to the community.
- Provide invitations to school-wide events and meetings intended for caregivers/parents (e.g., back-to-school nights, Parent Teacher Association [PTA] meetings, meetings related to immigrant rights,

parent-teacher conferences). Invitations and information about events and meetings should be in family members' native languages.

- Describe ways that caregivers/parents can participate in the children's schooling, including in decision making regarding the curriculum, school budget, and school policies (e.g., via participation in organizations like the PTA or School Site Council [SSC]). In some states, like California, caregivers/parents of English learners participate in special committees to advise the principal and staff about programs and services for English learners. Members of these committees are provided with opportunities to receive training to support them in this activity. For additional information about California's English Learner Advisory Committee, go to <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/cr/elac.asp>.

## **Newcomers' Rights and Protections**

Newcomer families need access to all sorts of information related to the schooling of their children and the wellbeing of their entire family. Schools are often the first place where newcomers gain access to this information. Some districts have established community centers around schools, where a library, clinic, various social service agencies—including those providing mental health and legal services as well as basic necessities—are located on the same campus as the school. Descriptions of community schools are available at the Coalition for Community Schools at [http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/national\\_models.aspx](http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/national_models.aspx). Many school districts throughout the country have a variety of practical resources for newcomer families. It is helpful to know what resources are available in your school and district so that you can inform families about them. Here we provide an overview of the kinds of information that we recommend including in orientations, as well as literature we recommend giving to newcomer caregivers/parents, who may be unaware of these resources. Because many families are focused on a number of pressing needs (e.g., obtaining employment, housing, food, healthcare, and other basic goods and services), they may not act upon this information when they first enroll their children in school. For this reason, it is important to provide parents with information of this kind on an ongoing basis.

## Educational Rights, Policies, and Regulations

There are a number of rights and policies that relate to the schooling of newcomer and immigrant students. In order to effectively welcome, work with, and inform newcomer students and their caregivers/parents, we believe that it is important for teachers to be familiar with the following rights and policies, which are described more fully in a U.S. Department of Education publication, *Newcomer Toolkit* (2016, 2017):

- According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), schools cannot share student information, including their citizenship status, if they know it, without parental consent. Given the current political environment, this issue may prevent newcomers from even approaching government institutions like schools and enrolling children in school (Langhout et al., 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, and the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2015), this prohibition against the schools' sharing such information must be communicated to newcomers' caregivers/parents in a language they can understand.
- Schools cannot require caregivers/parents to apply for or reveal their Social Security numbers (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). Some school districts ask for children's Social Security numbers so that they can use them as identification numbers. If a school or school district asks for a student's Social Security number, it must: (1) inform caregivers and the students that providing the number is voluntary and that refusing to do so will not prevent their children from enrolling in or attending school, and (2) explain how the number will be used.
- Schools need to inform caregivers/parents about what their child is learning and doing at school as well as provide regular reports of their progress.
- Schools need to inform caregivers/parents about testing policies and practices. (See Chapter 4.)

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) provides caregivers/parents of English learners with a Bill of Rights at <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/multilingual-learners/process/bill-of-rights-for-parents-of-english-language-learners>. The following is an abridged version:

## **ABRIDGED VERSION OF THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BILL OF RIGHTS FOR PARENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

As the parent or guardian of an English Language Learner, you have the right for your child to receive a free public education in the school district where you live. This is true regardless of your or your child's immigration status or what language you speak. You also have the right to:

1. Enroll your child in school without being asked to share your or your child's immigration status.
2. Have an interpreter or translator help you communicate with your child's school about your child's education.
3. Have your child placed in a bilingual education program when there are 20 or more students in the same grade who speak the same language. You may opt out your child from a bilingual program. However, the child must be placed in a bilingual or English as a New Language program within ten school days of enrollment.
4. Be notified in writing in your language and English about your child being identified as an English Language Learner and being placed in either a bilingual or English as a New Language program.
5. Meet with school staff to learn about New York State standards, tests, programming, and school expectations for English Language Learners; this meeting must occur before your child's final placement in an educational program and must be conducted in your language.
6. Receive information about your child's English language development (and home language development if s/he is in a bilingual education program).
7. Meet with school staff at least once a year to discuss your child's progress in school.
8. Have your child get the same support services and access to school activities that the school gives to all students.

### **Social and Economic Services for Newcomers**

Newcomers tend to face economic struggles when they arrive in the U.S. In fact, most of their time may be dedicated to securing food and shelter, which may make it hard for them to focus on other issues. While native-born citizens and people who are documented are able to obtain certain economic and

social benefits such as healthcare and economic support, it is more difficult for those who do not have documentation.

