



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

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## **INSTRUCTIONAL AREA: *Developing Life Long Learning***

### **Tierra de Oportunidad - Module 12**

#### **Parents Involvement In Their Children's Education**

##### **Overview**

Many immigrants come to the U.S. in search of educational and occupational opportunities for their children -- "so my children can have a better life". Immigrant parents' recognition of the value of their children's education is a valuable contribution to their children's future. However, to assure their children's success, parents will need to become increasingly involved in their children's education and participate in many facets of their children's learning experience. This participation should, ideally, go beyond the traditional role of making sure children go to school and helping them with homework.

Parents' investment of time to be involved in their own children's education is a rewarding and valuable experience. Becoming involved in one's children's education can take many forms -- from talking with children at home about school, to helping them with homework, or helping them resolve problems which arise at school, to being involved with school-related organizations -- for example a school site council or parent's advisory group.

Parents' involvement in their children's learning requires much more than help with formal learning tasks. It involves, also, talking to children, about a wide range of issues, encouraging them to be thoughtful, creative, and innovative. Parents' willingness to pay close attention to their children's experience in confronting a new culture is an important part of strengthening families' resiliency in adapting to a new cultural context -- neither accepting new cultural values unquestioningly nor rejecting them out of hand.

Parents do not need to be experts on education to be productively involved in their children's education. What they do need is to know that their concern, common sense, and participation will make a difference -- even when the "experts" -- school administrators and teachers do not seem to hear them. In several communities, immigrant parents have taken advantage of California's new provisions for innovative "charter schools" to work with other parents and teachers to develop school programs that respond directly to their needs.

Immigrant children face a variety of problems in school -- learning a new language, experiencing subtle or out-front ethnic conflict and discrimination, and facing the challenge of developing their own strategies for living in two cultures. Parents need to appreciate that learning to live in a multi-cultural society is bound to be a turbulent and confusing experience for most children. Their children will need solid personal support in this process.

Currently, children's right to equal education in elementary and high school is legally guaranteed by a Supreme Court decision affirming that right. Most U.S. educators believe that education -- access to knowledge -- is a basic human right but the picture is now becoming more confused as access to education comes to be conditioned increasingly on immigration status. Immigrant families will need to become actively involved in standing up for their own rights and their children's right to equal access to learning. (*Instructors, be aware that this is a political issue*)

## Basic Skills Development

This curriculum module serves to build several foundation skills. It will be useful for the instructor to emphasize to the class how the module and the class activities contribute to these skills.

<i>Speaking:</i>	Organizes ideas and communicates concerns.
<i>Mathematics:</i>	Estimates the economic value of education.
<i>Resources:</i>	Identifies, analyses and uses resources to resolve educational access problems.
<i>Interpersonal:</i>	Participates as a member of a team.
<i>Responsibility:</i>	Participates in the community.
<i>Seeing Things in the Mind's Eye:</i>	Sees the benefits from being pro-active.

## Teaching Points

1. **Children have a right to a primary and elementary school education**, no matter what their immigration status.. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that all children have a fundamental right to an elementary school and high school education.
2. **Children have a right to equal educational services.** There are very strong laws protecting children from discriminatory treatment based on their race, national origin, language, mental or physical disability, sex, etc. This includes the right to receive special help, for example, due to difficulty in speaking English. Parents also have the right to expect that their children be taught in ways which recognize their individual interests, concerns, and abilities. Although this right is not clearly legally protected, parents' involvement in their children's education can help concerned but overburdened teachers or even unconcerned teachers recognize their child as an individual.
3. **Parents themselves are important teachers.** Parents' willingness to take the risks of displaying their own ignorance when they do not know something, in working patiently to solve problems they face are an important part of teaching children. Playing with children and talking to them, even for a short period of time, is an important part of their learning. Trying new things is part of learning to learn. What a person knows is less important than what they do to find out new things. When parents and children explore learning together, the experience of cooperation, family support, and excitement outweigh the problems of being tired, not having enough time, embarrassment.
4. **Education includes more than just being in the classroom.** The information society requires more than basic education. It rewards creativity, the ability to work together, the ability to put information together in new ways, curiosity, questioning, and asking difficult questions. Students' participation in extra-curricular activities like sports, school clubs, music, theater is part of this development process and should receive as much support from parents as classroom work. Education often begins even before school with programs such as Headstart. Education can continue even in out-of-school summer programs and may, eventually, include employment-oriented programs for young people.
5. **The demands of future work will place more emphasis on personal interaction and**

**building close and collaborative interpersonal relationships**, meaning that children's friendships and relationships with other students are an important part of their education. Children's social activities are an important part of their learning experience. While inter-ethnic tensions continue in many school settings, California is moving steadily toward a multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual society in which children, teenagers, and adults of different ethnic backgrounds get along together. Many experts feel that one of the best ways to combat the negative impacts of gangs on young people is to make sure that no young person feels, left out, or in danger because they are on their own or isolated.

