Reading and Writing (and Singing and Dancing) to Learn About Immigration

What's your name?
Why are you coming here?
Are you a spy?
Do you know English?
Do you have a sickness?
What's in your suitcase?

This country's gettin' crowded
do we have enough space?

This country's gettin' louder
we've got a lot of different music traveling around.

Reading and music specialists Lois Sax and Jeanine Johnston and Principal Carmen Chan thought so, too. On small grants from a local arts commission, they brought to the school a composer, mime artists, and actresses. The performing arts met the social studies, and the rendezvous worked splendidly. The collaboration culminated in the production "In the Year of the Immigrant."

"In the Year of the Immigrant" put all 75 5th graders on stage, not just a few. The 5th graders presented "In the Year of the Immigrant" first to classmates, then in the evening to parents. So successful were both performances that a third was arranged for the students of another elementary school across town.

Dearborn Park is one of Seattle's most diverse elementary schools, with Asians, blacks, and whites in roughly equal numbers. One-third of the students are "at risk." Many are bused, some spending two hours a day traveling to and from. None missed any of the performances. Lingering after the evening performance, parent Trish Nicola was reflective: "Something like this is enough to make you think it's all working."

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