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Support Systems for Newcomer Immigrant Students

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LS 400: Senior Capstone

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Abstract

The focus of this Capstone Project is on the support systems that schools can provide to newcomer immigrant students. This is important because immigrant students need all the support they can get when they are attending a new school environment. Three action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented. Schools should have after-school tutorials solely for the newcomer immigrant students, have a welcoming environment, and have an English Learner class where immigrant students learn based on their knowledge. Based on this evidence, the combination of having a welcoming environment and having an English Learner class is argued to be the most effective way to provide the support system these newcomer immigrant students need when attending a new school environment.

Support Systems for Newcomer Immigrant Students

Parents always want what is best for their children's future, especially their education. My parents are no different. My father came to the United States from the Philippines with his family when he was twenty years old. He worked in the fields for a couple of years before working at a seafood factory in Alaska. My mother was still in the Philippines because they were still dating. Two years later, I was born. Four years later, my younger sister was born. Six years later, my younger brother was born. My father only goes home to the Philippines after his work season is over, therefore, he always missed out on the births of his children that were born in the Philippines. My mother understood because he is working to provide for his family. During the year my younger brother was born, my dad had already processed a petition for his family to come to the United States and live with him. He decided to petition us because it is better for us to live here. After all, there are so many opportunities, such as better education for his children and occupational opportunities, more than we could ever find on a small provincial island in the Philippines.

Fast forward to November of 2010, my family arrived in the United States. Everything was so different and new. Houses were bigger. The streets were wider. There was a large diversity in the population. But most importantly, speaking the English language was very difficult for us. Although we studied English in school back in the Philippines, we did not speak English frequently. We only spoke English when we were in our English classes. When I arrived in the United States, I was in seventh grade, but since I transferred late, I only attended the second semester of my seventh grade. Attending a foreign school for the first time was difficult for me. I missed a week of school just two days after I started because I was having anxiety attacks. I still was not used to everyone speaking English and the school environment was so

different from what I grew up in. I was just very overwhelmed with everything, from speaking

English every day to having no one to hang out with during lunch. Eventually, I got used to the

English language, but I would still be the quiet one in every class. I was afraid to speak because I

had the fear of the students making fun of my accent and grammar. Seventh grade was indeed

one of many challenges that I overcame alone, but based on my experience, I would not want

anybody to go through the same.

Before going to eighth grade, I had to take a reclassification test during the summer.

Fortunately, I passed the test and that determined how many English classes I took in high

school. I did only take one English class but I had to keep my grades up so I would not have to

go back to having two classes. Going back to eighth grade, I still struggled the whole year. I did

not have any support with my academics, especially with my English class. I had a great and

supportive teacher, but he could only help during classes. I was also alone most of the time

during my eighth-grade year. I would be at the library reading mystery books or doing

homework. Reading books helped improve my English literacy. I was getting better at

constructing sentences with proper grammar and punctuation. As time went on, everything I

struggled with got easier and I got through it all by myself. I was one of the top students in all of

my classes and I could not be prouder than that.

The challenges I went through probably happened for a reason, but I would not want any

newcomer immigrant student to struggle as I did. It would have been very helpful if the schools I

attended had a program that supported newcomer immigrant students like me because it would

have been for an easier transition and learning experience. Teachers can have after-school

programs dedicated to such students because they might be more comfortable learning with just

the teacher and other newcomer students. This way, the teacher can give all the students their

attention and help them improve their knowledge in English literacy, especially for the students who did not have an English class from where they attended school before they came to the United States. Everything can be very challenging for newcomer immigrant students, especially in a new school environment, but with all the help the programs provide these students, they will develop into such bright and independent students.

Literature Synthesis & Integration: Support Systems for Newcomer Immigrant Students

When coming to a new school environment, some newcomer immigrant students do not do well in school when there is no proper support system in school, especially when it comes to English literacy. Support systems, such as a welcoming environment, social-emotional support, and skills development, and tutoring, are needed to help students ease their transition into the new school environment and help them achieve their educational goals.

What is the Issue?

