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# *Immigrant Bangladeshi Communities and Intergenerational Conflict: The Need for Multicultural Education*

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### Abstract

Based on an ethnographic study of an immigrant Bangladeshi community, this paper points out the potential of adult education programs using a multicultural education framework. These potentials include helping immigrant adults address their own lack of appreciation for diversity in the U.S. and the intergenerational gap that exists between immigrant adults and immigrant children. This intergenerational gap stems from the adults' lack of knowledge about other cultures—especially U.S. culture—leading to perceived and sometimes real deviant/delinquent behaviors among their children.

### Introduction

The U.S. is a multicultural society where people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds live and interact. Extensive research has been done addressing the impact of multicultural education on the achievement of traditional school-age students and the teaching techniques employed by their instructors. Little, if any, research has been done to show the importance of multicultural education for adults. This paper will attempt to address this gap, discussing the importance of multicultural adult education and the possibilities of its effective use with adult immigrant learners. It also offers perspectives on when, where and how adult education with immigrant families might reduce intergenerational conflicts between parents and their children, while also increasing their collective knowledge and understanding of the culture they now live in

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and its social, political, educational and economic systems. It is hoped that this research will lead to additional work with immigrant parents and their children.

### **Multicultural Education and its Importance**

Multicultural education is an approach to social change (Gay, 2004) as well as a progressive approach for transforming education (Gorski, 2004). It now includes a variety of issues such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, language, national origin, and immigration; and in some cases, sexual orientation, age, and disability (Gay, 2003). The importance of multicultural education to such areas as the role of citizens, deviant behavior, schooling and learning, and cultural mixture will be discussed in the sections that follow.

#### ***Multicultural Education and the Role of Citizens***

The U.S. is a multicultural and immigrant society (Johnson, 2003). While earlier generations of immigrants came primarily from western and northern Europe, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people began arriving in the U.S. from all over the world: Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa. These new immigrants brought with them their own cultural traditions and languages, producing anxieties, hostilities, prejudices and racist behaviors among already established groups (Gay, 2004). Earlier generations of immigrants considered these new arrivals to be a threat to their safety and security (Lal, 2004). Researchers suggest that, against this backdrop, multicultural education could have helped to establish social harmony and to have assisted immigrants—new and old—in better understanding each other (Gay, 2004; Gorski, 2004; Jones, 2004; Powers, 2002).

Such was the case in the 1970s, when multicultural education was introduced in U.S. schools. While the primary purpose for this effort was to create greater acceptance of minorities, another underlying mission was to help recent immigrants better understand democratic values and the role of good citizens in their new home (Gorski, 2004). In this situation, multicultural education was important in enhancing cultural democracy, humanity, fitness for participation in government, and capability for American citizenship (Barker & Giles, 2002).

#### ***Multicultural Education and Deviant Behavior***

Multicultural education can help address and reduce the deviant behavior of youth. Researchers have noted that immigrant children

commit more crimes than children of mainstream society (Gay, 2004; Lal, 2004; Johnson, 2003). Dubois (as cited in Lal, 2004) explained the reasons underlying this behavior, stating that “American born children of foreigners are much more likely to commit crimes than native born persons of native parentage, not because they are children of immigrants, but because they are Americans and are no longer controlled by the traditions and customs which keep their parents in the paths of rectitude” (p. 20). Multicultural education can play an effective role in addressing this problem as it encourages children of immigrants to develop an appreciation for their parents’ culture. It can also serve as a vehicle to carry the customs, culture, tradition, norms, and values of diverse people (Gay, 2004; Lal, 2004; Gorski, 2004; Banks, 1994; Johnson, 2004).

