

Eastern Illinois University

The Keep

Eastern Education Journal

Administration & Publications

Fall 2015

Volume 44 Number 1

EIU College of Education

Follow this and additional works at: <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/eej>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Eastern Education Journal

College of Education and Professional Studies
Eastern Illinois University

Volume 44, Number 1, Fall 2015

Table of Contents

Tier I Interventions: The First Steps for Students At-Risk	2
Jude Matyo-Cepero, Jeffrey B. Kritzer, and Stathene Varvisotis	
Understanding Immigrant Children from Muslim Backgrounds: Issues and Challenges	27
Sham’ah Md-Yunus	

David M. Glassman, President

Blair M. Lord, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

EDITORIAL BOARD

Diane H. Jackman, Dean

Kathlene Shank, Special Education

Brenda M. Wilson, Communications, Disorders and Sciences

Gloria Leitschuh, Counseling and Student Development

Mahyar Izadi, Dean, Lumpkin College of Business and Applied Sciences

Kiran Padmaraju, Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education

Stephen Lucas, Secondary Education and Foundations

William Hine, Secondary Education and Foundations

Katie Lewandowski, Geology-Geography

Diane H. Jackman, Editor

Shannon Y. Bell, Managing Editor

Address all inquiries to:

Office of the Dean

Eastern Education Journal

College of Education and Professional Studies

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Avenue

Charleston, IL 61920

E-mail: edjournal@eiu.edu

Tier I Interventions: The First Steps for Students At-Risk

Jude Matyo-Cepero, Ph.D., NBCT
University of Nebraska Kearney

Jeffrey B. Kritzer, Ph.D.
University of Nebraska Kearney

Stathene Varvisotis, Ph.D., LDTC
University of Nebraska Kearney

Abstract

Elementary school teachers in a Midwestern school district participated in a survey asking them to indicate which Tier I interventions they used. The teacher participants indicated how often they used the interventions and their preferences for professional development in any of these interventions. Results indicated no significant relationships between interventions and teacher gender, interventions and the teacher level of experience, and between interventions and grade levels taught by the participants.

Tier I Interventions: The First Steps for Students At-Risk

The role of the classroom teacher is to impart knowledge and to facilitate learning. The goal of this endeavor is to support the academic growth of the students charged to the teacher. This responsibility is to be accomplished in an ever-changing environment and within a finite amount of time. In short, teachers must work with student of differing abilities, and ultimately achieve maximum potential for each student. In order to implement powerful classroom instruction, teachers must have the tools necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. The question then becomes, what are these tools? Tier I interventions are the basic tools needed by educators to reach student potential. This sounds quite elementary, especially when one considers that many teachers may not be aware of what a Tier I intervention involves. Additional confusion occurs because schools and districts have different interpretations and implementations of Tier I and its interventions.

Background

Historically, tiered interventions, known as Response to Intervention (RtI), were originally referenced in both No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the 2004 reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA). RtI was developed as a response to the over identification of certain groups of children, including minorities, children in poverty and English Language Learners, as learners requiring special education services. The outcome of research directly related to this over identification resulted in research driven curricula (Stewart, Benner, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2007) known as Response to Intervention or RtI. RtI is designed to work in unison with tiered instructions as a preventative measure to support student learning rather than dooming the student to failure (Revenue, Bishop, & Filce; 2010). In RtI, the

students' academic or behavioral program is constructed using scientifically based educational research. If student success, both academic and behavioral, is not achieved at Tier I, then the instructional level moves to Tier 2, which provides more intense support such as supplemental instruction. If Tier 2 does not yield success, more intense support occurs at Tier 3. This level will provide the student with supports that can include but are not limited to the possibility of referral for special education and/or related services. Keeping in mind the fluidity of RtI, a student's response to the interventions provided allows the possibility to move down the tiers (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2006). The decision to move a student from one tier to the next is data driven. Information, in the form of specific data collected over time, ensures the validity of the information collected, and leads to the development of appropriate interventions to meet the student's needs. Evidence based academic/behavioral strategies, and ongoing progress monitoring, further ensures opportunities for students to receive the tiered support they require for success (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In order for positive learning outcomes to occur, the instruction presented to the students should be "precise, frequent and sensitive to change" (Ysseldyke, Burns, Scholin & Parker, 2010, p. 56). Research has shown that while tests and test results are useful for guiding instruction, it is ultimately the decision of the teachers and members of the RtI team to determine how to present the material to the students (Salvia, Ysseldyke & Bolt, 2010; Ysseldyke et. al, 2010).

Tier I interventions, delivered during traditional classroom instruction, allows the teacher to become aware of a student's academic or behavioral struggles. According to Berkely, et al. (2009), it is essential that Tier I practices dovetail with instruction in order for a positive impact on student learning to take place. The teacher, as well as an academic support team, closely monitors those children identified as needing additional supports in Tier I. Data collection and

student progress monitoring determines if the strategies implemented are helping the child improve. Based on the results of the data collection, adjustments are made to the child's academic/behavioral program until it is determined that the child is able to function successfully in the general education classroom (Carney & Stiefel, 2008), or if more support is needed. As data review and progress monitoring continue to evolve, it may be evident that the child requires additional instructional methods. Some students benefit from extra, more personalized instructional methods in order to be successful (Robins & Antrim, 2013).

Data continue to be collected at Tier II. By more frequently monitoring the student's progress, the teacher ensures the success of the interventions implemented (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009) and to allow the team to make determinations whether or not to change, reduce or increase interventions. The student's success at Tier II will determine the need to remain at that tier, decrease to Tier I, or move ahead to Tier III interventions. Tier III provides the student with more intensive instruction. By monitoring the student's progress, more frequently, the teacher can determine if the interventions implemented are meeting the student's needs (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). The level of programming may intensify to provide the student with the necessary supports. The school may also provide the student with the most effective teachers to work with the students for longer durations of time (Robins & Antrim, 2013). Tier III interventions may lead to much more intensive, or frequent supports provided through special education programs (Robins & Antrim, 2013).

The Strategies

It is true, that the use of Tier I strategies leads to a reduction of referrals to special education. A review of various Tier I strategies follows:

Visual Cues

Visual cues can be a useful tool for students to use when learning new skills. These cues serve as a guidepost for how skill accomplishment and the expected results of the experience. A primary ingredient for success is for the student to be able to retain vital information shared in the visual cue. According to Valentini, (2004) “visual cues are a source of information that allows students to become active agents in transforming, classifying, organizing, associating and responding to instruction” (p. 22). A particularly difficult time for elementary age students is transition time, which, simply put, means moving from one activity or location to another. Without smooth transitions, precious learning time is often lost. Visual cues can include pictures, images, text, as well as listing the order, or steps necessary to accomplish a given task (McCoy; Mathur & Czoka, 2010). Research conducted by McCoy, et al. (2010) found that elementary students, once introduced to the practice of following visual cues, were able to enter a classroom, independently begin their work and maintain the expected behaviors of the classroom culture.

Differentiated Instruction

According to Tomlinson (2004), differentiated instruction is the process of “ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student’s readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of leaning” (p.28). Differentiation has existed in the United States since the time of the one room schoolhouse. Teacher expectations centered on meeting the individual learning needs of all students based on grade level, age level, proficiency, and even the amount of time a student was able to spend in the school because of the agrarian cultural needs of the farming family. Differentiation may mean one thing to the elementary teacher and something completely

different to the secondary teacher. The special education teacher may have an entirely different perspective on differentiation than the general education teacher. Teachers and administrators may also differ on their views of what differentiation means and the most effective method of implementation in the classroom. Teachers may choose from a variety of means to differentiate instruction. Levy (2008) states that “tiered lesson planning is one way for teachers to stay focused on the standards and curriculum required by the school/district/state while still maintaining flexibility in content, process and product that is to be taught” (p. 163). Students must also take an active role in the learning process by becoming a data collector in order to monitor their own progress and take ownership of their learning (Brimijoin, Marquissee & Tomlinson, 2003). Differentiation will not be leaving the world of education anytime soon. However, admittedly, differentiation is somewhat of a challenge for both the novice and veterans alike (Rock, Gregg, Ellis, & Gable. 2008).

Preferential Seating

Is sitting in the front row a positive thing or a negative thing? That depends on the student, as well as the teacher. Preferential seating may mean different things to different people depending on the circumstances. The interpretation of the phrase leaves much to the reader’s discretion. Gone are the days where the “naughty child” would sit in the corner in the front of the classroom, or where the “teacher’s pet” would sit front and center, whether they wanted to or not. The generally accepted definition of preferential seating is “seating the student in a location where he or she is most likely to stay focused on what you are teaching” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 38). Determining the most preferential seat must be a partnership between both the teacher and student(s). Many teachers are familiar with preferential seating if it appears as an accommodation in the student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP). The IEP must also clarify

what “preferential seating” means for that particular student. Like the IEP, preferential seating is an individual determination, which may meet the student’s learning needs, if not their social preference (Canfield & Swenson, 2006).

Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring is one of the most well studied strategies...it effectively promotes helping behavior...especially for students who have difficulty with the material. Peer tutoring may enhance academic skills within the inclusive classroom setting. Traditionally, peer tutoring takes the form of a struggling learner paired with a peer who has stronger skills in a given academic area. It does not consume a substantial amount of teacher time, and can provide students with frequent opportunities to practice targeted skills (Heron, Villareal, Yoa, Christianson, & Heron, 2006).

Teaching test-taking strategies

Are students—without instructional support beyond the provision of information about task demands—capable of learning and then adapting test-taking strategies to the specifics of individual tests (Broekkamp, & van Hout-Wolters, 2007)? Research by Corno (1986) indicates that student test performance can improve by adapting study strategies to the task demands. Identifying and presenting those demands, though, is largely under the teacher’s control. Students, guided by their teacher(s), learn to adapt their test-taking strategies in order to know how to respond to different types of test questions, regardless of topic. It is the teacher’s responsibility to help their students become aware of their learning modality by providing instruction to enhance and enable application in test taking situations.

Relaxation Interventions

Twenty-first century students face a multitude of pressures from pre-kindergarten through high school. Student's expectations include success on a daily basis in the classroom; additionally, the pressure to do well on high-stakes standardized testing can result in high levels of stress for students (Matyo-Cepero, 2015). High-stakes standardized testing exacerbates stress levels in both students and teachers. The student's ability to read a test question, to understand what the question means, and to use prior knowledge and skills to answer the question can result in frustration and misrepresentation of the student's actual ability level (Hughes, Schumaker, Deshler, & Mercer, 1988). Stress can be the cause of academic difficulties for students, but may also result in "physiological hyper-arousal, negative emotional responses, as well as behavioral problems in children" (Larson, El Ramahi, Conn, Estes & Ghibellini, 2010, p. 4). Research focusing on third grade students attending two midwestern public schools, preparing to take high-stakes standardized tests, conducted by Larson, et al. (2010) and found that relaxation interventions can effectively reduce test anxiety.

Black (2005) cites work the of DeBard and Kubow (2002), who found that two-thirds of elementary age students shared that high-stakes standardized testing caused them excess stress. The research also indicated that as students moved up through the grade levels, the stress increased. Research conducted by Lohaus and Klein-Hessling (2003) introduced 160 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students to systematic relaxation interventions such as progressive muscle relaxation and imagination and unsystematic relaxation interventions, which included neutral stories, which are stories specifically designed to ease student anxiety when working on arithmetic problems. The results of their research showed that there are beneficial short-term effects for the students when utilizing systematic relaxation interventions and there was not a

significant difference between the systematic realization interventions and the unsystematic intervention such as the neutral stories treatment. The authors suggest finding the child's personal preference, for example music, when developing a plan to reduce stress/anxiety. Nassau (2014) warns that many students identified as anxious may in fact be perfectionists, to the point of wanting to carry out the relaxation interventions correctly. If this should occur, it is important for the adult to remind the student that "the goal is to relax, not to be in a competition with other students or with oneself" (p. 1).

Strategic Instruction

The need for strategic instruction was the focus of work conducted at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KU-CRL) where the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) was developed over 30 years ago. SIM is a research-based, validated instruction method developed by the KU-CRL (n.d.) designed specifically to assist special education and at-risk students learn and develop strategies for school success. The learning strategies curriculum component of SIM is student focused to provide intervention for learning in the form of a highly structured learning process. Through this process, students develop metacognitive skills and insight into their learning processes. In the final or generalization stage, students successfully implement the strategy independent of teacher support or instruction.

Explicit instruction was the focus of a study by Manset-Williamson and Nelson (2005). They compared two instructional approaches with the goal of showing improvement in students with reading disabilities in the upper elementary and middle school grades. All student participants received explicit instruction. The researchers assessed evidence of improvement in decoding, fluency, and reading comprehension during half a school year. One group included students in inclusion settings who received the strategic instruction. The researchers noted

explicit instruction was teacher directed and included modeling and guiding the students through initial practice or “overt and systematic transference of the control of strategies from teacher to the student” (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005, p. 61). The results of this study indicated that special education students, when provided with intensive instruction, could make significant gains in reading instruction. The results applied to both participating groups of their research study. By strategically planning when and where to include various teaching methodology, technology, materials and assessment into lessons, which are aligned to the learning objectives, teachers provide their students with the level of support necessary for student success (Metcalf, Evans, Flynn & Williams, 2009).

Professional development opportunities in the Strategic Instruction Model, or strategic instruction in general, should not be limited to special education instructors. Struggling learners in all classroom environments benefit from explicit direct instruction. This instruction, provided by teachers who have received the necessary professional development opportunities, helps to ensure fidelity of academic instruction to their students.

Self-Advocacy

While adults may have a clear vision of self-advocacy, and may have put the skill into practice on more than one occasion, students may have a very different concept of this skill. Self-advocacy, described as the ability to understand and effectively communicate one's needs to other individuals, provides the student with a voice. One important thing we must inform our students about is that self-advocacy does mean asking for and accepting the help of others, when and if needed. Self-advocacy does not always mean doing everything alone, without the support of others. Students need to hone their self-advocacy skills in order to let others know what,

when, and how they need to do or have something in order to achieve a goal. Self-advocacy requires the students to give their point of view, or describe the outcome they are working for (Dowd & Tierney, 2005). When provided with the opportunity to implement self-advocacy skills students gain better preparation for their future and “become full and active participants in a democratic society” (Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker and Deshler, 2002, p. 1). Dowd and Tierney (2005) suggest effective self-advocacy strategies include “the student identifying a situation for which they should advocate” (p. 141). This may require the assistance of the student’s teacher or parents. Ultimately, there are three primary things students need to know to become an effective self-advocate; you must know yourself, know your needs, and know the way to get what you need (James, 2014).

One-on-one instruction

Children who struggle with successfully grasping the skills necessary to perform at their grade level, particularly in the area of literacy, benefit from working individually with tutors supervised by coordinators who are well versed in reading instruction. Currently, there exists a growing body of evidence that suggests children’s literacy deficiencies can be remedied if these individuals receive extra support in the form of direct, explicit, and systematic fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Joftus, 2002; Kamil, 2003; Leal, Johanson, Toth, & Huang, 2004; Papalewis, 2004; Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O’Neal, & Cusenbary, 2000). Instructional methods can effectively cross content areas to aid both increased academic success and increased self-esteem on the part of the students involved.

Cross-Age Tutoring

When implementing cross-age tutoring, the teacher will usually need to recruit older students, or tutors, to work with younger students, or tutees, on skills that need extra attention. Tutors and tutees, matched based on schedule compatibility and gender-based preferences, must demonstrate appropriate behaviors when away from adult supervision (Wright & Cleary, 2006). Obtaining parent permission from parents of both prospective tutors as well as tutees must occur before tutoring can begin. At the end of the sessions, teachers should debrief with the student partners, and provide parents with specific feedback about any improvement in their children's academic progress in the area of tutoring.

Methodology

Participants

Tier I interventions are the foundation for determining student needs. Many students benefit from services provided at Tier I; it is imperative to identify effective strategies that contribute to the ongoing academic growth of these students. Much debate exists concerning effective Tier I interventions. A survey listing Tier I interventions invited teachers to indicate interventions actively implemented in their classrooms. This survey, provided to elementary schools in a Midwestern school district, invited participation from teachers teaching grades K-5. Participation in the survey was voluntary. (See Table 1 for demographics)

Table1. Participant Demographics

Teacher Participants	N
Gender	
Male	4
Female	56
Grade Level	
K	5
1	6
2	11
3	7
4	15
5	14
Experience	
1-3	12
4-7	6
8-11	9
12-15	9
16-20	9
21-25	10
26+	5

N = 60

Instrument

The survey invited teacher participants to indicate which Tier I interventions they used. Participants noted frequency of implementation and the desire for professional development. Tier I interventions included: differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, cross age tutoring, mixed grades, one-on-one instruction, parent training, behavior rewards, preferential seating, pre-teaching, visual cues, teaching test-taking strategies, teaching self-advocacy, learning centers, relaxation interventions and strategic instruction. Sixty teachers responded to the survey.

Results

The researchers performed a one-way ANOVA to determine if a relationship exists between a Tier I intervention and the gender of the teacher. There were no statistically significant relationships between these two variables (see Table 2).

