OTHER THEMES

Humanizing Education for Immigrant & Refugee Youth

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ABSTRACT – Humanizing Education for Immigrant & Refugee Youth. In 2023, 184 million immigrants lived outside their country of nationality, including 1.3 million immigrants living in Brazil. Immigrant and refugee children have the right to attend school, yet too often public schooling does not foster success of immigrant students. This article highlights four key principles and related research-based strategies that educators can use to foster achievement, agency, and engagement in school for immigrant and refugee students: situate students' histories, families, languages, and knowledges as assets, not as deficits; recognize that immigrant students lead transnational lives; develop a culture of belonging and strong relationships with teachers and fellow students; and provide specific supports to immigrant students.

Keywords: **Immigration and Education. Refugee Education. Humanizing Education.**

RESUMO – Educação Humanizadora para Jovens Imigrantes e Refugiados. Em 2023, 184 milhões de imigrantes viviam fora de seu país de origem, incluindo 1,3 milhão de imigrantes residentes no Brasil. As crianças imigrantes e refugiadas têm o direito de frequentar a escola, mas muitas vezes a escola pública não promove o sucesso dos estudantes imigrantes. Este artigo destaca quatro princípios-chave e estratégias relacionadas baseadas em pesquisa que os educadores podem usar para promover o rendimento, o agenciamento e o envolvimento escolar para estudantes imigrantes e refugiados: situar as histórias, famílias, idiomas e conhecimentos dos estudantes como atributos, não como déficits; reconhecer que a vida dos estudantes imigrantes tem caráter transnacional; desenvolver uma cultura de pertencimento e relações fortes com professores e colegas; e fornecer apoio específico aos estudantes imigrantes.

Palavras-chave: **Imigração e Educação. Educação de Refugiados. Educação Humanizadora.**

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Introduction

According to the 2023 World Development Report, 184 million people — including 37 million refugees — live outside their country of nationality (The World Bank, 2023). 1.3 million immigrants live in Brazil, according to the Observatory of International Migrations (Brasil, 2022); most hail from Venezuela, Haiti, Bolivia, Colombia, and the U.S. All children, including those who are immigrants and refugees, have the right to attend school, an important site that offers newcomer students the opportunity to learn the language(s) of the host country, integrate socially, politically, and economically, and accrue knowledge and skills to pursue their future goals. Yet public schooling — often the first point of contact that immigrant families have with a government institution after migrating — is not set up to foster success of immigrant students.

To meet the needs of immigrant and refugee students, we need to humanize education. Humanizing education unfolds among educators and students rooted in dialogic and culturally relevant approaches that affirm the histories, heritages, and humanity of students and their communities. Ultimately, the process of humanizing education through the creation of deeply caring and committed school communities equips students to develop the skills, confidence, and knowledge to be agents of change; indeed, as Paulo Freire (1985, p. 70) wrote, “to transform the world is to humanize it”. Given the struggles that newcomer students and their families face, it is essential to create humanizing and caring school communities where their distinct needs are met, connecting them with information, services, and resources in their new country.

Drawing on our recently published book, *Humanizing Education for Immigrant and Refugee Youth* (Bajaj et al., 2022), this article highlights four key principles and a host of related research-based strategies that educators use to foster achievement, agency, and engagement in school for immigrant and refugee youth. Here, we define success not by test scores but using a holistic notion of mastery of knowledge and skills that are useful, relevant, and foundational for students’ future aspirations. The four key principles guiding humanizing pedagogy with immigrant and refugee students are commitments to:

1. situate students’ histories, families, languages, and knowledges as assets, not as deficits;

2. recognize that immigrant students lead transnational lives;

3. develop a culture of belonging and strong relationships with teachers and fellow students; and

4. provide specific supports to immigrant students.

In what follows, we elaborate each principle and provide specific classroom and school-wide strategies to enact them.

Situate Students' Histories, Families, Knowledges, and Languages as Assets, not as Deficits

Rather than operating from a deficit perspective, educators should recognize the many assets that newcomer students bring. Educators must build on what Moll et al. (1992) called students' "funds of knowledge", as well as what sociologist Tara Yosso (2005, p. 77-78) calls "community cultural wealth," defined as "[...] an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts," including (but not limited to): "linguistic capital", which "[...] includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style"; "familial capital," or "[...] those cultural knowledges nurtured among *família* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition"; "social capital," or "networks of people and community resources" that "[...] provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions"; and "aspirational capital," or "[...] the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers". We start from this asset-based perspective that honors the knowledges and goals that immigrant and refugee students and their families bring to new schools and communities.

Promote Curricular Inclusion and Relevance

An asset-based approach acknowledges and includes the histories, experiences, and heritages of newcomer students (Bajaj et al. 2022, Strategy #2). Incorporating students' backgrounds and present realities into the curriculum allows them to see themselves in school, making learning more meaningful and connected to their realities. Scholars have found that the more students are engaged in the curricular material, the more likely they are to persist in school (Bartlett; Garcia, 2011; Mendenhall; Bartlett; Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017; Suárez-Orozco; Pimentel; Martin, 2009). The curriculum should include "mirrors" (reflecting students' lives), "windows" (offering glimpses into other lives), and "prisms" for heightening students' "critical awareness of [differential] access to rights and resources" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 149; Sims Bishop, 1990; Bajaj; Argenal; Canlas, 2017, p. 125).