### ***Multicultural Education and Schooling and Learning***

Multicultural education has a tremendous influence on schooling and learning outcomes (Gay, 2004; Lal, 2004; Gorski, 2004; Jones 2003; Banks, 1994). Multicultural education makes schooling more relevant and effective (Gay, 2004). Researchers have found that students perform more successfully when they are able to find some similarity between their cultural backgrounds as practiced in home and those expressed in other social settings including school (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2004; Gorski, 2004; Jones, 2004; Lal, 2004; Johnson, 2003). Johnson (2003) noted that multicultural education prepares all students for democratic citizenship in a pluralistic society. He explained that multicultural education helps students understand how multicultural issues help to shape the social, political, economic, and cultural fabric of the U.S. Banks (1994) pointed out that multicultural education is a necessary ingredient of quality education. He noted that multicultural education, as a reform movement, was designed to bring equality in education for all students. Multicultural education can make school more interesting, exciting, inviting, and significant for diverse student groups. Gay (2004) elaborated on this argument, finding that learning becomes more interesting when it has a personal meaning to students, and that multicultural education subsequently helps diverse students find meaning in their own education.

Multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning; democratic values and beliefs are its foundation (Jones, 2003). Every student in America comes to school with their own level of cultural awareness and with their own cultural background. School is the place where students can share their stories and hear the stories of others. It

creates an environment where students learn to think more critically, and where they are taught to challenge the information presented to them. In a multicultural classroom, students learn how to respect different viewpoints grounded in specific cultures and belief systems (Jones, 2004). A teacher must be familiar with multicultural education if s/he is to endorse students' experiences in the classroom and to foster healthy interaction among students. Jones (2004) stated that when a teacher has knowledge of different cultural qualities, it becomes easier for a teacher to provide creative and respectful instruction.

Multicultural education helps students understand the evolution of modern conceptions of citizenship and prepares them to be skilled participants in an ongoing process of integrating into U.S. life (McLeod & Krugly-Smolka, 2004). Multicultural education addresses anti-discrimination, antiracism, equity, cultural pluralism and human rights. McLeod and Krugly-Smolka (2004) pointed out that multicultural education teaches us that human beings belong to many different subcultures, and that each individual has their own identity based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender or sexual orientation. They also noted the importance of encouraging students to explore and define their own identities.

### ***Multicultural Education and Cultural Energetic Mixture***

Domestic diversity in the U.S. has created an energetic mixture of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and experiential plurality (Gay, 2004). Different studies reveal that diverse ethnic, racial and cultural groups and individuals have made contributions to all aspects of American life and culture (Gay, 2004; Gorski, 2004; Jones, 2004; Lal, 2004; Johnson, 2003). Multicultural education is an idealistic, yet realistic approach to sharing the traditions, culture, games, and songs of diverse groups (Lal, 2004; Gay, 2004; Jones 2004; Gorski, 2004; Banks, 1994). According to Gay (2004) people from different backgrounds can build a richer community by sharing the best of their traditions and customs.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

As discussed previously, there is a significant amount of research addressing the importance of multicultural education for children. Most of this research focuses on how multicultural approaches in schools helps students to understand and appreciate different diverse perspectives and how students can benefit from this process. Some research also emphasizes multicultural education in an effort to reduce

the deviant behavior among children of immigrant parents. However, research has yet to be conducted that examines how multicultural education for immigrant parents can contribute to reduction of deviant behavior in their children; or if stated another way, how parental inability to understand and appreciate another culture contributes to a generation gap and ultimately to the deviant behavior of their children.

A systematic search for literature surrounding the issue of immigrant parent cultural knowledge and its influences on their children's deviant behavior did not produce any results. Some criminological research (Chin, 1990; Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Wong, 1997), however, reveals that parental lack of knowledge about the system and culture contributes to a generation gap that ultimately influences deviant behavior among their children. These studies from criminology, however, fail to depict how multicultural education for adults can be beneficial in minimizing the generation gap.

In an effort to address this under-researched area, this study focuses on how multicultural perspectives in adult learning for parents in an immigrant community can help them to understand and appreciate the views of their children (many of whom are "Americanized") and to minimize the generation gap, a factor contributing to deviant behavior.

### **Methods**

This study is part of a larger research study on juvenile delinquency which is as an ethnographic case study using multiple methods of research (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). As suggested in the literature of qualitative research, different techniques were used for collecting information to identify and explain the nature of the immigrant community and the contributing factors of juvenile delinquent/deviant behaviors and the nature of these behaviors (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2003). Essentially, this was an ethnographic field study using formal interviews as well as informal conversations and observations. A New York City Bangladeshi newspaper and *The New York Times* were invaluable sources. Data were collected over a four-month period in a Bangladeshi community in New York City.

