# BEYOND REFUGE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION OF FORCIBLY-DISPLACED YOUTH

by

Jason R. Swisher, B.S., M.Ed.

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Committee Members:

Duncan Waite, Chair

Rolf Straubhaar

James Koschoreck

Nathern Okilwa

## DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Patricia E. Swisher, who reminded me how proud she was of me throughout my doctoral program, and who was called to peace before I earned my degree. Grandma selflessly devoted her life to those in need of love and belonging.

*Naturaleza Criminal*
*por Francisco X. Alarcón (2002)*

soy
un nómada
en un país
de sedentarios

una gota
de aceite
en un vaso
de agua

un nopal
que florece
en donde
no se puede
ni se debe
florecer

soy
una herida
todavía viva
de la historia

mi crimen
ha sido ser
lo que he sido
toda mi vida

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Page**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....v

LIST OF TABLES ..... xi

LIST OF FIGURES ..... xii

ABSTRACT ..... xiii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .....1

Context of the Study .....2
Background of Refugee Education .....5
Problem Statement .....6
Purpose of the Study .....7
Research Questions .....7
Theoretical Framework .....8
Critical Theory .....8
Critically Framing Refugee Education in U.S. Society .....11
Significance of the Study .....15
Key Terms .....16

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....18

Socialization .....19
Support for Identity, Cultural, Psychological, Social, and Emotional Issues .....20
Support for English Language Acquisition .....23
Qualification .....25
Subjectification .....29
Partnership and Leadership .....29
International Schools .....32
Facilitating Change for Emancipatory Education .....35
Leading for Inclusion, Cohesion, and Shared Responsibility for Education .....37

Agentic Leaders Create a Welcoming Environment and Value Refugees....45
Partnering with Families and Community Organizations....49

III. METHODS....52

Overview of Qualitative Research Approach/Design....52
Site and Participant Selection....54
Data Collection....61
Semi-structured interviews....62
Focus groups....62
Participant observations....63
Data Analysis....63
A postcritical ethnographic approach to analyzing data....64
Validation....66
Delimitations....67

IV. NARRATIVE....70

Defining and Identifying Refugee....71
Classification....71
Stratification....73
Emotion....75
Uncertainty of Selves....76
Identity and belonging....77
Autonomy....80
Continuously Examining Psychosocial Educational Aims....81
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs....82
Inclusion and Empathy....85
Social and Emotional Learning....90
Self-Sufficiency and Self-Advocacy....92
Agency for Change....94
Continuously Examining Organizational Aims....97
Enrollment and Attendance....98
Assimilate to Graduate....99
Language Proficiency....102
Separate to graduate....108
Listening to Stories and Acting with Perspective....112
Making Time to Listen....113
Learning About the Effects of Forced Displacement on Families....117

Oppression beyond borders.....121
Parental perspectives.....122
Familial power shifts.....125
Learning About Culture.....127
Learning About and From Individuals.....133
Proving oneself and representing others.....137
Care and love.....138
Learning About Self.....142
Valuing and Developing Community.....144
Cultural and Sociopolitical Influences on Educational Communities: Contexts and Precedents.....147
Why Focus on Refugees? What About Everyone Else?.....150
Secondary Migration.....152
Recognizing Dis/connections in Support and Resources.....155
Support Beyond the School District.....158
Getting Creative With Funding.....163
Responsibility for Systemic Change.....169
Theorizing Change: How to Change the Approach to Educating Refugees.....173
Change in Belief.....174
Professional Development.....176
Change in Policy.....178
Elected officials.....179
The number of refugees and level of diversity in a school matter.....181
Change in Practice.....184
Change in Outcomes.....185
Leading Local, State, National, and International Change.....186
Summary.....189

V. DISCUSSION.....191

Revising Definitions.....192
Integrating Love, Care, Curricula, and Community.....194
Community Development is a Local Process.....195
Philosophies of Respect and Self-Challenge.....197
Establishing a cultural vision.....199
Making time for storytelling.....202
Valuing difference.....206
Publicly displaying care.....207
Prioritizing Social and Emotional Learning.....208

Encouraging friendships .....210
Providing counseling .....211
Supporting Refugee Parents.....212
Reforming Curricula and Teaching .....218
Addressing language.....222
Addressing biases.....223
Educating Educators .....225
Creating awareness across all levels of influence.....226
Building empathetic staff.....230
Treating educators well.....232
Connecting Educators, Refugees, and Resources .....234
Separating or integrating refugee students.....235
Geographically tracking refugees .....237
Partnerships.....239
Sustaining Systemic Change.....242
Funding .....243
Reconsidering Why and How We Educate.....246
Socialization Requires Social Systems .....250
Redefining Professional Development .....254
Measurement.....257
Integrating Leadership, Policy, and Practice .....260
Collectively-informed policies.....261
Authenticity in practice.....264
Interpreting Democracy and Equity.....267
Changing International Perceptions of the United States .....269
Closing Thoughts.....271

APPENDIX SECTION.....275

REFERENCES .....285

## LIST OF TABLES

**Table** **Page**

1. The international-, national-, and state-level participants in my vertical case study .....56

2. The local-level participants in my vertical case study .....57

## LIST OF FIGURES

**Figure** **Page**

1. Data collection and analyses process for building a theoretical framework from vertical case study research.....60

2. Picture of syllable type matching assignment.....104

3. Screenshot of quiz question with confusing answer choices.....106

**ABSTRACT**

As the record number of forcibly-displaced persons in the world continues to rise, more people of differing origins are sharing space and trying to live together. Prolonged displacement has turned into permanent resettlement and citizenship. To reflect this geopolitical transformation, education too must transform. In this vertical case study, I used a postcritical ethnographic approach to explore abstractions, practicalities, impediments, and assets proffered by my research participants to illustrate what an educational transformation should and could look like via a theoretical framework for emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth in mainstream schools.

I engaged in interviews, focus groups, and participant observations to gather data from 34 participants across local, state, national, and international levels of educational influence, resulting in a diverse collection of perspectives. I represented the results of the study in a narrative and discussion upon which I aim for educators to build. An emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth must begin with an examination of ourselves, our systems, and our societies and be sustained by leadership, policies, and practices based in love, empathy, listening, learning, and community.

# I. INTRODUCTION

As armed conflicts, genocide, politically charged economic situations, and natural disasters have continued around the world, more displaced persons than ever before are searching for better lives in new and unfamiliar countries. Roughly 40% of the 79.5 million forcibly-displaced persons worldwide are children (UNHCR, 2020). People have fled homelands, often due to oppressive circumstances, and arrived in countries that are typically foreign to them. The ways in which they make meaning of their world have roots in subjugated ground. As they learn how to navigate their lives in new countries, forcibly-displaced persons continue to be othered by those who have different conceptions of truths within the boundaries of their communities and codified in their laws (Lingis, 1994).

Fleeing persecution only to arrive in slightly less oppressive environments, forcibly-displaced children (herein used interchangeably with the term "refugees" for the sake of brevity) are susceptible to having limited or perhaps no opportunities to be liberated from repressive circumstances. Bounded potential can be due to educational systems that were not built with refugee students in mind and have been modified primarily to meet the goals of socializing refugees to conform to dominant social norms and qualifying students to speak the native language and pass exams.

Potts (2003) described an emancipatory model of education as one that "(1) explicitly addresses social oppression, situating community problems (and targets of primary prevention) within historical context, (2) acknowledges students as agents for social change, and (3) affirms . . . cultural resources for healing and social transformation" (p. 175). Such a model is rooted in the belief that educators and students,

together, can "engage in a counterhegemonic praxis of creating new transformative and liberatory possibilities" (Bautista, 2018, p. xiv), which can address the forces that lead people to reluctantly leave their home countries in search of better lives. I conducted this research to investigate possibilities to define an emancipatory education for refugees and to explore what might be considered as theoretical and practical components of an emancipatory educational framework. Context is important to any study, and especially relevant to my study, as I conducted it in the United States from 2019 to 2020—a time in which policies regarding immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have been intensely debated in the sociopolitical media landscape. I begin by describing the current sociopolitical milieu in which forcibly-displaced youth exist.

## Context of the Study

The historically high numbers of forcibly-displaced persons have tested many countries' policies regarding immigrants, refugees, and asylees. Leaders of some countries, such as Germany, have worked to welcome and assist as many asylum seekers and refugees as possible (De La Baume, 2017). Leaders of other countries, such as Bangladesh and Algeria, have forced people to return to their place of origin (Fullerton, 2015), occasionally at gunpoint (Domonoske, 2018). In recent history, the United States has been situated somewhere between the extremes:

> The United States [has often been] sought as a destination for immigrants due to the perception that a good life can be had there, through education and hard work, not just for the immigrants themselves, but especially for their children. (Waite & Swisher, 2019, p. 23)

Such meritocratic discourse—resonant of the Protestant work ethic (Weber, 1958), and often reinforced by educators—has been embedded along with beliefs of competition, individualism, and self-promotion in what many have termed the American Dream

(McGinnis, 2009). However, the xenophobic and protectionist zeitgeist of the Trump administration and its influence on U.S. government policies and practices that concern non-U.S. citizens has caused some forcibly-displaced persons to lose hope of finding a better life in the United States (Amos, 2016).

In 1981, then U.S. President Ronald Reagan stated:

> Our nation is a nation of immigrants. More than any other country, our strength comes from our own immigrant heritage and our capacity to welcome those from other lands. No free and prosperous nation can by itself accommodate all those who seek a better life or flee persecution. We must share this responsibility with other countries. (para. 1)

In 2020, the viewpoint of the current U.S. president is much different. During his campaign, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump "call[ed] for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" (Johnson, 2015, para. 7). A year-and-a-half into his presidency, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Trump's proposed travel ban, posing heavy restrictions on entry to the United States from seven countries (i.e., North Korea, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, and Venezuela), five of which are of a Muslim majority (Inskeep & Horsley, 2018). In 2020, the Trump administration added six more countries to the travel ban: Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan, Eritrea, Tanzania, Sudan, and Nigeria (Rose, 2020). Trump has also referred to immigrants as animals (Hirschfield Davis, 2018), and to illegal immigration as an infestation (Graham, 2018).

Per the Refugee Act of 1980, the President, in consultation with Congress, establishes an annual fiscal year ceiling for refugee admissions. That number was raised from 85,000 for 2016 to 110,000 for 2017 by President Obama. Despite an unprecedented number of displaced persons in the world (UNHCR, 2018a), the ceiling was lowered by President Trump every year of his presidency: 45,000 for 2018, 30,000

for 2019, and 18,000 for 2020—"the lowest in the history of the U.S. refugee admissions program" (Congressional Research Service, 2019). Furthermore, nearly 100% of the ceiling had been reached every year before Trump took office (Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System, 2020). However, the United States has collectively accepted just 56.2% the number of refugees afforded by ceilings in the 4 fiscal years Trump has been in office.

The numbers of refugees accepted by the United States in fiscal years 2016 through 2020 were 84,994, 53,716, 22,517, 30,000, and 11,814 respectively—drastic declines in numbers that had heretofore been slowly rising since the start of the Syrian war in 2011 (Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System, 2020). In 2020, Trump issued an executive order granting individual states and municipalities the right to refuse refugees, thus allowing communities to self-segregate and further limiting the number of refugees permitted into the United States (Trump, 2019). Governor Greg Abbott of Texas—the setting of this study—was the first person to effectuate that right when he announced his state would not accept any refugees in 2020. Declaring "Texas has carried more than its share in assisting the refugee resettlement process" (Romo, 2020, para. 3), he insinuated that helping displaced persons was a burden of charity as opposed to an example of compassion.

Though many economic, sociocultural, sociopolitical, and geopolitical factors contribute to the existence of refugees, many factors can lead to better lives for refugees. Education is a vehicle to discover and elucidate those remedial factors, because teaching and learning can broaden people's thinking and social consciousness. Although education occurs in many settings, the bulk of support for refugee children comes via

school-based practices, because schools are where children in the United States spend most of their formative time away from home. My study focused on how we can improve the education of forcibly-displaced youth in schools because building the agentic capacity for school staff, students, and teachers (Fullan, 2015) is important to the success and well-being of refugee students. Educators can, and do, help refugees feel welcomed by supporting their cultural and social adjustment and by helping them address psychological and emotional trauma (McBrien, 2005). However, more research is needed to explore how educators and students can cooperatively participate in an education that includes elucidating and deconstructing the social inequities and oppressive systems that often create refugees so that the number of refugees in the world can be mitigated or eliminated.

## Background of Refugee Education

While the rates of refugees' enrollment in schools are not as high as rates of their nonrefugee counterparts (UNHCR, 2018b), a positive schooling experience is important for refugee children's academic achievement and mental health (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Alan, 2012) and can lead to a reduction in armed conflict (Thyne, 2006). Consequently, educators should be creating and sustaining positive schooling experiences for refugee youth. However, using a critical lens, I argue that we, as educators, are not creating and sustaining positive schooling experiences for refugee youth. Extant leadership, policies, and practices imply educators have not moved far beyond the perpetuation of routines that value refugee students for their contributions to schools' academic indicators of success rather than valuing them for who they are and who they can be.

In Chapter 2, I review and critique the research and practice concerning refugee education and emphasize that too much attention is directed toward the socialization of refugees so schools can meet the socially accepted requirements of academic achievement. Working toward the goals of socializing and qualifying refugee students is adequate for moving children through educational systems and maintaining the status quo, but not sufficient for changing it.

## Problem Statement

Most research in refugee education is concerned with socializing refugees into their hosts' societies and qualifying them to graduate from secondary school; such literature is necessary and helpful for that purpose. However, the current body of literature has insufficiently addressed how education can serve an emancipatory purpose for refugees—specifically those who attend mainstream schools. Some educators have acknowledged this purpose, and promising emancipatory educational practices for refugee youth have been implemented in some international schools (Bartlett, Mendenhall, and Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017; Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; Bajaj, Argenal, & Canlas, 2017; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Mendenhall & Bartlett, 2018). Nevertheless, as Dryden-Peterson and Reddick (2017) found, emancipatory education for refugees in international schools—schools that serve students who have recently arrived in the United States—yielded disillusioned high school graduates who, upon reflection, felt unprepared for the structural inequalities they encountered in postgraduation life.

Dryden-Peterson and Reddick stated that "refugees, by definition, have fled from conflict and persecution; however, for many refugees, the systems and structures of racism and inequality that confront them in the United States are different from what they

experienced prior to arrival" (p. 271). Given that refugees and immigrants are consistently interacting with native-born students in mainstream schools, emancipatory educational practices for refugee students in mainstream schools may help to "align students' in-school experiences with the realities that they may face post-school" (Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2017, p. 270). However, a framework for emancipatory education for refugees in mainstream schools is yet to be developed.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to develop a theoretical framework for emancipatory education for refugee youth in mainstream schools. I built upon research in the field of refugee education by deriving ways to improve the education of refugees and their nonrefugee counterparts. Improvements can come in the form of borrowing and modifying established practices, forming partnerships between schools and other organizations, and generating different concepts of what an emancipatory education for refugees could look like. By engaging stakeholders at multiple levels of policy and practice, I developed a framework driven by the voices of study participants. My study concludes with a theoretical framework that can serve as a paradigm for theoretical debate and practice.

## Research Questions

Three central questions guided my research:

1. What paradigmatic concepts or philosophical directions can inform a theoretical framework for emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth in mainstream schools?

2. What changes in policy, leadership, and/or practice are needed to realize a theoretical framework for emancipatory education in mainstream schools?
3. How can we make the changes needed in policy, leadership, and/or practice to realize a theoretical framework for emancipatory education in mainstream schools?

## Theoretical Framework

Wolcott (2009) proposed that a "theory is a way of asking (inquiring) that is guided by a reasonable answer" (p. 75). In simply choosing to study the issue of emancipatory education for refugees, I asserted several theories, because I made the following assumptions: (a) education for refugees needs improvement; (b) education for refugees is a problem worth investigating; (c) developing a theoretical framework for emancipatory refugee education in mainstream schools may be a way of improving their education; (d) the people involved in the education of refugees can help to conceptualize policies and practices that support the framework, meaning it is possible to "use the group to change the group" (Fullan, 2015, p. 261); (e) it may be possible to implement such a framework; (f) implementing the framework can prepare refugees to be self-determined change agents; and (g) refugees acting as change agents may help to disrupt the systems that contribute to peoples' forced displacement. The theories I used guided my observations and methodological choices and influenced my representation of the data.

### Critical Theory

The theoretical framework I used was composed of the assumptions I listed previously, and tenets of critical theory. With roots in Marx's criticisms of capitalism and

the nature of modern work, critical theory is a position focused on analyzing society to change the status quo (Foley, Morris, Gounari, & Agostinone-Wilson, 2015). While social criticism has surfaced in a variety of orientational perspectives, the origin of the term "critical theory" is widely attributed to the theorists of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School established in 1924 (Crotty, 1998).

Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) described critical theorists as "concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (p. 90). Accordingly, critical theorists are only interested in knowledge insofar as knowledge can inform social emancipation (Corradetti, 2017). Critical theory challenges the notion that knowledge can be objective and impartial. Instead, critical theory presumes knowledge is formed through historical and social processes and positioned in the minds of humans who cannot claim a detachment from their milieu (Horkheimer, 1937/1976). Thus, knowledge concerned with the issues listed previously cannot be a simple reflection of one's reality. It must be continuously formed and reformed through dialectics.

Giroux (1986) stated that "schools reproduce the logic of capital through the ideological and material forms of privilege and domination that structure the lives of students from various class, gender, and ethnic groupings" (p. 85). Giroux suggested that schools should be places where knowledge of such oppressive social practices is used to provide critical license to students, rather than suppress it. If schools are to serve an emancipatory purpose, then critical thinking is necessary. Horkheimer (1972) maintained that "critical thinking . . . is motivated today by the effort really to transcend the tension

and to abolish the opposition between the individual's purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality, and those work-process relationships on which society is built" (p. 210). If such an effort is not made, then teaching and learning can be defined by oppressive work-process functions that preserve the status quo and serve to provide hegemonically-warped interpretations of what it means to be a successful individual. For refugees, the status quo definition of education can mean no more than learning English, passing exams, and graduating from high school.

Viewing leadership, policy, and practice—and how they continuously inform each other—through a critical lens has led me to the following two sets of concepts related to refugee education: oppressive concepts that I think we, as researchers and educators, have found we need to fight against; and liberatory concepts I believe we have devised to fight for and with. These include:

Oppressive concepts:

- Reproduction of dominant epistemologies via privilege (Giroux, 1986)
- Commodification of students (Goodlad, 1984)
- Banking pedagogies (Freire, 1972)
- Constructing the other via dominant discourses (Lingis, 1994)
- Subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999)
- Epistemicide (Santos, 2014)
- Using commonalities to establish distance from and strangeness of the other (Simmel, 1950)

Liberatory concepts:

- Democratic education (Dewey, 1916)

- Interaction to negotiate meaning (Vygotsky, 1978)
- Measuring what we value (Biesta, 2010)
- Caring relationships (Valenzuela, 1999)
- Sociopolitically relevant pedagogy (Bajaj et al., 2017)
- Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995)
- Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005)
- Conscientisation (Freire, 1972)
- Capacity building (Fullan, 2015)

**Critically Framing Refugee Education in U.S. Society**

Emile Durkheim (1922/2000) stated that "it is society as a whole and each particular social milieu that determine the ideal that education realizes" (p. 61). U.S. society is no exception. Schooling—that is, education at a school—in U.S. society reflects the perceived collective ideals of the American people within a present context that has emerged from, and been layered with, ideals of societies past: "From [Vygotsky's] sociocultural perspective, schooling is a socially constructed process where meaning is negotiated through interaction" (Samson, 2016, p. 52). Although schools are not necessary for people to be educated, they often serve as formal spaces for social interaction and meaning making to occur. This meaning making can be negotiated within Biesta's (2013a) three domains of educational processes and practices:

- Socialization: Education serves to help students develop their identities by recognizing and becoming a part of social, cultural, and political practices.
- Qualification: Education qualifies students to do something of economic and/or social value for themselves and their communities.

- Subjectification: Education serves an emancipatory purpose in helping students discover how they can be their unique selves.

There are synergistic opportunities between the domains, but they can also conflict with one another (Biesta, 2013b), as I argue that they presently do regarding the education of forcibly-displaced youth. The economically-driven educational policies of American society as reflected in American schools—often influenced by private individuals outside of traditional political processes (Hursh, 2016) —have given precedence to the domain of qualification at the expense of the other two domains. Socialization is an often unintentional, undervalued, and hegemonically influenced byproduct of the methods we use to qualify—and in many cases, commodify (Goodlad, 1984)—students to quantifiably measure the production value of human beings. Subjectification is rarely the focus of schooling in the United States, and it can be erroneously perceived as qualification when it is assumed that what students are qualified to do is indicative of who they are or who they want to become.

While qualification is a significant role of schools and schooling, it should not be the only or even primary aim of school practices and processes. When qualification becomes the primary aim, educators become explicators who stultify students (Rancière, 1991) and both eventually know no other way of learning but to "sit and get" information. Prevalent pedagogies become orchestrated such that "the master always keeps a piece of learning—that is to say, a piece of the student's ignorance—up his sleeve" (Rancière, 1991, p. 21). This monological banking concept (Freire, 1972) is a positioning of teachers and students that limits educators to a policing, facilitating capacity, and limits students' sense of self-determination. Dewey (1916) stated that "the

currency of [qualification becomes] responsible for the emphasis put upon the notion of preparation for a remote future and for rendering the work of both teacher and pupil mechanical and slavish" (p. 110). Thus, the need for a pedagogical shift toward subjectification—an emancipatory project of education—has driven me to propose this study.

The generally Western perspective that "students' academic performance is primarily a matter of individual initiative and motivation" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 65) erodes the importance of the teacher. Valenzuela (1999) expressed that "an obvious limit to caring exists when teachers ask all students to care about school while many students ask to be cared for *before* they care about" (p. 24). School improvement, as with any other societal movement, is grounded in the relationships between people. Valenzuela (1999) stated that "relations with school personnel, especially with teachers, play a decisive role in determining the extent to which youth find the school to be a welcoming or alienating place" (p. 7) and "productive relations with teachers and among students make schooling worthwhile and manageable" (p. 30).

Unfortunately, "human interaction is not rocket science. It's far more complicated than that" (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 114). When strangers enter established groups, there can be power imbalances due to the groups' accepted and shared social patterns, norms, ontologies, epistemologies, and languages. Simmel (1950) suggested a group's awareness of their commonalities can cause them to focus on what they do not share with others, thus uniting the group in establishing the strangeness of, and distance from others. Although there are qualities shared by all people, the power of qualities to unite people becomes weaker as more people share those qualities (Simmel, 1950). For example,

from Simmel's (1950) perspective, humanity is very weak in terms of its power to unite. Intrusions can prompt residents in a society to become defensive and attempt to maintain the status quo instead of welcoming and learning from the intruders. Defensive or conservative actions can manifest as simply as the way people perceive and choose to approach or evade new neighbors next door, or as complex as the way they perceive and educate new refugees in schools.

Refugees are often subtractively assimilated in U.S. schools (Valenzuela, 1999). Subtractive assimilation occurs when foreign students are instructed in ways that direct them to conform to the epistemologies and social norms of the dominant society while simultaneously devaluing or erasing the epistemologies, social norms, language skills, and cultural identities that the students have brought with them (Valenzuela, 1999). In tandem with subtractive schooling is the concept of epistemicide—that is, the destruction of knowledge and ways of knowing of subordinated groups (Santos, 2014). Yet schools are not simply places where students are instructed: "Schools are also cultural and political sites . . . they represent areas of contestation among differentially empowered cultural and economic groups" (Giroux, 1986, p. 85). An emancipatory education requires those who educate refugees to consider the sociopolitical contexts and historical circumstances under which refugees have lived and are now living (Potts, 2003). Critical theory can assist educators and students in challenging educational thoughts and practices that perpetuate the status quo by illuminating ways context and history can shape the differing epistemologies of individuals.

Fonte (2000-2001) suggested that gender- and race-based dominant and subordinate groups vie for leverage in ways that make all facets of life political, and this

includes the education of refugee children who are often viewed as members of race-based subordinate groups in the United States. Political aspects of human behavior must be open to critique. Although valuable educative opportunities for refugees and natural-born residents in a shared space can arise and be embraced, situations of acculturation can take consciously and unconsciously oppressive turns, even when established residents have the best of educative intentions. Taking a critical theoretical approach to my research allowed me to examine historical and current sociopolitical contexts and link their relation to policies and practices that are stated in one way but perhaps manifested in another.

## Significance of the Study

No one should be forced to leave their home. Yet the number of refugees in the world is unprecedented and growing (UNHCR, 2017, 2018a), and the current body of scholarly literature insufficiently addresses how education can serve to abate (and eventually eliminate) the circumstances that contribute to the creation of refugees. The significance of my study is rooted in the assumption that when people learn about issues of oppression, systemic marginalization, and how hegemonic actions shape the world, they may become agents in a sociopolitical dialogue to dismantle the ideologies behind the actions that create the circumstances that produce refugees. It may take decades for momentous change to happen, but the conversation should move forward now for future generations to benefit. My study propels theoretical scholarly research, pragmatic pedagogy, and educational policy development forward by fostering a creative conscientisation (Freire, 1972) of its participants and readers.

## Key Terms

*Conscientisation*: "The process whereby people become aware of the political, socioeconomic and cultural contradictions that interact in a hegemonic way to diminish their lives" (Ledwith, 2005, p. 100).

*Culturally relevant pedagogy*: "An attempt to create a schooling experience that enables students to pursue academic excellence without abandoning their cultural integrity" (Howard, 2001, p. 136).

*Emancipatory education*: "(1) Explicitly addresses social oppression, situating community problems (and targets of primary prevention) within historical context, (2) acknowledges students as agents for social change, and (3) affirms . . . cultural resources for healing and social transformation" (Potts, 2003, p. 175).

*International schools*: For the purpose of this study, schools that primarily serve nonnative-born students who have recently arrived in a host country; sometimes referred to as newcomer schools.

*Mainstream schools*: Schools that primarily serve native-born students.

*Praxis*: The application of theory into practice (Freire, 1972).

*Qualification*: Qualifying students to do something of economic and/or social value for themselves and their communities (Biesta, 2013a).

*Refugee*: **"**Someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so" (UNHCR, 2018c, para. 1).

*Socialization*: Helping students develop their identities by recognizing and becoming a part of social, cultural, and political practices (Biesta, 2013a).

*Sociopolitically relevant pedagogy*: Develops "a critical consciousness—by . . . giving youth the opportunity to form an oppositional consciousness, [and] also giving them tools to analyze social location, their own experiences, and the distinctions between school requirements and authentic learning vis-à-vis their future aspirations" (Bajaj et al., 2017, p. 260). This type of pedagogy cultivates "critical consciousness around global inequalities and transnational migration; (2) [creates] formal and informal avenues for reciprocal learning between families/communities and schools; and (3) support[s] and care[s] for the material conditions of students' and families' lives" (Bajaj et al., 2017, p. 258).

*Subjectification*: Helping students discover how they can be their unique selves (Biesta, 2013a).

## II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many terms have been used to describe people who were forced to emigrate from their home countries. These terms include refugees, migrants, immigrants, displaced persons, asylum seekers, and stateless persons. While there are many distinctions between the terms—and those distinctions often determine the services and protections those so labeled are eligible to receive—all children have a right to an education (UNHCR, 2010). Therefore, I chose to include texts in my literature review that concern children who were forcibly-displaced from their home countries, regardless of how they have been labeled. For the sake of brevity, I will use the term refugee to encompass all such students.

Though the literature includes research conducted in all areas of the world, most was published in Australia, Europe, and North America, not because I was searching for literature from those locations. Although I organized much of the literature into the domains of socialization, qualification, and subjectification (Biesta, 2013a), the research lies in the overlap of those three domains in terms of its overall educational goals—that is, the practices and processes in one domain can and do serve the purposes of other domains. Thus, we should consider the holistic connections between the literature in this review, and not interpret any purpose as independent of another. That said, researchers and educators tend to prioritize the practices of socializing refugee students to meet the goals of qualification (academic achievement). Reference to emancipation in the literature about refugee education was scant. Given that my intent is to develop a theoretical framework for the emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth, I end this chapter with an overview of literature regarding educational change to facilitate

emancipatory education generally, and to improve the education of forcibly-displaced youth specifically.

## Socialization

The socialization purpose of education serves to help students develop their identities by recognizing and becoming a part of social, cultural, and political practices (Biesta, 2013a). When it comes to the education of refugee children in Western countries, much of the scholarly literature addresses teaching the English language and includes practices aimed at socializing refugees into their hosts' societies. Under the umbrella of socialization, authors use terms such as assimilating (Birman & Tran, 2017), acculturating (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017; Kennedy & MacNeela, 2014), cultural transitioning (Makarova & Birman, 2015), adapting (DeCapua, 2016), adjusting (Birman & Tran, 2017; Brenner & Kia-Keating, 2016) and integrating (Ager & Strang, 2008; Berry, 2005). All such terms come with varying descriptions and interpretations, yet all are still typically embedded in discussions related to a primary goal of academic achievement (qualification). Also within the scope of socialization, researchers used multiculturalism (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016) and interculturalism (Catarci, 2014) as concepts to describe how educators can and should socialize refugee children in schools.

Although socialization is important, the amount of literature concerning socializing refugee students far exceeds the amount of literature addressing their qualifications (Biesta, 2013a). Educators are good at teaching kids to be like them. As we review the existing research, we should keep in mind the following: "The status of being a dominant discourse enables [an] ideology to be considered commonsense practice" (McGinnis, 2009, p. 63). However, *should* educators aim *primarily* to socialize

refugees into Western ways of living and learning, and are current methods of socialization appropriate? What do the aims and methods indicate in terms of hegemony, neocolonialism, exceptionalism, and other omnipresent Western ideologies that inform the perpetuation of systems—the U.S. education system and others—that dominate, exclude, and oppress refugees (McWilliams & Bonet, 2015, 2016)? Such ideologies have often informed the actions of leaders in and of many nations—including the United States—that have created the circumstances for refugees to exist in the first place (Haines, 2010).

**Support for Identity, Cultural, Psychological, Social, and Emotional Issues**

Being a refugee is often traumatic (Heptinstall, Sethna, & Taylor, 2004; McBrien, 2005; Shaw, 2003) and "most teachers neither have sufficient knowledge nor competence to deal with the psychological problems their students struggle with" (Pastoor, 2015, p. 252). Problems stem from fleeing one's home country due "to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3). Often, this forced migration is war-related (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016). "Unable or unwilling to return their countr[ies] of origin" (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3), asylum seekers find an intermediate country where they are often (dis)placed in camps while they apply for refugee or asylee status and wait—sometimes for years—until they are finally resettled either in the country of their first arrival or another country. It is not surprising that as many as 54% of refugee children have posttraumatic stress disorder and up to 30% suffer from depression (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011). Sadly, "interventions that combine education

programs with trauma healing techniques or that integrate healing activities in a school curriculum are rare" (Burde, Kapit, Wahl, Guven, & Skarpeteig, 2017, p. 641).

A stable schooling experience is an important protective factor in alleviating posttraumatic stress and depression in young refugees (Fazel et al., 2012; Nasıroğlu & Çeri, 2016). Additionally, Thyne (2006) showed that higher secondary school enrollment and literacy rates could reduce the likelihood of civil conflict in any country, rendering schooling for refugee "students with limited or interrupted formal education" (DeCapua, 2016; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010) extremely important.

Unfortunately, only 61% of refugee children attend primary school, 23% attend secondary school, and only 1% enroll in institutions of higher education, compared to a respective 91%, 84%, and 36% globally (UNHCR, 2018b). Educational leaders—and the global public, more generally—should be disturbed by the discrepancies between these numbers. Although education may not be necessary for self-determination and mental health, many who immigrate to the United States believe that it is (Bozorgmehr & Douglas, 2011; Daha, 2011; McGinnis, 2009; Mossayeb & Shirazi, 2006; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). McWilliams and Bonet (2016) found that Burmese and Bhutanese refugee youth "saw themselves as agents of their communities, charged with the task of becoming educated in order to return to their people to relieve their suffering" (p. 160). Given that many have been forced from their homes under political duress, refugee youth must realize that they can be sociopolitical actors who work to eliminate the circumstances that produce refugees. Supporting this realization is the responsibility of educational decision makers and other educators.

Considering that some immigrants have never been in a classroom before, they may not be aware of how U.S. schools function, or how people typically interact within them (Birman & Tran, 2017) or outside of them; neither might their parents. Fruja Amthor and Roxas (2016) noted that "the desire to be accepted, belong, and be heard [are] fundamental human need[s] and especially exacerbated in youth and those who have to transition from home countries to a new one" (pp. 170-171). In attempts to meet those needs, refugee students learn the social, cultural, political, and other norms and practices of their host countries while having to unlearn some of what they already know (Jackson, 2014). Educators' failure to acknowledge refugee students' social and cultural identities can lead to a devaluation of students' social capital. Valenzuela (1999) described this as subtractive schooling.

Subtractive schooling can be manifested in many ways, including, but not limited to: dress code policies that prohibit students' expressions of cultural identity or promote the dress of the dominant culture; behavioral policies that seem appropriate for the dominant culture but may include punitive consequences for those who are accustomed to different social norms; and the general speech, conduct, and tacit behaviors of school staff and students that may be conducive to the development of environments that exclude students who are new to the country. Promoting a "complex, positive, and flexible sense of identity depends not only on the individual youth's desire for ethnic identification, but also on the positive possibilities of recognition allowed by the larger context of reception" (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016, p. 161). Thus, educators in positions of power over students must take the first caring step by closely analyzing institutional policies and practices for possible rules and actions that marginalize refugee

students (Makarova & Birman, 2015), while also recognizing and welcoming refugees' differences as assets to be cultivated.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (Bitew & Ferguson, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995) is an oft-cited approach that can work to combat subtractive schooling. Culturally relevant pedagogy can be described as "an attempt to create a schooling experience that enables students to pursue academic excellence without abandoning their cultural integrity" (Howard, 2001, p. 136). However, there is no refugee culture. Therefore, culturally relevant pedagogy may support refugees in terms of constructing positive, caring relationships (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009) and applying specific cultural referents to learning, but it does not address the sociopolitical issues of becoming a refugee.

A culturally relevant pedagogy still resides in a system designed to absorb and socialize refugee students into it, and socialization is a branch of colonization because it involves one group being forced to conform to another group's norms. Something more is needed. Perhaps refugees can help to change the systems responsible for producing refugees, instead of becoming a part of those systems. Perhaps refugees can discover and continuously form their unique identities, and express them in ways that help to conceptualize an emancipatory education in which a culturally relevant pedagogy is not a tool to be implemented, but an inherent element in the comprehensive totality of education.

**Support for English Language Acquisition**

In the United States, capitalism, commodification, standardized testing, and other merit-based ideologies have pressed educators to appreciate students only for their

academic abilities and production values (Goodlad, 1984). Too, communication is often a barrier for refugee students to justify their academic aptitude when they are expected to learn, participate in discussions, and present oral and written information in a new language (De Jong & Harper, 2005). Because English fluency is a strong predictor of academic engagement and performance (Han, 2012; Kim & Suárez-Orozco, 2014), and refugees' scores on high-stakes tests are subsumed under label of English language learners (ELLs), refugees are compelled to assimilate and speak English as quickly as possible. However, "in many cases, refugee children have experienced limited or interrupted schooling, leading to low literacy skills in their native language" (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016, p. 160). It is no surprise that the bulk of the literature regarding the education of refugees deals with teaching and learning English as a new language. The scope of research that informs theories and practices for English language teaching is also broad because it can be applied to groups other than refugees. What is surprising, however, is that few studies discuss what and how we can learn *from and with* refugees as opposed to what and how we can teach *to* them. (I discuss these few studies later in this chapter.)

Within the repository of research-based literature and practices that educators can draw upon to help refugee students learn English, there are established organizational-level programs, such as the Chicagoland Partners for English Language Learners (CPELL), that provide frameworks and iterative processes for building system-wide capacities to teach ELLs (Israel, Goldberger, & Heineke, 2017; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). There are also established classroom-level programs, such as the Mutually Adaptive Learning Program (MALP), that focus on learning via culturally relevant

conditions (providing content relevant to prior experiences), processes (collectivistic learning), and activities (contextualized and scaffolded lessons) to engage students with limited or interrupted formal education or SLIFE (DeCapua, 2016).

Outside of established programs, there are many widely held beliefs and practices for how to teach English as a new language. Given that details of English language teaching are outside the scope of this study, I will not delve into such beliefs and practices, but I will mention some as they arise under the umbrella of other topics that are relevant to my line of inquiry. I recognize that it is important for refugee students to able to communicate, but I am also aware that they "are mostly positioned as language learners despite the fact that the complexities of their situations as newcomers go far beyond language acquisition" (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016, p. 163). My contributions here mostly lie beyond the complexities of language barriers.

## Qualification

Dryden-Peterson (2016a) analyzed the presettlement educational experiences of refugees in four countries of first asylum and described them as discriminatory, with teacher-centered pedagogies and extensive language barriers. U.S. schooling experiences cannot be described in a much better light, given that "test preparation and rubrics have replaced relationships, respect, and true reform" (Rodriguez, 2012, p. 27). Much of the research on refugee education indicates that when socialization is adequately underway, educators can begin qualifying students to do something of economic or social value for themselves and their communities. In my review of the scholarly literature, I found myself agreeing with Faltis and Valdés (2010), who stated that:

> At times, [the literature regarding qualification of refugees] is overly concerned with helping teachers learn relatively simple strategies for making academic

> content understandable to English language learners. This literature also tends to essentialize immigrant students, refugee students, and English language learners, treating them as if they all need the same social, language, and educational resources, rather than recognizing the complex variation within these groups. (p. 289)

Assimilationist perspectives can be felicitous for teachers because they feed into many teachers' preconceived notions of how students learn. The more refugees can be treated homogeneously, the less work others must do to understand and learn from and with them. Colonizing people and disqualifying their knowledge in favor of exerting dominant epistemologies can be easier than living with them and exploring unknowns as learners in partnership, but the societal benefits of the latter will remain unknown so long as we do not explore new paradigms of knowing. Collectively, the literature suggests that "a tension exists between refugee youths' expectations for educational opportunity and the reality of narrowed pathways through which those opportunities are realized" (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016, p. 166). Working toward the goals of socializing and qualifying refugee students is adequate for moving children through educational systems and maintaining the status quo, but not enough for changing it. It is difficult to move beyond what exists unless we have a vision for what can be. My research is an exploration of what can be.

There is more literature describing the known barriers to refugees' academic achievement than there is describing promising pedagogical practices or systemic supports. "Conflict is widely perceived to have negative effects on educational access, reducing the level of attainment for those who are exposed to violence" (Burde et al., 2017, p. 629). Brenner and Kia-Keating (2016) found that "refugee children feel unable to participate in classrooms, because the pedagogy is in conflict with their prior

experiences and cultural norms" (p. 234). Other studies have revealed that low academic achievement amongst refugee students has been attributed to ill-prepared teachers who were uninformed about the backgrounds of refugee students, unskilled in how to work with such students, and who perceived refugee students as unmotivated to work and prone to behavioral issues (Kovinthian, 2016; Roxas, 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

Birman and Tran (2017) discussed behavioral incidents and academic detachment in public schools, "with refugee students clearly becoming bored, restless, and frustrated when they could not master the academic material" (p. 141). We should not expect all refugee children to be readily interested in every subject in a host country's core curriculum—for example, refugees may have more immediate concerns than learning about the histories of particular U.S. states. Likewise, we should not expect that all refugees will embrace a curriculum that privileges Western, Anglo, Christian-oriented thought (Makarova & Birman, 2016; Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008). Burde, Guven, Kelcey, Lahmann, and Al-Abbadi (2015) reviewed literature in crisis-affected contexts and found that multiple-perspective history teaching positively affected students' attitudes and perceptions. But, with respect to an emancipatory education, it seems like such an approach to history teaching should be applied in any context so that "individuals can navigate, and shift, the structures that circumscribe them" (Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p. 16).

Although "the curriculum itself may be a barrier or a facilitator for refugee children's adaptation to western schools" (Brenner & Kia-Keating, 2016, p. 235), given the environment of high-stakes standardized testing, the academic material is not likely to be altered for students unless they have been medically diagnosed with special needs.

There are many challenges to evaluating refugee children for special education services in early childhood, most notably language barriers to communicating with children and their parents, a lack of quality assessment tools, and delays in initial screenings that can last years (Hurley, Warren, Habalow, Weber, & Tousignant, 2014).

Regardless of the curriculum, if teachers and children do not actively participate in classrooms, a negative feedback loop can be perpetuated (O'Neil, 2016). In such a loop, teachers do not receive adequate information from students to guide their instruction, yet do not probe to understand. Then teachers to begin to believe that children do not care, which causes teachers to ignore students. Ignoring students then prompts more disengagement from them, and the cycle usually continues until it ends in disciplinary action from teachers and administrators or the students drop out or are pushed out. Birman and Tran (2017) noted that behavioral incidents declined as refugees "learned the culture and norms of the school" (p. 141), but they also discussed the assimilationist attitudes that many teachers held. Thus, behavioral incidents may have declined because refugee students were met with punitive actions and consequently submitted to the forced assimilation by the educators in power.

Parental involvement is a crucial factor in supporting refugee students (Jamal Al-deen & Windle, 2015). However, language barriers (McBrien, 2011), a lack of an understanding of the host country's school system (Bartlett et al., 2017), differing cultural beliefs (Isik-Ercan, 2012; Sainsbury & Renzaho, 2011), and teachers' silencing of parents (Matthieson, 2016) have been cited as obstacles to engaging parents. So, children, teachers, and parents can all be said to recognize overlapping problems, but do

educational leaders have the time, knowledge, capacity, and will to be able to approach refugee education in any other way?

## Subjectification

Can we move beyond the various theories of how best to socialize and qualify refugees? Can we try to understand, bring forward, and value refugees' prior knowledge and experiences as part of the educative processes to serve an emancipatory purpose? Can we help students discover how they can exist as unique beings outside of the status quo (Biesta, 2013a)? If so, how might such an effort be conceived? How might educational stakeholders interpret the effort? How might conceptions of subjectification redefine what constitutes a quality education for refugees? There is a paucity of theoretical and empirical research exploring such questions, but what there is is promising and leads me to believe that an emancipatory education for refugee youth can be envisaged, developed, and implemented.

## Partnership and Leadership

Block, Cross, Riggs, and Gibbs (2014) identified the following key components of inclusive education for refugees: (a) celebrating cultural diversity, (b) raising awareness of refugee-specific needs amongst school staff, (c) using interpreters to increase parent engagement, (d) developing partnerships with local refugee support agencies, and (e) vertically and horizontally networking among schools in the same district to establish mutual support. Given that English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers bear most of the responsibility for supporting refugee students (Taylor, 2008), Taylor and Sidhu (2011) brought to light the "lack of targeted policies and organizational frameworks to address the significant educational disadvantages confronting refugee

youth" (p. 4). Additionally, Makarova and Birman (2016) "indicated various mechanisms within educational systems that maintain youths' marginalized status, such as the prevalence of a mainstream curriculum, language hierarchies, segregation of immigrant youth in newcomer classes, or placement in lower academic tracks" (p. 11). Block et al. (2014) stated that strong, active leaders are necessary to support refugee students schoolwide, but what if school leaders think that they are educating refugee students appropriately when they are not? How would school leaders know when and what they need to change? Partnerships can help.

A culturally relevant pedagogy is one strategy for supporting academic achievement, but a strategy is often just a patch for holes in a hegemonically-warped ideology. Many favorable research-based academic supports for refugee students seem to have arisen from partnerships among schools, community organizations, and universities. Often these partnerships support students in smaller, homogeneous groups (sometimes including parents) and provide safe spaces for refugees' voices to be heard.

Pastoor (2017) drew upon sociocultural and ecological theories to emphasize that learning is:

> inherently social and cultural . . . meaning is made through joint interaction with other members of a society . . . and child development occurs in a complex system of interactions and relationships across various settings that together constitute an ecological environment in which both people and systems affect and are affected by each other. (p. 147)

She found that unaccompanied young refugees had a difficult time learning in decontextualized settings, but they found meaning in the learning that took place in "residential group homes, part time work, and leisure activities, comprising of engagement in NGOs, as well as in sports" (p. 149). Lloyd and Wilkinson (2016) also

determined that refugees developed meaningful learning and literacy practices in everyday spaces, outside of schools. Similarly, Dryden-Peterson, Dahya, and Adelman (2017) described how bonding and bridging social capital (e.g., ties within and across communities, in person and online; Putnam, 2000) are important not only for the career guidance and social and emotional support that help refugees graduate from high school, but also for inspiring refugees to become agents for social change.

Overall, social, peer, and community support are recognized as valuable sources for refugee youth development (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017; Major, Wilkinson, & Langat, 2013). Bauma Benjamin, an educator and refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, trained other educators "how to have conversations about differences, stereotypes, exclusion, and empathy. He also instituted weekly debates where all the students at the school engage[d] on such topics as regional political conflicts or government education policies" (Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p. 20). Valuable training and activities such as this are not taking place in most schools.

In Philadelphia, a federally-funded program has offered help with homework and English language learning, translation services, psychological support, and job-search assistance for high school refugee students (McWilliams & Bonet, 2015). One school-community-university partnership in Australia was designed to support refugee students by teaching preservice teachers about the educational backgrounds and needs of refugee students and requiring those teachers to tutor refugee children as part of their preservice practicum (Naidoo, 2012). A group home for unaccompanied refugees in Norway has partnered with schools to allow refugee youth who are not fully literate in Norwegian to assist elementary school children in after school programs and receive documented

recommendations for part-time jobs in return (Pastoor, 2017). The experience of working part-time then created new avenues for learning, participating in society, and enhancing refugees' self-esteem (Pastoor, 2017). If nonrefugee children can grow up having been taught by refugee children, both parties stand to benefit linguistically, academically, and culturally. Nonrefugees may develop empathetic perspectives on global issues, and refugees may develop new perspectives on their host countries' education systems. If practices such as this become widespread, the benefits have the potential to create a paradigm shift in education. Biton and Salomon (2006) shared that peace education programs can change Israelis' and Palestinians' views of peace as being a product of war to a view of harmony and cooperation that precludes war. In Sri Lanka, Malhotra and Liyanage (2005) showed that even a 4-day workshop could have long-lasting positive effects on children's and adults' expressions of empathy toward people of varying ethnicities.

It would be interesting to find out how students can benefit from the widespread implementation of such partnerships as I have mentioned. However, I aim to push that interest further. I would like to explore how students and staff in mainstream schools can incorporate tenets of such programs in their everyday practices and thought processes so that partnerships and added supports for refugees are needed less as time passes. Instead of patching the holes in the dominant ideology when our resources allow us to do so, how can we begin to conceptualize and actualize a new ideology?

**International Schools**

International schools, sometimes called newcomer schools, are schools that primarily serve nonnative-born students who have recently arrived in a host country.

Bartlett, Mendenhall, and Ghaffar-Kucher (2017) noted that refugee students appreciate the safety, positive teacher-student relationships, reduced socioemotional stressors, and cultural support that come with socialization in international high schools. They also suggested that "students' optimism, resilience, and self-reliance are invaluable resources that could be cultivated more directly in schools" (p. 118).

Recognizing that "public high schools in the US are increasingly compelled to focus on the distinct needs and realities of these 'newcomer' youth particularly in the wake of the politicization of their presence in US schools and communities," Bajaj, Argenal, and Canlas (2017, p. 258) explored young immigrants' and refugees' "understandings of their experiences, self-conceptions, and positioning in the global economy" (p. 259). They found that educators in an Oakland, California international high school had extended Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework for culturally relevant pedagogy, and implemented a sociopolitically relevant pedagogy "foreground[ing] complex understandings of resistance in order to sharpen analyses of asymmetrical power relations for marginalized immigrant and refugee youth" (p. 260). Tenets of sociopolitically relevant pedagogy include "a cultivation of critical consciousness around interconnections among local and global issues, human rights, and the unequal circumstances under which migration occurs[,] . . . the creation of formal and informal avenues for reciprocal learning between families/communities and schools" (Bajaj et al., 2017, p. 261), and the promotion of the cultural wealth of communities (Yosso, 2005).

The work of Bajaj et al. (2017) illuminate a need to move beyond the dominant discourse of socialization and qualification, and toward an emancipatory education for refugees. Dryden-Peterson and Reddick (2017) have also expressed "the need to

problematize the purposes of education for resettled refugees, in particular opening up possibilities that the goals of schooling may not be exclusively national" (p. 256).