Learn about Students' Backgrounds

Educators should honor students' histories (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #2). They can begin when a student first arrives by conducting an interview (see Board 1 for sample questions). This interview may take up to 45 to 60 minutes and may require the presence of someone to interpret and/or read aloud, depending on the situation.

Board 1 – Sample Student Intake Interview Form

Personal History:

1. What language(s) do you speak at home?
2. Where were you born? (City/Country)
3. When did you arrive in [this country]? (Month/Year)
4. Where did you live before entering [this country]?
5. Did you live anywhere else before you came to [current town/city]?
6. When did you arrive in [current town/city]?
7. With whom do you live?

Schooling and Academic History:

1. In what language(s) do you feel most comfortable speaking, reading and/or writing?
2. Did you go to school in your home country?
3. How old were you when you began the first grade/primary school?
4. What language(s) did teachers use with you when you were going to school in your country?
5. How did you get to school? How long did it take you to get to school each time you went to school?
6. How many days a week did you go to school?
7. How many students were in each of your classes?
8. How long were your classes? How many minutes?
9. What subjects did you study in school?
10. Did you go to school every day or did you miss days? Why did you miss school days?
11. Did you like going to school in your home country? What did you like best?
12. Have you ever been in a special needs program or have you received special needs services? Please indicate types of programs or services.
13. What are your interests? (e.g., music, arts, sports, hobbies, etc.)
14. How do you feel about going to school here?
15. What would help you feel good/better about going to school here?

Source: Sample intake interview modified from Boston International High School and Newcomers Academy as cited in Castellón et al. (2015), and in Samway, Pease-Alvarez and Pease-Alvarez (2020, p. 36).

Another technique for inclusive curriculum is to have students conduct oral histories and family interviews and use those in class assignments or school events. Students can use smart phones to audio-record or make and show videos about their family experiences. Schools can hold an “oral history night,” when parents and extended family members are invited to bring photos or other artifacts that they use to relate the “[…] unique story of their own family’s journey, accomplishments, sacrifices, and experiences” (Munter; Tinajero; Campo, 2007, p. 124). Educators must take care with such an assignment, given that students and family members may have experienced trauma during migration; students should be allowed to decide how much to disclose about their families and communities.

Another technique for fostering inclusivity in the curriculum involves incorporating students’ oral histories and family interviews into class assignments or school events. To accomplish this, students can utilize their smartphones to audio-record or create and present videos depicting their family experiences. To showcase these narratives, schools can organize and "oral history night", where parents and extended family members are encouraged to bring photos or other artifacts that illustrate their family's unique journey, accomplishments, and sacrifices (Munter; Tinajero; Campo, 2007, p. 124). However, educators must exercise cautions when assigning such tasks, as students and their families may have undergone traumatic experiences during migration. It is important to allow students the autonomy to decide the extent to which they wish to share details about their families and communities.

Engage Families

It is critical for school to engage immigrant families (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #16). Effective strategies for family engagement must take into account the needs and realities of diverse families from distinct regions, realities, and backgrounds, as family structures vary. Family spaces at school, home visits, and community walks are three approaches to facilitate family engagement.

To enhance parent engagement, schools can establish dedicated areas for families, such as a parent corner, resource center, classroom, or even a family-operated garden. These designated spaces are particularly beneficial for immigrant and refugee families who are adjusting to a new country and its educational practices. Family centers serve as a valuable hub in which parents can seek information about the school or local community, seek guidance from knowledgeable individuals, and utilize shared resources like computers with internet access (United States, 2016). By providing these family spaces, schools actively support and facilitate meaningful parental involvement.

Home visits can serve as a vital connection between school and home for newcomer families. It is crucial to conduct home visits in a respectful and supportive manner, ensuring that families feel empowered and comfortable. The decision to receive a home visit should rest solely with the families themselves, as some individuals, particularly those with unauthorized immigration status, may feel uneasy about the concept. To maximize the effectiveness of home visits, consider the following tips:

- learn about and observe family norms for a visit to their home (such as removing shoes, extended greetings, etc.). Learn some phrases in the home language or have the student or a multilingual community member interpret (Samway; Pease-Alvarez; Pease-Alvarez, 2020);
- if families do not want to meet in their home, suggest other meeting locations, such as a local library, park, cafe, etc.;
- home visits may help orient families to school routines, address an issue, establish rapport, and initiate communication. Initial questions to open the conversation include: "Tell me about your

child;" "What does your child like best about school;" "What are schools like in (family's country of origin);" and/or "What are your hopes and dreams for your child?" (Samway; Pease-Alvarez; Pease-Alvarez, 2020, p. 249);

- many families will offer food or drinks to guests. Educators may also want to take a small token such as cookies or some fruit to offer to families to establish reciprocity (Samway; Pease-Alvarez; Pease-Alvarez, 2020).

After the visit, it is important for educators to document the valuable information and observations they gather about students and their families. This documentation may include details such as the languages spoken, faith traditions, parental occupations, special interests, family stories, and unique skills or talents. However, educators should avoid taking notes during the visit itself, as this practice may cause concern among families, particularly those with undocumented members. By documenting this information thoughtfully and respectfully after the visit, educators can ensure the privacy and comfort of the families while still capturing important insights to support their students' educational journey (Samway; Pease-Alvarez; Pease-Alvarez, 2020).

Another useful strategy is the community walk. During a community walk, teachers and staff members visit students' communities, are introduced to important landmarks and cultural centers, meet with community leaders, and engage in discussion (Bajaj; Suresh, 2018). Community walks allow teachers to see the community and its assets through the eyes of their students, positioning students as experts; they help teachers better understand family and community language practices and see students' multilingualism as an asset. Further, community walks offer a lesson in cultural humility by replacing assumptions with first-hand interaction with students' communities and by inspiring the reflective practice needed by educators and social service providers when working with diverse populations (e.g., Heiman et al., 2021).