Caregivers and parents may ask teachers and other educators for information about how to obtain public health services and private insurance. Obviously, this is an extremely important concern, but the laws and regulations in this complicated and ever-changing area of law are beyond the scope of this book to address. The best way to inform yourself about these issues is to speak with a lawyer who specializes in healthcare and/or immigration law, but if that is not a viable option, you can find useful information at <https://www.healthcare.gov/immigrants/coverage/>. There is also some useful information at <https://www.healthinsurance.org/obamacare/how-immigrants-are-getting-health-coverage>, but please be aware that this site is primarily a commercial site that provides quotes from companies interested in selling health insurance. It is helpful to have information available about organizations, such as churches and nonprofits, that provide those in need with food, clothing, and other necessities. Schools may have this information at hand. The following list includes organizations that provide services to immigrants regardless of their status:

Hispanic Federation	<a href="https://hispanicfederation.org">https://hispanicfederation.org</a>
Catholic Legal Immigration Network	<a href="https://cliniclegal.org">https://cliniclegal.org</a>
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service	<a href="https://www.lirs.org/mission-and-vision">https://www.lirs.org/mission-and-vision</a>
International Rescue Committee	<a href="https://www.rescue.org">https://www.rescue.org</a>

**Information Regarding Newcomers’ Immigration Options**

The immigration status of newcomer children and their families contributes to a great deal of concern, anxieties, and other issues that threaten their well-being. Members of immigrant families may have different statuses. Citizens, permanent residents with Green Cards, and those who are undocumented are often members of the same family and may be living together. A number of agencies recommend that undocumented immigrants find out what protections and options they may be able to obtain. Many districts employ outreach personnel, including family or home-school liaisons, who have access to this information. Resources available to all immigrants, regardless of their immigration status, are available at the following sites:

The Immigrant Legal Resource Center	<a href="https://www.ilrc.org">https://www.ilrc.org</a>
Immigration Advocates Network	<a href="https://immigrationadvocates.org">https://immigrationadvocates.org</a>
Immigration Law Help	<a href="https://www.immigrationlawhelp.org">https://www.immigrationlawhelp.org</a>
American Civil Liberties Union	<a href="https://www.aclu.org">https://www.aclu.org</a>

### What to Do If Family Members Are Approached or Detained by ICE Officials

ICE officers have been known to engage in racial or ethnic profiling when detaining people from all walks of life, including documented as well as undocumented immigrant people. Indeed, we have known of several U.S. citizens detained by ICE agents who suspected they were undocumented immigrants. According to St. John and Rubin (2018), ICE has wrongly identified at least 2,840 United States citizens as possibly eligible for deportation since 2002. At least 214 of these people were taken into custody for some period of time, according to ICE records analyzed by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University. Some were military veterans who were deported for traffic violations and nonviolent crimes (e.g., possession of marijuana, fraud).

All immigrants (both documented and undocumented) and, if possible, their children, must know that they have rights, if they are approached by ICE officials. A number of organizations have prepared guidelines for immigrants who are approached by ICE officers and/or local police. The following list of rights is a brief version of the ACLU guidelines at <https://www.aclu.org/advocacy-media/tools/psas/know-your-rights-handouts-if-ice-visits> as they existed at the time this book went to press. If you have specific concerns or questions about specific situations, you should seek advice from an immigration lawyer and not rely on this or any summary description of the laws and regulations in this complicated and evolving area of law.

- *If ICE agents or police officers come to their home*, immigrants do not have to open the door unless the agents show them a search warrant signed by a judge that has their correct name and address on it. (An ICE deportation warrant does not entitle the agents to enter the home.) Agents and police officers can slide these warrants under the door or show them through a window.
- *If ICE agents or police officers stop an immigrant in public*, unless the

immigrant is actually being arrested, they do not have to consent to a search.

- *In either case:*
  - They have the right to remain silent, but if they choose to do so, they should say so out loud to the agents or officers.
  - They are advised to give the agent or police officer a “red card” or “know-your-rights” card. “Red cards” can be obtained in a variety of languages on the Immigrant Legal Resource Center website: <https://www.ilrc.org/red-cards>. If immigrants are confronted by ICE agents or police officers at their home, the card can be slipped under the door.
  - They have the right to speak to a lawyer immediately if they are detained or taken into custody. If they don’t have a lawyer, they can ask the immigration officer for a list of all pro bono lawyers (i.e., lawyers who work voluntarily and without payment) in the area.

It is important that immigrants have specific documents with them at all times, including a work permit or Green Card if they have one; an ID or driver’s license; the telephone number of someone who knows of their plans or wishes regarding their children, in case they are detained; and who to contact for an immigration attorney. It is advisable that they do not carry any documentation about their country of origin or false identity documents, including falsified immigration documents.

Given the danger and insecurity many immigrant families face, it is important that caregivers/parents plan for the possibility of being detained or being the target of an unanticipated sweep. Many schools let caregivers/parents know if ICE officials are in the area or have been on school grounds via robocalls. Teachers and schools can help caregivers/parents develop a plan that addresses the following:

- Caregivers/parents need to make decisions about who will care for their child if they face deportation. This includes whether or not the caregiver/parent wants their child to stay in the U.S. and with whom. When deciding on who will take care of children, it is important to consider the immigration status of that individual. Caregivers/parents should consider individuals who are U.S. citizens or who cannot be deported.

