

BRIDGING THE GAP: EFFECTIVE PARENT COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN DIVERSE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Received: 02/2024

Published: 05/2024

ABSTRACT

This article examines the importance of parent communication and involvement in working with students from diverse- as well as often trauma-impacted immigrant and refugee communities- to foster academic and social development. Using a qualitative research design, the article explores the challenges and opportunities in building relationships between schools and families for immigrant and refugee students by examining the experiences of 10 educators, 10 school administrators and 10 parents from this population. In particular, the research describes the experiences of families who have been displaced from conflict settings, mainly from Afghanistan, and the challenges parents face when interacting with the U.S. public education system. Many parents find it difficult to understand what is expected of them by the U.S. educational system, parents - particularly those who have been detained or displaced - cannot engage with their children's education due to emotional and psychological barriers. The study highlights the need for trauma-informed models such as safe and supportive school environments for children and their families to better meet the unique needs of these populations. In addition, the study uncovered the important role of community-based organizations in mediating between schools and immigrant families by offering vital resources and offering guidance on how to negotiate the educational system. The research also emphasizes the need for empathy-informed practices to address families' emotional and cultural needs and experiences of conflict zones. "Meeting them halfway" by demonstrating cultural competence and offering frequent, empathetic communication, educators and school leaders can create solid relationships with the immigrant and refugee parents, which will benefit the schooling experiences of school children. This research adds to the relatively small literature on parent engagement in complex school systems throughout diverse education programs, and provides specific ideas for better communicating and supporting immigrant and refugee families within school contexts.

Keywords: Parent Communication, Immigrant Students, Refugee Students, Trauma-Informed Practices, Cultural Sensitivity.

INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement is commonly known as the key for student success. Research indicates that student learning is influenced by the home environment (Yang, et al., 2022) and that learning is strengthened through a partnership between home and school. But in urban public school communities especially those that serve immigrant or refugee resident populations the standard parent communication approach falls short when it comes to communicating effectively with a widespread and diverse student population. This need is particularly acute in a district like HISD, where there are more and more students who are coming from conflict areas, like Afghanistan, under immigration programs intended to help refugees and others displaced by war (Gil, et al., 2021).

The students in HISD represent a range of diversity, including the large number affected by trauma, displacement, and instability, and educators seize opportunities out of students' experiences. These clients often come with cultural and psychological experiences that have an impact on their participation in the regular classroom. With the increasing diversity in schools, the role of parents and how to involve them meaningfully is becoming more important (Fredricks, et al., 2016).

DIVERSE STUDENT BACKGROUNDS AND CLASSROOM REALITIES

In recent years, thousands of Afghan students have come to U.S. schools through refugee and humanitarian programs. Such students and students who are war-wounded/living with trauma come to school with the wounds of war, personal trauma, and experiences of interrupted or limited formal schooling, potential barriers to social and academic integration in school. A growing number of them are struggling with language barriers, social isolation and learning undertows after having spent years in refugee camps or a limbo-like state of displacement. This is the education gap that is negatively impeding overall achievement, as well as how students behave in the classroom (Graham-Clay, 2024).

The anthropological behavior of these children can be contrary to that required in structured classroom situations due to the socialized norms of these traumatized children (Yulianti, et al., 2020). For instance, students experiencing conflict zones or refugee camps may struggle to settle into the order and quiet of a U.S. school classroom setting. They could be silent, aggressive or withdrawing. That can place them in misunderstanding or conflict with peers from middle-class,

stable American backgrounds. American classmates, meanwhile, may not be emotionally equipped to engage with peers who behave in unfamiliar or troubling ways (Heinrichs, 2018).

Attending to (and Managing) Tension In such spaces, teachers should (be) have to attend to, which is to say manage, these tensions to create an environment where all the students feel welcome (Yu, et al., 2022). One of the great problems is how to make students of the two classes see and hear one another and learn each other's language and understand each other's ways. Furthermore, the teacher provides more than mere academic instruction, but also promotes socialization and positive emotional health (Jelas, et al., 2016).

ENGAGING WITH PARENTS FROM DETENTION AND TRAUMA BACKGROUNDS

It is also of course all the more challenging to find effective ways of engaging with parents in such complex educational environments that have all endured long periods in refugee camps, detention centers, or other such trauma induced spaces. There are numerous immigrant and refugee parents who struggle to grasp what the U.S (Xiong, et al., 2021). education system expects of them; interacting with schools is hindered by obstacles including language, schooling system unfamiliarity and profound distrust of institutions based on historical interactions others have had with them (Jules, et al., 2021).