There are other concrete strategies to facilitate effective engagement with newcomer families, as shown in Board 2:

Board 2 – Facilitating Effective Newcomer Family Engagement

Processes	Strategies
Collaboration	• Bring newcomer families and school staff together to co-construct meaningful communications and resources for families and to collaborate in the delivery of learning and support activities for families; • ensure newcomer families are represented on parent associations and school committees.
Capacity Development	• Build staff capacity to challenge deficit mindsets; shift towards an assets-based orientation or "community cultural wealth" model (Yosso, 2005); • create family welcome kits (in students' home languages) with information about school (e.g., parent/guardian rights and responsibilities; school schedules/calendar, procedures). Consider alternative formats for parents/guardians with limited literacy levels.

Assets Orientation	• Understand the cultural orientations and perspectives towards school in students' home cultures; draw from their backgrounds to establish culturally congruent family engagement approaches; • incorporate the cultures, histories, and realities of families into the school curriculum and activities.
Multimodal Communications & Language Supports	• Use multiple methods (e.g., newsletters translated into languages spoken by families, telephone trees, text threads/WhatsApp groups, website, family liaisons, etc.) and structures to communicate; • ensure adequate language supports are available for all families to be able to engage; • create a buddy system for new families to pair with continuing families at school (or families of alumni) from similar linguistic backgrounds to ask questions and integrate further into the school community.
Continuous Improvement	• Create mechanisms in different languages for families to provide feedback (suggestion boxes, surveys, short interviews) on school issues, and for continuous improvement of engagement strategies; • consider how family involvement may be weighed against competing demands (work schedules, etc.) and strive to facilitate engagement that is supportive of and responsive to families.

Source: Adapted from United States (2016, p. 136-137).

Position Home Languages as Assets

Another essential aspect of an asset-based approach to immigrant and refugee students is respect for their home language(s). Schools that successfully teach immigrant and refugee youth adopt school language policies that permit students to engage their home languages in the classroom, ensuring better content learning (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #11). Students may work collaboratively to translate the content into the target language, giving them opportunities for supported practice.

Translanguaging across language boundaries is key to this approach (García; Wei, 2014; Bajaj et al., 2022, Estratégia #1). A translanguaging lens refuses to separate language practices into artificially constructed, static categories, like "Spanish" and "Portuguese." Instead, it emphasizes how multilinguals draw across their linguistic repertoire, selecting "features *strategically* to communicate effectively" (García, 2012, p. 1). It also provides students with the space and support to draw across their linguistic repertoire throughout their thinking process. This stance directly challenges the widespread, monoglossic language hierarchies that position one language as more valuable and the ideologies that frame bilingual children as deficient. Instead, translanguaging indicates a stance of respect for and cultivation of students' full linguistic and cultural repertoires (García; Kleyn, 2016).

Drawing on this concept, García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2016) have developed a translanguaging pedagogy, which "[…] build[s] on bilingual students' language practices flexibly in order to develop new understandings and new language practices, including those deemed 'academic standard' practices" (García; Wei, 2014, p. 92). Translanguaging as a pedagogical method allows students to access texts, visual resources, and collaborative tasks which require communication using different types of language and skills. Translanguaging aids students as they develop their bilingual identities (García; Johnson; Seltzer, 2016).

To support translanguaging, schools can create a multilingual ecology, in which the languages and language practices of all children and families are heard and seen (García; Menken, 2015). This entails key multilingual signage around the school; using students' languages in announcements and school publications; multilingual welcome packets and notes home; multilingual resources in school libraries; and after-school language learning clubs (Menken; Pérez Rosario; Valerio, 2018). A multilingual ecology indicates to students that their diverse multilingual identities are welcome and seen as beneficial in the classroom. To sustain this ecology, classroom language norms should take a strong stand against linguistic discrimination, committed by both staff and students, in all forms.

Further, teachers can provide opportunities for students to draw on their home languages as learning resources. For example, teachers may provide instructions in the target language and expect the final product in the target language, but allow students to draw on all of their language resources as they brainstorm, research and discuss their topic, and write initial drafts. Teachers can engage students' home languages through exploring cognates, providing brief explanations in home languages, and previewing or reviewing a lesson in students' home languages (Calderón, 2008; Goldenberg, 2013). Multilingual ecologies are easier to sustain when a school hires and retains multilingual staff (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #9). When teachers are not proficient in students' home languages, the students themselves can be encouraged to partner with a classmate with a shared language or to use online multilingual tools and resources.

To meet the needs of immigrant and refugee students, schools must adopt the stance that every teacher is a language teacher; all teachers need extensive professional development so that they can learn to integrate language development throughout the curriculum (Echeverria et al., 2024). Lessons should include content and language learning objectives, with the language objectives carefully planned and scaffolded. Instruction should build on student experiences while developing the necessary background knowledge. Lessons should be well-organized and engaging, including:

> Clear goals and objectives; appropriate and challenging material; well-designed instruction and instructional routines; clear input and modeling; active student engagement and participation; informative feedback to learners; application of new learning and transfer to new situations; practice and periodic review; structured, focused interactions with other students; frequent assessments, with reteaching as needed; well-established classroom routines and behavior norms (Goldenberg, 2013, p. 40).