- Caregivers/parents need to provide the school with updated contact information regarding who will take care of their children, if they are unavailable. They need to make sure that the school and an adult who may be caring for their children have written information regarding their children’s medical conditions, including any allergies they may have, the medicines they take, health insurance information, and their doctor’s contact information. In states like California, caregivers/parents should consider having adults who assume the role of caregiver fill out a Caregiver’s Authorization Affidavit. (For a copy of the affidavit, visit: <https://www.lsc-sf.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CAA-with-Instructions.pdf>.)
- If at all possible, caregivers/parents need to inform their children and other family members residing in the U.S. of their plans regarding possible deportation. This needs to be done in a manner that is reassuring to children so that they know that a trusted person will care for them if the caregiver/parent is not available.

There are a number of resources that can be referenced for developing materials and orientations that help newcomer families better understand their rights, how to navigate social service agencies, and what they must consider when planning for the possibility of being approached or detained by ICE agents. School districts like the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) have specific protocols regarding how teachers, principals, parents, and other school staff or school district employees will respond if contacted by ICE. This information is made available to all families with children enrolled in the school district. For an example of the information about ICE posted on the OUSD website, see Appendix 2.

The following websites are also useful when developing materials and orientations for newcomer families:

Immigrant Family Defense Fund	<a href="https://immigrantfamilies.org">https://immigrantfamilies.org</a>
Immigrant Legal Resource Center	<a href="https://www.ilrc.org/family-preparedness-plan">https://www.ilrc.org/family-preparedness-plan</a>
National Immigration Law Center	<a href="https://www.nilc.org/get-involved/community-education-resources/know-your-rights/">https://www.nilc.org/get-involved/community-education-resources/know-your-rights/</a>
Informed Immigrant	<a href="https://www.informedimmigrant.com/guides/">https://www.informedimmigrant.com/guides/</a>

## Learning about Newcomer Students

When newcomer students arrive in schools, it often takes teachers time to learn important information about them. It may take a few days, for example, to realize that a newcomer is an emerging reader in their native language, has not yet studied division, or is struggling with trauma from family separation. To learn about newcomers, we recommend that teachers engage in a series of initial assessments that can help them tailor their instruction according to students' needs and experiences. These assessments include:

- *A conversation with the family to learn about the students' educational history and immigration journey, family, and language background.* The following suggestions can be helpful:
  - The conversation should be done sensitively and in the family member's home language, with the help of an interpreter, if needed.
  - Families must be assured that certain information will be kept confidential and they are welcome and safe at the school regardless of their immigration status.
  - The sample questions on the next page provide an idea of the kinds of issues school personnel might ask about. However, what is crucial is that this is a welcoming conversation, that the student and family member or caregiver feel safe, and that you are building a trusting relationship. To ease this, it can help if you have the conversation in a parent center or lounge area with a sofa and comfortable seating and offer beverages and snacks.
- *A one-on-one reading assessment in the newcomer student's native languages, as well as in English if the newcomer speaks or understands some English.* The school or district may have an adopted assessment in the native language of students, such as the *Evaluación del Desarrollo de la Lectura* by Ruiz and Cuesta (2000) (the Spanish version of the *Developmental Reading Assessment*) or *Sistema de Evaluación de la Lectura* by Fountas and Pinnell (2012). If not, school personnel with knowledge of a student's native language can ask the students to read a book in the native language, do a running record, and then ask the student to retell the text. (See Chapter 6 for information on how to conduct a running record.)

## EXAMPLE OF NEWCOMER STUDENT INTAKE INTERVIEW GUIDELINES AND QUESTIONS

I'd like to ask you some questions so that I can better get to know you and \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name). This will help me be a good teacher for \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name).

*If parent says yes, continue with the interview.*

*Personal History:*

1. How are you/your family doing?
2. What language(s) do you speak at home?
3. Where was your child born?/Where were you born? (Country and city/town, or other location)
4. When did your child arrive in the U.S.?/When did you arrive in the U.S.?
5. Where did you live before coming to the U.S.?
6. Did you live anywhere else in the U.S. before you came to \_\_\_\_\_ (name of the community where school is located)?
7. When did you arrive in \_\_\_\_\_ (name of the community where school is located)?
8. With whom do you live?

*Schooling and Academic History (Asked of students or, if students are too young, of caregiver/parent about the child):*

9. Did you go to school in your home country?
10. Did you like going to school in your home country? What did you like best?
11. How old were you when you first began going to school?
12. What language(s) did teachers use with you when you were going to school in your country? Did you also use that/those language(s)?
13. How many days a week did you go to school?
14. How many students were in your class?
15. What subjects did you study in school?/What did you do in school?
16. Did you go to school every day or did you miss days? Why did you miss school days?
17. What do you like to do? (e.g., music, arts, theater)
18. How do you feel about going to school here?
19. What would help you feel good/better about going to school here?

