

Non-formal encounters between Israeli families and African immigrant families foster lifelong learning competence

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the contribution of informal encounters outside the school walls between local Israeli families from “Waldorf Education” and immigrant families from Africa from formal state education and explore the consequences of these encounters on the development of lifelong learning competences. Research questions are as follows: In what way do non-formal encounters lead to the development of lifelong learning ability? What are the challenges and consequences of non-formal activity for research participants, families and educators from the pedagogical, social and personal perspectives?

Design/methodology/approach – The research uses a qualitative-interpretive case study approach that allows for in-depth observation of the phenomenon within the context of reality to understand the case, a non-formal encounter between two groups of parents from different cultures, languages and educational attitudes. In this case study, it is possible to generalize from the local to the global and examine processes, actions and behaviors in the studied case (Creswell *et al.*, 2018; Yin, 2009). This empirical study allows description, analysis, understanding and explanation of the challenges and actions in organizing and holding non-formal encounters from personal experiences as a first source.

Findings – The analysis of the data brought up two main categories that represent the actions and insights from the non-formal encounters for developing lifelong learning competences: create a personal dialogue to strengthen trust and confidence; foster parental involvement. Non-formal encounters between families from different cultural-social backgrounds may promote lifelong learning competences such as tolerance, inclusion and openness. However, external intervention by a social association is required to organize, support and operate them.

Research limitations/implications – The research’s limitation was that it was conducted in the country’s center. Therefore, the findings must be considered in the context in which they are presented and not generalized to other regions or communities from other cultures in Israel and the world. A few limited encounters may affect the author’s interpretation of the study data. In addition, expressions of “social desire” that may be expressed in interviews must be considered.

Practical implications – This study emphasizes social activism. Despite all the differences and tensions, creating an equal space in the families’ encounters is essential for lifelong learning. The immigrant parents participated in decision-making, the stages of organization and the activities themselves during the encounters. This partnership strengthened their commitment and responsibility. Because they are a powerless minority group, it should not be assumed that two encounters will improve their self-confidence. The proof is that fewer participants came to the last encounter. Education experts must maintain consistency and continuity in forming partnerships with immigrant families over time and as part of lifelong learning.



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Social implications – The non-formal encounters between the two groups of families create an atmosphere of equality: all are parents of children seeking to inculcate humane and social values. The collaborative atmosphere contributed to the understanding that closeness overpowers distance. Everyone is troubled by similar issues of parenting, enjoyment of children, nutritious food and a shared desire to be good citizens while maintaining tolerance, reciprocity and respect.

Originality/value – Non-formal encounters are actively performed to create belonging when the “others and we” join together for the community and the children. This is an extensive, open and accessible platform for strengthening social consciousness and understanding the connection between teaching, culture and society to promote equality in education. This study will allow schools to expand the boundaries of communication with parents and initiate additional activities with other social groups to foster children’s integration. It will enrich the academic knowledge about connections and communication of educators, families from Israel and immigrant families in developing a partnership in the school to promote lifelong learning.

Keywords Non-formal encounters, Immigrant families, Lifelong learning competences, Multicultural school, “Waldorf education”, Social associations

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Global migration creates tensions and uncertainty in the daily routines of citizens in the countries receiving immigrants. The formal and informal education systems need to adapt to the absorption and integration of immigrants from minority groups, especially non-Jewish African immigrant families - the subject of this study. In this study, the group of participants is referred to as “non-Jewish African immigrant families,” which includes refugees and asylum seekers as one part while ignoring the political status of these concepts. The Israeli Government determined that the Compulsory Education Law (1949) also applies to the children of foreign workers of compulsory education age who stay in Israel, regardless of the formal legal status of their parents. They are not entitled to rights and support. Multicultural schools must provide educational-pedagogical-social adaptation so that children acquire literacy skills and lifelong learning competences.

Studies ([Eliyahu-Levi and Ganz-Meishar, 2018, 2023](#)) have examined the interactions between educational institutions and immigrant families regarding the integration of children into formal education. These studies found that exposure to cultural knowledge, tradition, customs and difficulties that families face helps educators develop educational and pedagogical activities more adapted to success in studies and promoting achievements. They also strengthen the parents’ involvement in the school.

Non-formal education studies ([Eliyahu-Levi and Ganz-Meishar, 2016, 2019, 2020](#)) showed the importance of young volunteer activities for children from immigrant families. The immigrant children expressed positive perceptions regarding the volunteers from informal education. The children positioned the volunteers as those who help them, promote them in fulfilling their ambitions and enable them to break through the neighborhood’s boundaries.

In this study, I seek to create another discussion between the two spaces, formal and informal education, to develop lifelong learning competences through non-formal encounters outside the school. These take place out of desire, free choice and interest. The participants are parents from the dominant majority group - Israeli families with Israeli citizenship and Hebrew as their mother tongue with parents from weakened minority groups – African immigrant families who lack political and economic status and stability and do not speak Hebrew as their mother tongue. The study aims to strengthen lifelong learning competences through non-formal encounters between two groups of parents with the support of the school and two social associations.