It is often beneficial to incorporate pictures and realia (or real, everyday objects), visual cues and gestures, and hands-on learning activities (Echeverria et al., 2024). While these strategies are essential to support newcomers, all students benefit from explicit attention to language within content classes.

Recognize that Immigrant Students lead Transnational Lives

A second key principle of a humanizing approach to education is to recognize that immigrant students are transnational — they have history, family, cultural ties, emotional and potentially economic investments, and even political loyalties in other locations (Dyrness; Abu El Haj, 2020). For that reason, schools should not assume that their goal is to politically socialize students into allegiance to the nation-state or prepare them solely for local post-secondary schooling or employment options.

Because students have transnational lives and networks, it is necessary to help them develop proficiency in academic and life skills that facilitate post-secondary transitions to further education or into the labor market in their current location, in their country of origin, or elsewhere. Migration, return migration, family separation, and ethnic networks that span multiple countries shape how youth imagine and prepare for their futures (Bajaj; Bartlett, 2017; Kleyn, 2017; 2021; Oliveira, 2018). As described in the previous section, cultivating home languages prepares students for multiple pathways during and after high school.

Career preparation programs, including internships, offer inestimable opportunities for immigrant and refugee students (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #19). Promoting career development entails providing students with various avenues to explore different professions. These opportunities can arise through alumni and career panels, summer programs, shadowing experiences with professionals, or internships. While some schools mandate internships, others facilitate connections for students who are interested in pursuing them. In both cases, it is crucial to implement intentional and well-designed strategies for career development, especially for immigrant and refugee students who often have limited professional networks in their host country. For newcomer multilingual learners, career development experiences should explicitly align with their interests and strengths. To support students in their career journeys, schools can enhance their efforts by fostering and nurturing community connections. Ideally, schools should allocate resources to employ dedicated staff members responsible for cultivating and sustaining relationships with a wide range of nonprofits and local businesses.

Finally, for refugee and immigrant students, college may seem an impossible goal; they may be the first in their family to consider college and may not know how to navigate the college selection, application, and financial aid processes. Students' perceptions of the viability of post-secondary goals may also be limited by the xenophobia and racism they experience. Language proficiency is a limiting factor for many newcomer students; further, undocumented students face specific barriers, as they are denied access to government-subsidized tuition (Gonzales, 2010; Rodriguez; Cruz, 2009).

Schools may pursue a range of strategies to prepare students for college (Bajaj et al. 2022, Strategy #14), including: hosting alumni panels; mentoring; organizing bilingual information sessions, meetings with college admissions counselors, and college visits; establishing a central location for college information; and having dedicated college counselors on staff to ensure that students are taking the necessary courses and assist students with preparing for post-secondary transitions to higher education (Creating..., 2008; Fenner, 2014; Jaffe-Walter; Lee, 2011).

Develop a Culture of Belonging and Strong Relationships with Teachers and Fellow Students

A third key principle of humanizing education states that a strong sense of belonging, and supportive relationships with teachers and fellow students, foster the success of immigrant and refugee students. Students do best when they experience a sense of belonging and community at school (Manning et al., 2022). According to the U.S. National School Climate Center — NSCC (2021), a positive school climate features shared beliefs and values that are directly communicated by educators and reinforced through social interactions; school connectedness, including positive teacher-student relationships and high staff morale; discipline practices perceived by students as fair; and safety. While these features matter in every school, they are particularly important for immigrant and refugee students.

To establish such a culture, educators must develop a deep understanding of their newcomer students and discuss the actions that can be taken to ensure a positive and productive school climate for immigrant and refugee youth (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #12). Good educators recognize that immigrant and refugee populations are incredibly heterogeneous, and they “refrain from essentializing” (Sarr; Mosselson, 2010, p. 553). Students’ experiences vary significantly by the context of reception, including: how peers perceive the immigrant or refugee student’s nation of origin; levels of discrimination and racism; the prevailing ethos toward immigrants; economic opportunities; and municipal and state social policies. Immigrant and refugee students face different difficulties depending on income, status, family composition, social capital and social networks, religious background, race/ethnicity, languages and language abilities, legal status, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

To facilitate the integration of students into their new environments, educators should steer clear of binary, fixed, or homogeneous concepts of culture (Bartlett; Mendenhall; Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017). Unfortunately, schools often impede the sense of affiliation and belonging among transnational immigrant youth by perpetuating dichotomous ideas of citizenship based on nation-state boundaries. While certain groups may strategically claim homogeneity, it is important to recognize that group members may not necessarily share the same customs and beliefs. Culture does not dictate individuals' behavior; instead, it is an ongoing, dynamic, and collaborative process of making meaning alongside others. Additionally, power dynamics are shaped and perpetuated through cultural practices. Embracing a more flexible understanding of culture can help avoid rigid notions and problematic divisions between "home culture" and "host-country culture." Students feel more included when schools promote a view of cultural production and reinvention as an ongoing process, depict cultural practices as diverse within both home and host countries, and highlight how personal cultural repertoires vary in different situations and relationships.

Prior to their arrival in the host country, immigrant and refugee students have experienced schools with distinct policies, procedures, and expectations. They may have attended a school premised on cooperation and collectivism; they may have studied in a situation where asking a question of the teacher was seen as disrespectful, discouraged and/or even punished. Schools maintain a specific and somewhat arbitrary set of expectations and rules, such as sitting still for long periods, the wearing (or not) of a uniform, raising a hand to speak, rotating classrooms or teachers, or determining when it is or is not permitted to cooperate on a task. To address these norms, schools should provide an orientation to host-country culture and the school environment that addresses questions frequently raised by immigrant families, including a clear description of the roles of different adults in schools, an explanation of school rules and routines, and a description of different types of classroom activities.