Martin and Suárez-Orozco (2018) organized promising practices of newcomer schools into "three conceptual categories . . . (a) practices that addressed the individual needs of newcomer students; (b) school culture practices, which set the tone for inclusion into the school setting; and (c) partnerships with outside organizations and community members" (p. 83). While intimations of an emancipatory education for refugees have been cited in small international high schools that consist entirely of immigrants and refugees, we must remember that refugee students often have greater difficulties when attending mainstream schools (Pastoor, 2017). And when international schools excel in terms of supporting refugees, students' segregated classroom experiences often clash with their postschool experiences due to a lack of interaction and network-building with long-time U.S. residents (Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2017).

Historically, "the underlying assumption of segregated education for refugees was a speedy return to a country of origin; but the reality [is] that displacement [is] protracted" (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b, p. 478). We can no longer assume that refugees will be repatriated expeditiously. We must treat them not as temporary burdens, but as long-term assets to our society, meaning they must be able "to participate economically, politically, and socially. Thus, the central question for the field of refugee education is how to both enable the universal right to education and to facilitate refugees' ability to use that education within their host nation-states" (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b, p. 479).

Dryden-Peterson (2016b) stated that "despite integration in national education systems, in no nation-state [do] refugees . . . have the status that would enable the future

economic, political, and social participation for which that education sought to prepare them" (p. 479). Refugees, having lived in liminality, often arrive in the United States and "discover that the very institutions purposed to help them realize 'the good life', are in an equally precarious position, [and] they find themselves disillusioned and grasping for a hopeful beginning" (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016, p. 158). We can change that. Refugees, educators, and other leaders can help to "construct school environments that are conducive to *creating* futures, rather than simply inheriting them" (Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p. 22). Furthermore:

> Schools must develop a culture that represents refugees in positive and empowering ways, based on the strengths and personal-social assets they bring. This requires teachers who understand how to build on these assets in the curriculum and in their pedagogical practices. (Major et al., 2013, p. 101)

As the global refugee crisis grows, educators are going to have to learn how to teach to and learn from refugee students in ways they may not know just yet; ways that initially may be uncomfortable. Conceiving a theoretical framework for emancipatory refugee education in mainstream public schools is a good place to start.

## Facilitating Change for Emancipatory Education

Researchers and practitioners have made efforts to create educational change to facilitate emancipatory education generally and to improve the education of forcibly-displaced youth. Educational change is not often easy. A meaningful change effort is limited in its success without the full support of all stakeholders within and outside a school. However, "gaining the investment of many people . . . that asks them to set aside their own agendas is always messy business" (Connell & Klem, 2000, p. 116). Wheatley (1996) argued that "you can't change people, but people change all the time" (p. 17). When leaders implement a change effort in an organization, its members will change in

some way—toward or away from the goals of the change. Bolman and Deal (2013) stated that "change agents fail when they rely mostly on reason and structure while neglecting human, political, and symbolic elements" (p. 390) of organizations.

Considering the human, political, and symbolic elements of organizational change comes with a need to examine the distribution of power within organizations and the intentions and interests of educational change agents. Therefore, according to Møller (2017), "we need different approaches to research, including critical studies addressing the power structures [in education]" (p. 375), and "such knowledge is highly relevant for politicians and administrators who aim to improve their education systems" (p. 382). Kauffman, Sanders, and Wortmann (2019) noted that "underlying these approaches is the need to address power relations in the process of societal change itself" (p. 938). Regarding refugee education, specifically, framing school leaders' and teachers' roles is crucial, because they collaborate with refugee students daily (Arar, Örücü, & Waite, 2020, p. 3). For example, Koyama and Bakuza (2017) found that "the conventional avenues that were available to parents, such as parent-teacher meetings, were of little benefit to immigrant parents as communication in these meetings positioned teachers as the experts and parents as subordinates" (p. 316). Instead, Koyama and Bakuza (2017) proposed that refugee parents should be viewed as shared decisionmakers.

Biesta (2017) asserted that for people "to free [them]selves from the workings of power [they] need to expose how power works upon [their] consciousness" (p. 55). In doing so, they can work to liberate both oppressors and the oppressed from such identities (Freire, 1972). De Lissovoy (2019) suggested that to facilitate change for

emancipatory education, educational leaders and must politically and epistemologically decenter the West in emancipatory pedagogy models. De Lissovoy (2019) argued:

> Emancipatory theory and practice must be thought of first of all as a process of unwinding, in which the catastrophe of colonialism is reckoned with and what has been taken is restored. In education, both on the terrain of curriculum proper as well as in the process of subject formation in schools, this means a radical reconstitution of the values underwriting canon, rationality, and ways of being—as they are lived within the school and in its relationship to the communities around it. (p. 419)

Leading change for emancipatory education for refugees requires the inclusion of refugees' values and ways of being and knowing.

**Leading for Inclusion, Cohesion, and Shared Responsibility for Education**

Shaeffer (2019) said that the "ambitious way to make education systems more inclusive and therefore ensure they contribute more to building just and equitable societies is to reform all aspects of the education system towards inclusion" (p. 188). He explained:

> A range of policies and practices, at both the school and [national] level, can be put in place to make schools more inclusive: legislative mandates and whole-school reform; targeted responses to excluded groups; pedagogies which strengthen social-emotional learning and celebrate difference and diversity; the promotion of inclusive teaching–learning strategies and practices; and good quality, inclusive early childhood care and development [programs]. (Shaeffer, 2019, p. 181)

Acknowledging the importance of context, empathy, and the moral imperative of school principals, Arar and Örücü (2018) and Arar, Örücü, and Ak Küçükçayir (2019) illustrated the importance of culturally relevant leadership for social cohesion amongst refugees and nonrefugees in schools. Culturally relevant leadership "requires the establishment of multicultural discourse among the students and the teachers" (Arar & Örücü, 2018, p. 40) and principals who are "motivated by a pedagogy of compassion,

containment, and humanistic-universal commitment" (Arar, Örücü, & Ak Küçükçayir, 2019, p. 960). Arar et al. (2019) stated that "culturally relevant leaders develop in their teachers and students a critical consciousness, identifying and challenging inequities inherent in the larger society" (p. 962).

Therefore, educational leaders must be able to reflect upon their practices and work to synthesize the variety of value systems students and staff possess (Arar et al., 2019). "Enhancing teachers' understandings of refugee learners' unique situations and how these have been informed by intersecting social, historical, political and cultural elements is key to developing a responsive pedagogy" (Gagné, Schmidt, & Markus, 2017, pp. 440-441). Familiarizing teachers with refugees' experiences through experiential teacher education has proven beneficial for developing such a pedagogy (Gagné et al., 2017). Dal Magro, Pozzebon, and Schutel (2020) examined teachers sent to Brazil for transformative service learning and concluded that fully immersing teachers in community-based projects in contexts of scarce resources (disruptive experiential learning) enabled them to develop distributed leadership and critical thinking skills, social competencies, and broadened worldviews that fostered an appreciation for people's differences and changed their values.

Shaeffer (2019) asserted that:

> pre-service teacher education program[s] must be better designed to promote more equitable and inclusive teaching–learning strategies (child-cent[ered], interactive, flexible) which welcome diversity in a classroom and see differences (by age, language, ability, SES) not as a problem but rather as an opportunity for a higher quality of education. (p. 189)

Shaeffer (2019) added that in-service professional development should fill the gaps for teachers who did not receive such inclusive teaching education. Though professional

development has been heavily promoted to facilitate change for emancipatory education for refugees (Awada, Diab, & Faour, 2018; McBrien, Dooley, & Birman, 2017), Cummins (2015) argued that professional development often ignores issues of cultural and linguistic diversity. To address those issues, Cummins (2015) recommended an intercultural approach to education. Cummins (2015) maintained that such an approach:

> promotes social cohesion and respect across cultural groups by identifying and challenging patterns of discrimination and exclusion within particular societies . . . [and] promotes academic achievement and equality of educational opportunity for students from marginalized communities who frequently experience much less success in schools than students from dominant groups. (p. 457)

An intercultural approach to education affirms aspects of students' identities by connecting curricula with students' lived experiences while providing agency to educators to resist discriminatory organizational forms (Cummins, 2015). Though Cummins (2015) said "that intercultural education promotes academic achievement for linguistically and culturally diverse students" (p. 457), his proposal was primarily directed toward "how intercultural education might be implemented in multilingual schools where a significant proportion of students speak languages other than the dominant language of instruction and come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds" (p. 457). Cummins (2015) did not address an intercultural educational approach for mainstream schools.

Vlieghe (2018) suggested that perhaps,

> in the name of emancipation, a case can be made for forms of teaching that are neither student-centered nor teacher-centered, and for an education that is not so much driven by the needs and interest of learners as it is by the attention for and care about the world. (p. 925)

Simpson (2019) claimed that "psychosocial support-based peace education approaches can help individuals to heal, regain a sense of self and positive identity, and lay the foundations for building supportive social networks across communities, which are all integral to building social cohesion" (p. 39) and that "addressing the impact of trauma should be a building block for all social cohesion efforts when working with communities affected by conflict and displacement" (p. 39). Improvements resulting from peace education programs, Simpson (2019) cited, "were in understanding [of] how tensions can be eased by dialogue and listening to others, in self-expression and discussing problems, and in openness to diversity—all attitudes which are conducive to social cohesion" (p. 39).

Alvaraz-Blanco and Torres (2018) said that "when we understand learning as both an individual and a collective endeavor, this process involves playfulness, uncertainty, adaptability, curiosity, and constantly trying to see the world from another's point of view" (p. 325). Tinnirello and Samuels (2018) agreed that "a pervasive intellectual curiosity is necessary to understand the complex phenomena of the world" (p. 80), but also stated that "mere curiosity is insufficient for radical emancipation. Accordingly, the intellectual curiosity must be grounded in compassion and applied toward humanistic ends" (Tinnirello & Samuels, 2018, p. 80).

Tinnirello and Samuels (2018) posited that "instructors need to encourage students to be in tune with each other's emotional states, and they must establish learning environments in which students demonstrate commitment to the well-being of their classmates and most importantly: humanity" (p.75). A focus on human rights in educational curricula is a way to establish such a connection. A study conducted by

Awada et al. (2018) resulted in "recommendations that underscored the necessity of developing new curriculum and textbooks integrating [Human Rights Education] focused on accepting diversity, building peace culture, democracy, and citizenship" (p. 43) for students become global citizens. Awada et al. (2018) added that:

> teacher associations play a vital role in disseminating the best practices of the integration of [Human Rights Education] into school subjects. Teacher associations should provide teachers with the training and resources needed to develop the students' critical thinking skills, enable them to evaluate evidence, and to make judgments about matters of rights in the community. (pp. 54-55)

Aydin, Ozfidan, and Carothers (2017) stated that "educators must clearly define and advance an agenda to prepare youth for global citizenship" (p. 88) and that "educating all students with peers from differing backgrounds has the potential to improve work and social interactions among people of different races, languages, religions, cultures, and ages" (p. 87). Aydin et al.'s research (2017) recommendations supported such an agenda, as they included "chang[ing] the structures, culture, and programs of curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of a diverse student body" (p. 76). Melo (2019) suggested that critical pedagogy can address the needs of a diverse student body, because it "relates to a form of negotiated curriculum founded on the needs, life situations, and experiences of all learners" (p. 6).

Melo (2019) described a critical pedagogical approach as "not concerned with the transmission of content per se, but rather with the development of young people as protagonists of change" (p. 7) and added that critical educators are essential to dialogical learning. After analyzing a program in which children in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro were encouraged to formulate and implement their own socially transformative ideas, Melo (2019) concluded that the program:

> expand[ed] the creative capacity of participants and help[ed] [students] to identify—and think critically about —new aspects and possibilities in their own communities and everyday life experiences that they ha[d] hitherto not considered. . . . It promote[d] a non-authoritarian teaching approach based on mutual respect and learning, breaking with the traditional top-down relationship between teacher and students. In addition, participants [were] encouraged to engage actively and critically . . . rather than simply consuming information passively. . . . The adoption of an educational model based on reflective practices and critical dialogue . . . ha[d] stimulated participants to think critically about their places in the world, their living conditions, and the problematic issues and generally false discourses that outsiders have of their communities. This process of critical thinking ha[d], thus, heightened young people's social and political consciousness, which can serve as the basis for subsequent community activism. (pp. 7-11)

Strohschen and Elazier (2019) suggested that student and teacher should be in an egalitarian partnership in which they jointly choose the appropriate approach to teaching and learning. Similar statements are cited in literature regarding emancipatory education. Emancipatory education is often viewed as an approach to teaching and learning as a continuous interchange of teacher and learner, not as teacher or learner (Freire, 1972), and often with an assumption of equal intelligence amongst both teachers and learners (Rancière, 1991). According to Biesta (2017), "Emancipatory education is not a matter of transfer of knowledge from a teacher who knows to a student who does not (yet) know, but nonetheless is a process in which teachers and their teaching are indispensable" (p. 52). What may be more in question is *how* teachers and teaching are indispensable; a question that can be addressed by continuously examining the relationship between theory and practice. Thus, the concept that theory and practice must be closely related is also essential to an emancipatory education (Cox, 2019; Freire, 1972; Hoggan, Mälkki, & Finnegan, 2017). Melo (2019) observed that:

> as students grow increasingly accustomed to the teaching methods they are being introduced to, they can begin to critically reflect on how different social issues close at hand are significant in their lives, and how they are manifested. This is

> the essence of a negotiated curriculum; it consists of context-relevant educational content that is applicable to—and draws directly from—the environments of young people. . . . This type of contextualized and person-centered educational approach is absent from mainstream school classrooms. (p. 7)

Safari (2020) reported that dialogue journal writing in English classes created an emancipatory space for students to establish a sense of empowerment, positive feelings, and reduced anxiety while learning how to write about their lived experiences in English. This space resulted in Safari's (2020) students "critici[zing] the system of education, show[ing] their disgust toward it, and express[ing] their positive ideas about [his] class, and their transformation" (p. 7). As Safari (2020) put it:

> This new experience created a sociocultural space for us as humans to share ideas, re/construct meanings, and care for each other. In this caring and sharing atmosphere, we could move away from the constraints of formal schooling, institutionali[zed] knowledge, and banking model of language education which are prevalent in our educational system. (p. 14)

However, Oliveira, Soares, and Silva (2016) argued that "the educational process should not be restricted to the use of oral and written languages, and should present youths to various forms of expression that recogni[ze] and respect the language preferences of young people" (p. 5). Consequently, with respect to facilitating change for emancipatory education, leaders should be well-versed in and consider multiple, varied, student-centered, context-specific approaches.

In an exploratory exercise of Freire's emancipatory pedagogy, Clack (2019) aimed to relinquish control of the curriculum entirely and found that encouraging his students "to become active participants rather than passive recipients, and giving them real opportunities to make genuine choices can provide an environment in which students embraced their own curriculum" (p. 13). In doing so, Clack (2019) concluded that:

> using aspects of a critical pedagogy approach does allow us to examine how students see themselves in the context of the existing social and political structures, and provides some insight into the notions of control and coercion in education – for both academics and students. (p. 13)

Kauffman et al. (2019) "suggested adopting a critical-emancipatory perspective on learning, in which education is linked to an understanding of societal transformation as a pluralistic, nonlinear, and bottom-up political process" (p. 939). In adopting a critical approach, Møller (2017) recommended that educational leaders engage in dialogue regarding present noncontextual standards and accountability practices, which "may cause a necessary discomfort for those in power as well as political conflicts with those who have benefited from inequities" (p. 381). Though some may argue that discomfort is necessary, tense discussions can be mediated and mitigated by the presentation of data.

To generate actionable data, Shaeffer (2019) advocated for school inclusion self-assessments and explained that gender audits, as well as other types of audits of curricula materials:

> can show other kinds of discrimination and exclusion; indigenous people and those from other ethnic minorities are seldom portrayed in comparison to those of the majority population (and, if at all, often negatively), rural environments are shown much less often then urban ones (e.g., illustrations of modern transport and houses rather than traditional ones), and people with disabilities are barely represented at all and, if they are, can be portrayed as objects of pity rather than as having "different" abilities. (p. 189)

Shaeffer (2019) also suggested that standardized tests be evaluated as to whether they are legitimate forms of assessment, given that they are "unable to take into account the particular backgrounds, experience, and abilities of students" (p. 189). The results of school inclusion self-assessments can be used to generate improvement plans "coordinated by an inspired principal, skilled at both personal leadership and school

management, and developed collaboratively with teachers, parents, any existing school committee, and the students themselves" (Shaeffer, 2019, p. 191). School improvement plans should describe how excluded children can be included, either through specialized support, professional development, curricula, or community involvement (Shaeffer, 2019).

**Agentic Leaders Create a Welcoming Environment and Value Refugees**

Research has shown that a welcoming space is essential to refugee education, that educational leaders in local level jurisdictions matter greatly in refugee education, and leaders with a higher degree of autonomy can be more successful in navigating political and economic pressures in welcoming refugees as well as better support refugees in general (Bogotch et al., 2020; Rose, 2019). Merchant, Johansson, and Ärlestig (2020) contended that:

> the capacity of schools to provide a safe and welcoming environment for all students within their communities will be dependent, in part, upon their superintendent′s ability to preserve the core democratic mission of their schools, despite working within systems that may not support the same goals. (p. 53)

Movements to facilitate educational change require individuals working together in "organizations [that] exist to serve human needs rather than the converse" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117). Kauffman, Sanders, and Wortmann (2019) stated that emancipatory educational practice "must support people in learning to reflect on their worldviews critically by providing spaces for collective contemplation and by establishing direct contact to existing niches [and] rediscover[ing] the political as a core aspect of education" (p. 936). Merchant et al. (2020) pointed out that:

> focusing on the ways in which policies at the national, state/regional, and local levels can facilitate or constrain local efforts to respond to [refugees]. The alignment of policies at these different levels can be a powerful factor in

> supporting and advancing the work of school superintendents with the students and families they serve. (p. 52)

Connecting and knowledge-sharing among districts, regions, states, and nations is critical to improving refugee education, specifically, and to strengthening education systems broadly (Awada et al., 2018; Visconti & Gal, 2018). However, Visconti and Gal (2018) indicated a lack of organizations that lead the cultivation of such professional development. Consequently, Visconti and Gal (2018) recommended creating refugee support databases for "teachers to learn from one another, contribute strategies and approaches that work in their classrooms, and share information on challenges and ways to overcome them in the classroom" (p. 115). However, teacher-to-teacher knowledge-sharing first requires school leaders to hire teachers who are willing to teach and learn about educating refugees. Bogotch et al. (2020) asserted that governments must support educational leaders in addressing cultural issues in professional development workshops and hiring welcoming staff—including refugees—who can specifically address trauma and new language learning. Wilkinson and Kaukko (2020) expressed that "the careful selection and appointment of a diversity of staff" (p. 81) was crucial to building strong, trusting relationships amongst educators and refugee students and their families.

Not only is investing in refugee education beneficial for refugees, Mottaghi (2018) reported that investing in refugees' education is a public good, as it builds human capital and strengthens long-term global economic growth. Recognizing increasing numbers of immigrant and refugee students in schools, Aydin et al. (2017) stated that:

> School districts and policy-makers must recruit more teachers and staff members from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as bilingual teachers and staff members. Moreover, school districts must encourage teachers to understand and educate themselves to be aware of immigrants and refugee students who come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Teachers must read research

> materials and participate in professional development opportunities to learn more about diverse populations. Such training will not only help teachers eliminate their personal biases and harmful language, it will also increase their ability to accept and welcome students with different beliefs and values. This benefits everyone in an increasingly diverse society. (p. 86)

It is important to note that school leaders "responding in creative ways to the increased demand on resources [by] scrambling to cover increased costs is not a viable solution in the long-term to supporting refugees" (Gagné et al., 2017, p. 441). Therefore, "it is crucial to demand that policymakers and school officials invest the necessary resources where they are needed most and provide professional development so that school leaders and teachers can do a good job" (Møller, 2017, pp. 382-383). In considering long-term goals for refugees' integration, Capps et al. (2015) suggested that local leaders improve access to job training programs for refugees. Conversely, Luu and Blanco (2019) considered encouraging job training programs as short-sighted. Luu and Blanco (2019) analyzed U.S. federal policies concerning refugees' postsecondary education access and described "refugees' status in U.S. policy as an invisible group, frequently confounded with other groups under the euphemistic umbrella term 'new American'" (p. 1). Luu and Blanco (2019) illustrated that, "in these policies, refugees are represented as economic burdens, and their economic independence is presented as the key priority of relevant U.S. policies" (p. 1) that assume refugees should enter career and technical education tracks instead of postsecondary academic tracks. These findings support the idea that the short-term goal of entering the workforce as soon as possible was more important than investing in education for refugees' long-term academic and personal growth potential to be realized.

In addition to economic or career related findings, Luu and Blanco (2019) commented that "implicit in the documents is the assumption that refugees should leave their refugee identity behind as soon as possible in order to become 'new Americans'" (p. 15). Further, they concluded that "the prevailing invisibility of refugees in existing U.S. policies may add to the sense of displacement and disenfranchisement that many of them experience" (Luu & Blanco, 2019, p. 16), highlighting that "it is important to be aware of the reasons young people choose to participate or not participate in their own development program[s]" (Oliveira, Soares, & Silva 2016, p. 5). Similarly, Simpson (2018) found that

> it can be challenging to engage host communities in joint psychosocial support activities with refugees due to the stigma and mistrust between communities. In order to overcome this, psychosocial interventions need to be part of a holistic, tailored package of support which benefits both refugee and host communities. This could include interventions that bring children and young people from the host community to shared safe spaces and engage them in activities that challenge existing stereotypes and build trust. (p. 39)

Oliveira et al. (2016) conducted research showing that emancipatory action research with children created spaces for children to problematize their realities, engage in effective dialogue, "mak[e] decisions regarding their needs, and [exert] some control over the social institutions" (p. 4). Wilkinson and Kaukko (2020) suggested that "learning to love is a key element of educational leading understood as pedagogical practice" (pp. 70-71) and described how a "relationship of pedagogical loving—power with [refugee students] rather than power over—disrupts more traditional authoritarian relations of leader and child" (pp. 81-82). Furthermore, when leadership is viewed as a practice of pedagogical love, it can "disrupt the drive toward standardized curricula with

its emphasis on performativity and testing, a drive which particularly disadvantages students of refugee background" (Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020, pp. 71-72).

To lead with love requires that educators acknowledge refugees' challenges, strengths, and potential (McBrien et al., 2017) and value refugee students as contributors to societal change (Melo, 2019). All superintendents in a study conducted by Merchant et al. (2020) saw value in refugees' presence in their communities and promoted that value on their websites and in district materials. The superintendents also thought "the smaller sizes of their districts made integration [of refugees] easier to accomplish and provided important opportunities for district staff, community members, and refugees to get to know and become comfortable with one another" (Merchant et al., 2020, p. 50).

**Partnering with Families and Community Organizations**

For progress to be made, communities must understand what is happening in schools, why it is happening, why change is necessary, and how educational leaders plan to change it (Vollmer, 2010). Therefore, "explanations of differential parental involvement that utilize and reify static notions of culture and norms of society, in which [refugee] parents are positioned as passive within powerful structures of education, need to be interrogated" (Koyama & Bakuza, 2017, p. 312). Koyama and Bakuza's (2017) research indicated that refugee parents would advocate for their children in educational spaces and collaborate with teachers and community members to improve refugee education. However, there was miscommunication between refugee parents and educators, primarily based on a difference of expectation rather than language, and refugee parents "wanted the school to convey clear and high expectations for, and

specific evaluations of, their children's academic achievement" (Koyama & Bakuza, 2017, p. 316).

Clear, continuous, and collective communication is a key component of emancipatory education, as it supports a learning community's critical thinking and collaborative potential (Alvarez-Blanco & Torres, 2018, p. 312). Superintendents in Merchant et al.'s (2020) study affirmed that "the creation of multicultural home-school liaison positions to support their efforts to communicate with refugee students and parents, and to maintain a continuous flow of information between school and home" (p. 50), was successful and that hiring refugees for those roles was a priority. Koyama and Bakuza's (2017) examination of refugee parents' interactions with schools illustrated:

> that increasing refugees [parents'] involvement in the education of their children in host countries, like the US, can not only improve the children's education, but can also be instrumental in supporting the adult refugees to participate in institutionalized processes. Through their engagement with schools, refugee parents can develop identities and construct spaces that prepare them to participate in society in meaningful way." (p. 333)

Koyama and Bakuza (2017) also expressed that when schools partner with community organizations and resettlement agencies, spaces are created for refugee parents to engage with their children's education. Simpson (2018) cited evidence that partnerships between schools and refugee support organizations:

> can address barriers to social cohesion and restore social networks by building respect for diversity, promoting agency, and providing avenues for action which benefited the wider community. Primarily, the partner agencies created safe spaces to allow children to develop a sense of physical and psychological safety and supported young people to deal with traumatic memories. (p. 38)

Merchant et al. (2020) highlighted that, for partnerships to successfully support refugees, leaders of schools and refugee-serving organizations must establish a shared mission, goals, and roles. Lopez, Lee, and Tung (2020) identified that a summer

enrichment academy was helpful for refugees' language development and acclimating to the U.S. school system. Lopez et al. (2020) found that leaders were able to create a culturally relevant and engaging curriculum using strong district and community partnerships in which the superintendent, assistant superintendents, and other district staff worked with summer academy representatives to match the program curricula to school-year goals. The educators in the summer academy also collaborated with students' prior teachers to address the "socio-emotional needs of their refugee students and created a caring and collaborative culture throughout the program" (Lopez, Lee, & Tung, 2020, p. 93). Lopez et al (2020) attributed much of the success of the summer academy to educators who viewed cultural capital and multilingualism as assets and encouraged refugee students to take risks.

Visconti and Gal (2018) proposed that closer partnerships between institutions of higher education, professional organizations, and K-12 school educators across countries can provide "the benefit of understanding how to manage local school-work issues particular to their context" (p. 115). Not all organizations are uniform in makeup; thus, they cannot be improved using the same methods. However, to improve refugee education—a social venture—educational leaders must view organizational improvement through more humanistic frames. This change requires a deep knowledge of the social aspects of the organizations served. "Reform is easier to conceptualize than realize" (Visconti & Gal, 2018, p. 115). Yet, reform must be conceptualized before it is realized—the goal of my dissertation. My narrative and discussion in Chapters 4 and 5 build upon the work cited in this chapter to form a theoretical framework for emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth and influence future research.

# III. METHODS

## Overview of Qualitative Research Approach/Design

The purpose of my research was to develop a theoretical framework for emancipatory education that could lead to purposefully transparent actions to improve the lives of refugees. In pursuit of that purpose, I took a postcritical ethnographic approach (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004) in conducting a vertical case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2009, 2014). My reasoning for choosing postcritical ethnography as my methodological approach was rooted in Freire's (1972) description of praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 28). Anders (2012) stated that "postcritical ethnographers combine the commitments of critical theory and interpretive ethnography. Critical theorists and critical ethnographers often critique discourses, practices, and structures that reinforce and reify systemic inequities. Interpretive ethnographers trouble the act of representing lived experience" (p. 100). Critical inquiry played a role in my methodology, given that refugees' lives are heavily "mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2018, p. 237), and "critical researchers attempt to get behind the curtain, to move beyond assimilated experience, to expose the way ideology constrains the desire for self-direction, and to confront the way power reproduces itself in the construction of human consciousness" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 114).

Interpretive ethnography played a role in my methodology because I studied refugees amid a global refugee crisis while the United States was entrenched in political unrest regarding issues of refugees, asylees, immigrants, and foreign policies. Conducting my study in such a context, it was necessary to ask, not just "'*Who* am I?,'

but '*When*, *where*, *how* am I (so and so)?'" (Minh-ha, 1992, p. 157), because "global and local legal processes have problematized and erased the personal and institutional distance between the ethnographer and those he or she writes about" (Lee & Ackerman, 1994, p. 350). Therefore, my reflexivity—that is, my thinking about my "conscious biases, values, and experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 216)—and unique positionality as a researcher are not presented in a passive declaration but instead are woven into how I represent participants, their views, and the results of my study. I am a child of an Iranian immigrant, and many of my relatives have emigrated from Iran to the United States and elsewhere in search of opportunities for better lives. Thus, I empathize with those who migrate from oppressive circumstances. As a researcher, I am also in a privileged position, and, as such, must continuously examine myself as a judge in a privileged space, troubling my biases and the distance between myself and my participants that privilege can sometimes create. As I collected and analyzed data and wrote my narrative, I incorporated my reflexivity and positionality in my work so readers would have a better understanding of how I influenced my study.

Not only were my reflexivity and positionality impetuses for this study, they were also assets in terms of my ability to critique the systems that often marginalize refugees. Although I am a second-generation Iranian American, I may present as a White man at skin level. Given the topic of my research, my position—internally, and as I believe it to have been ostensibly manifested to my research participants—required a continuous problematization of myself as a person of privilege in said systems, and as a research instrument, layered throughout my research process. I have been, and always will be,

interrogating myself as an instrument of research, asking how I am influencing my study and how my study is influencing me.

## Site and Participant Selection

The refugee crisis is global. Education is local. Elements in many complex contexts connect those two levels to influence how refugee children live and learn. Therefore, to answer my research questions, I conducted a vertical case study—sometimes referred to as a multisited ethnography—to explore the "linkages among local, [state,] national, and international forces and institutions that together shape and are shaped by education in a particular locale" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2009, p. 12). Bartlett and Vavrus (2014) noted that "the vertical case study approach expands the locations of research while showing how actors are related through specific historical contingencies that connect disparate social sites and social actors" (p. 132). By uncovering and exploring such contingencies, and comparing perspectives vertically and horizontally across multiple sites, I created a theoretical framework for emancipatory education for refugees in mainstream schools that was driven by the voices of those responsible for it and those who participate in it.

The framework is the result of my analysis of qualitative data obtained from a variety of participants whom I purposefully selected (see Tables 1 and 2). I wanted to gather data from as many sources of influence on the education of refugees as possible so I could conduct a thorough analysis of what was happening, what should and could be happening, and what steps might be taken to align what is with what is possible. However, to keep my study manageable, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews (two of which consisted of two participants), two focus groups (each with six participants),

and two participant observations (one short-term and one long-term). I emailed questions to an additional participant (a U.S. Congressperson), because I was unable to schedule a semi-structured interview with him. All the participants in my study were unique—that is, no individual participated in more than one of my methods of data collection.

I chose to aim my methods of inquiry toward mainstream public middle and high school students for several reasons: (a) middle and high school students will soon be making important choices about what they want to do with the rest of their lives, (b) "it is in the very sinews of adolescent lives that we come to see how culture and global politics enter the body and soul of U.S. youth (see Rao & Walton, 2004)" (as cited in Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 152), (c) refugee children are more likely to be enrolled in mainstream public schools than in charter, private, or international schools, (d) emancipatory work is already being done in international schools, and (e) public schools have more public documentation of policies and practices available for research than do other types of schools.

Table 1

*The international-, national-, and state level-participants in my vertical case study.*

| INTERNATIONAL-, NATIONAL-, AND STATE-LEVEL PARTICIPANTS | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **LEVEL** | **ROLE** | **LOCATION** | **PSEUDONYM** | **NOTES** |
| International | Refugee Resettlement Communications Manager | International nonprofit organization, Turkey | Naomi | 90-minute phone interview; Formerly a U.S. federal immigration officer who decided U.S. asylum cases |
| | International scholar-practitioner(s) focused on refugee education | Netherlands | Ronald | 120-minute phone interview |
| National | Senior Education Team Member | International Rescue Committee (IRC), New York | Julie | 60-minute phone interview |
| | U.S. Congressperson representing a Central Texas district | Washington, DC | Chester | Emailed questions and answers |
| State | State Refugee Service Coordination Program Manager | Midwestern state | Carolina | 60-minute phone interview |
| | State Bureau of Refugee Services Operations Manager | Midwestern state | Leonard | 60-minute phone interview |

Table 2

*The local-level participants in my vertical case study.*

| LOCAL-LEVEL PARTICIPANTS (All in Central Texas) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ROLE** | **LOCATION** | **PSEUDONYM** | **NOTES** |
| Director of Social and Emotional Learning | Independent school district | Patrick | 90-minute in-person focus group #1 |
| Assistant Superintendent | Independent school district | Mabel | 90-minute in-person focus group #1 |
| Principal | Early college high school in independent school district | Bradley | 90-minute in-person focus group #1 |
| Assistant Principal | International high school in independent school district | Edward | 90-minute in-person focus group #1 |
| Assistant Principal | Middle school in independent school district | Tabitha | 90-minute in-person focus group #1 |
| Assistant Principal | Middle school in independent school district | Victor | 90-minute in-person focus group #1 |
| Math Instructional Coach/Teacher | High school in independent school district | Jasmine | 90-minute in-person focus group #2 |
| Government and Economics teacher | High school in independent school district | Charles | 90-minute in-person focus group #2 |
| Early Childhood Special Education Teacher | Bilingual elementary school in independent school district | Mandy | 90-minute in-person focus group #2 |
| English Teacher | High school in independent school district | Toni | 90-minute in-person focus group #2 |
| First Grade Teacher | Independent school district | Brian | 90-minute in-person focus group #2 |
| Economics Teacher | High school in independent school district | Arthur | 90-minute in-person focus group #2 |

Table 2 continued

*The local-level participants in my vertical case study.*

| LOCAL-LEVEL PARTICIPANTS (All in Central Texas) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ROLE** | **LOCATION** | **PSEUDONYM** | **NOTES** |
| Refugee Programs Director and Refugee Youth Program Coordinator | Community nonprofit organization | Laila; Marsha | 90-minute two-person interview in person; |
| Assistant Director of Bilingual/ESL Newcomers | Independent school district | Kristy | 90-minute phone interview |
| Refugee Family Support Coordinator | Independent school district | Marcela | 90-minute phone interview |
| Community and Attendance Liaison | Independent school district | Maya | 60-minute in-person interview |
| Director of Multilingual Education and Migrant Programs | Independent school district | Paula | 60-minute phone interview |
| Family and Community Engagement Associate | Charter school | Julissa | 60-minute phone interview |

Table 2 continued

*The local-level participants in my vertical case study.*

| LOCAL-LEVEL PARTICIPANTS (All in Central Texas) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ROLE** | **LOCATION** | **PSEUDONYM** | **NOTES** |
| Two refugees who graduated from mainstream public high schools | Central Texas | Niara;<br>Toya | 90-minute two-person interview in person; one follow-up email of seven questions (only Toya responded to the emailed questions—See Appendix A)<br><br>Niara (woman, age 27) arrived in the United States from Democratic Republic of Congo at age 13, now employed, some college education;<br><br>Toya (woman, age 19) arrived in the United States from Iraq at age 13, now a full-time first-year college student |
| Syrian refugee child in a youth mentoring program, and his family | Central Texas | Faraq;<br>Kaleb;<br>Joodi;<br>Hettie;<br>Hamid;<br>Aena;<br>Salik | Participant observation via in-home visits approximately 2 hours per week for 12 months;<br><br>My primary role was mentoring and tutoring Faraq (boy, age 13) who was born in Syria and arrived in the United States at age 8;<br><br>Kaleb (boy, age 3), born in the United States;<br>Joodi (girl, age 6), born in Jordan;<br>Hettie (girl, age 9), born in Syria;<br>Hamid (boy, age 15), born in Syria;<br>Aena (mother, age 39), born in Syria;<br>Salik (father, age 57), born in Syria |
| Several refugee students in a youth summer learning program | Central Texas church | None of these participants are mentioned by name in this study | Participant observation via 3 days of 3.5-hour learning group rotations in a space donated by the church;<br><br>My primary role was to teach middle and high school-aged refugee children English lessons through a variety of activities provided by the program leaders |

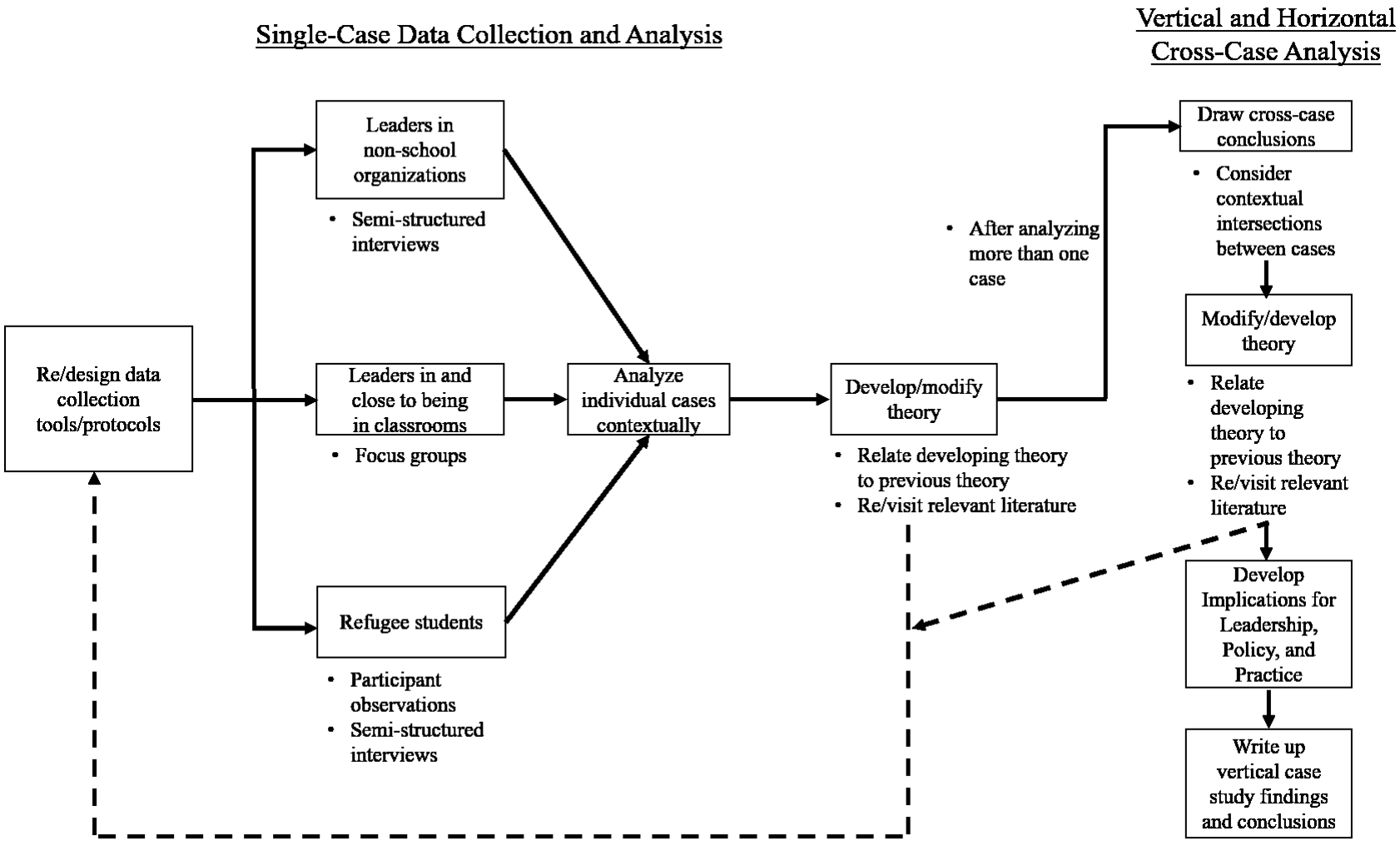



*Figure 1*. Data collection and analyses process for building a theoretical framework from vertical case study research.

**Data Collection**

Everyone is a meaning maker. To make sense of phenomena, qualitative researchers attempt to analyze the meanings these things have for their study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 10). Although this was my goal, I am cognizant of the critical aspect of my theoretical framework, one through which I view refugee education, and I realize that theories are a way of seeing and of not seeing. Lenses reveal and conceal (Waite & Swisher, 2019). Although I approached my study through a critical lens, my theoretical framework was pliable. I used aspects of grounded theory because I sought to inductively develop new theory from the data as I collected and analyzed them, as opposed to testing if or how critical theory applied to refugee education (Gibbs, 2008). As I collected data, I appreciated my participants' viewpoints and sought to explore and understand them (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 148). Consequently, my perspective changed throughout my study, and I included that shift in my thinking in this dissertation.

Case study research allows a researcher to use various sources and methods of inquiry (Dooley, 2002). As illustrated in Tables 1 and 2, my research methods included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observations. The use of multiple methods allowed me to triangulate my data to provide more grounding of the data in the theoretical framework I created. In this section, I explain my reasoning behind my choices of methods for the following three participant groups: representatives from nonschool organizations, leaders who are in and closest to being in classrooms, and refugee students. By selecting specific groups of participants, I "focus[ed my] efforts on theoretically useful cases" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 533), and by analyzing cases vertically and horizontally, I strengthened my narrative (Dooley, 2002).

**Semi-structured interviews**. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants in my study who were representatives from nonschool organizations because I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of how a variety of individuals interpreted and thought about refugee education at multiple levels of educational influence. The "interview[s] [were] conducted within multiple, intersecting contexts, including the setting[s] and people involved as well as the broader macro-sociopolitical contexts that shape[d] them" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 148). I asked some specific, contextual questions of each interviewee in addition to some more general questions which I asked multiple participants. (see Appendix C.)

**Focus groups**. The semi-structured interviews I conducted generated important data for my study, but interviews can be restrictive in terms of connecting participants' understandings with each other. Focus groups were essential to my research because focus groups can "facilitate the expression of ideas and experiences that might be left underdeveloped in an interview with a single participant" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 168). Although dialogue at all levels is important, it is particularly important at the local level in the field of education, because education is personal. Thus, I facilitated focus groups (see Appendix D) with leaders who were in and/or closest to being in classrooms, so that they could "construct or further explain key themes together, and . . . articulate differences and similarities in their perceptions and experiences" (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 103) educating refugees.

**Participant observations**. In conducting interviews and focus groups, I only gathered data from adults talking about refugee students. I chose participant observations to collect data through my direct interaction with refugee students, because, as Fine and Sirin believe,

> the youth themselves must be given room to actively challenge [adults'] potentially sedimented, biased perspectives, and to do so they need to be viewed and engaged with as experts of their own lives and of their own situated meaning making. (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 100)

I served as a mentor and a tutor in two local refugee youth support programs. In the summer learning program, I tutored middle school and high school refugee students for 3 days in July: 3.5 hours each day. In the fall and spring programs, I mentored a middle school refugee student through weekly home visits, 2 hours each. During my study, I immersed myself in these classroom and home settings to connect with refugee students and attempt to understand the complexity and variation of their perspectives.

During the mentoring and tutoring sessions, I wrote contemporaneous field jottings that I converted to inferential fieldnotes soon after (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I then analyzed my fieldnotes to incorporate the vivid and indispensable emic perspectives of the refugee youth in my study. I also used the fieldnotes to examine my thinking and how I was shaping and being shaped by my research—a form of reflexivity that I embedded in my research narrative.

**Data Analysis**

A "strength of theory building from cases is its likelihood of generating novel theory" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 546) via the synthesis of coincident and competitive themes in the data. During my analysis, I:

> consider[ed] what [was] shared and what [was] unique as well as what account[ed] for these similarities, complexities, and differences. In that sense, [I was] interested in the individual himself or herself as well as understanding the range and variation of experiences and perspectives within a group of one sort or another. (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 146)

—those groups consisting of the vertical and horizontal actors in nonschool organizations, the leaders in and close to being in classrooms, and the refugee students participating in my study. Dooley (2002) described the process of developing theory from case study research as follows:

> Case study research generally does not lend itself well to generalization or prediction. The researcher who embarks on case study research is usually interested in a specific phenomenon and wishes to understand it completely, not by controlling variables but rather by observing all of the variables and their interacting relationships. From this single observation, the start of a theory may be formed, and this may provoke the researcher to study the same phenomenon within the boundaries of another case, and then another, and another (single cases studied independently), or between individual cases (cross-case analysis) as the theory begins to take shape. (p. 336)

**A postcritical ethnographic approach to analyzing data**. Given the ethnographic nature of my method, my data analysis strategies included coding data to develop themes, making comparisons amongst the data (Huberman & Miles, 1994), and relating coded categories to each other and my theoretical framework (Madison, 2012). Employing open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I analyzed within and across cases, comparing vertically and horizontally (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2009) so that I could determine "whether a particular theme observed in one case was also present in other cases" (Dooley, 2002, p. 342), or if themes were contradictory. I constantly compared cases "not just to develop theory and explanations, but also to increase the richness of description in [my] analysis and thus ensure that it closely captures what people have told [me] and what happened" (Gibbs, 2008, p. 96). Throughout my study, I visited and

revisited literature that prompted me to adjust my ongoing data collection (Eisenhardt, 1989). This iterative, inductive process helped me to develop a holistic theoretical framework for emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth that will have implications for leadership, policy, and practice (see Figure 1).

I analyzed a large amount of data, and Dooley (2002) cautioned that "theory builders working from the rich voluminous data provided by case study research can lose perspective [of the parsimonious nature of good theory] and may be unable to recognize which relationships are most important" (p. 345). Cognizant of this potential issue, I worked to winnow the data so that I illustrated not "how *much* [I] have observed [and analyzed, but instead,] how *well* [I] have observed [and analyzed]" (Wolcott, 2009, p. 40, emphasis in original).

Incorporating the postcritical aspect of my methodology, I analyzed my data analysis in an ongoing process of action and reflection because the two could not be mutually exclusive if my research were to result in the creative conscientisation of the parties involved in the education of refugee youth. Instead, action and reflection needed to "constantly and mutually illuminate each other" (Freire, 1972, p. 149). An issue, brought to light by Sirin and Fine (2007), that I troubled in my action and reflection was

> how [I could] investigate politically, socially, and interpersonally charged topics with marginalized populations in ways that do justice to the complexities that exist within individuals and groups, and how [I, as a researcher and member of a dominant group, could] work through the challenges of discerning and confronting hegemonic undercurrents that influence[d] [my] research choices. (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 97)

As I analyzed my data, I also sought to reconcile a question asked by Michelle Fine in her interview by Ravitch and Riggan (2017): "To what extent do our methods reproduce our fantasies of the *other* rather than interrogate the complexity of our own privileged point

of view and the complexity of people who have been deemed *others*"? (p. 85, emphasis in original)

Critical inquiry assumes that "with every action taken, the context changes and we must critique our assumptions again" (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). "Understanding that qualitative data analysis is iterative, formative, and summative" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 216), I analyzed my data and realized that I needed to revise/rephrase some of my research questions, ask additional research questions, and collect more data from some participants after I had initially collected data from them. In this iterative and spiraling process, I went where the data took me, all the while being aware of the dynamic relationship between my research questions, data collection methods, and data analyses so that my study stayed anchored in my critical theoretical framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

**Validation**. Wolcott (1990) said that "validation neither guides nor informs" (p. 136) his work, and I view validation somewhat similarly. Through my research, I aimed to understand what is going on, not to convince someone of it. Inherently, my vertical case study, with multiple participants and varied data collection procedures served to triangulate the data; not just in checking participants' statements against each other, but more importantly informing a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of what has been going on in refugee education in mainstream public schools. In this sense, triangulation helped to create understanding, not to confirm it.

As I analyzed the data, I "view[ed] all people—not only those in positions of power—as meaning makers and experts concerning their own experiences (Brooks & Davies, 2007; Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; van Manen, 1990" (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p.

84). However, I recognized that there were "competing explanations and discrepant data" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 148). I welcomed the challenge of seeking clarity in my understanding, interpretation, and representation of the data and the scenes as a whole. Analyzing conflicting data helped me to develop a more vivid framework for refugee education.

## Delimitations

Wolcott (2009) stated that "good qualitative research ought to confound issues, revealing them in their complexity rather than reducing them to simple explanation" (p. 32). My study may have generated more questions than it answered. That is okay. Refugee children are in our communities now and they will continue to be for some time. My hope was to inform the ways in which educators and policymakers can help refugee youth to locate and develop their unique selves concerning the world around them, and to consider how they may want to change that world. My study was meant to start conversations. The result of my study is *a* theoretical framework, not *the* theoretical framework, and I am sure it will provide criticisms. I look forward to those criticisms. After all, my entire study is rooted in critique. One way to test those criticisms is by praxis (Freire, 1972)—that is, to put the theory into practice—which I discuss in Chapter 5.

