

Counseling Immigrant Students in the Schools

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Abstract

According to the 2010 United States Census, one out of every five children live in an immigrant family with either one or both parents being immigrants. This paper will explore the unique needs of children of immigrants who come to school as immigrant students. A discussion of the use of Reality Therapy as a counseling approach with this population is illustrated. Appropriate counseling techniques addressing immigrant students; academic, career and personal/social needs are addressed. A detailed classroom guidance related to the topic is included in the Appendix.

Keywords: immigrant students, reality therapy, school counselors, classroom guidance

The population known as immigrant students is not limited; rather, any student who has come to the United States from a different country can be considered an immigrant. Therefore, when an immigrant student arrives within the school system, school counselors need to consider the individual's personal background before making any decisions about how to conduct counseling sessions and what techniques will be the most beneficial to that particular student.

The following paper gives general information regarding the immigrant student population. However, it is very important to remember that each student, immigrant or not, deserves individual attention without being categorized into a group. The characteristics described below are some which are commonly found among Hispanic, European, and Asian cultures.

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Characteristics of Immigrant Students

Demographics

In the 2010 Census Report, 12.9 percent of the United States' population was made up of foreign born residents (individuals not born in the United States). Of the 39.9 million foreign born, 53.1 percent were from Latin America and the Caribbean, 28.2 percent were born in Asia, and 12.1 percent originated in Europe. The remaining 2 percent were from "Other" countries. At the time of this census, one-fourth of the foreign born population was concentrated in one state, California, while over half was distributed among just four states; New York, Texas, Florida and California. Georgia has 2.4 percent of the total foreign born population. Of the immigrant population, 7.1 percent were under 18 years old, and 80.5 percent were between the ages of 18 and 64 (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Common Characteristics

Immigrant students face challenges unique to them. They are more likely than non-immigrants to live in poverty and be uninsured. Their parents typically have low-wage jobs and may not be well-educated. Many of their parents have limited-English proficiency, so higher-paying jobs are not available to them. Immigrant students' parents may also be undocumented residents and therefore are not eligible for Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), putting greater strain on the families (Shields and Berman, 2004.) This poverty may affect these students in several ways. They may have health problems because their families are afraid to take them to a doctor or the health clinic. In school, these students may be bullied or ridiculed because they do not have all the things that their American counterparts have or are not able to participate in the activities their peers can due to lack of financial resources. These issues may lead to low self-esteem in immigrant students.

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Another challenge immigrant students may face is a language-barrier. Among all children in the United States, 18% speak a language other than English at home, and among children in immigrant families, 72% speak a language other than English at home (Shields and Berman, 2004). Since these children are not exposed to English other than at school, their command of the English language may not be as proficient as needed in order to succeed academically and socially. This lack of social and academic success may lead to early drop-out rates leading to a perpetuation of low-wage jobs and continued poverty.

Discrimination is another barrier immigrant students may face. According to García Coll and Szalacha (2004) social position, racism, and segregation can set children of immigrants apart from mainstream populations. Schools serving these students are also likely to have fewer resources, lower teacher expectations, and patronizing attitudes toward students of non-mainstream cultures. For these students, schools can become instruments of racial oppression. This feeling of racial oppression can lead to disillusionment with education and a negative attitude toward teachers and achievement. This disillusionment can lead to their dropping out of school at an early age in order to avoid this oppression.

One difference between most immigrant cultures and American culture is individual versus group orientation. In the United States, being independent and relying only on oneself is regarded as strength, whereas valuing the group over the individual is considered more important in many other cultures in the world. For example, Hispanic and Asian children will do what their parents and family wants them to do, regardless of personal opinions or plans. And if the child does decide to go against their family's wishes and branch out on their own, feelings of guilt might accompany their decision (Baruth & Manning, 2007).

Immigrant children may also be reluctant to visit a school counselor for many different reasons. Some feel an inherent distrust for Americans or people not of their heritage (Blacks, Hispanic), some believe that sharing problems with someone outside of their family is disrespectful (Asian), and others feel ignored or overlooked by adults (European). (Baruth & Manning, 2007).

