

Open School Doors:
Recommendations from Literature
Review

Alex Kendall & Mary-Rose Puttick

Recommendations

Leadership

Home school interaction with refugees/recently arrived families are most effective when leaders ensure that:

- 'one size does not fit all' and meeting the needs of the local community broadly and the needs of refugee and migrant families specifically are an explicit stated priority for the school;
- initiatives and interventions are informed by multi-directional principles and form part of the schools' 'vision' or 'ethos' and must be visibly and actively endorsed and supported by the school leadership team;
- initiatives and interventions are carefully planned with full consideration given to resource implications;
- senior roles, responsibilities and commitments in relation to driving initiatives and interventions should be clear and well disseminated to the wider community;
- focused teacher development is recognised and prioritised as a key factor in achieving successful outcomes;
- schools should have a clear sense of what they hope to achieve and a collectively agreed vision of success criteria – ideally both vision and success criteria should be developed collaboratively with parents;
- home school interaction priorities and actions are incorporated into and included in school development plans;
- progress against actions are regularly monitored and progress (and challenges) effectively shared and success celebrated with the wider community;

Underpinning principles

Refugee/recently arrived families and carers are most likely to feel included in home school interaction when schools:

- are open, welcome spaces that visibly and explicitly celebrate the diversity of their communities: through actions and behaviours of staff and students; wall displays; welcoming messages in entrance halls and reception areas; roles and responsibilities that are open to and taken up by refugee/migrant parents in school;
- have good, up to date knowledge of the legal frameworks within which refugee families operate and the resources and networks (including government, charity and community led) that families and schools can access to provide additional support and guidance;
- have demonstrate understanding and awareness of how education systems in key countries differ from their own and how normalised practices around grouping, assessing, behaviour, defining SEN and transitioning through school phases may differ from country to country and culture to culture;
- can make available a diverse range of language and cultural resources that ensure that home school interaction is accessible, hassle free and a positive experience for all parents;

- recognise and support the basic needs that a newly arrived family may have (keeping warm, keeping clean, keeping well fed, access to school uniform, access to basic equipment etc) that impact on home /school interaction in fundamental ways;
- feel confident that what is beneficial to migrant/refugee parents/carers/families is likely to be beneficial for all parents/carers/families;
- actively collaborate with migrant / refugee families (parents and children) in design of home school interaction programme, taking account of the expressed aspirations and needs and wider networks within communities;
- draw on their wider professional and community resources to adopt and 'outreach mentality' that provides scaffolded support (resources, peer support, language resources etc.) for home school interaction
- develop home school interaction programmes are context specific and tailored to the needs of specific communities;
- develop models of parental engagement that recognise the important role parents play as partners in children's learning and involve parents/carer as 'experts' in children's development and as decision makers to avoid the 'colonisation' of the home and the role of parents;
- treat home school interaction as 'knowledge exchange' activity through which teachers and parents as equal stake-holders work collaboratively to create an optimum environment for young people to thrive as learners and citizens;
- creates 'third spaces' for home school interaction, that is to say spaces that bring together ideas and priorities from home and school in dialogue to generate new fruitful conversations about how best to support children;
- are thoughtful about modes of communication and should recognise that communication in digital contexts must link to everyday life, practices and concerns if it is to be successful;
- do not replace face-to-face communication with digital tools but complement, expand and extend opportunities for interaction and knowledge exchange;
- support parent to make independent decisions about the risks (for them and their children) in relation to using technology – which which means understanding the benefits as well as the threats (e.g. safeguarding, radicalisation);
- are aware of the wider digital literacy experiences of their communities and the risks associated with any choice they make about technology and platforms, access and associated costs must be primary considerations for planning;
- afford parents opportunities to gain vocational skills that will support their employability and enable them to gain references may help families to build sustainable, more secure futures that provide the conditions for young people to be more successful in school;
- provide access to whole family activities is likely to yield significant benefit. A key element is for it to be a whole family activity and perhaps as part of the activity it could be to do it in a local library, maybe just once a week, or another public place where access to ICT and wifi is free. Schools could provide lists of local places, or facilitate activity in local spaces that newly arrived parents may not be aware, this may also support knowledge, understanding and confidence building about accessing wider community provision and or access and entitlement to local services;
- play an active role in facilitating and support peer to peer support for newly arrived parents/carers to enable them to be inducted in to and informally (or

formally?) supported and mentored to become active participants in the school community;

- cultivate high trust environments that enable teachers to be creative and experiment with their practice to evolve responsive, 'grounded pedagogies' and to build communities of practice that share new knowledge and expertise to the benefit of both teachers and the wider communities they serve;
- enable families to extend their funds of knowledge and build social and cultural capital that will support achievement of expressed aspirations.

Priorities for Teacher development:

Home school interactions with refugee/recently arrived parents work best when teachers:

- have opportunities to reflect on their own positionality and how their identities as professionals and representatives of authority as well as their own socio-cultural markers (gender, class, ethnicity etc) play out in their work with families and parents – this is particularly important when the social profile of teachers is significantly different to that of the school community/refugee families;
- have opportunities to explore their own communication repertoires (including their language and literacy identities), the strengths and weaknesses of the communication strategies they currently use to interact with parents and their ideas for developing and extending their work;
- have opportunities to reflect on develop and extend their digital repertoires and explore and evaluate the dominant literacy practices of home school interaction and to experiment with how to develop and extend these;
- explore the ways that the social and cultural capitals (funds of knowledge) that families bring to their home school interaction may work to include or exclude;
- take time to understand the literacy and digital literacy experiences of parents/carers and how best to ensure that parents/carers can participate equitably, independently and agentically in any home school practices that the teacher initiates or facilitates;
- understand the transition journeys of young people and their families;
- are professionally curious about the cultures and values that parents/carers and families bring to their engagement with schools and have an opportunity to explore, critique and challenge prejudices and stereotypes (including in the UK context a consideration of how colonial legacies play out negatively in contemporary relationships);
- are committed to balancing expressed needs of parents/families/carers with the professional demands and responsibilities of their role as teacher (within legal parameters);
- have an awareness of the way education systems function differently outside their home country and accept that parents/carers/families/young people bring may different values and expectations about education to their encounters with school and that the teacher must build bridges to support successful participation;
- schools have a good understanding of how education systems in key countries differ from their own and how normalised practices around grouping, assessing,

behaviour, defining SEN and transitioning through school phases may differ from country to country and culture to culture;

- understand how to work with young people and families who have experienced 'trauma', the impacts of this on a young person's interactions with school and know when and how to signpost to fellow professionals;
- are empowered to balance the needs of the young person with the 'norms' of school practices e.g. when a child's 'legal age' appears at odds with their developmental or social age;
- have some working knowledge of how to work with parents/carers/families of young people who have additional educational need and or who don't speak the official or dominant language/s of the school;
- have opportunities build their pedagogical repertoire to understand the differences between working in a learning context with children and working in a learning context with adults (andragogy);
- explore how best to marry competing priorities, advocate and lobby where local accountability cultures and the best interests of the young person and their families are not well aligned.