6. **Children whose parents are involved in their education are most likely to succeed.** Schools and the teachers in them are likely to best serve the children whose parents are involved in their children's education. Parents do not need to have any special knowledge to be involved in their children's education. They do, however, need to be willing to learn, to ask questions, and to take the trouble to meet with their children's teachers or school administrators. Parents can also play a crucial role by constantly seeking to build their children's self-esteem which may frequently be threatened by the difficulties of adapting to a new environment.
7. **Parents should consider being involved on advisory committees** for programs such as Migrant Education, Bilingual Education or on school "site councils". While participating on these committees, parents should feel free to expect staff to be accountable in explaining issues to them fully and should consider participation an important means of developing their own skills in securing information, analyzing it, and acting on it.
8. **In the U.S. schools are locally controlled and parents' involvement can make a huge difference in what kinds of services children get.** Being involved in school and educational politics can make a difference. The Los Angeles Unified School District has considered a resolution to allow parents to vote in school board elections whether or not they are citizens. Contacting state legislators will be a crucial part of making higher education affordable for immigrant children.

## **SAMPLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

1. Ask parents to describe their goals for their children and discuss the problems they will face in making those goals a reality.
2. Invite a Mexican or Mexican-American community leader to talk to the class about the educational challenges they faced in getting to their current position
3. Lead class discussion on whether extra-curricular activities are "wasting time" or not. If so, why? If not, why?
4. Ask each participant to discuss what their long-term educational plans are.
5. Role play different scenarios of student treatment by teachers. Are the students being treated equitably or not?
6. Estimate the value of an education based on different earnings of blue-collar workers, technical workers, and professional workers.
7. Ask the class to discuss whether it is best for mothers to deal with issues relating to school, fathers, or both parents.
8. Role play scenarios of different parent-teacher interactions.

9. Invite a K-12 teacher to talk about parents' roles in their children's' education. Alternatively, invite a principal or school board member to talk about their role in schooling, their vision of education, and the problems they are facing in their school and their immediate goals to improve education.
10. Discuss with the class different philosophies about language learning -- e.g. immersion, transitional English as a Second Language -- and their personal preferences about how best to learn a new language and what their children's experience in language learning has been.
11. Develop with the class a list of activities parents can do with their children which help them learn, but which do not require knowledge of the classroom material. These activities can include family trips, family conversations, talking about the content of television and radio programs, checking books out from the library, writing letters to family members, telling stories, and explaining traditional cultural values.

## RESOURCES

- "Tarjeta de los derechos de los padres" (*card with parents' rights*)  
Comite Nacional para Ciudadanos en la Educacion  
900 2nd St., NE, Suite 8, Washington, DC 20002-3557  
**(800) LE-AYUDA**
- META  
524 Union St., San Francisco, CA 94133  
**(415) 398-1977**
  - "The Rights of Limited-English Proficient Students: A Handbook for Parents and Community Advocates",  
Available from META for \$8.00
  - "A Handbook for Immigrant Parents: Protect the Educational Rights of Your Children"  
1991,  
Available from META for \$3.00
- California Dept. of Education, Bureau of Publications  
P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271  
**1-800-995-4099** (Visa & Mastercard accepted)
  - "Hacia la Realizacion de la Autoestima", 1992.
  - "The Changing Language Arts Curriculum: A Booklet For Parents"
  - "The Changing Mathematics Curriculum: A Booklet For Parents"
  - "The Changing History-Social Science Curriculum: A Booklet For Parents"
  - "The Family is Critical to Student Achievement", 1994
- Crossing the Schoolhouse Border:  
Immigrant Students and the California Public Schools  
Available from California Tomorrow, Fort Mason, Building B,  
San Francisco, CA 94123, Phone **415-441-7631**

## ESL Commercial Textbooks

- Decision Dramas, JAG Publications  
Unit 5, Bilingual Program or Immersion?  
Unit 8, High School: Drop Out or Stay In?
- The ETC Program, A Competency-Based Reading/Writing Book, Book 5: Language and Culture in Depth, Random House  
Chapter 2, Getting an Education

- Face the Issues, Longman  
Unit 8, From One World to Another
  - Faces: Exchanging Views in English, Lateral Communications  
Unit 6, School Days
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*A project of the California Department of Education, Youth, Adult and Alternative Educational Services Division, funded by contract #4213 of the Federal P.L. 100-297, Section 353 with California State University Institute and Hacienda LaPuente USD. However, the content does not necessarily reflect the position of that unit or of the U.S. Office of Education. 1997*