- *A writing sample in the newcomer's native languages and in English, if the student is able to do this.* We recommend giving a simple prompt, such as asking newcomers to write a story from their imagination or providing an intriguing picture and asking them to write a story about it.
- *A diagnostic math assessment, such as the following, which is an assessment that tests from counting skills up to middle school math skills:* [http://excelmath.com/downloads/placement\\_test\\_spanish.pdf](http://excelmath.com/downloads/placement_test_spanish.pdf). Students should be asked to complete as much as they can and stop or skip problems they don't yet know how to do.

In the absence of a centralized school or district intake system, many teachers have developed ways to informally assess and get background information on newcomer students who have been recently enrolled in their schools. For example, when new students arrive in Laura's class, she asks them to write her a letter introducing themselves. She provides a set of questions to help give them ideas about what they can write about. Newcomers write those letters in their home language. This provides Laura with some key information about her newcomers' families, experiences, and native language literacy. One of Laura's colleagues prepares a letter in Spanish, in which she introduces herself. When newcomers arrive, she shares this letter with them so they can get to know her a bit and to provide a model for their own letter.

Teachers can also learn about their newcomer students by being alert to how they behave. For instance, as we observe newcomers at play, we can become aware of the customs and practices that are part of their everyday lives outside of school. For example, when Cindy (Lucinda) taught preschool in a largely Mexican immigrant community, she learned about celebratory events as she watched children enact these events while playing with one another. During times of the day when teachers played Mexican *ranchera* music, her students arranged chairs along the walls of the classroom, leaving an empty circular space in the center. They then sat down on the chairs. After a few minutes, some children would get out of their chairs, approach another seated student, take that student's hand, lead them out into the circular space, and begin dancing together. Later, Cindy observed a similar scenario when attending a dance that her students' parents organized as a fundraising activity for the school.

Teachers also learn a great deal about newcomer students when making home visits and/or attending community and family events. Chapter 9 pro-

vides a detailed description of the ways teachers can engage with family members during these visits.

There are a number of very compelling and informative accounts about immigrants to the United States. There are also several recent films that address these topics. The following lists provide summaries of books and films that we think are particularly useful:

## Books

- *Lives in Limbo: Undocumented and Coming of Age in America* by Roberto Gonzalez (2016). This account follows 150 undocumented young adults in Los Angeles. Gonzalez documents the challenges and injustices that undocumented immigrant children have faced growing up in the U.S. Despite the fact that the U.S. is the only country that they know, they are denied the rights and benefits that their native-born peers enjoy.
- *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* by Valeria Luiselli (2017). Luiselli shares young asylum seekers' responses to interview questions that they are asked upon their arrival to the U.S. Luiselli, who was charged with the responsibility of interviewing these children or translating at their interviews, weaves their responses into a compelling account of the dangers and challenges they face while traveling to and living in the U.S.
- *The Far Away Brothers: Two Young Migrants and the Making of an American Life* by Lauren Markham (2017). This book chronicles the journeys of two unaccompanied minors, brothers Ernesto and Raul Flores, as they make their way from their home in Mexico to Oakland, California. Markham provides a poignant and eye-opening account of the trials they and their families experienced as they traveled across the border. Along the way they faced violence, detention, and encounters with immigration authorities. Once they arrived, they had to navigate a new culture, school, and economic challenges as they confronted their uncertain futures.
- *This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto* by Suketu Mehta (2019). This well-researched book provides a global perspective on immigration, through analyzing the causes of immigration from different continents to the U.S. and Europe, and links immigration

to the history of colonialism. Mehta also details the ways in which receiving countries benefit from immigration.

- *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario (2006). In this book, Nazario describes the journey of 17-year-old Enrique from Honduras to the U.S., in search of his mother, who immigrated to the U.S. 11 years earlier. Throughout his perilous journey north, Enrique faced almost insurmountable dangers as he traveled alone, clinging to freight trains and going by foot.

## Films

- *Documented*, produced and directed by José Antonio Vargas (2013). This documentary chronicles the immigration story of the Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, José Antonio Vargas, who came from the Philippines to the U.S. as a child. Vargas describes his experiences and the impact they had on his life and emotional wellbeing, as well as his subsequent work as an immigration activist.
- *This Is Home: A Refugee Story*, directed by Alexandra Shiva (2018). In this documentary, the viewer meets four Syrian refugee families who arrive in Baltimore, Maryland. With a limited amount of time to be able to negotiate their lives in an unfamiliar setting, the families find themselves having to contend with the travel ban, which constrains their economic and social opportunities.

## Newcomers Students' Socio-Emotional Circumstances and Needs

According to the American Psychological Association (2015), as well as a growing number of researchers, immigrant children who have experienced trauma, fear, and separation from their families are subject to psychological stressors and mental health issues. Many have been found to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. When beginning school in a new country, feelings of anxiety can be overwhelming, particularly for those who have experienced violence and insecurity in their home countries, a difficult journey to the U.S., family separation, economic challenges, and/or discrimination once they arrive, including in school. Teachers need to be alert to signs of socio-emotional distress in their students, including the following:

- Shaking and trembling
- Appearing withdrawn or listless
- Displays of aggression and/or anger
- Reports of not sleeping at night
- Crying or outbursts, and it is difficult to console the student
- Signs of self-inflicted harm (e.g., cutting)
- Dramatic changes in behavior

If you notice any of these signs or suspect that a student is in distress, immediately seek help from school or district administrators, a school-community liaison, and/or school district support staff. They may tell you to refer children for special education services, so that children can be further assessed to determine if they may be given Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs or 504 plans) that address psychological or socio-emotional issues. School and district administrators and school-community liaisons may also connect students with counselors, medical providers, and social workers who are available via community clinics and local hospitals. In the case of undocumented children, schools may be the only means through which they can obtain affordable health services, including mental health treatment.

