



Recensione

Wong, S., Sánchez Gosnell, E., Foerster Luu, A.M., & Dodson, L. (Eds.). *Teachers as Allies: Transformative practices for teaching DREAMers and undocumented students.* New York: Teachers College Press, 2018.

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Engage and advocate for undocumented children and youth is an act of courage. It needs to be performed with a specific legal and didactical preparation and, also, imagination. “Teachers as Allies” is a call by teachers to teachers, inviting their colleagues to join to a mission towards the inclusion. Indeed, involving immigrant students and American-born siblings and peers in successful and transformative classroom experiences is proposed by the authors as a strategy to discover and apply.

In this polyphonic book, Wong, S., E. Sánchez Gosnell, A.M. Foerster Luu & L. Dodson (Eds.) (2017) invited teachers to adopt a “dreaming” approach in their work toward undocumented children and youth in the USA. The term DREAMers refers to the undocumented youth who would have qualified for the federal DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act), originally proposed in 2001. The DREAM Act student advocacy group called the “Dream Project” has been and is still effective for undocumented children and youth empowerment. Dreaming is also a shared attitude, which teachers can embrace for hoping a better future for some of unprotected students.

“Teachers as Allies” make a detailed and current analysis at the macro level (institutional and social context) and micro level (interviews and testimonies) to attest the reality of immigrant students without documentation and American-born minorities in difficulties. Indeed, at the macro level, the authors show how immigration policies, ICE enforcement, and societal attitudes affect undocumented students and their family. At the micro level, the authors efficaciously show how teachers and school leaders can recognize these influences and choose to support students in a successful learning journey.

The text looks as a result of a « heartfelt collaboration » between people, communities, institutions, all in the first line to inform teachers. Know more about how to act with undocumented children and youth is the starting line strategy to react and find solutions in unfriendly and bureaucratic contexts. In this way, teachers can have the opportunity to freely give their help, surfing sharply an unfriendly system without fear of punishment. The authors provide several concrete examples of action, also proposed as guidelines, that teachers can directly reply or take inspiration in similar circumstances.

Mainly, “Teachers as Allies” offers spaces to different voices. In the prologue, the voice is one of the authors who learn to speak up and reach to enter in college, opening doors for her life dreams: “none of my personal achievement alone will change the world; however, who I become moving forward will” (p.xi). This perspective accompanies all the chapters of the book: to act to transform young life and support dreamers.

Section 1 introduces the reader how to work with undocumented students and their families. The section provides the reader with information to understand the issues of undocumented children and youth. Chapter 1 is “Undocumented Students, Families and Communities in Our Schools: What Every Teacher Should Know” by Shelley Wong and Jennifer Crewalk with Rodrigo Velasquez-Soto: here personal stories are braided with socio-political context of immigrant education in the United States. The opposition between personal aim and social opportunities leads to a “liminal status” of the undocumented youth, or the stressful condition of indeterminacy, affecting health and safety in the developing. But also affecting the access to scholarship, right to vote, to permanent residency or citizenship. The chapter provides also a short overview of federal immigration legislation and anti-immigration policies. Chapter 2 by Eva K. Thorp, Sylvia Y. Sánchez, and Elaisa Sánchez



Gosnell discusses “Embracing Dilemmas: A Framework for Teachers Working with Immigrant Students and Their Families”. Focusing on dilemmas becomes a key for teachers to find practical solutions, dealing with undocumented youth, peers and others professionals. Practical indications are given to act with culturally responsive and reflective practices, moving forward as an advocate and to be an ally. The section is close with the Chapter 3 “Teachers as Allies and Advocates for Students Living in Fear of Raids, Detention, and Deportation” by Eva K. Thorp, which goes deeply in exploring the fears that touch undocumented children’s lives.

The second section “Reaching Students from Immigrant Families through Transformative Culturally Responsive Education” is composed of three-chapter, focusing on the power of storytelling and narratives of empowering. Specifically, the Chapter 4 is “Antiracist Practices: Strengthening Students’ Sense of Self to Promote Hope and Confidence for Student Success” by Sandra Duval. The authors sensitize the reader to the importance of self-analysis in the interaction with the undocumented youth. The power of collective critical discussion and of “a single story” in a transcultural education is documented in Chapter 5 “An Examination of the DREAM Act from the Classroom to Capitol Hill: Analysing the Arguments” by Tiffany Mitchell and Brett Burnham with Gaby Pacheco. This analysis continues in Chapter 6 “First-Person Narratives: Recognizing the Hidden Challenges Faced” by Anita Bright and G. Sue Kasun with Dario Lopez.

The third section “Accessing, Surviving, and Thriving: DREAMers Go to College” unveils the students’ tribulations to access to college. In chapter 7 “Getting Ready for College: Navigating Undocumented Status, College Applications, and Financial Aid”, the legal, financial, academic and social-emotional barriers are analysed by Samantha Spinney with Danna Chávez Calvi, proposing practical guidelines. Similar questions are discussed in Chapter 8 “Mentoring and Retaining College-Bound DREAMers”, with a focus on Virginia context. If to be an undocumented youth could be difficult, to be also an LGBTQ student could put the DREAMers in a double exile, with bitter possible rejection from society by also original family, as explained in Chapter 9. The third section is close with a chapter about using critical narratives to build true relationships proposed in a first-hand experience by Aurora Chang with Nancy Gutierrez.

The fourth section “Finding, Sharing, and Transforming Identity through Art”, invite teachers to experiment tools and languages. The deconstruction power of the immigrant discourses using the music is illustrated in Chapter 11 by Gertrude Tinker Sachs and Theresa Austin. The following chapter by Susan Harden and Robin Witt is about an active learning pedagogy with the use of the theatre. Music, drama, student newspapers, letter writing, and social networks are all well-known practical strategies that involve actively all students in issues relevant to their lives.

Finally, in the last section, the authors explicitly explain how to become a teacher- ally. Briefly, the simple secret is to trust in a pedagogy of relationship.

In the end, “Teachers as Allies” offers a broad range of curriculum insights, resources and reflections to the different possible readers. This timely book is possible to be read in an interactive way: rich are the references to films, institutional laws, books and songs, allowing a cultural and social immersion on the bitter American actuality for undocumented students. The text also presents several bibliographic references at the end of each chapter. Open is the invitation to know more and search for in-depth information about the topic.

For teachers working with students from Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, it is a book to carry on in the working- bags going to work, becoming a valuable tool for teacher’s professional development. For school leader or educators in higher education, it provides recommendations for supporting the transition to college and professional suggestions to supports DREAMers and undocumented youth.

In any case, it is a passionate book that gives hope for a more inclusive society through education. Moreover, the text proves a remarkable support to open bridge of reflections for similar challenges, like Mediterranean youth immigration crises searching for inclusion in Europe, which require creativeness and courageous teachers too.