The Emotional Well-being of Secondary Refugee Students within a School Setting

Diane Oliva, Ph.D.
West Ada School District
EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF SECONDARY REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT STUDENTS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACCULTURATION AND SCHOOL SUPPORT

Research Conducted 2014-2015

Dr. Diane Oliva
Choice of Topic

- Concern for inequity in education
  - Unreasonable expectations
  - Lack of support
  - Amount of traumatic events

- Experience as a practitioner

  Students who have:
  - Witnessed death or murder due to war or political conflict
  - Recruited as soldiers
  - Have had family members disappear
  - Are separated from family
  - Been raped or tortured
  - Have parents who are not able to work or lead productive lives due to physical or emotional health
  - Live with the fear of uncertainty
Introduction

Background to the Study

- In the last 10 years the foreign born population grew by 32.6% (U.S. Census, 2010)

- By 2050 first and second generation immigrants will make up 37% of the U.S. population (PEW, 2012)

- Immigrants are the fastest growing student population in the United States with 24% of the K-12 student population having at least one foreign-born parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

- Student refugee and immigrants’ unique needs are not being met in public schools (Suarez-Orozco, C, Suarez-Orozco, M. M., & Todorova, 2008)
Purpose of the Study

- To examine the relationship between student acculturation and school support and whether school support effects categories of acculturation and the emotional well-being of newly arrived refugee and immigrant students.
Acculturation

“the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p.698)
Definitions

- **School Support:** Staff and programs within a school that support the academic, social and emotional lives of students.

- **Emotional Well-being:** “the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning” (Center of Disease Control and Prevention [CDCP], 2013, para. 4)

- **Newcomer programs/centers:** Programs which support students new to the country (newcomers) with low language and often low academic skills.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Participation</th>
<th>Cultural Maintenance</th>
<th>Cultural Maintenance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integration</strong> (Bicultural)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td><strong>Marginalization</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Berry’s Theoretical Framework**
Research Questions

- What is the relationship between acculturation categories and perceived school support for secondary refugee and immigrant students?

- What is the relationship between acculturation categories and perceived emotional well-being of secondary refugee and immigrant students?

- What is the relationship between perceived school support and perceived emotional well-being of secondary refugee and immigrant students?
The Literature Review

FAMILY ACCULTURATION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY
Downward Mobility
Fazel-Older youth psych disorders

STUDENT ACCULTURATION WITHIN SCHOOLS
Academic
Social
Emotional
Well-being
Suarez-Orozco et al. LISA- 2/3 psyc pre-mig Ellis 45-60 PTSD/Jones &Trickett-brokering

IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE SCHOOL SUPPORTS
Culturally Proficient Educators
Newcomer Centers
Short & Boyson/Castillo/Nuri-Robbins
Research Design and Methods
Sites and Participants

**Purposeful, convenient sample of:**
- 75 refugee and immigrant students ages 14-20
  - Advanced beginning to intermediate language learners
  - ---Countries
  - -----Languages

- 4 counselors assigned to one of the two Newcomer Centers

**Two Newcomer Centers**
- Both programs were within schools, but not segregated from high school peers
- Both programs had participation criteria
Phase One
Survey Instrument

Survey adapted from, The International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth (ICSEY) survey (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006)

Demographics
- 9 of the 15 No parent or community questions
- Added language

Acculturation
- Assimilation
- Separation
- Integration
- Marginalization

Emotional Well-being
- Life Satisfaction
- Self-Esteem
- Discrimination

School Support
- School Adjustment
- Research added School Personnel and Program Support
- Research added open-ended questions

5-point Likert Scale
Subsection Means

- Integration Preference
- Strong Self-esteem
- Strong School Support
Acculturation Means
Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question No.</th>
<th>Agree or Strongly Agree</th>
<th>f%</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. I feel that my culture should maintain their own cultural traditions but also adapt to those of America.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I would be just as willing to marry an American than someone from my culture.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. It is important to me to be fluent in both my own language and in English.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I prefer social activities that involve both Americans and people from my own culture.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I prefer to have both friends from my own culture and American friends.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
What is the relationship between acculturation categories and perceived school support for secondary refugee and immigrant students?

Spearman’s Rho Correlations

Note: * Correlation is significant at the .05 level. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel that my own culture should adapt to American cultural traditions and not maintain those of my own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is more important to me to be fluent in English than in my own language</td>
<td>.484**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My classroom teachers help me with my class assignments.</td>
<td>-.276*</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The counselor helps me find services when I need to contact someone in or out of school</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.268*</td>
<td>.250*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel I can talk to my principal or vice-principal when I need to</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.335**</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.594**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I feel welcomed to join clubs and after school activities</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.312**</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.454**</td>
<td>.632**</td>
</tr>
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What is the relationship between acculturation categories and perceived emotional well-being of secondary refugee and immigrant students?