## Establishing a Welcoming and Nurturing Classroom and School Community

All students benefit from being part of school and classroom communities where members trust, respect, and care for one another. Indeed, a number of researchers have found that strong and productive relationships among students and teachers foster students' academic achievement and socio-emotional wellbeing (Langhout et al., 2018). In the following scenario, Mr. Navarro involves his students in a number of approaches intended to help establish a caring and nurturing classroom community.

**SCENE:** A fourth-grade morning meeting

**PARTICIPANTS:** 29 fourth graders from a variety of different backgrounds. Four of these students are newcomers who came to the U.S. within the last six months.

Mr. Navarro stands at the door as his students enter the room. As students walk in, they choose if they want to greet their teacher with a high five, fist bump, hug, or wave. This allows him to gauge how students are feeling that morning. When Samuel comes in with tired eyes peeking out from under his hoodie and waves slightly, Mr. Navarro smiles, waves back, and makes a note that he should check in with Samuel later on. Students place their backpacks at their desks and form a circle on the carpet. On the board, Mr. Navarro has posted the following agenda for their morning meeting:

- Greeting: weather
- Morning letter
- Learning target: I can collaborate with my group
- Initiative: paper towers
- Debrief
- Collaboration goals

When the students are all gathered on the rug, Mr. Navarro welcomes them: “Today, let’s check in with weather. Different kinds of weather might represent different feelings. What’s one kind of weather?”

“Sunny,” says Jessica. Mr. Navarro starts a chart labeled *Weather* and writes *sunny* with a picture of a sun.

“Rainy,” offers Melinda. Mr. Navarro adds *rainy* and a picture of a rain cloud.

The class continues brainstorming types of weather and, in a few minutes, has a chart with several types of weather, including foggy, cloudy, hailing, rainbow, and snow, along with corresponding pictures.

“This morning in the circle, you’re going to choose one kind of weather that shows us how you’re feeling. For example, today I feel foggy (*he points to the word and picture for foggy*) because I’m a little sleepy this morning (*he rubs his eyes and yawns indicating that he’s sleepy*). First, let’s share with our partner.” He strategically has his four newcomer students seated with helpful students who can support them in choosing a weather word that represents how they’re feeling. Then the students go around the circle sharing a weather system and, in most cases, explaining how it represents their current mood.

Ana, a newcomer from Guatemala, shares, “Sun because . . . I . . . happy. Es el cumpleaños de mi hermanito y vamos a comer pastel esta noche (*It’s my little brother’s birthday and we’re going to have cake tonight*).”

“You feel sunny because you’re happy today. It’s your baby brother’s birthday and you’re going to celebrate with cake. How old is he? Is he one or two years old?” Mr. Navarro asks, showing one and two fingers.

“Two,” answers Ana, showing two fingers.

Next, Fatima, a newcomer from Yemen, shares. “Cloudy,” she says. “No happy.” Fatima does not elaborate in her home language because she knows Mr. Navarro

and most of her classmates will not understand. However, Mr. Navarro elaborates on Fatima's contribution and makes a mental note to watch her and check back in with her later. "I'm sorry you're not feeling happy today. Thank you for sharing with us. I hope you feel better later today."

After the class finishes sharing in the circle, Mr. Navarro directs their attention to the daily letter, which the class reads chorally:

*Dear Class,*

*I'm so excited today because we are starting our science project. You've learned a lot about energy this month, and now you'll start designing and making a car that moves with electricity. I've gathered lots of different materials you can use, like wires, batteries, Legos, tape, and toy cars. You'll be doing this project in your science groups, so you'll have to collaborate and work together.*