To prepare a welcoming environment for immigrant and refugee students, educators should actively and continuously seek new information about the countries and cultures from which their newcomer students originate. While respecting privacy, they should work to get to know each student—their personal journey, their family situations, their areas of interest, and their goals. This effort helps to develop trust while allowing teachers to differentiate instruction and build on students' motivations.

At the same time, to ensure students receive adequate academic support, it is critical to

> [...] assess students' educational needs, including the need for appropriate language assistance services and whether the student requires an evaluation to determine if he or she has a disability and as a result requires special education and/or related aids and services (United States, 2016, Ch. 2, p. 4).

This information will help staff develop a comprehensive set of academic, social, and emotional supports for each child.

School culture is not only about food and folkways: it is also, and quite centrally, about recognizing the serious political and economic constraints facing immigrant and refugee students. Students from mixed-status families fear the potential impact of forcible removals and the casual violence of others, particularly when and if political officials are fomenting xenophobic rhetoric. Immigrant student attendance may be negatively affected by increases in immigration enforcement. Schools need to plan carefully for how to support students when parents or caregivers are threatened with deportation (Breiseth, 2019).

Educators may believe that students learn about democratic processes and/or current immigration issues primarily in social studies classes. However, in truth, students learn about democratic engagement and belonging through everyday curriculum and pedagogy throughout the school day. As Jaffe-Walter, Miranda, and Lee (2019, p. 252-254) explain,

> […] when teachers remain silent on immigration policy, students interpret their silence as an implicit sanctioning of those policies […]. [W]hen xenophobic and false ideas about immigrants echo through public discourses and schools, teachers must actively challenge these dehumanizing discourses.

Schools should actively and persistently cultivate a sense of belonging. Students need to experience strong, respectful connections with teachers (Santos et al., 2018). In a school "[…] characterized by a strong culture of high expectations for all students" (Castellón et al., 2015, p. 199),

> Teachers frequently communicate their belief that every individual student is capable of success and are constantly pushing and encouraging students to believe in their potential. The school is also built on a culture of mutual respect. Students, teachers, and staff reported feeling valued and appreciated by each Other […]. Overall, the school staff has built a safe, caring, and nurturing environment for students. […] The goal is to establish trust, rapport, and a sense of consistency.

Scholars of immigration and education have found that strong relationships are essential for student success. In their foundational book detailing the findings from a longitudinal study with more than 600 newcomer immigrant adolescents, Carola Suárez-Orozco, Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, and Irina Todorova (2008, p. 44-45) find that

> […] positive relationships with peers and caring adults at school are associated with many positive outcomes for students: they become more social, motivated, academically competent, and high achieving; they are more likely to attend school regularly; and they become more academically engaged.

This "relational engagement" (Suárez-Orozco; Suárez-Orozco; Todorova, 2008) promotes students' academic achievement. Teachers serve as important role models, mentors, and translators of different cultural and professional norms for students. Families often hold deep respect for teachers, and educators can offer assistance to students navigating decisions and pathways academically, personally, and professionally.

To establish and maintain a sense of belonging, it is essential to make schooling relevant for newcomer students. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 469) described "culturally relevant pedagogy" (CRP) as an approach that "[...] not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate". Culturally relevant teaching is a way to "[...] empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18).

Students also need to experience a strong sense of connection with other students. Schools may use different strategies to facilitate that culture. Some schools use a "house system," dividing students into smaller groups with designated teachers for social support and helping students develop social connections. Other schools have developed a "buddy" program, connecting newcomers to more experienced students who share their home language.

Moreover, in order to foster a strong sense of belonging, schools must prioritize the safety of their students. To prevent instances of bullying, educators should establish and prominently display clear expectations for all students. It is essential to provide explicit examples of what constitutes bullying behavior, encouraging students to report any incidents of bullying, whether experienced personally or witnessed, through easily accessible reporting mechanisms. Consequences for engaging in bullying should be clearly communicated and enforced. It is crucial for educators to actively monitor and document any signs of bullying within the school community. Additionally, educators should request that families refrain from normalizing or excusing instances of bullying, emphasizing the importance of a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.

One simple strategy for promoting belonging is the use of "advisory" or "homeroom" periods in secondary school (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #7). Generally, an advisory period consists of a regularly scheduled period at least twice a week (of 30-45 minutes) in which a teacher follows a group of 10-20 students either for the school-year or, in some schools, over their four-year (or more) high school career, serving as an advocate and source of support. Advisory periods are a time for teachers to

1. check in with students about grades, attendance, or other issues;
2. identify any problems and offer support;
3. engage in communication between the school and home;
4. create a supportive peer group;
5. facilitate students' integration into the larger school community.

Advisory programs allow teacher to focus on the holistic development of students, and connect students to "consistent adult guidance" and a "stable peer group that meets regularly" (Forte; Schurr, 1993, p. 117). The Educational Alliance identified five dimensions of success for advisory periods: (1) a stated purpose; (2) thoughtful organization; (3) relevant advisory program content; (4) ongoing assessment; and (5) strong leadership (Osofsky; Sinner; Wolk, 2003). As shown in Board 3, advisory periods help to attain six key goals.