Table 2. Use of Tier One Interventions by Teacher Gender

Tier One Intervention	Sum of Squares	dF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Differentiated Instruction	.058	1	.058	.492	.486
Peer Tutoring	.039	1	.039	.111	.741
Cross Age Tutoring	.003	1	.003	.005	.944
Mixed Grades	.011	1	.011	.029	.866
One-on-One	.037	1	.037	.096	.758
Parent Training	.111	1	.111	.211	.648
Behavior Rewards	.557	1	.557	1.245	.269
Preferential Seating	.305	1	.305	.959	.331
Pre-teaching	.03	1	.03	1.3	.720
Visual Cues	.076	1	.076	.724	.398
Teach Test-taking Strategies	.866	1	.866	1.452	.233
Teach Self-Advocacy	.327	1	.327	.586	.447
Learning Centers	.013	1	.013	.04	.842
Relaxation Interventions	.233	1	.233	.406	.527
Strategic Instruction	.676	1	.676	1.296	.260

N = 60

The researchers performed a one-way ANOVA to determine if a relationship exists between a Tier I intervention and the experience of the teacher. There were no statistically significant relationships between these two variables (see Table 3).

Table 3. Use of Tier One Interventions by Teacher Years of Experience

Tier One Intervention	Sum of Squares	dF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Differentiated Instruction	1.256	6	.209	1.953	.089
Peer Tutoring	1.207	6	.201	.558	.762
Cross Age Tutoring	2.530	6	.422	.728	.629
Mixed Grades	0.942	6	.157	.374	.892
One-on-One	2.093	6	.349	.9	.502
Parent Training	4.503	6	.75	1.529	.189
Behavior Rewards	1.276	6	.213	.447	.844
Preferential Seating	2.472	6	.412	1.343	.255
Pre-teaching	1.033	6	.172	.742	.618
Visual Cues	0.467	6	.078	.721	.634
Teach Test-taking Strategies	3.642	6	.607	1.011	.428
Teach Self-Advocacy	3.129	6	.522	.935	.478
Learning Centers	2.736	6	.456	1.504	.195
Relaxation Interventions	2.944	6	.491	.849	.538
Strategic Instruction	3.860	6	.643	1.261	.292

N = 60

The researchers performed a one-way ANOVA to determine if a relationship exists between a Tier I intervention and the grade level taught by the teacher. The only statistically significant relationship between specific Tier one interventions and the grade level taught by the teacher was the use of learning centers, $F(5,56) = 2.659$, $p = .033$. *Post hoc* comparisons using

Table 4. Use of Tier One Interventions by Teacher Grade Level

Tier One Intervention	Sum of Squares	dF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Differentiated Instruction	0.240	5	.048	.375	.864
Peer Tutoring	3.520	5	.704	2.196	.069
Cross Age Tutoring	1.010	5	.202	.332	.891
Mixed Grades	3.577	5	.715	1.959	.101
One-on-One	3.820	5	.764	2.177	.071
Parent Training	3.708	5	.742	1.579	.184
Behavior Rewards	3.088	5	.618	1.392	.243
Preferential Seating	1.773	5	.355	1.095	.375
Pre-teaching	2.001	5	.4	1.932	.105
Visual Cues	0.108	5	.022	.186	.967
Teach Test-taking Strategies	1.163	5	.233	.362	.872
Teach Self-Advocacy	3.281	5	.656	1.205	.320
Learning Centers	3.788	5	.758	2.659	.033*
Relaxation Interventions	5.859	5	1.172	2.379	.051
Strategic Instruction	5.263	5	1.053	2.206	.068

N = 60

Tukey failed to identify where this difference occurred, as none of the comparisons were statistically significant (see Table 4).

Descriptive statistics gathered indicated that three most highly used intervention interventions were for visual cues (86.9%), differentiated instruction (85.2%) and preferential seating (82%).

Table 5. Percent of Sample Using Tier One Methods Daily

<u>Tier One Intervention</u>	<u>Percent Using Daily</u>
Differentiated Instruction	85.2
Peer Tutoring	24.6
Cross Age Tutoring	39.3
Mixed Grades	59.0
One-on-One	45.9
Parent Training	44.3
Behavior Rewards	68.9
Preferential Seating	82.0
Pre-teaching	65.6
Visual Cues	86.9
Teach Test-taking Strategies	26.2
Teach Self-Advocacy	42.6
Learning Centers	72.1
Relaxation Interventions	27.9
<u>Strategic Instruction</u>	<u>50.8</u>

N = 60

The three least used of the intervention interventions were peer tutoring (24.6%), teaching test-taking strategies (26.2%) and teaching relaxation interventions (27.9%) (see Table 5).

The most popularly requested professional development training sessions were strategic instruction (41%), relaxation interventions (36.1%), and teaching self-advocacy (34.4). The three least requested trainings were for preferential seating (6.6%), one-on-one instruction (11.5%), and cross-age tutoring (11.54%) (see Table 6).

Table 6. Percent of Sample Wanting Training in Tier I Methods

<u>Tier One Intervention</u>	<u>Percent Wanting Training</u>
Differentiated Instruction	16.4
Peer Tutoring	14.8
Cross Age Tutoring	11.5
Mixed Grades	19.7
One-on-One	11.5
Parent Training	32.8
Behavior Rewards	14.8
Preferential Seating	6.60
Pre-teaching	14.8
Visual Cues	23.0
Teach Test-taking Strategies	26.2
Teach Self-Advocacy	34.4
Learning Centers	26.2
Relaxation Interventions	36.1
<u>Strategic Instruction</u>	<u>41.0</u>

N = 60

Conclusions

Classroom teachers have many responsibilities. These responsibilities include having to deal with large workloads, disruptive classroom behaviors, additional school duties, and meeting district and state mandates (Rock, Gregg, Ellis & Gable, 2008). With goals such as imparting knowledge, facilitating learning and supporting academic growth, teachers must keep in mind that Tier I is the first step educators must take in helping to plan the academic blueprints for their

students' future educational success. Tier I interventions provides services to all students. All students receive high quality instruction in the general education classroom. In this study, participating teachers demonstrated a high comfort level with visual cues, differentiated instruction and preferential seating. The same teachers also demonstrated a low comfort level with peer tutoring, teaching test-taking strategies and teaching relaxation interventions. Areas that elicited a lower response rate included preferential seating, one-on-one instruction and cross-age tutoring. True to their profession, the teacher participants indicated an interest in professional development opportunities. Their areas of interest included strategic instruction, relaxation interventions and teaching self-advocacy.

References

- Alvermann, D.E., & Moore, D.W. (1991). Secondary school reading. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P.D.
- Berkeley, S., W.N. Bender, L.G. Peaster, & L. Saunders. 2009. "Implementation of Response to Intervention: A Snapshot of Progress." *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 42 (1): 85–95.
- Black, S. (2005). Test anxiety. *American School Board Journal*, 192(6), 42-44.
- Brimijoin, K., Marquissee, E., & Tomlinson, C.A. (2003). Using data to differentiate instruction. *Educational Leadership* 60(5), 70-73.
- Broekkamp, H., & van Hout-Wolters, B. (2007). Students' adaptation of study strategies when preparing for classroom tests. *Educational Psychology Review*, 19(4), 401-428.
- Doi: 10.1007/s10648-006-9025-0
- Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (2006). The response to intervention (Roti) model. *Technical Assistance Paper*. Tallahassee, FL.
- Canfield, T. & Swenson, K. (2006). Wisconsin Traumatic Brain Injury Initiative-adapted from Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (Reed & Canfield, 1999), (Reed, 1991) Edited 8/2009 KJC Mitoaction.
- Carney, K.J. & Stiefel, G.S. (2008). Long-term results of a problem-solving approach to response to intervention: Discussions and implications. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal* 6(2), 61-75.
- Corno, L. (1986). The metacognitive control components of self-regulated learning. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 11, 333-346.

DeBard, R. & Kubow, P.k. (2002). From compliance to commitment: The need for constituent discourse in implementing testing policy. *Educational Policy*, 16(3), 387-405.

Dowd, T., & Tierney, J. (2005). The Social Skills Curriculum. *Teaching Social Skills to Youth: A step-by-step guide to 182 basic to complete skills plus helpful teaching interventions* (ed.). Boys Town, NE. Boys Town Press.

Fuchs, L.S. & Fuchs, D. (2006). Introduction to response to intervention: What, why and how it is valid? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(1), 93-99.

Heron, T.E., Villareal, D.M., Yoa, M. Christianson, R.J. & Heron, K.M. (2006). Peer tutoring systems: Applications in classroom and specialized environments. *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 22(1), 27-45.

Hughes, C. A., Schumaker, J. B., Deshler, D. D., & Mercer, C. D. (1988). *The Test-taking Strategy*. Lawrence, KS: Edge Enterprises, Inc.

James, N.S. (January 17, 2014). Self-Advocacy: Know yourself, know what you need, know how to get it. Retrieved from <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/sec504.selfadvo.nancy.james.htm>

Joftus, S. (2002). *Every child a graduate: A framework for an excellent education for all middle and high school students*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Kamil, M. (2003). *Adolescents and literacy: Reading for the 21st century*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Larson, H.A., El Ramahi, M.K., Conn, S.R., Estes, L.A. & Ghibellini, A.B. (2010). Reducing test anxiety among third grade students through the implementation of relaxation interventions. *Journal of School Counseling*, 19 (8), 1-19.