Theoretical background

Migration and international mobility between countries affect residents who face tensions and struggles in economic, social and cultural contexts. Thus, the human social diversity of cultures, languages, religions and customs is present on the streets, neighborhoods, educational institutions and workplaces.

Studies (Suárez-Orozco *et al.*, 2015; Prasad and Segarra, 2023; McAuliffe and Khadria, 2020) explain that social integration helps immigrant families from marginalized minority groups to conduct their lives and be more protected in the foreign environment. The society that receives immigrants must maintain social equality and show tolerance, inclusion, mutual respect and understanding. Awareness of differences in language, behavior, tradition and external appearance of skin color is essential to integrating and living according to local norms and culture. The theoretical review includes two subjects on which this study is based: the African immigrant families in Israel and developing competence for lifelong learning.

The African immigrant families in Israel

The State of Israel is a destination country for international immigration, receiving mainly Jewish immigrants. Recently, following the fighting in Ukraine–Russia, Jewish and non-Jewish Ukrainian citizens were taken in to stay in the country illegally and without the need to apply for political asylum until the situation in their country is clarified (Population and Immigration Authority, 6.3.2023). The State of Israel, mainly between 2006 and 2013, received tens of thousands of immigrants and non-Jewish asylum seekers from Africa. Most of them stay in Israel illegally without deciding or resolution regarding their situation, and they are considered asylum seekers without economic, social and cultural rights, despite Israel signing an international convention of the UN Refugee Committee in 1951. Israel avoids deporting them, but they live on the social boundaries and in difficult living conditions while suffering from general, occupational and family instability. Immigrants experience a sense of alienation and social non-belonging and face explosive issues in majority-minority relations in a political-ethnic context, and not necessarily due to knowledge gaps in language, culture and technology or due to the changes in life patterns and behavioral norms and visibility of their skin color (Yaron *et al.*, 2013).

The concepts of the family unit and household management in the context of immigration may have a different meaning than the one known and familiar to the majority group in society. Following the migration, the connection with the nuclear and extended family was severed, and as a result, the immigrants were required to adapt to loneliness, to a sense of foreignness and to deal with economic and social difficulties. To create protection and respond to the absence of a nuclear family, immigrants live next door to residents from the same country of origin and status when they have an everyday basis of culture, lifestyle and religion. This partnership between immigrants contributes to a sense of belonging and reciprocity and helps raise children, solve administrative procedures and find a job. In terms of the education systems in Israel and the world, there is a trend of segregation. Immigrant children study in culturally homogenous schools established as a response to the community (International Organization for Migration, 2022; Kugler and Price, 2009; Schleicher, 2017).

Developing critical intercultural competence for lifelong learning helps educators strengthen the ability to exercise discretion adapted to issues in majority-minority relations, such as violating a minority group's rights. Critical cultural sensitivity will allow both majority and minority groups to examine the problems without succumbing to conservative cultural perceptions and political and populist rhetoric. Therefore, the role of educators is to

act as neutral cultural mediators with critical cultural competence to formulate an adapted personal and social pedagogical response for the benefit of the children. Immigrant families face a language barrier, inability to communicate in the most basic way, lack of job security, long working hours, objections and lack of cultural and social adaptation and poverty. These situations reinforce the foreignness of the families and deepen the disadvantages that immigrant children experience compared to children from the majority groups. The damage is to the mental, health and nutritional well-being of the children, to their literacy in their mother tongue and to dealing with loneliness, alienation and fear of transience and uncertainty (Tienda and Haskins, 2011; Van Hook and Glick, 2020).

The formal and non-formal education systems, humanitarian organizations and associations must respond to international migration. They are required to protect against racism to maintain equality and avoid damage to social justice. The education systems promote a shared life of tolerance, inclusion and mutual respect while providing equal opportunities to children and their families for social integration, creating social cohesion, health, security and in the future for employment and the acquisition of higher education (McAuliffe and Khadria, 2020; Wittenberg, 2017; Magner, 2016).

Non-formal education and African immigrant families

Learning in non-formal education focuses on relationships between people without formality and exact roles. The focus is on partnership. This learning aims to cultivate personal abilities to enrich and develop cognitive and social skills after school, especially in the children's free time. Kahane (1997) studied youth movements and their adaptation to the eight elements of informality and their crucial role:

- (1) voluntarism;
- (2) multiplexity;
- (3) symmetry;
- (4) dualism;
- (5) moratorium;
- (6) modularity;
- (7) expressive instrumentalism; and
- (8) symbolic pragmatism.

This study examines non-formal activities within associations and social organizations that collaborate with schools.

Non-formal education helps develop cognitive and soft skills, focusing on socio-cultural skills. The non-formal learning environment can improve the integration of children from immigrant families into the receiving society. It was found that non-formal education provides children from immigrant families with experiential learning that can empower them personally. This research aims to strengthen the importance of non-formal education and its activities for social integration (Yeasmin *et al.*, 2022).

Participation in non-formal education activities is based on choice, interest and children's motivation. These activities are available, more attractive, less structured and stricter than school curricula. They occur in different environments from the traditional school framework, such as youth movements, community centers and supplementary education (Bekerman *et al.*, 2006; Romi and Schmida, 2009).