I implicitly illustrated many of the delimitations of my study in terms of my methodological approach, theoretical framework, selection of participants, and positionality. However, an important delimitation that I did not previously discuss is the language barrier between myself and the refugees in participant observations. I am a novice in Farsi—illiterate but understanding the spoken language better than I can

articulate it. I do not speak any languages fluently other than English. I was able to speak some Farsi with a few students in the summer learning program I attended. However, most children in the program were fluent in a variety of languages that were unfamiliar to me and were in the initial stages of learning English. The refugee child I mentored throughout the school year spoke limited English. He and his family spoke Arabic in their home. Language fluency served as a delimitation in my field jottings and fieldnotes to the extent that every time data are transferred from one format or language to another, some level of context is lost (Gibbs, 2008).

My decision to use member checking as a validation strategy helped to mitigate misinterpretation as much as possible, but only to the degree that participants were versed in academic English. Therefore, the middle and high school-aged refugee students in participant observations did not participate in member checking of any text I wrote. However, all focus group and interview participants—including the two refugees I interviewed—were given the opportunity (1 month) to read my narrative and provide feedback on my interpretation of the data they provided. Three of the participants—Toya, Mabel, and Kristy—offered clarifying feedback and I collaborated with them to agree upon a few revisions.

My study was delimited by my choices of potential participants and by the range of people who agreed to participate. That said, more voices, especially from states other than Texas and from countries other than the United States, would be helpful to confirm or contest the concepts of the framework I developed. Multiple researchers using qualitative and quantitative approaches over an extended period can foster convergent and divergent perspectives to provide for a stronger, more synergistic view of data

(Eisenhardt, 1989). However, my study was purely qualitative and the theoretical framework I created was a result of my research only. It was driven by my analyses of participants' common interests in and perceived barriers to achieving emancipatory education for refugees in mainstream public schools. I expect my study to contribute to the ongoing conversation about teaching refugees by illuminating the voices of important educational stakeholders. In the next two chapters, I provide my narrative: my conceived theoretical framework and its implications for leadership, policies, and practices and my thoughts about possibilities for emancipatory refugee education.

# IV. NARRATIVE

The concepts and philosophical directions that can inform a theoretical framework for an emancipatory education of refugee youth in mainstream schools are interconnected with current and potential policies, leadership, and practices and how changes in such policies, leadership, and practices can be approached. Therefore, I describe my research narrative by outlining themes that address the three research questions holistically instead of addressing each research question separately. My narrative should be considered as one story—not *the* story—driven by the data participants provided and bounded by the critical frame I outlined in Chapter 3. This story consists of overlapping and intersecting themes herein relevant to improving refugee education. These are:

- defining and identifying refugees;
- continuously examining psychosocial educational aims;
- continuously examining organizational aims;
- listening to stories and acting with perspective;
- valuing and developing community;
- recognizing dis/connections and resources;
- theorizing change; and
- leading local, state, national, and international change.

Given the number of participants in my study and variety of lenses through which they view refugee education, it may be helpful to refer to their profiles in Tables 1 and 2 (see Chapter 3) while reading this chapter.

## Defining and Identifying Refugee

In my interviews and focus groups, I asked research participants what the words "refugee" and "asylee" meant to them or what they thought about when they heard those words. I then used their perspectives to reflect upon the complexity of identification and definition of forcibly-displaced youth. Naomi suggested that "a refugee could be anybody." What defines those displaced as unique, and why approach their education differently than other students? Participants generally responded in terms of classification, stratification, emotion, and uncertainty.

### Classification

Participants who did not work in classrooms tended to discuss classifying refugees. Some district administration staff leaned toward categorizing students by providing labels that served to fit students within present school system prescriptions of educational needs. Mabel said that "from the central office standpoint, . . . they wanted us to immediately see where you can place these students, because they have to start receiving credit. 'We need you to do a pre-assessment, a post-assessment. Where can you place them?'" Maya said, "I think a lot [of classification] depends on the paperwork that we receive when they're enrolling." Paula recalled, when her district began receiving refugees, that:

> We had to do all the research with the [regional] service center . . . how do we categorize a kid? Or how do we code a kid? . . . There is a specific definition per our laws . . . [and] we have to make sure that we have the proper documentation if we're going to categorize a kiddo as a refugee or asylee.

However, Paula recognized that "refugee" is one defining label, among many, that educators assign to children:

> Our kiddos are dual-coded bilingual and special ed, or they're [Response to Intervention], or they're gifted and talented, or they're McKinney-Vento. . . . My work transcends every label possible. . . . They might be classified as refugees or asylees, but they're students just like everybody else.

Although Marcela was the refugee family support coordinator, she was "deeply involved with special education." Difficulty learning a new language can sometimes be conflated or confused with learning disorders, and traumatic experiences can sometimes be conflated or confused with emotional disorders, making it difficult to know how to support refugee children within schools' existing systems of classification. Marcela described it thus:

> There's a pretty high number of refugee kids as well as immigrant kids who are basically placed in special education. Sometimes . . . [students] needed the support; other times, it would happen because I think individuals would confuse or misidentify or over-identify students.

Participants at the state level and higher tended to describe the terms "refugee" and "asylee" with literal definitions and legal semantics, as Leonard illustrated:

> A refugee is a person who has fled their country of birth and cannot return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. . . . An asylee, by U.S. law, is someone who has appeared at a U.S. port of entry or is within the borders of the United States who has a well-founded fear of persecution if they were forced to return to their native country.

Julie said "a refugee is somebody who crosses a border. But we do work, as well, with internally-displaced people . . . [and people] who ha[ve] not necessarily been displaced, but nonetheless [are] affected by crisis." Congressperson Chester epitomized the literal response when he replied via email, "United States Code covers my understanding," followed by the code, copied, and pasted (see Appendix E).

People must fall within specific criteria for Naomi's organization to assist them. Therefore, she did not dwell on her response: "The term is just a legal definition. It has

nothing to do with anything else." Ronald recognized that "it's a lot of semantics. . . . There are a lot of other individuals that are facing the same situation and the same dilemma, but . . . they do not have refugee status, or asylee status."

**Stratification**

Ronald recounted how some Dutch teachers' descriptions of refugees were inclusive of all immigrants escaping unfortunate circumstances, even those who had come to the country by choice. Those descriptions were not aligned with his perspective. He mocked what a Dutch teacher might say, followed by his reflection:

> Somebody who escaped war in the Congo or [who] was Afghanistan, or [who] was in Iraq, or [who] was in Syria. I mean those are refugees, come on. Those are *real* refugees. But these fake refugees that I'm dealing with in Holland? That's not a refugee! There's no escaping war and hardship." But then you start to ask yourself, well, they are escaping hardship. They can't live to the degree, to the happiness, to the care that they want, that they feel they should be able to live to.

Though some refugees are wealthier than others and have resources to provide additional support for their children, Ronald said he "usually think(s) of people [who] are receiving public support or receiving social subsidies" when he thinks about refugees.

Edward noted that "in [his international high] school, they're all extreme cases of trauma, every single kid," but that "refugees and asylees [are] a bit more protected, because they're here legally." He recognized that the legal designation of refugee or asylee affords some privileges that undocumented (im)migrants do not receive. Such privileges include funding, as Laila explained: "Refugee and asylee in my head are very similar. Now, because we have a federal grant, we're sort of trained to distinguish th[is] immigration lingo." How we define those (dis)placed determines the services that can be

provided for children and their families with government resources, whether funded directly or through community organizations or schools.

Marcela noted that definitions could exclude many (dis)placed students from receiving support:

> I had to be very careful because we were partially funded through what's called the [Refugee] School Impact Grant. . . . So, having to work under the guise of that grant, that documentation and those labels became pretty important, because we were only allowed to serve certain types of students who fit certain criteria. So they needed to be in a refugee status . . . and in Central Texas and Texas in general, that basically leaves out a pretty large chunk of the population.

(I discuss creativity with funding later in this chapter.)

For officially-designated refugees, there is also stratification before resettlement. Naomi mentioned that, historically, people had to be referred for resettlement to the United States via one of three channels: (a) an embassy; (b) the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; or (c) the family reunification program. However, she said that in Turkey—the country of asylum with the largest number of refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2018d)—there is now only one referral method:

> The Turkish government is in control of the initial referral for resettlement. So every refugee has to register as a refugee with the Turkish government instead of the United Nations. If they are generally determined to be a good candidate, then the file is sent to the United Nations who then makes the country-specific recommendation.

Political control issues may be why Turkey's leaders want to be the only decision-makers regarding who is a suitable candidate for resettlement. Nonetheless, the sorting, categorizing, and filtering of refugees by others does not begin upon resettlement. It is often a defining factor in a life of displacement, from beginning to end.

**Emotion**

Local-level participants provided personal, sentimental responses. Mabel discussed "having to teach [refugee students] how our language and their language could blend together" and asked, "How could we respect their culture as they were learning our culture?" Patrick argued that "some degree of trauma" was inherent in being a refugee, and Victor and Bradley agreed. In the teacher focus group, Mandy said that being a refugee meant "having to leave your home country, having to run away due to safety [concerns]." Toni reported that "displacement, lack of community, [and] fear. That fear is real. . . . They're running from something." Jasmine added that "they need safety. They need education. They need community." Charles mentioned "new cultures, new lifestyles, [and] new languages."

Participants in district-level refugee support roles conveyed mixed feelings when thinking about the terms "refugees" and "asylees." Marcela acknowledged the "prevalence of trauma," but countered that narrative by mentioning hope, and stating that "there's such resilience in the community, and there's such joy and happiness." She framed her refugee family support role as a surprising "celebration of the strength of these individuals who had been through a lot but were not defined by that experience. [Instead, they] were defined by their resilience." Julissa, evoking the American dream, stated that a refugee is "someone fleeing an alarming or unstable environment and is looking to have a better life, . . . hoping that, with hard work, they can continue to succeed and reap the benefits, just as anyone else would." Kristy cited that forcibly-displaced youth are "eager and want to learn but can be misunderstood." Though Kristy said, "the word marginalized comes to mind," she also indicated that she has "been very

blessed to have had the opportunity to be able to learn and grow and work with them." She discussed how fortunate we are to have them in schools, but also acknowledged challenges faced by undocumented "families who are coming here to seek a better life, [and] for their children's education."

I admired the resilience of Faraq's family, especially that of his parents: Aena and Salik. They were coping with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) while learning how to navigate life in a new country raising five children. Yet, they laughed a lot, and their attitudes were more positive than I had expected before I began participant observations with them. Though they were immersed in what could be called a refugee experience, they did not indicate concerns for how words might define them. When Faraq said he was going to enroll in a summer camp, I asked him if the camp was for refugees. He stared at me, blankly. He seemed unfamiliar with the word. I then directed my question to Aena, who replied, "I am [a] refugee?"

Niara—having lived in the United States from ages 13 to 27—responded to the term "refugee" more poignantly than other participants:

> The first thing that comes into my mind is you don't have a home. Being a refugee is not a happy thing. It's almost as [if] saying, "Oh, you're sad. You don't have anywhere to go." . . . I always think about what I missed back home. Not growing up in my home country, it always brings up the feeling of being strange in my own land. And because of that, I always feel like an outsider to my own people.

**Uncertainty of Selves**

The designations of refugee and asylee come with government and nonprofit agency assistance. Government officials must determine whether persons' reasons for fleeing their home countries are warranted sufficiently before assigning such designations. The person fleeing does not decide if they are a refugee or an asylee, or if

their hardships were sufficient to warrant assistance from another country. Someone in a host country decides the degree of the displaced person's fears and needs without knowing them, and possibly without visiting their countries or neighborhoods. Decisions regarding the rights and privileges of those displaced are made for them. This lack of control throughout the resettlement process may affect a sense of identity or autonomy. Considering such circumstances, one might wonder what emancipation truly means.

**Identity and belonging**. "Refugee status is conferred," Leonard said. Though Leonard was correct, refugee is more than a state of being. It is an identity assigned. Once assigned, it is continuously struggled with, as Toya and Niara exemplified in conversation with one another. Toya said: "The first thing that comes to my mind when I think about [the word "refugee"] is me and my family. We're refugees." She continued,

> You got kicked out of your country. And now you're trying to settle in a new country that you don't know anything about. So, you don't feel a sense of belonging anywhere. It's like, where- who am I now? . . . When I first came, I didn't belong, and, even now, I don't feel like I completely belong here in a way. It's not just about me being a refugee. It's also about my other stuff that represent[s] me, like my religion [and] my ethnicity. It's more than that that factor[s] into how I feel about belonging here.

The politicization of displaced persons often becomes heightened after they leave their home countries, as Laila depicted:

> We're here in our safe little cocoons, and it's just like, "who cares?" People are left to figure out their own survival for decades before it becomes disturbing enough for the rest of the world, and somebody notices, and starts to do something about it. But it only happens if it disturbs them enough. Like, if [people flee to] a country, [then there is] suddenly complaining [about] all these people here.

Naomi affirmed that citizens of Turkey and Lebanon are "just tired of having so many [refugees]." She expanded:

> People have been left stranded. . . . You've got millions of people who are just pawns in this weird, xenophobic, political game. They're watching the news and reading the paper, and now "refugee" is the bad word that nobody wants to say, and nobody wants to identify with, because politically, it's a term, and you're just this thing that has been dehumanized. . . . In Lebanon, 25%, . . . and in Turkey, 15% of the population are refugees. And it's gotten to the point where there's a lot of local, and national government hostility to their presence—which plays a role in the classroom.

Solemnly, Niara recalled that:

> I left the country when I was little. I was starting to learn so much about myself and about my people, the people I lived with. But I felt like they took away something that meant so much to me, something that I wanted to be part of me: my identity. . . . I have a void . . . I can't find anything to fill it. . . . For me, leaving the country, it means that I'll never be the same. . . . Basically, I did not belong anywhere. And, because of that, there's always the void that is to be filled.

At one point in our interview, Toya stated that she *was* a refugee. I then asked, "Do you not consider yourself a refugee? When did the label go away?" She responded:

> See that's the thing, because I've always [seen] myself as a refugee . . . and [in] the speech I recently gave, I think we said I was a past refugee. . . . So, I'm confused . . . What do you all consider to be a refugee and who is a past refugee?

Niara answered Toya's question:

> I don't consider myself a refugee anymore, mainly because I feel like I belong somewhere now. When I think about a refugee, a refugee is somebody who doesn't have a home. And [Central Texas] is becoming my home. I have my whole family here. I feel like I am not from here, definitely, but I don't consider myself a refugee anymore.

Toya replied to Niara:

> See if we're talking about that, I feel like I'm still a refugee then, because I don't feel like I completely belong here. Even though my whole family is here, I just feel like there is not a complete sense of belonging.

Niara then asserted that "I guess I always call myself an outsider instead of a refugee." "I've never called myself an outsider. I feel like that sounds worse than refugee," Toya declared. I interjected, "When I think of an outsider, I think of

somebody's who is not wanted or who is intruding. When I think of a refugee, I think of someone who needs help; who didn't have a choice." "What if you're both?" Toya asked. Niara resolved,

> I feel like it could be both. We don't know if they want us here . . . with everything that is going on, you've heard the media, what they say about refugees. "They have to be deported." . . . If you consider yourself as a refugee, that means you're not wanted here. . . . The word itself comes with a lot of experience: what you went through, what other people are going through right now. Even if you're not affected directly anymore . . . you're still being affected [by] what's happening out there to other people.

Toya and Niara both arrived in the United States as refugees when they were 13 years old, an age at which many children have begun forming their identities and are discovering ways in which they would like to be viewed by others. Having spent the first half of her life in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the second half in the United States, I asked Niara if she felt like she fit in now, 13 years after resettlement. She said:

> It's starting to feel like home, but I'd say I still have a long way to go I guess. . . . I long to go back home and learn and fit there too. I guess I want to be part of both worlds.

Kristy may have addressed the difficulty of belonging to both worlds when she said, "They want a better life for their family, but they're giving up their rights." When becoming a refugee, the right to identify as belonging anywhere is given up, at least temporarily. After resettlement, that right is never fully restored. Niara and Toya were aligned in some ways and conflicted in others about using the word refugee as a part of their identities. They may struggle for the rest of their lives with how they outwardly identify themselves or internalize the label of "refugee" that was assigned to them.

**Autonomy**. Definitions matter. Definitions can not only influence whether someone feels as though they belong, but they also determine who is accepted and rejected in spaces, groups, and societies. Seekers of refuge can choose to leave their homes, what items to take with them, and which direction to travel. Almost all subsequent decisions are made for them by others. Because of this, Naomi struggled to consider an emancipatory education for refugees as a concept:

> Refugees are forced to not exert any type of autonomy over their own existence. From the very start, from the flight from their country, they lose a lot of personal autonomy and it just diminishes with every step through a resettlement process. . . . It has nothing to do with them saying "I'd like to go to the US, or "I'd feel more comfortable in the US." That is not a discussion that happens at all. . . . [The United Nations] decide[s] where they're going to go. And then they tell the refugee. They don't ask them. . . . It's like, "This is what it is. Take it or leave it." Because you're a refugee, and the refugee resettlement program is designed for you to reach safety. It's not designed for you to feel good about anything. It doesn't matter what you want. If you don't want what's being offered, then you don't get what's being offered, and you can just figure out what to do for yourself. That's what resettlement is like. So, by the time a child and their family get to the United States and they're interacting with a teacher, they're probably at a point where they are no longer accustomed to raising their voice about anything or even telling somebody what they think, because they have been trained to understand that what they think is irrelevant. So, it would be quite a challenge . . . to encourage a child or their family to participate in their own development, because I would imagine that they've been dispossessed of even feeling like it's their right to do so.

Though I was assigned to mentor Faraq only, I often asked Hamid if he wanted to work on his school assignments with me. He would often reply, "If that's what you want me to do." When he would respond to me in that manner, I would tell him that we could learn about anything we wanted, and I would ask him what he wanted to learn about. He would either ignore me or reply, "nothing," or "I don't know." On those occasions, I questioned the internal and external influences on one's emancipation. I wondered how

we could move toward an emancipatory education for forcibly-displaced youth without input from children or their parents. Toni argued that:

> the struggle exists when we feel we have some sort of ability to emancipate anyone. I don't think that we can. I think we can create the conditions where other people can emancipate themselves. . . . Students can get to the place that we want them to arrive at if we teach them how to critique . . . to question . . . to create. . . . And if we did that first, maybe we could get to a place of resolution with the emancipation discussion, but right now [there] just doesn't really exist much room for it.

When entire families have been conditioned to do as they are told, encouraging refugee children to critique, question, and create can be difficult. Meanwhile, if educators do not consider refugees' opinions about what they would like education to do for them, emancipation remains uncertain.

When asked to define refugees, participants thought about classification and stratification while mixed emotions outlined the fragility of human interaction one must consider when addressing refugee education. To celebrate refugees' resilience while supporting those who also carry psychological trauma is a delicate position for educators to sustain.

### Continuously Examining Psychosocial Educational Aims

Discussing refugee education prompted participants to question the purposes of education: what they are, what they could be, and what they should be. "The part of emancipatory education that could certainly have huge benefits beyond just the student, but for those refugee families, is this whole idea of 'how do we think about our future?'," claimed Leonard. Toni asked more specific questions: "What's the purpose of education for refugees? Is it to acclimate them to the United States? Is it to teach them our ways? Is it to push them through the system so that they can go to college?"

Mandy, a focus group participant and teacher in the summer learning program, manifested the messiness that comes with a variety of educational aims for refugee students when she said:

> We struggle with [the purpose of educating refugees] a lot during the summers, because we do have very new families that have . . . been in the US for a month. Then they come to our summer school and it's like, are we actually teaching content? Are we teaching social behavioral skills? Or just, "This is what it is to be in this building. This is how we sit, and this is how we interact with other people regardless of where we're from." We're all over the place. . . . Is it just language? Are we doing content? Because then we have some of the kids who have lived here for a few years and it's like, "Now we're going to get you ready for ninth grade. . . . We're going to have to take this test." We just had so many things we were trying to target.

Given the range of perspectives, as per the nature of my vertical case study methods, participants' discussions about educational aims for refugee youth varied from improving society, to exhibiting appropriate social and emotional behavior, to passing classes and exams, to learning the language of the host country, to simply showing up for class, to not being hungry. The degree to which any such aims could be considered components of an emancipatory education is arguable, but psychosocial goals of education were valued by all participants.

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Participants defined an emancipatory education for refugees with references to what refugees did not have upon resettlement: physiological, safety, and love/belonging needs in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy. Emancipatory education for refugees could be broadly defined as freedom *from* the burden of concern and freedom *to* focus on relevant learning within a loving social community and to become the people they want to be.

Tabitha said her "goal would be for them to feel safe because they're coming from a situation where they probably didn't feel safe and things were unstable for them." At

the international level, Julie explained the purposes of education in crisis-affected areas in terms of protection:

> Fundamentally, it can protect children, provide a safe space, and a physical protection from certain forms of violence and abuse and exploitation that children are more vulnerable to during conflicts, such as sexual assault, [and] recruitment into armed groups. It can provide lifesaving messages about landmine awareness, health and hygiene, HIV, AIDS. It also provides protection—cognitive protection and psychosocial protection, [and] . . . a predictable sense of security, despite the chaos around them, that can reduce or reverse the effects of trauma.

After resettlement, educational aims may not be as critical as those of the International Rescue Committee, but refugees have plenty of other needs to be addressed by mainstream schools. Some families in Victor's district experienced poverty, homelessness, and other traumatic incidents regularly. He remarked that "when I think of these students, I'm not really thinking academics. . . . My goal is for them to get comfortable where they're at and then be in a position where they can start to thrive." "They've seen absolute atrocities and now they're sitting in a classroom. How well can they focus when they've seen that kind of stuff without proper counseling?," asked Arthur.

Participants in both focus groups were not quick to articulate solutions to meet students' basic physiological and psychological needs, revealing their difficulty in grappling with such issues. Tabitha disclosed her lack of knowledge about the help available to her:

> From the district standpoint, what kind of financial resources do we have to support those families? It's really hard for kids to focus on being successful in a new environment if there's not groceries that are always in the fridge and they don't have utilities on all the time, and they are living in a hotel room and they're moving around. Is there . . . a place where we could pull financial resources to give them the stability that they really do need?

Julissa recognized the struggle for refugee families to meet their children's basic needs and cited that her charter school "provide[s] free uniforms, free breakfast, free lunch, [and] . . . partner[s] up with [local nonprofit organizations]" to provide families with a bag of groceries every week. Though her school's efforts were not specific to refugee children, they did address some of the necessities that those in the teacher and administrator focus groups mentioned. Kristy, who directly supported bilingual/ESL newcomer students, described how her staff satisfied some of the primary needs of refugees: "Before they go to the schools, we even make sure that they have their backpacks and all their supplies. We give them little tickets to be able to go to our clothing closet."

Nonprofit organizations partner with schools to do what they can to assist refugee families in accessing basic needs such as food, shelter, and water, but nonprofit organizations mostly rely on government funding based on the number of refugees resettled each year (Rush, 2018). The lowered number of admissions during the Trump presidency, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, has decreased funding for nonprofit organizations that support refugees. Though the amount of money provided varies directly with the number of refugees resettled, the amount of money needed to support refugees does not. For example, a nonprofit organization will likely pay the same amount of money to rent office space, whether they are supporting 500 refugees or 300 refugees. Also, some people will not justify funding programs unless they can discern clear causal relationships between investments and quantitative results. Laila recalled a Texas politician's comment: "'We're feeding these kids for free and they're not doing any better in school.'"

**Inclusion and Empathy**

Carolina recalled one of the refugee participants in her youth mentoring program describe high school as "just watching everything go in front of him. Like, there goes the football team. There go the cheerleaders. There's the band. It just went by him. It didn't include him." She reflected that:

> When you come from the dominant group, you have a lot more shared everything, shared history. . . . We all went to school and learned the same thing and we have the same stories and myths and whatever that sort of binds us together. And when you're stepping into that, it's like, you've missed the whole background of the joke, right? . . . You just don't have the context.

Over the year, Faraq showed me certificates of accomplishment and photos he'd received from his school and the summer refugee education program. It was apparent he took pride in being recognized by others. I asked Faraq why he had a grade of zero in his art course. He said his art teacher "doesn't know how to teach," and "she's annoying." Over the next visits, I continued to inquire, and he eventually professed: "She says, 'I can't understand the way you talk.' She's racist." He also claimed his teacher talked about him, in Spanish, to his classmates. In October, he had an assignment in which he was supposed to match Spanish terms related to Día de Los Muertos with their English translations. He complained, "Why am I learning stuff about Spanish when I don't speak Spanish? I think that's racist. This is not art." Faraq was failing, not because he could not create art, but because he thought his teacher's attention to Spanish speaking students excluded him, and this affected his motivation and his relationship with his teacher.

Faraq exemplified how some refugees can feel more included than other refugees, even in the same classroom. However, Jasmine noted that "teachers have 15 hats already and they have 160 students that they see in a day. . . . [Teachers] have to have empathy in

all different directions. . . . Someone needs to support them." A lot of responsibility for inclusion is shouldered by teachers, who, considering the multitude of responsibilities they have in each class period, may lean toward assisting students whose language is familiar. No one in Faraq's class spoke Arabic. Social stratification amongst resettled refugees complicates inclusion and, as Marcela explained, such stratification can stem from language barriers:

> [In Central] Texas, you have a really high amount of Spanish speaking students and quite a few teachers who are also predominant Spanish speakers. When you introduced a student who happened to speak a different language other than Spanish or English, . . . there was sort of a fear within the schools and the teachers like, "What do I do with this student if I'm not able to speak the language?" . . . The fear, or the preconceived notions, or the biases, or the mental models kind of kicked in. . . . There are ways to do it that I often felt, working with teachers, that they didn't quite get it. . . . Our team [of three] almost couldn't address the need fast enough.

Some teachers claimed that normalizing difference should be a necessary goal in teacher preparation courses and referred to the importance of teachers' abilities to have a wide range of strategies to do so. Victor said, "You have to create that environment of inclusion, not just academically, but on a social level." However, he also admitted that "it's easy to get caught up with the 10% that do get our attention with the discipline issues [and let refugee] kids fall through the cracks." Other administrators told stories in which they wondered if they could have done more for refugees. Bradley recalled two Iraqi refugee sisters:

> They were kind of drawn to the adults on campus. . . . I remember the first time I saw the young ladies. They were sitting on the ground outside the cafeteria during lunch. They were just by themselves. So, I kind of sat down with them for a minute because, I don't know, these kids [were] new at our campus. They obviously looked different than our kids. They speak a different language. [The girls] were trying, but the kids didn't really gravitate towards them as becoming friends. So they were kind of isolated. And they told me that too. They said, "Our teachers are really nice, but the students are really hard to get along with.

> They don't really understand where we're from, so it's hard to make friends." So we found them really gravitating towards our hall monitor [and] the assistant principals. . . . But we, as a campus, and I think as an administrative team, we never really made anything different for them to accommodate them, even though you know that it's hard. And there was no class. I think we assumed that our teachers can work with them and get them what they need, right, rather than creating separate curriculum or separate opportunities for them.

Tabitha worked with an Iraqi refugee and scheduled "weekly check-ins with [her]self and [her] counselor for him." Though she questioned whether she did enough for him, she felt that she did the best she could with her resources. She said:

> A lot of just talking to him about, "How's it going? What are you struggling with?" And finding students that we knew were really easy to get along with [who] can help him navigate just coming into a low income, public school environment, around different cultures and languages he's not used to. We were trying to be super visible with him, supporting him, [and] sitting with him at lunch.

Tabitha also asked:

> What kinds of student groups do we have on campus that [refugees] can be a part of? Do we have students [who] are great leaders [who] can buddy up with them? Those things are really important to middle school kids. . . . We want them to have people to connect with, even if they may not understand each other. We want people [who] are warm and inviting to be around them [who] are positive influences on them as well. . . . I think the student mindset of being inclusive is really, really important. If it's not there, then we do need to create that type of environment.

Not all refugees feel at ease with inclusion. As Kristy mentioned: "Sometimes our refugee students . . . stay in their little groups because of comfort. . . . That's definitely an area of growth for our teachers: to understand how to be able to bring [kids] together . . . to learn from each other." However, teachers' abilities can be overshadowed by students' impressions. Toya reflected on how she perceived the adults in her U.S. schooling experience:

> I feel like what would also make a refugee fit in is seeing someone [who] looks like them; diverse [teachers] and administration. Most of my teachers were

> White. And so, I didn't feel a sense of belonging because nobody there looked like me.

Niara responded to Toya:

> You have a point here. When you have somebody [who] looks like you in a way that you can relate to, I think [it] helps. . . . Even being able to see someone who has an accent will give you courage to do certain things that you wouldn't do if that person wasn't there.

Toya expanded: "Because you're like, this person is here, that means I could be here too. . . . She can get there. That means that I can get there too." "She went through the struggles that I'm dealing with right now. . . . It is possible," Niara concluded.

Toya also discussed media infused biases:

> If I went [to school] and other people knew that I'm not who the media portrays about me, I feel like that would've helped me. . . . I feel like students don't praise differences. So when they see something that's different than them, they automatically think 'caution.'

Niara added: "I feel like if [refugees] can teach, or even share their experience[s] or even talk about their lives [so that others] can get to know what they go through on a daily basis . . . that would be nice." Toya mentioned a teacher's support in that respect:

> One of my teachers recommended that I [do] a project where I make a poster in English and Arabic explaining solar energy. After I made this poster, he hung it up in his classroom. Many students [who] had his class would come up to me and talk to me and tell me that [the teacher] wouldn't stop talking about the project. He would tell them that I've been in the US for so little and I was able to make this poster in Arabic and English. He would tell them about how impressive it was and also tell them about my journey and the hardships that I went through. His action made me feel proud of myself and made me feel supported.

Outside the classroom, group-oriented activities can remove barriers to inclusion. Toya explained that her science teacher went to great lengths to convince her parents to let her play soccer. The teacher not only confirmed that Toya could wear her hijab, long sleeves, and leggings under her uniform, but her soccer coach also drove her home after

practices. Toya recounted: "I was looking forward to playing every day with them, because [soccer] just made me fit in. It made me, like "Oh my god, I'm part of a team. Like, for *once*!"

Toya and Niara wanted to fit in and feel like they belong, but they wanted acknowledgment and care and they did not want to be targeted or singled out. This can be difficult to navigate for teachers and students, as Toya expressed:

> The setting factors into that. . . . After the class leaves, if [the teacher asks] "How are you?" I feel like that's good. But if every single teacher pulls a student into their office and [says] "Tell me about you," [then] you're just going to feel like "I'm different. They're showing me how I'm different." Because you want to feel like you belong with other students. . . . A teacher getting to know you is valuable. And taking it step by step and making sure the setting is [appropriate] . . . is a very valuable thing.

When I asked about possible programs designed to serve refugees, Toya was quick to reply:

> I feel like there shouldn't be a program [for refugee education]. . . . You shouldn't feel just a sense of belonging in this program. You should feel a sense of belonging in the whole school, with all programs. So I feel like if we do make a program, that's going to exclude the rest of the school and . . . you're excluded from everything else except from this program. . . . Let this program be the school.

Bradley said all of the sixth and ninth graders in his district were going to begin taking a class called Methodology for Academic and Personal Success (Texas Education Agency, 2008), which he believed would be key to helping kids develop empathy for one another. Mabel reported that teachers had recently started conversations in her high school's advisory period (typically a once-per-week, shortened class) that "weren't on empathy, but [more about questions of] how do you welcome somebody who doesn't look like you or act like you into the classroom and how do you help them?" Ronald argued that focusing on inclusivity is good, because it has a lot of literature, professional

development, and everyone can relate to it. He emphasized that what are determined to be inclusive classroom practices should not be decided by school leaders alone: "I'd want to talk to the community, . . . the teachers, . . . [and] the students. 'How would you feel more inclusive?'" Marcela mentioned that she had "spoken to a lot of nonrefugee kiddos who would sort of mentor [and] kind of help these brand-new students. It was a lot easier at the lower levels, so elementary and middle [school]." Bradley reflected that: "For new teachers in our district, we have a mentor system. We don't have a mentor system for students in these situations. That's an easy thing [to do] that doesn't require a budget."

**Social and Emotional Learning**

Julie broadly framed international educational goals as "things that are for a much lower capacity environment than say the United States and Germany, " meaning that goals began as simple as children attending formal school—something that is compulsory in the United States and Germany—and then advanced to learning basic social skills. She aimed for educating teachers about the importance of "supporting students' psychosocial well-being, . . . like a sense of control and a sense of predictability and concrete techniques," such as repeating daily activities and co-creating rules. She also explained that research, though not specifically focused on refugees, has shown that social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions can not only "mitigate the effects of adversity, [but] . . . result in higher outcomes in literacy and numeracy as well." Julie wanted teachers to understand how children are affected by prolonged adversity and trauma, and to have the resources, literature, and support from their school administrators to infuse social and emotional activities into their classrooms and shift their pedagogical focuses to such activities, as opposed to teaching to the test. "If you don't focus on that

social [and] emotional aspect, there [is] no way [refugees are] going to be able to start learning the academic stuff," Mabel attested. Most participants working in schools maintained a similar regard for the importance of social and emotional learning.

Though Julie acknowledged that social and emotional learning is important for all children, she emphasized that "research does show the biggest [academic] gains for children who have started as the most disadvantaged." Regarding social and emotional learning, Edward said that "at [the] international high school, that's what we do. Every single one of our kids is either an asylee or recent immigrant." But leaders in mainstream schools may have more difficulty, as Victor explained:

> The counseling support that districts give isn't designed to give deep intensive levels of therapy. . . . There has to be community involvement, because people can't expect schools to be able to handle that level of trauma with the level of things we have to do. . . . It's not that we're unwilling, but we need help.

Mabel also said that her district recently created a position, Director of Social and Emotional Learning and Guidance, and hired secondary-level counselors to address social and emotional issues with children. Social and emotional learning has become a popular phrase in education over the past several years and social and emotional learning programs have spread throughout the United States (Price, 2018), but such programs can be all-encompassing and prescriptive, as Jasmine described:

> They're doing a lot of SEL work at the district and trying to teach teachers about how to support students that have experienced trauma, . . . but it's still a very intro level emotional support. It's just kind of anybody [who] has experienced any kind of trauma, which is most kids or most people, . . . but refugees have experienced something completely different than a lot of our kids. And so, I don't feel like the SEL support is really targeted for those students.

Julissa made clear the importance of being "emotionally stable to do well at school, to communicate properly, [and] to have a relationship." So I challenged her to

consider what her goals would be if positive social and emotional learning were already taking place. She replied: "It would be to ensure they're filling out those 'do now's' and the 'exit tickets' to figure out where their comprehension is and continue adjusting those individualized learning plans." Julissa's response seemed as though social and emotional learning was a prerequisite for, or an aside to, as opposed to a part of academic goals. So I pressed her to imagine ways her school could improve by asking her to describe an ideal education for refugees. She responded: "I would do what we're currently doing, . . . because us getting them to fill out digital forms or doing work on the computer lets us know what their comprehension level is." Julissa would not change a thing about her school's reliance on computer-based algorithms to inform teachers' pedagogies. Yet, she upheld that "giv[ing] [refugees] the tools to be self-sufficient and successful on their own" was important.

**Self-Sufficiency and Self-Advocacy**

For Naomi, an emancipatory education is "a relationship where the learner has some sort of autonomy over what they learn and how they learn. . . . A learner would be able to participate in their own education in some meaningful way." Adults and students can cultivate autonomy within a school. But, for refugees, it is not as simple as telling them they can do whatever they want with their lives, or "by having those individualized learning plans and by consistently asking them if they're okay," as Julissa suggested. "What if, in terms of their social upbringing, there wasn't that sense of agency? There wasn't that sense of standing up and, 'this is my space and I need to emancipate myself of systems of oppression?'," Ronald asked.

After each weekly visit, I told Aena and Faraq to call or text me if they needed anything. Not once, over the year, did they contact me outside of my weekly home visit. During one visit, Aena asked me to help fix their internet connection. I pressed the reset button on the router, and it worked again. She said they had been without internet for a week. When I asked why she did not call me earlier, she simply responded, "It's okay." Mandy described a similar experience volunteering in the same mentoring program, years prior:

> The family's carbon monoxide detector was just [beeping]. It was just incessant. I was like, "I can't handle this. Who is your landlord? . . . We need to go [talk to him/her]." But there was that fear. They didn't want to go ask for help.

Toni added:

> Just as that family was afraid to ask for help about a beeping, that student was probably also told by the family not to ask for help in this particular way, because "we don't want to get caught up," or "we don't want anything to happen."

Marsha said she wanted "an education that gives [refugees] agency . . . without being afraid of authority." However, it can be difficult for refugees to change their mindset on self-advocacy after living a life of persecution. As Ronald stated, "There is nobody standing up for them. And that's why they're here."

Ronald said that refugee students' "opinions and their perspectives are necessary and important for the development of a more emancipatory education." "The goal of education is to make you self-reliant and free," Laila declared. Both she and Ronald referred to the trope of disadvantaged people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps as a myth. Nevertheless, for some refugee children, self-sufficiency is an immediate need. As Leonard alluded, "we get a lot of refugees who . . . [are] too old for high school. So, they have to go to work." He described the complexity involved in helping refugees feel

as though they can self-advocate and challenge social, economic, and political inequities in countries they are not grounded in:

> There are a lot of refugees who come from cultures where the idea of deciding what job you want to pursue is an utterly foreign concept. In their culture, they go to an office somewhere that tells them where they're going to work. Or by age 14, their school is transferring them to the profession track that has been chosen for them. So this whole idea of asking a refugee, "Where do you want to go work?" It's like, "Why are you asking me that? You're the one who tells me where I go to work."

Recognizing that refugees should be viewed as active participants in their host countries' societies, Julie stated that "helping students develop a sense of agency and control is especially central" to an emancipatory education. However, when someone has had all sense of self-advocacy stripped from them—often before they have had an opportunity to know what it feels like in the first place—helping them to build it is delicate work. Marcela said:

> If I could help or teach a refugee kiddo anything prior to entering the school system, it would be to try to [be] as open-minded as possible and to ask questions. I know that's not always culturally appropriate. . . . [But,] it's not always the students. It's often the adults that need to create that [environment] for them.

Carolina said:

> [There's] an empowerment piece to it. . . . It's about them feeling like their voice matters, their perspective matters. Their culture isn't denigrated in some way. That they really feel like, "I can just be who I am, in my complicated wholeness."

When refugees feel uninhibited, they may then feel empowered in matters of societal change.

**Agency for Change**

Laila hypothesized that there are probably a lot of refugees who feel both a responsibility to help others and a connection to their home countries. She recalled a Guatemalan asylee who arrived in the United States at 10 years old, who was now

enrolled in an Ivy League university: "He said, 'I'd never been back, but I always felt that I had to do something to make the country better.'" Niara discussed going back to Democratic Republic of Congo:

> I've always wanted to be a nurse, mainly because I want to go back home someday and be able to help in my community. People are dying from preventable diseases. . . . I want to educate women . . . from my home country. Anything that can give me the opportunity to give back to my community, especially back home. . . . If I can be that help, it will be a dream come true. [In] my tribe . . . school was for men, boys. No women. Women, once you reach 13-14, you get married and start having kids. I don't want that to keep happening. . . . I start thinking about how my mom grew [up] back home. What she went through . . . pains me somehow. It affects me indirectly, and I want to break that cycle. I don't want any child, any woman, any girl to go through that.

Toya did not discuss going back to Iraq, but she shared that being a refugee is more than just a label. It is an experience that has largely shaped who she is and what she is doing today. She described it thus:

> Now, most of the things that I'm doing are around refugees. So, every summer I intern with programs that help refugees. . . . I keep giving speeches during protests about refugees. . . . I definitely think that where I came from factors into where I'm going.

Her choice to become a change agent, a leader, and an advocate for refugee children was driven by her experience of being left out, feared, isolated, and unwelcomed. She now wanted to welcome new refugee children and provide them with knowledge based on her experience so that they did not have the same feelings that she had when she was resettled in the United States.

We "can't assume that [a refugee] wants to be an agent for change, . . . but the door should be open for that to take place," Naomi said. Julie indicated that Naomi's way of thinking calls for a major change in global ideologies:

> We used to talk about refugee education as we want [teachers] to prepare students with the skills they need to go home and rebuild their countries. Now we know

> they're not going home. So how do we change that language, but still have that method? We want to ensure children have the skills they need to succeed in their new countries and build themselves positive change and go home if and when conflicts subside and rebuild more peaceful societies.

Edward mentioned that advocacy could be contagious. He explained students' and parents' rights to them and told them that they have choices in terms of school and course selection, and how they express their needs and dissatisfaction with the school's staff. He noted that:

> [Refugees are] the most marginalized kids in the country, hands down. Language, socioeconomic status, culture, poverty, trauma, push factors, a lot of those things they have less control of. . . . [So] whenever kids come to me and advocate for themselves, that's huge. Then I know we're doing a good job.

Perhaps goals for emancipatory education can be perceived in phases. The first phase in emancipation being from the burden of conflict, exploitation, and other harmful psychosocial and physical noise. Toni illuminated what may be the next phase in emancipation:

> You might be free from the burden of, but now what are you free to do? Do you have the same privileges? Are you guaranteed the same lifestyle? Absolutely not. What, then, does emancipation really mean? . . . If we're going to take on the responsibility of creating this type of framework, we have to answer that question: Free to do what, after you're free from this thing? . . . How are we cultivating spaces for students to be able to be critical about the world that they inhabit without having to fit within this particular box? Are they free to critique? Are they free to learn? Are they free to teach? Are they free to understand the world as they know it without having to bubble in A, B, C, or D?

Tabitha suggested that emancipatory education is about the freedom to be "involved in our political system and [be] knowledgeable about what's going on. Otherwise other people are going to make decisions for you that affect you if you don't get out there and be a part of things." Naomi highlighted teachers' difficulties in supporting that ideology:

> Taking advantage of the diversity that is inherent in the refugee experience in that classroom can really do a lot to change the worldview of everyone in the classroom. And that, in and of itself, is an opportunity to . . . make others agents for change and to make others sensitive to their experiences. . . . It's not easy work, . . . and I sympathize with any educator who is trying to tackle that with all the other things that are happening in the classroom and all the other angles that they have to use to approach each individual learner. And doing so without information and adequate training for doing it.

Though the focus group of teachers initially discussed what emancipation may mean for refugee students, Jasmine related it to her own lack of freedom, as a math teacher. She lamented:

> My purpose, as a teacher, is to get them to answer questions that someone else has written instead of teaching my kids to ask the questions they haven't been asked before. I'm struggling a lot. I'm not saying I don't want to do that, but [because] I have all these other things that I need to get them to reproduce, I feel exhausted when I try to get them there. . . . I have to backtrack and say, "within this framework that I know we're in, what does emancipation look like?" And then I start going, "Well, emancipation for my refugee students, but also, . . . am I emancipating my other kids?" . . . I'm feeling stuck.

From Jasmine's perspective, captivated teachers should first be emancipated from serving a regime that pressures teachers to enforce students' reproduction of content to graduate. Ronald stated that education "can't just be about state standardized test scores or graduation rates. It's got to be something about discovery and respecting the process." He, along with Toni and Jasmine, indicated that emancipation may be the start of an educational journey for teachers and students, not the end goal.

### Continuously Examining Organizational Aims

Along with an examination of psychosocial aims, participants discussed several organizational aims. Brian articulated that the purpose of refugee education is "nested within the larger system . . . so it's hard for me to address the one that's inside of the

larger one without talking about the larger one. . . . Are we educating the rest of our kids to be emancipated?" Ronald affirmed that:

> This is bigger than just refugees. . . . Is [society] something that we're all a part of and we all contribute to, or is it "no, society is like this and you have to fit and conform," you know to be a good Central Texan, or a good American, or a good Dutch person?

In addressing systemic and societal issues that affect and are affected by refugee education, participants discussed aims related to enrollment, attendance, assimilation, and language proficiency.

**Enrollment and Attendance**

When I began asking questions related to improving the ways we educate refugees, Julie was quick to point out that *learning*, for resettled refugees, is considered by some grant funders to be "an innovative thing to be talking about." She explained:

> In this country, yes, of course we don't just measure success based on whether children are enrolled in the public schools. But for a long time, in the humanitarian context, that was the measure of success. That was what donors were demanding their grantees to report back on, and that's what grantees were doing. To say that now we want to see refugee children learning basic academic skills like literacy and numeracy sounds ridiculous if you're talking about children resettled in [the United States], but we're still trying to get that to catch on internationally.

Though K-12 schooling is compulsory in the United States, Faraq and Hamid were absent often. Throughout the year, Aena was sent several letters and emails—in English and Spanish, though her primary language was Arabic—from her boys' schools notifying her they may be denied academic credit if their unexcused absences continued. Laila's goal was for Hamid to finish high school, but, at 14 years old, he was already working to help his family pay their bills.

Leonard and Carolina—my two state-level participants—discussed educational aims with consideration for the ages at which refugees are resettled. Leonard posed questions about children who arrive between the ages of 17 and 19: "Do we try to get the child enrolled . . . and give them the best chance to complete a high school diploma? Or does the family need income such that the young person can't afford to be a full-time student?" Carolina added:

> They won't enroll you if there's no chance that you will complete the credits needed before you age out at 21. So . . . how do we help graduate them? . . . We'll see . . . a junior in high school [with] a pretty good grade point average. But when you look at their class schedule, it's a lot of . . . fluff classes. . . . They're not often being connected with everything from science to music to art. . . . So I feel like there is this gap for these older students where they really long to connect more meaningfully with information [and] skills that they can take with them for employment, but also [want to know] how to connect with their peers who [do not have] a lived refugee experience.

Enrollment and attendance are essential goals for refugee students, but Julie expressed that we should be aiming for more:

> We do need to make sure that . . . we [don't] think we're being successful if we have refugee children in our school and showing up. We have to be making sure that they're learning [and] . . . exhibiting positive social and emotional behavior, . . . as well as basic literacy and numeracy and language skills that they need to survive in the school systems. . . . We want to see children making friends and getting along with peers, and leading school clubs, and not just getting by, but thriving in a school environment.

However, thriving can be a lofty goal when an education system is designed to advantage students according to tacit cultural agreements of which refugees are not apprised.

**Assimilate to Graduate**

All participants recognized the rush to assimilate. "They arrive in Central Texas, and boom! They've got to start going to school and start doing well on the standardized tests and doing whatever they have to do," Ronald recounted. Noting that refugees in the

United States must enroll in school within 30 days of resettlement, he stressed that "it was a big push to get the kids to get all their immunization records up to date so that they could enroll in school." Thirty days is little time to orient to school while getting acclimated to a new country. Mabel argued that central office administrators wanted refugees assessed immediately to determine their placement and begin earning course credits. But assess what exactly? Marsha said that "just learning how to go to school and what the expectations mean . . . needs to be very clearly spelled out." However, Jasmine observed that "there's not really an intentional differentiation of instruction [for refugees]." Mandy reported that "if there was some pull out, it would be language acquisition, which was nice. But if a student showed any understanding of the English language, they were just kind of thrown in."

Though some degree of integration is inevitable, a rush to assimilate has downsides. Julissa mentioned that her charter school relied heavily on the integration of technology with individualized learning plans. She said:

> We are mostly digital. All of our scholars use Chromebooks. So they fill out "do now forms" and "exit tickets." And at the end of the week, teachers get that data and they meet together to ensure that we are continuing to adjust the individualized learning plans.

Faraq's teachers often assigned him computer-based work. Having a Chromebook and internet access was helpful in many ways. Nevertheless, during participant observations, I concluded that monitoring children's academic progress through prescriptive computer programs could not address the human aspects of refugee education, language(s), contexts, backgrounds, cultures, and social and emotional growth.

Kristy asserted that we need "more diversity in regard to the materials that are being utilized, because . . . a lot of times our kids don't see themselves reflected in the

literature. It's not fun to read." In one mentoring session, Hamid brought me a text titled "Phone Call," written by Berton Roueché, circa 1950. The story involved a landline phone and used outdated idioms such as "piling around the bend" and "party line." I talked him through the story and the teacher's questions on the associated worksheet using simpler English, but it took a long time and he showed no interest in it. Carolina, too, spoke of relevance in curriculum:

> I think there is very little effort to, for example, use literature, or poetry, or even music that resonates [or] that is similar to nations of origin that are represented by the students in your classroom. So when you sit down to read *To Kill a Mockingbird* . . . it's in English, but then it's also like southern English from the 1930s. There's just not those points that young people can connect to.

Coursework is often designed to prepare students for high-stakes tests—which at the time of this study, were standardized. Thus, educators' push for quick assimilation could be associated with systemically-driven graduation goals. Toni suggested that standardized test questions do not consider refugee test-takers: "You have a very middle-class, White audience. . . It's as if all students fit within this paradigm, and they don't." Laila decried Texas' academic testing system:

> Standardized testing is so difficult for a new English language learner, and so prohibitive. And they can't graduate from high school without passing it. So that is a big barrier to kids actually completing high school. There's just no way they can finish it, and the solutions that the school districts have found to that are very inadequate. They have teaching to the test, they have these phantom high school names where . . . you're going to your school, but you supposedly belong to this [other] school so that we don't claim you as a failure on the test. . . . There's just so much damage that's being done because of the requirement for these standardized tests. Why is it so important?

