

ROLE OF FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS IN THE ADAPTATION PROCESS OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN THEIR NEW ENVIRONMENT

Rollande Deslandes, University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières

Marie-Claude Rivard, University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières

François Trudeau, University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières

Caroline, B. Previoux, University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières

Jean Lemoyne, University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières

France Joyal, University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières

In Quebec, nearly 20 per 100 of the students are from immigrant and refugee families (Government of Quebec 2007). Immigrants increasingly settle in regions outside of Montreal (MICC 2007), like the Mauricie region. The motives surrounding immigration are numerous. For instance, some families seek safety while others hope for a better future for their children by focusing on better education. A question remains: How do school-age children adapt to their new environment? Research shows a worsening of the lifestyles from a health point of view among the new immigrants and the importance to document the influence of the host environment on these health issues (Nanhou & Audet, 2008). Other studies focus on the development of life skills that may foster the adoption of healthy lifestyles among immigrants (e.g., Lindencrona, 2008). At the same time, studies indicate that academic success is positively influenced by a healthy lifestyle (Koivusilta et al., 2001). Specifically, healthy eating habits and active living (physical activity) have positive effects on school achievement (Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). Families and school are essential contributors to school achievement (Deslandes, 2005, 2009, Epstein 2001, Henderson et al., 2007) as well as in the adoption of healthy lifestyles among school-age children (Rivard et al., accepted; Trudeau et al., 2008). This study was organized around two research questions: 1) To what extent have school-age children adapted to their new “home”, particularly in terms of development of healthy lifestyles and life skills? 2) To what extent have their families and schools contributed to their adaptation process? The study was conducted using semi-structured interviews conducted by two researchers with eight young children (girls = 3 = 5 boys) aged 8-13 years and their parents (women = 2 men = 6), all either immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Congo, Ukraine, Argentina, Algeria or Colombia. Five families are refugees while three others have emigrated for work reasons. They have been living in the Mauricie region from 2 to 5 years. Consent forms had previously been obtained from the parents and prior approval had been received from the university research ethical committee. The interviews were recorded and transcribed (verbatim). The analysis was done using N'Vivo software for coding data based on questions posed

during the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). . The results highlight the complementary roles of family and school in the adaptation process of immigrant children.

Keywords:

Family-school partnerships; adaptation process; immigrant school-age children; healthy habits; life skills.

References:

- Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for Education. An introduction to theory and methods*. Toronto, Ontario: Allyn and Bacon.
- Deslandes, R. (2005). Réussite scolaire: Déterminants et impact des relations entre l'école et la famille [School success: Determinants and family-school relationships impact]. In L. Deblois & D. Lamothe (Eds.), *La réussite scolaire. Comprendre et mieux intervenir* (pp. 223-236). Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Deslandes, R. (2009). *International perspectives on contexts, communities and evaluated innovative practices. Family-school-community partnerships*. London: Routledge.
- Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships : Preparing educators and improving schools*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R. & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale. The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. N.Y.: New Press.
- Koivusilta, L. K., Rimpelä, A. H., Rimpelä, M. & Vikat, A. (2001). Health behavior-based selection into educational tracks starts in early adolescence. *Health Education Research*, 16(2), 201-214.
- Lindencrona, F. (2008). *Strategies for a health promoting introduction for newly-arrived refugees and other immigrants*. Thesis. Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden.
- Ministère de l'immigration et des communautés culturelles (MICC, 2007). *Gouvernement du Québec*.
- Nanhou, V. & Audet, N. (2008). Caractéristiques de santé des immigrants du Québec : comparaison avec les canadiens de naissance. *Zoom santé*, Institut de la statistique du Québec : Québec.
- Rivard, M-C., Deslandes, R. & Collet, M. (accepted). L'approche école en santé au primaire : points de vue des parents. *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*.
- Trudeau, F. & Shephard, R. J. (2008). Physical Education, School Physical Activity, School Sports and Academic Performance. *International Journal of Behavior Nutrition Physical Activity*, 5(10), 1-12.