The researchers found a relationship between children's participation in non-formal education and socioeconomic factors such as parent's education and family income. Hence,

the participants in the activities are children from well-established families with medium-high socioeconomic status. Children from low socioeconomic status deny participating in these activities due to their parents' lack of knowledge, experience and financial support (Bouffard *et al.*, 2006; Golden *et al.*, 2017). Economic considerations also prevent participation from immigrant families whose parents require the children to help run the house, care for the younger siblings and improve the economy. Parents can also fear that activities in various informal education centers, such as youth movements, may undermine parental authority.

Activities organized in the format of non-formal education can significantly increase the children's motivation for learning and their involvement in developing skills for learning ability and transverse abilities of an affluent mother tongue, linguistic literacy, thinking skills, improvement in personal resilience and good citizenship education (Simac *et al.*, 2021; Stăncescu *et al.*, 2018).

The activities of the parents' encounters in this study emphasize the role of non-formal education in promoting equality in education. It is important to emphasize that the meetings reflected informal educational frameworks, even though formal educational actors were also involved. Family encounters aim to create a supportive community built through egalitarian relationships, which may positively affect all partners' well-being. Still, the majority group, which supports the minority group, should avoid taking over and managing the encounters.

Developing competence for lifelong learning

Multicultural educational framework and beyond must examine their conduct, especially in a personal and social context as citizens (Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competencies for lifelong learning, Text with EEA relevance). These competencies should be reflected in the school's vision, policies, curricula and activities in and outside the school, including references to immigrant parents. Foster listening to others' points of view, opinions and beliefs. Create relationships with the parents that are not only based on the transfer of knowledge but also on understanding the trauma they experienced and the difficulties in the new life. Encouraging positive feelings toward the "other" and dissolving the concepts of "us and them" that cause tension and violence will enable the children's families to integrate into a society that accepts (Leask, 2009, 2015; Deardorff, 2009; Green, 2014).

The purpose of the culturally responsive teaching approach is to strengthen the abilities and self-awareness of educators for children with a different cultural background than their own. They must know how to exercise discretion and formulate positions and activities so that the teaching is based on the cultural experience and knowledge of the children while creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. This approach does not focus on teaching methods such as learning about the history and heroes of a minority group, celebrating ethnic holidays and gaining knowledge about customs, food and more. Instead, it aims to change the educator's awareness of integrating the cultural context of the children into the teaching practices. In the culturally responsive pedagogy approach, educators must continuously self-evaluate their beliefs and behaviors and recognize their limitations in learning about themselves and the cultures of others. Cultural knowledge connects the children's previous knowledge with new knowledge while building a social-emotional connection and creating a safe space for them to learn (Hammond, 2015; Hoffman, 2018; Gay, 2010).

Educators from the majority group who carry encounters between cultures among the parents should create a safe environment of trust and mutual appreciation. Understanding differences between people and groups creates everyone's uniqueness and will allow collaboration. Teachers must be sensitive to parents' educational views, learn and listen and

will enable them to make their voices heard. Commitment and responsibility are how to exercise appropriate judgment in cross-cultural interactions with the parents and the children. The research literature presents three conditions for the implementation of an effective collaboration of parents in the school to promote the well-being of the children and help them in the future to integrate and become citizens who know how to act in a local and global context strategic planning of the implementation of the collaboration; support for parents, including resources and training; and supporting community involvement, including resources and training (Baquedano-López *et al.*, 2013; Pharaoh and Li, 2022).

Collaboration between parents and the school is based on tolerance, inclusion and reciprocity. It helps them set goals and accept joint responsibility for advancing children in studies and cultural integration processes in the new cultural and linguistic environment. This may encourage a new understanding of promoting equity in education while establishing other social, educational and cultural skills. Also, parents can demand a good education for their children (Francis and Roux, 2011; Hubbard, 2019; Richmond *et al.*, 2020; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Interactions between different social groups may lead to a discourse that has manifestations of violence, racism, submission and silence. Developing a concept of peace education that operates according to the principles of “Restorative Justice Pedagogy” promotes self-awareness toward others and the ability to deal with stereotypes and prejudices effectively (Lee and Walsh, 2017; Ratnam, 2020; Ogilvie and Fuller, 2016; Danesh, 2011). In these encounters, teachers are exposed to the treasures of family and cultural knowledge that can be integrated into classroom instruction. Applying “Restorative Justice Pedagogy” skills outside the classroom may help all partners acquire knowledge about the other and know how to recognize and act in an activist manner for a better, just and equal society that enables collective well-being for every citizen (Aceves and Orosco, 2014; Chinn and Bennett, 2020; Francis and Roux, 2011).