Counseling Needs of Immigrant Students

School counselors in a diverse school setting might see students of different nationalities on a daily basis. Some of the problems or issues discussed with these students may be common and every day, but some may have a deeper, culturally oriented origin. Again, getting to know the individual student is important, but the issues listed below are common issues found about the immigrant population.

Stereotyping may be a career issue with immigrant children. Hispanics are stereotyped as physical laborers, and thus may be influenced to find hard labor work.

Academic Issues

Fulgini, Witkow, and Garcia (2005), found that ethnic minority groups and immigrants in American schools are stereotyped in terms of their values and behaviors related to academic achievement. According to these stereotypes, Hispanics devalue education while Asians place great importance on school and good grades come easily to them. Immigrant students who hear these stereotypes might have difficulties in school based on what is expected of them by their teachers and peers. Hispanic students may not try as hard at school as it is assumed they do not care, and Asians might experience exceptional pressure to excel or immense depression/failure when a subject is difficult for them to understand. Additionally, school personnel who embrace stereotypes of immigrant students' low academic achievement may intentionally and unintentionally neglect or place these students in less rigorous classes. School Counselors may find that they may need to take a leadership and advocacy role when addressing the needs of immigrant students where stereotypes are imposed upon them.

Another issue for immigrant children related to academics is a possible language barrier. For some of these students, English is considered a second language, and might not even be spoken in the home. It might also be possible that the children of these families are the only ones with a grasp of the language. Immigrant students who are not receiving quality English as a second language (ESOL) classes are going to be at an obvious disadvantage in the classroom and in counseling sessions. Also, if a good interpreter is not available at or for the school, interactions with parents and guardians will also be disadvantaged.

Tests can also be an academic barrier for immigrant students. Tests which are biased towards English as the first language, American culture, and White students will not yield appropriate results when taken by a student who has spoken English for a relatively short period of time. Biased test results can lead to immigrant students being held back a grade or misrepresented in Special Education classes.

Career

Stereotyping may be a career issue with immigrant children. Hispanics are stereotyped as physical laborers, and thus may be influenced to find hard labor work. Also, some Hispanic families in America are migrant workers, and these children are often pulled out of school to make extra money for their nuclear and extended families.

Another issue with career counseling for immigrant students is the career tests available for use. Like academic tests, it can be difficult to find career tests written in a foreign language, or that have taken non-American culture into mind. These tests can mislead immigrant students as to what careers they should pursue.

Personal/Social

Sheppard (1989) states that after arriving in a new country, immigrants experience a feeling of euphoria at the opportunity for starting over and exploring a new environment. However, euphoria is

followed by "psychological arrival," in which the newly arrived individuals realize and feel the impact of cultural differences, become aware of what has been lost, and begin to idealize the past. During the first year feelings of depression, paranoia, insecurity, isolation, guilt, anxiety, resentment, and inadequacy are just a few of the many emotions that can haunt the thoughts of immigrants in a strange new place. Problems related to socializations usually decrease, but those related to health, family, and employment often remain.

One common personal/social issue for immigrant students is the degree to which they choose to acculturate themselves to American society. Many immigrant students, especially those who spent a significant amount of time in their home country, have to struggle with wanting to stay true to their roots, but also wanting to fit in with their American peers. Kasic, Kruglanski, Pierro, & Mannetti (2004) suggest that the degree to which immigrants experience culture shock is influenced by how many individuals of the same culture they are surrounded by in their new environment. The more familiarity they have, the less motivated they will be to acculturate to American culture.

