Supporting ELL students: The role of school social workers

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Acculturation and Enculturation

Stages of Acculturation

Cultural Adaptation (relationship sought among groups)

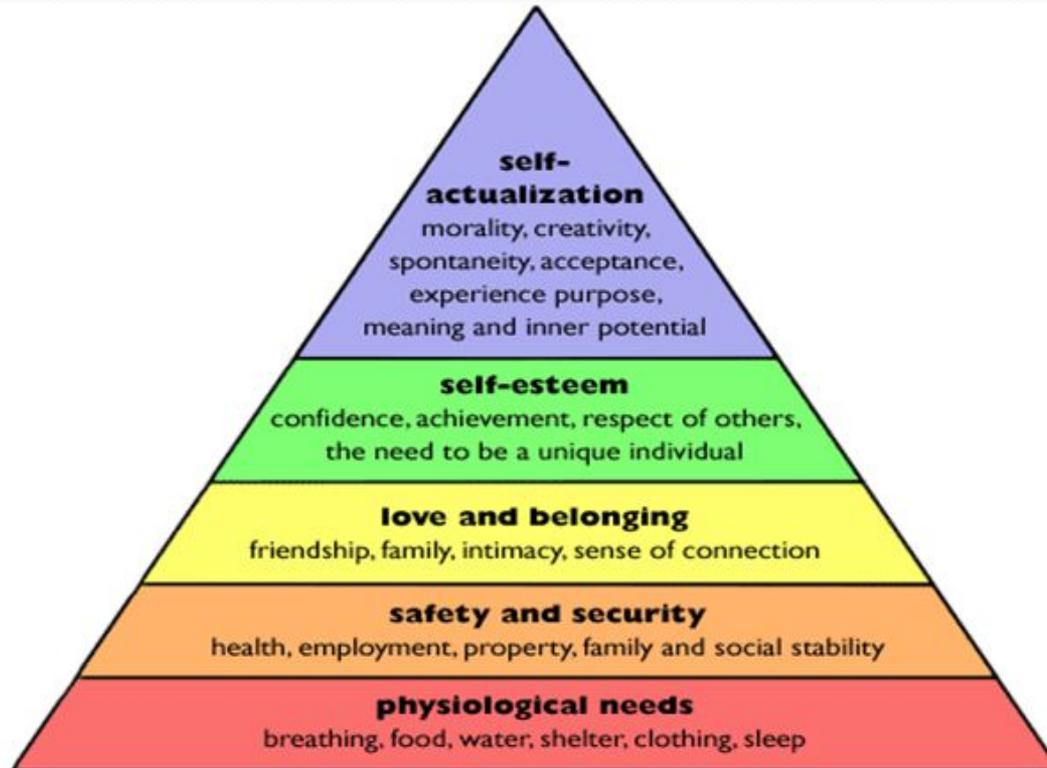| Maintenance of heritage culture		Low	High
	High	Separation	Integration
	Low	Marginalization	Assimilation

Post-Immigration Factors That Affect Child's Adjustment

Intergenerational Acculturation Gap

- Loss of Common Language
- Discrepant Values and Beliefs

Immigrant Paradox: Culture of Origin can be a Protective Factor

Hierarchy of Needs

Clinical Challenges

Past Trauma

Many immigrants have already experienced significant trauma before ever making the journey:
- Witnessing/ experiencing of violence
- Sense of danger
- Separation from relatives who "led the way"
- Poverty
- Persecution, oppression or corruption from authorities
- Neglect

Trauma During the Journey

For some, especially people entering illegally or seeking asylum, traveling to the United States can be a harrowing, dangerous experience

- potential for rape/violence
- hunger, illness, exhaustion
- fear of being caught
- detention at the border
- uncertainty

Loss and Reconnection

Saying goodbye to:

- grandparents, extended family
- primary caregivers (in many cases not the parents)
- friends
- girlfriends/ boyfriends
- trusted adults

Establishing new ties:

- with long-separated parents, who have often remarried
- new (unfamiliar) siblings from new relationships
- school
- new friends
- new romantic interests

Intergenerational Trauma

When students come from areas with extreme poverty and instability, trauma often goes back generations:

- Parents may have been victims of rape, violence, or extreme neglect themselves.
- Older generation may have stopped their education early out of necessity. They often struggle to support their children in school.
- Parents who have difficulty coping or expressing themselves cannot model this for their children.