Formal and informal conversations took place in a neutral and natural setting where the participants felt comfortable. In the informal conversations, there was much discussion of the participants' knowledge of the newly found culture as well as focused discussion of the behavior of children in the community. Conversations often took the form of group

discussions. Local Bangladeshi restaurants were especially conducive to generating conversation among and with groups; especially in the evenings and on weekends. Some conversations were conducted with people in social settings and while attending cultural gatherings.

Formal interviews were also used to collect data for this study. Questions were developed and organized to use as a guide while in the field. These questions were intended to explore how immigrant Bangladeshi parents and adults perceive deviant behavior among immigrant Bangladeshi youths and the factors that contribute to this behavior. Once these questions were organized, they were e-mailed to some adult members of the immigrant Bangladeshi communities who live in different regions of the U.S., including New York City. Telephone conversations were conducted with several immigrant Bangladeshi parents regarding research issues. The responses of these individuals assisted in the reorganization of the interview guide, and also provided important guidelines as to how to approach parents and adults without confusing them about the intention of the study.

A total of 34 people were interviewed from the Bangladeshi community in New York City. Among these 34 interviewees, 12 were youths, 16 were parents/community members, 4 were school-teachers, and 2 were guidance counselors in local schools where many immigrant Bangladeshi students attend. Interviewees were not randomly selected. They were purposefully selected with the goal to select those who would be able to provide insightful information appropriate to research phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Although an attempt was made to record the interviews, most of the respondents were unwilling to speak while being taped. These conversations were recorded in writing including as much detail as possible. At the end of each interview, the transcript was read to the respondent to ascertain accuracy. Transcriptions of recorded interviews were also read to the respective respondents.

“Networking” was another aspect of the research study that proved to be extremely helpful. Individuals were requested to provide names and phone numbers of their friends and relatives living in the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in New York City. Individuals were requested to recommend only people they thought would cooperate in providing information and making introductions to other community members. A number of respondents and/or contacts were made using this approach. While in the field, these initial contacts introduced the researcher to other

potential respondents and data were generated through this snowball process.

Newspaper reports were relied heavily upon as well, particularly the local newspaper *Thikana*. This is a Bengali newspaper published in New York City by Bangladeshi journalists. The newspaper is widely read among the members of the Bangladeshi community. Prior issues of *Thikana* from the past two years were reviewed for relevant news articles. Several articles were collected and then presented to the participants during the interview process. The participants were requested to make comments on the news articles. The participants were asked to voice their views regarding a particular article or a similar and/or related issue. Additionally, *The New York Times* was reviewed to find news articles that referred to the immigrant Bangladeshi people in New York City. The newspaper had published a few articles that were also used in group and individual discussions with the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Interview and conversation notes were analyzed by the researchers at length, noting any similarities or common themes and issues. Major themes included lack of knowledge about U.S. systems, cultural and generational disconnect and conflict, and deviant behaviors of children.

During interviews and informal conversations, different issues and/or concerns were raised, with a second reader crosschecking the validity of these issues and/or concerns. This process assisted in acquiring and clarifying details on particular issues. A second person with some training in qualitative studies was always present during informal conversations. Sometimes this second person asked probing questions of the respondents while taking detailed notes. Notes were frequently checked and crosschecked to establish accurate recording and interpretation of data.

### **Findings**

As mentioned earlier, we conducted research to determine whether the lack of knowledge and/or appreciation of other cultures among immigrant adults and parents contributed to a generation gap and ultimately to the deviant behavior of their children. Based on our data, the research does show that when immigrant parents living in a multicultural society do not understand different systems within that society and fail to appreciate cultural differences, they lose control of

their children. This lack of control contributes to the deviant behavior of their children. The research also shows that if parents in a multicultural/multiethnic setting fail to appreciate other cultures, they can be described as culturally illiterate and narrow-minded. Thus, they are reluctant to allow their children to socialize with children from other cultural or racial groups. In fact, our data show that there is a tendency to criminalize the behavior of children simply because of their association with children of other ethnic groups. Table 1 highlights the major themes identified in our research.