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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I prefer to have only American friends.</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I prefer social activities that involve Americans only.</td>
<td>.342**</td>
<td>.483**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other kids outside of school treat me unfairly or negatively.</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>-.318**</td>
<td>-.206</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I take a positive attitude to myself.</td>
<td>.326**</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.254*</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase Two Interviews and Open-ended

- Students
  - Eight Students
  - Two Sites

- Counselors
  - Four Counselors
  - Two Sites

- Open-ended Questions
  - 75 Students
  - Survey
  - Two Sites

- Interview questions validated by EL expert panel
- Interviews: I-CVI .98
- Open-ended questions validated and piloted
- Open-ended: I-CVI .96
Qualitative Codes and Themes

- Eight Students and four Counselors

- Seven Themes Emerged
  - Support for academics
  - Additional program support
  - Challenges to educational access
  - Students’ academic strengths
  - Support for student emotional well-being
  - Challenges to emotional well-being
  - Students’ emotional strength
Qualitative Codes and Themes

Interviews

Top Student Academic Challenges
- Lack of English
- Unaware of programs or school information
- Communicating information

Top Counselor Academic Challenges
- Gap in education
- Types and levels of classes
- Lack of English and communicating information
Qualitative Codes and Themes

**Interviews**

- **Top Student Emotional Concerns**
  - Very little reported
    - Different cultural background (3)
    - Lack of friends (2)

- **Top Counselor Emotional Concerns**
  - All counselors talked about mental health-concerns
    - Trauma/Mental health issues (11)
    - Different cultural background (9)
Qualitative Question 1

- What is the relationship between acculturation categories and perceived school support for secondary refugee and immigrant students?
  - Strong desire to be part of the host country
  - Strong desire to learn English
  - Strong desire to have American friends

Faraji summed up the majority of the students’ sentiment for school support,

“Like, last year when I came here, I had no English at all. So I really need help and I truly got help.”
Qualitative Question 2

What is the relationship between categories of acculturation attitudes and perceived emotional well-being of secondary refugee and immigrant students?

Students:
- Preference for integration
- Strong Perceptions of emotional well-being
  - High self-esteem and low reports of discrimination
- Strong desire to have American friends

Counselors:
- Greatest concern for the students’ emotional well-being
We dealt with a lot of trauma [with] PTSD in kids, which would manifest [as] depression. I think some was expectations were pretty high with what it was going to be like when you came to America. And when you get to the reality of what it was going to take, that can be tough. And then there was the traditional stuff, missing home, missing family, adjusting to other students, other cultures.
Qualitative Question 3

- What is the relationship between perceived school support and perceived emotional well-being of secondary refugee and immigrant students?

Disconnect between Students and Counselors

- **School Support**
  - Support versus academic challenges
  - Transportation
  - Money

- **Emotional Well-being**
  - Students had high self-esteem and low reports of discrimination
  - Counselors had significant concerns of mental health issues among students
Summary of Findings

- **Acculturation**
  - Integration was most preferred by 85%
  - Integration was not always realized
    - Separation and assimilation practices

- **School Support**
  - Students felt well supported by teachers and counselors
  - Students discussed multiple academic challenges
Summary of Findings

- **Emotional Well-being**
  - Disconnect between perceptions of emotional well-being
    - Students reported low concern for mental health
    - Counselors reported multiple concerns for students emotional well-being including possible PTSD
Interpretation

- Manifestation of trauma
  - Time
  - The protective factor
  - Trust in source

Resiliency of refugee and immigrants
- Succeed under any circumstance
- Newcomer programs may be the support students need in order to be successful
Implications and Recommendations

- **Need for Newcomer Programs**
  - Fund and support newcomer programs at the secondary level
  - Hire specially trained teachers to support newcomer students

- **Necessity of Specially Trained Counselors**
  - Hire specially trained counselors to support the additional emotional well-being of newcomers
  - Provide adequate assessment of newcomers psychological health
Recommendation for Future Research

- Conduct experimental model at school sites without newcomer programs
- Sample refugee and immigrant youth who have been in the country longer
- Use a combination of acculturation surveys to allow for additional insight into patterns of student acculturation
- Assess adolescents with instruments that accurately measure the strength of mental health
Implication for Personal Practice

- Propose second newcomer site for middle school
- Expand family advocacy and engagement programs for refugee and immigrants
- Provide additional professional development for elementary newcomer staff
- Collaborate and train statewide on cultural proficiency
- Publications in the area refugee and immigrant support
Student Panel
1. What were the most difficult obstacles you had to face when you first started school in the U.S.? What would have been helpful in overcoming these obstacles?

2. What support do you think schools could provide to other students new to the country?

3. If there were no assistant teachers in classes, how would that affect your learning? What do assistant teachers do to help you the most?

4. Are the members of your family aware of how they can participate in your education? If yes, how? What could the school do to help your family be better informed?

5. Do you have any concerns about meeting graduation requirements? If so, what are your concerns? Are you aware of your college or career options once you graduate? If so, how are you made aware?
Mission Statement

“The mission of the West Ada School District’s English Language and Cultural Immersion (ELCI) program is to ensure that each English learner develops linguistically, academically and socially within a collaborative and culturally supportive environment”
ELCI Criterion

Celebration Picnic
Staff

- 4 Certified Staff (2 pt. time)
- 3 Paraprofessionals (2 pt. time)
- 1 full time Counselor
- Endorsed Gen Ed Teachers
- District Administrator to support program
- Additional support for students with higher language skills
Classes
Extended Day and Year

After school tutoring

Field Trips

Shiny Beast Club
Family Support

- Family Advocate
- Adult English Classes (partnership CWI)
- Adult Computer Classes
- Parent Forums
- Health Clinic
- Home Visits
- Interpreters
- Celebrations!
Busing
Scholarships
Q & A

감사합니다

Natick

Danke  Еυχαριστίες  Dalu  Köszönöm

Thank You  Tack

Grazie  Спасибо  Dank  Gracias

Merci  Seé  ありがとう
Dr. Diane Oliva  
Federal Programs Coordinator  
West Ada School District  
oliva.diane@westada.org  
(208) 350-5104
Think of your own needs

- What are the greatest challenges you have with supporting newcomers?

- What support does your district currently provide for newcomers?

- What changes are you seeing in your school regarding newcomers? What do you see as the greatest need in your school for newcomers?

- What steps can you take to educate yourself or others in providing support for newcomers?