

Book Review of *Composing Storylines of Possibilities: Immigrant and Refugee Families Navigating School*

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Despite fluctuating federal immigration and resettlement policies, the United States of America continues to rank among the countries with the largest number of foreign-born residents in the world. The voices of these immigrant and refugee families are fundamental to cultivating engagement with their children's schools, not only to promote their children's academic success, but also to nurture the well-being of local communities and American society as a whole. The works within the book, *Composing Storylines of Possibilities: Immigrant and Refugee Families Navigating School*, edited by Martha J. Strickland, showcase these voices while problematizing the relentless deficit model surrounding the engagement of immigrant and refugee families in their children's education. Each chapter shifts the discourse of school personnel as omniscient experts to a more collaborative approach through which schools strive to understand how values and life circumstances shape these families' actions, including how their engagement might differ from dominant White, middle-class norms and expectations. The structure of the book, through storylines, reveals these families' worldviews and provides insights into how and why they do what they do. Although the editors state the book is targeted toward preservice and practicing teachers as well as educational administrators, the more research-based chapters will also appeal to educational researchers. There are practical guidelines and suggestions provided throughout this edited text that highlight cooperative efforts among schools, communities, and families. This guidance should ideally foster "community-engaged educators" who honor immigrant and refugee families' collective cultural and community knowledge (Haddix, 2015).

The common mantra among all 12 chapters, however, is the challenge for us as educators and educational researchers to grapple with and unpack our own personal biases and deficit beliefs. These deficit perspectives often inform and infiltrate school policies and practices which can then inadvertently obstruct or exclude richer engagement of immigrant and refugee families, shortchange the personal and academic potential of their children, and unconsciously foster harassment and bullying by “othering” these children and their families. The philosophical underpinnings, practical suggestions, unwavering respect for the resilience and capacity of immigrant and refugee families, and the uncompromising belief in the possibility for transformative family–school–community partnerships embodied in this text echo the body of work and research conducted by Campano et al. (2016) and the scholarship of Housel (2020).

The book is separated into two sections. The first section, entitled “Listening to the Storylines of Immigrant and Refugee Families,” contains seven chapters, while the second section, entitled “Responding to the Storylines of Immigrant and Refugee Families,” contains five. The first section provides a platform for immigrant families to share their perceptions and feelings, typically confusion and frustration, when attempting to interface with their children’s schools. For example, in Chapter 1, a professionally trained mother originally from Pakistan who ultimately became a teacher in the U.S. shared her initial struggles when advocating for her American-born children in their schools. The school’s insensitivity to their cultural and religious needs (“ignoring the soul of the child”) led to ostracism and bullying. She stressed that immigrant mothers need to be directed on how to interface with schools. Similarly, in Chapter 2, a Latina mother from the Dominican Republic had to grapple with the loss of professional status upon immigrating as well as being excluded from the goal-setting process in her daughter’s early childhood class. She stressed the importance of empathy, mutual respect, and authentic relationships with parents to build trust and foster parental involvement. The Chinese cultural norm of humility as a strength, which lies counter to more assertive, individualistic American standards and expectations, was explored in Chapter 3. Fostering bicultural competence and understanding how humility might prevent parents from initiating contact with teachers, who are seen as authority figures, is crucial when promoting engagement with immigrant families from East Asian cultures.

In Chapter 4, a Muslim family from Pakistan shared overcoming deficit perspectives of their “genderized” culture, the disconnection between their home identities and practices in school, and the importance of involving the entire family, not just the parents, in outreach and activities with the school. Chapter 5 highlighted how the lack of interpreters who are fluent in immigrant parents’ home languages can thwart school engagement. Specifically, the home

languages of many immigrant parents from Spanish-dominant countries are not Spanish but indigenous languages. *Salir adelante*, to forge ahead, requires that these parents be seen as equal partners in their children's education, regardless of their own level of formal education, with school policies being "made in conjunction with parents, not for them" (p. 93). Building on community "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and "cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005) as a foundation, Chapter 6 shared how many Latino/a parents valued relationships when the teacher listened to their concerns and did not talk down to them. Ultimately, when resources from the community are provided to facilitate dialogue with immigrant and refugee parents, communication becomes "fluid" and language is no longer a "barrier."