Board 3 – Advisory Dimensions for Newcomer Students

Dimension	Objectives	Sample Activities	
1. Academic Progress	Ensure regular attendance and academic persistence, and that adequate academic progress is being made towards high school graduation/completion of requirements.	• Reviewing attendance, progress reports & grades regularly; • addressing any obstacles to completing homework and assignments; • liaising with other teachers if needed.	STRONG PEER-TO-PEER AND ADULT-TO-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS
2. Advocacy	Advocate for additional services and supports within the school and/or refer the student to out-of-school services if required.	• One-on-one check ins and monitoring of overall well-being; • referrals to school social worker, legal aid, health, or other services; • engage in school- or district-wide efforts to support students, such as advocating for sanctuary or safe haven policies.	
3. Socio-Emotional Support	Utilize a trauma-informed approach to engage students and foster open communication with each student.	• Regular check-ins with advisory students to identify any challenges; • activities in advisory such as journaling, art, or movement exercises that can address complex emotions.	
4. Connection	Build a sense of group identity and camaraderie within the advisory group to allow for a strong peer support network, especially for students who may not be part of an already established peer social group at school.	• Participate in a group activity as a collective (e.g., a field trip, create a group name, a collective bulletin board, shared playlist, etc.); • celebrate each advisory student's birthday as a group; • rotate days on which students can share a talent, a story, a photo, music, or a recipe/food item.	
5. Information Sharing	Allow time for advisor and students to share information with each other during the advisory period about, for example, community resources, internships, social services such as free internet programs, etc.	• Have time for announcements and information sharing during advisory; • create an email list or a text/WhatsApp thread for advisory students to share information with one another.	
6. College/ Career Preparation	Dedicate time during advisory for future-oriented planning to ensure all students are aware of deadlines and opportunities.	• Structure time in the upper secondary grades to walk students through applications to two- and four-year colleges; • go on a field trip to a local college as an advisory group; • track scholarship, internship, and college application deadlines and have students work on applications during advisory period.	

Source: Adapted from Osofsky, Sinner and Wolk (2003).

Advisory periods are not a panacea, but they offer one important avenue for ensuring that issues are identified and addressed in a timely manner.

Another strategy for building a strong sense of belonging is to recruit multilingual and immigrant teachers and staff members (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #9). Research demonstrates the power of a diverse educational staff. Students need to see themselves and their community represented among the teaching staff (Gers Gershenson; Hansen; Lindsay, 2021; Cherng; Halpin, 2016). Bilingual educators play crucial roles as instructors, interpreters, curriculum developers, and advisors. Their linguistic abilities and cultural knowledge benefit their students, and they help raise and affirm the status of other languages. Some schools pursue a "grow your own" strategy that recruits educators from the community who are invested in staying local. Such programs must address the financial barriers and lack of support that teacher education candidates sometimes face. Multilingual, immigrant staff members, including secretarial, counseling, and janitorial staff, are also crucial.

Alumni are powerful resources and mentors for immigrant students (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #20). They may serve as role models and advocates, and they may more easily anticipate obstacles or barriers faced by students (Gardner, 2022). They may even become staff members whose strong connections to the community help responsive educators avoid missteps. Engaging alumni who have previously been in the same position as current students can be an impactful approach to help students visualize themselves in higher education or professional environments down the line. Schools have effectively utilized social media platforms like WhatsApp to maintain connections with alumni and involve them in activities such as alumni panels, mentoring programs, or even as staff members within the school. By inviting alumni to reunions, celebrations, fairs, information sessions, and other events, schools can effectively incorporate their valuable experience, expertise, and networks. This inclusive approach provides students with valuable advice, insights, and perspectives, while also fostering a sense of belonging and motivation for their own future success.

Specific Supports for Immigrant and Refugee Students

Research-based strategies for high-quality pedagogy are good for all students, including immigrant and refugee students. These include strategies like: purposeful grouping that is revisited and revised frequently, depending on learning goals (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #3); differentiated instruction and universal design for learning (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #4); and continuous, formative assessment and project-based learning and assessment (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #6). Further, at the school level, leaders can adopt a range of practices that benefit multilingual students, such as enacting democratic school governance, integrating coaching that is aware of the needs of multilingual learners, engaging in teacher team inquiry, integrating socio-emotional learning into school-wide planning, and developing a multilingual learner data framework (see Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategies #8 and #10; see also Auslander; Yip, 2022). In addition, there are some specific supports needed for immigrant and refugee students.

Consider the Tradeoffs of Temporary Separation versus Integration

First, educators must consider when, and for how long, it is beneficial to separate immigrant and refugee students (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy 3). There is a danger to long-term separation, such as stand-alone language programs or tracking students. Tracking has been shown to be deleterious to the academic achievement of students categorized as target language learners (Callahan, 2005; Swail et al., 2005). Scholars have argued that tracking and ability grouping have few academic benefits and serve to further class-based social stigmatization and alienation from schooling, providing access to high-status knowledge for some and denying it to others (e.g., Oakes, 1985).

However, there are school programs that strategically separate immigrant and refugee students for a short, specified period. For example, newcomer programs are small, tight-knit programs for students who have been in the country for a limited amount of time (often six months or less). They are tailored to the needs of newcomer students, providing emergent bilinguals with intensive language instruction while supporting content area instruction (Short; Boyson, 2012). Programs may be full- or part-day; they can be established for any grade level; they may be programs within a school, separate sites, or full schools.