For parents who have spent years in detention or refugee camps, their experiences prior to reaching Australia might well influence how they view school systems, as one perceived bureaucratic or totalitarian system might look much like another. And the emotional wounds inflicted will often result in fear or reluctance to interact with authority figures at schools. This can act as a n obstacle to what communication can take place between schools and parents, with detrimental effects for the academic and emotional support children experience at home (Erdener, 2016).

Establishing good relationships with them now, let's now focus on how to develop good relationships with them is a matter of patience and a respect for their culture and individuality. Days of enrolling our constituents into the Medicaid Expansion, or holding scoring events; days of providing translation services or trust-building community organizing and space for informal conversations, long before anyone is whipped into "debate mode." By regular conversation, teachers can teach parents how to help their child's educational and emotional support (Zhu, et al., 2021). These interactions, which often reveal the root causes of a student's behavior or academic struggles, have a transformative effect that can sometimes cause a positive shift in a student's home and school life (Lara, & Saracostti, 2019).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the role of effective parent communication and engagement in supporting the academic and social development of students from diverse, trauma-affected backgrounds, particularly those from conflict zones such as Afghanistan.
2. To identify culturally sensitive strategies and practices that educators can adopt to foster meaningful relationships with immigrant and refugee parents, addressing language barriers, trauma, and trust issues to promote student success in multicultural classrooms.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important as it provides insights into the nuances of parent communication and engagement in multicultural education contexts, particularly schools with a high proportion of immigrant and refugee students. With the globalization and diversification of student populations, teachers need to cater to the different experiences and needs of students with a trauma history. This research underscores the importance of culturally responsive approaches and trauma informed practices for establishing strong school-family partnerships. By concentrating on a population originated from a war-torn area such as Afghanistan this research draws attention to the need of empathy, trust building and personalized approach in combating communication barriers. It also offers immediate guidance to educators and school leaders to support parents—particularly parents who are unfamiliar with the U.S. education system—by providing them with multilingual resources, community help and mental-health services. Finally, results from this study may extend policy and practice in multicultural classrooms providing for more inclusive, supportive environments for students and their families leading to improved educational opportunities for a highly diverse range of students.

CLASSROOM INTEGRATION: BRIDGING TWO WORLDS

It IS very difficult to take such students -those that come from a war torn or displaced background and put them into a nice 'safe' 4 walls school with desks and chairs in rows. Many of these students come with emotional and behavioral issues brought on by the trauma they experienced, so their promotion to school is far from flawless. The distress they bear on their shoulders can appear in a range of forms — from a tendency to withdraw and shut down to anger and unruliness (Martínez-Álvarez, 2017; Wong, et al., 2018).

Similarly in the case of students born in the United States, they may find the behaviors of immigrant peers difficult to comprehend or identify with. These students may not be socially and emotionally mature, or culturally aware, enough to help students transition into a new culture. If these conflicts are left unattended, they may result in acts of intimidation, racism or exclusion, which make things harder for both migrant students and their classmates. Two-pronged strategy is required to tackle these problems (Epstein, et al., 2019). For U.S.-born children, educators can cultivate students' empathy by framing age-appropriate conversations around global diversity, trauma, and the lives of refugees and immigrants. Simultaneously, immigrant students require safe, caring environments that allow them to share their experiences and acclimatize themselves gradually to their new home. This demands a positive classroom climate and culture, one that honors diversity and affords students the chance to learn from one another's unique experiences (Page, et al., 2021).

LESSONS FROM 29 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Based on his 27-year career in education, the author has gained numerous invaluable experiences about teaching in diverse, multicultural classrooms. Having taught students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, the author found that the most effective teachers are "bridge-builders," connecting home and school through empathy, communication, and positive classroom climate. Aside from the practical expertise derived from many years of teaching, the author's role as a Ph. D. student who has contributed some useful theoretical reflections on the issue of how to cultivate multiple student voices. Backed by research – such as that involving restorative practices, trauma-informed care and culturally responsive pedagogy – and hands-on experience, the work on meaningful parent engagement has taken a clear shape for us. Based on research, they help schools to build places where students can flourish academically and socially under the toughest of circumstances

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative research methods to investigate the intricate issues of parent communication and engagement across a variety of educational contexts, some of which serve a high number of immigrant and refugee students, a number of whom come from conflict zones including Afghanistan. The qualitative methodology was selected since it can gain a deep understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and behaviors that students, parents, and educators, who are involved in the tensions and opportunities of being in the multicultural classroom, carry out (Snell, et al., 2018; Shamash, et al., 2022). The methodology is outlined as follows:

DATA COLLECTION

This study will use a multifaceted and multimethod approach to data collection to access all experiences and points of view on the part of the main actors in the education of immigrant and refugee students. First, educators and school administrators and parents will be invited to participate in semi-structured interviews (Krauss, et al., 2017). These interviews will seek to uncover their experiences, struggles, and beliefs in relation to the communication, engagement, and academic and emotional support of students. The semi-structured nature used in the interview allows for adaptability and participants can express what they want to while remaining in the scope of the interview.