- Leal, D., Johanson, G., Toth, A., & Huang, C. (2004). Increasing at-risk students' literacy skills: Fostering success for children and their preservice reading endorsement tutors. *Reading Improvement, 41*(1), 51–72.
- Levy, H.M. (2008). Meeting the needs of all students through differentiated instruction: Helping every child reach and exceed standards. *Heldref Publications 81*(4), 161-164.
- Lohaus, A. & Klein-Hessling, J. (2003). Relaxation in children: Effects of extended and intensified training. *Psychology and Health 18*(2), 237-249.
- Manset-Williamson, G & Nelson, J.M. (2005). Balanced, strategic reading instruction for upper-elementary and middle school students with reading disabilities: A comparative study of two approaches. *Learning Disability Quarterly 28*(1), 59-74.
- Matyo-Cepero, J.A. (2015). The effect of the SIM inference strategy on reading scores of special education and at-risk students. *Florida Journal of Educational Research 53*, 1-9.
- McCoy, K.M., Mathur, S.R. & Czoka, A. (Spring 2010). Guidelines for creating a transition routine: Changing from one room to another. *Beyond Behavior 19*(3), 22-29.
- Metcalf, D., Evans, C., Flynn, H.K. & Williams, J.B. (2009). Direct instruction + UDL=access for diverse learners: how to plan and implement an effective multisensory spelling lesson. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus 5*(6), 30-53.
- Nassau, Jack. "Relaxation training and biofeedback in the treatment of childhood anxiety." *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter* Dec. 2007: 1+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 21 Apr. 2014.
- Papalewis, R. (2004). Struggling middle school readers: Successful, accelerating intervention. *Reading Improvement, 41*(1), 24–37.

Peterson, C.L., Caverly, D.C., Nicholson, S.A., O'Neal, S., & Cusenbary, S. (2000). *Building reading proficiency at the secondary level: A guide to resources*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Revenue, S., Bishop, J. & Filce, H.G. (2010). Response to intervention (RtI) and tiered systems: Questions remain as educators make challenging decisions. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 78(4), 30-35.

Robins, J & Antrim, P. (2013). Planning for rti. *Knowledge Quest* V 42(1), 44-47.

Rock, M.L., Gregg, M. Ellis, E. & Gable, R.A. (2008). REACH: A framework for differentiating classroom instruction. *Preventing School Failure*, 52(2), 31-47.

Salvia, J., Ysseldyke, J.E., & Bolt, S. (2010). *Assessment in special education and inclusive education*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Stewart, R. M., Brenner, G.J., Martella, R.C. & Marchand-Martella, N.E. (2007). Three-tier models of reading and behavior: A research review. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions* 9(4), 239-253.

Stuart, S.K. & Rinaldi, C. (2009). Universal design for learning & differentiated instruction: A collaborative planning framework for teachers implementing tiered instruction. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(2), 52-57.

The KU Center for Research on Learning | KUCRL. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ku-crl.org/>

Tomlinson, C. (2004). Differentiation in diverse settings: A consultant's experience in diverse settings. *The School Administrator*, 7 (61), 28-35.

U.S. Department of Education (2004). Teaching children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: Instructional strategies and practices. Retrieved September 2, 2014, from <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/needs/speced/adhd/adhd-resource-pt2.doc>

Valentini, N. (2004). Visual cues, verbal cues and child development. *Strategies: A journal for Physical and Sport Educators*, 17(3), 21-23.

Van Reusen, A.K., Bos, C.S., Schumaker, J.B. & Deshler, D.D. (2002). *The Self-Advocacy Strategy for Enhancing Student Motivation & Self-Determination: An Education and Transition Planning Process*. Lawrence, KS: Edge Enterprises, Inc.

Wright, J. & Cleary, K.S. (2006). Kids in the tutor seat: Building schools' capacity to help struggling readers through a cross-age peer-tutoring program. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(1), 99-107.

Ysseldyke, J., Burns, K.W., Scholin, S.E., & Parker, D.C. (2010). Instructionally valid assessment within response to intervention. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42 (4), 54-61.

Understanding Immigrant Children from Muslim Backgrounds: Issues and Challenges

Sham'ah Md-Yunus, Ph.D.
Eastern Illinois University

Abstract

Immigrant children from Muslim communities come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, speaking 60 different languages. Some of their religious beliefs, values, and practices created issues and challenges for teachers of these children. This article provides basic information about Muslim and Islamic practices, issues, and challenges Muslim immigrant children face in new country and in the school and offers some suggestions for teachers on how to understand Muslim immigrants.

Key Words: Muslim immigrant children, Islamic teaching and practices, education

Understanding Immigrant Children from Muslim Backgrounds: Issues and Challenges

Since September 11, 2001, Muslims in the United States (U.S.) and other parts of the world are facing greater levels of discrimination, suspicion, and racism (Maira, 2004). Negative portrayals of Muslims in various forms of media and in popular entertainment have become an integral part of public consciousness and affect the well-being of Muslims both in the U.S. and globally (Maira, 2004). Muslims feel vulnerable to terrorism and are perceived as a potential threat to the larger society and certain government agencies (Trakim, 2004). This negative attention makes it vitally important to understand the diversity of immigrant and indigenous Muslim experiences, along with the various ways of practicing Islam for individuals who work with this population.

In a survey conducted by Mastrilli and Sardo-Brown (2001), a third of teachers in the U.S. reported a negative reaction upon hearing the word “Islam”; they responded using terms such as “terrorists,” “enemy,” “trouble,” “war,” “Bin Laden,” and “unfair treatment of women” (p. 156). Other teachers receive information through media but little from research or direct personal experience with this population.

As children of immigrants enter schools in larger numbers, these children may be at risk for failure when teachers are unacquainted with their home culture (Haboush, 2007). Research on marginalized groups has shown that teachers’ limited experience or understanding of their students’ cultures may lead to negative educational and psychological outcomes in children (Kunjufu, 2002). The Longitudinal Immigrant Families and Teachers Study (LIFTS) by Rogers-Sirin, Ryce, and Sirin (2014) examines how cultural mismatch in the school context can affect teachers’ perceptions of and judgments regarding immigrant children and their parents. The study revealed significant differences between a student’s home culture and school culture. This

leads to situations in which teachers can “easily misread students’ aptitudes, intents, or abilities as a result of the difference in styles of language use and interactional patterns” (Delpit 2006, p. 167). Parental beliefs about education and their interactions with schools and teachers may be misunderstood or conflict with school rules and subsequently be viewed negatively by teachers (Delpit, 2006). For example, teachers expect parents to be involved in their children’s education however, this is not generally a practice in many immigrant families. Although this finding is not inherently negative, previous research with LIFTS and other samples has found how value differences can negatively affect teachers’ perceptions of parents (e.g., Lasky, 2003) as well as their perceptions of students’ academic achievement (Hauser-Cram et al., 2003) and behavioral well-being (Sirin et al., 2009). Thus, teachers may perceive value differences as harmful to students’ well-being in school.

In order to inform readers about Islam in the hopes of improving the education of young Muslim immigrant children and their families, this article provides some basic information on cultural values and practices of immigrant children and families from Muslim backgrounds living in the U.S. as immigrants explains how these values and practices affect participation in everyday life. To clarify the subject of the article, the term “Muslim” will refer to a worldwide community of people who adhere to Islam as their religion, in varying ways. First, I will give an overview of who Muslims are and the distribution of Muslim populations in the world. Second, I will explain some basic concepts of Islam, Muslim family and community values, and Islamic teaching and practices. Third, I will discuss some issues and challenges faced by Muslim immigrants in general. The article concludes with some discussion and brief suggestions for how to understand Muslim immigrants.

Who is Muslim?

“Muslim” is an Arabic word meaning “one who submits to God” (The American Heritage Dictionary 2009, p. 161). A Muslim is an adherent of Islam, a monotheistic Abrahamic religion based on the Qur’an (Nasr, 2006). The word “Islam” is derived from the Arabic verb *Aslama*, which means “to accept, surrender to, or submit to God” (Council of Islamic Education, 2011, p. 2). The core Islamic sources of Qur’an (the highest source of religious authority) and *Sunnah* (the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad) provide knowledge in Islamic teaching (Mawdudi, 2011). Immigrant children with Muslim backgrounds generally practice Islamic teaching, beliefs, and values. Muslims believe that Islam as a religion is a comprehensive way of life based on Qur’anic teaching and that one must believe in God.

