Developing Social and Emotional Skills in Refugee and Immigrant Youth: Challenges and Strategies

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Who’s an immigrant? Who’s a refugee?
• Over 9% of public school students in the US are English language learners (ELL). This number is growing.
• 20% of the US population speaks a language other than English at home.
King County’s Foreign-Born Communities
Challenges to Youth Workers

- Retaining youth workers who can relate to youth from a broad range of backgrounds
- Developing capacity among youth workers to serve as cultural brokers and community leaders
Implicit Bias

• Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decision-making in an unconscious manner.
Allison and Penelope are talking on the phone.

ALLISON: We just got home from the pediatrician.

PENELOPE: Oh yeah? Are you still seeing Dr. Nielsen?

ALLISON: It’s so sad. He retired last year. Now we see this Indian doctor. But she’s really nice.

PENELOPE: Do you think it’ll be hard for the kids to understand her? There’s this Indian boy at Freddy’s school, and whenever I see his parents, I can’t figure out what they’re saying.

PENELOPE: The kids didn’t seem to mind. I think they were just happy she gave them candy at the end.
Activity: Implicit Bias

• What stereotypes are implied in this conversation?

It’s not just Allison and Penelope. All of us have implicit biases. We tend to feel comfortable with those who are like us, who are part of our group. But if we want to achieve equity in our increasingly diverse society, we all need to work to overcome our biases.
What is social emotional learning?

A process through which people build awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships and making responsible decisions, leading to success in school and in life.
1) Self-awareness: ability to identify and name one’s emotions and their influence on behavior
2) Self-management: ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors
3) Self-efficacy: ability to motivate oneself, persevere, and see oneself as capable
4) Social awareness: ability to empathize with others from diverse backgrounds
5) Social management: ability to make safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions
6) Social engagement: the ability to consider others and a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community
What are the risks and challenges that can burden refugee and immigrant youth?
Challenges of Migration

- Loss of predictable context (community ties, work, customs)
- Separation from extended family members, friends, and neighbors
- Trauma prior to migration or during “crossing”
- Feelings of guilt about escaping while leaving others behind

*Refugee/Immigrant parents might be emotionally unavailable to support their children as a result of all these stresses*
Other Family-of-Origin Issues

- Poverty
- Undocumented Status
- Limited Experience with Education
Youth-Level Issues

• Interrupted education
• New language and educational system—many refugee/immigrant youth attend segregated and underfunded schools
• New family structure: migration might reunite children with parents and siblings they haven’t seen for years (or ever)
• Additional responsibilities at home: taking care of younger siblings, translating for parents
• Navigating two cultures: home culture and mainstream American culture
• Confronting racism and xenophobia in the new society
How home culture shapes us
How does your home culture shape your views about

• Education?
• Mental health?
What is youth development?
Youth Development: An intentional, deliberate process of providing support, relationships, experience, resources, and opportunities to promote positive outcomes for young people.
Role of Educators/Providers

• To enhance protective factors for youth
  • Connectedness to parents and family
  • Connectedness to other adults and organizations
  • Connectedness to school
  • Spirituality
  • Optimism, a sense of possibilities

• To inform, not control, youth choices and help youth develop resilience

• To guide exploration of identity
  • Who am I?
  • Who am I in relation to others?
Key Principles of Youth Development

- Positive outcomes
- Youth voice and choice
- Strategies to engage ALL youth
- Community involvement and advocacy
- Focus on collaboration
Youth Program Quality Initiative

- **Safe Environment**
  - Emotional Safety
  - Healthy Environment
  - Emergency Preparedness
  - Accommodating Environment
  - Nourishment

- **Supportive Environment**
  - Warm Welcome
  - Active Engagement
  - Encouragement

- **Interaction**
  - Belonging
  - Collaboration
  - Leadership
  - Adult Partners

- **Engagement**
  - Planning
  - Choice
  - Reflection

**Youth Voice in Governance**

**Professional Learning Community**

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How do we engage youth with refugee/immigrant backgrounds in social and emotional learning?

By respecting their cultural beliefs and practices.
Establish a Culture of Trust and Openness

• Encourage staff working with youth to learn about the home cultures of youth in the school/program

• Find ways in class/program to celebrate and explore home cultures of youth
  • Youth Showcase
  • Multicultural Night
  • Recognizing special holidays
Establish a Culture of Trust and Openness

- Use community agreements and a youth contract to set program expectations from Day 1.
- Use weekly community circles to check in and reinforce program culture.
- Establish contact with parents and families as much as possible— and not only to report a problem!
Provide Opportunities for

- Community Service
- Community Engagement
- Recreation
- Advocacy

Art for Earth

Visual Art Showcase
Tuesday August 15, 2017
Rainier Vista Central Park
1:00 - 2:00 pm

Sponsored by: ReWA, Coyote Central, and Clay at Seattle Office of Arts & Culture