Sources of Fear

How does it work here?
- laws
- child discipline
- what to expect from authorities
- immigration - uncertainty about status
- housing
- education

Frightening or Hateful Rhetoric
- in the news
- from politicians
- within the community
- from other students

Creating a Culturally Mindful School

CULTURE

- A combination of a person's world views, beliefs, language, and values
- Can be grouped into two different categories
- Visible/Tangible Culture - crafts, music, art, technology
- Invisible/Intangible Culture - values, beliefs, opinions, assumptions

CULTURAL ICEBERG

The Cultural Iceberg

VISIBLE
- Age
- Clothes
- Gender
- Language
- Behaviours
- Physical Characteristics

LESS VISIBLE
- Patterns of Speech
- Body Language
- Favourite Foods
- Festivals
- Musical Preferences
- Talents
- Family Traditions
- Religious Practices
- Social Skills
- Heritage
- Nationality
- Wealth

NOT VISIBLE
- Social Status
- Role in Family
- Skills
- Knowledge
- Political Views
- Life Experiences
- Attitudes
- Personal Values
- Sexual Identity
- Personal Beliefs
- World View
- Family Attitudes and Values
- Thought Patterns
- Assumptions

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IMPLICIT BIAS

- The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our actions, understanding of events, and decisions in an unconscious manner.
- Activated involuntarily, without awareness
- Learned as young as age 3
- Fueled by stereotypes perpetuated in the media or other beliefs passed along by parents, peers,community members
- Everyone is susceptible and your implicit biases can have influence in every sector of society

IMPLICIT BIAS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Occurs when a teacher/faculty member has an assumption about a student's learning style and his/her capability for academic success that is tied to identity or background
- Examples can include:
- Expectation that students who speak with certain accents might be poor writers
- Students who are affiliated with a particular group may be treated as experts on issues related to that group
- Assumption that students from certain backgrounds have different intellectual abilities and/or ambitions

MICROAGGRESSIONS

An outgrowth of implicit bias

Experienced as slights, insults, or denigrating messages

"You don't sound like a _____"

"So what are you?"

CHALLENGING IMPLICIT BIAS

- Develop an awareness of your biases so that you can interrupt them

- Teach colleagues about implicit bias

- Be on the lookout for implicit bias in your school

A CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

- Students and staff alike recognize, appreciate, and capitalize on diversity so as to enrich the overall learning experience.
- Culturally responsive teaching advocates for students and places an emphasis on the school adapting and modifying its messages
- Fostering a culturally inclusive learning environment encourages all individuals to develop effective intercultural skills

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Be aware of how your own cultural assumptions might influence your interactions with students and parents.
- Consider how the backgrounds and experiences of your own students influence their motivation, engagement, and learning
- Can course materials, activities, assignments be modified to be more accessible to all students?
- Incorporate diversity into overall curriculum and school events
- Be proactive in connecting with and learning about students

Well-Intentioned Approaches that Backfire

Sometimes, in the process of showing concern, teachers school staff can accidentally make problems worse:

- Too much or too little intervention for truancy and missed work
- Using peers to intervene with students who seem down or disengaged
- Lowering expectations so much that students don't see a point to attending
- Pressuring students for more language output when they are not ready
- Forcing students to attend counseling

Pushing In & Supporting Teachers

You can get to know the students by running whole class discussions on:

- Wellness, including mental health
- Self-care, finding balance through leisure activities
- Feeling words and images, ways to express emotion (journaling, Feelings Fridays, feeling scales)
- The importance (and EXPECTATION) of asking for help- sources of assistance for different needs
- Mindfulness, CBT, DBT, and many other modalities can be very useful and applicable.

Some Tips....

- Be prepared to GO SLOW, inside and outside the classroom
- Meet them where they are- leave the discipline to others

- Keep push-in lessons limited in scope
- Use less verbal, more experiential and written activities. unless you can use their native language

ENGAGING ELL FAMILIES

- Make a personal connection with families
- Attend group meetings or introduce yourself in positive contexts.
- Integrate cultural traditions of your ELL families whenever possible

- Communicating with ELL families is key
- Teach how they can support their child's education.
- Provide opportunities for parents to learn more about important topics
- Is there a larger extended family network locally?

Building Trust

Overcoming Challenges to Engagement

Becoming a Trusted Adult

Start where they are:

- Become a familiar person by pushing into their classes, attending their events or creating fun activities.
- Some may be thrilled to talk and be heard, others may be guarded.
- Lay out the rules you work by and start with a welcoming stance.

Creating an Environment of Safety and Stabilization

- Check in and assist students with basic needs
- Make space culturally welcoming
- Explore and honor their support networks
- Respectfully listen to and honor their immigration story
- Empathize with their loss of homeland and challenges of this new culture
- Support client's strengths and courage
- Normalize experience
- Respect resiliency

Be a Constant in a World of Change

Dependability
- Follow through reliably on what you agree to.
- Try again and again to make a connection, even if just for a minute.

Predictability
- Make confidentiality guidelines clear from the beginning and keep reinforcing them as needed.
- Set boundaries for what you can realistically do.

Teaching Coping Skills

Even when immigrants have not experienced trauma, poverty, or persecution, they have by definition experienced the following:

- HUGE change
- loss of what is familiar
- loss of routine

We need to NORMALIZE this for them:

- Stress from change is expected and normal (Weddings, births, and promotions all raise our stress even though they are meant to be positive experiences.)

Coping Strategies

- Breathing
- Take 5
- Grounding
- Journal Writing
- Art
- Think of someone you trust and imagine a comforting conversation with that person

- Affirmations
- Share your narrative
- Physical Activity
- Music