Muslims around the World

There are more than 1.57 billion Muslims living in 57 countries. This number makes up about 23% of the 2011 world population (Pew Research Center, 2011). Sixty-two percent reside in Asia, 20% in the Middle East and North Africa, 15% in Sub-Saharan Africa, and around 2% in Europe and North America (CIA world fact book, 2008). Nine million Muslims reside in North America (Pew Research Center, 2011). Muslims speak 60 different languages and come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Center for Immigration Studies, 2012). Arabic is the most commonly spoken language, followed by Bengali and Punjabi (Al-Romi, 2006).

Muslim Family and Community

Family Structure and the Role of the Family

In many Muslim communities, the family is considered to be the most fundamental and important social unit. It can be difficult for individuals to avoid the mediating influence of their family. In traditional Muslim families, members relate to one another based on hierarchies; the

older the member, the more authority and respect the member is afforded. Within this structure, obligations are seen as more important than rights, and family interests outweigh personal interests (Salman, 2007). Mothers typically are the primary caretakers of children, especially those with disabilities. Fathers tend to be less involved with child care responsibilities, but this is not always the case for families having children with special needs. Some fathers were more accepting of their children with disabilities than are mothers (Ansari, 2002).

For Muslims, the family bond is founded on mutual expectations of rights and obligations for every member of the family and a cooperative approach with regard to family cohesion is emphasized. Each member is expected to contribute toward the overall family welfare with his or her individual resources and income (Ross-Sheriff & Hussain, 2004). Islamic teaching charges parents with the duty to cherish, sustain, educate, and train their children (Giger & Davidhizar, 2002). Even as adults, Muslims rely on their parents and other family members for many necessities of life, such as food, clothing, and housing. The strong cultural emphasis on maintaining family harmony and stability can lead to efforts to avoid conflict and defer decision-making in the family hierarchy.

In Islamic countries, relatives and extended family members either live together or live close to each other so that children are thought to have multiple sets of “parents” who have as much authority over them as their own biological parents (Abu El-haj & Bonet, 2011). Extended families remain an important part of the family structure and can be an asset to the community as they can provide emotional and material supports for the core family. In some cases, members of the extended family are included in discussions about family affairs such as making decisions about children’s educational plans (Abu El-haj & Bonet, 2011).

Parenting Styles

Muslim parents usually demand complete obedience and devotion to the family and community. Children often accept this authoritarianism as normal and learn to abide by their family's rules (Ismail et al., 2009). Parents believe that their children are best educated by memorization and repetition rather than concepts of reflective questioning (Ismail et al., 2009). While most schools in the U.S. develop individualism, autonomy, personal initiative, and a critical sense, at home children are expected to cooperate with family members and neighbors. This situation sometimes creates a situation in which children must learn to embrace a dual set of values, often remaining more passive at home and more vocal at school.

Some immigrant parents do not support their children's pursuits in extracurricular activities in school and may even question the purpose of such activities (Md-Yunus, 2012). They may feel their children are being distracted from their education, becoming too involved in Western culture and thus are gradually slipping away from their ethnic culture, or becoming too "Westernized" by involving themselves in the community (Karim, 2009). Although immigrant parents do not necessarily prohibit such activities, they do not encourage their children to actively participate either (Karim, 2009).

Some Muslim parents limit their participation in schools, especially those with limited education (Haboush, 2007). One of the reasons for this is conflict with work schedules or being unsure of how to get involved. Some parents may feel that they do not have to participate in school unless there are issues with their children's education (Md-Yunus, 2008). Teachers may also be unsure how to involve parents in schools (Ross-Sheriff & Hussain, 2004).

Collectivism and Individualism

Collectivist attitudes are often given more emphasis among Muslims in the family structure and the needs of the group. Family members feel a responsibility for one another, and individuals usually are not expected to function independently of the family unit (Hasnain et al., 2008). Muslims often express a religious duty to care for and provide for the weak or disabled. For example, a family's responsibility to support persons with disabilities extends to aunts, uncles, cousins, grandchildren, and grandparents.

On the other hand, individualism is generally practiced one's own family. For example, families embrace "a culture of pity" for the disabled, and prefer to keep family struggles and affairs secret, which may lead Muslim families to hide their children with disabilities from society (Fazil et al., 2002; Khedr, 2006). These families claim a responsibility (and even an expectation) to continue to care for their children into adulthood (Ross-Sheriff & Hussain, 2004). Seclusion of a child also may be a means of escaping the shame or humiliation associated with having a child with a disability. Thus, families of children with disabilities may be less likely to visit friends or socialize; but when they do go out, they are more likely to leave the child at home (Bywaters et al., 2003). Moreover, many Muslim families deal with family matters privately and therefore seek only minimal outside support, if any (Laird, 2006).

The Role of Community

Members of Islamic communities consider each other "brothers and sisters" (Ross-Sheriff & Hussain, 2004). They use a wide range of family relationship terms to frame other relationships. For example, when speaking to an unrelated woman 10 or 20 years older, a young man might use the vernacular terms for "elder sister" or "auntie," and a young woman may address any man of the older generation as "uncle" (Abd-Allah, 2006). This practice might seem

stifling or naïve to people accustomed to the flirtatious discourse between males and females of all ages that occurs in some societies, but it tends to create a more inclusive, less competitive environment in which those who are shy, lack confidence, or are less physically attractive can play their roles without embarrassment. It also avoids forcing children and young people into sexualized conversations before they are mature enough to handle them (Abd-Allah, 2006).

Members of the community also promote relationships and support among each other. Usually when individuals meet with each other, they will wish *salam*, a greeting and farewell ritual. Another example is visiting the sick, which is considered a religious responsibility, and being visited while sick is one of the essential rights of a Muslim (Margolis et al., 2003). Some families or individuals give moral and financial support to new immigrant families who have just arrived in the community. Some newly arrived immigrants may reject services that conflict with their cultural norms, even when these are provided by the community. For example, ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) in Dearborn, Michigan, started a child care service for the Islamic community in the area to fulfill the needs for child care services (Siddiqui, 2011).

Many Islamic communities establish mosques and centers as places for Friday prayers and for after-school and weekend religious school for children to study the Qur'an and learn about Islamic teachings. Some teachers and *imams* (Islamic leaders) provide services free of charge. These places also serve for social gatherings such as funerals and general activities like dinners and bake sales. The mosques and centers are mainly used as a house of worship, but community-sponsored cultural programs and activities are also held there (Al-Romi, 2006). When immigrants arrive in a new country, they often undergo significant stress in adjusting to their new surroundings, and these centers serve as sources of information (Al-Romi, 2006).

Islamic Teaching and Practices

Most Muslim children learn about Islamic teaching through formal and informal education in *madrasah* (educational institution), mosques, or at home starting as early as preschool (McCreey et al., 2007). Islamic teaching aims at producing Muslims who are knowledgeable, competent and pious, with moral and ethical values that enforce a strong belief and devotion in God based on the Qur'an and Sunnah (Borhan, 2004). The faith also includes beliefs about what is best for the development of well-balanced individuals through an outlook that integrates spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual dimensions (Borhan, 2004; Ismail et al., 2009).

Prayer

Prayer "is an integral part of a person's life and considered an activity of daily living for Muslims" (Margolis et al., 2003, p. 61). Muslims pray five times per day: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall (Haron, 2011). Schools should provide at least one or two very short (5-7 minutes) prayer periods during school hours, with a special area of the room that will provide accommodation for religious obligations. Friday is considered a weekly mini-holiday of sorts; it is the day on which congregational prayers are held (Haron, 2011). Men are required to attend Friday prayer, and many women also attend.

Gender Issues

Gender is one of the most misunderstood aspects of Islamic practice and culture and is routinely a source of conflict (Laird, 2006). Young children are free to choose whom they play with and the play area; no attempts are made to separate children of different sexes when they come into physical contact with each other during the course of their play (Borhan, 2004). However, free mixing among men and women is prohibited after puberty, including sitting together in class, eating together in the cafeteria, on the bus, during class, and extracurricular

activities (Borhan, 2004). In particular, direct skin and physical contact between post-pubescent males and females who are not direct blood relatives is prohibited (Conly, 1998). This includes shaking hands or otherwise coming into bodily contact with individuals of the opposite gender (Nimer, 2002). Male teachers should be especially sensitive to the belief that physical contact between nonrelated males and females should be avoided (Borhan, 2004). Male teachers should generally avoid eye contact with Muslim mothers, and female teachers should avoid contact with Muslim fathers.

Food and Dietary Practices

In Islam, there are two types of food: *haram* or forbidden and *halal* or permissible (Borhan, 2004). Muslims do not eat pork products, or any food that contains pork-based gelatin or mono diglycerides (Hoot et al., 2003). Rather, they eat only food containing vegetable mono diglycerides or foods which are labeled with a U or K indicating that they are classified as Kosher by the Orthodox Union (Hoot et al., 2003). In addition, Muslims are forbidden to consume blood, carrion, and alcohol (Margolis et al., 2003).