Many newcomer immigrant students struggle with the acculturation process when entering a new school environment, especially without support programs for them. According to Ward (as cited in Schachner et al., 2017), "Acculturation refers to dealing with psychological stress, acquiring new skills, and developing a sense of identity and belonging during cultural transition or when navigating between different cultural groups." These students struggle with the acculturation process, especially in a new school environment because of having different learning knowledge from the countries they are from, such as having taught in different ways than the teachers taught students here while they were in elementary. "Immigrant youth are more diverse than ever before, arriving from multiple points of origin; In the U.S. for example, 89% originate from Latin America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, or the Caribbean while 11% migrate from Europe or Canada" (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2016). As most immigrant students migrate to the

United States during the time they are still in school, adjusting to a new school environment is the experience that can change their perspectives on life. Schachner et al. (2017) state that "school adjustment, including academic achievement, is among the most important acculturation outcomes of immigrant youth and an important developmental outcome in adolescence."

"Many immigrant children struggle with the process of acquiring academic English. Among pre-kindergarten to 5th-grade immigrant children in the U.S., 62% of foreign-born children were found to speak English less than "very well" while 43% of the U.S.–born children of immigrants and 12% of children of U.S.–born were categorized as such" (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2016). Thus, because they probably speak and comprehend a language other than English, newcomer immigrant students have difficulties in conversing and participating in their classes. Having difficulties participating in class shows that these students need support in helping them speak the English language.

Why is this an Issue?

Adjusting to a new school environment can be an issue for newcomer immigrant students because they do not have the support they need. Suarez-Orozco et al. (2016) state that "English-language learner (ELL) students often cannot receive support for learning English from their parents. These students also have limited opportunities for sustained interactions with highly proficient native English-speaking peers in informal situations (e.g., in the cafeterias and hallways of schools and neighborhood contexts), contact that is strongly predictive of academic second-language proficiency outcomes." Having limited opportunities to interact and participate in a class can affect a student's academic performance, which can lead to negative experiences. According to Li and Lerner (2011), "early adolescence often involves a decrease in academic

achievement and marked increases in adjustment problems, such as depression, delinquency, and substance use" (p. 233).

Additionally, many newcomer immigrant students who have had no access to education or had little schooling even in their native languages may require different curricula from their non-immigrant classmates and need extra assistance to get caught up with their peers (Chang, 1990). This shows that newcomer students have a disadvantage when it comes to learning, especially with comprehending the English language. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010) state that "Newcomer students arriving at the midway point of their educational trajectory must surmount the "formidable barrier" of adjusting to a new land, developing academic English skills, and fulfilling graduation requirements in a high-stakes testing environment that is not designed with their educational needs in mind" (p. 602). Without the support programs these students need, these experiences will affect the students' pathways to their educational achievements and goals.

What Should be Done?

Providing and implementing support systems in schools for newcomer immigrant students will help their progress in school. **"**Psychological and social supports are often necessary to help children overcome traumatic histories, to adjust to the new culture and school systems they will face in the United States, and to ensure that the children's primary support systems their families are not left behind" (Chang, 1990, p. 17). Such programs will help ensure a safe educational environment for the students and also involve the parents in their children's education. Programs such as the International Schools Network provide newcomer students with different unique educational methods: "the mission of Internationals Network is to provide high quality, public education for newly arrived immigrant students through a unique educational model based on the exploration of interdisciplinary academic content in linguistically

heterogeneous, learner-centered environments" (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2016). Suarez-Orozco et al. (2016) also state that the classes are small and the teachers and students work together in small groups where the "Instruction is project-based, and the curriculum is interdisciplinary, incorporating performance-based assessments."

Additionally, according to the US Department of Education, "Welcoming newcomers into a school community necessitates empathy and understanding of the unique challenges faced by newcomers and their families" (p. 31). Having such welcoming school environments will help students ease their transition into the school and the learning environment as well. Moreover, "it is necessary to assess students' educational needs, including the need for appropriate language assistance services" (US Department of Education, p. 33). Knowledge about the students, including their previous schooling and life experiences, is important to help them have a successful transition into the new school environment. Additionally, the US Board of Education also stated that "Beyond that, teachers and school staff should find ways to build their knowledge of the general country and cultural origins of their newcomer students, and also strive to get to know the individual students" (p. 33). This is important because that would focus on individual students' needs and makes it easier for the students to learn and gain more knowledge about the new learning environment, such as an English Learner class.

Conclusion

Having support systems for newcomer immigrant students will help them ease their transition into the new educational environment and help them improve their academic outcomes.

