

A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES: WHO ARE THE NEWCOMERS OF THE 21ST CENTURY?

Patricia Davis-Wiley

Professor of World Languages and ESL Education
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

It's his first day in the new school and Seungbok is a bit frightened yet excited to go back to school. He loves to learn, has always enjoyed going to school, and he is anxious to make new friends in this strange yet wonderful new country. Due to the academic winter break in his home country, he has been on vacation since mid-December through mid-February and he is ready to return to a familiar routine.

Seungbok just arrived with his parents from South Korea last week, but it has taken his family several days to locate and buy a reliable yet reasonably priced vehicle to use in this city which has poor mass transportation. The Lee family also had to find a suitable place to live and then locate the school zoned for them. Although classes started over five weeks ago in the new school, the principal assures the Lees that their son will be just fine. "Oriental children are *always* so smart," she says to the Korean family.

After completing the mandatory paperwork, the parents reluctantly leave their nine-year-old son with an E.A (educational assistant) who has been assigned to escort him down to Mr. White's fourth grade classroom. "Strange," thinks Seungbok to himself, "everyone I've met so far in this new school must be hard of hearing; they have all spoken so loudly with my parents and me."

The E.A. and the new Asian student do not speak as they proceed to the classroom. Ms. Brown just assumes he wouldn't understand her anyway; he has a strange-sounding first name,

and, after all, he isn't American. Little does she know that Seungbok does speak a little English because he had some American friends in his apartment building back home and his father, an English education professor in Korea, taught English at his home university prior to taking a semester's visiting scholar position at the local university in this new American city.

As Seungbok enters his new classroom, the teacher goes over to him, bends down, staring into his face, and says in a loud voice, "Hi! My name is Mr. White. What is your name?" Seungbok answers shyly, in a low voice, with downcast eyes. Mr. White bellows, "Gee, I don't think I can say your name right. How about if I just call you Sam?" And so it begins. Welcome to America, Sam!

The above is a scenario that undoubtedly plays regularly in the American education arena due to the increasing numbers of *newcomers*—people who emigrate from another country to become residents in the United States. Who are these newcomers? From which countries do they come? How many are there? How many newcomers will there be in the future? What challenges will they present to the educational community in this century due to the change they effect in the ethnic and linguistic diversity in the U.S.? These are the issues that will be addressed in this article.

WHO ARE THE NEWCOMERS?

Essentially, a *newcomer* (also known as a recent or *new* immigrant) is a person who emigrates from another country to the United States to take up residence. Often, but not always, this new arrivee speaks English as a second language and is described as being "non-English proficient (NEP), limited English proficient (LEP)," a reader and writer "of English as another language (REAL)" (Faltis, 2001, p. 4) and a "second-language learner" (p. 5). He or she may have a non-English language background (NELB), be a non-native English speaker (NNES), be a linguistic-minority student, or be an ELL—English language learner. (This latter term is used most commonly in the field at this writing.) From where do these newcomers come? A brief look at the history of immigration patterns in the U.S. will answer that question.

HISTORY OF DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS IN THE U.S.

Demographers (Hughes & Seneca, 1999; Jones, 1992; Taeuber & Taeuber, 1958; Wells, 1982) attest to the fact that the U.S. population has long been a multiracial nation and is becoming even more diverse in the 21st century. However, according to historian Riche (2000), 200 years ago, the U.S. was a country whose early census calculations only counted three ethnic populations, Whites, American Indians, and Blacks. Only American Indians who were taxed were counted in the population numbers, consequently, "estimates of the Indian population are vague... [In addition] ...Blacks...represented roughly 20 percent of the population that was [actually] counted [in the first official U.S. Census] in 1790" (Taeuber & Taeuber, as cited in Riche, 2000, p. 15).

Benjamin Rush, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, urged that "German and French be taught in America's 'English schools'" (Stevens, 1999, p. 387), at the same time that Benjamin Franklin spoke of the increasing numbers of "German immigrants in Pennsylvania," (p. 387), unofficially documenting the influx of both German and French newcomers to the newly founded nation. During the 1800s, Northern and Western Europeans dominated the numbers of newcomers which also included in descending numeric order, Asians, Canadians, Caribbean Islanders, Central and South Americans, Africans, and others (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975).