This dietary restriction is mandatory for both adults and children. Therefore, teachers should work with administrators to assure that school cafeterias offer Muslim parents information regarding the ingredients of lunches served at school and make certain that at least one menu item such as fish, vegetables, yogurt, or cheese is acceptable for Muslim children.

Teachers and administrators should also be aware of potential problems regarding the preparation and serving of food. For example if the cafeteria simply removes the pepperoni or sausage from cooked pizza, it is still *haram* because of the pork grease. Well-intentioned teachers sometimes make pepperoni and cheese pizzas available but use the same knife to cut both, thus defeating the purpose of keeping pork fat off the children's food (Hoot et al., 2003).

Non-pork meats also require special preparations; the slaughter of an animal for food requires a certain ritual. The butcher must recite the name of God, slit the throat of the animal, and drain the blood (Haron, 2011). Meat from an animal slaughtered this way is called *zabiha* or *halal* (Mawdudi, 2011). Many Muslims will eat meat only if it has been prepared this way. Many Muslims also accept meat prepared according to kosher rules. Seafood is almost universally allowed, regardless of how it has been prepared (Mawdudi, 2011).

Before meals, Muslims are supposed to recite *doa* (saying) to thank God (Haron, 2011). They are not to play with food and must finish their food as a manifestation of appreciation of God's benevolence. Eating with one's right hand is religiously prescribed (Haron, 2011). Children are taught to handle food with the right hand when eating with their hands and also to use utensils with their right hand (Borhan, 2004).

Dress Code

Modesty is highly valued in Islam, and many Muslims consider dress to be an important expression of modesty. After reaching puberty, both men and women are instructed to dress modestly and to avert their gaze when encountering someone of the opposite sex. Clothing is generally, but not always, expected to be loose for both men and women. Commonly stated rules are for men to be covered from the navel to the knees and women to be covered over their whole body except for their face and hands (Haron, 2011). These rules vary from country to country, and family to family, and they do not apply universally across any group.

The issue of *hijab* (veil) and headscarf is especially interesting. In some Islamic countries, women are required to wear a veil, whereas in others it is not obligatory. Thus, the decision to wear the headscarf in certain cultures is considered necessary and in others is interpreted as simply going a step further in terms of piety (Ross-Sheriff & Hussain, 2004).

Although children are generally not restricted in what clothing they wear until puberty, many Muslim families encourage their daughters to wear the *hijab* and dress very modestly early in life to avoid difficulties during the teen years. The *hijab* is always seen as a physical symbol of conservative Islam, thus to wear it in public in a non-Muslim country is to call attention to oneself rather than assimilate. Hence, choosing to wear the *hijab* in the West is a “gendered badge of religious and political allegiance” (Nimer, 2002, p. 20) and a way for Muslim women from various nation states and social and cultural backgrounds to “engage modernity in a new manner and within different paradigms” (Kadi & Billeh, 2006, p. 320). The *hijab* is therefore a physical symbol of Islam adopted by many for cultural reasons and by others for religious reasons. In light of the attention given to modesty, teachers can support Muslim children by being flexible with the related issues. For example, if schools require shorts for physical education, the option of wearing sweatpants might be provided. Girls may be allowed to wear headscarf instead of *hijab*.

Classroom Accommodations for Muslim Immigrant Children

School Curriculum and Activities

Some children who had previous education in their home country might find education in the new country different and contradictory its contents and emphasis. For example, in some war-torn countries, the oral tradition is the main source communication of these cultural treasures as fathers tell their sons old tales “he does not have in his pocket, he carries in his mind” (Jones, 2010, p. 29). Reading and story time may be new to these students. Furthermore, some textbooks in these countries incorporate Muslim elements or war topics through subjects in the curriculum. For example, mathematics textbooks in Afghanistan featured the question, “In one year a group of Muhajideen spent 124,800 Afghanis, what was their monthly expenditure?”

(Interim Textbook, 1986, grade 4, p. 54 as cited in Jones, 2010, p. 30). Children who have been exposed to this type of curriculum may talk about this or use these as examples in class. Some topics and lessons in science and technology might be conflicting with Islamic teaching and values. For example, according to Islamic principle, human beings were created by God not by evolution (Ismail et al., 2009). Therefore educators need to be sensitive when explaining this topic to Muslim children.

Teachers should be aware that some Muslims may have reservations regarding music. Some types of music might not be acceptable to Muslim parents. Although most Muslims have no problems with soft, relaxing music, Islam teachings prohibits loud, violent, or depressing music. More orthodox Muslims, for example, might request that musical activities be conducted with unaccompanied voices. In addition to music, art projects involving human forms might be a concern for some Muslims (Ismail et al., 2009) whose belief in one God has led them to question the use of photos or pictures of human beings, animals or even statues that might be considered idols. Although Muslims do allow such depictions when made by children or when created as toys for children (Ismail et al., 2009), some parents may be offended by school requests to have children bring stuffed animals for show and tell (Borhan, 2004). Muslim parents consider stuffed animals same as concept in the art projects, which involved of human forms. Nevertheless, teachers should be sensitive to this potential concern and be prepared if some parents request that their children be excused when class photos are taken or if they request that their children not be photographed in the classroom. In addition, Muslims are not allowed to keep dogs and puppies as pets or to touch these animals (Borhan, 2004). Parents may feel offended by books, stories or movies that glorify these animals.

Holidays and Events

The Islamic year follows a lunar calendar of 12 months and 354 or 355 days; thus, Islamic dates rotate throughout the Gregorian calendar. There are two main holidays in Islam: *Eid Al-Fitr* and *Eid Al-Adha*. *Eid Al-Fitr* is celebrated at the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, and *Eid Al-Adha* is celebrated at the end of Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Huda, 2006). Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is one of the most anticipated times of the year for Muslims. They commemorate this event with fasting throughout the month (Huda, 2006). Although this practice may seem rigorous, Muslims generally greet Ramadan as a time of spiritual renewal.

Some Muslim families might have some reservations regarding common holiday celebrations in the U.S. such as Halloween and Thanksgiving but others do not mind if their children are exposed to the traditions and customs of other religions and cultures. If parents request that their children not participate in such holidays, related school programs or activities, alternative programs should be offered by the schools.

Fasting

Fasting means to refrain from all food and drink from dawn to until sunset during the month of Ramadan (Athar, 2011). While they are fasting Muslims must also abstain from smoking and sexual contact. In addition, there are culture-specific beliefs regarding watching television, listening to music, and pursuing secular activities that do not in some way enhance spirituality (Athar, 2011). The purpose of fasting is to develop appreciation for what one has and to reconfirm responsibility toward those who are hungry and in need by feeling how those who are without food or water feel (Athar, 2011). Although fasting is not obligatory before puberty, younger children sometimes choose to follow their parents in fasting. If teachers have children

fasting in their classroom, they should provide a separate area for them while the other children have snack or lunch. Lack of food and drink also has potential physical implications as fasting can result in dehydration (Giger & Davidhizar, 2002). Dehydration is especially dangerous for people with certain medical conditions, and teachers should pay attention to fasting children for signs such as paleness or exhaustion. In addition, fasting students should be exempted from vigorous physical activities.

Medications can pose another issue during Ramadan. Consuming anything by mouth, including medication, can break the fast, so Muslims may be reluctant to take medications scheduled during the daytime hours (Giger & Davidhizar, 2002). Non-oral medications such as those that are inhaled, applied to the skin, or injected also pose a challenge. In general, the rule is that such medications will not break the fast unless they act as a source of nutrition (Haron, 2011), so people who take medications are not required to fast; in fact, they are discouraged from fasting because Islam prohibits doing harm to oneself. It is important to mention that exemptions to fasting are available for people who may be at risk or may put others at risk; this applies especially to people in jobs that make them directly responsible for the safety of others, such as long-distance travelers, breastfeeding mothers, pregnant or menstruating women, and sick people (Laird, 2006). Ramadan is also a month of community and socializing, as Muslims often gather in the evenings to share in fast-breaking meals. Parents and children may not be able to participate in school functions if they are scheduled during fast-breaking time as the children and parents must be at home to break the fast with their families.

Challenges of Muslim Immigrant Children

Immigrant children from Muslim backgrounds generally face two major challenges in their new country which are tied to the overarching character of Islam. First, they are alienated

and marginalized due to the differences in their faith and religious practices involving special obligations and responsibilities, which shapes the way Muslims as individuals and as a group respond to the conditions in their new country. Second, they have to deal with differences in school systems and programs, sometimes resulting in problems in their studies that may ultimately lead to failure in schools.