Second, focus groups of students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds will be convened. These conversations aim at reflecting, in the students' experience, what happens inside a classroom and their experience with their peers, their teachers and the school, in general. The analysis will enable the research to grasp the dynamics of the groups and of the experience shared by the students; specifically with regard to the vision in terms of adequacy and support in the educational context.

Moreover, classroom and parent-teacher meetings will be participated as observer. Such an approach affords the researcher with firsthand experience of the realities of communication in the lives of teachers, students, and parents. Witnessing these interactions within their natural context will also aid in uncovering tacit cultural norms, non-verbal communication practices, and culturally-relevant practices currently in use by teachers to stimulate involvement of culturally diverse families.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research strategy ideal for uncovering and interpreting patterns within rich, description data, such as that derived from interviews, focus groups, and participant observations. This systematic process of coding the data, grouping significant perspectives and creating themes that express common ideas, opinions and experiences of the participants is termed as codifying (Thomas, et al., 2020). Thematic analysis may be used to the researcher to reveal not only the explicit, but also the hidden/revealed meanings of the data, focusing on themes such as parent engagement, communication difficulties and effective ways to deal with challenges in multicultural classroom contexts.

Transcripts of interviews and focus groups, and field notes of observations, will be read and re-read during preliminary stages of analysis to familiarize the analyst with the data. Codes will also be created to identify salient aspects of the data related to the research questions. Categories which will be developed into major themes will be formed around these codes. In addition to this investigation on all stakeholder perspectives, the examination will attend to differences in perspective according to the stakeholder groups (educators, parents, students) in order to fully grasp the underlying forces (Li, et al., 2021). Additionally, thematic analysis does not require fixed form of data and can comprehend both shared experiences and conflicting cases, making it a suitable approach to investigate multidimensional social concepts such as cultural communication and participation in different educational settings. In this way, the study seeks to yield findings that not only describe existing practices and difficulties, but can also guide recommendations for culturally responsive and inclusive educational practices.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The identification of participants to whom the results of this study are to apply will be based on the need to develop nuanced understandings of immigrant and refugee students educational experiences (or lack thereof) and the strategies schools use to serve such youth. Teachers and school administrators in schools with a high percentage of immigrants and refugees will be the study's target, especially those who have recently come from conflict-affected areas. These educators are typically the first to enact strategies of communication and engagement; as such the views of these practitioners are crucial to understanding the issues and values of multicultural learning places (Wright, et al., 2018).

The relevance and quality of the data will be guaranteed by the use of purposive sampling method. The researchers also purposively selected the participants due to their direct participation in the issues of interest. Teachers and school leaders will be selected for their ability to work with a variety of student populations and engage immigrant families. Furthermore, parents, and students themselves, who are first-affected by these educational and communication problems will be considered in the sample. Their participation is essential for an understanding of the lived experiences and affective intensities involved in the negotiation of schooling in a new and often alien cultural environment. Targeted selection of participants in this way provides voices of those most affected by and involved in the phenomena studied and hence supports depth and transferability of the findings across other similar educational contexts.

LIMITATIONS

Implications although we aim to offer a nuanced examination of the experiences and perceptions of immigrant and refugee students, parents, and educators in this research, there are several limitations to consider. First, the qualitative nature of the data in this study itself imposes constraints on the application of the findings to wider populations. Given the sample to be purposive and small, insights are likely to be a biased reflection of experiences in other schools, districts, or cultural contexts.

Second, language barriers may be an important obstacle, particularly during the interviews or focus groups with participants who are not fluent in the researcher's mother tongue. Whether when using translators or interpreters, meaning can be lost in the translation and depth of answers could be compromised. In addition, participants' emotional condition, in particular if trauma affected, i.e. refugee families, may influence whether they are able or willing to thoroughly recount their experiences. This may lead to superficial responses or reserved answers that hinder the quality and accuracy of the data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 Thematic Data Analysis Related to Research Objectives

Research Objective	Themes	Sub-themes
Objective 1: Explore the role of effective parent communication and engagement in supporting the academic and social development of students from diverse, trauma-affected backgrounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parent-Teacher Communication - Parental Involvement in Student Learning - Impact of Trauma on Parental Engagement - Social and Academic Outcomes of Parent Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methods of communication (e.g., meetings, emails, calls) - Frequency and quality of engagement - Impact of trauma on ability to engage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in academic performance and social behavior due to parent engagement