In the early 1900s, the countries of origin of newcomers to the U.S. shifted dramatically from Northern and Western Europe to Eastern and Southern Europe (Riche, 2000). In fact, there were so many newcomers at that time that "an anti-immigration backlash...prompted the U.S. Congress to close the country's open door policy to a crack in the 1920s" (Riche, p. 10), which didn't re-open until the passage of the *Immigration Act of 1965*.

Between 1900 and 1910, the U.S. population actually increased by 10% due to the arrival of 9 million newcomers. Comparatively speaking, about this same number of immigrants came to the U.S. during the 1980s, but the total number only reflected a 4% increase of the then larger aggregate population. From 1981 to 1990, the greatest numbers of newcomers arrived when "more than 7.3 million people immigrated to the U.S.—a 63 percent increase over

the previous decade" (García, 2000, p. 8). Indeed, the 1980s were the decade of major growth for this particular population in recent times. Table 1 gives an overview of this dramatic increase, showing 18 countries which have sent the greatest number of newcomers to the U.S. between 1981 and 1998. The section of the article that follows Table 1 presents the particular challenges that such diversity has on the educational arena.

TABLE 1
Countries of Origin and Population Numbers
Newcomers to the U.S. from 1981-1998
[Population shown in thousands
(1,653.3 represents 1,653,300; 1,651.4 represents 1,651,400)]

Country	Year/Population			
	1980s	1990s	1997	1998
Mexico	1,653.3	1,651.4	146.9	131.6
Philippines	495.3	348.5	49.1	34.5
Vietnam	401.4	317.8	38.5	17.6
China	388.8	268.7	41.1	36.9
Korea	338.8	114.1	14.2	14.3
India	261.9	236.5	38.1	36.5
Dominican Republic	251.8	258.1	27.1	20.4
El Salvador	214.6	147.7	18.0	14.6
Jamaica	213.8	109.8	17.8	15.1
Cuba	159.2	94.9	33.6	17.4
Iran	154.8	79.4	9.6	7.9
United Kingdom	142.1	95.0	10.7	9.0
Haiti	140.2	114.4	15.1	13.4
Colombia	124.4	81.7	13.0	11.8
Pakistan	61.3	70.5	13.0	13.1
Ukraine	NA	92.2	15.7	7.4
Taiwan	(1)	76.8	6.7	7.1
Russia	NA	70.4	16.6	11.5

NA=Not available.

¹Data for Taiwan included with China.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2001 Statistical Abstract of the United States* retrieved September 22, 2002, from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/01statab/stat-ab01.html>

AMERICA'S DIVERSITY: A CHALLENGE FOR EDUCATORS

It is estimated that in 1850, 1 in 7 people in the U.S. were foreign-born, compared with 1 in 20 in the 1950s and 1960s, 1 in 13 in 2000, and a projected 1 in 7 people in 2020 (García, 2000, p. 8). Results from the 2000 U.S. Census report that "the nation is the most ethnically and racially varied in modern times" (Rosenblatt, 2001, p. A16). Presently, nearly one-fifth of the U.S. population lives in a household where a second language (other than English) is spoken. In addition, in more than three-quarters of these homes, the second language is Spanish, with the next most commonly spoken languages being Chinese, Russian, French, German, and Italian (García, 2000). Data from the 1990 Census reported that 32 million U.S. residents spoke a second language at home (other than English) and in excess of 7 million lived in a home where there was no English-proficient speaker over 14 years of age (Swerdlow, 2001, p. 1). Extrapolated trends from recent census data suggest that,

by 2009, there will be 40 million U.S. Hispanics, making them 13.6 percent of the population and the nation's largest minority group. If trends continue, Hispanics could be 15 percent of the population by 2015 and nearly 25 percent by 2050. (Colorito, 1999, p. 5)