These themes and issues are keys to understanding how lack of appropriate education among adults in a multicultural society may contribute to the deviant behavior of children. The following discussion and selected examples illustrate these issues further. Each of these stories is drawn from different settings and hence, shows how limited understanding of a different system/culture effects many aspects of immigrants' lives.

In the Bangladeshi community in New York City, many community members expressed fears about their youth becoming "Americanized." They also saw a conflict between Bangladeshi and American cultures. Many Bangladeshi people were offended by various U.S. customs, such as dating. On the other hand, what is an accepted practice in Bangladeshi culture is sometimes treated as a crime in the U.S., such as parental discipline. In Bangladeshi culture, slapping or hitting ones' own children is perfectly acceptable. Traditionally, Bangladeshi people believe it is appropriate to control their children through corporal punishment. In Bangladesh, this practice is not considered abusive, and physical punishment is extended beyond the home. Other adult family members and school teachers are expected to punish children to "keep them in line." Slapping or otherwise hitting children is an accepted way of punishing children.

On the other hand, in the U.S., children are taught in school to report to the police or other agencies if their parents or anyone hits them. This brings about distrust and fear among some immigrant parents and adults. In fact, many Bangladeshi parents believed that this law encourages deviant behavior among Bangladeshi children, encouraging disobedience and disrespect.

There are other strict parental practices in the immigrant community. Bangladeshi parents want their children to follow the rules as they (the parents) establish them. They do not allow their children to watch television often because they are very reluctant to accept any aspect of



Table 1: Issues Pertaining to Risk Factors of Deviant Behavior as They Relate to Adult Learning and Appreciation of Other Cultures which Appeared in the Interviews and Informal Conversations

Themes/Issues or Conversations	Number of Interviews	Total Number of Mentions
Parents do not speak proper English and do not know the American system	93	141
Norms/practices of discipline are different here than in Bangladesh, and are sometimes conflicting	70	105
Parents' lack of knowledge of how to discipline their children in America	53	95
Children's association with African-American and/or Spanish children	67	94
Children are exposed to American culture	49	89

U.S. culture. They want to see their children succeed in U.S. institutions and enjoy the good qualities of U.S. life, but good qualities are relative. They sometimes punish their children (particularly girls) for adopting what the young people see as positive U.S. behaviors. For example, merely wearing many U.S. dresses may cause parents to discipline their child.

Another illustration is of a parent disconnected from U.S. culture as well as from her child, demonstrating both parental strictness and the fear that can result when cultures clash. A very religious mother was cooking and doing housework. She was an extremely conservative woman by Bangladeshi standards, wearing a “burkha” (veil) whenever she is in the presence of males outside of her family. On this particular night, she asked her daughter for help, but her daughter was watching television as she often did. The mother called for the daughter several times, finally coming to the living room and pulling her daughter by the hand. The daughter was defiant and the next day at school, she told one of her friends what had happened. She also told her friend about her mother’s strict rules. Her friend advised her to report the incident to a teacher, which she did. The teacher then reported the incident to a social worker who, in turn, contacted the family. Because she did not follow her mother’s order, Bangladeshi community members who were aware of the incident viewed the girl as noncompliant and as exemplifying deviant behavior. Nevertheless, they also blamed the mother for being overly harsh. Chin (1990) has noted that given the different nature of child rearing processes in the U.S. and other countries, immigrant parents can become confused about the right practice to follow when supervising and disciplining their children. This lack of proper parenting supervision may have contributed to what was seen as delinquent behavior among his respondents who were Chinese.

The following incident further illustrates what a lack of knowledge and understanding of the system does to create fear and distrust and how it makes the move toward citizenship more difficult. A local Bangladeshi business owner reported catching a Bangladeshi youth with an item he had stolen. According to the store owner, “I caught him with a mango in his pocket that he stole from my store. I knew this youth because he always comes to my store to buy groceries. On that day, he did not buy anything, but I noticed that he was sorting mangoes from the box. I thought that he would buy some mangoes. But after awhile as he was leaving the store I noticed that one pocket of his pants was bulging. I stopped him and asked him that what was in his pocket. He said nothing.