Further, students who are less familiar with the emphasis on inquiry-based learning and critical thinking may need more time to adapt to the pedagogical model. Students may have previously attended schools that emphasized memorization or required different genres of writing. Pedagogies are deeply cultural; they encapsulate ideas about how young people learn (e.g., Schweisfurth, 2013). Students may find such a pedagogical shift challenging, and may benefit from explicit instruction about pedagogical expectations.

Students with Limited and Interrupted Formal Education, or SLIFE, often have specific needs (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #5). They may have large gaps in their formal education due to political unrest, trauma, violence, or financial constraints in their home countries (Custodio; O'Loughlin, 2017; Hos, 2016). SLIFE are truly heterogeneous; even among students from the same country, there can be great linguistic and cultural diversity. Given their interrupted education, upon arrival in the host country, they face an urgent need to learn academic content and the target language before they exceed the legal age limit for remaining in secondary school and 'age out' of the system (Umansky et al., 2018).

SLIFE students have specific language, literacy, academic, socio-emotional, and cultural needs. These students need learning programs that:

- address their acculturation to the new school system;
- attend to their socio-emotional needs (poverty, post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD], family separation or reunification, etc.);
- provide focused initial literacy instruction appropriate for adolescentes;
- provide focused academic skill instruction to bridge gaps in knowledge;
- integrate content and language instruction (WIDA, 2020, p. 2).

Schools may respond to the needs of SLIFE students in different ways. Schools with larger SLIFE populations may set up separate SLIFE classrooms, allowing students to stay in them for up to two years in order to take content classes in their home language and intensive courses to develop the target language. Other schools mainstream SLIFE students but provide push-in services or supports.

Regardless of the setting, SIFE students benefit from "[…] an explicit focus on language development, with contextualized pronunciation work, vocabulary and sentence development, and discourse structure woven into lessons," in collaborative classrooms with sufficient "modeling and scaffolding" through, for example, "images, concept maps, and sentence frames" (Castellón et al., 2015, p. 7). In these classes, hands-on activities that activate prior knowledge and "[…] value students' experiences and perspectives" are "[…] designed to encourage purposeful communication using cognitively challenging and discipline-specific language and complex texts", and they "[…] encourage the externalization of student learning so that teachers can formatively assess and monitor student comprehension of content" (Castellón et al., 2015, p. 7).

Provide After-School, Weekend, and Summer Programming

Immigrant students, and especially SLIFE students, may need additional hours of instruction; schools can offer that support through after-school and/or summer programs, which provide critical academic and language support that complement what happens in the classroom (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #15). Participation in these activities can lead to higher academic achievement, lower dropout rates, and continued studies after high school. Social, civic, cultural, and sports activities help to build students' personal development, self-confidence, and interpersonal and leadership skills (Deutsch, 2017). Programs also help youth to think about the future and to explore academic and professional pathways after high school. Teachers and school leaders need to think creatively about how they might provide these opportunities by recruiting educators and volunteers, as well as developing partnerships with local organizations.

Trained volunteers from a local organization or a university offering community-based or service-learning courses may provide excellent tutoring support, language practice, and homework help. To ensure optimal participation, it is advisable to organize tutoring sessions within the school premises, considering the transportation challenges that students may face. Co-locating tutoring sessions also enables tutors to communicate with teachers, if needed, fostering collaboration and coordination. When recruiting and training tutors, it is crucial to identify individuals who can provide subject-specific assistance while also offering language support. Whenever feasible, schools should strive to enlist tutors who can communicate in the same language(s) as the students. Establishing long-term pairings between students and tutors is particularly beneficial, as it allows sufficient time for students to develop a sense of comfort and rapport with their tutors.

After-school peer tutoring offers another possibility. Schools that primarily or exclusively serve newcomers often pair them with more experienced same-language peers: the veteran students help to translate content and integrate new students into peer groups, and they provide peer tutoring on specific subjects. Peer tutoring is particularly efficacious when peers receive training in how to tutor (see, e.g., Fuchs et al., 1994; Miller; Topping; Thurston, 2010).

Cultural, linguistic, sports, and leadership programs provided after school offer students valuable opportunities to participate, foster a sense of belonging, make new friends, learn to interact with people from different backgrounds, and manage stress. A study on newcomer and refugee students in Arizona and New York found that students who participated in extracurricular activities and clubs, whether they were offered by their school or not, experienced a stronger sense of school belonging and inclusion (Russell et al., 2021). Students praise the importance of clubs that help them preserve and celebrate their own cultural traditions and languages, as well as the chances provided by these clubs to interact with one another, speak in their home languages, and share and celebrate different aspects of their family and cultural traditions (Mendenhall; Bartlett, 2018).

Weekend programming extends opportunities for newcomer students. Schools may open on Saturday, paying teachers to help students who need academic support; they might also partner with a community organization to tutor students on not only assignments but also job, college, and scholarship applications.

Summer instruction has a major impact on student achievement, particularly for SLIFE (e.g., Atteberry; McEachin, 2016; Gershenson, 2013). Summer programs have a positive impact on students' sense of belonging and transition to new schooling environments (Symons; Ponzio, 2019). In some districts, newcomer academies have been established to specifically support students in acclimating to different educational cultures. These summer programs not only aid students in developing their academic language skills but also provide them with valuable opportunities to earn credits. As emergent bilingual students often spend significant amounts of time in language classes, they may miss out on completing recommended or required courses for high school graduation or college admission (Kanno; Kangas, 2014; Umansky, 2016). Summer credit recovery programs offer students the chance to develop their target language proficiency, familiarize themselves with the technology platforms commonly used in schools, and fulfill the necessary credits for graduation. These programs play a crucial role in ensuring students' academic progress and success.