The final chapter in this section, Chapter 7, was likely the strongest counternarrative to immigrant families' alleged indifference toward their children's education. The grandparents of Lebanese and Germanic descent in this storyline escaped poverty and war to provide the educational opportunities in the U.S. to their children and grandchildren that were denied to them in their countries of origin. This reverence for education was passed from generation to generation in the family, where multicultural understanding was cultivated as a strength and parents respected as co-instructors. As evidenced in other storylines, "teachers should exercise caution when determining parental involvement based on attendance and leadership in school functions and organizations" (p. 131) alone. As asserted by Tarasawa and Waggoner (2015), refugee and immigrant parents value education deeply and typically have high educational aspirations for their children, but they often support and nurture their children's education in more community- and home-based ways.

The second section provides more practical strategies so schools and communities can collaborate to enhance engagement with these newcomer families. The suggestions and strategies detailed are primarily informed by the storylines presented in the first section. As mentioned above, most immigrant families emigrated and make tremendous personal sacrifices post-resettlement to provide a "high-quality education" to their children and better opportunities overall through educational attainment. As explored in Chapter 8, community centers are a way of providing out-of-school educational spaces and psychosocial resources for immigrant families. These centers also help the entire family adjust to a new country, culture, and language while supporting immigrant youth in culturally relevant ways and thus epitomize the concept of "community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005). Chapter 9 showcased community-based research as a means of youth and community empowerment and transformation. Such research allows educators, researchers, and other community members to learn with and from immigrant youth and their communities to

co-create needed educational change. Through these collaborative endeavors, educators and educational researchers must continually reflect on their power and assumptions as well as their impact on these communities. This constant self-reflection regarding power and privilege aligns closely with the work of Kendi (2019). Similarly, as one of the contributors to this chapter, Campano's methodological approach of actively involving immigrant youth and their families in community-based research mirrors other research that he and his colleagues have conducted (Campano et al., 2016).

The authors of Chapter 10 cautioned how wider structural inequities that racialize and minoritize newcomers can impact perceptions of immigrant students and their families and the support they receive from schools. Specifically, ignorance about the pace of academic additional language acquisition prompts students to exit ELL classification within three years, versus the five to seven years required. Similarly, the vagaries of language acquisition often get conflated with learning dis/abilities. The authors argued that these deficit frames should be replaced with more "asset-based storylines of possibility." The next chapter focused on higher education, both in developing university partnerships to prepare reflective instructors who can support vulnerable immigrant youth as well as providing the administrative resources and guidance to immigrant families during their children's transition into postsecondary studies. Fundamentally, any "deficit ideologies" need to be dismantled so immigrant youth and their families are seen as equal partners and immigrant youth can emerge as educational leaders. The final chapter places these anti-immigrant sentiments in a more global and political context. These fraught messages often create an incongruence between their immigrant students' home and school cultures. When teachers perceive parental views and experiences as different from their own, they expect children to do worse academically. To counter these oppressive messages and support parental engagement, schools need to provide immigrant and refugee parents with a clearer overview of the educational system and support immigrant youth and their families as they adjust to new norms and expectations (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015).

Perhaps the best summation of the current state of engaging immigrant and refugee families with their children's schools in the U.S. and the challenges that educators must confront and overcome was found in Chapter 11:

Deficit thinking, hostility towards languages other than English, ethnic and religious cultural backgrounds, implicit biases, a lack of professional development and resources for teachers, and the stress of not knowing how to engage immigrant families have discouraged school leaders and educators alike from making efforts to develop ways to engage immigrant families and students in schools (p. 203).

Since 9 out of the 12 chapters in the book were written by two or more authors, collaboration and the melding of ideas and perspectives were the hallmarks of this edited text. Foregrounding the voices of immigrant and refugee families is not commonplace in the research literature surrounding parental engagement with schools. Plus, using these voices as the inspiration for strategies and interventions is extraordinary. For me, trauma was the unspoken undercurrent in all these storylines and interventions, but unfortunately it was not explicitly addressed as an issue to be considered when nurturing engagement among immigrant and refugee families. Perhaps future research articles and edited texts for educational practitioners and researchers should address the crucial and often overlooked need for trauma-informed policies and practices in our schools (Gross, 2020).

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