

Chapter 1

Meaningful Engagement With Immigrant Families

Christi Batamula

Gallaudet University, USA

Bobbie Jo Kite

Gallaudet University, USA

Julie Mitchiner

Gallaudet University, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter prepares pre-service teachers to work with immigrant families with Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) children. Immigrant families are families with children with at least one immigrant caregiver who resides in the United States and is not a U.S. citizen at birth. The chapter highlights a case study showing the unique experience of this vastly growing population of families in the US as they navigate engaging in the education of their DHH children. The chapter also focuses on theories and practices in preparing preservice teachers to work with immigrant families with DHH children. Family engagement often glances over in teacher preparation programs, but this is a detriment since family engagement is a predictor of school success.

BACKGROUND

Children of immigrant families represent a large population in the United States, with more than one out of every four children having at least one immigrant parent (Anderson & Hernez, 2022). It is unknown how many of these children are DHH, but

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it is assumed that some of them are since two to three out of every 1,000 children born in the United States are DHH (NIDCD, 2021). This number is even higher among children born outside of the United States. As parents, immigrant families need to navigate the school system in their new host country, which may, on some levels, differ vastly from the school system in their country of origin. Many immigrants face being alienated in the school system with unfounded stereotypes and assumptions regarding them and their cultures (Gougeon, 1993; Kaveh & Sandoval, 2020). There is a growing focus on family engagement in children's education, particularly for families who face unique challenges. In addition to navigating the school system, immigrant families with DHH children also have to navigate the complexities of Deaf education. Teachers who work with immigrant families must understand how the cultural experiences of these diverse families impact how they engage in their children's education. Examining how immigrant families with Deaf children navigate multiple cultural systems, including advocating for their DHH children as they parent, will help build partnerships between families and education programs working with families with Deaf children.

Consequently, unlike many other cultural values, children learn from their families (Epstein et al., 2008). Deaf culture is generally not embodied in the home when the child is the only Deaf person in the family. For many hearing parents of Deaf children, their child is the first Deaf person with whom they have any meaningful contact. Therefore, they often spend the first few years of the child's life trying to figure out what it means, physically and culturally, to be Deaf (Hulsebosch & Myers, 2002; Mitchiner & Batamula, 2021). These challenges include audiological choices about hearing technologies such as cochlear implants or hearing aids, language modalities (oral or bilingual bimodal), and early intervention or school choices such as mainstream, a school for the Deaf, or a school with a Deaf education program (Kite, 2020; Mitchiner, 2015). Immigrant families with young Deaf children must also experience this navigation of the construction of what it means to be Deaf; however, this is layered upon navigating a new host culture as well.

Immigrant families face being alienated in the school system with unfounded stereotypes and assumptions regarding them and their cultures (Batamula, 2016; Gougeon, 1993). With a growing focus on family engagement in their children's education, particularly for families who face unique challenges, it is important to understand how the cultural experiences of these diverse families impact how they engage in their children's education. Examining how immigrant families with young DHH children navigate multiple cultural systems as they parent will help to build partnerships between families and education programs working with families with DHH children.

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