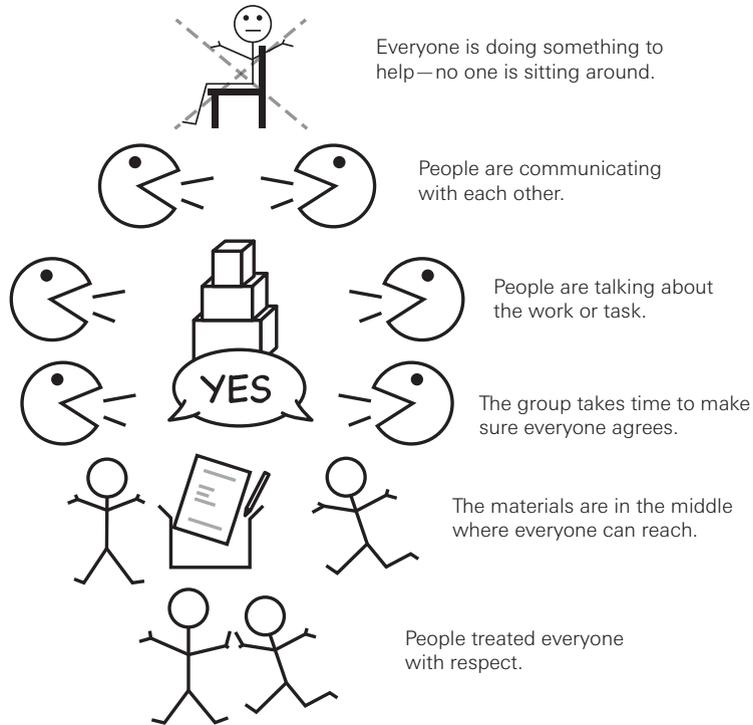
*Sincerely,*

*Mr. Navarro*

The students buzz with excitement and look at the materials Mr. Navarro takes out to help his students understand the task they will complete. Then he introduces the cooperative activity or challenge, known as a *cooperative initiative*, which his students will engage in today. Twice a week, the class participates in cooperative initiatives that are focused on different socio-emotional learning (SEL) goals. Mr. Navarro strategically chooses initiatives and SEL goals that will support students with their academic work later in the day. Recently, the students have conducted several science experiments in their groups, and he's observed some challenges with collaboration, such as one or two students taking over and not allowing newcomers to contribute and conflicts about turn taking and how to go about a task. He has chosen an initiative to help students practice collaborating in their science groups with a non-academic task.

"Today in your group, you're going to get 10 pieces of paper and your mission is to work together to build a tower that will stand up by itself. You won't get any tape or glue, so you'll have to be creative," Mr. Navarro explains, showing the materials and gesturing to help his newcomers understand. Then he explicitly mentions the challenges students have had collaborating. "Sometimes, it's hard to work together. We can have trouble sharing materials or deciding together what we want to do. We can't always get our way when we work in a team. We also need to make sure everyone gets to participate and that one person isn't taking over. While you're building, I'm going to walk around and observe how you're collaborating. What does it mean to collaborate well? What will I see and hear when I'm walking around if your group is collaborating?"

Mr. Navarro creates a chart with the class labeled "Collaboration." As the students suggest ideas about how to collaborate with one another, he lists them on the chart and annotates each item with an image. After a few minutes, the class, with Mr. Navarro's help, has generated the following chart:

**FIGURE 2.1: Collaboration Chart**

Mr. Navarro gives the class 10 minutes to create their towers. As students work together, he walks around, jotting down notes on his clipboard. He avoids directing the students' work or mediating for them if things get tense. The groups buzz with activity and he sees two newcomers, Samuel and Fatima, start to perk up and engage actively with their groups. At the end, the students come together and compare their towers. They celebrate the groups whose towers are still standing. Although some towers fall, they know this was a game and groups giggle as their towers fall apart. Mr. Navarro keeps a lighthearted tone and emphasizes the process of their collaboration rather than the product. He brings the class together to the carpet to debrief their collaboration. First, he gives them a few minutes to talk in their groups about two questions: What went well? What was challenging?

When Mr. Navarro brings the class together, students use their collaboration chart to debrief their work together. He also adds specific observations of things he saw students doing well in their collaboration to affirm and extend their ideas. He says, "I noticed that Table Two divided up the task so everyone had something to do. Fatima and Javier were folding papers into square tubes, and Melissa and Helen were putting them together. Everyone was busy helping the whole time. I also saw at Table Four, they had a hard time deciding how to start because Michelle had one idea and Sarahi had another idea. Then Sarahi said, 'We're running out of time,

so let's just try it your way, Michelle.' She compromised and then they could get started." Mr. Navarro adds *Divide up tasks*, *Compromise*, and *Negotiate* to the class collaboration chart and says, "I also noticed that there were times when students used different languages during the activity. For example, Fatima asked Sarahi a question in Arabic. I'm thinking that Sarahi's answer was helpful for Fatima." He adds *Use different languages to help everyone understand and complete the activity* to the chart.

To close out the morning meeting, Mr. Navarro gives each child a sticky note and asks them to write a collaboration goal for themselves. He asks, "What is something you need to work on today in your science group? Maybe you need to work on listening to other people, or maybe you need to work on being more involved or asking for help?" He charts possible goals and asks for other ideas from the class. Then each student writes their own goal and shares it with their group. They leave the sticky notes on the tables to remind themselves of their goals. After science time, they will reflect on their goals and set new goals for tomorrow's science work.

Key principles underlying the above scenario include the following, which are discussed below:

- Check and reconsider assumptions and biases.
- Foster trust, empathy, and belonging.
- Celebrate newcomers.
- Foster agency and activism.
- Engage in restorative approaches to conflict and discipline.