So I searched him and I found the mango. He said that he bought it from another store. But I was certain that it was from my store. When he was asked repeatedly, he admitted to stealing the mango. I asked him not to come to my store anymore.” When the store owner was asked if he called the police, he responded, “No, I did not call the police or any other authority. The reason was that I did not want to get involved in any trouble and as I knew the boy I did not want him to get in any serious trouble. Again, if I called police, they probably would let him go as he is a kid. So, I thought there was no point in calling the police.”

Dominating the views of parents is another behavior that is characteristic of children who demonstrate deviant behavior. From conversations with community members, one of the reasons children dominate their parents is, simply put, because they can. Parents’ lack of education, their inability to speak or fully understand English and their lack of knowledge concerning U.S. systems gives their children ample opportunity to take on leadership roles that are typically reserved for parents. Through school and community activities, the children have learned to speak English. They know the rules and regulations and the system far better than do their parents. They have become the interpreters of language and custom. They control conversations because they answer the telephone, translate and represent for their parents to those who do not speak Bengali. This is a nearly a complete reversal of traditional parent-child roles, and it can cause confusion and resentment.

Often when children have this type of control, they make matters worse by taking advantage of the situation, manipulating their parents for their own purposes. As an example, one respondent reported that his 15-year old son was listening to rap music and the volume was very loud. He asked his son to lower the volume, but he did not listen to him. In his own words, “I got angry and kind of ordered him to stop the music. My voice was also loud. My son got angry at me and said ‘don’t scream at me. If you scream I will call a cop.’ I got scared. I don’t want to get into any trouble and I don’t want to get involved with the cops....Now it’s very difficult to punish my kids even if they do something wrong. I am not able to control my own children.” This example shows how a parent’s lack of understanding regarding the U.S. legal system can contribute to incidents of disrespect on the part of the child and subsequent fear and trepidation on the part of the parents.

Education is another issue where parents are often deceived and manipulated by their children. For example, in Bangladesh, getting a 60 percent grade on a test is an indication of a very good student. In fact,

a grade of 60 percent or above is the highest scale in the grading level. However, in the U.S., 60 percent is typically an indication of failure. It was noted that some children who had gotten a grade of 70 percent on a test, displayed it to parents who were, in turn, very pleased. They were led to believe that their child was doing well in school and, as a result, they were often very proud of their children's success. Furthermore, it was noted that children sometimes took advantage of this lack of knowledge by asking their parents for rewards for sub-standard performance.

In a multicultural society, there is much interaction and association with other cultural and ethnic groups. However, it is well known that Bangladeshi parents prefer that their children associate only with other children from the Indian subcontinent. In fact, in New York City, many Bangladeshi parents look at Indian and Pakistani immigrants, who have been in the U.S. longer and have had some measure of success in this country, as role models, particularly for their children. In their larger community, however, there are immigrants of Hispanic or African American background. The area is economically depressed with very few, if any, Whites or European immigrants.

Bangladeshi parents in the community do not approve of interaction and association with Hispanic or African American children in the neighborhood. It is improper and considered deviant behavior. The general attitude of community members toward their Hispanic and African American neighbors is not positive. Bangladeshi adults believe Hispanic and African American youth are not well supervised and that their manner of dress and public behavior are offensive. Many parents and adults feel that when a Bangladeshi youth associates with members from these other cultural groups, they begin to act in the same way, dressing inappropriately, using vulgar language and showing disrespect to adults in the Bangladeshi community. Bangladeshi children are aware of the feelings of the adults in their community and they often use these feelings to their advantage.

Bangladeshi parents have no contact with Hispanic or African American families, thus, their attitudes are based on stereotypes and the result of a general lack of knowledge about and appreciation for Hispanic and African American culture. This indicates that not only is there a generation gap, but that there also exists a powerful cultural gap. This cultural gap stems mainly from parents' inability to value different aspects of other cultures, especially the culture of their new home. In this immigrant Bangladeshi community, adults are inclined to practice their traditional Bangladeshi cultural norms whereas many of their children,

as they are exposed to different aspects of U.S. culture, lose interest in their parents' traditions.