The sense of urgency to assimilate was a difference between countries that Ronald recognized:

> In South Holland . . . the kids were really teaching each other about where they're from, what they do, [and] how they face assimilation. And [in] the US, . . . it

> seemed like the idea was a fast-paced program to get kids familiar with life in the US, with education in the US, and just the way you do things, so you can be successful.

Marsha opined that "a lot of the stuff is geared towards an expectation that kids already have a certain level of understanding that [refugee] kids certainly do not." Laila added, "You know, jump rope. They're expected to be jumping in and jumping out as that rope is going. Nobody's stopping for [refugees]. That is the big problem. If [refugees] mess up, it's their fault."

Despite participants mentioning the hardship of assimilation, Mabel offered an example of solution: "We developed classes for local credit. Just basic classes, like we're going to take you to the grocery store and [teach you] how to navigate all of these things first." Maya added:

> We have courses in the high school level that have specific curriculums for newcomers to begin to process: (1) their experience, [and] (2) connection to the structure of the school [and] the expectation of the school. It's presented sometimes in their language if the teacher speaks Spanish, but oftentimes [it's done] using sheltered instruction methods. The elementary students, they have more opportunities for Spanish instruction.

All participants recognized that rapid assimilation was necessary for refugee students to graduate from high school in the United States. However, they did not believe that pressure to become similar to native-born students was ideal and shared thoughts that suggested an integrative systemic model would be more beneficial.

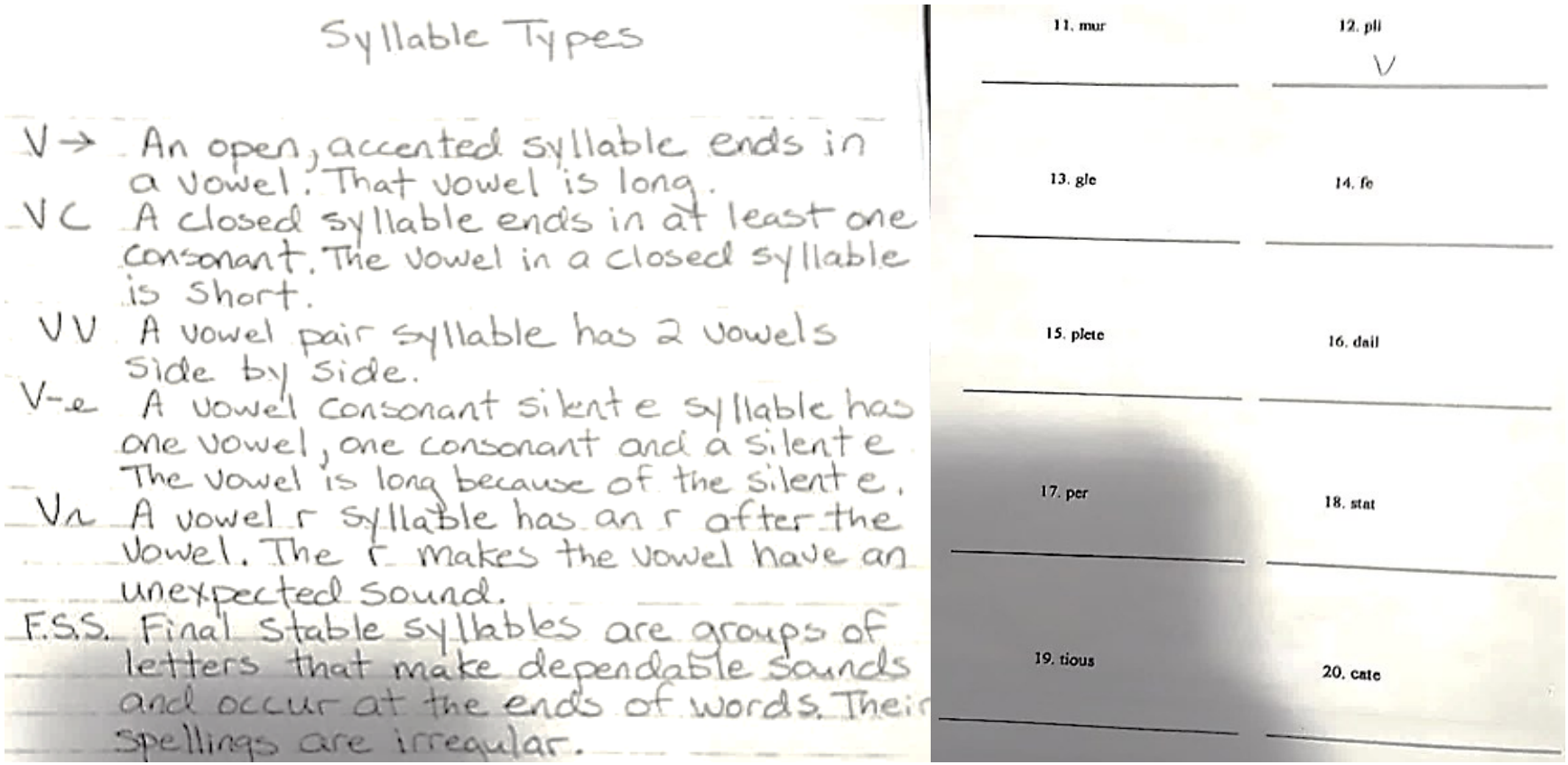
**Language Proficiency**

With rushed assimilation often comes rushed language learning, which can overwhelm adolescent refugees. Learning a new language is often critical for newly resettled adolescent refugees who must quickly begin taking exams to graduate from high school. "I loved school," Niara professed. "I loved being on campus, just to be there and

learn new things. But at the same, because of the language barrier, it was not a fun environment for me." "English is hard," Faraq adduced. He was not literate in Arabic, either. Every assignment we worked on began with reading in a new language. First, I would help him to read/speak the words correctly. Then I would help him to understand what the words meant. Then I would help him to understand what the words meant when they were put together in the sequence and context at hand. Only then could we attempt to respond to the question/prompt. With 10-20 questions per assignment, it was difficult to keep him engaged, especially when he saw no value in the work. I could understand how a 13-year-old child who just escaped the Syrian war would lack interest in learning about the history of Texas, written in a foreign language. Had anyone explained how a Texas History course could be relevant to him? As Ronald stated:

> It's a lot to ask for a student to make their way here . . . either facing war or loss of family members or tragedy. . . . And trying to [then] take AP classes, trying to study William Shakespeare sonnets, or learn the state motto? I mean, "What does that have to do with me and what my educational aspirations are?"

Faraq was good at math and often enjoyed it. However, it became difficult because of contextual factors in the story problems. His teacher could have edited the text and maintained the mathematical skill being assessed, but she did not. One of Hamid's assignments simply listed types of syllables on one sheet of paper and a page of examples and blanks on another sheet (see Figure 2). The assignment had no context or consideration for students learning English as a new language.



Syllable Types

V→ An open, accented syllable ends in a vowel. That vowel is long.

VC A closed syllable ends in at least one consonant. The vowel in a closed syllable is short.

VV A vowel pair syllable has 2 vowels side by side.

V-e A vowel consonant silent e syllable has one vowel, one consonant and a silent e. The vowel is long because of the silent e.

Vr A vowel r syllable has an r after the vowel. The r makes the vowel have an unexpected sound.

F.S.S. Final stable syllables are groups of letters that make dependable sounds and occur at the ends of words. Their spellings are irregular.

11. mur

12. pli

V

13. gle

14. fe

15. plete

16. dail

17. per

18. stat

19. tious

20. cate

*Figure 2.* Picture of syllable type matching assignment.

Not only was Faraq not making connections to the content of his academic curriculum, the language of the online program that his school used was a continuous English lesson for him. Statements such as "confirm your submission" with an "OK" and "Cancel" button were not intuitive, yet the program did not have translation options. No one in his household could help him determine what he was supposed to do on the variety of websites and modules involved. Often, when we logged into Faraq's online program, I would see that he had submitted assignments several times with a variety of failing scores. His frustration had led him to guess until he received the minimum passing score.

In one case, Faraq's teacher had structured a quiz such that the question and answer choices were images from texts pasted into the software program (see Figure 3). The answer choices that he could select were randomized letters, not followed by text, making it unnecessarily difficult to match the answer choices from the image to the answer choices in the program. For example, the answer choices in an image might read F, G, H, J; but D, A, C, B in the program. Copying and pasting questions with the answer choices from paper to computer made the quiz harder for no productive reason. Faraq often understood what he was supposed to do after I helped him decipher colloquialisms and academic English. However, writ large was that technology was not helpful when the curriculum remained unchanged for refugees and a teacher was absent. Laila exhibited her frustration:

> Just because that kid's in ESL class for an hour doesn't mean that he can now take regular social studies in the regular language of the book, or the language of the math or the science, because they don't simplify those. . . . [Educators are] forgetting that. And it's all very difficult terminology and sentence structure and vocabulary that's way beyond them. . . . By the time they piece it together to figure out what the question is, it's then that they realize that they don't know the answer.

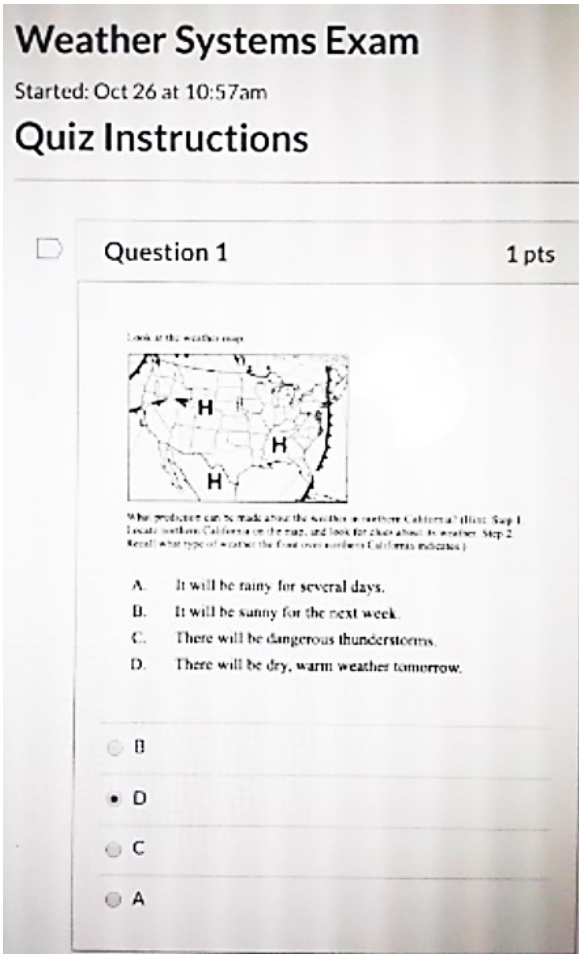



*Figure 3.* Screenshot of quiz question with confusing answer choices.

"As a [bilingual 5th grade] teacher, I really didn't know anything about refugee students and specific strategies for refugee students," Ronald admitted. Training regarding teaching students who are learning English as a new language is sometimes available to educators, but Jasmine indicated that it might often be structured as a one-size-fits-all course:

> I wasn't super educated on what to do specifically for refugee students or how to even build community. . . . I did get some kind of ESL supplementary certificate. But it was focused on what kind of supports can you do language-wise, not kid-wise, or experienced-based.

Mandy added, "They have differentiation for special education and gifted and talented kids and English language learners, but it's the refugee aspect [that is missing]."

Paula said teachers in her district used an online software called ELLevation that provided "analytics as far as how students are performing and how they've performed on assessments. . . . There's also a platform for instructional strategies. . . . So, if [the student is] a beginner in English, [the teacher] can use this instructional strategy." She also stated said the district's newcomer program includes a 3-hour block of classes: (1) general English; (2) reading; and (3) English language development. Placement in and exit from the language program was determined by a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC). However, Toni claimed that "a lot of times [refugees] don't get placed properly. If they don't know the language, then they're automatically put into a push-in inclusion course, which is not necessarily indicative of how well they learn or where they are academically." Paula did not mention programs that addressed refugees' nonlanguage-based challenges.

In Turkey, Naomi observed that "the process [of resettlement] is so long that people learn Turkish too." Though speaking multiple languages can be viewed as an asset, Laila illustrated how educational leaders have let it remain a barrier:

> They need a second language in high school, . . . but they have to go take Spanish when they already speak four other languages. So, it's trying to try to get the school up to being able to test them in the languages that they know . . . so that they don't have to learn a fifth language while somebody else is learning a second. They're being challenged unnecessarily with that.

Niara, who spoke four languages prior to learning English in the United States, said "I was always looking forward to my French class to be able to speak my French." However, if she had not already spoken one of the foreign languages offered by her school, she would have been required to learn two foreign languages: English and another.

**Separate to graduate**. Language proficiency gaps between English language learners and native English speakers sometimes causes educators to separate the two groups. Laila proposed that her "ideal situation would be to have kids in a separate space." She elaborated:

> We've been trying to push for . . . some kind of welcoming center or school where all refugee kids can start. So that they can fill in some of the gaps and be there between a year or two years. . . . Then they can go [to their area schools] with more confidence and they're not so far behind.

When told by school officials that doing so would be segregating refugees, Laila responded "Yes, but *academically*, and just to give them a chance to catch up. . . . There is a welcoming center, [but] they're all Spanish speakers. . . . So why can't this be for refugees too?" I asked Laila about the area international high school and she replied:

> They have to opt into it. They're told they have that choice, but a lot of times parents don't understand the advantages of sending their kids there. They say, "Well, why am I putting them on two buses when my local high school is so close?" not realizing that there is a big difference. . . . It would be nice to have something like that in middle school, [because] . . . you have them in a more protected environment and [can] . . . start with the basics, because their problem is English.

Ronald described how separation within the Dutch school system—like that of the United States—not only limits refugees academically, but also how it acts as a barrier to community:

> You decide as a young kid—I think 12 years old—which route you're going to take. Which secondary school you're going to go to: . . . the super high achieving one which prepares you for university, . . . a middle one . . . which prepares you for community college, . . . [or] the vocational track, which can prepare you to just get a job. . . . They're totally different campuses. If you're going to do the vocational thing, you will never hang out and never study the same things that they do in the middle one . . . or the [one with] people [who] are on the track to university. So, there's really stratification. Why might I be describing all this? Because if I arrive in this country not speaking Dutch, . . . I need to get it. I don't have the funds to go to private school. . . . It's kind of a socioeconomic question. . . . [The Dutch system] is much more isolating, because it really

> demands an excellent understanding of Dutch to move up in the system. The teachers are there to help the kids learn Dutch and become familiar with Dutch classes and a different subject matter, but you don't see the efforts at integration, at becoming a part of the Dutch community, of becoming part of the greater school community. . . . A constant refrain [of refugees] was "The Dutch language is so hard. It's so hard to get to know Dutch people."

Whereas many participants discussed trauma and language barriers as defining characteristics of refugees, Edward commented on what makes them as unique as any child:

> Move away from teaching them English as the only goal, because we all know that learning English doesn't guarantee anybody's success. We all know people who speak English fluently and it doesn't say anything about who they are. . . . Mov[e] away from "Pobrecitos, poor little kids, we need to teach them English." . . . They're just teenagers. Like any other teenager, they're finding who they are in the world. . . . And so, focusing on . . . those assets that they bring rather than [that] they have trauma, [and/or] they don't speak English.

Nevertheless, Edward voiced that English "can take 5 to 7 years to master, so they're already at a disadvantage." Thus, he implied his international high school is prescriptive: "If they come in with very little proficiency in English, they're double blocked in English," and the other "core classes are usually double blocked," because "four out of the five tests that kids need to graduate from high school happen in the first 2 years."

Victor's description of the difficult decisions administrators have to make summarized how stratified school systems defined by language proficiency and high-stakes tests can isolate and stress refugees, demarcate what types of knowledge are valued and what success means for refugees, cause them to dislike school, and limit their postsecondary options:

> Because of accountability, if they fail two [state standardized] tests, are we taking away two of their three electives and putting them in an intervention class? Or are we making a conscious decision to help them keep electives, so they don't hate school every day? Because if you hate school that early, and it carries on, that's going to carry on for the rest of your life. So what do we need to do to help these

> kids feel well-rounded, feel like they belong to something, so they want to continue to be a part of it?

There are certainly nonlinguistic reasons for enrolling refugees in separate schools. During a mentoring session with Faraq, we looked at the website of the high school he was scheduled to attend. There was a picture of last year's ninth-grade class on the home page. Faraq immediately commented, "They're all White." I responded by telling him that there was also an international high school designated for people who were born outside the United States. "I'm definitely going there," he replied. What Faraq may not have realized is that enrolling in a school with a mostly non-White population may bring with it unwanted public perception, as Ronald outlined:

> There are these schools which are for the really smart kids and the really good kids. And they're kind of mostly Dutch, mostly White. And these schools over here are for the kids [who] need to get a good job, . . . but they're not university material.

In my summer program observation, refugees were all together in a building. Mandy discussed the task of separating them from each other:

> We separated 12 years old and up for developmental [reasons]. If they're 13, reading on a first-grade level, we're not going to put them with the first graders. That's demoralizing. . . . So, we got to do other things in the older groups. We tried to do some academic stuff, but again, [we had] all levels academically and different languages [in the same space], so it was a mess at times. But you just have to read the room. If we're thinking of a different form of education, would it look like that? I don't know. Would it look like a mess at first?

Marcela thought that refugees should be less spread across the district so that she could focus on professional development for teachers and front office staff:

> If there was a way . . . to make sure that students could be maybe placed in a more strategic way in schools, enrolled in schools that were set up to work with that particular population or maybe more sensitive to the population versus, "You're going to be enrolled at this campus simply because this is your neighborhood school." How do we address this on such a grand scale when we're just a small team? . . . You can only do professional development so often, right? And when

> we're targeting 89 schools, and you have students enrolling continuously and . . . you might have a new teacher, . . . it just wasn't sustainable to be able to really keep abreast of the staff's needs.

Kristy had implemented varied newcomer programs within several schools in her district. However, she argued, prior to her employment in 2017, "There hadn't been any true programs to support [refugees]. . . . They were placed into a general ESL, either content-based or pull-out program." So she did some research with refugee students who had attended school in her district in the past. As a result, she said, "Many . . . [had] dropped out of school . . . because of the struggles they had in their classes compared to having a newcomer program in place to support and scaffold for them."

The structure of the newcomer classes in Kristy's district differed depending on the student body. At some campuses, newcomers were in self-contained classrooms with one newcomer-trained teacher for the core courses, but they took elective courses with the rest of the school children. At other campuses, Kristy said that newcomers had different teachers for their core subjects, but the teachers were "specifically focused on working with the newcomers, and it's not self-contained." She also emphasized that she tried to determine what is best for each student individually: "It could be that maybe they only needed the reading and writing block of the newcomer class. But for math, they may be out in the general math classes." Her overall assessment was that having classes specifically for newcomers had been an improvement:

> It's allowing for them to acquire the academics while acquiring that language, with the focus being helping them to acclimate and acculturate to the school system . . . in a safe environment and not having to feel embarrassed. . . . You're going to see the kids in a newcomer [class] talking and participating more than a general ESL class.

Naomi shared her mixed feelings:

> On the one hand, you will want children to be able to integrate with the larger student population without being constantly reinforced that they're refugees, they're the other, like they need special accommodations. But it seems like perhaps . . . a separate homeroom might assist with some of the issues that are very unique to a refugee child [and] acknowledg[e] the fact that they may have some unique challenges [and] perspectives.

Victor, too, conveyed that "refugees and asylees are going to have specific needs, but at the end of the day, they're not going to want a specific wing or hallway. [They] want to be a part of the campus."

If educational systems remain inflexible in terms of being welcoming spaces, then there may be academic advantages to separating refugees. However, if refugees are separated, they may be challenged in feeling as though they belong. An ideal approach to determining organizational aims may be to establish the degree to which refugees should learn to belong and belong to learn.

**Listening to Stories and Acting with Perspective**

Several participants conveyed the importance of educators listening to refugees and learning about their experiences. "I don't think I started hearing about refugee education until I got to a graduate program and started talking to folks. So when you think about the lack of language around those students, it's pretty shocking," Toni reflected. Prior to becoming a scholar, Ronald had worked as a teacher, a school counselor, and an assistant principal. Of those roles, he said that the school counselor position provided him with the exposure and perspective to realize the struggles that refugee children were having, "because as a school teacher, you have a certain number . . . of kids that you teach. And, as a counselor, I saw basically everybody in the school on a pretty regular basis." Carolina said:

> We are always . . . educating about, "why does it matter?" Why should the United States continue to be taking in people who are being forcibly-displaced? Why is that not only important, and the right thing to do, but how does it benefit our country and our communities? That then also raises awareness of the circumstances, and why they're here and needing maybe some additional support.

"I think just knowing and talking with those students, hearing from their perspective[s], and their parents' perspective[s] is a value add[ed]," Kristy maintained. However, Maya suggested that just listening to refugees' stories is a challenge: "It's a cultural shift from the norm of operating schools." Ronald indicated that the shift needs to start with campuses that have begun creating a culture of respect for diversity and acceptance of people within their borders: "I'm talking about that rare school that really is a hub of the community and . . . also listens to the voices of the community."

In this section, I describe the importance of listening to refugees to learn about forced displacement, culture, individuals, and oneself. While listening may seem simple, it is an often neglected, yet powerful element in developing a welcoming school community with common goals.

**Making Time to Listen**

Participants who were classroom teachers at the time of this study or had previously been classroom teachers discussed lacking time to listen to refugee students, families, and leaders of professional development courses. "I really didn't know much about support systems for teachers when I was a teacher," Ronald recalled. However, he found that the district had a refugee family liaison who had formed a partnership with a local university's Middle Eastern Studies department to create a workshop about teaching Arabic-speaking refugees. Ronald went to the workshop and reflected:

> It was really remarkable, because I was in a pretty big district: 80,000 to 90,000 kids, maybe 10,000 teachers. . . . And twice a year, they would have this

> workshop. It was usually on a weekend, and [there] would be 50, maybe 60 people there. I was like, wow! There are not enough people. Where are all the people?

Even at 50 to 60 people, not all attendees were educators, nor were they from Ronald's school district. The workshop was open to employees of neighboring districts, case workers, social workers, and representatives from refugee resettlement support agencies. Laila conducted an annual training to "tell [educators] about the issues with refugee education," and the last workshop she led had roughly 15 attendees. Marcela described how high turnover in the education field made training difficult:

> My staff had to train the campus I had just trained, because over the summer all of the teachers left and there were new teachers [who] didn't know how to work with refugee students. They didn't know what a refugee was. They didn't know some of the cultural parameters. . . . It was very overwhelming. . . . You had to admit that you couldn't meet the need, as much as you wanted to. [There] just [weren't] enough of us to go around, and the turnover just wasn't sustainable.

Listening is not a one-time, one-way venture either. Jasmine inquired, "[Parent/family] liaisons are super important, [but] how much contact do they get with their individual teachers? . . . Do those teachers feel heard and supported?" Marcela pointed out that she and her staff were not experts in training teachers and administrators:

> Professional development is a really big one, and one of the things that we weren't trained to do. We weren't educators. I don't have a teacher's background and none of our staff were teachers. We were actually providing support services, a lot of interpretation and translation as well, to arriving families. So what we ended up having to do was to connect with English Learner Specialist teachers that were masters at this type of work. And then, through that, we were able to do the professional development.

In Holland, Ronald observed "there was a lot of talk about themselves and . . . citizenship, and about life and people telling their stories." However, one teacher was with the same students two to 4 hours per day. Ronald commented, "Of course that

teacher, for that long a time is not just a teacher. They're also a good counselor. . . . That was really a different dynamic." Whereas, in the United States, Charles contended:

> The support has to start at the district or administration level, because I see . . . that class of 35 [students] for 50 minutes and then they're gone. It takes more than just one or two teachers trying to make that child feel comfortable, and they might not have time to do that. You've got to have outside programs or liaisons or something available to that individual at the district or school site level. . . . It can't be put on the individual teachers who are trying to juggle 35 kids, testing, their curriculum, their home life, everything.

Laila deplored the U.S. educational system as set up to press teachers to value things tangential to their students as persons:

> The education system sucks teachers dry. All these reports and all these things that you have to do. Before you even go into the classroom and meet a kid, you're working double the hours. And so, the value is not in what you're doing in the classroom. It's in all these other things.

Some opportunities were available for school staff to learn about teaching refugees in Central Texas, but they were often outside of teachers' regular work schedules. Marsha and Laila both emphasized that teachers should be compensated for the extra time they spend listening and learning to become better educators. Perhaps some teachers could learn during the school day by simply listening to the refugees in their classrooms. That is, if they knew which students were refugees.

Arthur revealed, "In my 6 years of teaching, I've never known if I've had a refugee student or not. . . . Just identifying them so that people can cater to them would be a big step in making [school] easier for them." Jasmine added, "The lack of language of that in the schools is shocking." Though many teachers in the focus group had suspicions, none had ever been told that refugees were in their classrooms. Several of the administrators admitted that they, too, did not always know. When I relayed that information to Toya and Niara, Toya responded: "That makes me question. . . . I felt like

teachers *knew* but didn't *know* who [me and my brother] were. . . . They probably just thought I'm an immigrant."

Naomi speculated on why some teachers and principals may not be told about the refugees in their schools:

> I think it's a very delicate balance because you don't want to label the children as "refugee, refugee," because of the political climate. . . . But, as a teacher, . . . to help them become successful academically, they kind of need to know that.

Laila attributed part of the lack of awareness to spreading the refugee population thin across 89 different schools in her district: "[The resettlement agency] may contact the school that has 10 or more refugees and give them some information, but the school that has two may not ever know that these are refugee kids."

Even when we know who to listen to, listening can be difficult due to language and/or emotional barriers. During my participation in a summer program for refugees, I was partnered with a tenth-grade girl and asked to help her complete a card-matching activity about senses that some younger refugees were completing with ease. I asked her where she was from and she replied, "Tanzania." She responded to every subsequent question I asked with a cautious "yes" or "no," but did not understand what I was asking. As we worked on the matching activity, I could quickly tell she could not read words such as "hot" and "cold." She consistently mismatched the cards and would look to me for approval of her choices. I questioned how I was to attempt to listen to her story when we had such basic obstacles to overcome.

Recognizing similar struggles, Paula discussed aims for some of the refugee youth in her district:

> We're not even talking about culturally relevant pedagogy here. We're just talking about just basic necessity, like, how do I even . . . communicate with the student if

> they don't speak? Because for whatever reason, they're traumatized, and then they just aren't speaking. . . . So you have two different pieces here: the basic necessities, as far as that affective piece of their livelihood; and then you're talking about the academic piece, as far as what is it that we're doing in school.

The systemic pressure on educators to assimilate students quickly often results in little time available for listening to refugee students and families, while language barriers are an added complexity.

**Learning About the Effects of Forced Displacement on Families**

Several participants who were not classroom teachers at the time of this study discussed the need for teachers to learn more about how forced displacement affects students' families and consequently students' behavior towards and within schools. "What I would like to see is the teachers having a bit more empathy and I think an understanding of where kids are coming from," Kristy said. Ronald described forced displacement as "this idea of uprooting . . . and you're forced to leave and go to a brand-new place." He depicted his own study of refugee education as "kind of an awakening," because U.S. political discussions and media coverage had skewed his perception of the process one must go through to be granted refugee status, making it seem as though people could simply pack their things and move to the United States. For Ronald, the media had not conveyed aspects of child development that are affected by the difficult physical and psychological journey that refugees must go through.

When I asked Naomi to describe educational situations for forcibly-displaced youth who were waiting to be granted resettlement, she replied:

> It's much easier to know . . . what's happening . . . in refugee camps. Despite all the cons with living in a camp, the resources are sort of concrete. In Turkey and Lebanon . . . they are generally all urban refugees . . . and there's pretty much nothing.

Despite the lack of educational support, Julie cited that "refugees are moving further from traditional camp-based environments and they're increasingly living in urban contexts and noncamp settlements [due to] a global policy movement that's much more towards integration of refugees into national systems."

Once granted resettlement approval, the Lebanese and Turkish sites Naomi worked with provided a 2- to 5-day cultural orientation training that she described as a "very general education . . . basically just geared towards explaining to refugees what their life will be like [and] what is expected of them in the first month of their life in their resettlement country." She stated that her organization's site in Turkey provided said training for adults ("defined as anyone 14 and older") and covered "freedom of religion and U.S. laws . . . with a wide brush." They have a separate training for children, which she considered to be not much more than "just babysitting." For example, youth were shown what a classroom looked like and told that they had wait in line for things and raise their hand to speak in U.S. schools. "So, by the time a refugee child or adolescent reaches the US, I would say, pretty much by and large, from this region, they're grossly ill-prepared for anything," Naomi concluded.

Once resettled, refugees may be able to slightly shift their focus from survival to education, but other struggles can get in the way. As Laila conveyed, refugees:

> are traumatized all over again when they're in the US . . . They come here and then they go, "Okay, land of the free!" What land of the free, when you can't afford to pay your rent, there's no medical coverage, [and] the schools are . . . survival of the fittest?

Faraq's family of seven lived in a government-subsidized apartment project. It was difficult for him concentrate on schoolwork with the noise and other distractions. The building walls were concrete and cold. Once, Aena brought me a glass of tap water with

gray bugs in it, each about one-quarter inch long. Their rent was $216 per month. She said if she and Salik earned more than a specific amount of money, the government would raise their rent. They realized that it did not make sense to work full-time if they would pay higher rent and net nearly the same monthly income. They preferred to concede work time to raise their children. Aena worked part-time at a daycare and was able to take her three youngest children to work with her in the summer. She occasionally earned cash by doing chores for an older Syrian man in her apartment complex. But Aena and Salik were cautious, as they said government workers checked on them frequently to make sure that they were not working when they claimed they were not working.

Aside from their ongoing financial struggles, there were basic things Faraq's family asked for my assistance with: internet navigation and making online purchases; resolving technical issues with their computers, phones, and televisions; comprehending letters from the school district (often about Hamid's excessive absences), medical bills, and medicine bottle labels; and more. One of many examples was that their television menu was in Spanish. So not only could they not read the menus, they could not change them to English—a language they were only slightly more familiar with.

Julie said that teachers should receive training to:

> have a sense of the types of things [refugees] might have experienced in the past and how that can affect not only their behavior, but also their ability to learn and to focus and to concentrate and to remember, . . . so that we deal with the kind of the root cause of any difficulties. And sitting still in class, and getting along with peers, and resolving conflicts peacefully, and learning to read, and write, and do math, and play.

Niara discussed learning as a mutually beneficial, two-way process:

> If [teachers] can take the time to learn about certain things that are not familiar to them, . . . it will not only be helpful to the student, but the teachers as well. . . . They need to learn how to teach these kids and the kids need to learn how to learn in the environment that they're in.

Ronald attested that asking refugee kids to share the stories of their resettlement journeys may seem to be a therapeutic and inclusive exercise, but teachers should approach such an activity with caution, because it could also be retraumatizing for children. Jasmine asked, "How do you balance that in the classroom when you have those [students who have] either similar or very different experiences, but then also very different perspectives or desire of what it looks like to talk about it?"

Charles commented:

> Especially in Social Studies, [because] you might be teaching about that. I want to be respectful of that kid if they've experienced it. . . . That's why you should know . . . who you have in your classroom. . . . [Then], if we're going to be talking about this, this might be something I want to have . . . an individual or small group conversation [about] . . . with this group of students . . . to make sure [they] . . . are comfortable.

With regard to potentially discussing traumatic events in class, Jasmine hypothesized that "that fear is huge with teachers. . . . I don't want to make [refugees] feel called out. I'm picturing this huge balancing act that I don't see school districts being super successful at, in general."

Carolina provided an option for teachers to open channels for storytelling while minimizing the risk of traumatizing refugees when she said:

> An interesting entry point into some of those discussions . . . is having discussions around the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. . . . [Asking], "Did you even know this existed? . . . In your country were these rights protected?" And those have been some of the most fascinating discussions I've been in over the years, with both adults and youth.

She said that this activity would often lead to dialogue about empowerment, and rights that are protected for men in some countries, but not women, or adults, but not children.

**Oppression beyond borders**. Faraq sometimes wanted to discuss current political issues with me. During one of our sessions, he asked, "What if Trump becomes president forever and bombs this country like they did in my country?" Oftentimes refugees escape one oppressive circumstance only to find themselves in another (physical, political, institutional, or verbal). Niara suggested exploring such oppression by "put[ting] yourself in their situation and imagin[ing] what [they] went through." Toya claimed that it can be helpful for refugees to describe their journeys to nonrefugees, but the depth of one's understanding is more limited by explanation than exposure: "For someone to truly understand what someone else is going through, they have to experience it."

In his English class, Faraq was asked to draft a paper and was provided with a few topics to choose from. He chose to write about racism. I guided him through the writing prompts he was given, and he dictated his paper while I typed it (see Appendix F). On another occasion, Faraq's assignment was to write about what he wanted to change about school. He said he wanted it to be easier for him because he was also learning English. I asked him if he wanted to write about how school was more difficult for him because he was from Syria. He said yes, but Hamid heard us and interjected: "Don't say you're from Syria. That's not good to say." I asked why. "It's like, not a good thing," Hamid replied.

During another visit, I learned that Faraq had fought another student and both were suspended for 3 days. I tried to find out more about the reasons for the fight, but Faraq did not want to divulge much. However, he mentioned that "there are fights

between Mexicans and Americans in my school all the time." He also showed me a pocketknife that Hamid had purchased and told me that he would use it for protection if anyone from his school came to his house. Faraq's school environment complicated his identity and sense of safety.

**Parental perspectives**. Salik was an auto mechanic in Syria. After resettlement, he worked a variety of low-paying jobs. During my year of observation, he obtained a part-time job at a chicken restaurant—where no one else spoke Arabic—and brought leftovers for his family to eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I asked him if he wanted to be a mechanic in the United States. He said he did but claimed that he could not get hired without knowing English or Spanish. Stress often showed upon his face, which I assumed affected his children in some way.

Maya used a grant from the state to hire case managers to work closely with truant students (not all of whom were refugees) and stated that, after 2 years, "they're still peeling back layers that are contributing to students' self-esteem . . . [and] how their families do care about education, but they just can't figure out 'How do I stabilize my family?'" She also concluded that "oftentimes, the parents blame themselves. So, when we have parents [who] blame themselves, and then we have a system that blames them too, it impacts the level of hope."

I was more than a mentor for Faraq. It was apparent within the first few months of my observations that Faraq's entire family needed ongoing guidance to navigate life in the United States. Mandy, who had previously been a mentor, concurred: "We mentored everyone in the house." Toya reflected that:

> It's sad to say, but my parents had little impact on my education. . . . We couldn't lean back on our parents. Often times my parents didn't even know anything

> about what we were learning in school. . . . Nobody asked my parents what they needed or what we needed. It would've definitely been something that my family would have wanted.

Toya, who now volunteers with the same nonprofit organization that supported her family upon resettlement, said that the organization offers English classes for parents, but transportation was often an obstacle to parents' education. Laila also mentioned logistical troubles but praised the efforts of her local school district's refugee office for helping with parental transportation to school events.

Kristy's district sent buses to pick up refugee parents to attend their annual parent symposium, but she decried the amount of paperwork parents were required to fill out, the assumptions made that parents were literate in their first language, and that some forms were not available in their first language. To address those issues, Kristy said she "created flyers and information all through visuals." At the last parent orientation meeting for parents in Laila's district, she had difficulty translating a district form containing 15 multiple-choice questions about the types of assistance and interaction parents would like from the district. She reported that the parents "had no idea why we brought them here for 2 hours. They did it because they were asked. . . . And the school district is always talking at such a different level than the parents understand."

Ronald said that school officials need to ask refugee parents, "How can we make our school better for your son or daughter?" But to refugee parents who are not accustomed to communicating with their children's school staff, that question may be met with confusion. Laila recalled a parent's misunderstanding: "Why are they asking me how can the school help? Do they mean they would help me with my rent?" Marcela said, "There's certainly a lot of pushback and cross-cultural things going on, like 'Even

though [my son] is in a different grade, can he be in the same grade with my daughter? Because he needs to watch over her.'"

Maya said that her district has a parent liaison whose job is to "help parents understand the system so that they can navigate through the system." She added that "we need to be able to build relationships with parents . . . [and] get to know their story. We can't begin to challenge our own systems if we don't know that the systems aren't working for the parents." She also determined that there must be problems with our educational system if parents need so much guidance to begin with and that school staff "really need to take a look at our own deficit beliefs about how we determine whether parents are prepared or not."

Laila proposed that parents may be:

> shamed by their kid not doing well. So, they don't want to come face the teacher. This is not like the American mother who's coming all militant, saying, "Why are you failing my son?" . . . They would be telling their son, "You did this wrong. And if the teacher said you got a C, you must deserve a C." . . . [Parents] are not supposed to tell the teacher how to do her work, because culturally, that's not acceptable. If you are a respected person in, let's say the Middle East, they will call you teacher. "Teacher" means that you know more than me.

Laila also emphasized that teachers should not consider a lack of parental communication to be related to a lack of care. In many countries, she said:

> The principal is the only one who would talk to the parent. Teachers are not allowed to talk to the parent. The parent has no say in the school. . . . So the expectation in [the United States] that "this kid obviously is not supported because his parents did not talk to the teacher" [is] just so false. The parent doesn't know they *should*, right? That's part of the education we try to give them. . . . There's a big gap between what the parents understand the school does and what the school thinks it does.

Charles mentioned that he used to work in a district in Minnesota that had large Somali, Hispanic, and Native American populations, and consequently hired cultural

liaisons for each group. One liaison for each group was assigned to the high school, and others at the middle and elementary schools rotated so that someone would be on a campus every other day at a minimum. Charles said the role of the liaisons was to be someone who parents or children "can talk to and discuss any differences or questions that they have that they might not be willing to discuss with administrators or teachers." Ronald emphasized that having district refugee family liaisons or other specialists who can address psychological aspects of trauma is important for supporting refugee families as well.

Paula said her predecessor formed a parent advisory council: "A core group of parents that would come in fall and spring" to serve as the parent advisory committee for the district and "go back to their home campuses and spread the word [about] services, programs, and so on." She said she planned to reinstate the council, but asked "how do we keep that unity?" Two meetings per year is not often. She also noticed that a lot of the outreach from administrators to parents "happens in the spring when [the communication is about] testing awareness."

**Familial power shifts**. A lot of responsibility to help refugee parents navigate the school system, and society in general, is thrust upon their children. Julissa noticed a reversed dependency in which refugee children are often "the backbone of their family, being the [people] who translate for their parents . . . [and] teach them how to use [technological devices]." Realizing that "it could be [that] most of [refugee children's] time is invested in teaching and supporting their parents [rather] than teaching and supporting themselves," Julissa discussed her school's efforts to educate parents: "We

provide night computer classes for parents. We teach them how to . . . write resumes, . . . apply for jobs, . . . be self-sufficient, and not rely on their children for communication."

In my participant observations, Faraq, Hamid, and Hettie frequently served as interpreters for me and their parents and would teach their parents how to use phones, laptops, and televisions—responsibilities that native-born students generally do not have. Faraq would sign forms with his father's name, though neither of them fully understood what he was signing. For instance, Faraq showed me the medical form his parents were supposed to fill out so that he could get a physical exam to participate in school sports. Faraq did not understand why there were three lines for names other than his own (father, mother, and emergency contact). Nor did he understand the terms listed next to the checkboxes asking about his family's medical history. Additionally, Salik often took Hamid with him on errands to interpret/translate. But Hamid's English reading level was on par with third grade standards, so certain tasks—such as translating a mobile phone or internet contract or bill for Salik—would have been beyond Hamid's understanding as well.

One day, Aena showed me her bank account ledger, because she did not understand why she had been charged $14.06 by Amazon when she had not made a purchase. After investigating with Faraq, I discovered that he had purchased an Amazon Prime subscription upon checkout by mistake, because he saw the word "free" on the shipping menu. He did not realize that his mother would be charged a subscription fee and that $14.06 was the first of many monthly payments. This is a case in which Faraq's mother did not know enough English or have enough technological savvy to purchase something, so she asked Faraq to do it. But Faraq did not have the English skills and

adult mindset to navigate a website's marketing and question why something would be free.

"The younger you are, the quicker you acculturate," Marcela said. But, no matter how quickly a child adjusts, they may not understand what's trying to be communicated between adults. As Paula recalled, "There's a lot of responsibility and burden on our children having to translate for their families on matters that a 6-year-old . . . has no clue about." Leonard was adamant that:

> there's a feeling on the part of refugee parents that their children are losing their culture, losing their roots, losing their connection. And oftentimes the children develop an inappropriate sense of their own power in the family. . . . So, we definitely recommend very strongly against engaging children as interpreters, especially for their parents.

However, Marcela observed that "in some communities, the students would actually completely lose their first language. And if [their] parents hadn't learned English, [then] communication [between them] could be lost," which may cause familial tension. Perhaps asking refugee youth to function as interpreters is asking them to become adults too soon. Alternatively, refraining from asking refugee youth to interpret may press kids to assimilate so quickly into the host country way of life that they completely lose their native language and cannot communicate with their parents. The latter has implications for how much refugee children can help their parents to become self-sufficient.

**Learning About Culture**

Participants' discussions about culture spanned social and academic contexts and overlaps. As Leonard illustrated:

> The biggest thing that could help teachers is . . . understanding what culture is. . . . Different cultures have very different fundamental unwritten norms and practices.

> When I talk about culture, I use the analogy of the iceberg, because the dress and the food and all the things people share when they present "Oh, here's some things you can know about our culture." That's the tip of the iceberg. All the stuff below the surface—the water of things—everyone who grew up in that culture just knows. It's that common knowledge thing I talked about. And it's unique to that culture. And you, as an outside person, will never know all of that. And that's okay. That's what makes diversity such a beautiful thing.

"In my years of experience working with refugees, I've learned so much more about life, and about things that I may take for granted, about culture, about language, [and] about diversity than any textbook could have ever taught me," said Kristy. Niara reasoned that "because [some teachers] don't know what it is like to be an immigrant or coming from outside of America, they don't know what it [means]."

I viewed my mentoring activities as a privilege, because I was able to learn about Syrian culture directly from Syrians, as opposed to reading about it in books, watching documentary films, or listening to lectures. Brian realized that "[refugees] bring a lot of knowledge . . . from their culture. But we don't really see that as an asset in the classroom, typically." Patrick emphasized that educators often have a deficit-, rather than asset-based approach to teaching. Leonard proposed that all people who work with refugees should discuss and:

> understand some of the fundamental differences between cultures with regard to things like time management, with regard to whose effort is to be acknowledged—the individual's or the group's. Are laws and rules to be applied equally? Or are there people who are important enough that they should not have to follow the rules everyone else is expected to follow? Cultures differ, fundamentally about these things. And this is the part [when] people say, "Well, everybody knows that." Because when you hear that phrase, "everybody knows that," you can expect to hear, "Well, everyone in *your* culture might know that," because a lot of people don't even think about the fact.

Refugees are often resettled by government order in the same apartment complexes as other low-income families, with little or no regard for the cultural

differences of the residents. Mabel described an incident in her former district in which Somali Bantus, Bantu Bantus, and African Americans were living in the same apartment complex and a specific word was said on the school bus that was interpreted differently by all three groups, thus leading to an altercation that ultimately resulted in evictions from the complex. As she described it, "it was a culture clash." She and Edward mentioned that differences in gender roles must also be recognized and addressed. Mabel observed that "it was difficult for some [students] to take instructions or guidance from a female because of the role they play in their country."

Paula said that "culturally relevant pedagogy, as far as having a curriculum that our teachers are truly seeing their students reflected in the work that they're doing," is "the number one best practice" to make curricular connections with refugee students. Maya insisted on the idea of "teachers as cultural workers," but asked:

> How do you know that a teacher has a certain appreciation for what happens outside of school and how it impacts their child within the classroom, and how they either assume responsibility or not for impacting that . . . and how [they] infuse it into [their] curriculum?

Maya's question is difficult to address. For example, Niara recalled feeling insulted when one of her teachers asked her if she used to live and dress like the children she saw in UNICEF television ads. She said:

> They show poor kids on TV asking for help. And so, I was like, no, that's not how I used to live. We used to live in normal houses. We used to go to school. We used to do things that other kids in America are doing. Even though our culture is different, we still had a normal life.

Leonard suggested to "let the kids tell the story of their culture," and that, in doing so, kids would also learn from their parents and possibly retain/maintain more of their culture in the process. However, Niara admitted that, as an adult, she was still confused

about the role that culture played in her life: “Every time I am in a group of my people talking about their experience back home . . . I don’t have anything to talk about. I felt in between my culture and American culture.”

Toya thought that teachers and nonrefugee kids should be more educated about current and historical oppressive circumstances that cause people to flee their countries. But such education takes capable, sensitive teachers and/or students who would teach each other. Niara said she remembered a social studies lesson about the genocide in Rwanda in which her teacher and classmates began asking her questions. She is from Democratic Republic of Congo, but they assumed she knew everything about the event because she was from Africa. Niara concluded:

> When you're informed about certain things, you know how to behave when you come across someone who went through it. And for me, I feel like if they can teach about this kind of stuff that other people are going through in the world, I think it will be helpful when you meet someone who went through that. At least you would be mindful of what they might be going through instead of just talking however you want or come out as ignorant.

Kristy, a former social studies teacher, said, “I would try to make sure [we were] making those connections to all the different groups of students to help them relate to [the] diversity we had [and] help the kids understand that we can learn from each other.” Patrick suggested that “if one content area can . . . really prioritize it, social studies is the natural place.” Charles noted that his former school had discussed the implementation of a program called Culturally Proficient School Systems (CPSS). He stipulated that “it’s not specific to refugees, but just all cultures, everybody, and bringing in sources from different cultures.” However, he said, “It’s still left up to each individual teacher [to decide] what they’re going to do with that.” For Charles, it was natural to recognize and

educate about students from varied backgrounds, because he taught world geography. He said:

> I had students from the different places that we were talking about and I had a curriculum where I said, "Here, you're the expert at it. You teach us. I can tell you what I've read in a book, but I've never been there. I've never experienced this. I want you to teach the class." And I had this group of girls who taught a lesson on Islam. "Talk to [your other] teachers [and] you can skip your classes for today. You teach all my classes." Because it means more coming from them than it does [from] me. . . . We did a lesson on the Lost Boys of Sudan in my class, and that's what a lot of my students were experiencing. . . . It brings perspective to students [who] were born in America of how scary that might be, and kind of opens their eyes and it opens up the conversation. . . . The other geography teacher was doing it a different way. We kind of had freedom in that way. . . . I just felt comfortable saying, "Hey, run with it. Let me learn from you."

Though learning about culture can be more immersive when learning from a refugee's perspective, they, too, need help in learning about new cultures. As Toya attested: "It's not just learning what the state requires, but what you also need to learn to fit in and know what surrounds you." Niara highlighted the cultural learning curve for refugees when she said:

> There's so much to learn that's not just English. . . . we are not familiar with the culture. We understand what we were taught back home, but in America we're like babies. We're still learning every single thing. But if, in class, we can have the opportunity to learn about the American culture—like, things that are done every single day—that would be helpful.

Julissa presented a more simplistic view of culture than other participants: "The first week of school is something that we call culture week. . . . Children learn about the rules, where their classes are, they get to know their teachers . . . and they learn about who we are and how we operate." However, Julissa's perspective pointed to a complex aspect of culture that may go unnoticed when teaching refugee students: academic culture.

Academic culture in the United States is typically geared toward testing. Laila noted aspects of academic culture as it relates to assessing refugee students:

> They're very culturally American, those tests. The kinds of questions, the kinds of situations they're putting in, the kinds of language and vocabulary is very American. So even kids who speak English before they come here, they're not necessarily going to do well on that test, because of that. Also, multiple choice testing is such a Western thing that kids from other countries also have to learn. . . . So, it's not just content. It's also the methodology that's used. And then the stress on the timing and all these very strict requirements. It's very intimidating. . . . Even though individual schools and the school district [are] trying to be more accommodating, . . . those very rigid requirements haven't changed. The high stress environment for refugees is doubly destructive, because they've come from trauma, and all these changes are happening in their lives, and they're already being looked at as not good enough. . . . So there's psychological stress on them in addition to the language issues.