The activities of informal education depend on the local, social and national context, and they indicate flexibility and adaptability to social and economic changes, especially during periods of crisis or at social turning points. The activities tend to focus on subjects complementary to the official curriculum of the Ministry of Education, such as sports, art, language acquisition, science and volunteering in the community. The learning methods are different from what is expected in traditional formal education. Participation in various activities can contribute to children’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. They help strengthen academic skills, self-confidence and creativity. The purpose of the activities is to consolidate social values from direct and authentic experience in the community, developing responsibility and commitment to others through shared experiences in Israel and around the world. In addition, there is growing recognition in the European Union and the world that informal education can provide acquiring skills and strategies for lifelong learning that will help children be absorbed in the labor market and the higher education system in the future (European Commission, 2015; Lipnickienė *et al.*, 2018; Affeldt *et al.*, 2017).

This study focuses on creating collaboration between parents from the majority group and parents from marginalized minority families in society outside the school. Moreover, non-formal encounters strengthen competences for lifelong learning, bridge cultural-social differences, decrease feelings of alienation, reduce racism and enhance the understanding that parents and children accept their ethnic identity. The encounters may allow teachers to free themselves from traditional pedagogical principles and reduce the convention that the parents must take responsibility and initiate contact with the school. The parents will show initiative to overcome various structural and social obstacles that prevent them from

initiating interaction and freeing up time and resources to benefit the activities. The study aims to examine the contribution of non-formal encounters between Israeli families whose children are studying as part of anthroposophical education and African immigrant families and their consequences for strengthening lifelong learning competences.

Methodology

The study uses a qualitative-interpretive case study approach that allows for in-depth observation of the phenomenon within the context of reality to understand the case, a non-formal encounter between two groups of parents from different cultures, languages and educational attitudes. In this case study, it is possible to generalize from the local to the global and examine processes, actions and behaviors in the studied case (Creswell *et al.*, 2018; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009).

This empirical study allows description, analysis, understanding and explanation of the challenges and actions in organizing and holding the non-formal encounters from the personal experiences as a first source of the parents, the teachers and the program centers of the two social associations. Using several research tools makes it possible to collect data and create an intensive description as a key to understanding the phenomenon being studied: observations and personal interviews with the centers, the teachers and the parents who organized and participated (Zur and Eisikovits, 2015).

This study examines the shared experience in non-formal encounters between Israeli families whose children study in “Waldorf Education” and African immigrant families and its implications for developing lifelong learning competences in a personal family, social community and school environment. Study questions:

- Q1. In what way do non-formal encounters lead to the development of lifelong learning ability?
- Q2. What are the challenges and consequences of non-formal activity for research participants, families and educators from the pedagogical, social and personal perspectives?

The study context

School

The “Soul Group,” enterprising manager Orna, with the “Elifelet” Association, citizens for refugee children (www.elifelet.org), approached the multicultural school in south Tel Aviv. They initiated the “Soul Connections” Program, formulated with the multicultural school. This program of non-formal encounters is based on the educational concept of “Waldorf Education” in the anthroposophical schools that work to build social values, pluralism and human brotherhood while developing a constant dialogue with the human environment in all its aspects and nuances. In the spirit of the anthroposophical approach, the goal is to create an open space in nature for play, creative handicrafts activities, listening to music, authentic face-to-face meetings and intimate discourse out of natural desire and motivation in both communities: families with children from Israel and, from African immigrant families.

The non-formal encounters process

- Educators at school presented the project to the committee of immigrant parents. They asked not to have encounters in the Israeli homes families to avoid jealousy and tension with their children.

- An introductory meeting was held at school with twenty-eight immigrant parents. After an experiential activity of getting to know each other, the participants were divided into discussion circles to allow parents to share and the school and associations to learn about the parent's and families' needs. At the end of the activity, the parents received an explanation about the program "Sol Connections" and expressed their desire to participate.
- The "Sol Group" association – invited parents from "Waldorf Education" schools from the country's center to participate in the project. In the introductory activity held in the evening at Zoom, 35 parents and 12 children participated. According to Orna, "Sol Group" association, the parents expressed a desire to join because:

These parents are active in what is going on at the school, so for them, this is a natural and important move to work for connections between cultures and between families.

- Two WhatsApp groups were opened separately for each group of parents, and after the first encounter and introduction, they connected the two groups. A joint group that is still active was opened. Voice messages in Tigrinya, English and Hebrew, as well as photos and videos of the shared experiences, were mainly sent.
- Non-formal encounters were set for Friday afternoons and before Shabbat. The school pre-arranged transportation for immigrant families to the "Yarkon Park" in Tel Aviv. The school and the families from "Waldorf Education" brought equipment for handicrafts and mats. They organized creative activities, playing and singing with all the partners by learning basic skills such as rolling hand movements, tying threads, embroidery and more in a relaxed and free atmosphere. The African immigrant families shared customs and foods, so a traditional coffee "Buna" ceremony was prepared, and everyone ate traditional breadcakes, cookies and fruit.
- Another encounter was held two months later in the same place with a similar number of participants.
- In the last session, immigrant parents requested to move the participants to a park close to where the children's families lived, but there was a minority of participants.

Participants

The participants are 72 families, teachers and organizers: 34 parents who immigrated from Africa as a minority group with a different cultural background, dark skin, wearing festive clothes for a social event, less familiar with the park, Tigrinya mother tongue, low socioeconomics and different educational perceptions.