Support Students' Mental and Physical Health

Immigrant and refugee students benefit when schools become hubs of essential services, such as healthcare access (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #13). Access to physical and mental health services in a school setting has been shown to effectively increase well-being, especially for students living in poverty (Bundy et al., 2006) and for those who may be uninsured or unable to access public services. Established school infrastructure and strong relationships with families enable students to access reliable information and services that the school has coordinated with community organizations and other service providers. Importantly, students can receive these resources without concerns of being deceived, charged excessively, or reported as unauthorized immigrants. Mental health services are often subject to stigma within immigrant and refugee communities, despite the significant need for interventions to address the trauma experienced by youth and families. Recognizing and addressing this stigma is crucial to ensure that appropriate support is provided to those who require it, acknowledging the challenges they have faced or may still be facing.

School-based health services can encompass various options, including health centers or mobile clinics situated on school campuses. These facilities offer a range of essential services such as primary medical care, mental and behavioral health care, dental and oral health care, health and nutrition education, substance abuse counseling, case management, and other necessary support (Health Resources and Service Administration, 2017). Additionally, establishing vaccine clinics within schools can significantly improve accessibility to immunizations. Another approach to providing these services is through referrals to external organizations that collaborate with schools to cater to their student population, often funded through state programs or charitable organizations that offer no- or low-cost services to communities. These strategies ensure that students receive comprehensive and vital healthcare while promoting their overall well-being within the school setting.

A whole school approach to wellness for newcomer students can coordinate and align efforts towards student well-being. With newcomer student populations, many of whom may be unaccompanied minors, refugees, asylees, and/or students with interrupted formal education, integrating a trauma-informed approach is essential to building successful relationships with students.

Provide Legal Services and Legal Information

Centering the whole child in the context of their social, economic, and political realities requires an acknowledgement of students' sometimes precarious immigration statuses (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #17). Fear of deportation – their own or of family members – has negative impacts on school performance due to absenteeism and students' mental health, and it heightens the risk of dropping out (Kirksey; Sattin-Bajaj, 2021).

Educators and schools dedicated to serving newcomers have taken proactive steps to address the challenges faced by unauthorized migrant students in diverse ways. These initiatives aim to enhance students' academic engagement and overall well-being by providing them with valuable information and resources. For instance, schools may organize information sessions, establish supportive school policies, and foster partnerships that assist students and their families in navigating their legal status (Cunningham, 2021). Many schools also conduct workshops on legal rights, making this crucial information readily available to students and their families through informative displays throughout the school premises. These efforts demonstrate a commitment to supporting unauthorized migrant students and ensuring their access to necessary resources while promoting a safe and inclusive educational environment. The following checklist, excerpted from the organization Learning for Justice (Collins, 2020), offers reflection and planning prompts for educators and school leaders as they consider the question, "How is your school supporting undocumented students and families?"

> - *Enrollment.* What information must be provided for students to enroll? How is your school or district ensuring you're not requiring students or families to disclose their citizenship status?
> - *Student Services.* What information must be provided for students to access extracurricular or support services? Check up on athletics policies, enrollment for special services, free and reduced lunch enrollment, transportation policies, resources for students experiencing food insecurity or homelessness, and more.
> - *Family Resources.* How are translation services managed by your school or district? Who is responsible for ensuring all information is available in all home languages? What community resources are available to families—including connections to pro-bono legal supports, legal clinics, and food and health care support for undocumented families? Where is this information available?
> - *Law Enforcement Interactions.* Under what circumstances may law enforcement interact with students on your campus? Who serves as a point of contact for law enforcement? Who ensures [student privacy] guidelines are followed? (Collins, 2020, paras 30-34)

Unauthorized immigrants may feel unsure about who to trust with regards to accurate legal information or whether they can safely access state services (Immigrant…, 2018); the role of the school as a "safe haven" and site for information as well as resources for families cannot be underestimated.

Develop Community Partnerships

One strategy for serving refugee and immigrant youth is to develop community partnerships (Bajaj et al., 2022, Strategy #18). Partnerships promise major benefits for students and their families, including learning support and after-school opportunities. Partnerships may complement, enrich, or extend the academic curriculum (Decker; Decker; Brown, 2007; Sanders, 2006). Based on their study of more than 30 successful partnerships aimed at supporting the needs of language minority students, Adger and Locke (2000, p. 23-24) note that effective partnerships should:

- assure that potential partners are fully committed to the partnership;
- maintain communication;
- ensure strong leadership at the program level;
- start small and build carefully;
- look for opportunity.

Schools can partner with a variety of community organizations, including those that focus on social services, health, arts, postsecondary and career exploration, and civic engagement, to name a few.

Implications and Conclusions

The strategies presented in this article offer educators and school staff various ideas and approaches to humanize education. Humanizing schools take an assets-based approach to students and their families. They recognize that immigrant students have transnational pasts, presents, and futures. They actively develop in the school a culture of belonging and strong relationships with teachers and fellow students. They employ solid pedagogical approaches, and they provide specific supports to immigrant students. As Salazar (2013, p. 124), building on Freire, said, "Educators are responsible for promoting a more fully human world through their pedagogical principles and practices". Guided by these principles, and associated strategies, educators can pursue Freire's goal of building educational institutions and processes that humanize, allowing teachers and students alike to enjoy a fuller humanity.

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Availability of research data: the dataset supporting the results of this study is published in this article.

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