Faraq was almost completely disengaged from schoolwork during Ramadan, when he and other family members were fasting from sunup to sundown for 30 days. He had little energy, he slept a lot so that he would not be as hungry or thirsty throughout the day, and it was exceedingly difficult for him to focus. The state standardized tests were being administered during Ramadan, and I wondered if his teachers understood the physiological effects of fasting on students' behavior and ability to focus. He and Hamid skipped an entire week of school during Ramadan because they maintained they did not have the energy to go.

If Faraq understood what was being asked of him, he could do his assignments. However, aspects of academic culture precluded him from performing well in the eyes of others. At times, it seemed he had learned more about multiple-choice test taking strategies than he did about his course subjects.

Marcela suggested that:

> We tend to devalue other types of knowledge and lived experiences. For example, some of our families came from agricultural background[s]. Some of our students were expert farmers, but there isn't really a whole lot of space in our curriculum in the state of Texas, at least—certainly not in standardized testing—to even elicit much of those experiences.

Charles expressed that he had more autonomy in the classroom than Toni or Jasmine:

> I've been fortunate enough not to have a tested class. I've taught government, economics, and geography, which weren't specifically tested at the state level. And I had administrators that said, "You know what? Do your thing." . . . So, if I needed to take an extra week to do this thing, [I could]. . . . I was fortunate enough to be like, "We're going to do some free responses," [or] "You're going to teach me." We're going talk about cultures. We're going to talk about behaviors, . . . community-building, and doing [discussion] circles in my classroom, because . . . if you don't build those relationships, [then] the content isn't going to stick. But again, I had that freedom where my performance wasn't based on how my kids did on a test.

Mandy, who also did not teach a course associated with high-stakes, mandated tests, added:

> We have lots of freedom to do all sorts of project-based learning . . . and restorative circles. I see a lot of that in early education and early childhood. . . . We need early intervention and then more support at the middle school and high school levels, because . . . [at] my own school, we have tons of resources for cultural restorative practices and social and emotional learning and project-based learning.

**Learning About and From Individuals**

Marcela said that we should "just be open-minded with students and try to learn as much as [we] can about [refugees]." For Ronald:

> Education is more than just the classroom and workbooks and exercises. It's also, what people are learning from one another. . . . It was obvious that a lot of the [refugee] kids had great ideas and they had a lot of life experiences that many Dutch people would never even know about. . . . If they could become part of the curriculum, if their stories could become part of discussions . . . to make education more participatory, wouldn't that make education more dynamic? Wouldn't people want to be a little bit more interested?

Many of my research participants suggested that we listen to refugees' stories, but Niara felt as though she had no story she wanted to tell. She said:

> [My people] always talk about their experience back home, the beauty of our home. But me, I don't have that. Even though I know the stories. I've heard stories from almost everyone in my community. But for me, I don't have anything to tell. I don't have that beautiful thing to share with my American friends.

Though I believed Niara did have beautiful things to share, her viewpoint could have created hesitancy in teachers and other students who may have wanted to learn from her. Laila said:

> The classroom is different for every teacher. There are some teachers who notice this kid sitting by himself and not getting it and does something about it. And there's others that go, "Okay, he's one of 30 [students]. Yeah, I'll just, you know, I'll keep an eye on him," but don't really interact necessarily. So all the decisions that are made on the systemic side are not really looking at the individuals. And refugee individuals are different, depending on their background and where they come from, and how much attention they draw to themselves, because a lot of them try to blend into the background and not get a lot of attention.

Paula understood that children have unique needs and wondered how we were addressing those needs systematically. Noting that we often address refugees when they exhibit behaviors inconsistent with teachers' expectations, she said, "We're analyzing the symptoms and not getting to the root of them." She believed that teams of teachers needed to have deeper conversations about teaching refugees. When I asked how much interaction there was between prekindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school teachers in terms of conversations about educating refugees, she replied, "I can honestly tell you it doesn't happen."

If we are not learning much from refugees themselves, and we are not talking to each other about them, then how much do we know about them when they enter schools? Kristy asked and answered her own question: "Do we receive information about them before coming, in regard to their education? No." However, Kristy learned about education systems in various countries via her self-driven research and experience. She said she traveled to Kenya, because she "wanted to have a better understanding of where our students are coming from." She also communicates with educators in refugee camps.

Consequently, she generalized that refugee youth from the Middle East seem to have more of an educational foundation than refugees from African or East Asian countries, and that girls are often not formally educated in in the Middle East.

Maya emphasized that we need to be continuously listening to families and learning more about their stories. As a community/parent liaison, "our role is to get to know them," she argued. She did this through community walks, home visits, and phone calls. Maya claimed that hearing refugees' stories can help to "built the level of trust with families where they will begin to divulge a little bit more, . . . [and] trust requires time." Kristy and Charles suggested that home visits from liaisons, interpreters, and teachers would be greatly beneficial to educators and refugee families, especially when parents may not have transportation to schools. However, Maya stressed that prioritizing home visits is determined by the principal of each school and that only "some understand the importance of it" and are "trying to figure out how [to] include it . . . [and] create the culture and buy-in from teachers."

Maya encouraged parent liaisons to conduct home visits "in teams so that [they] have a built-in mechanism for feedback. . . . Afterwards you can have a conversation [with each other]." Though, she added, "at the teacher level, a lot of it is driven by the desire of the teacher. . . . There are certain campuses that will ask their teachers to do a home visit. They'll do one . . . or two per year." I learned a lot about the stories of Faraq and his family through my home visits. The visits helped me to connect with Faraq, develop trust with his family, and try to relate educational activities to his life. But one or two visits was not enough. It took consistent, weekly, dedicated time over the course of a year to develop a trusting relationship. However, communication from Faraq's teachers

would have been helpful and I never received it. Direct, honest, cooperative communication was necessary, because if I walked into Faraq's home and did not know what he had been doing in school all week, it was difficult for me to support what his teachers wanted him to learn. If he walked into school and his teachers did not know what his life was like outside of school, they would have trouble connecting his education to his home life.

Faraq was always extremely helpful when I needed something. When my computer battery would run low, he would say, "I got you," and find an outlet for me. When Kaleb would go through my bag and play with things, Faraq would correct him and put everything back where it belonged. Every visit, Faraq and his mother would bring me tea or coffee, and something small to eat. These are insights into aspects of Faraq's behavior that educators might not learn during classroom instruction.

Niara and Toya agreed that I probably learned more about them in our 90-minute interview than their teachers did throughout all their years in the U.S. school system. "When [teachers] take the time to get to know you, they learn something. . . . [When they] speak to you [and] spend time with you, they get to know that you're capable," Niara stated. Toya felt similarly and began talking about her experience. She then stopped using "I" and began using "we" in the middle of her story, as if to speak for all refugees:

> When I was [in school], I felt like [my teachers] didn't learn anything [from me]. But right now, because I have some connections with my middle school teachers, when they're looking at me, they learn something. Because I always felt like I wasn't capable when I was in middle school with those teachers. And now when they look at me, they learned that we are capable. We are people too. We can live too. We can succeed. We are capable of doing more than people assume. I was this middle school girl once, didn't know English, almost failed classes . . . and now they look at me as this refugee advocate who's going to [college], who was

> once the president of the National Honor Society. . . . They should put more effort into what they're doing with refugees.

**Proving oneself and representing others**. Creating an inclusive environment can be difficult for educators when refugees feel as though they must work to overcome others' fears before they are welcomed. Niara and Toya both told stories about feeling the weight of how they were perceived, and the responsibility to represent others like themselves (Iraqis, Congolese, refugees, Muslims, women) to help people overcome their biases and misconceptions to be respected and valued as human beings. Toya reported that she felt she had to fight to recreate the image that others had of her:

> Most times, I had to approach people. People were afraid of me. Nobody approached me. They thought that I was this alien in this school who didn't know anything. . . . I had to find my own ways and be myself and talk to other people, which I couldn't do most of the time, because of the language barrier. So it's like, "Okay, you have to live through this." . . . I felt like I broke the glass ceiling by proving to [other students] that what the media portrays about Muslims isn't accurate. I felt like when I went to middle school, these students, most of them thought that "oh, I am a terrorist." . . . By the time I first got into middle school to the time I left middle school I proved to them that we are not who people think we are. So, I taught them. . . . Sometimes I asked my friends what did they think when they first met me? And then some of their answers were like, "Oh, I was scared." So I was able to take that fear and turn it into something and make friendships. So I felt like, now they know what Muslims really are like. They know now that we are people too, and we can grow too, and we are not like what other people think we are. I had to prove it by being myself, by showing them who I am and who I stand for, who I represent, [and] what my identity is. I proved to them that what they thought of me and people who look like me is just not accurate.

Niara said that she made some friends when she arrived in the United States, with whom she has remained friends during her adult life. She recalled that:

> They were interested in getting to know our stories. And I felt like they learned something. . . . Most of the time, I get asked about my accent. The say, "even though you have an accent, you're intelligent. You know what you're doing, and you have dreams that you want to accomplish." And because of that, I feel like definitely when they get to know you, they learn a lot. . . . People always assume because you have an accent, you don't know this, or you're not intelligent. You

> are not capable of doing that. But to me, it is something beautiful that I value. It is part of me. . . . I don't know if I want to lose my accent, because I love it.

Niara remembered just one classroom lesson in which refugees were represented, The Holocaust. She said:

> That was what we concentrated about, which is why kids, in order to find out about refugees, they relied on media and social media and the news—which is why they have the views they have. Because there wasn't enough information provided by the school.

Toya's experience affected her to the point that she wanted to improve schooling experiences for other refugees and is now an activist:

> I graduated middle school not feeling welcomed. What I'm trying to do right now is actually reach back to my middle school and do a segment where I go there and talk to their students and educate them about refugees, asylees, immigrants, [and] people of color. Because I felt like, at that time, I could have used the help and support of other people coming to my middle school and educating those kids, so I could [have been] treated better. That's the goal.

While Niara and Toya were the only participants to comment on the additional burden of proving one's value, their reflections were invaluable student perspectives that many educators may overlook.

**Care and love**. Participants often mentioned the importance of educators' care and love for refugee students. "There's a lot to say for students feeling integrated, feeling welcome, feeling cared for," Marcela stated. She continued, "Try to help them feel welcome. Try not to see language . . . [or] culture as a barrier." While realizing that teachers have many other students in their classrooms, Marcela said she just wants them to "put away their fear or anxiety" and to stop saying they do not understand how to teach a student from another country. She would rather teachers say, "I don't understand, but I'd like to learn more. It makes a big difference. And that's felt. The students feel this."

Niara expressed what might be considered teachers' fears of not knowing how to reach out to her when she said:

> I don't think [teachers] cared. If they cared, they could have asked me, "How was your life like? How do you feel? How do you fit in this country? How do you like America?" You know, trying to know me, but they never did this. They never asked.

Toya, too, remarked that:

> One of the things I would have wanted to see in my classrooms was for the teacher to ask me questions to get to know me as who I am. . . . When somebody knows you, they know how to help you. I can't say that will expect them to know how to help me if they don't know what I'm going through. . . . It won't happen overnight, but even showing that interest of knowing what your needs are, I think will be helpful to the students.

However, Toya and Niara illustrated the sensitive nature of care and love because they insisted that they would have felt overwhelmed and different than their classmates if all of their teachers had given them too much attention simultaneously. Still, they would have liked for their teachers to recognize them as needing unique attention due to their refugee experiences. When I asked Niara if she felt comfortable asking her teachers for help, she replied:

> I felt comfortable asking certain teachers that I felt were making an effort to help me. But those who seemed not to care, I wasn't comfortable asking. And also, because, back home, kids are not encouraged to speak [or] to have a close relationship with their teachers. And it was kind of hard to ask questions. . . . I'[d] go [to my U.S. teachers] sometimes with my limited English. It was useless.

Toya shared similar feelings:

> Honestly, most of my teachers didn't understand, and they didn't give me the help that I needed back then. They just didn't care. They didn't give me any special support. I recently got here. I didn't know English. I don't know what we were going to learn. I don't know anything about where I am right now. And teachers didn't even bother to ask if [I] needed help more than other people. They treated [me] like [I've] been her for a long time and [was] just like other students. But, in reality, I needed more help in certain areas. They didn't understand [why] . . . sometimes I need to use dictionaries. . . . I just felt like maybe they did know that

> I needed some help, but they chose to ignore [it], because it's extra work for them. . . . I immediately thought that my teachers assumed that I am like barbaric, and because of that, I felt like I am dumber than everybody else in the class. So I felt like going to a teacher and ask[ing] them a question is just going to prove to them that I'm not as capable and as smart. So I always tried to avoid asking teachers questions, because I felt like even if they answer it, I'm not going to understand it. I avoided [that], because I know that I wouldn't benefit. I felt like it would bring me [more harm] than good, so I just tried to solve things [on] my own.

For teachers, Paula thought that care and love should take priority over pedagogical skills: "Who has the heart to teach these kids? Because if you have the heart, and you have the willingness, then I can teach you the strategies." Julissa suggested that "the school could have an advocacy group of people [who] really do care . . . [and] are willing to take the time and help." She also claimed that "communication is key. So if a person feels like they don't have the time, or they just don't care as much, that's totally fine. But [let] someone know [about students who are struggling]." Lastly, Julissa believed that reaching out to community members who want to help would be a positive step.

Julie stated that the International Rescue Committee had been experimenting with various models of education for students in refugee camps and that adding coaches (teacher assistants) for specific students in classrooms was not only expensive, but also resulted in a clear decrease in academic outcomes for those students. Perhaps the number of adults in the classroom does not make as much of a difference as whether they express care for their students. Niara maintained that:

> When a teacher takes that first step . . . every single day, talking to you to get to know you, I feel like that's nice. You kind of develop that sense of trust. You trust the teacher . . . [and] if you have a problem, [you] can go to her or him, . . . because they have opened up to you.

Edward emphasized that creating systems that foster love and care are crucial to educating displaced persons. He summarized some comments from others in the focus group:

> Some of the things I've heard is everybody shared about, like, "I'll go talk to the kid," but that's not formal stuff. You're doing that out of the kindness of your heart. As a human, you're relating, but what if you're not there and the next person that is there doesn't have that within them? So it's creating the formal structures to where that is something that'll continue. And I think that if you invest in it, then [refugees] see that. "We've invested via this whole department, and [there's] somebody [who] I can go to, and I have trust in them, and they value me, because there are all these support systems just to help me succeed in school."

I developed a relationship with Faraq through basketball, music, and answering his questions about societal, political, and economic issues that were important to him. I had an academic agenda for most sessions, but if he wanted the conversation to go elsewhere, we went elsewhere. For most of my participant observations, we went elsewhere. It was 7 months before Faraq and I had a full 2-hour session exclusively of schoolwork. I had to be someone he viewed as caring and trustworthy before he would reciprocate by collaborating with me on academic material of my choosing.

When the winter holidays came around, I brought gifts for everyone in Faraq's family, including a basketball video game for Faraq and Hamid. Faraq was excited but told me we needed to do his school assignments first. Then we could play. That was the first time that he had made school assignments a priority for us. It had been 8 months of work, but I felt like this event helped him to realize that I was there to help and that I cared about him and his family. His response to do schoolwork before playing his new video game was, from my perspective, his gift to me in return. That incident reinforced my belief that adults must take the first caring step before students will reciprocate in

terms of educational engagement. But, as Marsha asked, "How do you get people to care about each other?"

**Learning About Self**

Making time to listen and learn about their refugee students can cause problems for teachers. In an ideal world, Toni would want "endless resources, endless compassion, and empathy." However, there are limits to how much a teacher can express ongoing care and love for all their students. Edward said that the teachers at his school had experienced compassion fatigue because of spending so much time working with traumatized children. Marcela, who had quit her job just a few months before our interview, concluded that:

> One of the reasons I left was because I felt like I had brought [the district's refugee support] forward as far as I could. . . . I was very torn about leaving, because I absolutely adore the work and felt like we were really making a difference. But I did feel like that world could be better infused with new ideas and I was starting to think someone new would be better in terms of bringing the work forward. . . . I was a really big proponent of making sure that we often talked about all of our challenges with the work, because it is pretty challenging work. . . . Also recognizing my limits. . . . We're not meant to solve everything. . . . We were only going to be as good as we took care of ourselves in that process. . . . It was hard to walk away.

The reflections of Edward, Marcela and others highlighted the importance of self-awareness and examination amongst educators in improving education for refugees. "The first people to be emancipated need to be the adults in the system," Patrick explained. "And it can't be one and done. You can't just say we did that in the fall. It has to be ongoing." Kristy said, "Professional development needs to have teachers reflect upon their own beliefs and understand who they are, first and foremost." Patrick added that:

> When we started our social emotional learning in 2011, everything was focused on the students. . . . [Recently,] we've really pivoted to focus on the adults, because if you don't take care of the adults' social and emotional needs, how can they take care of the children's social and emotional needs? . . . Our CP&I [Cultural Proficiency and Inclusiveness] initiative is what we call an inside-out approach. So first you deal with us adults, our own implicit biases and all the preconceptions we have. Then we can serve the kids. So I think that's an important piece with any sort of refugee/asylee initiative. We want to jump to, "Okay, we're going to do double English. We could do double math and we do everything for the kids." But probably the first step is to go to the adults and make sure everyone has that welcoming [attitude] and everyone understands we have implicit biases and how to address those. That's a really important piece that gets ignored.

Maya emphasized the importance of:

> working with teachers and increasing a certain level of critical awareness around societal factors that really are at play in their classrooms, and how they can be blind to them. They have to understand them themselves, and then determine whether or not they will be that political teacher within their classroom. The same goes for our staff—be it our parent liaisons or instructional assistant, teacher, custodian, [or] bus driver. . . . We all come in with our own philosophy and our own ideology about things. But sometimes we're not aware what developed that ideology, and what experiences we've assimilated into our being that has promoted one philosophy over another. . . . A lot of it [is] just you, unpacking yourself and trying to figure out why you understand the world the way you do, . . . and of what benefit is it to you . . . [and] to others? . . . And are there things that you would change? Are you making the impact that you want to make or wanted to make? . . . It is a very slow process . . . [to get to a point when] a teacher would say, "Yeah, I'm starting to question my philosophy of education."

Tabitha recalled enjoying an ongoing professional development course for administrators and teachers in her district that met for 2-hour sessions, twice per month. She said, "there was time built [in] to create sheltered instruction strategies" and "discover [that] I have a lot of stereotypes about other cultures." Claiming that President Trump's messages and actions made it more difficult to have straightforward discussions about biases, Victor claimed that:

> it's something that we have to address explicitly. . . . In grad school classes when you talk about cultural proficiency [and] when you talk about White privilege, people get really uncomfortable, and it's because 1) People don't want to talk

> about it; and 2), they're not used to talking about it. We have to increase both of those.

Julie said that, in a refugee camp in Nigeria, the International Rescue Committee had implemented "teacher learning circles, which are peer mentoring meetings to share challenges and solutions." In such circles, perhaps there could be space for teachers to share and explore their lives with each other. For example, Mabel told the focus group a story about how she lost all her forms of identification when her house burned down: "That's really changed my perspective on life. . . . And then having to . . . establish your identity because you don't have any artifacts to prove who you are. In my mind, that's what our refugees and asylees feel like."

When someone is open to learning more about themselves, they may then be able to decide whether they are in the profession they'd like to be in and/or the school they'd like to be in. As Maya described it:

> Some may say, "I didn't sign up for this. . . . I want to play the role of the traditional teacher." And that's fine. There are districts that have that context. Here, we really need teachers [who] understand social and political factors that contribute to a student's education and non-education. . . . Understanding it is just the first step . . . [Then], I can ask, "Will I be able to respond to this or not?" . . . Across the district, I think we've increased our awareness of the need to also include that component in our interview protocols.

**Valuing and Developing Community**

Participants discussed the importance of valuing and developing community within classrooms, schools, and districts. Charles recognized that the general focus of schooling tends to be on academic achievement, and community involvement tends to get lost or forgotten. But "you have to . . . really open up to do some community engagement," declared Ronald. He mentioned that opening forums for discussion with parents of refugee and nonrefugee children, local community members, and refugee

support organizations would help to stimulate curiosity and connection between refugees and nonrefugees to ease integration. But, Ronald asked, "How do you do it on a daily basis, or minute by minute, hour by hour, with kids [who] are not used to the way things are done in Central Texas, or the US?"

Ronald referenced U.S. nationwide-, statewide-, or districtwide-programs with various activities throughout the year, such as the "No Place for Hate" initiative in Central Texas, but argued that they could be viewed as top-down, superficial, and not implemented with integrity. He said such initiatives are akin to "corporate principles that they try to do across the whole organization, like 'we believe in trust' and 'we believe in respect.'" Instead, he suggested we "just talk about how to create this classroom community; how to make all students feel welcome." He cited averred at the school where he did his research in Holland, the students "got to know one another really well. It was a cohort [and] they were together [for] nine to 10 months. . . . Something's built. . . . They have that classroom community. For secondary schools in the US, you definitely don't have that." Jasmine professed that:

> I don't *know* my kids. . . . I don't know anything about them unless they decide to tell me. . . . And I can try to build that culture myself, but I don't have the education. I don't have the language. I didn't have the support to go there in a math classroom.

Brian agreed, saying "there wasn't space or time to unpack all that stuff, which would've helped the learning. There's this culture in schools where your story doesn't really matter. You have to learn geography, and we're going to talk about that only." Mandy, however, did not feel the same way about her prekindergarten classroom. She said:

> Academics at the younger level [is] not as important. . . . We have full evaluations that tell us everything about our child[ren] before we even meet them. Then we

> can build an education plan that works best for them. . . . The social and emotional learning and language acquisition is most important.

Maya pointed out that we cannot ignore how political, economic, and social issues shape refugees' schooling experiences and lives. She noted: "We have staff members [who] will sit on housing committees . . . [and] on census committees, so that we are out there and [are] bringing back information [about] what we're seeing out in the community." But, she questioned, "Have we moved the meter on how the families are doing in the district, and how the families are doing after they've graduated? . . . How do we make connections from in the classroom to outside the classroom?" Ronald claimed that "if refugee students [and] their family members can integrate into the school community, into the local community, it seems like they'll get more comfortable and they'll be able to . . . achieve that which they desire."

Paula implied that low staff turnover could help to build and sustain community. She attributed her 25 years of tenure in her community as beneficial to community development:

> I've been grounded in the community for a long time. . . . I know my community. I go to church with these people. I teach these kids on Sunday. I see them, because of my daughter's friends, because of my niece's friends. . . . I have personal connections with a lot of people. That's huge!

Having worked in neighboring districts, where she does not live, Paula remarked that she "loved the communities, . . . but [couldn't] say that [she] had a personal connection with those people in those communities."

**Cultural and Sociopolitical Influences on Educational Communities: Contexts and Precedents**

Educational communities can be shaped by contexts and precedents, both of which have implications for refugee education. "How can education not just pass on ideas of a colonial power, but how can you really build upon the knowledge and the context? . . . I feel like that is often what is still missing," Carolina remarked. Regarding cultural influences on educational communities, she and other participants raised more questions than they could answer. Carolina continued:

> Everyone brings their own context. So, to me, it's that two-way street. So that even if I see the student in my class who maybe didn't grow up with the stories of our founding fathers, and the country that he comes from also has their stories and their national heroes and their national challenges and their national history or whatever it is, how can I just be like, "I need you to learn about the American Revolution?" I'd be like, "Is there anything like this in your country's history that feels like a parallel?," or something to where it's pulling out that those things matter too.

There were parallels to Syrian history in some of the stories in Faraq's Texas history class—in terms of revolution, civil war, and I'm sure others—but he was not making the connections. History was being made in Syria in real-time. Faraq was a part of it and was in the United States because of his country's civil war, but his assignments were exclusively about Texas; no parallels were made explicit to him.

Ronald worried that teachers might not feel comfortable discussing factors that have caused refugees to leave their countries, for fear of inciting stress in their students. But relevant lessons of conflict and struggle do not have to prompt depressing or traumatic moments. Tabitha noted that:

> the adults control the environment, and [the students] are feeding off us. . . . The adults have to be in the right mindset as well. How can we allow that student to share their culture with us? That's so interesting, because we celebrate Black

> History Month and Cinco de Mayo, and that's it. But what else is there for us to recognize that we're not?

"It's a lot more that's not so much academic or scholastic aspects of education, but more the integration part," Ronald maintained. He continued:

> How can [refugees] be more involved in a local community and how can the local community embrace them or integrate them into the way a school operates or the way that a community builds and thrives and develops? So many times, school community is defined by the majority. I really believe in a more intercultural description of a community, where everybody feels that their background and their points of view are part of the fabric of the community. On one hand, everyone needs to do their physics and chemistry and their maps and their history and whatever, and they should all be able to participate in that, and it shouldn't just be the history of one nation or the history of one perspective. It should include, intellectually, everybody's points of view, everybody's perspectives, but also the more humanistic side or the more inter-relational side of the educative process [such] that everybody's respected within the community.

However, Patrick said that it is not enough to have common mindsets and beliefs about the importance of developing community. We need systems to support our beliefs. He illustrated his point this way:

> A couple of years ago, when we had the ICE [Immigrations and Customs Enforcement] raids, these families were incredibly traumatized. But if you have that system of, "We're not going to first period. We're going to advisory [class]. We're going to do restorative circles and we're going to process what's happening in our community." If you just believe something, but you don't have the systems to back it up, it's just talk.

Julissa said it is important that:

> that we're having crucial conversations with students about current events, current situations, asking them how they feel, how they think others feel in their situation, and how we can help, how we can empower them to use their voice for the better.

But, Maya asked, "How do we focus on social [and] political [issues] when there's so many other things to do. . . . How do we not lose this?"

Leonard said that the cultural question for refugees is, "What do we do to keep the culture we came from, and how do we then make it a valued part of this culture we've joined?" Toni was conflicted. She said:

> I want everybody to get everything that they need at all times. But does that mean denying someone else what they need, if this person gets what they want? Because what if [for] this refugee student, in their country, it is demonic for someone to be trans[gender]. But they're sitting in the same class with someone who is trans, and we're granting *them* all of these rights and all of this access? And then you've got *this* student that we want to give access, but their fundamental values are completely different. So what do you do?

Brian responded to Toni with:

> How can we design a top-down system that fits every possible scenario and every possible kid? That is impossible. So the best we can do is try to draw a box around whatever this community is and . . . have a conversation together. What kinds of things do we value? . . . Maybe we don't agree on certain issues, . . . but we can agree on how we share space together.

Brian suggested that we ask ourselves, "Do we really want to be the melting pot, or do we want to honor what everybody brings and . . . keep some of these kinds of cultural practices in place and not lose them?" Toni responded, "How do you make sure that everybody's needs are met in a culturally sustainable way? . . . Let's keep cultures alive . . . in ways that don't discount or diminish or dismiss whole groups of people." Brian mentioned that if policy continues in a one-way, top-down fashion, then, for teachers, "this would just be another [requirement], right? Like, 'Now you have to be a culturally proficient genius in addition to all these other hats you have to wear.'"

Edward said that he would like to "creat[e] a group within the school district where, once a month [refugee families and school staff] meet to discuss . . . the things that [refugees] are going through, . . . just so that they can start building community within the district." Maya said that her district had recently implemented a dual-language

program. Coincident with the program were events called community learning exchanges (Guajardo, Guajardo, Janson, & Militello, 2016) conducted at the district level two or three times per year. These events were designed to "exchange ideas back and forth" between parents and the bilingual teachers. However, the parents who attended were overwhelmingly monolingual English speakers: "We didn't have participation from the parents of the Spanish speakers," she said. However, she recalled that when a community learning exchange was conducted at the campus level, the Spanish-speaking parents showed up and she translated for "fantastic conversations with parents across diverse experiences." In the future, she plans to hold events at the campus level for each of the four dual-language campuses in her district.

Outside of holding two or three events per year, how can we ensure that refugees are getting the attention they need? Paula said that visibility is key:

> I work in a huge bureaucracy, . . . so if I can get in front of instructional coaches [and] principals, that's the biggest help to avoid the red tape. . . . As a bureaucracy leader, just making sure that we stay connected is the biggest thing.

Maya asked:

> How do we develop a language to help communicate across diverse perspectives so [that] we can see it happening in the classroom with students, and begin to develop an appreciation for one another? [Then] maybe it will transfer to parents as well, and then begin to [have a] ripple effect. . . . How do you build trust with your staff? . . . How do you work with your staff so that you begin to understand their own experiences and what's driving their philosophy and their way of understanding how they engage with parents [and] students?

**Why Focus on Refugees? What About Everyone Else?**

Some participants considered what educators might do to educate refugees that they would not do for nonrefugee students. "Well, is there an emancipatory framework for all students?," Ronald asked, "or is that for people [who] are disenfranchised or

underprivileged or come from different backgrounds or are not part of the majority?" Ronald believed that to think about an emancipatory education for refugees, we must "depend on some type of emancipatory framework, . . . approaches, or policies in place for other student students. . . . It [must be] part of the . . . zeitgeist, . . . the culture of the school." The framework "has to start branching out from programs that are already there: programs to respect diversity, cultural integration, or integration of all members of [a] community," he declared. Patrick said,

> With schools that don't have a large number of refugees, it's got to be the idea of inclusivity need[ing] to be woven into the fabric of your school culture. So, if you have three refugees and then you have 10 students who identify [as] LGBTQ+, and then you have 30 special needs students and . . . our kids of color, . . . then you're going to include your refugees and asylees. So, I think it's a bigger picture than just that group. It's all kids.

Tabitha said, "What we would be doing for them is really what we should be doing for all kids [who] are experiencing trauma."

Though these comments have merit for building inclusive school communities, a lot of participants abhorred a one-size-fits-all framework for. Furthermore, Carolina cautioned that teachers may not be aware of the layers of trauma with which refugees have to deal. Specifically, she said:

> We call it the triple trauma paradigm. So it's the trauma that forced them, whether it was the conflict or genocide or persecution that happened in the first round. And then part two is what happened in the camps or whatever setting they were in. And then the third part [is] the trauma of resettlement, of being in this new place, and trying to take it all in. And what does that look like in the classroom and how does that affect memory, attention, habits, [and] what's happening? How does this whole experience affect family dynamics?

I asked Toya if she thought that refugees should be educated differently than other immigrants, who perhaps left their home countries by choice. She responded:

> I do think that educating refugees should be approached differently than educating immigrants. Even though refugees and immigrants need all the support they can get, refugees are in need of more support, because we aren't as prepared as immigrants. Most, if not all immigrants, knew what to expect, which is why they can be further prepared than a refugee. . . . At the end of the day, even refugee parents are at a more disadvantage than immigrant parents. Unlike refugee kids, immigrant kids can get some of the support they need from their parents, because their parents are prepared to some extent.

**Secondary Migration**

Refugees may not always be content with the location in which they have been resettled. Such discontent can provide challenges for educators who want refugees to be involved in their communities. "Can a refugee integrate and become part of a civic community?," asked Ronald. This is a question, not only for the established community, but also for refugees. Ronald recognized that some refugee families view their situation as a temporary setback and hope to eventually go back to their home countries. Thus, they may not feel that there is much value in becoming a part of a community that they will soon leave. That was the case with Faraq, Hamid, and their parents. Salik often said, in a sorrowful tone, "America, money, money, money." When I told him I was taking a trip to Canada, he put his head in his hands and repeated hopelessly, "Take me to Canada." On a separate occasion, Aena said she wanted to go back to Syria after she passed her U.S. citizenship test. When talking about presidents with Faraq, I asked him what Syrian money looks like. He showed me images of Syrian currency online. One of the bills depicted President Bashar al-Assad. When Faraq saw it, he declared, "He is why we had to leave Syria. He is causing all the trouble. If he dies, we can go back to Syria."

Ronald mentioned that refugees are often resettled in one area of a city, "but then they would end up all together, at the same school." He observed that after refugees are resettled, they sometimes find where other people from their home country live and move

there “so that the community would kind of join together and then create this enclave” in the city. This can create community amongst people from the same country but can also serve as a barrier to integration with the community at large and create difficulties in terms of school district support.

“It’s kind of hard to get a handle on standardizing the response to refugees, because they’re not in a centralized location,” said Naomi. Marcela described such difficulty, and her desire to centralize registration, because in her district of 129 schools—with refugees being spread across 89 of them—secondary migration had made it difficult for her team of four people to track refugee families and ensure that supportive services were provided in the schools they were attending. It was especially onerous when families moved in the middle of the school year. Kristy was able to create a refugee welcome center and centralize registration for refugees, but she was in a medium-sized district. Marcela was in a large district. When it came to tracking secondary migration, Paula said, “If I’m not there advocating and saying, ‘Look at these population patterns and where the kids are coming in,’ then I can honestly tell you, it’s not happening. Somebody has to advocate for [refugees], and that’s my job.”

Laila noted that secondary migration is not only driven by a desire to be near others from one’s home country, but also by finances. Refugees are often resettled in mid- to large-sized cities because that is where many resources are. She also said that refugees get financial support from resettlement agencies for up to 6 months. After their monetary assistance expires, they sometimes move to places with lower living expenses. When an entire city has no affordable housing, they move too far away for nonprofit organizations to provide educational support, as she described it:

> We worked really hard in getting [this] school district up and better, and now they're in . . . all these other counties [where] there's no ESL, very little knowledge of refugees, and we don't know which schools they're in.

Laila also mentioned that refugees sometimes lose government assistance when they move. So, even within their host countries, they may be restricted in their movement; thus, limiting their income potential.

Marsha said that her nonprofit organization held drop-in tutoring at apartment complexes where refugees lived. Kristy's district used to host additional classes at apartment complexes, but they stopped because the number of families had decreased. As the number of forcibly-displaced persons in the world has increased, refugee children have begun to arrive in U.S. schools in rural areas with staff who are unprepared to support them. "That was a big learning curve back in 2016," Paula recalled.

Faraq's family had moved to another area of the city because they had gotten evicted from their previous apartment complex. Faraq often talked about how much more he enjoyed life when he lived at their previous complex and went to a different school. He expressed it like this:

> Kids in the other apartment, we used to hang out all the time. There was a kid from Iraq. They speak my language. People went outside. We used to go to McDonald's all the time. Here nobody goes outside. The other day I went outside to play basketball, and nobody was out there.

Faraq's family did not like their neighborhood or its schools. One day, Aena showed me two letters sent by the district that indicated she had a choice of schools for Faraq and Hettie. When I looked at the address of the nonneighborhood school, I concluded that it appeared on paper as though they had a choice. However, the nonneighborhood school was so far away that it would have been at least an hour-long commute each way on a city bus. It was not a choice for Aena. She was stuck with her

neighborhood school. But district officials could certainly say that they gave her a choice. Concerning integration and segregation, Julie illuminated the lack of understanding from a broad perspective:

> We have the Global Compact on Refugees, which calls for the integration of refugees into national systems, but we know that it's easier said than done. On the donor side, they don't always know what to invest in, [because] we don't really have a lot of research on what it takes and what will yield results.

**Recognizing Dis/connections in Support and Resources**

Sometimes educators do not have the resources they need to support refugees. Sometimes resources are available, but educators are not aware of them or do not know how access them. Edward reported that his district established a welcome center, where all refugees go for an orientation to the district and school life in the United States. However, he worked in a large district and assumed that smaller districts may not be able to justify creating a welcome center. To which Patrick replied, "If you don't have the benefit of having a welcome center, . . . train your office staff to be that welcoming center. [At] every school, the office staff are so critical [for] that first impression." The welcome center Edward mentioned was in the building where Marcela worked. Marcela said the 4-hour orientations were primarily designed for immigrant students, not specifically refugees, and that refugees and orientation leaders had difficulty communicating with one another in sessions due to a lack of language interpreters. She said she provided a separate orientation at the refugee resettlement office where she could have support from interpreters. Though, Marcela reckoned:

> I don't know if you can ever give enough orientation for something like that. . . . The school systems are intense. And there's so many rules and regulations you have to consider. So, it's a pretty tall order to expect students to get it right away or families to understand.

Paula claimed that "schools need to be better informed so they're able to communicate to our families and . . . our students." Niara criticized systems of teacher education when she said:

> Sometimes we blame teachers not caring about students. . . . Some of them might be willing to learn, but because they're not familiar with everything that is going on, they don't even know how to help. And they don't even know who to ask to help these children.

Arthur had been working for his school district for 6 years and was still unaware of how or if his district supported refugees specifically. He mused, "I wonder what kinds of services are provided as far as counseling and therapy for some of the kids that are coming, say from Honduras or Syria, where they've seen people get blown up and killed."

Paula mentioned that many administrators and teachers are not aware of the programs available and how students can be served in said programs. For example, she said someone suggested a student be placed in the English/Spanish bilingual program when the student's first language was Swahili. She said:

> The number one question I get from folks [who] may not have ever taught a student atypical from [who] they've been used to teaching [is], "I don't know what to do. Just tell me what to do." So many times, they don't know who to go to. . . . It's like, "No, you have a department. We have a department where we've got your back. . . . We will get you the resources you need. You need your ESL certification? We will get you training to pass that test. If you need a textbook, a professional learning book, to help you navigate, . . . we'll get you the book." . . . It's knowing who to go to.

Knowledge of people who can help a start. But sometimes those people are too busy. Kristy worked in a medium-sized district and held many roles. She was responsible for educating staff across the district on matters of refugee education, liaising between the district and refugee resettlement and other support organizations, and advocating for

refugee families' inclusion and participation in the school community. Marcela was in a large district and started as the only person supporting over 1,000 refugees. Paula was the only person in her district responsible for coordinating refugee efforts, but she was also the director of multilingual and migrant education programs—so, refugees were just one small group within her purview.

Victor said he's used to "working with what we have, because that's what we do." He said that "there [are] building blocks we can work with" and that his "district is very fortunate to have parent liaisons on basically every campus [who] could reach out to our families. . . . The barrel's not bare, and we're still definitely climbing uphill, but there's something there for us to work with." Paula mentioned that her previous district had a parent liaison and a food pantry at every campus. Her current district had such resources, including a clothes closet, but they were spread throughout the district due to the variety of demographics in different geographic areas.

Marcela reported the benefit of a supportive leader who believed in the work she was doing and helped her to get the resources she needed to support refugees in ways she saw fit. For example, her supervisor connected her with staff who helped her to develop a geographic tracking system for refugee students. Using the system, she was able to identify secondary migration trends and be proactive about where the district would need resources. She was then able "to allocate positions to those campuses that were titled, specifically, refugee support positions." These were not additional staff, but were roles assigned to teachers and teaching assistants who would provide additional instructional support to students and partner with her to provide training for other teachers. "Those were my champions. . . . They were . . . my eyes and ears into the school when I often

couldn't be. . . . They were often the ones [who] were even advocating at higher levels," Marcela recalled. She said that her team of four was also "involved in anything related to discipline [and] . . . special education" concerning refugees.

Julie asserted that "we are so far behind for reaching our targets on education. . . . We're never going to reach this goal if we don't invest in education." Laila determined that the lack of investment is due to large-scale systematic problems: "We have to go back and evaluate the whole society, because it's become [too capitalistic]." Julie highlighted the myriad problems countries face. She said:

> A government might not have the will or the capacity to integrate refugees into their schools. The will might be there, but the classrooms are overcrowded. They don't have enough teachers to accommodate the influx of refugees. They have refugees [who] speak another language and have used a different curriculum altogether. They have refugees who are traumatized or have been out of school for years. They don't have teachers with a specialized training that they need to address the unique needs of refugees.

In the remainder of this section, I describe participant discussions regarding support and resources beyond school districts, creativity with funding, and responsibility for systemic change.

**Support Beyond the School District**

Participants expressed the importance of partnerships in supporting educational goals, because school districts lacked the resources to do everything in-house. "I don't know that the formal public-school system will ever be able to fully address the needs of students and teachers in a differentiated way," Julie confessed. Ronald believed that educational leaders should "try to offer as many different support programs [as possible]. And the school district can't do that by itself. . . . A school has to become a partner with . . . people in the community [who] can offer further assistance."

Jasmine said that she "would love to see families welcomed to our district and assigned a mentor . . . to make sure those families feel safe and supported and advocated for." Mandy agreed, saying, "We just had 'Meet the Teacher' and all these groups were sitting out in our hallways. It's like, forget the Boy Scouts. . . . Offer family mentor services!" "Some sort of counseling services that the students have access to 24 hours a day would be ideal," Toni added.

Victor's school partnered with a youth council that would provide counseling support to families—not specifically refugees—via home and school visits. Julissa said, "We have social workers on site that help with that social and emotional component." But the social and emotional learning initiative at her school was for all students. Mabel added that her city funded a "mental health coalition to help all students and people in the community with trauma" and that "district personnel are on that committee as well." No participant mentioned an organized focus on refugees' counseling or social and emotional needs, though such needs often differ uniquely from those of nonrefugee students.

Mabel also stated that her district had partnered with a local church to provide interpreters for parents at school meetings. Kristy said that she collaborated with refugee resettlement agencies to coordinate travel to school functions and find interpreters for schools' parent conferences. Charles noted his Minnesota school "had a language line as well, where you could have a phone conversation and the translator would do it live or leave a message." He also mentioned that he used online applications, such as Google Translate, to communicate with parents.

Marsha coordinated an in-home mentoring program and two after-school tutoring programs specifically for refugees—one at a middle school and the other at the district's

international high school. I volunteered in these programs, so I knew the tutoring program at the international high school did not begin until late October. When I asked why it had not started earlier, Marsha and Laila said that they had been contacting the school's administrators since the start of the school year but had not received any responses. Regarding addressing individual refugee students' needs, Laila determined that district staff were too busy to help. So she "started a youth council of refugee kids—teenagers and young adults . . . who've worked with refugees—to try to educate the kids." Her hope was that the youth council would communicate to high school and middle school students the importance of welcoming refugees, noticing them and "support[ing them] when the whole system is failing [them]."

Marsha also worked with Laila to coordinate a summer program for refugees, of which she said, "the idea is just to get them exposed to as much English as possible during the summer, so they don't lose anything." The program was primarily held in rooms donated by a church. In my observation, parents of refugees took English courses in the upstairs rooms while their school-aged children were being taught by myself and other volunteers (mostly high school students) downstairs. Half of the parents supervised all the nonschool-aged children while the other half of parents were in their English classes. After 90 minutes, parents would trade roles so that everyone spent an equivalent time learning English and supervising children. It was an effective system, but without dependable volunteers and low-paid staff, it would not have been sustainable. The organization had a few full-time employees and relied heavily on volunteers who could not provide consistent support. Additionally, Mandy mentioned that the organization "has people [who] go out and develop relationships with families and encourage them to

join, but . . . the onus is on the families. If that was just a given opportunity to every refugee in [the district], that would be great." Naomi said, "The resettlement agencies provide a good amount of assistance to help families, . . . but these are also bureaucratic agencies that are underfunded and understaffed."

Mandy and the others who led the summer program were exemplary of the types of caring people it seemed to take to make refugees feel welcome. Mandy expressed a similar sentiment when she said:

> The director is not an educator. She hired [the coordinator], who is phenomenal, but again, not an educator. They brought in educators to do this, but we are not experts in refugee studies or anything at all. We were just doing the best we can with what we got.

Mandy added that during the school year, "we just need more interpreters. It is so hard to get them in special education, even in just Spanish, much less Farsi or Arabic. Even at [the summer program], we can get one interpreter every Monday."

In my assessment, support beyond the district was not enough unless adults inside the schools partnered with adults outside the schools. The responsibility to support refugee-specific needs could not be entirely held by either schools or community organizations alone; it had to be a partnership. Faraq's teachers would have benefited by communicating with me, but they did not respond to my emails. When Faraq talked to me about dropping out of school, we discussed his reasons and what the consequences may be. He did not share his thoughts with his teachers or school counselor. Together, school staff and I might have been able to help Faraq more than I could alone.

Marsha said that the local international high school created a permission form for parents to designate other individuals as eligible to receive communication from school staff, but it was not a district-wide form. So I wrote a letter to the principal for Aena,

stating that she gave the school staff permission to talk to me about Faraq. After 3 weeks of communication between me, Aena, and a member of the school staff, the letter finally had content the school required. I was told it needed to be notarized, so I created a space for it. Aena signed it and delivered it to the school. The letter did not improve the communication from Faraq's teachers. Faraq often told me he had no schoolwork to do. So I would look at the assignment titles in his teachers' online gradebooks and create lessons that I thought might be relevant to his teachers' curricula. However, our sessions could have been more efficient if his teachers, counselors, or other staff had communicated with me to tell me how I could help. Marsha explained that teachers are often overwhelmed. Laila added that high school teachers often do not respond to nonparents and tend to think that if parents are not contacting them, then parents must not care. Sometimes, "the only parent who speaks English is working full-time, probably two jobs. He's the one who has the phone," Laila remarked.

"I would collaborate with every community member or internal or external partner I could find. I basically felt that that was the best approach. It was kind of like divide and conquer," Marcela reported. She also partnered with the local university's Middle Eastern Studies department to place college students who were learning a Middle Eastern language across the district to mentor K-12 refugee, asylee, and immigrant students. As she described it, "It was pretty fantastic. We had about 50 schools by the time I left, which is not all 89-90, but it's a good amount." Marcela also started working with city officials and representatives of nearby districts to help refugees find affordable housing.

Paula's district partnered with Community Action of Central Texas—a nonprofit organization focused on adult education—to support parents. The organization applied for adult education grants to sponsor ESL, GED, and other classes for the parents of students in Paula's district. To support educators, Maya said that her district had partnered with a local university to implement a program that helps to develop leaders through discussions about "social [and] political factors that contribute to how we think about education, how we understand the status quo, [and] . . . how it may work for some and not work for others." She stressed, however, that these types of discussions need to spread and asked, "How do you build the capacity of others to also do the work?"

**Getting Creative With Funding**

Funding is required to support refugees. "We have to have the systems in place. Let's put our money where our mouth is," Victor declared. In the same focus group, Bradley lamented, "[As] a small district, we don't have the money to do a lot of the things that we all want to do." Naomi expressed that "most . . . shortcomings . . . seem to be tied to resources. . . . I just feel like we don't put enough money [and] information resources into the education process." She confirmed that "the framework of resettlement agencies—the direct link between the resettlement overseas and domestic, what happens after resettlement—has been decimated by Trump. So many offices have closed because of lack of funding." Julie attested that funding is the greatest obstacle. She said:

> The [humanitarian] system is not set up to address children's long-term learning and development needs. . . . It was just focused on meeting immediate lifesaving needs. It's taken a lot of advocacy to get education seen as a humanitarian sector.

Without being able to fully rely on resettlement agencies and community organizations, and not being able to justify much spending on nondominant populations, mainstream schools can get creative with how they financially support refugees.

Though funds from the School Impact grant were to be allocated for students legally designated as refugees, Marcela revealed that she was able to "blanket [the district's] services to students in need," including "immigrant students who didn't fit the criteria," because the district funded part of her work and district funding did not have the same restrictions. Marcela pointed out that federal grants are extremely specific in terms of school districts' spending for groups. Given School Impact grant funds could only be used for government-defined school-aged refugees in the country for 5 years or less, she said President Trump's massive reduction in the number of refugees allowed into the United States threatened the "sustainability for really critical services for really a vulnerable population," because the district may soon not meet the minimum number of refugee students needed to retain the funding. Laila criticized the federal government more bluntly when she said:

> [We need] a government reflecting the compassion of the best of the people, not the hate of the worst of the people. If the government programs would reflect what the best of us want, and try to help, and not constantly be counting pennies when it's . . . somebody who's brown, but not caring about the millions that White rich people [are] taking or getting. . . . Our government is so concerned with "Oh, I can't spend an extra cent on foreigners." So, they're not willing to make these programs any better. We are supposed to teach English as a second language to newly-arrived refugees. To learn English as a second language, you need at least 1,000 hours of instruction and sitting in a classroom. . . . Do you know how much we're required to do as government agents? . . . We're required to do 40 hours of English language instruction. They say, "Well, we have to have classes of 80 hours. And people are required to attend 50% of that." So they're only required to attend 40 hours of instruction, because they should be pulling themselves up by the bootstraps, working, [and] making money. How can you work and make money if you don't speak the language?

Carolina stated that "one of the things that we have seen is when programs and services and things work for youths or adults with a refugee background, it tends to also work better for other groups." She noted that districts could and do use funds from programs for ELLs to cover some of the additional needs for refugee families. Carolina recognized that "the funding is obviously never enough to really meaningfully do everything that we wish it could, but it's at least there." She suggested that:

> there's really a lot of creative thinking [to] maximize these funds [to] put things within the school to celebrate and lift up these young people and their families, . . . but it really takes having the people who are willing to be advocates . . . and who are willing to think outside of the box.