Counseling Approach with Immigrant Students: Reality Therapy

Reality Therapy is commonly used in the school counseling setting. Mason and Duba (2009), proposed that

reality therapy techniques be applied to school counseling programs. They propose using reality therapy methods will help school counselors develop positive therapeutic relationships and improve students' self-esteem (Mason & Duba, 2009). This theory is based on helping clients make appropriate choices to successfully attain their five basic needs: survival, fun, freedom, belonging, and power. Reality therapy has a present focus, and the counselor works with clients in a positive way, without listening to complaints, to help them develop a plan for getting what they want (Wubbolding, 2002). School counselors using Reality Therapy consider the five basic needs that all humans possess (survival, love and belonging, power or achievement, freedom or independence, and fun) when engaging in counseling immigrant students. Special attention must always be given to love and belonging which Glasser (2002) believes is the primary need. These basic needs make up one's Quality World and this personal world include specific images of people, activities, events, beliefs, possessions and situations that fulfill individual needs (Wubbolding, 2002). People are always the most important component of this Quality World. For a successful therapeutic outcome, the school counselor must be the kind of person the immigrant student would consider putting in his/her Quality World (Glasser 2002). As school counselors interact with his/her immigrant students, their

personal characteristics enable them to appeal to one or more of each student's basic needs.

Reality therapy can be used with immigrant students during counseling sessions for a number of reasons. Reality therapists are non-judgmental, and must constantly work on creating a comfortable and respectful environment for their immigrant students to feel safe in. This facet of Reality therapy can be very helpful to students who feel as though they stand out and do not belong in a classroom of American students. Rapport is considered extremely important in Reality therapy, and counselors are not afraid to allow students plenty of time to feel as though they are in a safe and trusting environment.

Reality therapy is also a good fit for immigrant students because it allows the counselor to take a direct and active role during the counseling sessions. This can be helpful when working with immigrant students who are not used to being in a counseling setting with someone who



is not a family member, and does not know where to begin or what is appropriate. Being direct is also of importance when working with students on making an academic, career or personal/social educational plan, as the school counselor can advise the students as to how effective or realistic their plans are. Metaphors can be used in individual counseling sessions, instead of directly addressing personal matters, which can be uncomfortable for some immigrant students (Baruth & Manning, 2007).

Techniques

Establishing rapport is paramount in any counseling relationship and is no different in the school counselor and immigrant student counseling relationship. Foreign-born or immigrant students might need to take more time becoming familiar with their school counselors or warming up to the idea of discussing personal matters with someone outside of the family. School counselors should take this time to ask their students about their culture, and maybe even ask them to bring in something they treasure from home. Showing an interest in what is important to the student will let the student know that the counselor has a genuine interest in getting to know them. Counselor-student relationships are also considered one of the most important aspects of counseling to European Americans (Baruth & Manning, 2007). Most importantly, establishing rapport and getting to know and understand the student will help school counselors determine what types of counseling techniques will work best with the individual student.

The "Ultimate Question," a Reality Therapy counseling activity, is useful with immigrant students because it gives the school counselor insight into the student's quality world, as well as any cultural influences that are influencing their lives. So much information can be gained from asking any student what goes on in their perfect world. Counselors using this technique should be sure to ask the students where they are, what is around them, and the people who are and are not there. The "Ultimate Question" activity can address cross-cultural competency of the school counselor's awareness of their student's worldview as the students' attitudes and beliefs are revealed, and will also give the specific cultural knowledge about the students.

Family therapy can also be useful for immigrant students' backgrounds. Hispanic and Asian cultures greatly value family, and also place the most respect and power in the hands of the father figure. Having an Asian student's family present during counseling sessions might also alleviate feelings of betrayal of the family, as the issues will be discussed in their presence. Family therapy addresses the Cross-Cultural competency of Culturally Appropriate Intervention Strategies, and it

demonstrates counselor knowledge of family structures, hierarchies, values, and beliefs.

Group counseling can also be used in few different ways. A newcomer's group could be created for all new students at a school, or a small culture-specific group could be formed to address the needs of certain students. These groups would give immigrant students a sense of belonging, and help them find other students with similar interests, or who are experiencing the same difficulties. Groups would satisfy the Cross-Cultural competency of Culturally Appropriate Intervention Strategies, as it shows that the counselor understands intrinsic help-giving networks.

