La voz y la vida: Literacy and Identity in Young Latino Immigrant Students

Guide for Curriculum Unit 07.04.06, published September 2007
by Paulina A. Salvador

Recent immigration from Mexico and Central America has profoundly changed the cultural landscape of the United States. My fifth grade bilingual classroom is a microcosm of the Latino immigrant community residing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. My students represent the social, political, economic and educational needs of this burgeoning Latino immigrant community which is largely concentrated in one area of the city. This nine-week curricular unit explores best practices for literacy development, incorporating progressive teaching strategies for English language learners. It also aims to create a learning environment that is challenging and culturally inclusive. Throughout the teaching-learning process students will have several opportunities to interact with literature and reflect on their ethnic and bicultural identities. Memoirs, narratives, poetry, and oral histories of immigrant Latinos are incorporated to reveal the parallels that the students may find with their own experiences. Students will also consider the history of immigration, in general, and of Latinos in the United States. As culminating writing activities, students will write an oral history of a recent immigrant whom they know well. Using the oral history as a primary source, they will create an illustrated third person memoir picture book.

(Developed for Elementary Bilingual Education, grade 5; recommended for Elementary and Middle School grades 5-8)