Leonard said that his state refugee program performs a lot of the duties that might otherwise be managed by a nonprofit. He described the limitations they had in terms of who they could serve, delimited by the funding they received, but also how they pieced together funding from various sources to serve refugees who fell into different categories as defined by the grants they were awarded. He said:

> We provide casework[ers] to refugees in the post-resettlement period, which is generally 90 to 180 days, [and] we can work with refugees who've been in the US for 5 years or less. We can work with refugees who've been here a little longer because we also receive funding [from our state's] Welfare-to-Work program. And then we also have some programming available for older refugees who are not subject to that 5-year limit for us to be able to serve them, . . . because all immigrants are subject to a 7-year-ban on any Social Security income they might ever receive.

Leonard added: "For refugees, that's something that we take pretty seriously and recommend that all older refugees are working toward attaining citizenship so that they don't have to have that ban on receiving Social Security affect them." But becoming a citizen requires speaking, reading, and writing basic English, which can be difficult for a lot of older parents. Laila recalled a disabled refugee over 65 years old who did not learn

English and, therefore, could not become a citizen and receive social security income. He had children and grandchildren under 18 years old and had been on the public housing waiting list for 6 years. She reported that people lose their government assistance and it is difficult to help them get it back. "You need committed people helping them, and there's not enough people. . . . We know what the gaps are. We just are unable to [fill] them," she said. Laila indicated that it is difficult for her to simply make time to find, train, and connect volunteers with refugee families.

Leonard explained that "for those younger refugees, who maybe were just a little too old to make it through an American high school when they got here," his agency used grant funding intended for career training to train "200-300 refugees as certified nursing assistants, . . . paramedic medical assistant[s], . . . and other kinds of higher level [professionals]." The training used a cohort model of about 10 students per cohort, and Leonard said, "each individual class might have [had] five or six different cultures in [it]." Therefore, his agency's education provider used the Cummins' model of ESL instruction to move from contextual, hands-on training to less context and more theoretical training, while "adding 10 to 20 percent time to each of the curricula [to] . . . give people a little more absorption time." The program also included a success manager who would work with the kids to help them build plans to complete the training if circumstances arose that interfered with their coursework. Leonard described the program as a success for several reasons. Still, the community development aspect of it was what he was most proud of: "That cohort model was something that I found really encouraging, because you had students from maybe five or six different cultures that became basically a unit dedicated to making each other successful."

Julie shared how important funding is to the work of the International Rescue Committee and how meeting donors' requests for quantifiable measures is difficult in an environment imbued with a capitalistic mindset. She said:

> For donors, they might be funding education, but they fund the things that are easy to measure, like access. . . . We don't necessarily see donors incentivizing government partners and NGO partners to invest in programs that really aim to achieve learning outcomes for children. It's very difficult to measure, especially when we talk about things like social and emotional learning outcomes. We might check a box and measure progress in terms of access, but that's just measured by enrollment and not necessarily attendance. But it's very complicated for teachers to routinely take attendance, especially if they're dealing with overcrowded classrooms. So, [International Rescue Committee] is kind of at the forefront of trying to change things, not just by talking the talk, but by demonstrating that in our programs. We're piloting and testing new measures: quick, easy-to-access, low-resource measures of social and emotional development [and] measures of attendance taking. We're doing research. We're partnering with academic institutions. We're sharing what we're doing. . . . Another way that we're doing that is by investing in cost research, so that we can really advocate for interventions that are cost-effective, knowing that education in America is always going to have limited resources. We want to be able to show the international community that it can be done and figure out what the best interventions are that can meet the most amount of children with the lowest cost and have the greatest impact.

Julie said that the International Rescue Committee and New York University Global TIES for Children partnered with organizations in the Middle East and North Africa to compile an online interagency database of research, noting what practices and measures have reliability and validity. Research is being done, and resources for improving refugee education exist. However, sometimes people are unaware that they exist and/or how to find them and apply them. Paula said her district has "a wealth of opportunities that our students are just not getting access to, because we as educators don't know [that they exist]. And we don't know how to advertise that and publicize that for our students, and our families."

From the global perspective, Julie said:

> My job is really to sort of help shift the field, because right now education is not a humanitarian priority. It receives less than 2% on average of all humanitarian aid. And at the same time, development—which funds education strongly, as it's traditionally seen as a development need—doesn't go to crisis and conflict contexts. And yet we're seeing such a shift in places of conflict. We're seeing refugees are displaced anywhere between 10 and 20 years, where they're not going home anytime soon, [and] they're not living in camps. All of a sudden, we've got fragmented funding systems, humanitarian donors versus development donors, and education just tends to fall through the cracks. So we're really advocating for a bridging of that and increased attention and quality funding to these types of programs.

Leonard was proud to highlight that his state government office was able to provide funding for his local school district to hire "navigators or outreach specialists from refugee cultures" to serve as communication and general support liaisons between refugee families and school staff. Paula outlined that her district's long-term plan included determining how to invest their money in parent liaisons, because "they're such a key part to making sure that we are bridging the parent/home connection." Tabitha maintained that "if you're looking for something that requires money, it comes down to the relationship between the school board and the superintendent." She emphasized that the school board must believe in trying to improve the lives of every child in the district for money to be spent specifically on refugees. Laila attributed a lack of funding to:

> lack of compassion and understanding and not being willing to invest in humans. . . . Look how well they do if they have an opportunity. But we don't want to give them an opportunity, because we're too cheap, because we think they're not good enough.

If educational leaders cannot rely on adequate funding by those who control the distribution of money to education, then creativity in the use of funds will continue to be a necessary component of improving refugee education.

**Responsibility for Systemic Change**

Systemic changes are needed to work toward an emancipatory education for forcibly-displaced youth. "A lot of refugees [are] unable to succeed in our system and they never get a high school diploma. So they are forever restricted by that," Laila contended. Marsha suggested that the predominant ideology of leaders in the United States is that there is nothing wrong with the educational system, but that, instead, the responsibility to succeed within it lies upon each individual's shoulders, including refugees. "So, when they fail, it's like 'See, they weren't good enough,'" Laila asserted. When I asked Congressperson Chester how he envisioned refugee children having a quality education in all 50 states, he, again, deferred any federal responsibility, responding: "The ability or inability of states to provide a quality education to students is a matter for those who reside in those states to decide."

Naomi said that after a refugee arrives in the United States, the resettlement process is overseen by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration:

> That file is now a U.S. integration file, not [our organization's] file anymore. And we don't have access to what's happening anymore with that individual. So perhaps the State Department, the resettlement program itself, could facilitate better communication, better partnership, between the overseas actors and the domestic actors, so that at least that transition for children is more seamless, [and] the people who are receiving those children have a better understanding of what their needs are, and that the resettlement agencies can communicate with local communities [and] schools about how to deal with these children.

Julie said that the International Rescue Committee conducts:

> extensive interviews and information gathering, but that documentation [regarding children's educational history] is likely not present when people arrive [in the United States]. And that can be a barrier. So we might have that information, but it might be difficult to prove. . . . We ask for the relaxation of requirements for documentation for enrollment in schools and understanding that

> when people flee violence, they don't necessarily take anything that indicates anything that they've been in school.

Carolina said that "some families do come with transcripts, [but] . . . that's the exception." Carolina's organization receives a biodata form that lists the number of years of formal education for each refugee family member—which may be zero. However, this is simply information that the family provided when going through the resettlement process overseas. It is the only information they have regarding any refugees' education before arrival. Using the biodata form, they may know that a 17-year-old refugee stopped going to school in fifth grade. But they cannot enroll in fifth grade and there is little correlation between the academic content learned in refugees' home countries, refugee camps, and resettlement countries. So district staff will enroll her or him in high school and do their best to provide extra academic support. Carolina noted that the biodata form "at least gives you a general indication that they've had some experience sitting in a classroom and maybe have held a writing instrument." Leonard's organization received the same basic information, but Leonard warned that it "is not always incredibly reliable. . . . When we first meet a refugee and we ask about their education, they say, 'I have no idea what that means. That's not what I told them.' So, it's all over the board."

Laila and Marsha were only provided with refugees' countries of origin before working with a family. They have conversations with families to learn more about their educational history. Through such conversations, they found a lot of variation in children's education, even within the same countries of origin. She role-played a conversation that went like this:

> "How many years were you in school?" Say, okay, "I was in school for 5 years." And then nobody asks, "How long is a school year? How long was your school day? What did you study in school?" Once you get into those little nitty-gritty things, you find that 5 years of schooling is really more like one. Because, in refugee camps, people went to school sporadically, or not at all. And then, when there's war, they probably had two months of school [in] a year. All those details are never really spelled out anywhere. You just learn them as you talk to families.

When I asked Laila if she wrote a summary of what she learned about each refugee child and provided it to the schools, she responded: "We don't have time to address the individual. . . . There was a time when we sent the profiles of the countr[ies] to the school district . . . but it's too specific and too much work if you're looking at every family."

Kristy contacted school administrators before refugees' first day of classes to "let them know who the students are, what are their grade levels, what language they speak, and what country they come from," basic information that should be known about all students. She argued that the administrators are responsible for informing the students' teachers. However, the information she received and provided was only for formally-designated refugee students, not asylees or asylum-seekers. Someone at newcomer campuses in her district—where most refugees, and none of the asylum seekers, were enrolled—ensured flags of home countries of their students hung at the entrance before the first day of classes.

Marcela said that her team conducted "an educational background test and a check" with families at the orientation she held at the refugee resettlement agency. However, it was not easy. She described it thus:

> It can get tricky because you have a family of six kids. So to do each one individually with just our team became challenging. . . . In addition to enrolling them, we would give an educational background check to try and assess where they were. . . . Many families do not feel safe in sharing the information, [because] . . . families often come from countries where they didn't have access to education or they were shunned from education, or where their particular type of

> student wasn't supposed to be educated in that system. So we became sleuths in trying to really find out the true answer to why x or z was happening or what they were really trying to tell us. . . . A lot of times, we really didn't have a full answer until the kids were in school for a couple of weeks. It becomes very hard to discern; like, is this just an adjustment period? There were a lot of questions about that that were really quite hard to answer.

Toya disclosed that, "no one from my school tried to learn from me or my parents about our school experiences before we came to the US." Naomi stated that she could not envision local schools communicating with resettlement support organizations overseas, but she would like to see a "mechanism for organizations [like hers] to document and to assess a child's learning needs before they even arrive in the US." Though, she added:

> There is nobody in our organization who is even qualified to do such an assessment. . . . It would be great [for resettlement agencies assisting schools or community organizations] to know "Okay, this child is 7 years old, but they have not been in school for 2 years. They cannot read in their native language. They have difficulty with x, y, and z." As far as I know, there is no such information that's being shared. . . . Have some sort of learner profile, [so] a teacher can at least have an idea [about] how they can try to approach [refugee students]. Even if they don't have the skills for it, an awareness would be helpful.

However, Naomi's organization had greater systemic issues that needed to be addressed, as she explained:

> It's a huge challenge, because resettlement agencies have suffered a whole lot of defunding. . . . In 2016, we resettled 7,249 refugees from Turkey and Lebanon. And in 2017, that number was 246. . . . Everything that's gone wrong with the program, they want to blame us. We get threats to harm us. We get threats from people to harm themselves. It's not been a lot of fun, but it's been worth the experience to have our finger on the pulse to see the effect of what's happening at the international and national political level on the ground. And it's as ugly as one could expect. It's sad. And we don't know if we'll exist next year. . . . And we're not just some little mom and pop. This is the organization that handles all the resettlement from Turkey and Lebanon—depending on the year, the number one or number two host of all refugees in the world; and we don't know if we'll still have jobs.

Julie listed the complexities of grand systemic obstacles as well:

> It's the funding mechanisms, the way agencies interact, the way they have separate and fragmented mandates, the way the UN is both an implementer and a funder and part of the UN system, the way NGOs who do this work get grants on average for one year, the way that research is given to different contexts and different sectors so we can't even generate the evidence we need to make the case.

Patrick was adamant that whatever is done to educate refugees better:

> can't just be one kind of narrow sliver. It needs to be comprehensive. . . . In some cases, probably you need to blow up the system, but . . . [in] all of our districts, . . . good things are happening [that] in most cases we could . . . add [or] tweak.

Edward emphasized that every school and district must self-assess, and Mabel argued that such a self-assessment must happen every year to create a sustainable model that reflects what the community values. Marcela, whose team of four attempted to support refugees at 89 different campuses, found it difficult to help campuses self-assess because, as she asserted,

> each campus really operated like its own entity; like its own little country with its own rules and regulations. And it became fairly challenging just to address the needs of the students in a systemic way, because every single piece was different. You needed to know the ins and outs. You needed to know the bureaucracy.

From local to global levels of educational influence, participants indicated that teamwork and clear communication within and across organizations was vital to improving refugee education.

### Theorizing Change: How to Change the Approach to Educating Refugees

I asked participants to list the following drivers for changing the approach to the education of refugees in the order they thought each needed to happen first through last (see Appendix G):

- Change in belief;
- Professional development;
- Change in policy;
- Change in practice; and

- Change in outcomes

All but three participants responded. (I did not have enough time to ask Maya or Ronald. Congressperson Chester ignored the question.) I scored their responses on a scale of one to five by assigning the first-listed driver five points and the last-listed driver one point. I also asked participants to provide a justification for their responses. In this section, I present some of the arguments for and against the prioritization of the drivers I prompted participants with. The subheadings in this section are listed in the order that the aggregate numbers indicated the participants believed things needed to happen to create effective change for educating displaced youth. That said, several participants were conflicted in the orders they chose.

In each focus group, at least one participant changed answers after hearing other participants' justifications for their answers. Some indicated that certain things needed to happen simultaneously, and a few discussed a continuous loop of these drivers for change to build upon itself in a cycle of improvement. There is no right or wrong order, but it is worth noting that no one listed "change in practice" first, no one listed "change in outcomes" in the top three items, and 22 of 24 of the respondents listed a change in belief as the first or second driver. Additionally, it is important to note that all the explanations given by participants referred to changes that needed to be made by nonrefugee adults.

**Change in Belief**

Among participants who listed a change in belief first was Toya who said that, "you have to believe something in order to work towards it." People must think to themselves, "believe I can learn; believe I want to understand why people behave

differently or have very different ideas or participate in discussion very differently," Leonard contended.

Maya emphasized that "it's not about one person . . . creat[ing] all this change. It's about creating a critical mass of folks who are wanting to think beyond the normal scope of education." In Carolina's experience, change is "typically more powerful" and has "more lasting strength" when it comes from that person or group of teachers or principal who feels . . . passionately about [it]." She explained:

> When you have teachers, coworkers, [or] whoever, and it's a peer saying, "I've been trying this, and I have seen this work. This is the impact I'm seeing on my students. You should try this," it is often taken a little bit differently than when it's another top-down policy coming from the people of the district, . . . [because] that is just [received] like, "Oh, they just don't understand our day-to-day challenge."

Bradley said that, "if there's a fundamental change in belief in what is needed, then that would lead to policy changes, and then changes in practice." In response, Tabitha argued that we need drivers to change beliefs: "It's hard for people to put some good systems into place if they don't feel the reason why they need to." Though most participants thought that a change in people's beliefs needed to happen first, changing beliefs may be the most difficult driver on the list. Naomi described why she listed it last:

> I feel like the belief system is a sort of dangerous one to try to say we're going to change beliefs, . . . because it's extremely subjective and it also is extremely personal. And it depends on what you mean by trying to change beliefs, because people get extremely defensive [and] extremely sensitive when it comes to changing their beliefs. Because someone's belief system is their identity. And I think that you can reach an impasse far more quickly, between people [and] between groups, if the aim is to change their beliefs. . . . It's not a very easy thing to do. . . . It happens as a result of many, many things, in a good way, in effective ways. As an intentional initiative, it's limited in my experience.

Charles said:

> You could probably put belief on both ends of the spectrum. [First,] you get a majority of the people who believe something [already]. And then after you go through the rest of the process, those who were skeptical at first might eventually buy into that belief.

Of the 22 respondents who listed a change in belief first or second, 15 listed a change in belief first. All seven respondents who listed a change in belief second listed professional development first, indicating that they felt training or experience was a prerequisite for changing beliefs.

**Professional Development**

Laila and Marsha listed professional development first because generating awareness of refugees' experiences could lead to a change in people's beliefs. "We can't hold our breath until people's beliefs change. So you need agents of change to go out and initiate and put those thoughts in people," claimed Edward. Tabitha added:

> If we're making a big change on a campus that may make people uncomfortable, we go to our department heads, our professional learning community leads, . . . [and] our influential teachers, because they had a change in their belief system and they're bought-in.

Marcela suggested that "change in any kind of mindset or belief happens through exposure. Aside from working with a refugee student directly—which is brilliant—you [can] certainly have a change in exposure, which would happen through professional development." Mabel indicated that for people to change their beliefs, they need to experience something significant: "Professional development would come first, so we could get that buy-in, and then people could start changing their beliefs, melding that into their practice, which would then inform the outcomes. . . . Then we could advocate for the policy changes." Marcela—who continually led professional development sessions in her district due to perpetual staff turnover—advocated for professional development to be

geared toward policy for superintendents and toward practice for teachers. Ronald said that professional development would need to be centered on “how to interact with people [who] are from different backgrounds and different places.”

Toya maintained that “teachers need to be educated enough about something to teach students.” Many participants in the teacher focus group discussed the importance of relevant professional development sessions in general. Arthur recalled a professional development session he had attended: “I was a little annoyed, because I had to sit there for 8 hours and . . . [listen to someone] talk about stuff that I already do.” Mandy responded to Arthur: “For some people, the belief has to come first, but for us the belief is already there, so now we can move on to practice.”

Toni remarked:

> When I think about professional development, in many situations, it's not even attached to anybody's belief at the school. It's just like, “Oh here, this could work, and it might not. Just do this reading thing because they said that we need to.” So, beliefs aren't even in there. . . . [Staff] are going to go back to school [and saying], "Oh, I wasted my day."

Jasmine replied to Toni:

> As a person [who] did professional development [for] the district, I saw lots of trainings that would go that way. But I would try really hard to teach teachers the way that I taught my students. And I believed that if my teachers didn't buy into me at all, . . . they're not going to do it. I can throw all these strategies that I know are great or that I think are great, but I would try really hard to make sure that I connected with [the teachers] first. I needed that groundwork belief before I could even open my mouth. Otherwise, . . . I felt like a fraud if I was just talking to people [who] didn't believe anything I was saying.

Participant discussions indicated that if professional development were to be effective, it would need to be specific, relevant to educators, and closely tied to beliefs.

**Change in Policy**

"You're not going to maximize anything unless there are policy decisions that prioritize certain things. Making this a priority through policy is the most direct, long lasting, and effective way of making change," Naomi emphasized. Charles said:

> If [teachers] are doing it the way they've done it for 30 years, they're not going to be teaching in a way that might be conducive to [refugees]. So unless there's a directive coming down, or a push by the district or by administration, I don't think you're going to see that change within the classroom.

Edward recognized that "what we have now is a result of policy. So, if you change policy, then I think the dominoes will fall. If we want to go bottom up, it's just going to take longer."

For Leonard, policy change was last, because "you have to kind of write up what works after the fact," and "you can't force people to develop cultural competency with a rulebook." Julie said:

> The reason I think change in policy is last, instead of the policy influencing the outcomes is because I think once we can prove that we can change an outcome, the policy change is likely to follow. So, I'd almost [have it be] a loop, because that ultimately keeps influencing the change in outcomes and in a more sustainable way.

Charles said, "once you get that change in belief, you need a change in policy to get those who are skeptical . . . on board." Bradley countered Charles: "Policy, to me, doesn't mean much, because a lot of us have policies that we check boxes [for] and move on. It doesn't mean we believe in what we're doing necessarily." When Ronald discussed inclusivity, he ultimately said, "I just think so many times it seems like such a difficult task, because the school leaders always have such strict guidelines to follow, and there's so many boxes they have to check."

Laila discussed changes in policy at a national/international level:

> It's about caring and doing something about crises that are happening in other places before they become catastrophic. But who? The U.S. has already stepped back from leadership. . . . It's just sad that we have the same issues, and I've been [supporting refugees] since 2002.

Marcela concluded:

> Change in policy, gosh, that could go at the beginning or the end . . . [or] in the middle and continuously. . . . Policy is kind of in the whole piece [and] it's not going anywhere. It's a really critical part of the work.

**Elected officials**. Discussions about changing policies prompted talk amongst those in the teacher focus group about elected officials and voting. Toni thought that some people "have to see it to believe it," prompting Brian to say that "a lot of times, our beliefs are based on our experiences. So, in order to change beliefs, you have to give people different experiences. And sometimes that requires policy change." Arthur argued that a change in belief must come from the people who "then elect politicians who can then go in and change the policy." Toni countered, "But I feel like we don't even get to choose who makes our decisions." Charles acknowledged that:

> it's not a direct democracy, but 40% of people [who] turn out to vote are making those decisions. So who are [those decision makers]? They make up the characteristics of those who are actually getting out to vote. School boards directly influence the policy of the district [and] where it's going. And you have bonds and different things that are passed with 200 people who vote out of a group of 30,000.

Arthur added that, in his district "there was a school board member [who] was elected, . . . because one person voted." Jasmine reflected that:

> The school board holds a lot more power than I realized. . . . These seven or eight people, . . . they're making policies for thousands of students, . . . thousands of families. . . . And they're not perfect by any means.

Brian responded, “There are many districts where there’s low turnout, . . . and school board elections are notoriously influenced by special interests, because there is a lot of power and a lot of money that flows to those positions.” Mabel claimed that school boards just respond to policy implemented at the state level:

> [School boards] are not going to change policy as long as we have these strict parameters in place on this [state] accountability system, because it’s all tied. . . . It all goes back to policy and money. . . . Changing policy is going to come from us as organizations challenging the system and changing the people that we vote into office.

Toni reminded the group of who we were focused on:

> I’m going to show up if I want my interest to be heard, . . . [but] you’ve got a lack of access to refugee families who may not even understand what’s going on. So, to vote is way [beyond] them.

Refugees are not allowed to vote until they become citizens, which can sometimes take decades. Laila said of decision-makers in elected positions:

> They’re oblivious. The numbers [of refugees] are small enough that they can ignore them. Plus, do you know how many refugees are actually voting [and] what their concern[s are]? Even the refugees who are voting, of course, are not getting the correct education on who to vote for.

During a participant observation, Aena told me that she hoped President Trump would be voted out this year (2019), and said to me, “Agree, disagree, president, election. I learned these words yesterday.” So the election process and the content of the debates and platforms upon which people run for elections have learning implications for refugees too. Toni argued for solving the root of the problem: “It's about making sure that the countries that [refugees] are running from don't have the issues that they have, so that [their citizens] can be comfortable where they are. We don't have that power.” With regard to involving lawmakers in decision-making processes about refugees, I asked

Naomi what types of questions I should ask congresspersons for this study. She responded, "I wouldn't even talk to them. They don't have a fucking clue."

**The number of refugees and level of diversity in a school matter**. Ronald noted that the recent drastic reduction in number of refugees allowed by President Trump has lowered the number of refugee students in U.S. schools and thus diverted attention away from refugee education, because refugees are less noticeable as a group. This has resulted in fewer resources and less investment in supporting refugee students and their families, because decision-makers can rarely justify resources dedicated to such a small number of people. Ronald described the practicality of supporting a small number of refugees in a large school as a barrier to school improvement:

> First of all, the population of refugees, is it a large population? . . . If I were the principal of the school, I'd [say], "Well, yeah of course I want that to happen, but there are a lot of priorities that we need to meet, and how high is this on the list?" And that's just reality. . . . In a mainstream school, how can you make [education] emancipatory and something that really promotes cultural dialogue and inclusion, but focus it specifically on refugee students?

Bradley described schools as products of capitalistic societies whose goals are to produce as many educational products (students) for as low of an operational cost as possible: "They're not going to allocate a teacher and that budget to three [refugee] kids. They're going to be thrown into a regular classroom with 25 to 30 kids. It's more efficient for the district." Arthur commented:

> I can't see how changing the entire system would benefit everybody. . . . Do you change the entire system for one small group, or do you maintain a system that does work for a mass of people, [and] that's great for them, but now you still need to work with those smaller groups that need that extra [support]?

However, most teachers and administrators agreed that the current system, in fact, does not work, and is not great for most people. Jasmine said, frankly, that:

> If you're trying to change policy for just a small group, that's not going to happen. . . . Hav[e] the community build something and decide what we want our classrooms to look like. What do we value as a community in this classroom? That, I feel, is the only way that it's going to make sense. . . . If we can come together as a community and say we value these differences, and we support these differences, and we want to make sure that everybody's accepted, [then refugees] fall into that and that benefits them as well as a bunch of other [groups].

Mandy added that Jasmine's idea "allows for more differentiation. . . . You can base it around the needs of the people in your community, not just blanket [policy]." Toni responded:

> It would also be nice if we didn't have categories to determine who was less important. If we didn't have this laser attention focus on the biggest percentage of the population that we can get to pass. If we could break down the categories and use them only as the means to support those who are not getting support, then maybe we can move forward. . . . It's a shift from a scarcity mindset to one that is abundant. We have everything that we need to address the needs of every student in this country, whether they are born here or not. . . . And the sad part is that the richest of us feel like their kids are going to be left out if we help the students [who] don't have anything at all.

Mandy commented that, "it costs nothing to shift. . . . It's just a mental shift."

Bradley said that when it comes to learning about refugee education in his district, "the interest level [of teachers] is not very high. It's because 98% of those teachers don't have those kids. So they don't value it." Edward commented:

> Do we even have a way to measure the success of only refugee students? And if that data was out there, what would it say? The vast majority aren't being as successful as other students? And so, then we have to ask ourselves, "Does it matter to us then?" Because if we're not measuring it, then do we care?

Laila addressed measurement in terms of what most districts consider to be an indicator of success: graduation rates. She gathered data on her own, and those data informed her argument for separating refugees from other ELLs:

> The attitude of the district has been very reluctant to separate refugees as a group. They want to deal with refugees as part of all English language learners. There's a big sensitivity to this whole idea of segregation. . . . That's being

> overemphasized. . . . When they're studying how students are doing in school, refugees are lumped in with all English language learners. And nobody knew, until we separated some numbers years ago, that . . . the graduation level was like 25 percent for refugees. The school district was in shock: "No! The graduation level is 80, 90 percent." Yes, but those 20 percent that didn't [graduate], those are the refugees. You can't look at them as part of the whole [group of English language learners], because they're different. They've had other barriers to education.

Carolina reported that one of the districts in her state had a program that placed refugees in schools that specifically provided language and community integration support for them. The program included a partnership with another school whereby the refugee students would visit the other school weekly to write poetry, share stories, and play games along with nonrefugee students. She said that they also wrote and performed a play together "based on the refugee experience and what it feels like to be excluded." What was most significant about the program for Carolina was that "it was much more of a two-way street. Their stories and their experiences and their expertise had equal value in that setting." But she said that when the number of refugee arrivals decreased in 2017 due to Trump's decision to lower the admissions ceiling, "the school district said, 'we can't justify putting this many full-time employees towards this [program].' So maybe it's integrating them more [now], but they're really struggling because the support isn't the same."

Edward acknowledged other focus group members' comments that small numbers of refugees in mainstream schools can cause kids to feel isolated. He then described the advantages of numbers in his international school:

> I would say a blessing of our school is that we don't have that issue so much, because kids come in [groups]. . . . Whenever there's Cuban refugees, there [are] five to 10. . . . [With] Iraqi students, . . . it was 10 to 20. The African kids, we had five to 10. So they always kind of get along. They know each other's languages.

> So I think that helps them feel at home a little bit faster and . . . focus on learning sooner than having to deal with all of that isolation.

Policies, money, and educational outcomes are interconnected and heavily influenced by elected officials who can be changed by the public. Given that electoral systems in the United States rely upon majority rule, refugees need support to advocate for policy changes simply due to their low population numbers.

**Change in Practice**

Changing practice was either the third or fourth driver on everyone's list. Patrick was adamant that "we can't wait for policy to be changed. We have to do the right thing for kids every day. We have to have the courage." Though, according to Charles, changing our practices can take a long time too: "It might be one year for this teacher [and it] might be 10 years down the road for this teacher, but if you keep giving them the tools necessary through professional development, they will hopefully change their practice." Over time, practice can change the makeup of a school community, as Tabitha implied:

> The practice part is really important, because outcomes don't change unless we can make sure that we continuously do this; not just in the first 6 weeks, but this becomes a part of who we are. It's part of our identity.

It can be difficult for us to change our practices, especially when we are trying to meet the needs of a variety of individuals—children and adults. As Kristy observed: "I think teachers try, but sometimes I think they just teach to the middle." Ronald proffered:

> I think you would need that top-down in terms of policy to offer those aspects of interchange and exchange and support for different voices—a polyvocal approach. But you would also need that kind of fervor at the local level. . . . It has to come from the bottom up. . . . It has to start in the classrooms with the way the teachers interact with the kids; the way the teacher creates that trusting community within the classroom. . . . No teacher is going to be able to figure it out on their own, but through the expertise of others [and] through advice, it can

> happen. And then it can become a schoolwide vision or goal. But it has to be something that becomes intentional.

Intention is integral to change. Though participants differed in the order in which they thought things needed to happen for people to change the way they approached the education of refugees and asylees, they generally believed that when the four prior elements were in motion, a change in outcomes could be produced.

**Change in Outcomes**

Listed fourth or fifth on every participant's list was a change in outcomes. Changing outcomes perhaps had the most varied interpretation of all the components of change that I proposed to participants, possibly due to different connotations the word "outcomes" can have. "I really don't think that when it comes to educating anyone, that outcomes should be driving what happens in the classroom," Naomi stated. Instead, she thought that the process of growth and change should drive classroom practice. Julissa said that a change in outcomes was the last driver on her list, "because you can't really change the outcome of a situation. It just happens. And you can't control it either." Others implied that the power of people to change outcomes was essential to educational improvement: "From my experience, often policy has changed because of outcomes," Patrick remarked. He used social and emotional learning as an example:

> Nobody [had] heard of it years ago. And just this year, the legislature passed a bill that mandates character education at all schools. . . . So, 2 years from now, with more outcomes [and] more research, we're going to hit up the legislature to change it to social and emotional learning.

A change in outcomes may be the only thing that leads some people to change their beliefs and/or policies. As Charles described: "You're going to have those [who think], 'Until I believe in something, I'm not going to do it.' . . . [And] if you see a

change, your beliefs might change." It is important to note that no participant deemed any single driver as more important than another. Participants only differed in the order that they thought educational change could/should happen. Thus, their responses illustrated that improving refugee education requires a collective understanding that change does not occur in the same way or at the same pace for all people; and that it requires collaboration at all levels of influence—local, state, national, and international.

**Leading Local, State, National, and International Change**

In addition to providing thoughts about the order in which change should happen, participants provided insight into how change could be led throughout the vertical chains of educational influence. Ronald discussed the differences in educational governance between The Netherlands and the United States:

> In the Netherlands, there is a national educational body that really decides how primary/secondary schools award diplomas or award certain types of achievement rates and how they function. And each school has its own leadership team which tries to meet those needs. The US is completely different [in] that it varies from state to state and . . . the state makes decisions, but then the school district, . . . also decide[s] about what they're going to do. And it seems harder in the US to have a national program that promotes, I don't know what to say, anything! . . . First you have the U.S. Department of Education, but then you have a Texas state education board, but then you have the board of each district and so on. So, how would you get something down through all those levels? . . . You would definitely need the input, in Holland or in Central Texas or in the US, from the people on the ground level about what they're seeing in the classrooms.

When I asked Naomi what she thought I should ask a congressperson for this study, she replied: "What can [U.S.] lawmakers do to ensure that we're actually giving this opportunity to children? . . . I would imagine you'd have quite a difficult time with a lawmaker at that level." She was correct. In my list of emailed questions for Congressperson Chester, I asked: What kinds of improvements could be made to better support refugees in K-12 public schools, and how could those improvements be

supported at the federal level? His response was, like his other responses, a dismissal of federal responsibility:

> Schools should ensure that the children who live within their borders are receiving a quality education. State funding should focus on addressing the needs of the classrooms, including the needs of the educators. The manner in which education is best delivered is best decided by states given our system of federalism. These questions are best aimed at state legislatures, city councils, and local school boards. If local communities want to prioritize specific programs with the intent that all students are receiving a quality education, state and local lawmakers and school administrators should be left with the power to make those decisions.

My research aim was to explore potential components of a theoretical framework for emancipatory education for refugee students in mainstream schools. My hope remains that the results of my research may propel discussions affecting practice. But Ronald reminded me of the divide between academicians and practitioners, status quo and revolution, policy and feeling:

> Being part of the research world now, there's a lot of awesome ideas out there. And there are a lot of people [who] mean well [who have] really fascinating ideas about what education could be. I don't know how that gets translated into the practical. . . . I think it's . . . kind of a feeling, but also a kind of a change in society about moving away from prejudice and bias and moving towards respect; and the idea of dignifying diverse elements of background and society. And it doesn't seem like that's happening with our current political trends in the US or in other parts of the world.

It may be that for changes in refugee education to happen, people must care enough to change. But just deciding to care may not be enough. Edward elucidated that:

> If we decide that we do care, then how do you hold schools accountable or districts accountable to their success? And if you're going to hold them accountable, are you then telling the school district or school something like, "I am willing to make you 'go under,'" per se, and not meet accountability, because you have 20 students in your school district [who] are refugee[s] who aren't successful?" Do those 20 kids matter so much that I'm willing to say, "Whatever, tarnish the school," and say, "Your school [is in need of] improvement?" That's a big thing. It's like this because that's the only way that we're going to do it, right? Accountability [the local word generally used to refer to state standardized test results]. So you're going to start measuring that sub pop[ulation] of refugees. So

> I think there's some tough questions. But ultimately, I don't think that'll happen. And so, it just comes [down] to the human in us. You just have to do it because we believe that every kid needs to pass.

Laila said: "There's a lot of good that happens in the local level. The problem is that you cannot change the system easily from the local level." Tabitha believed that adults in positions of authority not only have to care enough to change the ways we educate refugees, but also to change the ways that we measure and communicate our success to the community. She said:

> Stop having accountability be the only measure of success. And we have to do a much better job of sharing success that's all encompassing. Accountability is one thing, but we have to educate the community that that is one rating for us, but we also do this, this, this, this, and this very well, and look at our kids thriving in this area. And guess what, that's not going to be on that accountability report, but it's our responsibility. We know how accountability works to educate the community because all they're going to see is that letter rating, because that's what's accessible. But we have to share our own success stor[ies].

Mabel suggested that we redefine accountability to encompass more than test scores: "Accountability is simply checking in on your organization and asking the why, . . . the vision, the core commitments. . . . What's the narrative?" Patrick agreed, adding:

> parents want [their children] to grow up to be contributing members of society [and] to be happy. [There are] probably a hundred different characteristics they want. None of those probably include pass the [standardized tests]. . . . We've just got to change the metrics. So, if [standardized testing] is our measurement, how are they going to be when they're 25, 30, 40, 50 [years old]? . . . I have a [colleague] who is a superintendent now. They do not allow any conversation of [state standardized tests] in the community. No banners [and] no accolades, because they're divorcing themselves from the system, because they don't think it's fair. . . . Luckily, he's in a community where kids can read and [there's] not a lot of poverty. So they do well on the [tests]. But that's brave. . . . Maybe if more districts did that, we would get some change.

Victor said that “We all recognize that we hate that system, but it’s the system we have to live with and the one that we’re measured by. So we still have to play the game. We have to find a way out of it.”

Naomi considered the vertical levels of educational influence as she described the complexity involved in change:

> I can't imagine how one could affect change when it comes to educating refugee learners without it being a policy shift on every level. Because at the local level is where it's most important, but how can you sort of change politics at the local level without changing it somewhere else too? So everywhere. Even at the school level. And maybe the way I would envision that would be, again, through the refugee program as a whole, together with resettlement support centers, with resettlement agencies, with PRM [Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration], with the State Department as a driver, and with Health and Human Services . . . to try to at least start the conversation at the national level. Because I think some sort of standard would be helpful. You can't expect all the different communities to know how to respond to [refugees]. It seems to me like it's horribly inefficient to expect the process to change itself at [the local and state] level[s], because you have people duplicating effort. You have people researching [and] doing things [that] somebody in a different state has already done. So I feel like it has to start at the national [or] maybe the international . . . level before it can be most effective. I say that with hesitation, because I don't mean to say I expect the federal government to be the school principal. It's not like that at all. But there are certain actors at the national level who have more information and more access to resources than at the local level. I don't like the idea of this being dumped at the local level—at school district level—[and] say[ing], "Okay, I guess you'll deal with this,” without teachers having any idea what to do.

Though concerted efforts through vertical levels of influence can be difficult due to the amount of communication and coordination needed, participants generally indicated that it was necessary for all levels of educational influence to be connected and working toward the same end to create meaningful change.

## Summary

My research generated valuable participant discourse about the current state of refugee education and considerations for potential improvements within and across local,

state, national, and international levels. A theoretical framework for emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth requires consideration of the input provided by participants in this research as it relates to defining refugees, examining educational aims, listening to stories, valuing community, connecting resources, and teaming across vertical chains to lead change. In Chapter 5, I interpret these elements and recommend some pathways to improvement.

# V. DISCUSSION

This research illustrates that the education of forcibly-displaced youth has generally been limited to providing refuge, language lessons, and basic academic support. However, it is clear participants in this research had visions of greater educational goals for refugees—some of which the participants thought of as emancipatory. Thus, a theoretical framework to understand emancipatory education for refugees would prompt discussions about what leaders can do to improve refugee education. Is an emancipatory education within the scope of possibility for refugee students in mainstream schools? Based on how participants discussed the current and potential future state of refugee education, the answer is yes. I outlined the components of a theoretical framework for emancipatory education for refugee students in mainstream schools broadly in Chapter 4. The themes included: defining refugees and asylees, reconsideration of educational aims, integration of refugees' voices in decision-making, community development, resource allocation, and leading change throughout disparate entities.

However, there was variance in how participants conceived of an emancipatory education for refugees and the obstacles to realizing such an education. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, there has been promising research conducted in the field of refugee education. Given prior research and the data generated from this study, educators can learn from the frameworks and resources already in place and build upon them to develop welcoming, empathetic, protective, supportive, and inclusive school cultures and learning communities. In this chapter, I interpret my research narrative through a critical lens and outline policy implications, make suggestions, and ask questions that can help to develop an emancipatory education for refugees that represents a synthesis of my narrative and

prior research. The scope of this discussion includes revising definitions of those displaced; integrating love, care, curricula, and community; and sustaining systemic change.

## Revising Definitions

Definitions matter because they affect the services provided for children and their families. It may be better to examine the term 'refugees' as to who is excluded from the definition, rather than who is included. The terms participants used when describing refugees included language, trauma, fear, culture, isolation, support, and documentation. All such terms can be related to anyone who has been forcibly-displaced, regardless of the semantic determinations made by federal government officials to approve or deny one's refugee or asylee status. Perhaps reducing financial insecurities and increasing the life expectancies of children are not reasons for government authorities to grant official documentation to families, but they may still be reasons why families were forced to flee their home countries and are attending school in unfamiliar countries.

Many forcibly-displaced families are in local communities, where their undocumented children are often invisible within local schools. Forced displacement is what uniquely defined the children discussed in this study. Therefore, to eliminate the stratification and resulting unequal levels of privilege and support received amongst those displaced, we might base the use of grants and other government funds on forced displacement status only. Forcibly-displaced youth would then include refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants, as opposed to refugees exclusively. Separate labels may be justified for many reasons, but funding should not be one of them.

Edward, Ronald, Bradley, Arthur, Jasmine, Laila, and Carolina indicated that educational leaders would be hesitant to write or implement policies that would affect a few students who could otherwise be dismissed without damaging a school's overall performance. If leaders create an appropriate category within the system of standardized testing, the increased number of students in a school classified as such could prevent all forced populations from being ignored based on numbers alone. For example, a school may have 10 refugees, 20 asylees, and 50 undocumented children enrolled. When collectively defined as 80 forcibly-displaced students, the test scores that concern those who submit to systems of standardized testing may be significant enough to affect a school's overall performance in the eyes of the public. Consequently, educators may pay more attention to teaching forcibly-displaced students. Educators cannot let forcibly-displaced youth fail in schools because of how they are categorized in a system that we created and have the power to change.

School staff often look at documentation and then try to categorize or code children and apply ready-made forms of education to them (Freire, 1972). When enrolling refugees, administrators may pay more attention to their English language fluency than to their academic aptitude, individuality, or circumstances. Alternatively, we could rid education of standardized testing to disrupt the rigid categorizations of children. If children were self-defined by their experiences, rather than by the stereotypes and prejudice generated through the assignment of categories and labels, then we might stop viewing them only in terms of categories and numbers that determine our success or failure as educators.

Toya associated her identity with her refugee experience, religion, nationality, skin color, language, and gender. Some refugees may associate special education needs, sexual orientation, and other factors with their identity as well. The clinical mindset of some educational leaders causes them to dismiss intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) in favor of quick solutions to the question of where a child fits in the current system. Answers to that question often result in prescriptions for education based on misidentification or overidentification rooted in broad generalizations about where children are from, how they behave, and how well they score on exams. We can learn more about our students before deciding how best to serve them.

## Integrating Love, Care, Curricula, and Community

Though refugees are more likely than nonrefugees to have needs associated with trauma, finances, and cultural and social navigation, we cannot broadly prescribe how to educate them. With respect to self-determination and self-advocacy as emancipatory goals, and acknowledging that native-born students and school staff are more privileged in educational dialogues, educators must give refugees sufficient attention and allow them the space to tell their stories before deciding how education should serve them. Listening and responding with appropriate support cannot be a one-time or temporary event. It must be ongoing, so that it becomes part of a school's culture. A welcoming and inclusive school setting where voices are heard and opinions are valued should be supported by everyone. However, such a space must be created by those who currently dominate school cultures, and that requires a willingness to listen and cede power.

In this section, I provide suggestions and prompt the discussion needed to support the creation of welcoming spaces driven by emancipatory goals. Considerations include

local community development, ideologies of respect and self-challenge, prioritization of social and emotional learning, support for refugee parents, curriculum and instruction improvement and reform, considerations for teacher education, and an examination of resource allocation. Collectively, these topics integrate of love, care, curricula, and community.

**Community Development is a Local Process**

Ronald asked: "Can refugees integrate and become a part of civic community?" This question relates to established cliques and refugees. Refugees were forced to the places where they reside. Perhaps some refugees do not want to be a part of their new community or to develop a sense of belonging to it. Maybe they view their refugee status as a temporary setback that they must cope with until they can go home. The first step toward an emancipatory education for refugees, however, must be taken by everyone else. The first step is to welcome every human being into our educational spaces, because a feeling of belonging is at the root of an emancipatory framework for refugee education in mainstream schools (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016).

Establishing shared values through all vertical chains of educational influence is difficult and likely impossible. Lawmakers are too far removed from schools to understand what happens within them. I solicited many politicians for this study and received political responses: ignoration, deferment, and self-absolution. School staff must lead the welcome for refugees by making spaces for community to be built, even if policies do not support such acts. Refugees lack integrated community upon resettlement. Local community members must invite them to integrate. That takes

courage, love, care, and patience (Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020). It is not a concrete process, but local community members must be intentional in the inclusion of refugees.

Making space for community-building means addressing social, emotional, economic, societal, and political issues in classrooms. Teachers must begin to learn about students' experiences and have the support and language to use to build a classroom culture that includes refugees, especially in courses that do not conventionally lend themselves to community-building discussions (e.g., math classes). Community-building takes time because relationship building takes time. Forming relationships with refugees requires that there be continuous touchpoints between students and teachers to slowly build trust and the willingness on refugees' parts to open up and talk about their lives. After refugee students begin to trust their teachers and classmates, they may be open to contribute to their new communities without fear. Policies can support and be supported by communities if they are based on a shared goal of a shift away from standardized teaching and learning objectives and toward an education rooted in differentiation based on local interests, beliefs, and values. Such an ideological shift translated into policy is a signal from the top of an educational hierarchy downward that individual beliefs about what education can and should do for everyone should form a collective purpose of education defined locally.

Groups in the majority generally influence schools and broader communities. However, refugees will never be in the majority (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b). Building an integrated community never ends, but it starts with nonrefugee adults and is done through dialogue. Not all participants in the focus groups I conducted shared beliefs with each other, but they were willing to listen and open to having their minds changed by one

another. Such willingness creates possibilities for incorporating a variety of others' perspectives into our daily lives and actions—this is an essential disposition for teachers who educate refugees.

Teachers, students, families, and other community members collectively define their communities. This can start with teachers and students appreciating one another. That, in turn, may lead to positive exchanges between educators and parents. In that sense, a school community would change first. Then, the broader community could change. The result may be the spread of a common philosophy of inclusiveness from students to their parents to the civic community.

**Philosophies of Respect and Self-Challenge**

An emancipatory education for refugees is not just about welcoming people into spaces. It is also about welcoming people's opinions in discussions. Educators should strive for a zeitgeist of unabated diversity in thought in classrooms that begins with and is sustained by respectful and welcoming teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction. Educators cannot expect refugees to immediately feel as though they can speak up, influence social transformation, and challenge societal inequities without solid footing in their countries of resettlement. An emancipatory education for forcibly-displaced youth is a slow process, and one that requires educators' perspectives to be asset-based (Major et al., 2013); that is, a mindset that values inclusivity, equity, diversity, culture, and self-advocacy. Educators must work to normalize differences by honoring what students bring to their classrooms—especially students from other nations—and acknowledging nondominant epistemologies and ontologies in order to open spaces for students to be who they are without feeling the need to hide anything (Major et al., 2013).

Resisting the urge to put forth one's epistemology and ontology as the only ways of knowing and being can be difficult. Welcoming people with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and ways of looking at the world has not historically been valued in U.S. educational systems. However, learning from people directly as opposed to reading about them in books or listening to teachers talk about them can be a privilege. Intentional or not, refugees' experiences are often skewed by or absent from mainstream media. Therefore, teachers, counselors, and principals may not be educated on the uncertain and arduous paths refugee families often traverse before and during resettlement. We have an extraordinary opportunity to learn directly from refugees, if we only accept it. We cannot ignore that opportunity and press refugees to do things our way.

A fundamental shift in community learning is more than the occasional nod to groups of people on significant holidays. It necessitates a way of living defined by the slow and intentional dismantling of the established division lines of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, wealth, and others. Once established, those lines are difficult to undo. Erasing them is the ultimate manifestation of inclusivity. Though, as Ronald alluded, how do we create a culture shift that is more than rhetorical? Schools, like businesses, post their values on banners in hallways or stamp their slogans as taglines in newsletters. However, in hierarchical forms of organization, those values or slogans are not likely to be created or informed by those who reside at the bottom of organizational charts. They are generally issued from those in power at the top. Instead, communities should co-determine what they value in their schools.

**Establishing a cultural vision**. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, refugee children often shy from participating in classrooms when local pedagogies clash with their experiences and norms (Brenner & Kia-Keating, 2016). How can we encourage culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995) without knowing the cultures of those we are trying to address? As Leonard suggested, let us start by understanding our own cultures. Ask ourselves, what is culture? How did we arrive at our understanding of our culture? A way to answer those questions is to begin learning about other cultures, so that differences are illuminated, and things once considered mundane now move to the forefront of our consciousness.

After we have started learning about ourselves, we can begin to learn about our students' cultures in a less didactic manner. Then we can pursue the challenge of establishing a cultural vision that includes how our staff and students want to approach issues of welcoming, thought inclusivity, belonging, and self-determination. The vision should spawn from a collaborative effort among students, parents, staff, and community members. If the vision is created by those responsible for making it a reality, it may be more likely to become a reality (Fullan, 2015).

Marcela mentioned that each school in her district operated in its own way according to each principal's perspective. Toni noted that people have many different fundamental values. Fundamental values are taught and learned, explicitly and implicitly in schools. As educators, we can influence what those fundamental values are. Cultivating changes in values can take a long time and a resolute staff. It can help to have staff who plan to live in the community in which they work for an extended period,

because they can build relationships and develop meaningful shared values with students and their families.

Schools have adults and children who do not want to participate, but that should not preclude the development of a cultural vision and the efforts to realize it. There are no limits to changing a vision over time because schools and communities are always changing. It can be a challenge for school administrators to make their schools the center of their communities and embrace different educational mindsets to create a cultural vision. However, a framework must be collectively defined before schools can work toward it.

A cultural vision that includes refugees is inclusive of daily practices of multidirectional teaching and learning between students and teachers while valuing people's cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). A cultural vision is not defined as a week of systemic orientation or assimilation in which students learn about the rules and how to find their classes, as was the case in Julissa's charter school. A cultural vision is inclusive of an ongoing effort to change the school communities so that they reflect the contributions from and goals of the societies they serve (Durkheim, 1922/2000).

