Honduran refugee students: Cultural background profiles

Language

Spanish (official)
Amerindian dialects including Garifuna, Tawahka, and Castilian

Teaching in the Classroom

Access to education varies across social classes in Honduras. Honduras did not have a national education system until the late 1950s and prior to the reform, education was exclusively for elite families who could afford private education. Government reforms in the late 1950’s created a national public education system.

At least one-quarter of people from Honduras cannot write or read, although education reform led to free and mandatory schooling for children between seven and fourteen years of age in Honduran society. Less than half of those that enroll in public schools follow through primary level, whereas middle and upper-class families generally send children to private schools. Because of the disparity, you will likely notice that some Honduran students will have little or no reading or writing skills.

Family/School Engagement

When greeting people from Honduras, educational degrees are important. Addressing a family member by their respectful title, such as “Dr., Mr. or Mrs."

Honduran culture is more relaxed and you will find that modes of speaking are generally informal and punctuality is more lenient. The close family ties and communalism culture means
that families will be more involved in students’ lives. Thus, when addressing any particular issue with students, it is normal to speak with family members to better understand the situation or seek insight into offering alternatives, solutions or ideas.

While Hondurans are more private in nature, they can also be more expressive and vocal in conversation, using hand gestures or tapping someone they are speaking to in order to get their attention. Pointing fingers can be offensive or seem rude, so it is better to greet Hondurans with open hands in a general direction or with a widely acceptable “thumbs up” to indicate that everything is OK.

Hondurans generally avoid casual conversation topics around work or partisan politics. The Honduran coup of 2009, which maintains family and community divisions, largely characterizes modern politics, so it is better to avoid introducing these topics of conversations early on. Other conversations to avoid with families when engaging with students, parents or extended family involve criminality or corruption, as many Hondurans may have encountered some aspect prior to immigrating.

**Culture, Gender and Family**

The majority of Hondurans are Roman Catholic or Protestant, with other less commonly practiced religions. The predominant ethnic groups include Mestizo, which are mixed American and European descent, as well as a small percentage of Amerindian, black and white.

However, dress can be more formal or conservative in Honduran culture and brightly colored clothing, particularly amongst women. There is a great deal of emphasis on community, and traditional and religious festivities and customs are important in the life of Hondurans.

Hierarchically, roles of men and women are more traditionally viewed. The strong gender roles reflect the dominant male role of power and authority with decision-making. Women are perceived to have primarily domestic roles as well as the understanding that is less appropriate for women to be unaccompanied in public.

Additionally, because of the collectivist culture rather than Western individualism and the large average family size, Hondurans can be more personal in space, where it is common to speak and stand in close proximity to one another. It is not uncommon to see friends holding hands with one another or expressing affection openly in public. Younger Honduran students may be more affectionate than other newcomer populations.