Multicultural Activities

School counselors can address the common needs and stereotypes of immigrant students in their comprehensive school counseling program by intentionally including a series of multicultural classroom guidance lessons in their Guidance Curriculum. This would not only benefit the immigrant students in adjusting in and adapting to the American school system but will also help all students show respect for others. Relevant multicultural topics should include respect, individual differences, friendship, stereotypes, diversity, acceptance, and tolerance. School counselors could also take the initiative to organize a Culture

Day where students will be asked to do show-and-tell presentations about their heritage, and will be encouraged to dress up in culturally accurate or representative costumes. A classroom guidance activity designed to help elementary students identify and "bust" stereotypes are included as a sample of such classroom guidance activity in Appendix A. This lesson asks students to identify stereotypical statements, and symbolically bust them by popping balloons.

Conclusion

This paper was designed to give an overview of what issues may be presented to school counselors when in contact with children of immigrants. Although each immigrant student will have his or her own personal history and background to consider, there are some things which may be considered "common" factors among this population. The most common issue among this population is the possibility of a language barrier, which can hinder academic, career, and personal/social achievements in the school setting. This issue may require school counselors taking on a leadership and advocacy role to assist their students in their educational achievement.

Reality therapy is commonly used in the school setting because of its directive and specific approach to helping students create realistic plans to reach their goals. This type of therapy,

combined with individual, group, and family sessions, can help immigrant students find a comfortable place to talk about what is going on in their lives. Culturally diverse guidance activities should be planned by the school counselor to help all students in a school understand the importance of respect, acceptance, and diversity thus aiding in immigrant students' adjustment in and adaptation to the American school.

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Appendix A

“Bursting” Stereotypes

Type of Activity: Classroom guidance lesson

Title of Activity: “Bursting’ Stereotypes” adapted from http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp294-01.shtml

Participants: 3rd-5th grade

Goals and Objectives:

- Academic Standard A: Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.
 - o Achieve School Success.
 - A:A3.2- Demonstrate the ability to work independently, as well as the ability to work cooperatively with other students.
- Personal/Social Standard A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.
 - o Acquire Self-knowledge
 - PS:A1.9- Demonstrate cooperative behavior in groups.
 - o Acquire Interpersonal Skills
 - Recognize, accept, and appreciate individual differences
 - Recognize, accept, and appreciate ethnic and cultural diversity.

Resources Needed:

1. Two dozen multicolored balloons, inflated
2. Two dozen paper or tag board sentence strips, two inches wide by 12 inches long
3. Writing paper
4. Pencils or Pens
5. Children’s dictionary
6. Crayons or markers
7. Common pin

Time Needed: One hour

Instructions:

Before the lesson, cut paper for sentence strips and inflate about two dozen small balloons. Store balloons in a plastic trash bag until ready to use.

Begin the lesson by writing the words man and woman next to each other on the board. Draw a vertical line between the two words to create a two column chart. Have students set up a piece of writing paper the same way. Then ask students to write words or phrases that describe the qualities or characteristics of a man under the word man and words or phrases that describe a woman under the word woman. To get the ball rolling, you might ask students to share a few ideas with their classmates. Give the students a few minutes to compile their lists.

Next, arrange students into small groups and ask them to share their lists with group members. Then give each group two minutes to brainstorm additional words or phrases describing a man, and two minutes to think of additional words or phrases describing a woman.

Bring the groups together to create a class list of words and phrases about men and women. Write them on the chalkboard as students share them. Then ask some of the following questions:

- Are you happy with the lists you have created? Do you see any changes you would like to make to them?
- Are there terms that do not belong under the heading they are under? re there terms that might fit under both headings?
- Is it fair to say that *all* men _____ or that *all* women _____?

After this discussion, write the word *stereotype* on the board. Ask students if they know what the word means, being sure to encourage their answers. Then write down the dictionary definition of the word. For example, *Scholastic Children’s Dictionary* defines stereotype as “An overly simple picture or opinion of a person, group, or thing. It is a stereotype to say all old people are forgetful.”