### Adult Education and Prospects of Change

Based on the findings of our research, we developed the following conceptual framework. It shows how a multicultural focus could assist immigrant parents in using appropriate discipline and in reducing the fear and ignorance of a cultural system that does not penalize parents for wanting the best for their children.

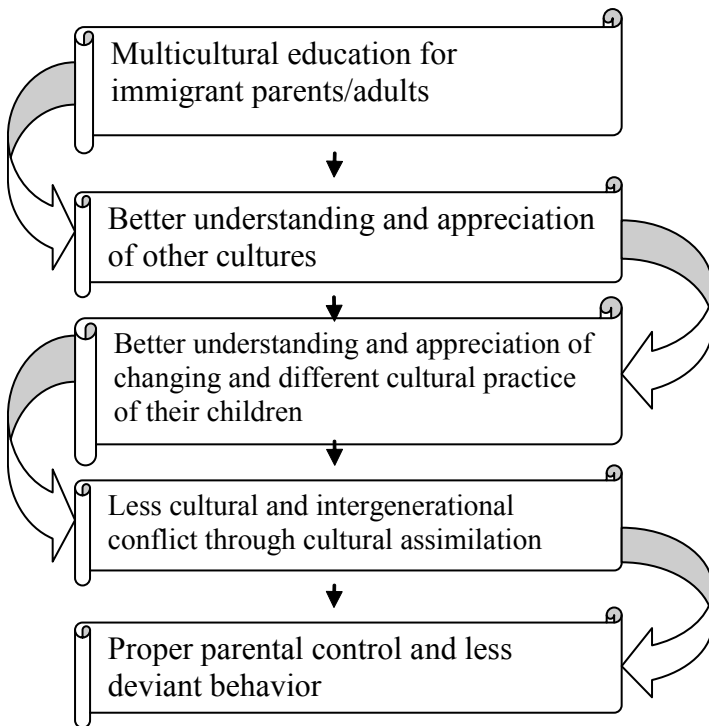


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework That Depicts How Adult Education with a Multicultural Focus Can Help Parents and Adults of an Immigrant Community to Properly Discipline and Guide Their Children.

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 argues that adult education with a multicultural education focus can help immigrant parents better understand and develop an appreciation for other cultures. As they begin to appreciate other cultures, they are able to bring a balance to their lives and, ultimately, to foster some compromise between two cultural systems: the system of their home country and the U.S. system. Understanding the U.S. system, rather than fearing it, will help parents reach a proper balance in effectively disciplining their children. Selected multicultural adult education courses for immigrant parents can address this issue, reducing the conflict and fear of the unknown that fosters inappropriate behaviors in children—behaviors that often result in difficulties arising in both the Bangladeshi and the wider community.

Based on the existing literature and findings in the research, we made an attempt to show how adult education can help immigrants learn and appreciate both mainstream U.S. culture and the culture of other immigrant groups. We pointed out earlier that a lack of knowledge concerning the U.S. system and culture leads the immigrant parents to be isolated in a new society. Since parental lack of knowledge about U.S. culture contributes to what is described as a generation gap, adult education can educate and guide parents to minimize that gap. When parents from different parts of the world come to this country as immigrants, many of them take English as a second language (ESL) classes, participate in different job training workshops, and go to different career organizations to look for jobs. In all of these settings, adult education can help immigrant adults to better understand and appreciate U.S. culture. In addition, different religious institutions such as churches, mosques, and temples could be considered as places to educate immigrants. For immigrant adults who do not speak English, adult education practitioners can provide information in their native languages. Adult educators should show respect to immigrant cultures, helping immigrants sustain the glorious parts of their own culture while assisting with an often challenging transition to U.S. behaviors and norms concerning parenting, education and the law. Other possible topics for discussion would include how rigid behavior and lack of cultural knowledge can be causal factors in inappropriate behavior by children, how an appreciation of other cultures helps family members build a brighter future, and how ineffective parenting skills can create a generation gap with its ensuing consequences.