### **Check and Reconsider Assumptions and Biases**

Newcomers are unfamiliar with many of the customs and practices that many people who are born in the U.S. share or know about. Further, they are not a monolithic group. Rather, they come from many different countries and cultural backgrounds. We cannot assume that they share the same immigration story or immigration status. And, they certainly don't share the same customs, academic experiences, or histories. It is important that we don't rely on any stereotypes or biases we may have about newcomers, including their race,

ethnicity, religion, and gender. Further, we must be careful not to privilege our experiences and practices over those of other communities. For example, Mr. Navarro in the scenario above has had few opportunities to work with female Muslim students. When first encountering students like Fatima, who wore traditional head scarfs, he assumed that Fatima would be shy, quiet, and hesitant when participating in class because he thought the use of head scarfs among Muslim women and girls was a sign of female submissiveness. As he stated when describing his assumptions, "I thought girls who used head scarfs would be docile and likely to do whatever I or any male students told them to do." However, he learned that Muslim students like Fatima were often willing contributors to class discussions, unafraid to express viewpoints that may not be shared by Mr. Navarro or her peers.

Bias is also reflected in what many of us consider to be normalized views about children and child raising. For example, we have often found that many people from mainstream cultural communities, including teachers, assume that the child-raising experiences thought to be associated with mainstream communities are not only the norm, but necessary, if children are to learn. Consequently, they may hold steadfast views about the practices that they think are essential for children's learning and those that are to be discouraged or, worse, deplored. For example, drawing on her work examining language socialization practices in Anglo and Latinx communities, Ana Celia Zentella (2005) argues that many teachers and members of the public at large think that reading to children, a practice common in many mainstream Anglo communities, is an essential child-raising activity and a hallmark of good parenting. However, this practice was not prioritized in the Puerto Rican community in New York, where she was raised. Instead, letter writing and completing one's homework were valued literacy practices in her home. She states that, when individuals view mainstream practices as the norm, they often discount or even demonize the practices and cultural views that non-mainstream children bring to school.

Bias can be addressed in classrooms by making sure that students from marginalized populations are viewed as capable and contributing members of the classroom community. For example, Mr. Navarro noticed that some of his students took over activities and did not allow newcomers to contribute. He decided to emphasize the contributions newcomers made to groups in order to increase their social and academic status in the class. He also focused students' attention on assessing the collaborative aspect of their work together so that they would encourage and value the contributions of all students.

Bias is also reflected in the collection of books and materials that are present and used in classrooms. We can address bias when selecting books and materials by considering the guidelines described in Chapter 6.

### **Foster Trust, Empathy, and Belonging**

There are a number of approaches and activities that we and others have used that are intended to help students engage with others and, in so doing, gain an appreciation and understanding for different perspectives; foster a sense of belonging in the context of a safe and caring community; and conceive of one another as equally valuable participants in joint endeavors. Such activities include the following:

- *Cooperative learning activities*, such as the one described in Mr. Navarro's class, in which students engaged with one another to accomplish a task or activity. In the case of newcomers new to English, it is important to develop activities that they can engage in without having to rely exclusively on spoken or written language to make meaning. For example, Mr. Navarro used a cooperative initiative or challenge in which students collaboratively constructed a tower. As they engaged in this activity, they had opportunities to work with a diverse group of learners to accomplish a joint goal and, in the process, foster friendships, a sense of community, and belonging (e.g., newcomers were not paired with students from similar backgrounds, with students deemed to be roughly the same in terms of their academic ability, and/or with students who spoke the same language). As they jointly assessed their work, students reflected on and gained access to others' perspectives in order to focus on the challenges and successes they had collaborating with one another. They also gained insights into the varied resources that different students brought to the activity. This was of particular concern to Mr. Navarro because he wanted to make sure that students did not privilege the contributions of some students over others, which can contribute to establishing social hierarchies within the classroom community. For that reason, he made sure to offer his own observations about students' contributions when he pointed out the different ways students collaborated (e.g., by compromising, by focusing on a particular task). Examples of other cooperative activities can be found in Appendix 3. Regardless of the cooperative activity used, it is import-

ant that we, like Mr. Navarro, engage students in debriefing those activities.

- *Icebreakers and greetings* that explicitly welcome each child into the room and foster a sense of belonging among newcomer students. In addition, we can use greetings to gauge how students are feeling early on in the school day. In the case of the previous scenario, Mr. Navarro greeted each child nonverbally via a signal of the child's choosing (e.g., a high five or fist bump) and asked them to share how they were feeling by choosing a weather condition that matched their mood.
- *Discussion activities* linked to academic tasks, like book discussions (see Chapter 6).

### **Celebrate Newcomers**

In order to convey to students that their classrooms and schools are welcoming and inclusive spaces that foster a sense of belonging and trust, teachers acknowledge and celebrate who their students are. Students need to see their school and classroom as their space, a place where they feel they belong and that reflects their identities and interests. In the previous scenario, Mr. Navarro enacted this principle when he explicitly called attention to the contributions that newcomers Fatima, Javier, Ana, and Sarahi made when working in their groups, including occasions when they used languages other than English. Despite not understanding what Fatima and Sarahi said to one another in Arabic, he conveyed a positive message about their use of that language when he said that he was sure that what Sarahi said in Arabic was helpful.