Write on the chalkboard these phrases:

- All old people are grouchy
- Women are better at cleaning than men
- African American men are the best basketball players
- Asian men are the best at math

Give students a few moments to consider these phrases then ask them to share their reactions. Lead students to the conclusion that the statements are too general to be true; encourage them to recognize that it is unfair to make such sweeping statements. Help students make the connection between phrases and the term *stereotype*.

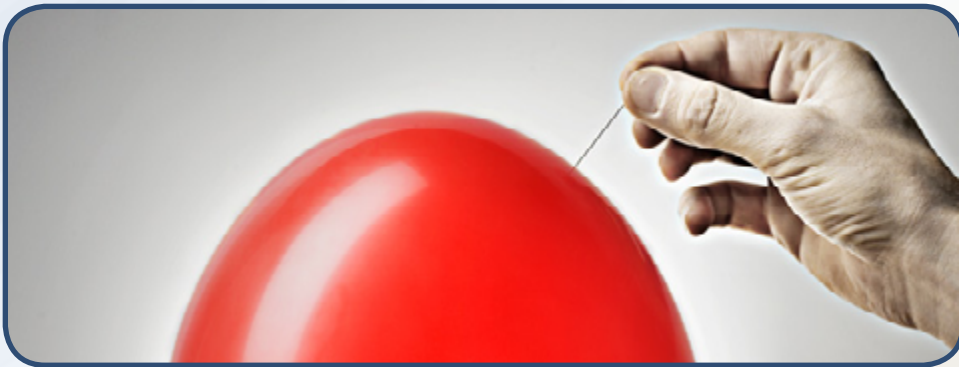
Have students return to their small brainstorming groups and ask them to come up with additional stereotypes they might have heard or thought about. Tell them to keep a written record of the stereotypes they think of. When the flow of stereotypes seems to be slowing down, ask students in each group to take a final look at their lists and mark with a star six to ten of the most interesting stereotypes. Bring the class back together so they can share their ideas. Each time a student shares a stereotype, hand that student a sentence strip and ask them to write it down. Instruct the student to write the words large and bold with a bright marker or crayon.

Now, grab the balloons inflated for the lesson. Call the students holding the sentence strips to come one at a time to the front of the classroom. Have each student read their sentence aloud and hold it up for the class to see. Hold up a balloon as the sentence holder calls on classmates to refute the stereotypes on the strip. Once satisfied that the stereotype has been busted, pop the balloon.

After all the balloons have been popped, ask the students how they felt about the lesson. What did they learn? Were there times during the lesson when they felt angry or sad? Then ask the students to write a paragraph or two explaining what they learned from the lesson. They should include specific examples of stereotypes and explain why they believe those stereotypes are wrong.

Evaluation Method:

The paragraphs written by the students will serve as an evaluation of the effectiveness of the lesson.



Racial Identity Development and Academic Achievement of Academically Gifted African American Students: Implications for School Counselors

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Abstract

Gifted African American students are underrepresented and underserved in gifted education. The current article provides an overview of proper identification, racial identity development implications, psycho-social concerns and the importance of family involvement in the development of gifted African American students. A case study is presented to provide interventions school counselors can use with both students and parents as they advocate for underserved gifted students.

Keywords: racial Identity, African American students, gifted education, school counseling

The academic achievement of African American students has been the subject of many research studies with most of the research focused on the consequences and causes of underachievement (Williams & Bryan, 2013; Obidah, Christie & McDonough, 2004; Ogbu, 2003). In the United States, the field of gifted education, similar to the field of special education is grounded in the belief that some students demonstrate a need for specialized education services that has not been provided in our public school system (King, Kzleski, & Lansdowne; 2009). Students who identify strongly with their ethnic group are better able to negotiate potentially negative environments, to deal with discrimination and prejudice, and to have high self-esteem. It has been found that students with a positive racial identity are better adjusted (Rowley & Moore, 2002). Whereas, much has been investigated and written about academic underachievement and racial identity of African American students, little attention has been focused on the academic achievement and racial