Muslims as Immigrants

Muslim immigrants practice a different culture and faith from those of their host countries. As immigrants, they often face discrimination, stereotyping, racism, bias, and even marginalization by schools and communities because of their minority status. They may feel that they are being treated as second-class citizens, especially those who came to the West for political asylum or as refugees. Differences in religious beliefs, values, and practices have set Muslims apart from adherents of other religions. Moreover, after the 9-11 tragedy, Muslim immigrants in the U.S. and other parts of the world are affected by the War on Terror in the Middle East and Asia. “Islamophobia” in the U.S. has further put Muslim children at a disadvantage through discrimination against them.

The well-being of children is influenced not only by the legal status of parents, but also by family income and structure, parental work patterns, educational attainment, official language proficiency, health insurance coverage, and access to work supports such as tax credits, food assistance, and child care. If immigrants fail to assimilate in the new culture and become less proficient in the language of their new country, they are generally excluded from mainstream society. However, for Muslims, “the process of assimilation and acculturation is conflicting with the values, norms, and expectations of their religious and ethnic communities and those of the dominant society” (Abu El-haj & Bonet, 2011, p. 35). For example, in school, Muslim children

are often kept apart from their peers as they avoid eating pork items in school lunches, fast during school physical activities, avoid direct skin and physical touch contact between post-pubescent males and females who are not direct blood relatives, and engage in other religious practices such as prayer during the day.

These children struggle to find their place in the new society. They have often left their original countries at a young age and, unlike their parents, might lack meaningful connections to their country of origin, making them unlikely to consider it a place to return or point of reference. Instead, these children evaluate themselves or are evaluated by others by the standards of their new countries. Through interactions with natives these immigrant children negotiate their identities, develop a sense of belonging, and form new associations (Abu El-haj & Bonet, 2011), but there is no guarantee that tolerance will immediately follow after interactions and integration. Usually tolerance takes precedence at schools over integration, as integration happens in the community. It is impossible to foresee whether greater integration in schools will immediately foster interaction and mutual respect between students of different cultures (Abu El-haj & Bonet, 2011; Banks & Banks, 2010; Nieto, 2009).

Immigrant Muslim children must attempt to deal with the contradictions and search for ways to create alternative forms of acceptance and a sense of belonging that would extend beyond the assimilation discourses that often create tension and stress. For that reason, Muslims agree that basic differences exist between their culture and Western culture. Although some develop integrated paths by skillfully melding their Muslim and mainstream culture (Al-Romi, 2006) many are torn between cultures, marginalized by their communities, positioned as threatening outsiders, and construct hyphenated identities.

Differences in the School System and Program

The promise of a better life in a new country is not always simple and straight forward for Muslim immigrant children. They are not only living in a new culture that is totally different from their own, but also learning a new language and new subjects in a new school system. Immigrant children fare poorly in almost all aspects of schooling and well-being. Even those who came to the West as volunteer immigrants, still face the same hurdles due to their immigration status. The differences in the school system such as curriculum, teaching approach, and assessment, as well as the kind of school are all important factors contributing to discrimination, harassment, and racism in schools.

These new experiences often create confusion. Like immigrant children of other backgrounds, Muslim immigrant students struggle to understand and become frustrated. As a result, some children feel depressed and uninterested in school, which may lead them to be at risk for academic disengagement. The cultural-ecological theory of minority schooling posits that some educators position these students by placing them in low-stream tracks (Ogbu, 2003). Ogbu further asserts that current educational discourse continues to attribute to immigrant students underachievement primarily to school and societal factors (e.g., tracking, stereotypical teacher attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, social-class inequities, and cultural differences) between home and school.

Some teachers and administrators see Muslim students as English language learners who struggle to understand the academic language and are less proficient in oral communication. Proficiency in English is critical for these students in understanding academic concepts and functioning effectively in schools. When working with immigrants whose first language is not English, educators should assess the barriers to communication caused by language discomfort

or lack of ability. Teachers can contact centers that provide resources such as interpreters or someone that is familiar with the culture and language of the immigrants to assist these students in schools. Some children who have been in the school and community for quite some time also play a role as language brokers to their families. Acting in this role helps them become proficient in more than one language, acquire better language skills, and maintain their native language as well (Md-Yunus, 2012).

The status of Muslim immigrant children with special needs is also perceived differently than in the West. Muslims from South Asia see disabilities as a taboo because they worry about their reputations and the possible stigma associated with a disability (Ansari, 2002). As a result, both children and adults with disabilities are kept at home because they are perceived as being unable to learn or in need of protection and extra care (Bywaters et al., 2003). The understanding of cognitive deficits such as an intellectual disability or mental retardation is different from the way it is understood in developed nations. In the Muslim world, judgments about cognitive ability are based less on standardized testing and more on a sense of what the family and community demand of the individual (Hasnain et al., 2008). Given that many immigrant and refugee Muslims are not literate, they are not likely to see a teenager as mentally impaired if he or she has not yet learned how to read. This example highlights the facts that concepts of normalcy are not universal and that impairment must be seen in its social and cultural context (Hasnain et al, 2008). Teachers can use this information to set expectations and evaluations of their students that are culturally sensitive and unbiased.

Teachers Roles in Helping Muslim Immigrant Students

McBrien (2006) indicated that the issues of being marginalized due to the differences in schools systems and educational programs could be addressed through the following ways:

provide social service to facilitate children's adjustment, provide language instruction to students and their parents, and combat discrimination. For example using field-dependent teaching approaches may help these students better understand the contents of the subject matter, as many of these students are familiar with a field-dependent learning style. Field-dependent learning style "is characterized by a student's preference for group work, the need for outside encouragement, and sensitivity towards others" (McBrien, 2006, p. 353). The problem with a field-dependent learning style is that many teachers in the adopted countries tend to associate it with low intelligence.

Another challenge is appropriate assessment and grade placement for Muslim children. For example, standardized testing and examinations were not based on their ability and culturally inappropriate, so the results are skewed and children are placed in the low-track classes. School districts should evaluate students using broad-based assessment rather than standardized tests. Researchers suggest that pre-service teacher preparation programs include mandatory bilingual and multicultural education training (McBrien, 2006). In addition to have English as Second Language (ESL) teachers and program should be placed in schools. In their graduate programs, students are encouraged to conduct ethnography studies to build their understanding of the political, social, and cultural backgrounds of immigrant families in their schools. Understanding Muslim immigrants' cultural and faith differences may eliminate prejudice and discrimination.

Adams and Kirova (2006) suggested some social support strategies such as welcoming children and making their classroom like home by providing emotional support and a caring attitude such as smiling, projecting an assuring attitude, and staying near the newcomer so the teacher's proximity can be reassuring. Using a "buddy system," putting the child in a small group of students for class work, and avoiding giving any one child extensive responsibility for

the newcomer are also helpful (Md-Yunus, 2012). Social support is also critical for children and families to be successful in the community. A sibling in the school or someone from outside the school can communicate with the new comer and explain the class routines and procedures may be called upon for support (Md-Yunus, 2008). Some school personnel can also welcome and inform parents and families about the school and community and reach out by inviting the child or family to share about their home culture and bring traditional foods to share with the class so that the child feels welcome, appreciated, and more confident and secure in school.

Teachers can consider adjusting the learning standards and being more flexible to address the culturally relevant aspect such as using multicultural aspects in the curriculum. Many teachers have been quite successful helping these immigrant children with strategies for supporting cognitive development such as using visuals, concrete examples or manipulatives, demonstrating, using gestures, repeating instructions (Md-Yunus, 2008), offering way to remember words and signs (Adams & Kirova, 2006). McBrien (2005) reported that teachers who allowed these children write in their native language or illustrate their answers and used audio recording of English books and computerized lesson proved the tools to help the children understand. Some schools have utilized virtual tour technology to help children learn the culture and practices of Muslims in an effort to help overcome some of these differences.

Conclusion

September 11, 2001 dramatically changed the landscape for Muslim immigrants throughout the world. The criminal behaviors of some Muslims brought a negative image to the Muslims. Although some first generation immigrant students often seek to involve themselves in the community, society still perceives them as strangers. As a result, the trials and tribulations of Muslim immigrants are not limited to the decision to assimilate into their host country's society

but to what immigrants and their children also face as the “Muslim paradox,” characterized by “extreme vilification” on one end and by a “considerable degree of acceptance, on the other” (Huda, 2006, p. 28). Contradictory images of Muslims praying peacefully in mosques are broadcast alongside footage of bearded men committing heinous acts (Trakim, 2004).

Islam’s basic teachings are counterintuitive to many cultural practices that are considered “Islamic.” Many contemporary scholars, instead of distinguishing fact (the prescribed belief system) from practice (cultural practices) introduce their own biases to their analyses, leading to conclusions that are misleading and confusing (Delpit, 2006; Karim, 2009). For example, the hijab, is an expression of faith and spiritual freedom. This bias research about it sends the message that Muslim women are oppressed, secluded, and vulnerable, considered inferior, and denied basic human rights. Muslim children have suffered from a clash of cultural practices and religious edicts. The clash has almost always ended with “the religion morphing into a watered down, more agreeable version of its original self” (Karim, 2009, p.15) in school.