27 parents of local families, born in Israel, and their children attend schools in "Waldorf Education" according to the anthroposophical approach, have bright skin, wear sports and modern clothes, know the Park, Hebrew mother tongue and have moderately high socioeconomic status.

Three program centers, five educators and the management team: the school principal and two female assistants from a school for children from African immigrant families in the country's center (Table 1).

The study tools

The data were collected through three research tools:

- (1) observations;

Table 1.
Participants' table

Participants	Age	Gender
34 African immigrant parents	30–42	20 F 14 M
Children	10–12	
27 “Waldorf Education” parents	35–46	17 F 10 M
Children	14–16	
Three program centers	42–52	3 F
Five educators	33–44	5 F
School principal and two female assistants	48–54	3 F

Source: Author creation

- (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews that took place after participating in the “Soul Connections” program for about 1 h with a focus group from the three groups and with the program centers; and
- (3) documents such as invitations and verbal and voice correspondence in the WhatsApp groups.

Three open observations were conducted in non-formal encounters when the researcher acted as an observer in a participant position who did not have a role or was a member of the groups being studied. To completely understand the group’s activities, the researcher participated as an active observer and held natural conversations with the participants, writing shortlists, observing and participating in the activities while maintaining a distance to create objectivity. Thus, the researcher created access to all participants in different situations, with the participants controlling the information provided to them (Merriam, 2009; Adler and Adler, 1994; Kawulich, 2005).

The observations were carried out during the entire encounters, up to 2 h, and the participants’ role in promoting lifelong learning competences was examined while discovering familiarity, creating communication, multilingualism, non-verbal behavior and situations of uncertainty. Spontaneously selected recordings were made and then transcribed.

The interviews were conducted with a focus group of up to ten participants from all groups of parents, totaling 20 participants. In addition, interviews were held with five teachers, the program centers from the association, the school principal and the management team. The discussions took place face-to-face, on Zoom, in a phone call for 40 min. The participants were asked to comment on the program’s contribution to developing lifelong learning competences:

From your point of view, explain the purpose of these non-formal meetings. Describe the extent of the program’s contribution to your future life and your children’s. What is the plan, and how?

The children asked short questions using common words and clear language to overcome the obstacles of a lack of command of Hebrew and a lack of understanding of the parents. After showing photos from the encounters - how do you feel? What was? What does she say? Why? What is difficult? (Griffin and Care, 2015).

Data analysis

The data was analyzed using content analysis, focusing on what the participants said rather than how they said it. Content analysis allows a look into the inner experience. It focuses on

the words and descriptions of the three groups of participants: families, educators and the program's initiatives, reflecting their actions, feelings, beliefs and knowledge. Moreover, content analysis allows for describing the data and drawing valid conclusions in a broad context (Krippendorff, 2004).

According to the phenomenological approach to analyzing the findings, cross-referencing the data helped formulate and clarify the meanings and create generalizations. The recurring phrases and ideas were mapped and grouped into general categories (Merriam, 2009; Englander, 2020).

Limitations of the study

The research's limitation was that it was conducted in the country's center. Therefore, the findings must be considered in the context in which they are presented and not generalized to other regions or communities from other cultures in Israel and the world.

A few limited encounters may affect the author's interpretation of the study data. In addition, expressions of "social desire" that may be expressed in interviews must be considered.

Ethics

The ethical rules regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents and the data were carefully maintained. Avoid offensive questions and give participants a choice whether to answer. The Participants' names and described educational and social settings are aliases. Participation in the non-formal encounters was done out of personal preference and inner belief in their success, and mandatory attendance was not required.

Chief Scientist Approval File Number, Ministry of Education – File No. 13627.

Findings

The analysis of the data brought up two main categories that represent the actions and insights from the non-formal encounters for developing lifelong learning competences: create a personal dialogue to strengthen trust and confidence; and foster parental involvement. Non-formal encounters between families from different cultural-social backgrounds may promote lifelong learning competences such as tolerance, inclusion and openness. However, external intervention by a social association is required to organize, support and operate them.

Create a personal dialogue to strengthen trust and confidence

The pedagogical meetings at school always discussed promoting children's academic, social and educational achievements. The pedagogical discourse changed to organize and activate the social initiative to create non-formal encounters between families. It was now addressed to the children's families. The discussion was based on how the teachers are recruited to be part of their activities to deal with the parents' challenges.

The principal of the school, Sigal, participated in the administrative process:

I wanted to bring something different to teaching at the school to strengthen families. I realized that I needed help from associations because teachers do not have time and that I should permit teachers a personal choice without judgment on whether to participate. Only the teachers who know the families can contact them and recruit them. There were many meetings with the teachers, and we decided to contact parents with a high level of Hebrew discourse, inquiries from work, and motivation. If a mother is a single parent and has two children and works two jobs, we do not contact her. With the investment of the teachers and educational counselors, things would have happened. We sent the parents a video in Tigrinya to explain the program.