Results of the 2000 Census suggest that nearly 3 in 10 Americans are members of a minority group. Population percentages for these minorities are shown in ranges in Table 2 due to the fact that for the first time in American census history, people were allowed to identify themselves as belonging to more than one ethnic group. Demographer William Frey (2001) stated that whereby White Anglo (i.e., non-Hispanic White only, using census jargon) comprised less than 70% of the nation's population in 2000, "the minorities display many cultures and hues, including 6.8 million Americans who identify themselves with more than one race" (p. A23). To further complicate racial identities, in addition to the original six groups used in the U.S. Census before 2000 (non-Hispanic Blacks, non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanics, Asian or Pacific Islanders, American Indians and *some other race*, "there are now 57 additional multiracial groups, which means [that] people can identify themselves by one of 63 racial categories" (Pugh,

2001, p. A1). Children from these mixed heritages will undoubtedly have to choose their ethnic identities, in part on how society accepts them, in part how the educational arena considers them, and in part on how they perceive themselves. They will have to decide also if they will identify with their ethnicity (e.g., Hispanic or Latino, Asian, French—that which differentiates them by point of origin, religion, culture, values) or with their race (Black, White, Brown) (Banks & Banks, 1993).

TABLE 2
The U.S. Population for 2000 Shown in Ranges
of Percentages for Major Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Group	Percentage of Population Ranges
White (Non-Latino)	69.1% to 70.4%
Black or African American	12.1% to 12.9%
Asian/Hawaiian Pacific Islander	3.7% to 4.5%
Latino	11.3% to 12.5%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census*. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000. Retrieved September 18, 2002, from <http://factfinder.census.gov>

Of particular import to the U.S. educational community is the number of school-age children (e.g., aged 5-18) who are second-language learners. According to Faltis (2001, p. 11), "without counting the children of undocumented workers from other countries, the population of children for whom English is a second language was conservatively projected to have reached 3.5 million by the year 2000 and to approach 6 million by 2020. In fact, ethnic groups of students once labeled minorities will soon become majorities, especially in densely populated urban areas. (García, 2000). It is projected that non-Hispanic Whites will "make up barely one-half of the population by 2050 and will lose their majority status by 2060" (Riche, 2000, p. 4).

One of the most comprehensive studies concerning the increased diversity of U.S. schools, *The Road to College: Educational Progress by Race and Ethnicity* (College Board, 1991), reported that

the U.S. Non-White and Latino populations of students would increase from 10.4 million (1985-1986) to 13.7 million (1994-1995), representing an increase of 29%. White student enrollment, however, would only rise 5% and its percentage of the total student population would drop to 66% from 71% in 1994-1995. Non-White and Latino student numbers would increase from 10 million in 1976 to a projected 50 million students in 2026. Therefore, it is predicted that in 2026, the racial composition of America's schools will mirror the opposite of what it was in 1990 when 70% of the student population were White. Further extrapolations of these data suggest that by the year 2000, U.S. schools were educating 6 million K-12 students who were second language learners, and by 2026, this same population will comprise 25% or one-quarter of U.S. classrooms (García, 2000, pp. 21-23). What does this mean for educators?

In addition to the potential linguistic challenge of not being able to effectively communicate with second language learners, educators "who fail to recognize how the values of traditional schooling may clash with particular cultural values [Kugelmass, 1995, as cited in Marlowe & Page, 1999, p. 19], often face classrooms of disengaged, unmotivated, and/or disruptive learners who may find school irrelevant, or even hostile to their values" (Marlowe & Page, 1999, p. 19). In contrast to the rich ethnic and racial diversity of the student population prevalent in U.S. K-12 classrooms in 2002, typical classroom teachers are White, most likely monolingual—English is their first and only language (García, 2000; Marlowe & Page, 1999), and are probably ill-prepared to teach children from diverse cultures, languages, and academic abilities. Mainstream teachers may have accepted the challenge of working with second language learners, either willingly or by default, however, "relatively few are prepared to teach children who are becoming bilingual along with monolingual children who speak the language of the teacher" (Faltis, 2001, p. 5). Research examining this phenomenon indicates that mainstream teachers (described above) actually know very little concerning what types of classroom strategies may benefit second language learners (Penfield, 1987). Conversely, "ESL training, personal experience with other cultures, [and] contact with ESL students" appear to significantly correlate to a positive

attitude toward ELLs and toward ESL inclusion into the classroom (Youngs & Youngs, 2001 as cited in Reeves, 2002, p. 23). Special attention and training, however, is not the only challenge to equitably accommodating the second language learner in today's classrooms.