Through the Cultural Bridges Act of 2002, Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, along with a bipartisan coalition of U.S. senators, pointed out the importance of promoting national security through international educational and cultural exchange programs between the U.S. and the Islamic world (NAAA-Action Alert, 2005). As authorized through this legislation, approximately \$75 million was spent in fiscal years 2003 through 2007 to expand the activities of the State Department’s existing educational and cultural programs in relation to the Islamic world. Such spending shows the U.S. commitment to connecting to the 1.5 billion people who live in the Islamic world in the hope of bridging cultural barriers. Unfortunately, despite such efforts to reach out, many in the Muslim community remain marginalized (Salman, 2007).

Adaptations to diverse cultures sometimes create tensions in public spaces such as schools. In particular many Muslim children living in the new countries are still bound by traditional Islamic practices (Al-Romi, 2006). For these children differences in culture, religion, and values between school and home created conflict. Some media organizations have used programs and broadcasting information about Muslim and Islamic culture live on local television stations and newspapers as part of the community diversity programs to create understanding and awareness about Islam.

At the community level, interfaith dialogue can also help the community understand and build trust when they meet and share their personal beliefs. Dialogue takes place not only in the schools, but also at work places, and even in the neighborhood. Through range of activities including forms of cultural production and consumption, such as pop music and on-line educational forums, young people from Muslim transnational communities are asserting their “voice” to belong and participate as full members of their communities.

References

- Abd-Allah, U. F. (2006). *Islam and the cultural imperative*. Retrieved from <http://www.crosscurrents.org/abdallahfall2006.htm>
- Abu El-Haj, T., & Bonet, S.W. (2011). Education, citizenship, and the politic of belonging: Youth from Muslim transnational communities and the “war on terror.” *Review of Research in Education, 35*, 29-59.
- Adams, L. D., & Kirova, A. (2006). *Global migration and education*, Mahwah: New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Al-Romi, N. H. (2006). Muslim as a minority in the United States. *International Journal of Educational Research, 33*(6), 631-638.
- Ansari, A. (2002). Parental acceptance-rejection of disabled children in non-urban Pakistan. *North American Journal of Psychology, 4*(1), 121-128.
- Athar, S. (2011). *Ramadan fasting and Muslim patients*. Retrieved, from www.imana.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=7720
- Banks, J., & Banks, C. A. (2010). *Multicultural education*. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn Bacon.
- Borhan, L. (2004). Teaching Islam: A look inside an Islamic preschool in Malaysia. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Education, 5*(3), 378-390.
- Bywaters, P., Ali, Z., Fazil, Q., Wallace, L. M., & Singh, G. (2003). Attitudes towards disability amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents of disabled children in the UK: Considerations for service providers and the disability movement. *Health and Social Care in the Community, 11*(6), 502-509.
- Center for Immigration Studies. (2012). *Muslim immigrants in the United States*. Retrieved from www.cis.org/articles/2002/back802.html

CIA world factbook (2008). Muslim in the world. Retrieved from

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/id.html>

Conly, S. (1998). Gender gaps and gains. *People Planet*, 7(3), 22-23.

Council of Islamic Education (2011). *Defining Islamic education: Differentiations and applications*. Retrieved from www.cie.org.

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Fazil, Q., Bywaters, P., Ali, Z., Wallace, L., & Singh, G. (2002). Disadvantage and discrimination compounded: The experience of Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents of disabled children in the UK. *Disability & Society*, 17(3), 237-253.

Giger, J. N., & Davidhizar, R. (2002). Culturally competent care: Emphasis on understanding the people of Afghanistan, Afghanistan Americans, and Islamic culture and religion. *International Nursing Review*, 49(2), 79-86.

Haboush, K. (2007). Working with Arab American families: Cultural competent practice for school psychologists. *Psychology in the Schools*, 44(2), 183-198.

Haron, S. email correspondent on August 2, 2011. All citations of Haron, 2011 and 2012 refer to personal communications.

Hasnain, R., Shaikh, L.C., & Shanawanim, H. (2008). *Disability and the Muslim perspective: An introduction for rehabilitation and health care providers*. Center for International Rehabilitation Research Information and Exchange. State University of New York, University at Buffalo.

Hauser-Cram, P., & Sirin, S. R. (2003). When teachers' and parents' values differ: Teachers' ratings of academic competence in children from low -income families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(4), 813-820.

- Hoot, J.L., Szecsi, T., & Moosa, S. (2003). What teachers of young children should know about Islam. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 31(2), 85-90.
- Huda, Q. (2006). *The diversity of Muslims in the United States*. Special report, United States Institute of Peace. Retrieved from www.usip.org
- Ismail, H., Md.Yunus, A. S. A., Ali, W. W.Z., Hamzah, R., Abu, R., Nawawi, H. (2009). Belief in God based on the national philosophy of education amongst Malaysian secondary School teachers. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(1), 160-170.
- Jones, M.E. A. (2010). Muslim and western influences on school curriculum. *Journal of Asia Pacific of Education*, 27(1), 27-39
- Kadi, W. & Billeh, V. (2006). Special issue on Islam and education-myths and truths. *Comparative Education Review*, 50(3), 311-324.
- Karim, H. (2009). *Jihad of youth: Why first generation immigrant Muslim youths are drawn to the philosophy of Tariq Ramadan*. Master Thesis, Georgetown University Washington, D.C.
- Khedr, R. (2006). *Putting disability on the Muslim agenda*. Retrieved from www.islamonline.net/English/family/2006/05/article02.shtml
- Kunjufu, J. (2002). *Black students- middle class teachers*. Chicago, IL: Images
- Laird, L. D. (2006). *Muslims and the cultures of healing*. Unpublished manuscript, Boston University School of Medicine: Boston, MA.
- Laksy, S. (2003). The cultural and emotional politics of teacher-parent interactions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16, 843-860.

- Maira, S. (2004). Youth culture, citizenship and globalization: South Asian Muslim youth in the United States after September 11th. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24(1), 219-231.
- Margolis, S. A., Carter, T., Dunn, E. V., & Reed, R. L. (2003). Validation of additional domains in activities of daily living, culturally appropriate for Muslims. *Gerontology*, 49(1), 61-65.
- Mastrilli, R. & Sardo-Brown, D. (2001). Pre-service teachers' knowledge about Islam: A snapshot of post September 11, 2001. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 29(3), 156-161.
- Mawdudi, S. A. (2011). *Islamic way of life*. Retrieved from http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/islamic_way_of_life/index.htm
- McBrien, J. L. (2006). Educational needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 329-364.
- McCreey, E., Jones, L., & Holmes, R. (2007). Why do Muslim parents want Muslim schools? *Early Years*, 27(3), 203-219.
- Md-Yunus, S. (2008). Immigrant parents: How to help your children succeed in school *Journal of Childhood Education*, 84(5), 315-318.
- Md-Yunus, S. (2012). *She is my language broker: How does cultural capital benefit Asian immigrant children in the United States*. ERIC EDS 5295567.
- NAAA-ADC action alert: Support Cultural Bridges Act of 2002 (2005). Retrieved from <http://www.cafearabica.com/nuke/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=12&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

- Nasr, S. H. (2006). *Islam*. The world almanac and book of facts 2006 (pp. 14-16). New York: World Almanac Education Group.
- Neito, S. (2009). *Language, culture, and teaching*. 2nd.ed. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Nimer, M. (2002). *The North American Muslim resource guide: Muslim community life in the United States and Canada*. New York: Rutledge.
- Ogabu, J. (2003). Theory of academic disengagement: its evolution and its critics. *Intercultural Education*, 15(4), 385-395.
- Pew Research Center (2011). Religion & Public Life Project. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population>
- Rogers-Sirin, L., Ryce, P., & Sirin, S. R. (2014). Acculturation, acculturative stress, and cultural mismatch and their influences on immigrant children and adolescents' well-being. *Advances in Immigrant Family Research*, doi 10.1007/978-1-4614-9123-3_2
- Ross-Sheriff, F., & Hussain, A. (2004). South Asian Muslim Children and Families. In Fong, Rowena. *Culturally competent practice with immigrant and refugee children and family*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Salman, S. (2007). Muslims in America. *The Trust*, 10(3), 10-15.
- Siddiqui, E. (2011). *A brief history of Islam in the United States*. Retrieved from www.islamamerica.org/history.cfm
- Sirin, S. R., Ryce, P., & Mir, M. (2009). How teachers' values affect their evaluation of children of immigrants: Findings from Islamic and public school. *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 24(4), 463-473.
- The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Ed. (2009). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company

Trakim, L. (2004). From conversion to conversation: Interfaith dialogue in post 9-11 America.

The Muslim World, 94(3), 343-355.