Sigal testifies to her managerial perception that promoting collaboration with immigrant parents is essential to change the school “to bring something different.” According to her, the significant partners in the program’s success are the teachers, and she should invite them and open an inclusive approach to “allow personal choice” of participants. She believes in the teachers and their professional ability to know which families are suitable for such an activity and how to convince them. At the same time, as a manager, she knows this is a new task for the teachers. The pedagogical discourse takes on a more social, economic and emotional tone. She demanded that the teachers consider the family and its lifestyle, not just the child sitting in the classroom, his academic achievements and his class participation. The social association’s activities and their contribution to the program’s implementation are significant. However, collaboration with the school was necessary to adapt the way of contacting and recruiting the parents to promote social pedagogical approaches. This is how Anna, the management commandments, described:

The founder of Orna, the Soul Connections program, asked me to create tutoring families; Israelis will adopt a family from Eritrea. She plans to strengthen personal and family connections, not satisfy humanitarian needs. I strongly objected and explained that tutoring sessions bridge the gaps between the weak and the strong. The social pattern of I give, and you receive does not promote the program’s goals. To learn together in these encounters, it is forbidden to reflect on differences.

Anna revealed the social tensions and power relations in the overt and hidden relationships between the majority group and the minority. Her words imply that the social association had positive intentions but did not sufficiently understand the importance of a discourse released from the motives of paternalism and the dominant culture’s power. They required critical cultural sensitivity to enable a safe and protected environment for immigrant families as a basis for creating trust, collaboration and open communication. Gila, the teacher, supports the essential program, but she focuses on the change required in her role as a teacher:

I believe in collaborating with the parents just like I do with my children. This is important, but there were many ladders to build. To reach accessibility to recruit the parents, I need good citizenship in front of them, and I do not have the time and energy. It is not enough to say that it is essential to contact the parents, and I was worried about the workload.

Gila emphasizes her concerns: “There were many ladders to build.” The teacher openly reveals the gaps and her efforts beyond the teaching hours in the classroom. She knows goodwill and motivation are not enough. As a teacher at a multicultural school, she emphasizes, “I need good citizenship” to deepen the relationship with the parents. She is aware that she must develop citizenship competence and be active. However, producing activities that require additional personal resources is complex.

It can be learned that the pedagogical, educational and personal discourse is based more on critical thinking and human sensitivity for adjusting the activity with the parents. It was also found that despite the challenges, the teachers cooperated. They understood the need to expand their role to a social and civil space; education is lifelong and not separated from society.

Foster parental involvement

Meetings between two groups that have never met and have differences create tensions and situations of discomfort and strengthen conflict issues. Therefore, finding common themes to help promote lifelong learning is imperative. The non-formal encounters aim to develop the intercultural ability to create collaboration between people from different cultures while

maintaining mutual respect, openness and tolerance. The parents' families from "Waldorf Education" and the social associations helped plan and carry out the activities. As described by Mother Hadas from "Waldorf Education":

We chose a craft activity to create indirect communication and not just through words. We thought the immigrant parents knew traditional handicrafts but only had essential experience. Handicrafts from the "Waldorf" connect to the essence of people and their inner strength. I saw how children and parents move between the activities. They sat on the grass, children facing children, adults with children, and parents of both groups talking. Everyone wanted to be kind. One father turned to me for help, and I felt no tension or anything like that. There is fun in joint creation. There is a product. Something that can be hung on the wall and seen and strengthen its belonging to me.

Immigrant families are familiar with the traditional education approach that examines the children's abilities through academic achievements, marks and works. In the encounters, for the first time, they were exposed to craft activities that were not part of the school curriculum. Hadas' words: "One father turned to me for help, and I felt no tension or anything like that." The parents felt that the environment was supportive, inclusive and without a paternalistic attitude toward them. The atmosphere was joyful. All partners sat together in the same area and were helped by various materials, such as cotton wool, knitting sticks, a cycle of clothes and more.

The teachers met with the parents outside the school for the first time. The activities' style and purposes revealed to the teacher new ways, which they had not experienced before, to promote personal and social skills. The commonality between the parent groups was based on something other than activities related to achievements, development of thinking and technological and digital knowledge. It was independent of the parents' education and their previous professional and academic experience. These activities use the initial handicrafts, and success lies in the belief that making a personal product strengthens personal and social confidence.

The African immigrant parents were required to release time and resources to participate in the encounters. Elm, the mother, explained the change needed in parental involvement:

I am coming, but some parents wanted to go and did not come; I do not know why they are angry. I do not work. It was fun to bring our bread. Everyone ate. I made it at home. Another mother brought coffee. The school brought a bus for everyone, and we went to the park. Dad helped make coffee on the fire. After I came home, I could not sleep. I was so happy. I was tired but not going to sleep because I was pleased.

Elm adds authenticity to her description, which includes happiness. She did not give up; she decided to participate and was not ashamed. She prepared the bread in advance, and there was a coffee ceremony. Her attitude is to work to get out of the world of loneliness as an immigrant from a minority group. She was allowed to strengthen the visibility of the culture of her country of origin and express her cultural identity. Elm notes that some parents did not come due to personal anger, dealing with economic and social problems and lack of knowledge of Hebrew. The benefits of these encounters are that the positive experiences with high emotional intensity will affect personal resilience later in life.

