



“You hear that I am involved and I am trying”

Dispositions of immigrant parents towards their young adolescent's academic experiences

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Málþing á vegum sveitarfélaga á höfuðborgarsvæðinu og
Rannsóknastofu í fjölmenningarfræðum við HÍ

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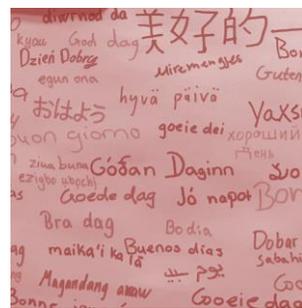


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Question

How do immigrant parents in Iceland see themselves as being involved in their adolescent's education ?



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Research motivations

This study was motivated by:

- Transitional challenges for students in 8-10th grade
- Expectations of parental involvement to support schools
- Implications for immigrant parents

Competing narratives (Urel, 2010):

- All parents are subject to institutionalized obligations of nurturing a healthy home-school relationship
- Immigrant parents have multiple reasons for level of parent engagement or disengagement.



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Review of Literature

Parent involvement is welcome within a narrow range of acceptable behaviors:

- be positive,
- trust teachers' judgement and assessments,
- accept teacher's definitions of their children's educational and social performance. (Lareau and Horvat, 1999)

Dissimilarities in **social and cultural capital** between teachers and parents can create subtle barriers to participation. (Lareau and Horvat, 1999; Turney and Kao, 2009)



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Review of Literature

- Immigrant parents absorb a **transnational habitus**, an ongoing internalization of managing connections 'here' and 'there'. (Erel, 2010; Kelly and Lusia, 2006)
- Using **Intersectionality** as an analytical tool to recognize the various social divisions of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, and ability. (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016)



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Data collection

2016 – mixed methods

- Online parent survey
- 6 parent semi-structured interviews

2019 - ethnography

- 5 parent semi-structured interviews
- Classroom and school participant observation (ongoing)
- Online follow-up parent survey (ongoing)
- Document analysis (ongoing)
- Additional interviews with parents, students, teachers (forthcoming)



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Interviews – Icelandic schools

“From my experience, the teacher doesn’t have to do anything. By just looking at me, it makes me want to study. In here, I don’t see that encouragement from the teachers.” (Joshua)

“I cannot help him with his Icelandic homework. As soon as he struggles with Icelandic, I have to ask a friend. (Lisa)

“They emphasize social skills in Icelandic schools. I think it’s very, very perfect.” (Tanya)



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Interviews – Social interactions

“I tried a couple of times actually talking to them [Icelandic parents], but I felt like I was not really welcome so I just stopped. So I don’t want to be involved anymore.” (Sarah)

“At work... I’m used to them for a long time. I feel like one of them. But when I go to school, I feel like I’m different. I try to join in, like yeah, I’m just one of the parents. But no, I don’t feel... no I don’t like it.” (Joshua)

“When I was in school, I had some foreigner classmates. They are treated just like normal. But here you, oh my god. Sometimes it’s like, you’re walking in water, floating.” (Jasmine)

“The longer you stay in Iceland and not fit in, the lower you get. You probably experienced this, right?” (Lisa)



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Interviews – Trust and control

“I don’t want my kids to just relax. Also I value manners. You know, you have to respect your parents and elderlies.”

“I just feel like there needs to be a little more respect. In my time there was respect and kids were taught respect.”

“I think kids here have a little too much freedom to talk to their teachers. I think it should be more middle. Kids should be taught to respect their teacher, because they don’t.”

“I tell him all the time, you have to study. But it doesn’t connect, you know. That’s why I’m considering myself as a failure as a parent because I couldn’t convince him to do these things. Just to study.”



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Interviews - Language

“If you don’t speak the language, you’re just lost. They [Icelanders] speak English for some time, but they’ll eventually switch over to Icelandic.” (Lisa)

“They have Icelandic names, they look Icelandic, speak Icelandic. So that is more on me to have that other side.” (Julia)

“I think now it is ok, my Icelandic is getting better. Beforehand, I didn’t understand anything. I was never trying because my ex did almost all of the talking.” (Sarah)

“It matters to meet teachers using the same native language. This is a problem in Icelandic schools.” (Marta)



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Findings

- Parents are generally positive about school-initiated involvement (InfoMentor, news updates, homework help), but spend minimal or no time for those same school-initiated obligations of involvement.
- Parents do not feel their relationship with the school beyond minimum is valued or needed for the benefit of their child's academic performance or behavior.
- Parents feel added pressure to increase parent-initiated involvement in order to maintain their own cultural values such as culture-specific codes of conduct, respect, responsibility, and discipline.
- Competing narratives between migrant-specific cultural resources and national capital, i.e. language competence carries a lot of cultural capital among migrant groups.



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Further analysis

- Can we move beyond a narrow view of cultural resources versus national capital, that exploits differences of gender, ethnicity, and class, to construct new forms of migrant-specific capital? A more inclusive view of cultural wealth?
- How do immigrant parents, on a path towards downward mobility, utilize parent involvement as a way to secure their child's upward mobility?



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