By not making spaces for children to share their lives, stories, and ways of knowing and doing, educators practice subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and propagate epistemologies defined by state actors, themselves, and test and book writers. Subtractive schooling perpetuates a belief that the purpose of education is to deposit predetermined ideas of what knowledge is into empty vessels to condition them to be like us (Freire, 1972). Ensuring that a cultural vision is established with fidelity takes

persistent work over an extended period. It includes discussions about how to share space in ways that encourage learning and respect.

A change in educational philosophies may not be apparent for many years, but the groundwork needs to begin now and be maintained. Discussions about a cultural vision do not have to start when refugees arrive. They can start at any time, in any school, whether refugees are enrolled. Bring nonrefugee parents into educational dialogue along with students and discuss what culture means to them. If we start incorporating a philosophy of inclusion in a cultural vision now, then when refugees arrive, they will find schools to be more welcoming places.

Individuals often do not realize that their norms and behaviors are different from others' until they go somewhere drastically different than their homes or witness something that differs from accustomed experiences. If we define culture as the customs, norms, and behaviors of a group of people, then teaching and learning about culture are great opportunities for refugee and nonrefugee students and teachers to teach and learn from each other because everyone can participate in discussions about how things are said and done in different settings. Acknowledging that we behave differently in different spaces can help us to respect differences in society. Let refugees know that their assets and cultures are valued and are no less important than the cultures of the countries in which they reside (Major et al., 2013). Everyone can be a participant in learning about unfamiliar cultures. Learning about and from refugees takes love and fosters love (Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020).

**Making time for storytelling**. Maya recalled great conversations during campus-level community learning exchanges (Guajardo et al., 2016) between parents and bilingual teachers, and she only held two or three exchange events per year. Such exchanges should be conducted monthly, including summers, so that refugee families do not lose touch with school staff and other families. Bring community members in for storytelling, too.

It will likely be difficult to get parents of refugee students to attend community learning exchanges, because parents may not understand the purpose of the meetings. But we must convince students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other community members that it is important to attend school-related meetings. We cannot have an inclusive environment if we have no one to include. Make parent-student-staff meetings easily accessible and continuously promote them so that everyone has an opportunity to share their voices and hear other voices. Begin exchanges with good facilitators and interpreters, and the participants will advance the learning experiences through dialogue.

We must build the capacity of others to do the work too (Fullan, 2015), because storytelling should also happen at the classroom level for community change to occur. It does not have to be regularly scheduled time, but it can be. The point is to encourage storytelling to understand one another. Adults may be fearful of provoking traumatic memories by encouraging refugees to tell their stories (Brenner & Kia-Keating, 2016). However, I argue that such fear is often exaggerated and can be alleviated if refugees are encouraged to choose what they tell. In my study, all adults discussed trauma, but none of the refugees did. Toya and Niara just wanted teachers to get to know them. Faraq started doing schoolwork with me after I spent time listening to his stories and showing

him that I valued what he brought to our relationship. Students typically do not care what you know until they know that you care (Valenzuela, 1999). Be willing to let students be teachers first.

Refugees can share stories without discussing traumatic experiences. Storytelling is a part of building refugees' autonomy, self-advocacy, and identity in protected learning spaces, which can lead to healing (Burde et al., 2017). There are stories to share that have nothing to do with what forced people to leave their countries and hearing those stories can be a great learning experience for everyone. If, at some point, a refugee student feels comfortable talking about their resettlement journey and the reasons for it, then they can do so. That, too, would be a great learning experience for everyone. We will never be able to walk in others' shoes comfortably, but we can get comfortable with discomfort in the interest of developing inclusive communities through our curiosities.

Others affect refugee children's identities during the experiences of becoming refugees. Whether outwardly expressed, labels that they did not choose have become a part of their identities, and they have to address that as they mature. Storytelling can help refugee children to understand the influences that have shaped who they are and to decide who they want to become. When we do not tell our stories, others may create narratives about us, for us. Those narratives probably will not represent us the way we want to be represented. Telling one's story is imperative for refugees.

We can counter false narratives by making spaces for refugees' input. It can be difficult for refugees to find their voices and express them when our societal norms support the silent attendance of children in most spaces, schools included. In societies often labeled as democratic, enforced silence is oppressive. It can be difficult for

educators, too, because the stratified, tracked, and prescribed nature of school systems results in the labeling of students. Students internalize assigned labels, as do educators.

Storytelling establishes empathy on the listener's part. Empathy gives some comfort, and comfort is foundational to learning. Stories can be told student to student, student to teacher, or teacher to student. The point is to understand one another. Toya and Niara did not feel as though their classmates or teachers took time to get to know them. They felt prejudged and uncomfortable. Those feelings can persist throughout refugees' entire lives. Bradley noticed that his two refugee students kept to themselves often and spent more time with him and the hall monitor than they did with other students. Refugees come into our environment, so we must take the first steps to welcome and show interest in them, or they will not feel valued in school. Educators must be unafraid to approach students who speak unfamiliar languages, venture into unknown spaces, learn about refugees, and discover the value they bring to classrooms and societies. It can be difficult to admit that we do not know things, but we must take risks to progress. When educators stay in what is comfortable, they often exclude refugee students. Anxiety and fear dissipate, and love and care evolve as we get to know one another. Caring is key to community-building and to any framework for educating refugee students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

Some refugee and immigrant parents do not want their children to share their backgrounds with native-born children, because they may not want their kids exposed as different and possibly subjected to humiliation, oppression, or embarrassment. Ideally, society should not make people afraid of expressing who they are and should not force them to express who they are either. If a welcoming culture is established and

continuously worked toward, refugee parents may be less fearful. I discuss ways to support parents later in this chapter.

Listening contributes to awareness and cultural proficiency. No course in cultural intelligence or a certification in cultural competency is equivalent to sitting with children and their families and listening to their stories. It happens locally. It takes time, and it starts with educators. In a classroom, storytelling may look like a mess. If it does not, teachers may be controlling the environment too much.

Learning a story takes time, establishing trust takes time, and teachers rarely have time. Alleviating the pressure of teaching a massive amount of content in a short timeframe to prepare students for state standardized tests would free time for children to share their stories in class. Other helpful changes can be made concerning how teachers spend their time. They could teach fewer conventional classes per day and have more time for self-reflection; learning about the self; relationship building with other school staff, students, and families; and community development. Educational leaders may need to spend more money to hire more teachers to teach the same number of students. However, as I mentioned earlier, the United States has enough money. It is simply not allocated to these ends.

Storytelling provides learning experiences for everyone in the room, and as Brian opined, experiences can change people's attitudes and perspectives. Storytelling acknowledges refugees and empowers them and others to talk about things that can help us to understand one other. Educators can begin learning how to facilitate storytelling by listening to one another's stories and then attempting to tell those stories from others' perspectives. Then they can ask themselves how that exercise changed their self-

awareness and their awareness of others. Being self-aware includes understanding biases and analyzing how philosophies have been shaped.

**Valuing difference**. Some participants mentioned that educators should have an asset-based approach to teaching, rather than a deficits-based approach. Educators should continuously investigate and discuss the origins of deficits-based approaches to avoid them, which is difficult to do in a capitalistic society based in competition and exploitation of others' weaknesses. We work within an educational system that has conditioned us to identify differences and associate them with deficiencies. Therefore, discussions must be ongoing because people tend to revert to their habitual ways of thinking and doing even after they have completed professional development courses. Ongoing discussions help to maintain a welcoming, empathetic environment as new students and staff enter schools.

As Toya and Niara described, valuing difference is not easy, because educators must balance the acknowledgement and promotion of the appreciation of difference while being mindful of the possibility that students may feel as though they have been singled out. Refugee students can be cautious and shy due to many factors, past and present. Consequently, teachers should approach relationships with refugees carefully, so that refugees do not feel judged or stupid for asking questions or struggling to pronounce foreign words. Valuing difference demands patience, but when refugee students feel valued by their teachers, they may feel more comfortable asking their teachers for help instead of remaining silent.

When refugees are enrolled in the same classes—generally because they are part of an English language learning group—teachers may tend to teach them all in the same

manner. While similar circumstances led refugees to resettlement, they are still individuals with their perspectives and should not be educated in the same manner. Niara looked forward to expressing what she knew, and French class was an opportunity for her to do that. Educators can show that we value differences by providing more opportunities for refugees to share their knowledge in ways that do not require proficiency in the languages of their host countries. Students and educators should continuously discuss how to welcome people who, at a surface level, are unique, and how to participate in educational spaces together and be valued by all who occupy them.

**Publicly displaying care**. In many organizations, the people who control the distribution of resources put those resources toward what they value most. If the result of that resource allocation is something visible, tangible, and meaningful in the minds of refugees, then refugees will feel valued and know they belong. Consequently, their advocacy and self-determination can begin to develop.

Images are powerful. When people walk into a school, they should see student work and messages that express that refugees are welcome. Messages do not have to be exclusively about refugees, but refugees should be intentionally included. Post the school's cultural vision online. Exemplify the school's culture through videos and journal and newspaper articles. Hang flags of the countries represented by students in the school, as someone did in Kristy's district. Present pictures and quotes and historical moments that happened in other countries, not just in the United States.

School leaders must ask themselves how they want to represent their students. They can begin by referring to their community-generated cultural vision. They can ask themselves what it means to be a panther, or tiger, or whatever school mascot they

have—as Ronald suggested. Or they can simply ask themselves: "What is our school about?" In whatever way they choose to promote their values and successes, school leaders must never stop telling their schools' stories so that people know the campus is more than a grade assigned by the state as a result of performance on a standardized test.

Policy changes are frequently a result of proven, visible needs. Measurement and documentation are often required to prove needs. Find ways to continuously express the positive results of the philosophical shift of teaching and learning away from that which only prioritizes standardized test scores to that which prioritizes respectful inclusion and community-building. Document it and make it easily accessible to show the need for a corresponding shift in funding and policy support. Emphasize openness to having critical conversations about the socio-political issues that influence biases and learning in order to address them constructively to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Philosophies of respect and self-challenge should provoke more than empty words that people put on signs because they are required to have slogans or to check boxes. Promote such philosophies in job descriptions and interviews. If people are eager to learn and contribute to an ever-changing cultural vision and community-building practices, then they will apply.

**Prioritizing Social and Emotional Learning**

Storytelling should encourage, value, and consequently prize difference. Storytelling should also positively influence social and emotional learning. As Julie asserted, the ability to resolve conflict peacefully and make friends is a prerequisite for healthy living and greater opportunities as an adult. However, we must be mindful of what we consider to be appropriate social and emotional behavior by determining what

social and emotional learning may look like for refugee children, and how that can differ from that for native-born children. Such mindful avoidance of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) takes continuous professional development training and practice for educators throughout their entire careers. Social and emotional learning must become policy to make it a priority. Otherwise, success will continue to be determined primarily by test scores, and training will propel educators toward standardized test-related goals.

Mandy said she had the autonomy to address the social and emotional needs of students in her elementary bilingual classes. Secondary teachers in my study did not have that autonomy. Yet emotions and social interactions do not disappear when students reach middle school. So why do we stop addressing them? Unaddressed psychosocial issues are especially problematic for refugees who arrive in the United States as adolescents because they are likely to have missed what might be the most crucial component of their education at a time in their lives when they need it most. I suggest that we should be embracing social and emotional learning throughout our lives, more so than any other school subject. Social and emotional learning is not a prerequisite for higher learning. It is higher learning.

As Laila described it, refugees children's lack of academic success is sometimes attributed to their behaviors. Dominant discourses can drive what educators consider to be commonsense reasons (McGinnis, 2009) for why refugees may not behave according to school norms. However, misbehavior is not because they do not want to or cannot learn. Educators can determine what drives refugee children's behavior and address it in a restorative and constructive manner by talking with refugees instead of talking about them. Address issues collectively. Listening to students tell their stories can be a

powerful determinant for people to change their teaching practices. However, social and emotional learning cannot be just another packaged set of instructional strategies for all or a prescriptive set of steps used to treat any student who has experienced trauma. Social and emotional learning should be tailored to individuals.

Social and emotional learning is not just for students. Educators should engage in it and not be afraid to show their vulnerabilities to their students. Showing vulnerability and listening creates trust and allows students to view educators as people who care. But, as Patrick mentioned, compassion could be a factor. It is emotionally and physically draining to care: Teachers and administrators must cope with the realization that if they try to care about everyone, they risk caring for themselves. Educators need to care enough to empower others to practice self-care and promote social and emotional learning.

The importance of social and emotional learning cannot be understated. Its long-term effects on how we treat each other as adults may be difficult to measure, but they will be felt. Whether through war, genocide, climate change, or other means, forced displacement is caused by people via their social and emotional actions. When people change, the world changes.

**Encouraging friendships**. Compared to refugees who arrive in their host countries during early childhood, adolescents are forced to assimilate faster, are tested more, are in bigger schools where they can go unnoticed in larger classrooms and have greater responsibilities at home. Furthermore, many students develop cliques of friends throughout their elementary school years, so it is may be more difficult for recently resettled adolescent refugees to make friends than it is for elementary school-aged

refugees. Toya said she consistently attempted to make friends by approaching her classmates so that her actions defined her as opposed to the attributes ascribed to her. The burden should not be on the refugees. They are guests in the United States. We must take the first welcoming step.

Bradley suggested a student mentorship program in which native-born students partner with refugee students to help them navigate their unfamiliar environment. Counselors can schedule student mentors' and mentees' classes so that they attend most or all of their classes together and ask teachers to seat them together. Perhaps student-mentors could be refugees from the same countries or speak the same native languages as their mentees. If Toya, in 11th grade, 4 years after her arrival, had been partnered with a newly-resettled middle or high school refugee student, it could have been a great experience for both. A student mentorship program bears little to no cost for a school district and may be more beneficial to native-born and refugee students than many funded programs.

Create special interest groups for students to attend before, during, and after school, and encourage refugees to join and lead those groups. Belonging is important (Fruja Amthor, & Roxas, 2016). When refugees feel like they do not belong, they begin to be at risk of hating school. Do not assume that refugees will figure out how to navigate schooling. Formalize assistance by providing structures for children to connect in ways that are visibly supported by adults in the school.

**Providing counseling**. Often, secondary school counselors focus on scheduling students and ensuring they have the credits they need to graduate. Not much of their time is spent listening to and counseling students about personal matters. However, refugees

should have an outlet for dealing with trauma and stress. Teachers may not know how to support refugees who have had severely traumatic experiences, especially when they do not share a language, nor is there always time and space in their classrooms to do so. Students should be able to contact counselors with personal social, emotional, and psychological issues—not just course credit issues. However, refugees are not likely to ask or know they can ask for help. Counselors should start conversations with refugee students and their families to build relationships and make them aware of their free counseling services.

Counseling must be balanced with a recognition of refugees' resiliency. Refugees need support, but they also need to know that they are viewed positively by people in their host countries. Helping refugees in ways that do not cause them to feel as though they are pitied or labeled as different than their peers is a delicate position for counselors; it requires knowledge, experience, and skill. If schools cannot offer counseling in ways that help refugees to build self-esteem, then school leaders should partner with organizations that can provide such services in person and by phone, and preferably 24 hours per day.

**Supporting Refugee Parents**

Refugee youth carry the burden of assimilating not only themselves but their entire families. They are often responsible for interpreting for their parents when they may not understand what is communicated either. They help parents navigate school systems and society. They are asked to be adults while they are children. This burden is subtractive and can be traumatizing. Meanwhile, native-born students can focus more on aspects of a healthy childhood, such as schoolwork and play. The responsibility gap

between refugees and nonrefugees will never be closed, but it can be lessened. Refugee children should view life as more than work. We must stop assigning adult responsibilities to them by supporting their parents.

Self-advocacy is also a goal for refugee parents. Parents should know that they can make decisions for themselves and their children and feel comfortable doing so. But refugee parents may not feel like they have a voice by the time they are resettled. It is difficult to express one's voice when silenced by teachers (Matthieson, 2016) and schools, and it can be especially challenging when one does not have the words due to language barriers (Ripley, 2013). Schools should partner with other organizations to provide parent education, not only concerning language learning, but also how to obtain employment in their fields (e.g., the Tent Partnership for Refugees, tent.org), enroll in appropriate courses of education, or complete job training programs. If refugee parents are only required by law to attend 40 hours of English language instruction, then they will be severely limited in their job prospects. Refugees should be provided with at least 1 to 2 years of monetary support under the condition that they regularly attend English classes to reach the minimum goal of 1,000 hours that Laila cited. This support can free refugee youth from being the communication intermediaries between their parents and the school by teaching their parents how to navigate society and technology. Refugee children can then use their time to enjoy more of their childhood and the family structure can be maintained.

Communities must involve refugee parents. Provide free transportation for refugee parents to community events and programs, either by partnering with the local transit authority to obtain free or discounted public transit passes or by soliciting

volunteers to drive. If the high school has a driver's education course, allow refugee parents to take it for free. Start vehicle donation programs for refugee families.

Without citizenship, one cannot vote. With rare exceptions, refugee parents cannot become citizens without basic English literacy (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2020). But why? Understanding a country's native language should have no bearing on one's ability to take an exam. The citizenship test can and should be translated for refugees, but this is not done. Even when refugees become citizens, they may be afraid to vote because voting requires identification. Without fully understanding how the U.S. political systems work, refugees may fear deportation. If parents do not advocate for themselves because they are fearful, then they may encourage their children to behave similarly.

A lot of local issues posted for referendum are not publicized widely. Regardless of voting eligibility, refugees should be able to share their opinions about issues that matter to them. School district leaders should promote ways for refugee parents to voice their opinions, either directly or via proxy. Because refugees may not speak up for themselves, especially in settings such as school board and city council meetings, school-sponsored advocacy groups should be formed to serve refugee parents in such settings as needed. Said advocacy groups should consist of people who understand how school systems work, and who are familiar with community-based support organizations.

Refugee parents may find it difficult to attend community meetings and speak up for themselves when their priorities are providing food and shelter for their families. The irony is that decisions made in those meetings often affect refugees' abilities to have their priorities addressed. When refugee parents are confident in themselves and better able to

support their children's physiological needs, they are better able to attend meetings to provide much-needed input to their children's education.

In Chapter 2, I noted that connections between refugee parents and school staff are important (Jamal Al-deen & Windle, 2015). However, school staff often write and speak at a level of English and in a style of English that is foreign to refugees. That is why Aena asked me to read emails and letters from her children's schools. She had been taking English classes periodically in the United States for 6 years and was still learning basics and nuances. She could not be expected to fill out questionnaires from the school or read long emails or letters written in a business or academic style of communication. Yet, none of my study participants indicated that there was consideration shown for refugees in the parental paperwork required by their districts. Schools should contract with organizations that provide translation and interpretation services in many different languages. Creating flyers and informational documents with as many visuals as possible is also helpful, as Kristy had done. At a minimum, staff can use free software applications such as Google Translate to translate letters and emails into parents' native languages. Sending communication exclusively in English and Spanish to parents who speak a variety of other languages is ineffective. It also signals to refugee parents that educators do not care enough to accommodate them.

Laila noted that silent or absent parents are sometimes blamed for their student's behavior or performance in schools. Teachers cannot assume that silence is apathy. Aside from the financial and time issues at play, participation in their children's education is a peculiar concept to many refugee parents. Refugees have been told how to live their lives; refugee parents will not suddenly begin telling teachers in a new country how to

educate their children. Their agency may have been stripped from them. They may be embarrassed to ask for help. Or it may be culturally inappropriate to talk to school staff in their home countries.

Even when refugee parents have the time and intent, they often cannot help their children with schoolwork, especially when it is written in academic English. A self-perpetuating flaw in educational philosophy is revealed when teachers assume that parents do not care, and then teachers stop caring. When students notice that teachers do not care, students care less, their grades fall, and their subsequent teachers may tend to believe that the students and their parents do not care. It takes time for refugee parents to build their confidence. Refugee family support specialists and advocacy groups should provide continuous support to negotiate such complex issues.

Sometimes forcibly-displaced families do not know what they could or should do when struggling with school, work, and other obligations. Schools should provide all refugee families a support specialist who can be called upon to answer questions, ask questions, present options, and bring awareness, access, skills, and guidance in navigating educational and other social systems. That person should be someone with community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). If we want refugees to be self-determining, they need to know who to talk to when they are unsure of how to accomplish their goals. One support specialist can be assigned to multiple refugee families, but such support should be provided for as long as the family has children enrolled in school. Refugees cannot be expected to participate socially, economically, and politically in society and be productive citizens if educational leaders do not provide them with the support to do so.

Positions such as parent-, family-, and community liaisons and newcomer coordinators are important. (For the sake of brevity, I call them refugee family support specialists.) Refugee family support specialists are essential to generating and maintaining pathways for communication and reciprocal learning between refugee parents and school staff (Bajaj et al., 2017). Teachers should be connecting with families and listening to their stories, but teachers can only do so much. Support specialists are the catalysts for community-building and bonding between refugee families and teachers.

Each campus with refugee students should have at least one refugee family support specialist. Specialists should conduct frequent home visits to form relationships with families and help them build their agency. Discussions with families should take place year-round, not just in the spring, when it is time for state standardized testing. Such springtime discussions generally are more about what quick steps can be taken to help children pass tests than children's progress in becoming self-determined individuals. If possible, support specialists should conduct home visits in pairs and discuss the visits afterward, as Maya had done. If a refugee family has children at multiple campuses, then specialists from each campus can coordinate visits together. Postvisit discussions between specialists at different campuses can be beneficial for knowledge sharing and mutual support. Regular conversations among specialists, teachers, counselors, and principals must take place so that staff understand what is happening in the lives of refugees. Frequent, direct, and honest communication among all parties is an absolute requirement. Communication does not mean paperwork generated to justify someone's budgetary earmark for their position. It means continuous dialogue from enrollment to graduation.

Ideally, people doing community-building work live in and are a part of the community they serve. Therefore, they see the needs and community resources in their daily lives outside of work. If support specialists live in the community in which they work and send their children to the schools there, then they may cross paths and associate with refugee families more often and develop long-lasting personal relationships. Such relationships are important for refugee families with multiple children because a family can be connected to a district and its staff for a decade or more. Trust between support specialists and families is necessary, and it can develop faster if specialists are a part of the community they serve.

**Reforming Curricula and Teaching**

Upon resettlement, refugee students have a stronger connection to another country than to the one in which they reside. As the data illustrated in Chapter 4, curricula must be relevant to them. We cannot create curricula in which children see themselves if we do not understand our children. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and socio-politically relevant pedagogy (Bajaj et al., 2017) can engage refugees in academics and inform teachers about their students. Toya, Niara, and Faraq all discussed how politics affected their social lives. Refugee youth are ready to engage in discussions about current social, political, and economic issues. By default, teachers control their classroom environments. So if educators aim for students to express self-advocacy and autonomy in classrooms, then teachers must open the curricula to sensitive discussions and let students drive. Instead of teaching World History with a narrow scope simply to meet state standards, discuss areas of the world that students identify with or are interested in. Students should teach each other and their educators. As Patrick suggested,

social studies and English courses are natural spaces for such discussions. However, a more notable change could stem from diverse cohorts taking a culture and community course every year from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Educators must acknowledge that history is being made daily and we are all part of it. If what happened in the world yesterday is relevant, teachers should change today's lesson to be concerned with that event. If we make connections between current events and events of the past, address the causes of historical and current events as they relate to oppressive circumstances that lead people to become refugees, then history lessons will still be learned. In the immediate information age in which we now live, books will always be behind today's news. Students cannot wait for books to be written about current events, yet we cannot let news and social media be the only ways that students obtain information about and discuss the current state of the world. An emancipatory education for refugees is one that stimulates awareness of the causes of today's social oppression so that our children can learn *from* history, not just learn *of* history. We cannot ignore who we are teaching or what is happening in our world in favor of sticking to predetermined lessons.

Move away from curricula centered on the United States. The host country perspective should not dominate curricula, especially when leaders of the host country have contributed to the circumstances that produced refugees (Haines, 2010). A paradigmatic transformation is needed to accommodate the global society that travel and technology have created. Children should be learning about people from a variety of countries daily. If we are required to teach about the history of Texas, then explain why, and do not prioritize the memorization of dates and names. Instead, explain how

concepts involved can be relevant to refugees today. Or make Texas History an elective class for refugees. Texas History is not refugees' history. Refugees have too large of an educational gap to close to be taking nonrelevant courses that contribute to boredom, restlessness, frustration, and behavioral disruptions in class (Birman & Tran, 2017). Hamid and Faraq were both absent from classes so often they risked losing course credits. They also considered dropping out of school, which would have increased their susceptibility to posttraumatic stress and depression (Fazel et al., 2012; Nasıroğlu & Çeri, 2016). Perhaps if the curricula were engaging and relevant for them, they would have attended school more often.

Instead of lowering expectations for refugees to close the educational gap, create expectations that look different. Laila expressed that the academic, nonsimplified vocabulary, and tacit cultural assumptions in standardized tests unnecessarily raise the level of difficulty for refugees higher than the level set for nonrefugee students. The academic language in Faraq's science curriculum lacked any consideration for non-native English speakers. Miscommunication is easy in any language when colloquialisms, idioms, and other uses of language conflict with formal English that students learn in schools. Still, such miscommunication can be detrimental to English language learners. The standards set for students should be equivalent at the least but should not be higher for refugees. Educators must reduce or eliminate unnecessarily difficult academic language and stop perpetuating irrelevant literature.

Refugees should have opportunities to read text that resonates with them, not just in terms of their nationalities and cultures, but in terms of the subject matter and style of language. Use literature, poetry, and music that resonates with refugee students. If

teachers do not know what that might be, they should ask students to share. Teachers can plan curricula for the semester or year but should be continuously learning about their students so that they can change what or how they teach to ensure relevance and interest to students daily. Recognizing Mexican holidays and Black History Month to cater to the majority of non-White students is not sufficient cultural education. Stop teaching to the majority and start teaching to the children in the room.

Teachers should have flexibility in their curricula to meet the needs of their students without rushing through irrelevant topics to meet arbitrary measures. We can create curricula that are differentiated based on experience, as Maya desired, by welcoming students' knowledge into classrooms daily. Then, everyone is included and can begin to understand one another in the community and knowledge building process. An ideology lies behind all course curricula, overt or not, but if things are not talked about, they remain opaque (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Teachers should articulate what it is they are attempting to teach and how they are attempting to teach it. Be clear and invite everyone not only to be a part of lessons but to shape how they look.

Multiple-choice standardized testing and reliance on computer-based assessments to tell teachers what kids know should be reduced or eliminated in favor of teachers learning about students, building relationships with them, and helping them to discover who they are and who they want to be. It is a challenge for children to become self-determining when they are constrained by high-stakes testing regimes. Such routine and slavish (Dewey, 1916) reproductive practices (Giroux, 1986) are a means to accepting oppressive systems that contribute to the global crises that create refugees in the first place (Haines, 2010).

Legislators and policymakers do not create standards with refugee children in mind. Instead of teaching at a pace dictated by the state, educators should build time into the curricula for students to think, create, and synthesize their thoughts about the material and what they would like to do about it. Otherwise, we are simply reproducing what we know for the minds of others and stagnating social improvement. Ideally, this built-in time would be supported at the district and state levels. I contacted the Texas Education Agency—my state's highest-level educational authority—to interview someone for this dissertation and was told that they do not have anyone whose work is associated with refugee children. If no one at the policymaking levels of education considers refugees in their daily work, then we cannot expect legislatively-mandated curricula or testing to consider refugee youth.

**Addressing language**. If educators do not set more than basic language goals, then we will continue to perpetuate systems of low expectations for refugees. Language proficiency should not be a prerequisite or barrier to learning and belonging. Dual-language programs are more often implemented at the primary school level but should be implemented at the secondary level and promote the value of diverse languages spoken throughout secondary schools. We can build common languages of respect while maintaining everyone's cultures and avoiding subtractive assimilation.

In Texas, there are many opportunities for Spanish-speaking refugee children to practice their native language. But many other languages go unrecognized. Educational leaders can survey all students to find out what languages are spoken in the school and what languages children want to learn. Then they can offer these elective courses for the languages that children are interested in. If resources do not allow for new language

courses, then leaders can establish programs, clubs, or coursework that enable students to practice those languages with each other.

English is a foreign language for many refugees from non-English speaking countries. For those students, English courses should serve to fulfill foreign language credit requirements. Refugees should also have the option to test out of other foreign language courses if they know multiple languages, and thus unlock crucial semesters of coursework that they can use to close gaps in other subjects or get additional help with English. By not addressing foreign languages through an assets-based lens, educators waste refugees' time at a point in their lives when time is indispensable.

**Addressing biases**. Many participants suggested that school staff and students should investigate, realize, and discuss their own biases. Refugees may have been removed from oppressive circumstances in their home countries, but that does not mean they have been removed from political, verbal, or institutional conflict. They may still be targeted in ways that are not obvious. For example, the dismissal of their epistemologies in subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) is a form of biased exclusion from our educational system. In Texas, assumptions are made about Spanish-speaking refugees that slot them into categories grounded in biased views of Mexicans when, in fact, they may be from a multitude of countries.

Education should serve to help teachers and students acknowledge that everyone interprets actions and words differently. Those interpretations should be valued and embraced in classrooms as enriching learning experiences. However, teachers should not be addressing their biases for the first time as they begin their careers. Teacher

preparation programs must include coursework that inclines preservice teachers to investigate their biases.

During the school year, students and staff can take field trips to places where people look and behave differently than their dominant community groups and discuss their experiences. If that is not possible, then host guest speakers for storytelling sessions, and take every opportunity to attend local or touring performances that exhibit cultures unique from the dominant U.S. culture and discuss the experience. Create assignments for students that require them to interview people from other countries or generations (or both) about the ways aspects of life are different from there/then to here/now. Then share the interview results in discussion with classmates. Teachers should do the assignments too.

Implicit biases are inevitable. Admitting them and talking about them amongst staff and students is a way to form a welcoming school culture. Every interaction a refugee student has can be a welcoming interaction, whether with someone at a welcome center or front office, a teacher, a student, a custodian, a counselor, or a cafeteria worker. But welcoming is not about assimilation, because assimilation can trend toward nonreciprocal actions in which refugees learn programs, systems, and societal norms of dominant groups. Welcoming includes people changing people through mutually respectful dialogue and interaction.

Addressing and coping with implicit biases is necessary, but it cannot be done in a one- or two-time training session. It must be continuously dealt with because our biases are constantly being influenced through everyday stimuli. According to Lipmann (1922):

> If we cannot fully understand the acts of other people, until we know what they think they know, then in order to do justice we have to appraise not only the

> information which has been at their disposal, but the minds through which they have filtered it. (p. 57)

Biases should be expressed in the company of others so much that discussions about biases eventually stop being uncomfortable and become everyday self-work. When things are rarely discussed, people rarely know how to discuss them. If things are often talked about, their definitions can be reinforced, making them less ambiguous (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Teachers need to be comfortable discussing biases and teacher-to-student and student-to-student discussions about biases need to occur frequently.

As educators, we can all continuously discover and assess ourselves while broadening our perspectives through dialogue with others. Educators should learn our stories as we learn those of others and acknowledge the origins of our ideologies and epistemologies as we challenge others'. Then we can move forward on an ontological level as people who are willing continuously to change and become throughout our lives. We can begin to approach teaching and learning in an emancipatory fashion. This great venture for educational spaces can be pioneered with an inclusive culture. It is a monumental shift in philosophy from the standardized and policed structure that currently pervades school systems to one that values introspection and shared experiences.

**Educating Educators**

Teachers must acknowledge and value that schools are social and political sites where difference is abundant (Giroux, 1986). Positive transformational change in organizational culture requires school staff who are willing to be devoted leaders in community-building efforts. Short-term training sessions conducted by outside consultants are insufficient. Sustaining a school's culture requires time and a belief and willingness to create and maintain connections amongst students, staff, and other

community members in pursuit of perpetuating educational systems that adapt to reflect the societies of which they are a part (Durkheim, 1922/2000).

Refugee students struggle to fit into educational systems because the systems were not designed for them. Rigid educational systems have influenced ideals about what teaching and learning should look like in educators' mindsets before they become educators, and one manifestation of that impression is subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). When teacher preparation courses are designed to approach teaching in the same manner that generations before were taught, it can be difficult for pedagogy to change. Given that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (Ripley, 2013, p. 64), an emancipatory education for forcibly-displaced youth must begin with educators' awareness of refugees' lived experiences.

**Creating awareness across all levels of influence**. Ronald's position as a bilingual counselor opened him to the challenges that refugees were facing. It was not until Paula was hired as an assistant principal at her district's alternative school that she realized the traditional school model did not work for every child. Positions and titles provide and hide perspectives due to the amount of exposure they afford people. Many teachers are restricted in their interactions with refugees within schools because they only see specific sets of students each day or may be interacting with refugees without knowing it. It is a challenge to be sensitive to individuals when we know nothing of their experiences, but ESL teachers cannot continue to bear the bulk of responsibility for supporting refugee students (Taylor, 2008).

Furthermore, professional development or training about educating refugees is not helpful when teachers and administrators have not been notified which students in their

schools are refugees. We must know our students in order to build school communities that represent them. Some district representatives in my study stated that administrative staff quickly assessed refugee children's academic needs, goals, and abilities upon registration or orientation. Yet, after preliminary assessments were completed, little to nothing was relayed to other school staff. Aside from my study participants whose primary jobs were to support refugees, no participants knew much about the refugees in their schools, and no teachers had been told when refugees were in their classrooms. The responsibility to let teachers know that they are teaching refugees cannot be placed upon students or their parents. That responsibility belongs to school and resettlement agency leaders. If we cannot communicate on a local level, we cannot expect to communicate through vertical channels.

Educators should understand how varied education can be in urban and rural contexts of crises in other countries because refugees from those contexts are the children who arrive in mainstream schools upon resettlement. Such understanding requires communication across all levels of educational influence. As Julie noted, most measures of success in contexts of crises are whether children are in school. There are few measures regarding what occurs in classes. When families are granted resettlement in other countries, no substantial information about their children's education is passed to host country schools. The learner profile Naomi suggested would be a good starting point for a solution. The profile can be a single-sheet, two-page document, including the following, at a minimum:

- a brief history of the child's home country, its education system, and the reasons why the child is a refugee;
- a brief description of customary social interactions and cultural practices unique to the child's home country;

- a description of the camps, neighborhoods, and countries in which the child has lived;
- if, when, how, and in what contexts the child has been informally and formally educated;
- what languages the child knows and how well the child reads, writes, and speaks those languages;
- the academic and nonacademic interests of the child and notes about the child's strengths and struggles in said interests; and
- established or potential mental health concerns for the child and reasons for said concerns.

Knowing nothing about refugees' prior education and current levels of competencies in subject areas is a significant disadvantage for educators. Knowing where to begin academically with refugees could allow teachers to shift their focuses toward listening to refugees' stories and building relationships instead of assessing refugees' knowledge and determining placement. With the current focus on perpetuating a stratified system rooted in grades and exam scores, teachers are pressured to put forth no more effort than is required to graduate refugees from one grade level to the next. Teachers need time to get to know refugees as human beings. Such efforts, as Toya and Niara described, would make the social, emotional, and academic aspects of refugees' lives less stressful.

However, Naomi said that no one in her organization was qualified to do assessments necessary to create learner profiles. Those staff need to be hired. Naomi revealed there is little to no education in Turkey and Lebanon for refugees awaiting resettlement. Before refugees are resettled, they need more than a few hours of generic orientation to what life will be like in their host countries. The people who are regularly educating them and talking with them should be updating their learner profiles.

The learner profile should be in a digital format. It should be translated and transferred from the organization assisting forcibly-displaced persons in the country of

first asylum to the country of resettlement, to the resettlement agency, to the school district, and to the school. Host country teachers should continue updating the profiles each semester so records can be sent to another school if refugee families relocate.

Additionally, school and refugee support organization leaders around the world need a platform to connect, learn, teach, and share ideas. The way refugees are supported varies greatly across geographic areas. On the local level, educators' and students' experiences in refugee education in mainstream schools should be frequently shared with district leaders, teachers, and students so that adults and students can shape what refugee education looks like in practice and begin documenting successes and lessons learned. Then, such documentation can be shared globally with other organizations and be developed further with diverse input.

International Rescue Committee (IRC) members do research and pilot measures of social and emotional learning and share their knowledge with higher-level academic institutions. Leaders in K-12 schools should be receiving that information, acting upon it, and providing feedback to the institutions and the IRC. The refugee crisis spans all levels of educational influence. So, cross-organizational dialogue can lead to intentional improvement in multiple venues. Actors (including students) across the levels represented in my research should form refugee advisory committees and talk with each other regularly to enact operational change through the vertical systems in which we reside.

Provided that I could not get Faraq's teachers to talk to me and I live within their city, communicating across all the levels in the vertical chain in my study would be a tremendous undertaking. Everyone involved would have to work to ensure connections

do not dissolve and to maintain the fidelity of contact so that meetings do not slowly become boxes that people have to check. At a minimum, direct communication amongst members of the committee should occur once per fall, winter, and summer semester.

Training teachers about what education looks like in contexts of crises helps them to have a baseline understanding of some of their students' backgrounds. It also raises awareness of global topics and an appreciation for the privileges some educators have that others do not. This type of education for educators can work to combat subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). Teachers have many responsibilities and cannot always address the specific needs of every student at every moment. But a simple awareness may cause changes in how they educate and treat their students, consciously and subconsciously.

**Building empathetic staff**. Before resettlement, many refugee families were just trying to survive each day. With the continued financial struggles they have upon resettlement, survival has not become much easier. To quickly begin incorporating schoolwork into daily tasks is daunting for refugee students and parents. Educators must understand, at least at a surface level, the educational experiences that refugees had before they arrived in their classrooms. Some refugees have never had formal schooling or have had drastically different experiences of schooling. Yet they are suddenly thrust into classrooms where teachers often treat students as though they should have the same tacit social and academic understanding (Dryden-Peterson, 2016a).

A diverse staff who looks like and can empathize with refugee families is important for refugee children to feel welcomed and ambitious about school. Hire refugees to be teachers or support staff who could assist refugee youth during in-school

or after-school tutoring. If refugee or immigrant applicants are not available, hire people who have taught in other countries, worked in other countries, or traveled to countries that are producing the refugees in the school. School staff should be able to discuss experiences that have led them to change their perceptions about the world around them.

Hire caring people with a willingness to learn and then train them about educating refugees so that they are not left on their own to figure it out. If needed, hire someone experienced in refugee education or partner with a community nonprofit, resettlement agency, or university to educate school staff. Toya's experience as a refugee in a mainstream public school shaped who she was and what she was doing with her life. Her choice to become a change agent, leader, and advocate for refugee children was driven by being fearful, feared, isolated, unassisted, and unwelcomed. Through being poorly treated, she developed the desire to ensure that others did not have those same experiences. Toya wanted to go back to her middle school and give speeches about what it was like to overcome obstacles and navigate the U.S. school system as a refugee, a Muslim, and a woman to prove to others that she was capable. Refugees should not have to prove to their teachers that they are capable of great academic performance and leadership. Teachers should believe it first, and then help children to see it.

If Toya does not return to her school to talk about her experience, then her teachers may not otherwise see her successes and have the opportunity to change their pedagogical habits. Toya was an anomaly amongst refugee children. As an adult, she wanted to educate students and staff at her former middle school. However, her principal should have been the person to initiate such training. District leaders should value their students' experiences enough to partner with them to mentor other students.

If possible, pre-service teachers should teach in refugee camps as part of a course in cultural competency or as part of their practicum (Naidoo, 2012). Otherwise, they should be required to work with students who have had drastically different educational experiences than their own—preferably via traveling to other countries. It would require partnerships between institutions, but it would be worth the effort to create new empathetic and participatory concepts of teaching and learning (Pastoor, 2017). If educators cannot empathize with who they are educating, then teaching will remain rhetorical to as to instructing all students, and thus unintentional for any student.

Toya and Niara did not mention any tools or strategies that they wished their teachers would have had. They said they wanted their teachers to recognize and get to know them. They wanted teachers who looked like them to serve as their role models. They, and Faraq too, wanted to feel like they belonged. That feeling is fostered by a genuinely supported, welcoming culture. There is no certification or toolbox of strategies that can substitute for the caring relationships that can be built between those who empathize with one another.

**Treating educators well**. No one should expect teachers to be masters of counseling, culture, curricula, community, caring, and myriad other things while expressing persistent love for their students. It is difficult for teachers to continuously exercise empathy when they have many responsibilities that divert their attention away from the human aspects of their students and compel them to view their students as simply recipients and regurgitators of information. Adding more complexity to teachers' pedagogical decision-making can wear them down and cause them to quit. Leaders in education should examine what they require teachers to do as a result of their policies,

eliminate anything that does not directly support students, and assist teachers with anything that does.

Investing in teachers should include more human resources to ease the mental workload that teachers carry. Teachers need time before, during, and after the school year to collaborate with each other and external partners to share their stories and ideas about refugee education, especially across elementary, middle, and high schools. In Kristy's district, such communication was nonexistent. Investing in teachers should also include trust from district leaders and the freedom to interact with children in ways that support the cultural vision. Teachers make a difference each day and their professional judgment should be respected.

Representatives from local university and resettlement support agencies were at the refugee education workshop that Ronald attended, but less than 0.5% of his district's staff attended. Why? Did they perhaps lack awareness or interest, or maybe they were simply busy or tired? Caring can be exhausting. The refugee population is too small to affect their school's performance, so perhaps educators' incentives are insufficient. If teachers' jobs were linked to refugees' success in schools, would more teachers attend such professional development opportunities? Would teacher preparation programs then include courses about educating refugees? I was certified to teach through a 6-week summer program. Teaching refugees was not discussed in my courses.

Kristy said that when one of her campuses hired two teachers for newcomer students, current teachers worried about losing the English language learners from their classrooms—not because the teachers had developed relationships with those students, but because they were receiving stipends for having those children in their classrooms. If

educators want to uphold the culture of a caring and loving school community, then we need teachers who are more concerned about their students than their monthly bills. Part of that assurance comes from better teacher preparation programs and better salaries so that teaching becomes a top choice of profession for more people, not a fallback job that people approach with lackluster effort.

**Connecting Educators, Refugees, and Resources**

Many educators, refugees, and families are unaware of the systems and supports in place that they can leverage, especially within the community at large. Nonprofit support organizations, such as the one I volunteered with, should be promoted heavily within schools. If educators and other support organizations were in frequent communication with one another, then forcibly-displaced youth would have better educational experiences than they currently do.

As the demographics in a community change, school staff need to know what current resources they can use and what added resources they may need to assist refugee students and families. They should be told what resources are available upon being hired and reminded frequently. Throughout the year, they should be asked for feedback about the resources they have used and what additional resources they would like to have.

Though educators cannot only give refugees laptops and expect them to be academically successful, we can expect that they will use laptops to pique their interest in educational topics, find answers to their questions, and navigate community resources to help themselves and their families. Though we cannot simply give refugees food and shelter and expect them to score high on standardized tests, we can expect that providing such things will improve their health and focus in our classrooms. Emancipatory

education for refugees is social work before it is scholastic. Continual communication about resources is necessary, but resources alone do not improve education. Educators and students must know when, how, and why they should use the resources available.

**Separating or integrating refugee students**. The degree to which refugee children are separated from mainstream students is a difficult decision that educational leaders must make. The answer may depend on the number of refugees and quality of resources within a school. Does a district have enough refugees and teachers to warrant creating a separate school, or a wing within a school? How would such a separation affect students? Would they feel as though they were marginalized and isolated from others (Makarova & Birman, 2016), and thus have a more challenging time integrating into the society outside of school (Dryden-Peterson, & Reddick, 2017)? Or would they feel more comfortable and optimistic learning alongside other forcibly-displaced students and immigrants (Bartlett et al., 2017)? Would their teachers look like them or speak their languages? Some large districts have international schools, but if we aim for inclusivity, why educate refugees separately?

Toya and Niara were both intelligent women driven to learn. I do not know if separating them from nonrefugee students for academic purposes would have affected the ease with which they were able to learn. Still, I know they wanted to feel like they belonged in their schools and in society. They expressed that they would not have felt a sense of belonging if they were deliberately separated. However, when Faraq learned of the international high school in his district, he was excited and determined to enroll because he wanted to be in a school with other Arabic-speaking, non-White children. Welcome centers and self-contained newcomer classes may suffice for initial comfort

with and basic orientation toward schools and school systems, but separation cannot be prolonged if children are to integrate with their host populations. Refugees should learn from and teach to children native to their host countries.

Instead of international high schools, perhaps the best compromise for large districts is to establish specific schools where refugees and immigrants are integrated with the host country population. Then, refugee youth would not be separated from the host population, but the district's refugee resources—human and otherwise—could be more efficiently allocated to centralized students and staff. Of course, transportation to those specific campuses would need to be coordinated and secondary migration considered.

There may be programs and initiatives already in place on campuses that promote inclusivity. If so, educators should begin to borrow from those programs in pursuit of a more encompassing goal. As Toya said, "Let this program be the school." There is no one solution to resolve the dilemma of separation versus integration because each refugee has unique needs and each district has different resources. Some refugees may be familiar with the U.S. education system, may have traveled to the United States frequently, or even previously attended school in the United States. Others may need a more sheltered transition. Educators must have conversations with refugee students and parents to negotiate the appropriate social and academic integration plan for each child, while bearing in mind that many refugee parents are not often accustomed to being able to make choices regarding their children's educations. School systems need flexibility for action based on the result of such negotiations.

**Geographically tracking refugees**. When refugees from the same countries move near each other within their countries of resettlement, additional opportunities and challenges are presented. Self-segregating via secondary migration can help refugees support one another. Still, it can be challenging to become a part of a community when viewing and being viewed by others as part of a separate group (Simmel, 1950). Alternatively, a high level of diversity dilutes awareness of potentially synergistic commonalities that could also work for and against refugees (Simmel, 1950).

Marcela repeatedly mentioned that each campus within her district had its own culture, and this created problems for her, because she had to learn each campus' ways of working while attempting to support refugees at nearly 90 campuses. If leaders at those campuses cannot compromise to adjust their policies, procedures, and behaviors accordingly to assist refugee support specialists in doing their jobs effectively, then refugees should not be spread so broadly within a district such that staff cannot support them.

Regardless of the degree to which refugee children are separated from mainstream students, centralizing registration, and tracking where refugee families live and which campuses their children attend is essential to our ability to use resources wisely, especially for large districts. With few resources and many refugees to potentially serve with rigidly restricted spending, the identification of forcibly-displaced children must be streamlined. Marcela traveled to 130 campuses to determine which students in her district were refugees and concluded that there were refugees to support at 89 campuses. Those children may move to other campuses at any time, and new refugees can arrive at any time. So, in a large district, just tracking where refugees are located and notifying

them of the services they can utilize can be a full-time job without a centralized, efficient registration system. Refugee family support specialists should be spending their time working with and for refugees, not solely identifying them.

If refugee youth are fortunate enough to be resettled in school districts with many English language learners, then they may receive better English language instruction and more English language learning resources than those who are not as fortunate. Unfortunately, refugee families often do not have the privilege to choose to move to districts with the resources their children need. Instead, they are often relegated to reside in government-subsidized housing and accept what resources are available. Refugees should have access to support outside of schools—especially from people who speak their native languages—without being hindered by a lack of transportation. When we know where refugees live, we can create evening and weekend tutoring/mentoring sites at their apartment complexes, for adults and children. It would require continuous coordination to ensure that the locations of tutoring/mentoring sites adjust as refugees move in/out of areas. But, as Pastoor (2017) and Lloyd and Wilkinson (2016) remarked, meaningful learning for refugees often occurs in contextualized, everyday spaces. Therefore, we must bring schooling into our broader communities to build relationships and bridging capital (Putnam, 2000) so that refugees know they belong, are welcomed, and can self-advocate.

With a residency tracking system, refugee support specialists should be able to identify groups of people living in the same apartment complexes or neighborhoods who may have conflicting cultural views. They may then facilitate community learning exchanges so that families can learn about differences between their cultures, the cultures

of their neighbors, and broader U.S. cultures. Such conversations require talented facilitators who may need to be procured through district partnerships.