In the Israeli reality, African immigrants must deal with hostile attitudes and expressions of verbal and physical violence, racism and exclusion, as well as the risk of deportation. These non-formal encounters invited the mother to leave the political and social criticism aside and focus on her feelings. According to Becky:

My children also enjoyed the meetings. I have much love for how you behave and speak nicely. I constantly see Israelis in the supermarket, at work, and on the street. They do not talk like that.

There are many looks, swearing, and no respect. I am afraid they might want to hurt me. There were good people here. I felt good and talked to everyone without shame. Now I am happy; I have only good words. If they send a note from school, I come all the time.

The mother is not afraid to share the harsh reality she experiences in her day-to-day life with Israeli society. It seems that Israeli citizens' behavior is based on political views and policies of religious, social and economic conflict.

The intercultural activities while playing together created good family communication, reducing pressures and tensions. When the immigrant parents feel secure, they will find appeals and motivation to promote collaboration with the school in the belief and hope that the goal is shared.

Despite the efforts of all the partners, Dalit, the teacher's words also show the difficulties that, for her, we will not be able to solve through informal meetings:

The meetings were on Friday afternoons, and I arrived before Saturday. It was complicated in terms of the house, but I came because it was important to me. I was excited to see everyone; I knew the parents were surviving, and they came. They dressed festively and sat at the stations alone and with their children. The relationship with the parents is essential to me, but we have stepped up here. The parents trust me more and are positive, but still, it is not enough. Some parents still complain and are angry with me that their child is studying in school.

The teacher's words indicate that she showed understanding and commitment to work for the children's families and was moved that the parents were active and were seen as an essential event in their eyes. However, her words show her low expectations of the parents from the minority groups: "The parents are surviving, and they came." The teacher assumed parents from a minority group would lack motivation and desire to be involved in the activity due to economic difficulties and social and cultural gaps. She was surprised that they tried and collaborated. Her words emphasize the power of social hegemony against the minority group. The lack of trust in the understanding that the parents from the minority group can be active and resemble the parenting patterns familiar to her indicates a lack of critical cultural sensitivity. Her words, "We have stepped up here," underline the differences that originate in stereotypical situations vis-a-vis the minority group. Her discomfort is in the new activities she promotes for lifelong learning in meetings with Israelis. The teacher emphasizes the words of the parents' complaint instead of their ability and skills and the potential of the non-formal encounters to support their involvement. Her words may hide her discomfort in the face of the activities of the associations.

Participation in intercultural meetings depends only on people. When the activities are self-directed in a "Waldorf education" approach and based on a desire to find similarities and let differences exist, intercultural competence can be developed throughout life.

Discussion

This study illuminates the social and cultural aspects as a significant anchor in the school routine to strengthen lifelong learning competences. The first study question asked how non-formal encounters between different groups of parents lead to the development of lifelong learning among the participants: parents, teachers, management and social associations. The study's findings show that these encounters were perceived as essential and that activities should be taken to activate them again. Collaboration with social associations helps and supports a school and promotes communication between different social groups.

The families of the children from Israel belong to a unique group whose children study in "Waldorf Education." This educational alternative to the well-known traditional framework

emphasizes the child's development from the initial elements of body, mind and spirit from birth to adulthood. The immigrant families usually meet with the Israeli community in public places where the hierarchical order is prominent. In contrast, the non-formal encounters between the two groups of families create an atmosphere of equality: all are parents of children seeking to inculcate humane and social values.

The collaborative atmosphere contributed to the understanding that closeness overpowers distance. Everyone is troubled by similar issues of parenting, enjoyment of children, nutritious food and a shared desire to be good citizens while maintaining tolerance, reciprocity and respect.

The school receiving immigrant children must depend on more than its common resources to develop sensitivity, understanding and pedagogical responses to linguistic, social and cultural diversity. The school must open the door to additional collaborations to promote lifelong learning competences beyond what is done in the classroom. Non-formal encounters can help determine a holistic policy for educating children from immigrant families and encourage principles of "Restorative Justice Pedagogy" (Oliver and Boaz, 2019; Ogilvie and Fuller, 2016; Kakos and Teklemariam, 2021).

The non-formal encounters are based on humane and emotional foundations beyond the routine communication at school. Social solidarity and human commitment are skills that were expressed in the meetings. The participants tried to put the socio-political context and the economic and social difficulties aside. They wish for goodwill, mutual respect and enjoyment out of a desire to act for social change toward minority groups (Chinn and Bennett, 2020). However, we should not ignore hidden tensions among the teachers that reflect positions of power and ability between the majority and the marginalized ethnic minority on cultural, social and religious grounds. These non-formal encounters may allow the teachers to examine their actions again in the context of social-cultural sensitivity, even in a limited way.

Parents whose children study in "Waldorf Education" came to the encounters with higher motivation and insights than the teachers because they are working to enable social solidarity - "parents for parents." Intensive parenting also takes care of other children. The responsibility is not only toward their children but also to be concerned and invest time in other people's children. This parenting style is related to the desire to create an equal society and a belief that the upbringing and future of the child depend on the well-being of the children of the future (Bendixsen and Danielsen, 2019, 2020). It is possible that the teachers had their first experience with this social solidarity of "parents for parents." Therefore, they expressed reservations in their words and did not even advance the activities to another step or try to maintain continuity.

