




Breaking Barriers

**Socialization Connections via video-conferencing.
Challenges of transnational newcomer students in
an American high school.**



Context of the study

- Small town in a Midwestern state in the USA.
- Predominantly white monolingual community.
- Since 1998, the school district has seen the arrival of transnational students (5.25% of the student population in 2004).
- American and Japanese manufacturing companies are located in this town.
- Transnational newcomers are Hispanic, Japanese, Mandarin, and Arabic students.
- A school district with little expertise on how to address the new challenges contacted a neighbor university--Greatresearch University.

Purpose and method

Purpose of the study

- To raise students' consciousness of their own realities and create an understanding of their subjective experiences through dialogue.

Method

- Qualitative study that used technology mediated (videoconferencing) observations and interactions. Face-to-face interviews with students, teachers and parents, and students focus group.

Participants

- Nine Hispanic high school students, two teachers, and a multilingual/multicultural team of educational researchers with diverse academic background.

Theoretical premises

- The student is not a passive recipient of socio-cultural knowledge but rather an active contributor to the meaning and outcome of interaction with other members of a social group.
- Individuals actively participate in the construction process of their social worlds.
- Individuals conceptions and perceptions are grounded on their subjective experiences.
- Individuals bring different realities to interpersonal encounters.
- Reality, including concepts of self and social roles is constructed through social interactions.


Exploratory study/Needs assessment

- The University
 - A group of multicultural/multilingual faculty and students decided to conduct an exploratory study to identify the challenges.
- The group
 - Met with district and school administrators,
 - conducted classroom and school observations,
 - interviewed teachers, parents, students, community members, and
 - conducted students focus group.

Challenges Identified:

- Bi-dimensional Cultural Understanding (newcomers-school community).
- Language Learning and Second Language Acquisition
- Newcomer Students' Social Emotional Needs
- New Student Integration/Inclusion
- Relationships between newcomers and local students.

What we learned about the students:

- Little hope for success.
 - Didn't see reasons to stay at school.
 - Didn't see reasons to go to college.
 - Didn't feel welcomed or wanted in the school.
 - Some of them felt isolated and uncared.
 - Their families were afraid they would not succeed.
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Role of Videoconferencing

What we know:

- Videoconferencing system is being used to connect students that are geographically dispersed to enable collaboration with other students and to develop multicultural relationships (Cifuentes and Murphy, 2000).

Role of Videoconferencing

What we did:

- Used the videoconferencing system to conduct socialization connections.
- Nine students and a facilitator met during one school period (50 minutes) every week.
- Students' concerns, schooling experiences, and their social-emotional needs were discussed.

Socialization connections

Why we did it:

To provide transnational newcomer students with a non-threatening school-based environment to share their schooling experiences and develop multicultural understanding. The students' native language was spoken during socialization connections.

Findings

- The students found the connections valuable in helping them understand the culture, school, and relationships.
- They were more confident about their abilities to take on challenges.
- Their participation in classroom activities increased to the extent that they not only answered questions but also raised content-related questions.
- Toward the end of the school year, a sense of trust was developed.

Findings

- The students gained an understanding of the implications of their legal status in the country and opportunities to pursue secondary education.
- Their performance at school improved.
- Their socialization at school went from no-interaction to participation in sports, group activities, and events.
- The nine students stayed at school the following school year.