Research Objective	Themes	Sub-themes
Objective 2: Identify culturally sensitive strategies and practices that educators can adopt to foster meaningful relationships with immigrant and refugee parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culturally Sensitive Communication - Building Trust with Immigrant Families - Trauma-Informed Engagement Practices - Role of Language and Interpretation Services - Community Support Systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culturally appropriate communication strategies - Building trust through personalized outreach - Trauma-sensitive methods of engagement - Use of interpreters and multilingual materials - Role of community organizations in supporting parent-school communication

A summary of the themes and with respect to the research questions are given in Table 1). The results of Objective 1, (regarding effective parent communication as an important factor that supports their students from culturally diverse trauma-affected backgrounds) major themes emerged: Parent-Teacher Communication, Parent Involvement, and School. Sub-themes focus on the type and frequency of communication, the hurdles of trauma on the involvement of parents, and the importance of parent involvement on the academic and social growth of students. For Aim 2, to discover culturally appropriate practices that usher in trusting relationships with immigrant and refugee parents, specifically, themes include Culturally Sensitive Communication, Building Trust, and Trauma-Informed Practices. Sub-themes describe the significance of culturally competent communication, trust-building practices, the role of interpreters and multilingual materials, and utilization of community support systems. Cumulatively, the table shows how thematic analysis serves to link stakeholder experiences to more global patterns that have implications for successful, inclusive educational practices (Poon, 2020).

Table 2 Qualitative Data Analysis from 10 Educators, 10 School Administrators, and 10 Parents of Immigrant and Refugee Students

Participant Group	Theme	Sub-theme	Key Findings
Educators (n=10)	Parent-Teacher Communication	Methods of communication (e.g., meetings, emails, calls)	Educators emphasize regular face-to-face meetings and consistent emails to maintain communication with parents.
		Frequency and quality of engagement	High-quality engagement is noted when educators reach out frequently, but many immigrant parents require translation support.
	Parental Involvement in Learning	Impact of trauma on ability to engage	Teachers report that trauma affects immigrant students' behavior, making it harder for parents to engage consistently.
		Social and Academic Outcomes of Parent Engagement	Parent involvement correlates with improved academic and social outcomes for refugee and immigrant students.
School Administrators (n=10)	Culturally Sensitive Communication	Culturally appropriate communication strategies	Administrators stress the importance of understanding cultural contexts and using culturally relevant communication styles.
		Building trust through personalized outreach	Building trust with immigrant families takes time; personalized outreach is essential to engage effectively.
Parents of Refugee Students (n=10)	Community Support Systems	Role of community organizations in supporting parent-school communication	Parents of refugee students express gratitude for community organizations that facilitate communication and provide resources.

Table 2 presents a summary of the qualitative data from 10 teachers, 10 school administrators, 10 immigrant and refugee students' parents, thematically grouped and sub-grouped, with key findings. For educators, the overarching topic of Parent-Teacher Communication centers on the frequency of meetings and emails, but is complicated by the issue of language barriers and the need for translation assistance. Educators also report that trauma influences the behavior of the students,