It is ironic, that although the U.S. is a land of immigrants, and New York is a state with a large portion of recent immigrants, this research

did not locate any specific agency or organization that offered adult education for first generation immigrants. When immigrants live in the U.S., they ultimately must learn how to contribute to building the future of their new home. There is a need for adult educators to advocate for new U.S. immigrants. Adult education can offer community-based formal and informal programs, as well as undergraduate and graduate courses, especially in the area of diversity. Immigrant graduates can work with different organizations to help other immigrants learn about their new society.

Although there is substantial research advocating parental involvement (Yan & Lin, 2005; Heystek, 2003; Sheldon, 2003) and showing a strong relationship between parental involvement at home and children's performance in schools, we did not find initiatives that might help immigrant parents to guide their children in the education process. Adult education can provide printed materials in different languages that will help parents to understand the school system and ultimately contribute to the national, social, and economic development of the nation.

Adult education, especially with a multicultural focus, would be a great help to the immigrant community described in this research study. It would allow parents of children to become bilingual and understand how schools operate, how the social, economic and criminal justice systems work, while closing the various gaps between parents and their children. The outcome of such an adult education program would do much to assist parents in understanding their children's behaviors and to provide them with parenting options that assisting in negotiating cultural differences. Multicultural education as a concept and a process is both an old and a new challenge (Gay, 2004). It supports the concept that cultural liberty and the recognition of multiple identities are beneficial within and amongst cultures. We all have our own values and heritage that we should be able to adhere to and practice. Multicultural education could offer adult immigrant learners an idea of who they are in this new, larger, more culturally diverse society, and understand where they come from, and what they can become. It also can help adult immigrants better understand how and what role they can play in shaping the social, political and economic systems of their new home

### **Conclusion**

Multicultural adult education is an important tool for all groups in

U.S. society; however, it is an essential tool for preparing immigrant families to learn and appreciate the society in which they live. It is also essential in helping immigrant parents to bridge the generation gap which is perceived to be a contributing factor in the deviant behavior of their children. In this paper, which includes a research study of an immigrant community in New York City, we have tried to share our commitment to the values and beliefs of the Bangladeshi community, while at the same time offering some suggestions as to how the adult community might overcome some of the obstacles they face regarding citizenship and effective parenting. We truly believe that there must be a way to provide these experiences to adult immigrants in a way that allows for new learning while maintaining their traditional values and beliefs.

We would like to conclude this paper with illustrations of some personal experiences that have affected our lives and which we believe demonstrate our commitment to the importance of multicultural education for children and adults. These experiences also allow us to share our belief that there are many types of prejudice and discrimination, and not all are evident in immigrant communities. But these experiences have had a lasting impression upon our lives and we believe with education they can evolve into positive changes. There is the story of a man who never permitted his wife and children to join any birthday or wedding parties. Why? Because he believed that if his family members joined in these parties, they would lose and/or devalue their own culture and religion. Another story involves a 14-year old girl in New York City who attempted suicide. Why? Because of the rigid mentality of her parents and their lack of appreciation for and understanding of other cultures and religions. In this atmosphere, she felt hopeless and lost. Last there is the father who taught his 4-year old daughter to view people from other religions as pigs. Other examples include prejudice and discrimination based on gender, minority group affiliation, disability and or physical size.

These attitudes and behaviors are learned and can be unlearned, for they are not supportive of a culture that promotes human diversity—a civil society and an educated society. Adult immigrants, and all adults, deserve an opportunity to develop the characteristics and the skills necessary to be productive citizens. They also deserve the opportunity to learn new parental skills to help them bridge the generation gap, as well as the cultural gap. As the gaps diminish, the deviant behavior of children will lessen and conflicts and barriers to true community building will decrease. It is our hope that the stories told in this research



will encourage other researchers to pursue studies of other communities, assisting them in ways they can identify and bring about positive change in their communities. It is our belief that immigrant families across this nation are struggling to find out who they are and how they fit within the larger community of immigrants that make up the U.S. We believe the key is adult education that fosters a commitment to diversity.

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