



# Diversity in public education: Acknowledging immigrant parent knowledge

## Key Details

### KEY WORDS

Immigrant Parent Knowledge, Cultural Knowledge, First Language Knowledge, Religious Diversity, Parent Involvement

### POPULATION GROUPS

Newcomer Youth; Racialized Youth

### STEPPING UP THEMES

Education, Training & Apprenticeships  
Strong, Supportive Friends & Families

### RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

### SOURCE

Academic

**“This research suggests that the immigrant parents saw transmitting their first-language knowledge, negotiating the terrain of both home and school cultures, and helping their children combat various forms of racism as important forms of involvement that their children needed. These hidden forms of parental involvement expand narrow conceptions of parent–school relations that tend to reinforce and serve the interests of White, middle-class families” (p. 134).**

### 1. What is the research about?

Immigrant parents have knowledge – including formal education, values, language, culture, religion, life experiences, and community knowledge – to contribute to Canadian educational settings. But conventional North American models of parent engagement overlook and dismiss immigrant parents’ knowledge. The literature on parent engagement takes on a deficits-based model when discussing immigrant parents. To expand such models of parent engagement, this study asks the following research questions:

1. What is immigrant parents’ knowledge regarding their children’s learning?
2. How do parents mobilize their knowledge to advocate for their children?

In doing so, this study offers a re-conceptualization of parent engagement, one that is inclusive of immigrant parents’ knowledge and reflective of the social and political contexts in which immigrant youth are embedded.

### 2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in Calgary, Alberta.

### 3. Who is this research about?

This research explores the perspectives of recently immigrated parents. The participants all received credentials from their countries of origin. In total, the participants came from 15 countries and spoke 25 different languages.

### 4. How was the research done?

The researcher conducted interviews with 38 immigrant parents. The questions brought out participants’ experiences with their children’s teachers. The questions also focused on how immigrant parents developed, constructed, and used knowledge to engage with Canadian educational systems. Data was analyzed to identify different forms of knowledge held by immigrant parents.

### 5. What are the key findings?

The study identified three significant forms of knowledge: (a) **Cultural Knowledge**; (b) **First Language Knowledge**; and (c) **Religious Knowledge**.

- (a) Immigrant parents held knowledge on the ‘cultural scripts’ (or patterns unique to their culture) that frame their children’s social interactions. Participants noted

that while their knowledge could provide a holistic understanding of their children, it was often neglected by educators and school administrators.

- (b) Participants also placed importance on the sharing of first languages with their children. Immigrant parents reported that doing so allows children to remain connected to their cultural and political identities, and, in an increasingly globalized world, can help their children secure employment.
- (c) Participants described the importance of religious knowledge. Participants noted that while Canada espouses rights to religious freedom and multiculturalism, immigrant children, and, specifically, Muslim children, faced religious hostility in Canadian schools.

Finally, the study described that immigrant parents share these forms of knowledge to actively engage in school systems and protect their children against racism and discrimination. Participants described speaking to teachers about racism, fostering strong spiritual identities in their children, and engaging their children in anti-racism initiatives as examples of parent engagement that support the wellbeing of immigrant children.

## 6. Why does it matter for youth work?

Models of parent engagement must be expanded to be inclusive of immigrant parents. This study makes visible how immigrant parents use their knowledge to engage systems by constructing a counter-narrative to discrimination. Youth workers who work with immigrant youth can similarly explore the knowledge and practices of immigrant parents to examine their contributions and engagement with youth wellbeing.



Guo, Y. (2012). Diversity in public education: Acknowledging immigrant parent knowledge. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 35(2), 120-140.  
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