

Immigrants and Taxes: An Investigation by the Students of the Immigrant Learning Center (Malden, MA)

Popular Education workshop, First Literacy, Feb 11, 2019

Some people believe that immigrants don't pay taxes. The students of ESL 3 and ESL Literacy conducted a survey of the immigrants at this school. We asked the students with jobs to tell us how much they pay per week in income taxes toward Medicare, Social Security, Federal and state taxes. We also asked them about their work hours, wages, job descriptions, past professions, native countries and the reasons they came to the United States.

The students who answered the survey came from 26 countries including: Albania, Bosnia, Brazil, Burma (Myanmar), China, Colombia, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Iran, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Taiwan, Turkey, Ukraine and Vietnam.

They came here for many reasons: to be with their families, to help their families, for their children's future, for jobs, better pay, careers, business, education, freedom, peace, safety from war and violence, escape from political persecution, a better political environment, democracy, American culture, a better quality of life, more opportunities, to learn English, to start a new life, because they or their family members married Americans, or because they love America.

The professions in their native countries were reported as: engineer, civil engineer, electrical engineer, aircraft engineer, telecommunications engineer, commuter programmer, computer operator, technician, geologist, agronomist, professor, teacher, student, musicologist, lawyer, tax department director, media consultant, bank teller, insurance company manager, insurance salesperson, salesperson, operator, supervisor, electrician, welder, carpenter, mechanic, car painter, gardener, housepainter, customs official, tax inspector, dentist, pharmacist, nurse, nursing assistant, doctor's office employee, accountant, secretary, bookkeeper, typist, data entry typist, cashier, real estate agent, barber, hair dresser, factory worker, cleaner, seamstress, tailor, baker soccer player, lifeguard, volleyball coach, monk, dancer, business owner and trader.

Their current job descriptions include: cleaner, fast food worker, cashier, restaurant cook, chef, restaurant employee, nursing assistant, home health care assistant, bottle recycler, factory worker, gas attendant, delivery driver, truck driver, newspaper delivery person, data entry typist, supermarket carriage attendant, dance teacher, meditation teacher, teacher, cosmetologist, beautician, barber, baker, security guard, shipping clerk, stock person, salesperson and library volunteer.

Their work week ranges from 4 to 71 hours per week. Their hourly pay rate ranges from \$6.75 to \$17.00 per hour. The average rate is \$10.04. Their tax contribution per week range from:

Federal taxes:	\$0 to \$157.	Total contributions are \$1,406 per week and \$73,112 per year.
Social Security taxes	\$0 to \$103.	Total contributions are \$1,373 per week and \$71,396 per year.
Massachusetts taxes:	\$0 to \$61.	Total contributions are \$906 per week and \$47,112 per year.
Medicare taxes:	\$0 to \$24.	Total contributions are \$346 per week and \$17,992 per year.

The total yearly tax contribution by students at The Immigrant Learning Center is \$209,612. The government helps support this school and the students' taxes help support the government.

The Question Formulation Technique

The essence of the RQP educational strategy has two major components: *Developing the Skill of Question Formulation* and a *Framework for Focusing on Decisions*. The *Question Formulation Technique* is a simple step-by-step process that teaches learners how to formulate their own questions. “Formulating” rather than “asking” questions is stressed because formulating questions requires people to think carefully about what they need to know, what they want to know, and why they want to know it. The process begins by having learners select an issue that is of concern to them that will generate questions. They then go through the four structured steps of the technique:

1. **Brainstorming:** In this first step, participants think of as many questions as they can about the issue. By brainstorming questions, rather than ideas, they start to come up with questions without stopping to analyze, explain or answer them. This step allows participants to get more comfortable with the formulation of questions, to get beyond the initial emotionally loaded questions, and to hear different perspectives without entering into a discussion. Participants who may be comfortable with brainstorming are often challenged by the task of brainstorming questions. That is why this part adheres to posing only questions. All the questions are recorded exactly as formulated, validating the learner’s input and instilling a new confidence in their ability to participate. Once brainstorming is completed they learn how to distinguish between close and open-ended questions, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each and which to use depending on the kind of information they are seeking.
2. **Prioritizing:** Participants are asked to prioritize their questions and, by analyzing them, to select the top three that they want to pursue further. They then choose one of those three to focus on. This step provides an opportunity for discussion and assessment of the different issues that have surfaced. It requires give and take between the members of the group.
3. **Branching-off:** Once participants choose the one question they want to focus on, they are asked to branch off that question and brainstorm more questions about it. This process will help them discover how to ask more questions to help them get closer to the answers they need. They will also discover new questions they will want answered. Those who had difficulty brainstorming questions in the beginning will feel more comfortable now.
4. **Prioritize again:** Finally, participants prioritize again from the last list of questions they generated and choose the three they want to get answered first. Now they are ready to work together to design their own action plan for getting their questions answered. Going through the steps sequentially engages people in a critical thinking process that deepens their ability to think independently and enables them to discover new layers of complexity and understanding of the issues that they are concerned about.

The Focus on Decisions helps learners use their question formulation skills to probe a particular decision and decide on what actions they need to take by focusing on:

1. The process used to make the decision: Questions are used to help learners uncover the steps used in making a decision; the who, when, where and how.
2. The basis used to make the decision: Here learners focus on discovering the rules, regulations, and policies that the decision is based on to determine if the decision is legitimate.
3. The opportunities to participate in the process: Learners question to determine the role they can play in the process.

For more information about *The Right Question Project* and its work, go to www.rightquestion.org.