Method

For this Capstone Project, I investigated how newcomer immigrant students and parents view the opportunity of having support systems in schools and what they thought could be done to improve them. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, I used what I have learned to formulate an action that responds to the opportunity in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

This research took place at Las Flores Middle School[2]. This is in Monterey County, California. Las Flores Middle School is one of four middle schools in the Meadows School District. It is located on the east side of the city. Las Flores Middle School opened in 2000. The school provides students with dynamic learning opportunities in a safe and secure environment. The campus is in the middle of a residential area, but the school is very attractive and appealing to the eye. The school is clean, despite the residences surrounding it, and on a school day, many students are walking to and from classrooms. ([2] Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations.)

The student population of Las Flores Middle School is 1,186, and the school serves grades 7-8. The school's minority student enrollment is 99%. More specifically, the school is made up of 98.2% Hispanic students, 1% Caucasian students, 0.3% Asian, 0.2% Multiracial students, 0.1% African American students, and a small percentage of other ethnicities (How Does Las Flores, 2020). The student population is made up of 50% female students and 50% male students and 89% of the students are economically disadvantaged (Paz, 2020). The student-teacher ratio is 22:1, which is the same as that of the district. At Las Flores Middle School, 26% of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 31% scored at or

above that level for reading. In Meadows School District, 29% of students tested at or above the proficient level for reading, and 18% tested at or above that level for math (Lopez, 2019).

Participants and Participant Selection

I invited two students and one parent to participate in this study. This group of prospective participants was invited to participate because of their relevant experiences. I also self-reflected on the interview questions.

Josie Alfonso. A Filipino female parent of the students I interviewed, who once attended Las Flores Middle School. Josie is the middle child of three children. She is the only one who immigrated to the United States from her family and she supports her family who is left back home in the Philippines.

Shawn Alfonso. A Filipino male 12th-grade student who attended Las Flores Middle School when he first came to the United States. Shawn is athletic and likes to play basketball. He is the oldest son of Josie. He has a younger sister named Lara.

Lara Alfonso. A Filipino female 11th-grade student who attended Las Flores Middle School a year after they came to the United States. Lara got to attend 6th grade in Oak Grove Elementary before attending Las Flores. She is a very shy girl. She is the youngest child of Josie. She has an older brother named Shawn.

Researcher. This topic is personally meaningful to me because I was once a newcomer immigrant student in middle school. I did not have any support throughout my middle school years. I am similar to my participants, who are my cousins because they were also newcomer immigrant students, but the difference between us is that they already knew what to expect because I have told them about my experiences. The thoughts, feelings, or assumptions I need to

be mindful of as I move forward with this project are my own opinion of the support program

instead of basing it on the research.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

Students' Interview Questions:

1. Describe your experiences of attending a new school as a student who immigrated from
   another country.

2. What helped you during the transition to the new school?

3. What was challenging during the transition?

4. Do you know if there is currently being done to support newcomer immigrant students'
   transition into their new school? What do you think about these efforts?

5. What do you think should be done to support newcomer immigrant students'?

6. What do you think are the challenges or barriers to providing more support for newcomer
   immigrant students?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to say about being a newcomer immigrant
   student or what should be done to help newcomer immigrant students transition into their
   new school?

Parent's Interview Questions:

1. Describe your experiences of having children attending a new who immigrated from
   another country.

2. What helped you during their transition to the new school?

3. What was challenging during their transition?

4. Do you know if there is currently being done to support newcomer immigrant students'
   transition into their new school? What do you think about these efforts?

5. What do you think should be done to support newcomer immigrant students'?

6. What do you think are the challenges or barriers to providing more support for newcomer immigrant students?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to say about being a newcomer immigrant student or what should be done to help newcomer immigrant students transition into their new school?

Procedure

Participants were interviewed. All interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took place at home. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting, or unexpected responses. All interviews/surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, two former newcomer immigrant students, their mother, and myself were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve the support system of the newcomer immigrant students in schools. This is important because these newcomer students need all the support they can get to be able to achieve their academic goals in a new school environment. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: cost; time; and effectiveness. The cost for each option

depends on how much the school invests in. Effectiveness will measure what are the positive

effects of each option on the students. This is measured based on how helpful each option would

be in improving each student's experiences and performances in the new school environment.