A special challenge for the educational arena which is and will increasingly continue to be infused with a plethora of ELL-newcomers, is to overcome the "tendency in schools to place [second language] students into higher or lower tracks based upon English language and literacy abilities (Harklau, 1994, as cited in Faltis, 2001, p. 6). Once these students are labeled, tracked, and segregated, it is difficult for them to "move into higher social and academic circles" (Oakes, 1986, as cited in Faltis, 2002, p. 6).

DISCUSSION

Is there hope that the Seungboks, Rusikos, Javiers, Mohammeds, and Akikos will be nurtured and accommodated in the 21st century mainstream classroom? Will they subsequently thrive academically and socially, and grow to become successful and productive students and world citizens in the new tomorrow? Yes. It is, however both a monumental challenge and a moral and ethical responsibility of those who call themselves *educators* to change the present educational paradigm which does not always address the special needs of ELLs. It is the educational community which must do whatever needs to be accomplished to ensure that America's newcomers have a fruitful journey on life's road to autonomy. This is the challenge.

REFERENCES

- Banks, J.A., & Banks, C.A.M. (1993). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- College Board and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. (1991). *The road to college: Educational progress by race and ethnicity*. New York: Author.
- Colorito, R. (1999). Hispanization of the U.S. *The World and I*, 14(10), 70-75.
- Faltis, C.J. (2001). *Joinfostering: Teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Frey, W.H. (2001, March 19). A closer look at the melting pot. *Newsday*, p. A3.
- García, E. (2000). *Student cultural diversity* (3rd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Harklau, L. (1994). Tracking and linguistic minority students: Consequences of ability grouping for second language learners. *Linguistics and Education*, 6, 217-244.

A Demographic Profile of Diversity in the United States: Who Are the Newcomers?

- Hughes, J.W., & Seneca, J.J. (Eds.). (1999). *America's demographic tapestry: Baseline for the new millennium*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Jones, M.A. (1992). *American immigration* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kugelmass, J.W. (1995). Educating children with learning disabilities in Foxfire classrooms. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 28(9), 545-553.
- Marlowe, B., & Page, M. (1999). Making the most of the classroom mosaic: A constructivist perspective. *Multicultural Education*, 6(4), 19-21.
- Oakes, J. (1986). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Penfield, J. (1987). ESL: The regular classroom teacher's perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21, 21-39.
- Pugh, T. (2001, March 8). Hispanics pull even as U.S. minority census: Population's virtually tied with African Americans. *The Herald-Sun*, p. A1.
- Reeves, J. (2002). *Secondary teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the inclusion of ESL students in mainstream classes*. Unpublished dissertation, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Riche, M.F. (2000). America's diversity and growth: Signposts for the 21st century. *Population Bulletin*, 55(2), 3-43.
- Rosenblatt, R.A. (2001, March 13). Census illustrates diversity from sea to shining sea. *The Los Angeles Times*, p. A16.
- Stevens, G. (1999). A century of U.S. censuses and the language characteristics of immigrants. *Demography*, 36(3), 387-397.
- Swerdlow, J.L. (2001). Changing America. *National Geographic*, 200(3), 42-61.
- Taeuber, C., & Taeuber, I.B. (1958). *The changing population of the United States*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1975). *Historical statistics of the United States, colonial times to 1970*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000. *2000 Census*. Retrieved September 18, 2002, from <http://factfinder.census.gov>
- U.S. Census Bureau. *2001 Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Retrieved September 22, 2002, from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/01statab/stat-abo1.html>
- U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Services. (1999). *Statistical yearbook of the immigration and naturalization service*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Wells, R.V. (1982). *Revolutions in Americans' lives: A demographic perspective on the history of Americans, their families, and their society*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

A vertical bar on the left side of the page, consisting of a series of yellow and orange rectangular segments. A small red diamond is located at the top of this bar.

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: A Demographic Profile of Diversity in the United States:
Who Are the Newcomers of the 21st Century?

SOURCE: Int Educ 32 no1 Fall 2002

WN: 0228802732003

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited.

Copyright 1982-2003 The H.W. Wilson Company. All rights reserved.