making it difficult for parents to become consistently involved. However, in families where parents are involved, significant differences in the academic and social results of their children are found. Culturally Sensitive Communication remains a top priority) according to district administrators. They emphasize the importance of tailoring communication approaches to be more culturally appropriate and the importance of building relationships with immigrant families through individualized and ongoing outreach. The topic of Community Support Systems is apparent to parents of refugee students. These parents appreciate the role that community groups play in generating two-way communication between schools and families and making tangible contributions to parent involvement and children's learning. Taken as a whole, the results highlight the significance of trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive school-family communication.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of parent communication and participation for various school contexts including schools which serve populations of immigrant and refugee families (Wang, et al., 2019). One of the recurring themes to come out of the research is the detrimental effects of trauma on the minds of students themselves and their families – especially when they have been displaced by conflict or have lived for long periods of time in refugee camps (Yang, et al., 2022). That trauma is frequently evident in parents' challenges as they try to make their way through the U.S. education system, which may be all new to them in terms of how schools are organized and what they expect, and where they've come from in terms of culture (Collado, et al., 2021). The research found that trauma can result in emotional and psychological walls that make it more difficult for parents to be involved in their children's education. Trauma: How Understanding Events Affects and Eases Learning As a result, there is a call for educators to implement trauma-informed practices which support students and also offer emotional and logistical support to parents (Yang, et al., 2018). Furthermore, the research supports the need for culturally sensitive communication techniques. Educators said personalized outreach, multilingual support and the role of interpreters are key to building trust with immigrant and refugee families. Effective strategies were demonstrated to be those that promoted the home-school partnership and thereby enhanced student learning and adjustment. Those families are also supported by the community-based organizations that provide the resources, guidance and ties with schools, the study found. Interpretation of this finding underscores the importance of school-community partnerships to support immigrant and refugee students and families. The findings have implications for the role of empathy, cultural competence, and trauma-informed care to encourage authentic parental involvement which will help to develop more inclusive and supportive education environments for racially and culturally diverse students to thrive academically and socially (Ansong, et al., 2017; Yang, et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study highlights the importance of strong parent communication and engagement in promoting the academic and social success of students with trauma backgrounds. The findings show that the process of meaningful interaction with the education system is far from simple or straightforward, especially for families who have made traumatic displacements, are coming from conflict zones such as Afghanistan and are all learners as well as educators. The results reveal that the influence of trauma is significant both on student behavior and on parental involvement, and are a call to educators to utilize culturally sensitive and trauma-informed responses to the unique challenges that these children and their parents face. It highlights the value of customized outreach, multilingual assistance and partnerships in building a bridge between schools and families. When educators use empathetic, culturally relevant communication strategies, they can establish trust with parents and help parents be more involved in their children's education. The participation of community groups also enriches this process, offering additional support and guidance as families negotiate the idiosyncrasies of the U.S. education system. Finally, this study points toward the urgency of generating schools that stretch themselves from conventional modes of communication in service to those inclusive and responsive to immigrant and refugee families. In doing so, schools can create contexts that promote not only the academic success of these students but their emotional and social well-being. The results from this study provide important implications and practical suggestions that can inform educators and leaders in their quest to build equitable, compassionate, and encouraging learning environments that promote the success of all students, regardless of their background.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations from experience and research on how to improve parent involvement and make educational environments more welcoming and supportive of diverse students include:

CULTURALLY COMPETENT TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS: We need to make sure that school personnel receive culturally competent professional development. Teachers, educators, and counselors should be trained to understand and accommodate the cultural, linguistic, emotional requirements of immigrant and refugee families. That training should pay special attention to the challenges that these families face, including the transition to a new education system and navigating the emotional fallout of displacement or trauma. Culturally competent educators will have a deeper understanding of students and families' lived experiences and more effective

modes of communication, ultimately working to engage families in a manner that is respectful, inclusive, and supportive.

DEDICATED LIAISONS OR INTERPRETERS FOR IMMIGRANT PARENTS: In order to break down language hurdles and help with better communication, schools need liaisons or interpreters for the immigrant parents. These bilingual staff members can serve as intermediaries between school and home, so that when it comes to the U.S. education system, parents who don't speak English, they get to fully understand what the system expects of them. This will also assist parents in understanding school rules, events, and their children's academic performance. Interpreters or resources in a parents' home language can help parents better understand their child's education and feel more trusting of the school.

PARENT WORKSHOPS: Parent workshops should be developed to assist immigrant and refugee parents with this aspect of their children's education. These could be workshops to help explain the U.S. public school system in language and information that is easy to digest. What topics could be addressed, then: understanding grade levels, testing, student rights, how you can help at home with learning. Making these workshops available in different languages means that all parents can attend and become involved in their child's learning. Workshops also build community and offer resources to parents that allow them to be active participants in their child's education.

Mental Health Support: Offering mental health assistance is another key recommendation for schools with immigrant and refugee students. These families also usually bring a host of psychological issues that result from experiences in war, displacement, and resettlement. Schools should provide mental health services not just for students but also for students' families, as they struggle to deal with the emotional and psychological consequences of trauma. Mental health programs can provide counseling, therapy and workshops to help students adjust to their new surroundings, and to equip parents with training and psychological resources to support their kids.

EMPATHY EDUCATION IN CLASSROOMS: Ultimately, empathy in schools [is] crucial to creating a school culture that is more inclusive and supportive. Teaching them empathy, diversity, and refugee experiences in school are the most effective ways to help students understand what their classmates are going through. Such education has the potential to decrease discrimination, bullying and isolation by peers, and can improve acceptance and support for immigrant and refugee students. The lesson on empathy not only benefits those who are directly impacted, but creates an overall school environment in which kindness, respect, and inclusivity are celebrated. Adopting these suggestions will make schools better at reaching out and engaging all parents, in providing students with supportive surrounding, and in promoting academic achievement in the educationally diverse classrooms of the future.

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