Time/Efficiency measures how much time is being used with each option. This is measured

based on how much time each option will consume on helping improve the students' experiences

and performances in the new school environment. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option

an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Cost	Time/Efficiency	Effectiveness
After school tutorial	Costly	Medium	Effective
Welcoming environment	Not costly	Medium	Moderately effective
English Learner Class	Not costly	High	Very effective

After School Tutoring

Tutoring will clearly help with developments in the students' comprehension of the

English language. While interviewing my participants, they mentioned that having someone to

help with translating and communicating will support newcomer immigrant students. Tutoring

would be conducted individually to students who are struggling in understanding the English

language. This would support the students because they would have more time to learn and

understand the material taught with the tutor. Also, the tutor would be able to support each

newcomer immigrant student understand the meaning of translated words and explain them to

the students because they will have more time together individually than as a whole class.

"Quiroga et al. (2002) found that four first-grade English language learners (ELLs) who were at

risk for reading difficulties significantly improved in English word reading after receiving

individual intervention that included phonological awareness instruction in both English and

Spanish and explicit decoding instruction in English" (Denton C. et al., 2004, p. 3).

Welcoming Environment

After interviewing my participants, a welcoming environment has been established as a way to

help support newcomer immigrant students. "The environment of a school or early childhood program has

a significant impact on students" (Making Students Feel Welcome, 2018). The former newcomer

immigrant students I interviewed said that the welcoming school environment of the school they went to

help with their transition, especially getting to know other students who also helped them with their

transition. According to the US Board of Education, "Newcomer students have diverse backgrounds and

needs, which depends on previous school experiences, their level of literacy in English and their home

language (or language of wider communication), their immigration status, and their home living status"

(p. 34). To assure students feel welcomed into the school environment, schools need to address each

student's circumstances, seek knowledge of their home country and culture, and provide support when

and where these newcomer immigrant students need it.

English Learner Class

In an English Learner class, newcomer immigrant students are usually mixed with English

Learner students but are born here, so that differentiates the English language comprehension between the

students. According to Colorin Colorado, "For ELLs who have recently arrived in the U.S., they will face

the challenge of learning a new language in addition to adjusting to an unfamiliar cultural setting and

school system" (How to create a welcoming classroom environment, 2018). The newcomer immigrant

students have less English language proficiency than the students who were born here. Therefore, having

an English learner class where they focus more on helping students improve their English skills by pairing

them with students who have the same needs, such as improving their English language and literacy

development. According to Calderon et al. (2011), "vocabulary is the first important step toward and

indeed, the foundation of school success for English learners and other students" (p. 110). Teachers need

to show respect for the student's primary language and culture, and by helping them with vocabulary

instruction, it will be an effective way of developing students' phonological awareness.

Conclusion

After analyzing and researching the three different options on how to support newcomer

immigrant students in schools, a recommendation has been decided. Combining the second

option, which is having a welcoming school environment, and the third option, which is having

an English learner class where they focus more on helping students improve their English skills

by pairing them with students who need the same help, instead of just teaching the whole class

the same lessons or curriculum, because not all students have the same learning abilities and

English proficiency, is highly recommended to be the support systems that schools can provide

to newcomer immigrant students.

Concessions.

While making this recommendation, a significant concession requires to be made in favor

of option two, having a welcoming school environment. This option would be very beneficial for

both the students and students' families. Having a welcoming environment can provide very big

assistance for the students and families who have difficulties in transitioning into the new school

and their new lives. Students would be able to learn faster and easier with the help of the school

staff and students. The families would also benefit from this because they know that they are

welcome to the school their children are attending.

Limitations.

Writing the recommendations, limitations have come up. The first limitation of this paper is the lack of data about how English Learner class helps students improve their English language comprehension. Another limitation that came up is the lack of research evidence for how an English learner class can be a support system for newcomer immigrant students.

Potential negative outcomes.

There are possible negative outcomes to consider in this action option. For instance, ELL teachers may feel overwhelmed when they are teaching two different types of English Learner students, such as students who were born here who are familiar with the English language, and immigrant students, who are not familiar with the language. Teaching both types of students can overwhelm a teacher because having two different learning goals might be too much for them.
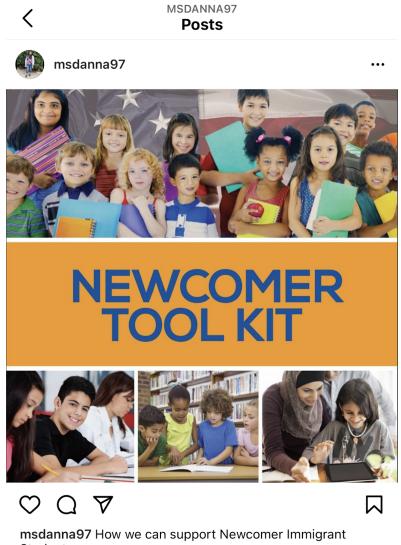
Conclusion.

