

Chapter One

WHY THIS BOOK MATTERS

But I'm Not an Immigrant!

You may not be an immigrant but many of your neighbours are. Globally, over 200 million people are immigrants. This represents a doubling of the figures since the 1960s. Migration and its impacts on families are of great concern to health and social services practitioners and policy makers worldwide. This book is primarily for professionals who work with immigrant children and their families, including teachers, early childhood educators, social workers, health professionals, counsellors, settlement workers and family resource program personnel. As well, all of us as citizens who have various forms of direct and indirect contact with newcomers can benefit from more extensive knowledge of the strengths that new arrivals have to offer. The book will introduce readers to the work of leading thinkers and researchers into immigrant issues, including my own research and experiences with newcomers.

The growing immigrant populations of Western countries are not charity cases. Rather, they bring net benefits to the host societies. Countries with shrinking populations are not in the position of charity givers responding to those who are not part of the old cultural mosaics. The opposite is true: host countries have benefited and stand to benefit further from these new arrivals. Indeed, there is no other way to explain the policies of host countries in the last fifty years without assuming that the countries are deliberately seeking immigration because of the benefits it brings. Large urban centres in immigrant-receiving countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom are now home to diverse populations of newcomers. Why have these newcomers been invited to enter the receiving countries? Because in most receiving countries the fertility rates for their existing populations are below what is needed for replacement. In simple terms, their populations are shrinking. These trends affect non-migrants as well as migrants.

Public policies encourage immigrants with a recognition that the immigrants' rates of producing children will help keep the societies at their present levels or at least mitigate the problems of shrinkage. Another benefit of welcoming immigrants is that they swell the numbers of young adult workers. In order to maintain existing benefits to seniors and retired people and pay their medical expenses, countries require a large base of contributions from the younger working population. Whatever difficulties immigration creates, these are outweighed by the contributions made by newcomers.

Some subsets of newcomers experience difficulties adjusting and securing housing and employment. However, the problems are usually transitional. The historical evidence is that most newcomers are able to sustain themselves, if not prosper. For newcomers, as well as the receiving societies, the widespread life success of the children is of most importance. After taking a wide-lens view of the various realities facing immigrants today, this book will focus on the crucial issues involved in sustaining the mutual links between immigrant parents and their children.

Facing the Growing Antipathy against Newcomer Populations

Given that immigrants are a critical part of Western societies, where do derogatory stereotypes and beliefs about immigrants come from? While pressures of globalization and political, environmental and economic turmoil have contributed to the displacement and fragmentation of family networks in many parts of the world, the attitudes of citizens of some host countries are becoming less welcoming. It is only a matter of time until public policies in those countries change to more closely reflect these sentiments.

The media coverage of newcomers often portrays them negatively and elicits fear among the citizens of immigrant-receiving countries (Bauder 2008a). For example, newcomers are often characterized as criminals. As well, the media commonly portray the countries of origin as backward, utterly brutal and very dissimilar, having such practices as honour killings of teenage girls and genital mutilation. In the United States, there are pressures for immigration authorities to improve border security and quickly identify and deport illegal immigrants. Concurrently, current legal and social systems frequently leave migrants vulnerable to unemployment and lacking access to benefits. This is detrimental to both the newcomers and the receiving countries.

This noticeable chill has often been accompanied by outright hostility toward some immigrants. Counter measures around the world have included attempts to ban the hijab from schools, universities and other public places, attempts to prevent construction of mosques and attempts to limit the rights of children born to immigrants. Changes to the law in Arizona enacted in 2011 allow police to check the documentation and lay criminal charges against those who lack proof of legal entry into the country. In Utah, a list of undocumented people was recently made public, causing fear and panic among people wondering if they should move. The picture in many countries is one of less welcoming attitudes toward newcomers, if not xenophobia, with immigrants receiving the message to either abandon their identity or leave.

The impact of the chilly environment for immigrants is profound. This social climate forces some newcomer families to remain outside the mainstream of the receiving society and, officially at least, have a kind of ghostly

existence. Examples from the U.S., while they appear extreme, are worth looking at. The constant fear of being accosted by police or immigration officials takes its toll on immigrants, especially those who are non-white, even if they are documented. In the recent crackdown on undocumented people in Arizona, the police are given the duty of determining suspected status. Even U.S. citizens of Mexican appearance have been detained if found without adequate documents. In Canada, the evidences of chill are often more subtle; there is more skepticism about refugee claims, and officials sometimes turn a blind eye to the consequences of deportation, which may include abuse or torture. At the same time, the Canadian and U.S. governments have made some compassionate efforts and are officially committed to welcoming immigrants. One wonders if a reason may well be that up the road, immigrants, their friends and families will all be voters.

There are a number of social costs associated with present approaches to immigrants and their families. Both the host countries and the newcomers lose when social ills such as gangs and drug involvement arise. A society is hurt when its children are hurting. Hurt children become angry children, and many angry children grow up to behave in antisocial ways. Host societies are hurt when their members do not feel they belong or do not appreciate the stake they have in the social welfare of the community.

Uninformed Consent:

Am I Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?

This book does not focus on public policy or advocate for or against immigration. It takes the position that enhancing the well-being of immigrants is important for the whole society. When we address the well-being of immigrants, both at the macro level by broad public policy and at the micro level by improved interactions between individual service providers and newcomer families, we all benefit. The primary intent of this book is to provide information and practical suggestions for professionals who work directly with newcomers.