Additional practices aligned with this principle include the following:

- Display art, photos, and other objects from students' home countries in classrooms and throughout the school.
- Make sure that culturally responsive books in students' home languages are available in the school library and students' classrooms. See Chapter 6 for a list of publishers and distributors of bilingual books and books in languages other than English.
- Provide opportunities for students and families to share their cultures with others via music, singing, storytelling, art, and cooking. See Chapter 9 for suggestions.
- Ask children to plan and decorate the classroom in ways that reflect their interests and identities.

It is important that we are aware that some newcomer students and their family members may not want to share information about their home countries and cultures and immigration journeys. Consequently, we need to let family members know that we would like to draw on this information when working with students and ask them for their permission to do so.

### **Foster Agency and Activism**

When we encourage students to assume an active role in their learning and classroom community, students see themselves as being responsible for and in control of what they do. In the previous scenario, this sense of agency was fostered when Mr. Navarro had the students articulate what quality collaboration looks like. He also had the students set their collaboration goals for their science work, giving them space to reflect on what they felt they needed to work on. Throughout this book, we advocate for providing students with opportunities to exercise agency as they make choices about what they read, write, and talk about.

As we mention in Chapter 8, when the curriculum focuses on issues of social justice, students see themselves as actors or agents when it comes to fostering a society that is committed to the wellbeing and equality of all its members. As we describe in Chapter 1, like other students from marginalized communities, many newcomers have experienced the kind of oppression that has constrained their voices, rights, and individual and collective freedoms. By addressing social justice issues in the classroom, we can help to foster and, in some cases, restore agency and hope to newcomers who have struggled with oppression.

### **Engage in Restorative Approaches to Conflict and Discipline**

Over the course of the last few decades, zero tolerance policies to discipline have been promoted in many schools serving immigrant students and students of color. These policies, which began to gain momentum as a response to school shootings in the 1990s, are grounded in the assumption that youngsters' unwanted behaviors would be eliminated when met with harsh punishments (Ginwright, 2016). Critics of these policies have argued that instead of improving school climate and contributing to safety, they foster a climate of defiance and retribution that may contribute to or further intensify tensions

between teachers, students, school administrators, students' families, and community members. When enacted in schools serving student populations that have experienced discrimination and oppression, these approaches are particularly damaging.

A crucial part of restorative justice is building a strong classroom community so that when conflict or challenges arise, there is something to restore and there are relationships to work through those challenges. In the previous scenario, Mr. Navarro took time each day to welcome each student into the room and to build a strong learning community. He planned and facilitated activities so students could develop positive relationships with one another. He also utilized a restorative approach when he was honest about how collaboration is challenging and had students reflect on what was difficult in a way that did not blame one another. Challenges were not seen as the fault of particular individuals, but as something inherent to collaboration. Mr. Navarro created a space to talk about this proactively and for the students to name what productive collaboration looks like and to practice it in a non-academic activity where differences in academic status often make collaboration more charged. Mr. Navarro supported students in taking a growth mindset toward their and others' development by setting collaboration goals. The ethos is that everyone has something to work on and is in development as human beings; no one has reached perfection. To learn more about restorative approaches, please visit the following websites:

- <https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/134/BTC-OUSDI-IG-08b-web.pdf>
- <https://www.weareteachers.com/restorative-justice/>

## Additional Resources

The following websites contain information that you may find useful as you prepare to welcome and foster a caring and productive classroom community.

- *U.S. Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit*: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/newcomers-toolkit/index.html>
- *Building Welcoming Schools: A Guide for K-12 Educators and After-School Providers (Welcoming America)*: [https://19lwtt3nwtm12axw5e31ay5s-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/WR\\_K12Toolkit\\_Final.pdf](https://19lwtt3nwtm12axw5e31ay5s-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/WR_K12Toolkit_Final.pdf)

- *Creating a Welcoming Classroom for ELLs and Immigrant Students: Strategies and Resources*: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/creating-welcoming-classroom/creating-welcoming-environment-ells-and-immigrant>
- *Support for Immigrant and Refugee Students: A Guide to Creating Safe and Welcoming Schools for Immigrant and Refugee Students in California*: [https://19lwtt3nwtm12axw5e31ay5s-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SIRS\\_Guide\\_to\\_Safe\\_and\\_Welcoming\\_Schools\\_With\\_Cover.pdf](https://19lwtt3nwtm12axw5e31ay5s-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SIRS_Guide_to_Safe_and_Welcoming_Schools_With_Cover.pdf)
- *Oakland Unified School District's Family Orientation Videos*: These videos are intended for newcomer families and are available in several languages. They explain how elementary, middle, and high schools are organized in the U.S., how newcomer programs are typically structured in the district, and how to enroll children in school: <https://sites.google.com/ousd.k12.ca.us/newcomer-toolkit/whole-child/orientation-videos?authuser=0>