



# Supporting (Im)migrant School Mental Health Community of Practice

This worksheet is for your questions, notes, quotes, and anything else to help your experience during the Community of Practice Sessions.

## See Me: Understanding Newcomer’s Experiences, Challenges, and Strengths

### **Fathima:**

Fathima is a 13-year-old girl who recently arrived from Indonesia. Fathima speaks Indonesian and Arabic at home with her parents and her little brother. Her mother enrolled her in a dual immersion program upon arriving in the United States with the hope that Fathima will be able to improve her English, as well as maintain her Arabic language. Her mother is pleased that the school district offers a dual language program in English and Arabic. When Fathima is with her two best friends, there is a lot of laughter. Today, the trio of girls is performing a play for their classmates. Fathima speaks rapidly and animatedly in Arabic. The story the girls have written is funny, and their classmates seem captivated by the story the girls have created. When Fathima’s character speaks, she interjects English phrases. During the show, Fathima’s character exclaims, “No way!” and “Let’s go!” and “See you tomorrow!” During the girls’ performance, they are expressive and talkative. Their classmates applaud loudly when the performance is over.

Later in the morning, the teacher is reading with the class. They are reading a version of the Indonesian folktale “Deer Mouse and the Farmer” in English. Throughout the lesson, Fathima adjusts her hijab and seems distracted. As the lesson progresses, Fathima continues to sit quietly, sometimes appearing not to be paying attention. Each time the teacher asks a question of the students, the English-speaking students call out excitedly, sometimes speaking over each other. Fathima remains silent during this time. As the students leave for lunch, the teacher asks Fathima if she liked the book. She tells the teacher in Arabic that the story reminds her of home. When asked why she did not offer that observation during the lesson, she comments, “I understand the story, but I don’t understand the words”.

### **Margaret:**

Margaret, a fourth-grade student, loves to read and play the piano. Her parents, her two brothers, and she immigrated to the United States from England three months ago. In England, Margaret’s mother was the head of the human resources department for a successful publishing company. The company recently opened an office in the United States, and Margaret’s family decided to leave England and become permanent residents here. In England, Margaret was popular and outgoing. She did very well in school; her favorite class was math. Margaret played on a netball team, and she also played the piano. Margaret often draws in the library during recess, and she describes her friends in England and says she misses her teammates. “They don’t play netball here. All of the girls in my class here play on a softball team, but I don’t play softball.”

Margaret’s mother had told her that there would be little difference between her life in England and her life in the United States, but Margaret is finding that this is not the case. First, Margaret says, the English is different. “There are a lot of words I don’t know, and when I first came, the other kids laughed at my accent. Sometimes I didn’t understand them, and sometimes they didn’t understand me.” Second, Margaret was surprised that, even though her favorite subject is math, she did not understand a lot of the math problems she had to do in class and for homework. “The numbers are different! We used pounds in England and here we use dollars. We used kilometers and here we use miles. And I have to learn about pounds and ounces, because all I know is that I weigh six stones!”



**Emilio:**

Emilio, a shy boy from Mexico, arrived with his family in the United States at the age of 5. He is now 12 years old and in the seventh grade; he has missed the past three days of school and has fallen behind on several projects. When asked why he has missed school, he shrugs and says that sometimes he just “can’t take it anymore.” His math teacher adds that she cannot understand why Emilio has not integrated more with the other students from Mexico, adding, “Over half of our student population is from Mexico.” When Emilio is asked where he is from, he says he is from Oaxaca. “The teachers think that all Mexicans are the same, but I am from Oaxaca, and they make fun of me.”

The they Emilio refers to are a group of fellow Mexican students who call Emilio and other students from Oaxaca names, such as “indito,” referring to the indigenous roots of many Oaxacans. “When I speak Mixteco, they laugh at me and tell me I should go home. In middle school, the kids used to tell me I was dumb, because I didn’t speak Spanish.” While many of Emilio’s teachers do not know that this bullying takes place, the ESL teacher acknowledges the struggles that his students from Oaxaca face in school. “Mexico is actually an extremely diverse country, and many students come to the United States not speaking Spanish or have parents who do not speak Spanish. There are racial and linguistic distinctions within Mexican society that we teachers are only now realizing. We used to think of our students as one big group, but that simply is not true.”

Emilio says he has learned some Spanish since coming to the United States in the second grade and explains, “When they found out I was from Mexico, they put me in a class for Spanish speakers.” Emilio laughs when he adds, “I’m practically trilingual now!”

**Igor:**

Igor grew up in Russia, where he attended school regularly, was an excellent student, and enjoyed his childhood and early adolescence. When he was 14, his family moved to New York. Igor had studied some English in school, but like the rest of his family, he knew only a few phrases. His father had been an elementary school teacher in Russia, but in New York, with extremely limited English skills, he could only get a job as a janitor in a department store. Igor’s father studied English at night and dreamed of someday working in a school again. Igor and his family lived in Astoria, Queens, where they kept in close contact with the Russian community. At first, Igor attended a neighborhood high school, but a year later, encouraged by immigrant friends of the family, he transferred to International High School at LaGuardia Community College, where he is a 17-year-old junior.

At home, the family converses in Russian, and Igor, his two younger brothers, and his teenage friends speak Russian with the adults in their circle. Among themselves, they speak English. A warm, open, and energetic young man, Igor had made friends easily. At school he speaks primarily English, except when he talks with other Russian-speaking students who are new to the school.

His English has developed rapidly since his arrival, and he can read fairly well in English. He still does not understand everything in his school texts but knows how to persevere and be patient. When he writes in English, he makes errors, but, as he put it, he feels he has “come a long way.” Because he is doing well, and he feels that he has enough of a foundation in English to succeed, Igor has decided to take the test for his GED rather than stay in school and graduate with his class.

## Reflection Questions

<b>How were they vignettes similar to things you've seen in your school? How were they different?</b>	<b>What new ideas or insights did you gain?</b>
<b>What are the implications for practice?</b>	<b>What do you think you might try to do differently in your classroom? As a school?</b>

## Community Conexiones

What partnerships exist that specifically support (Im)migrant students?

How might you, a school mental health leader collaborate with others to support (Im)migrant students?

Additional Reflections:

Reference: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/newcomers-toolkit/ncomertoolkit.pdf>