Although professionals who work with newcomer children and families usually wish to be of assistance to them and address their unique needs, many professionals feel the pressure caused by the pervasive chilly attitude toward newcomers. While the front-line workers tend to be supportive of families, they cannot help but absorb these attitudes of suspicion. Living and working in such a context is a challenge for professionals on the front line, who are pulled in several directions.

Moreover, blanket ignorance regarding the unique challenges facing newcomer families and their children can be found even amongst the best intentioned of helping professionals. This “uninformed consent” vis-à-vis the systemic conundrums facing immigrants can make itself felt even in seem-

ingly pluralistic quarters. Communities sometimes superficially recognize diversity in practices such as food, dance and festivals. However, deeper issues often remain unaddressed. One sees, for example, the continued emphasis in Canadian schools on immigrants' foods and festivals. This creates an impression that circumstances for newcomers are as favourable as ever and that there is a welcoming, multicultural nation, benevolently involved. It ignores the realities of the context of reception.

It is beneficial for those who work with immigrant children and their families to understand the root causes of immigration and the variety of pressures families experience. By gaining an understanding of the problems experienced by newcomers, professionals will be better prepared to assist or work with immigrants and immigrant families. Some of the most common issues encountered by those on the front lines include the following:

- communication difficulties;
- home language use and retention; and
- academic underperformance.

In most cases, professionals have good intentions and are committed to making serious efforts to promote a well-functioning multicultural society, welcoming immigrants and assisting children in their new environments. This book is intended to help practitioners and pre-service professionals understand and respond appropriately to the issues and challenges that arise when working with newcomers; it includes practical guidance along with examples of successful interventions.

In Conclusion: How Will This Book Help Me?

This book is relevant to practitioners of all helping professions in immigrant-receiving countries. Teachers, administrators, social workers, health care professionals and other helping professionals will find valuable, practical information that will prepare them to work with newcomers more effectively. It will also be of service to interested citizens as these issues are relevant to all members of a democratic society. In Canada, 20 percent of the population is foreign born. In the United States, the percentage in 2009 was 12.5 and growing. In all immigrant-receiving countries the numbers of foreign-born residents are significant.

This book introduces readers to the challenges faced by immigrant families and to meaningful, effective ways of assisting them. Working with young newcomer children and their families requires professionals to acquire and apply knowledge and skills beyond those traditionally taught in most pre-service professional training programs because in order to find success and

derive satisfaction from working with newcomers, professionals need more than skills. The attitudes, dispositions, personal beliefs, values and ethics that individuals bring to their work are of equal importance.

This book invites readers to examine their own attitudes and approaches and to become more self-aware. Professionals who work in ways that empower families and build strong communities are motivated by their commitment to fairness and equality. They see their roles as more encompassing than simply delivering health care, education or social services. The fact is that today's helping professional is part of a broader historical and social context. Beyond improving service and support for newcomers, the satisfaction helping professionals may derive from their work is also commensurate with their greater sense of purpose.

To that end, this book concentrates on principles. The reader will not find specific recipes or procedures for dealing with individual immigrants or distressed immigrant families. Rather, illustrations are meant to promote understanding of the principles. Within a general approach based on empowerment and sensitivity to cultural context, there is simply no way to prescribe specific steps for every situation. It is useful to look at specific cases, which is why this book includes detailed discussion of how the principles were applied in those cases. This book is intended to provide readers with a deeper understanding of immigrants and their issues and provide a platform from which professionals might choose appropriate responses to the cases they will encounter in their work.

The theoretical foundations and research findings described in the following pages will encourage and prepare professionals to work collaboratively with immigrant families. Part I explores the realities of modern immigration, beginning with a focus on the migration patterns. Chapter Two introduces the legal and regulatory systems that impact newcomer families. Chapter Three provides an overview of the major institutional pressures encountered by immigrant parents. These pressures unexpectedly result in their authority being undermined and lead to the weakening of the family structure. Chapter Four discusses how these pressures impact immigrants' daily lives.

Part II introduces the theoretical and foundational tools needed by professionals to become positive influences in the lives of newcomers. Chapter Five explores the theoretical underpinnings for understanding families and working in ways that empower them. These frameworks focus on families' differential access to and possession of cultural capital. Chapter Six explores the implications, for the dominant developmental theories, of the data collected from several studies with Latino families. Chapter Seven provides a broad, detailed framework to help professionals identify and focus on the strengths, supports and other protective factors that children need in order to thrive. That framework is used in the analysis of interventions.

WHY THIS BOOK MATTERS

Part III is devoted to exemplary interventions that have been implemented to empower immigrant families. Chapter Eight addresses the fundamental question of how to work with families whose cultures are very different than our own. It provides a typology of interventions that have been implemented to empower immigrant families. In many exemplary cases, the interveners made serious efforts to understand parental goals and worldviews and to empower parents and treat them as fully engaged equals. Chapter Nine presents the author's own attempts to help empower immigrant families.

Chapter Ten summarizes and reiterates the main themes in the book with particular focus on the interventions targeted for the new waves of immigration. This last chapter examines how immigration laws intersect with family functioning. The closing chapter also proposes that this is a good time for interventions. The growing anti-immigration sentiment that is characteristic of the post-9-11, post-market-crash context provides a good reason for finding ways to highlight the cultural capital that immigrants bring with them.

What follows is an exploration of the experiences of today's immigrants. This book introduces new ways of looking at today's problems and encourages readers to empower and collaborate with newcomers. It also helps readers develop essential tools to create a better future for immigrants and for all members of our communities, one family at a time.