The teachers helped and supported the parents' recruitment, and adapting the activities to their needs created a tolerant and respectful atmosphere. Indeed, these activities will affect classroom teaching and the development of lifelong learning competences. The focus of these encounters is the social value of a game, an informal dialogue with music and food prepared by the participants in the background, creating a pleasant, inclusive and good atmosphere. These basic and essential social activities can help create closeness and intimacy to open, get to know, be there for each other and promote the integration of immigrant families in the country.

The second study question concerns the challenges and consequences of non-formal encounters in a pedagogical, social and personal context.

In the non-formal encounters, an attempt was made to create a new space for learning. Each participant came with their family anchors, invested and gave as much as possible without judgment. The loneliness of the non-Jewish immigrant in Israel should not be

ignored if the culture of his country of origin is excluded and opposed in a political and religious context. Both groups of parents aimed to consolidate social acculturation, focusing on the familiarity of social identity and common contact to establish belonging. However, in the third meeting, the response from the immigrant parents weakened. It is possible that there were objective reasons. Maybe the parents expected a more intense and meaningful involvement in their daily lives. The social associations and the families from “Waldorf Education” should have attempted another step of formulating other actions beyond playing and staying together (Wilchek-Aviad and Timsit, 2018). Following the positive interaction at the meetings, the parents’ desire to demand social integration when their children study with Israeli children in the urban area became stronger (McAuliffe and Khadria, 2020; Prasad and Segarra, 2023). It is also possible that other voices demanding integration interfered with the decisions of the immigrant families and prevented them from joining. When the parents demonstrated parental competence and expressed their voices, the teachers were exposed to a closer understanding of them. The teachers are the agents of significant change in the school. Therefore, they must adopt insights from these non-formal encounters and adapt pedagogical content knowledge to the culture of the country of origin, the literacy of the home and their lives (Tulloch and Moore, 2018; Yuan, 2018).

Strengthening social belonging through non-formal encounters with the local community is a significant resource for immigrants. These encounters enable the possibility of filling knowledge gaps, skills and strategies and provide a holistic point of view for teaching and learning (Siarova and Graaf, 2022; Koster *et al.*, 2020).

The aim of establishing social family connections beyond the activities has yet to be realized. Meanwhile, young people from “Waldorf Education” who participated in the encounters showed commitment and initiative. They come every Friday to teach at the school for enrichment activities, study assistance, personal contact and enjoyment. The social association continues to work on creating projects to benefit immigrant families. When the school year began, the children received pencil cases sewn in collaboration between Israeli women and women from African immigrant families.

The challenge of integrating immigrant children into society is present in educators’ routines. Non-formal encounters are actively performed to create belonging when the “others and we” join the community and the children. This is an extensive, open and accessible platform for strengthening social consciousness and understanding the connection between teaching, culture and society to promote equality in education (Deardorff, 2009; Cochran-Smith, 2005; Gorski, 2012; Francis and Roux, 2011; Ogilvie and Fuller, 2016). It is essential to have a preparatory before the non-formal encounters to relieve tensions and anxieties and to enable good experiences that will create more interactions in the future (Shelton, 2003; Xavier and Fahrni, 2019).

The study will allow schools to expand the boundaries of communication with parents and initiate additional activities with other social groups to foster children’s integration. It will enrich the academic knowledge about connections and communication of educators, families from Israel and immigrant families in developing a partnership in the school to promote lifelong learning. Further research may focus on developing activities beyond understanding but on joint activities for the local and global society.

Implications for teaching lifelong learning

This study adds to and enriches previous studies examining parental involvement in school (Eliyahu-Levi and Ganz-Meishar, 2018, 2023) and the contribution of non-formal education (Eliyahu-Levi and Ganz-Meishar, 2016, 2019, 2020) to the importance of joint educational

institution and social organization activities for integrating immigrant families into the receiving society to life extended learning.

This study emphasizes social activism. Despite all the differences and tensions, creating an equal space in the families' encounters is essential for lifelong learning.

The immigrant parents participated in decision-making, the stages of organization and the activities themselves during the encounters. This partnership strengthened their commitment and responsibility. Because they are a powerless minority group, it should not be assumed that two encounters will improve their self-confidence. The proof is that fewer participants came to the last encounter. Education experts must maintain consistency and continuity in forming partnerships with immigrant families over time and as part of lifelong learning.

All participants in the non-formal encounters experienced profound personal satisfaction and meaning. The educational need to foster these positive experiences that may help children solidify their identity as citizens in a local and global context for lifelong learning.

The findings demonstrate that participants could consolidate new knowledge and refine their perspectives and judgments, driven by their responsibility and commitment to children. This collaborative approach promotes a society based on tolerance, inclusion and social activism, instilling confidence in the process.

Educators must stress the transformative power of non-formal encounters set in natural contexts and reveal life's human and social sides. They have the potential to dissolve social, economic and cultural tensions, offering a promising outlook for positive change.

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