Many newcomer immigrant students are having a hard time transitioning to a new school environment because of no support systems. Changes need to be made to provide newcomer immigrant students with the assistance they need to improve their experience in a new school environment and to improve their English language comprehension. Support systems in schools have a great impact on their experience in a new school environment and that will help with their academic progress in school throughout.

Action Documentation

Newcomer immigrant students need support systems when attending new school environments. These support systems will be able to help these students overcome barriers and hardships throughout their time in the new school. Being a newcomer immigrant student is hard when attending a new school environment because everything is different from what these students have been accustomed to, such as the language, different teaching techniques, and

technologies. With the support system, the acculturation of these students will be easier for them and they will be able to get used to the new learning environment comfortably. For this action project, I interviewed two former newcomer immigrant students, their mother, and I also did a self-interview. After researching and conducting interviews, the three action options that emerged were after-school tutorials, a welcoming environment, and an English Learner class. After-school tutorials will help the newcomer immigrant students learn and practice the English language and even practice familiarizing themselves with new technologies that are used in a classroom, such as Chromebooks and computers. A welcoming school environment is very important for these students because it helps ease their acculturation to the new school. Also, having English Learner classes where these classes focus more on helping students improve their English skills by pairing them with students who have the same needs, instead of just teaching the whole class the same lessons or curriculum, because not all students have the same learning abilities. The chosen recommended action was combining a welcoming school environment and having English Learner classes which focus on each student's needs. These actions were selected because these were the most reasonable and also ensure that the students have support systems that the school can provide during school hours. As the action for my project, I have made an Instagram post with the link of the brochure to spread the ways we can support newcomer immigrant students and used relevant hashtags to broaden my reach. I also provided the same link to my interviewees so that they can broaden their existing knowledge of supporting newcomer immigrant students as well.

msdanna97

**NEWCOMER
TOOL KIT**

msdanna97 How we can support Newcomer Immigrant Students
Check out the link!
Link: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/newcomers-toolkit/ncomertoolkit.pdf

#supportsystem #immigrantstudents
#newcomerimmgrantstudents

2 days ago

https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/newcomers-toolkit/ncomertoolkit.pdf

Image 1. Screenshot of the Instagram post for the brochure of how we can help support newcomer immigrant students with the link of the brochure in the post as well.

Critical Reflection

For this Action Project, I had a hard time choosing a topic because I could not think of anything school-related. But after my professor and I had an individual discussion, she helped me come up with a topic that was school-related and that I can relate to. The topic we came up with was the implementation of support systems for newcomer immigrant students because when I was in middle school, I was a newcomer immigrant student and I did not have enough support that could have helped me overcome some of the hardships that I experienced. Some of the unexpected or surprising moments I had during the research process of this project was when my interviewees changed their mind about the oral interview, and instead did a written interview where I just asked them the questions without recording. Another unexpected moment I had was when I had difficulties finding some resources that can help me with my topic. That moment took a toll on me and I had to stop my research because the stress and anxiety were too much for me. Due to the pause in my research, I had to modify my findings by removing some information I could not find to back up my topic because of the time frame I had. So far, the outcome of this project has been good, even though I lack some of the information I needed to support the topic I chose. What I know now that I wish I had known from the start is how much time and effort I needed to complete this project. This project was really difficult for me because I had so many unexpected obstacles that made it difficult for me, such as my laptop breaking down while doing some research, which was very frustrating because I lost all the information I needed. What I learned about myself and working toward change is that I need the confidence and bravery to be able to succeed in making a change in our community.

Synthesis and Integration

The Liberal Studies MLOs, the required coursework, and this Action Research Project have impacted my professional development positively. The MLO 1: Developing Educator has helped me improve my thinking, writing, and speaking skills about the important responsibilities of a California public educator through this project. Although I encountered some difficulties, they helped me motivate myself to finish this project to the best of my ability. Additionally, the next necessary steps I need to take in order to become the professional that I envision being is to improve my current learning about being a future public educator even more. This will help me in the future be able to successfully teach a classroom confidently and effectively.

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