Considering the unprecedented number of forcibly-displaced persons in the world, the number that will be showing up in rural and suburban schools who have previously not had refugee students is going to rise. Excepting some English language learning programs, school staff in such areas are not typically prepared to teach refugee students. District leaders must form partnerships with neighboring school districts so that when the costs of living in gentrified urban neighborhoods force refugees to move to rural and suburban areas with fewer resources designated to refugee support, the staff in the urban areas from which they came are aware. Then, urban district staff can work with staff in surrounding districts to provide training and information to them. The previously-mentioned learner profile would be a great tool for staff to support refugees through secondary migration. The focus group participants in my study had worked in several different districts within and outside of Central Texas, and some had taught outside of the United States. Yet all participants learned about educating refugees from one another during our discussions. Year-round open communication channels between districts can prove beneficial in discovering ways to improve refugee education.

**Partnerships**. I have mentioned partnerships throughout this chapter, but I focus on them in this section, because partnerships deserve special consideration. Partnerships can build community support for refugee youth (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017; Major et al., 2013). School staff cannot meet the needs of refugees alone because the resources provided by government funding and grants are insufficient. Partnerships are especially important for small school districts that are not able to justify hiring staff to support

refugees specifically. If basic resources such as shelter, food, and clothing cannot be provided through district or grant funds, schools can partner with local organizations that can help provide those things, as Julissa and Kristy illustrated.

District leaders can also contract with free or low-cost interpreters and translators from local university programs and nonprofit organizations so that adults and students can practice their multiple languages. Refugee students may be assigned college student mentors who look like them and serve as educational role models. Mental health care can also be provided by community college or university students as a component of their practicum for various certificates and degrees. Such partnerships are beneficial for college students, not just in terms of completing their coursework, but also in providing them with awareness and new perspectives regarding refugees' lives. For some college students, the experiences may encourage them to pursue careers supporting refugees. Additionally, such partnerships may pique more educators' interests in refugee education and serve to build positive relationships between school staff and university staff that lead to future partnerships, research sharing, and professional development training.

Partnerships with organizations that serve the broader community may help refugees become self-sufficient while addressing the reasons they left their countries. Such partnerships may necessitate spaces where refugee children can connect with nonrefugees outside school buildings. However, nonprofit and other community organizations are understaffed, underfunded, mostly volunteer-based, and students and families must often actively seek to discover them. Resources should be provided within schools so that compulsory attendance, transportation, meals, and interactions with nonrefugee students serve as a foundation for the additional support that partnering

entities can provide. Making room for partnership activities within campuses reinforces schools as the centers of community-based systems where everything that students and their families need to shift their focus to self-determined goals is available for them in a familiar space, for no or little cost. The model of the summer program in which I participated could be replicated year-round and housed within schools instead of churches so that transportation would be less of an obstacle. Refugee parents could continue trading the duties of babysitting and English language learning in school-sponsored spaces, which can then encourage school community-building and ease parents' apprehensions about talking with school staff.

Support from district leaders is a necessity. District leaders can form alliances with nonprofit organizations and universities to help refugee youth transition to U.S. classrooms, especially those youth with deep levels of trauma that needs to be addressed. Teachers and counselors cannot bear all of this responsibility alone, but they should know how to support refugees in times of psychological or emotional distress. Free or low-cost training on such topics can be provided for staff through partnerships. Julie and Patrick agreed that additional research is needed on how social and emotional learning programs affect refugees. Districts can partner with nongovernmental organizations and universities to undertake that research.

Refugee students who are resettled late in adolescence and cannot graduate before they age out of the K-12 school system should be mentored closely. Mentors can help them earn their general education diplomas and make choices about their postsecondary lives while working part-time. Educators in K-12 schools and community colleges can work together to create online and evening classes to support them. Career training

partnerships, such as the one Leonard described, are invaluable to refugees who are resettled between the ages of 17 and 19. Refugees in such programs can learn useful skills for themselves and their families alongside other refugees with whom they can connect experientially.

Lastly, nonprofit organizations should not be doing all of the work to offer their services to schools. External partners and educators must be in continuous communication with each other about students and families while persistently promoting their services to refugees in efforts to build trust and community. It is difficult for external organizations to support schools when school leaders are not responsive. Organizations that support schools should not be at the bottom of educators' contact lists. The mentorship, after-school, and summer programs sponsored by the nonprofit organization I volunteered with were important to refugee students. They could have been more helpful to refugees if educators had communicated with the adults who were working with their refugee students and families outside of classrooms. Those who serve as ambassadors, advocates, or mentors for refugee families should be acknowledged, understood, appreciated, and viewed as partners by educators, not as nuisances or people to be ignored or simply tolerated.

## Sustaining Systemic Change

Education systems in many, or perhaps all countries were not formed with refugees in mind. Therefore, to address the fact that refugees are in classrooms, adjustments and modifications have emerged over time to push refugee youth through childhood and out of school systems. Adjustments and modifications are rarely sufficient or sustainable, and it is not enough to replace people working within systems if the

systems in which they operate remain unchanged. Education systems should serve students and teachers, not the reverse. Yet, as Taylor and Sidhu (2011) illustrated, policies and organizational frames remain ignorant of the difficulties of refugee lives. To conclude this chapter, I discuss how we can sustain systemic change by addressing: funding; the purpose of education; the importance of social systems; professional development; measurement; the integration of leadership, policy, and practice; interpretations of democracy and equity; and international perceptions of the United States.

**Funding**

The annual number of refugees allowed into the United States has significantly declined under the Trump administration (UNHCR, 2020). By maintaining a low refugee population, government organizations (including schools) can justify reducing or eliminating expenditures for refugee students and their families. The lowered numbers also negatively affect teachers, social workers, interpreters, and others who have jobs supporting refugees.

Though grants fund some refugee support, schools should not have to compete for funds to support refugees. School districts with money to hire grant writers are more likely to win and less likely to need grant money. Marcela and Carolina separately received the Refugee School Impact Grant, funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The word "impact" was used by the grantors to describe how the funds are to "support school districts *impacted by* school-aged refugees" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020, para. 1, emphasis added), as if to imply that an influx of refugees is equivalent to a school damaged by a natural disaster and needing financial

support—as opposed to describing how the grant can impact refugees. The language describing refugees as a burden on our society must change at the federal and state levels of government.

Marcela mentioned that the Refugee School Impact Grant provided no help to parents. Yet, money spent on families' utilities and groceries benefits children by providing a stable home life—to address the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as many participants said was necessary—and the ability to concentrate on schoolwork as opposed to working to help with family expenses. Furthermore, when adults struggle to provide for their children or are relegated to doing work they are overqualified for, they can become depressed. Parental depression resulting from economic stress can negatively affect children's mental health and attitudes toward school (Nasıroğlu & Çeri, 2016). School budgets and grants should allow for money to help refugee families meet physiological and safety needs (clothing, food, shelter, utilities) foundational to education.

Most humanitarian aid comes in the form of food, water, and shelter. But modern crises are prolonged, and refugees are not returning to their home countries as quickly as they have in the past, if at all (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b). So humanitarian aid policies must continue to acknowledge education as something that requires funding. Funding suffers when refugees are displaced for 10-20 years because government programs are not designed to sustain refugees for a protracted time. Therefore, U.S. systems must be redesigned to support them. If people cannot rely on government social programs to support refugees, then educational leaders must take responsibility. Refugees are not someone else's problem—they are our assets. Educators can make more intelligent long-

term decisions for the money available. For example, technology can be helpful in education, but new computers cannot address refugees' social, emotional, or psychological troubles.

As Julie noted, those who want to invest in education typically want to know that they will see quantifiable, positive results. Quantifying the positive influences people can make on the lives of refugee children can be difficult. However, funds can be purposed for refugees if the labeling or naming or categorizing is creatively broadened, as described in Chapter 4. Carolina, Leonard, and others used funds to support refugees by justifying the need for various programs using the larger populations they serve. For example, refugees are generally poor, but many poor people are not refugees; refugees generally experience some level of trauma, but some nonrefugees also experience trauma. When school board members make budget decisions knowing that funds can be used for large numbers of students, they may be more likely to allocate funds. Thus, educators can frame solicitations for funding or uses of current funding to benefit larger groups of which refugees are a part. Then the money can be used to serve the children who need it most, regardless of how those kids are coded, identified, or defined.

Ultimately, educators should not have to cobble together funding from various sources, compete for grants, and creatively circumnavigate semantically-driven spending stipulations to help refugee students and their families. Unfortunately, educators often must rely on private donors to fund education for refugees, even when money is available in budgets. A collective change in philosophy is needed to drive the proper spending of it. If we invest in refugees, their lives will improve. Educational leaders' careers might be at risk if they spend money on refugees that could be spent elsewhere, because the

results of investing in refugees will not always manifest as higher standardized test scores. However, if policymakers decouple funding from standardized test scores, then necessary funds to support refugees should be available.

**Reconsidering Why and How We Educate**

Niara was inspired to help people in her home country. She had seen her country's problems and wanted to help solve them. Did anyone in her school acknowledge that? Did anyone ask her what she thought education should do for her and then help in working toward her goals? Were Niara's teachers supported in using space and time to encourage children to debate, exhibit, and write about global social justice issues in their classrooms? As refugees arrive in countries and stay for longer, indefinite periods, we are going to have to learn how to change our ideas about the purposes of education and how teaching can support those purposes.

People become refugees due to well-founded fears of persecution. That fear does not vanish upon arrival in a host country. It pervades all aspects of refugees' lives, which is why several research participants declared that self-advocacy should be a goal for emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth. Speaking up for oneself presents intimidating obstacles for people who have been persecuted.

Refugee self-advocacy is a lofty goal for educators as well, considering that the goal of some organizations is simply for refugees to attend school. The stripping of one's sense of self-determination is a part of the process of becoming a refugee. It is a mental disturbance that happens through a long, drawn-out process, typically over several years, in which refugees are at the mercy of others. They have been stripped of their rights through dehumanizing processes. Consequently, it may seem easy for adults in host

countries to tell refugee youth that they can choose who they want to be or what and how they want to learn, but it is a challenging concept for refugees to grasp when their experiences have in no way included such freedoms.

Before refugees can decide who they want to be, they must first discover who they now are in the new countries and social settings in which they have been placed. That takes time. Yet the U.S. education system is designed for fast-paced reproductive activities unrelated to individual personal growth (Giroux, 1986); for example, the "do now forms" and "exit tickets" that Julissa's charter school heavily relied upon. It is a system built for producing graduates, filtering winners, discarding losers, and pushing people through levels of an educational structure that creates a wealth-, class-, and race-based society.

We need to question our philosophies of education to reassess what the purpose of education is now and what we want it to be. We have been going through the motions for too long without pausing to reconsider why we educate people and what we hope to achieve as a result. We must begin with such conversations, build systems and programs around these reconsidered goals, and rid ourselves of systems and programs that do not align with those new goals. For Jasmine, the purpose of education had been defined for her as students reproducing what they read/heard/saw. To that purpose, her role had subsequently been restricted to solely being a master and deliverer of academic content, stultifying her students while keeping "a piece of [their] ignorance up [her] sleeve" (Rancière, 1991, p. 21). It was not the role she thought she should have. Jasmine could not foster the creative thinking, community-building, and self-discovery she wanted in her math class, because there was no time for it. There was only time for reproduction

because that was what the state required. If policies require a narrow, high-stakes focus on reproduction of information, teachers and students will be too exhausted to integrate love, care, and community into their curricula. Our teachers must first be emancipated from the current purpose of education (scoring well on standardized tests) if students are to be emancipated. Emancipation is the beginning of a story, because once students and adults are free of our current purpose of education, then meaningful educational journeys can begin.

If a refugee education is to be emancipatory, then everything we do must be in the interest of building self-advocacy, self-determination, and autonomy for students and educators. Yet our stratified school system is rooted in English language proficiency and high-stakes test scores that strip individual attributes from students and educators. For educational systems to change, there must be an uprising from the local level to indicate that educators will not be complicit in a system that treats children as units of production and deprives them of individuality. Local-level input should shape what our educational system looks like, and the purpose of education should be defined by those it serves: educators, families, and community members collectively. Congressperson Chester deferred all federal responsibility for education to local communities. However, if federal policymakers are going to continue to pass laws mandating what education should look like, then change at the local levels must ultimately trickle up so that we have champions for refugees at state, national, and international levels.

Teaching cannot be solely geared to subject matter as outlined by states, and education cannot be solely about qualifying children to become workers. Education is about human beings, and has two other purposes, according to Biesta (2013a)—

socialization and subjectification. Thus, start the movement toward what the role of schools and schooling can be by focusing school practices and processes primarily on the socialization, secondarily on the subjectification, and lastly, on the qualification of students. I am not implying a sequence that requires one domain to be realized before moving to the next. Instead, I intend for the order to signify where we should place emphasis in our practices so that the role of schools and schooling can shift to be more in sync with the philosophies reflected by my research participants.

We can begin making this adjustment in our priorities by helping refugee students to answer two questions: Who are you, and who do you want to become? Or, to put it another way: What kind of person are you (addressing socialization) and what kind of person do you aspire to be (addressing subjectification)? These questions are not asked and answered once in a person's life, nor are they necessarily asked by an educator. They should be asked of oneself constantly, because human beings—children more so than adults—are ever-changing, developing, and becoming. Our role as educators should be to prompt students to contemplate those two questions of self continuously. We need not ask those questions directly—although it is not a bad idea to do so—we should ask them through our teaching and questioning styles and methods, curricula development, and behavior in everyday social interactions to allow for students to be recognized in public contexts (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016).

Continuously working to answer the questions of socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2013a) will guide students toward qualification. That is, students will be compelled to answer a third question: What do you want to do to get there? If students are socialized insofar as they interpret how and why society functions in the

ways it does today, and how they currently fit within it as social, cultural, and political actors, then their goals related to qualification will be natural corollaries of their self-determined visions of their subjectified selves. Their unique roles can then alter society to meet the needs of their generation and generations to come.

Our pedagogical practices should simultaneously provoke thought about and be responsive to those three questions to engage students in their learning as individuals and collaborators (Fullan, 2015). Our concerted efforts of socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2013a) should lead students to desire that qualification also be a part of their schooling. This desire will, in turn, demand that educators have the capacity to help students become qualified. In this sense, the scope of schooling can be framed within the ecologies of youth-adult partnerships (Bolstad, 2011; Mitra, 2009) that serve to adapt to societal needs continuously.

Top-down change is faster, but bottom-up change is more meaningful. To change from the bottom up, one must become an agent for change, and change agents are developed through awareness of others' stories. Once aware, people are capable of care, empathy, and love for others. Change agents attend school board meetings, speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, run for political office, and influence policies.

**Socialization Requires Social Systems**

Capitalistic societies create systems that generate winners and losers. Within those systems, those who hoard opportunities at the expense of others' generally advance (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). In capitalistic education systems, those who succeed often come from the same groups of people who used cultural wealth to successfully navigate the systems they then perpetuate (Yosso, 2005). Recalling the jump rope analogy that

Laila illustrated, capitalistic systems function without stopping to acknowledge or accommodate those who do not fit (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). Consequently, refugee students and their parents are significantly disadvantaged before they even begin schooling in their host countries.

Sometimes students who do not fit within the models of multiple-choice test-taking specialists are blamed for their lack of success in U.S. schools. If refugees fail, then neoliberal capitalists might say that it was because refugees did not do things correctly or did not abide by the rules, though nonrefugees may be consciously or unconsciously subverting refugees' attempts to succeed by the nature of the systems that they have set up for people like themselves to succeed in (Kovinthian, 2016; Roxas, 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011). As children age, the U.S. education system inclines educators to value children more for their utility than for their humanity (Goodlad, 1984)—a form of neo-colonization. As the system is reproduced and touted as effective by those who were deemed winners within and through it, refugees can rapidly become the losers, the defective, or subpar products in the capitalists' assembly line of educational products.

English fluency as a crucial component of educational success in the United States requires refugees to assimilate quickly in order to graduate (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Han, 2012; Kim & Suárez-Orozco, 2014). For the system to continue pushing children through or out of it, refugees must be categorized into quantitatively-driven programs. For example, if schools have few refugees, then those students will likely be placed in English language learner programs with no regard for the reasons they are in the country. In Julissa's charter school computer programs seemed to tell adults

how to educate. It seems that if Julissa could design a computer program specifically for refugee students, that is what she would want to do. A computer program will not tell a teacher that a child did not answer a question correctly because the underlying concept involved in the question was implicit in U.S. culture, but not in the child's native culture. A computer program cannot tell a teacher that a child should be given a different assignment because the child has witnessed armed conflicts and reading about the history of such events may be too traumatic for her at the moment. We must know our students' stories to know how to educate them.

Laila took it upon herself to determine that the graduation rate for refugees in her district was 25%, because the refugees' data had been aggregated with all English language learners to report a graduation rate over three times greater. Forcibly-displaced youth should not also be forced to suffer through hastily and insufficiently patched holes in their education systems simply because there are not enough refugees to warrant adequate attention. Education is an endeavor of human interaction. More than computers, refugees need people who care about them. Unfortunately, many adults are products of and servants to educational systems rooted in cost efficiency. In a capitalistic system, school officials sometimes aim only to meet the expectations set for them. If they are not incentivized by policies or other means to care about refugees' graduation rates, then they will probably focus on other matters. A capitalistic mindset seeks the greatest benefit for the least cost, conceals mistakes, and takes advantage of vulnerable and silenced people.

In my pursuit to develop a theoretical framework for emancipatory education, many participants focused on the practicality of supporting refugee students. Pragmatism

has value, but it can be a barrier to improvement. Current systems and precedent can get in the way of thinking about what is possible. In some cases, we need to jettison entire systems and start over from a different perspective, because the systems we have do not reflect the needs of our societies. We have no obligation to perpetuate dysfunctional systems.

Capitalism gives rise to individualism, yet education and community-building are everyone's responsibility. Creating an educational system of collectivism within a larger system of individualism may cause parents to question what is being done to address their children's unique needs specifically. It will take a community effort to shift our perspective to one that views education in a manner that justifies greater support for some to result in a better society for all. Again, we have the resources to provide everyone with what they need for emancipatory educational practices to thrive, but those resources are not allocated properly, in part due to capitalistic mindsets of scarcity and selfishness. A change in mindset to one that prioritizes equity has no financial cost when resources are abundant.

It can be difficult to admit that a system that was successful for oneself is actually a broken one for many. It is conditioned, self-serving laziness on the part of people in power not to change predominantly capitalistic education systems to more socialized ones. To work to help others in the name of equity often requires attributing one's own financial and cultural wealth to generational sources of privilege as opposed to arduous work, natural ability, grit, or some other attribution. However, we must admit that a reason we may think our education systems work well is that we designed them, and we designed them to mimic or perpetuate the systems in which we were successful. If we do

not consider those who are different than ourselves, we will continue to refuse change in favor of producing and blaming the other (Lingis, 1994). Brilliant leaders are learners who view everyone as capable, intelligent people from whom much can be learned.

**Redefining Professional Development**

One of many components for our educational system leaders to reconsider is professional development. Professional development is not a one-time, one-course, or one-program training. It is the ongoing self-work of school staff and students to create the type of environment that is welcoming of all people and values them as educators, learners, community members, and changemakers. It consists of daily practice and responsibility to hold others accountable for practice by challenging and accepting challenges to engage in uncomfortable dialogue in efforts to broaden our perspectives (Dryden-Peterson, 2017). Professional development should instill agency among school staff to continue to stay abreast of issues related to refugees and seek learning experiences that require connecting with individuals whose lived experiences vary widely from their own.

As Brian warned, improving education for refugees cannot become a list of superficial checkboxes for educators. For ideologies and values to change, refugee education must be continuously woven into pedagogical discussions. School improvement begins with an understanding that, as human beings, we are always developing and becoming. It takes vulnerability for adults to admit that they can unlearn and learn things about themselves and others. It takes constant self-work supported by peers. It is a slow process and often requires an artful facilitator/leader to push

conversations to emancipatory terrains of thought so that educators question their philosophies of education. Time must be afforded for educators to explore such thoughts.

Teachers cannot get caught up in day-to-day tasks and forget that they have refugees in their classes. Often, teachers conduct "get-to-know-you" activities with their students during the first week of the school year and perhaps host a parent night soon after classes begin. Then, too often, teachers quickly get overloaded with responsibilities that cause them to stop learning about/from their students and start exclusively teaching to their students. Refugee family support specialists should maintain their visibility and foster continual discussions about who refugee students are and how they can better be served. Masterful teachers' interactions with children may seem natural from outsiders' perspectives, but the art of social interaction is often a manifestation of experience and training over an extended period (Goodlad, 1966). Refugee education must remain a focus in conversations to raise teachers' consciousness to the point in which a shift in ideology and pedagogy is sustained as a way of being for teachers.

Leaders need leaders and supporters need supporters. As Patrick advised, if we do not take care of ourselves, we will be limited in our abilities to take care of others. The hardship, distress, and PTSD of refugees can lead to hardship, distress, and PTSD for those whose lives revolve around supporting refugees. When Marcela had one other person on her team, they bore more guilt and sadness than they did after they hired more staff. Outlets must be in place to relieve the stress that supporting refugees may cause educators. Simultaneously, compassion fatigue should not be allowed to numb educators to refugees' problems or cause them to begin viewing children as simply daily work.

People working with refugees need support networks of colleagues to share challenges and remind each other of the progress they are making.

Julie said: "We don't really have a lot of research on what it takes and what will yield results." District leaders should consider hiring a full-time team of qualitative and quantitative researchers. This team could conduct year-round culture audits via interviews, surveys, and focus groups with schools' employees, students, parents, community members, and staff of partnering organizations. Audits determine where the district stands concerning realizing its cultural vision, what practices may need to be changed to progress toward that realization, how to maintain the culture once it has been realized, and to assess whether the vision needs to change to meet the needs of the ever-changing community. The ensuing findings could also be the beginning of a wealth of stories and experiences that can be shared at all levels of educational influence to broaden the literature base for refugee education.

If research is continuously and transparently presented to all stakeholders and community conversations about the research take place, then discussions can lead to district leaders evaluating their distribution of resources, hiring refugee support staff, and forming new partnerships. The link between the research team and those participating in the research should be direct and constant so that professional development becomes synonymous with practice. Furthermore, the research team must not be externally contracted. They should live in the districts in which they work so that they get to know children, families, and school staff and become invested in their communities while building relationships that result in trust being precipitated across all educational stakeholders. Trust takes time and committed staff. A research team that is a part of the

organizational community can develop and maintain an intangible cultural currency that external research teams cannot generate.

Our interest should not end with high school graduation. Refugees should be asked to contribute to the improvement of their schools after they graduate to create a framework rooted in community. The research team should converse with former refugee students and their parents periodically for years after graduation and use the information to inform leadership, policy, and practice continuously.

**Measurement**

One can infer a lot about systems by how they measure success, because they typically measure what is valued by those who created them (Biesta, 2010). As I mentioned previously, most educational systems seem to serve one primary purpose: qualification. Those qualification competencies are often measured through standardized means. Standardized tests mean little to nothing to refugees. For refugees, life is far from what test writers would consider standard. Refugees deal with various levels of trauma and misunderstanding while being required to take exams that their nonrefugee peers have been prepared for throughout their lives. Meanwhile, on the international level, success for some refugees is simply measured by whether they have access to formal schooling.

In the same way that international aid donors want to see that their funds are being used for something measurable, educational policymakers generally do not create policies unless they can measure the effectiveness of those policies through reporting mechanisms. However, the social and emotional progress, self-advocacy, and agency of refugee students cannot be measured via low-cost, multiple-choice, machine-scored

exams and easy-to-digest letter grades. But it can be deduced through ongoing, intensive culture audits conducted by district research teams.

We must assess refugees on more than English language proficiency. Language should not impede academic attainment, character building, and postsecondary pathways. We can assess how refugee youth feel about their schools and communities. We can also assess their social and emotional adjustments to their host countries. Ask them how much they feel their schools support channels for self-advocacy. Ask them if there are students or groups of students who they feel are marginalized within their schools. Ask who they think has or does not have a voice in their community and whose voices are more influential than others. Most importantly, use the results of those assessments to make improvements instead of solely assessing because it is mandated by policy. On the state and national levels, leaders should audit educational policies to determine how our K-12 schools are predisposed to favor native language speakers. Then determine ways we can evaluate English language learners so that they are not disadvantaged when compared to native English speakers.

Lack of attention to refugee education may not be visible in mainstream schools that have good overall standardized test scores and few refugees. Those schools may perform well according to current standards of measurement, while their refugee students fail invisibly. Leaders can measure how well refugees are doing without accountability measures that force schools to fail or succeed entirely. Convince state and federal policymakers to value more than one measure of success by taking ownership in showing progress without letter grades or test scores. If success stories are not expressed, then few will know of the positive work being done in schools. School leaders should tell

school communities' stories, whether lawmakers want to hear them or not. If the term "accountability" in education no longer referred to standardized test scores, but instead meant telling stories about a school or district as a way of citing progress toward emancipatory goals, then checking in with the state may be an eagerly anticipated event as opposed to one that induces fear and anxiety.

If story days replaced testing days, then children could tell stories about what they learned regarding academics, social and emotional growth, personal connections, and community contributions. Students could also provide their vision for themselves for the next year of school. We might learn more about what refugees know in a 10-minute storytelling presentation than we could by viewing test scores generated by weeks of rote preparation. In that regard, the word "accountability" could be associated not with standardized test scores, but instead with students justifying their growth by illustrating it in personally meaningful ways. Story days may even take less time than standardized testing days. However, the extent to which the time spent affects children can never be measured. That is the beauty of education: It permeates long after the time spent between teachers and students has ended.

Teachers, who know their students, should be the ultimate evaluators of their students, not arbitrary test writers. Teaching is engaged in by professionals. They should be treated as such. Teachers should have conversations with refugee students and families and publicly share refugees' stories of success, or have refugees tell their own stories of success. Otherwise, people external to classrooms will evaluate refugees, and teachers will not likely agree with the way refugees are judged by those who do not know

them. Publicize success stories so that people see that what educators are doing matters and justifies the resources needed to continue the work.

As Naomi said, results should not drive what happens in classrooms. If teachers continue to push themselves and students in educational assembly lines, then refugees will remain byproducts of reproduction. Instead, we should measure processes of growth and change and use those measurements to guide future decision-making.

**Integrating Leadership, Policy, and Practice**

I solicited participation in this research from every member of an education or education-related committee in the United States and Texas Congresses. I also solicited every contact I could find in the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. I received no responses. In the case of the U.S. Department of Education, contact information was not listed on the official website. When I contacted the Texas Education Agency, I was told that no one employed by the agency worked on issues related to refugee education.

Congressperson Chester—who was not a member of an education committee—was the only legislator to participate in my research. He participated because I emailed every person I could find who worked for him almost weekly for 6 months with the continual reminder that he was my U.S. district representative. Congressperson Chester never spoke to me or wrote me directly. His letter of response to my interview questions was typed on his official letterhead, scanned, and sent to me via email from one of his employees. As I mentioned earlier, Congressperson Chester categorically deferred all responsibility for education to states and localities. Yet, when I initially contacted him

via his website, education was a topic available to select from a menu of issues within his purview.

Only educational stakeholders at the local, state, and international levels volunteered to participate in my research without hesitation—and the two state-level participants were not lawmakers. My entreaties were ignored by the dozens of government policymakers I solicited. If congresspersons are going to shirk responsibility or claim local leaders are responsible for refugee education, then we should not have state and federal mandated accountability measures tied to schools.

It takes great leaders across local, state, national, and international levels working together to listen to each other and to refugee families to make and support intentional changes. School board members are voted into their positions by community members. School board members hire superintendents, superintendents hire principals, and the leadership provided by principals can drastically affect the attention paid to refugee students in classrooms. Thus, the power to change refugee education ultimately lies with community members en masse. Though the impetus for change does not have to *come* from organizational leaders, organizational leaders must support it. It is not enough to come together as a community and decide how we want to approach education. We have to vote for leaders who share our cultural vision or run for office so generational changes can be enacted and sustained across all levels of educational influence. Working to support refugees is just that, work.

**Collectively-informed policies**. A change in belief is an indispensable driver of change in practice. Though there are many stimuli for changing one's beliefs, several participants pointed to policies as factors that override personal beliefs to influence their

practices. Policies are important. If policies had not stipulated the allocation of resources to Naomi's organization, then she would not have been able to help resettle refugees. However, policies can be a push factor for the amount of support educators are willing to provide.

Many of the participants in the administrator focus group discussed wanting to make changes, but they did not feel as though they were in positions to do so, because of restrictive policies in place. To support refugee students appropriately, participants in the administrator focus group seemed to think that people in positions of power greater than their own would have to write policies that supported their beliefs. Victor stated: "As an [assistant principal], I'm mid-level management. So policy is not really registering for me on that level." Edward lamented: "What we have now is a result of policy. . . . I wish there was a change in policy first."

Policies should be supportive of the culture we want to have. They should not define culture. When policies are written in attempts to apply to all students, they often marginalize refugees (Makarova & Birman, 2015). Moreover, policies cannot apply to all students when they are written without input from any students. Everyone with a stake in education, especially students, should view themselves as change agents, not as change recipients. A school's culture should include the encouragement of such a mindset.

Policies cannot be written to force people to embrace refugees or inclusivity. However, if policies were written with the collective input of community members, refugee advocates' opinions would be incorporated, and refugees would be educated accordingly. Beliefs inform policies, which, in turn, influence educators' behaviors.

Outcomes of behaviors then inform beliefs once more and beliefs, again, inform policies. If that cycle continues, then there should be documented perpetual improvement reflecting the beliefs and support of a society, not the interests/values of an elected few. Policies should be referred to as documentation that represents what an organization stands for, and they should be upheld with pride because they were developed in partnership by educational leaders, students, and the broader community. Policies should not be delivered by an ominous and elusive "leadership," or "management," or "government" to be feared by those who feel they have no choice but to receive them and follow orders. Those who propagate from such policymaking:

> encourage us to point our fingers into nebulous alleys of deception and shrug our shoulders, often masking their identities by pointing their fingers alongside us. They want us to fear losing our jobs, and to conform to a mindset grounded in survival and self-preservation, not the altruistic disposition that educators should have. (Waite & Swisher, 2018, p. 196)

Conscious or unconscious, there is intention behind every act. Currently, the most all-encompassing U.S. educational policies suggest that our society values test scores. So the push for educators to focus on English language learning for refugee students is simply a means to a test score in the eyes of policymakers. Yet, no participants valued test scores. Communication about practice in schools vertically translated to theory at policymaking levels is severely limited. If something is not discussed, it is often ignored and can lose meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). The more teaching and learning are discussed throughout the loosely linked vertical chain of educational influence, the closer we will get to shared purposes of education and a shared mission for how to implement what is needed to fulfill those purposes daily and strengthen the chain.

Julie asserted that "we should be applying the same kind of standards of research to children and their learning that we do to medicine and the health field." School board members and state and federal policymakers should continually consult those who are in and closest to being in classrooms to learn what is valuable in education and what practices work to honor those values. Politicians are too far removed from classrooms to view refugees as more than liabilities on paper. The people who are in schools know what refugees need, because they are living with their needs. When considering implementing local-level policies, educators must ensure that the policies support their collectively-created cultural vision. If any policy is unsupportive of the vision, then it should be altered, discarded, or ignored.

**Authenticity in practice**. In a 2020 television interview, Josie Duffy Rice claimed that "policy is often no match for culture." Ronald maintained there are always people working in schools who do not want to be there, and Bradley noted policies alone are insufficient for changing beliefs. There will always be things educators do not believe in, but they will abide by rules because they fear the consequences. When policies do not align with beliefs, people may check boxes and complete work without fidelity or enthusiasm.

Several participants viewed governance, bureaucracy, and box-checking as barriers to good practice, but such things are not inherently worthless. If checking boxes represents something of genuine value and meaning to refugees' lives, it can be a supporting act for how educators hold themselves accountable for realizing their cultural vision and the supporting policies they have collectively generated. Compliance does not have to be a complaint.

Too, people who have mastered professions in ways that are comfortable for them may be the last adopters of change, if they change. However, it can be difficult for anyone to intentionally seek uncomfortable situations in the spirit of personal and professional growth. That difficulty can lead people to comply with policies superficially and avoid enacting genuine change. Policies may not change beliefs authoritatively, but they can open exploratory pathways for new practices by constructively challenging educators. Over time, new practices may change people's beliefs, but only if policies continue to be revised with the input of those who are directly affected by them. Though people will jump into cycles of change at various points, and cycles may look different from person to person, a change in beliefs is essential for progress.

Some of my research participants questioned what we might do for refugee students that we would not do for all students. Many policies are written with the intent of supporting all students, but when implemented, the practice of educators indicates otherwise due to implicit and explicit biases, habits, convenience, and conditioning (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). Policies can be written to open channels for education to serve emancipatory purposes for all students, but to engage in dialogue, activities, and curricula that welcome refugees, support them, and build community alongside them requires self-conscious attention to our actions.

Though change is most directly influential and relevant at the local level, it helps to be informed by others rather than to experiment without regard to research and debate. Earlier, I mentioned that frequent communication across the vertical chain of those who support refugees would be beneficial for informing classroom practices. Naomi mentioned that horizontal communication was important as well. Rarely is someone the

first to do anything (Brandt & Eagleman, 2017). We should form international online special interest groups across districts, regions, states, and provinces to discuss practice and share research and resources about refugee education. Ultimately, local-level change will have to be supported at the other levels to be sustained. If we continue to share stories widely across the local level, then representative cultures will grow vertically and future generations of those who hold positions of state, national, and international policymaking power may be more likely to make decisions that reflect the ideals of those who practice teaching and learning.

Teachers are asked to incorporate a lot of different things in their classrooms. As Brian implied, if the impetus to change originates at the top of educational hierarchies, then educators will likely see it as something else on their task lists. Swift change can come from top-down policy, but meaningful change comes from local-level groundwork within schools and communities. However, a major component of sufficient change is an increase in educators' salaries to levels that indicate that they are valued professionals. Educators should not feel as though their time attending to educational issues in unimportant and they should not burn out because they have to volunteer their time to learn about refugees. Policies must allot paid time for educators to intentionally work on themselves and their communities so that we do not view educational practices with refugees as checkboxes. Policies should support cultural changes that reflect our societies so that educators can become who they want to be, and an inclusive educational culture is established in school communities.

**Interpreting Democracy and Equity**

Educators and students must address the benefits and flaws of education in a democratic society. In a democratic education, schools should represent their communities and vice versa. Meanwhile, all stories, experiences, and epistemologies should carry equal value. Acknowledging that everyone has a voice in education is theoretically admirable, but fundamentally inadequate when the greatest number of similar voices rule, because, by definition, refugees will never have the greatest number of voices in mainstream classrooms. Consequently, school communities and broader communities will continue to be largely defined by nonrefugees.

If education is to be democratic, will it continue to be defined by the majority? Tabitha noted that we celebrate Black History Month and Cinco de Mayo, but that there are other occasions we may not know about. We recognize Black and Hispanic cultures because those students are prevalent in Central Texas schools. But if everyone is equally valued, then why do we recognize and celebrate events that highlight some groups and not others? Actions, overtly or in the subtext of what and how we teach, shape what happens in schools. Those actions currently demonstrate that refugees and nonrefugees are valued unequally, even though research has indicated that multiple-perspective history teaching has positively influenced refugee students' attitudes and perceptions (Burde, Guven, Kelcey, Lahmann, & Al-Abbadi 2015).

Ronald wanted integration, community, belonging, and involvement. Educators will need to assess how democracy simultaneously supports and undermines those things. Additionally, all community members must be willing to let refugees change the way they think, because a democratic system includes the rights of its members to criticize the

system and its leaders. That will be tough, because, once gained, the power can be difficult to redistribute or relinquish. Power can also be abused and misused without conscious thought. Democracy can be contradictory to human nature, and thus require fighting our intuitions and tendencies in order to uphold it.

Agentic people have a sense of power, but refugees begin resettlement with no power. To work toward the emancipatory goals of self-advocacy and self-sufficiency, refugees need to be in an ecosystem where they can gain power. However, schools generally have defined power structures. So, the redistribution or creation of power in schools must be supported by those who currently hold it. How finite is power within a school, and how is new power created? Educators should discuss how power is distributed in their schools, from the hierarchical structure of the education system, to innate desires for power amongst children, to defining how much power is too much power.

Dewey (1927) declared that "no government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interest of the few" (Dewey, 1927, p. 225). The U.S. education system was created within an ostensibly democratic society. However, the United States has become a more diverse nation since its inception, and its educational system should change to reflect and serve the people who are now within it (Durkheim 1922/2000). If we are to call our education system or any other system democratic, then representative input is needed to interpret what democracy means to those whom the systems serve, that includes refugees.

Some research participants posited that if something implemented was beneficial to refugees, it would likely be beneficial to all students. Although not directly named by any participant, this was an issue of equity. If a democratic education is defined in terms of equity, are some voices amplified more than others? One participant paraphrased John F. Kennedy, who once said, "A rising tide lifts all boats" (Woodrow, 2014, p. 49). But, in the spirit of his analogy, not all boats are built similarly. Some are hole-filled canoes, struggling to stay afloat. Some are polished yachts. So providing the same level of support to all students by justifying that the few who need it most will also benefit is an equivocation in lieu of addressing inequities in the school system. To further the flaw in Kennedy's analogy: Though the tide may rise for all, the gap between the quality of the boats remains the same. Many participants wanted to create an inclusive environment that is welcoming of diverse perspectives. It is easy to claim that making improvements for *all* students will benefit *every* student, but are we trying to create a truly level field of educational opportunity or just make sure that refugee students are provided with enough resources to push them through school systems?

**Changing International Perceptions of the United States**

Toya took responsibility for representing Iraqis, refugees, Muslims, and women as a teenager and felt as though she had to prove her value and overcome others' biases. She would have struggled less with such issues in Iraq. However, she should have been able to enjoy her time as a teenager in any school in any country without deep concern for her intersectionality. U.S. politics and news media have engendered complicated, bias-laden impediments for immigrants before they even arrive in the country. Refugees must successfully navigate those obstacles to be respected and valued as human beings.

Moreover, refugees often must overcome people's misconceptions of them before they can begin to feel a sense of belonging. Overcoming others' misbeliefs is a lifelong struggle.

Forcibly-displaced people have often considered the United States to be a meritocracy (Waite & Swisher, 2019). However, they resettle in a different reality—one in which power requires privilege, connections, and an extensive understanding of unwritten rules. When refugees leave the United States for their home countries, they will be asked about their educational experiences. Collectively, we can influence the image that others have of the United States and its education system. Publication and dissemination of dialogue that portrays the United States as what it is, instead of what it is thought to be, will help to generate appropriate expectations for refugees so that they are better prepared, mentally, for what they will face upon resettlement.

Presently, the United States is not an exemplar of leadership in terms of welcoming refugees. National leaders have turned their backs on human rights violations, wars, and climate catastrophes that forcibly-displaced people, and then closed U.S. borders when those people presented themselves asking for aid. Without refugees in the country, native-born children will have fewer opportunities to interact with children who have more varied perspectives and experiences. That means fewer opportunities to build an empathetic world. Educators cannot let our leaders enforce educational ignorance through policymaking. To begin dismantling the barriers that national leaders have put in place for refugees, educators must use socio-politically relevant pedagogy (Bajaj et al., 2017) to educate children to be more empathetic, critically conscious, and collectivistic leaders.

## Closing Thoughts

An emancipatory education for forcibly-displaced youth is an education that frees them *from* having their lives determined by other people. It frees them *to* be acknowledged, respected, and self-determined. It frees them to independently express themselves without fear of reprisal—whether that be in a school setting or elsewhere—and to be welcomed to continue their lives in new countries in ways they see fit. It frees them to belong and be valued.

A theoretical framework for emancipatory education of forcibly-displaced youth requires an ideological shift in the way students, teachers, administrators, counselors, parents, lawmakers, and other community members think about and approach people who do not appear similar to themselves. Underlying this ideological shift is an overall reassessment of the purpose of education and how we measure successful schooling. We tend to think about and focus on test scores, statistics, letter grades, and individual achievement because the structure of the educational system that has been set up for us is one in which capitalism has met technology. But our current system was constructed by people, and people can change it (Pastoor, 2017).

All systems are our systems. We created them, and we can dismantle and deconstruct them and build new ones that serve us better. It is easier to make slight modifications to current systems continuously. However, the more modifications we construct, the more the original purposes of the systems become unrecognizable. As modifications continue, it eventually becomes evident that the original purpose of our education system no longer appropriately serves those who are required to use it. My study is one of many research studies indicating that the time for a new educational

system is past due. In Chapter 2, I cited components of an inclusive education for refugees, as outlined by Block, Cross, Riggs, and Gibbs (2014). The need for all those components was upheld by my research, exemplifying that the education system has remained static. It is past time to advance. We must escape the mindset that frames our current educational system as the backbone for everything else we want to do with our lives. It is not time to think outside of the box. It is time to get rid of the box and create a system more appropriate for our present society that includes refugees as equally valued participants.

The United States has the resources to support refugee students and their families fully. The people who control the resources must want to distribute them differently. It takes education to improve education. Consequently, educators have the power to promote the mindsets that we want our future leaders to have. Change must begin locally and be sustained generationally for pressure and funding from the national level of educational influence to be more supportive of socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2013a) in schools. If resources from high-stakes testing were instead put toward education that values culture; psychological, social, and emotional healing; self-determination; respect; inclusivity; belonging; and learning from one another in diverse, socio-political spaces, then an emancipatory education for forcibly-displaced youth can be more than theoretical. We could put it into practice.

Lawmakers do not seem to be asking themselves or anyone else what society wants the purpose of education to be before they define success. Yet, at the time of this dissertation, there was only one active refugee U.S. congressperson, and she did not have a seat on an educational committee. Without representation, state and national changes

are difficult. If state and national leaders represented refugees, then perhaps we would see a systemic focus that prioritizes fellowship. People may begin thinking about collective benefits of education as opposed to individual benefits, statistical measurements of knowledge might not hold as much value, and we might measure educational success based on how happy people are. If we wanted more quantitative measurements, we might measure the success of our educational system based on the number of people in our prisons, the number of people who are not pleased with their jobs and/or incomes, the number of homeless people, the number of crimes committed, and/or the number of people seeking help for substance abuse.

Dialogue matters. In my focus groups and interviews, some participants reflected on their practices and revealed that they probably could have done more to support refugees. Our discussions raised insightful questions and inspiring thoughts. If more discussions like ours took place in schools, perhaps they would stimulate desire and action to change the way we educate. The field of education involves adults and children working together toward many different goals—some of which we cannot define—all while we are shaping and being shaped by society. There is no universal formula for success in that endeavor. But with care, love, attention, and cooperation we can support refugee youth in working toward emancipatory goals (Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020).

The theoretical framework I presented is intended to stimulate conversations about how to improve approaches to the education of forcibly-displaced youth. The number of displaced persons in the world is higher than it has ever been (UNHCR, 2020). Educators must be prepared to teach refugee children, not simply tolerate them. This dissertation adds to and propels new conversations about present approaches to educating

refugees and how to improve refugee education going forward. Insight from this dissertation should drive more research and dialogue about the education of forcibly-displaced youth and add to the complexity of understanding that all must continuously internalize and debate to improve education wholesale.

# APPENDIX SECTION

**APPENDIX A: Follow-Up Questions Emailed to Toya and Niara**

1. Were there specific people or programs (within school or outside of school) that you felt were supportive and helped you overcome some of the obstacles you faced or helped you achieve the goals you had?
2. Could you point to anything that you thought the school staff was doing to help you feel welcome? If yes, please talk a little about that.
3. What kind of role did your school counselor play in supporting you?
4. What kind of role did your family play in your education?
5. Did anyone from the school (teacher or nonteacher) reach out to your family to welcome you/them, explain anything about the school system and what kinds of support they can provide, or ask your parents what they need or what you need? If they didn't, would that have been something that your family would have wanted?
6. Did anyone from the school try to learn from you or your parents about your schooling experiences before you came to the US?
7. A lot of schools talk about migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylees as one group of kids called "newcomers." They prescribe all "newcomers" with the same or similar curriculum and levels of support. If your teachers had known you were a refugee (whose family was *forced* to leave their home country), as opposed to an immigrant (whose family had *chosen* to leave their country willingly), do you think that could have or should have changed the way they approached teaching and learning with you? That is, do you think educating refugees should be approached differently than educating immigrants as a whole? If so, in what way(s) should it be different, and why?

**APPENDIX B: Dissertation Timeline**

| Task | May 2019 – Apr 2020 | May 2020 – Dec 2020 | Jan – Feb 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Collected data | | | |
| Memoed and journaled | | | |
| Reviewed scholarly literature | | | |
| Analyzed data | | | |
| Drafted dissertation | | | |
| Prepared final dissertation text and presentation | | | |

**APPENDIX C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

**Study Title:** Beyond Refuge: A Theoretical Framework for Emancipatory Education of Forcibly-displaced Youth

**Principal Investigator:** Jason Swisher
**Email:** js2291@txstate.edu
**Phone:** 512-699-7617
**Sponsor:** N/A

**Faculty Advisor:** Duncan Waite
**Email:** dw26@txstate.edu
**Phone:** 512-245-2304

My research is guided by three central questions:

- What paradigmatic concepts or philosophical directions can inform a theoretical framework for the emancipatory education of refugee youth in mainstream schools?
- What changes in policy, leadership, and/or practice are needed to realize a theoretical framework for emancipatory education in mainstream schools?
- How can we make the changes needed in policy, leadership, and/or practice in order to realize a theoretical framework for emancipatory education in mainstream schools?

My interviews will be semi-structured to allow me the flexibility ask follow-up questions based on my interviewees' remarks. Therefore, I will ask some, or perhaps all the following questions (not necessarily in the order listed) below:

1. What do the words "refugee" or "asylee" mean to you?
2. How would you explain what it is like to become and be a refugee or asylee as a child?
3. How are we currently promoting teaching and learning between refugee or asylee students and their teachers and nonrefugee peers in mainstream schools? What are they learning from each other? What should they be learning?
4. What are your goals for the education of forcibly-displaced youth?
    - Why are those your goals?
    - How do you plan to or how are you now achieving those goals?
    - What and/or who is helping you to achieve those goals?
    - Why are those things/people/structures helping?
    - What obstacles are in the way of achieving those goals?
    - Why do you see those as obstacles?
    - How do you think you or others can overcome those obstacles or do a better job of achieving those goals?
    - Do you always make decisions in the best interest of achieving the goals you mentioned?
        - If yes, how do you know they are in the best interest? If no, why did you make decisions that you knew weren't aligned to your goals? Can you provide an example of such a decision?
5. What drives the decisions you make about educating refugees or asylees?

6. If you could design an education program specifically for refugee students, what would it look like? That is, what would be its components, its drivers, and its measures of success?
    - Would any ideological shifts need to occur prior to implementing such a program, or do you think those shifts would occur after people change their practices and see a change in outcomes?
        - Explain what those ideological shifts would be from and to, and how they could be changed prior to implementing the program or how they would change after the program was implemented.
7. What can an emancipatory education for refugees and asylees look like in mainstream public schools?
    - What changes need to be made in order realize this type of education?
    - What can be done to help make those changes?
    - How are you working to realize this type of education for refugees and asylees in mainstream public schools?

    One definition of emancipatory education is a model of education that:
    - Explicitly addresses social oppression, situating community problems (and targets of primary prevention) within historical context
    - acknowledges students as agents for social change, and
    - affirms . . . cultural resources for healing and social transformation.

    Do you think these are essential elements of an emancipatory education model for forcibly-displaced youth?
    - **If yes:**
      How, or in what ways do you think teachers, school leaders, and educational stakeholders at varying levels of influence (local, state, national, and international) can address each of the three elements of emancipatory education that I just mentioned? [repeat each bullet in #7, if necessary]
    - Would you add any elements to the three in the model of emancipatory education that I mentioned?
    - **If no:**
      what do you think are essential elements of a framework for emancipatory refugee or asylee education in mainstream public schools?
8. Many things can drive change. In what order do you think the following things need to happen for people to change the way they approach the education of refugees and asylees?
    - Professional development
    - Change in belief
    - Change in practice
    - Change in outcomes

    Why did you order those things in the way that you did?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**APPENDIX D: Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions**

**Study Title:** Beyond Refuge: A Theoretical Framework for Emancipatory Education of Forcibly-displaced Youth

**Principal Investigator:** Jason Swisher
**Email:** js2291@txstate.edu
**Phone:** 512-699-7617
**Sponsor:** N/A

**Faculty Advisor:** Duncan Waite
**Email:** dw26@txstate.edu
**Phone:** 512-245-2304

My research is guided by three central questions:

- What paradigmatic concepts or philosophical directions can inform a theoretical framework for the emancipatory education of refugee youth in mainstream schools?
- What changes in policy, leadership, and/or practice are needed to realize a theoretical framework for emancipatory education in mainstream schools?
- How can we make the changes needed in policy, leadership, and/or practice in order to realize a theoretical framework for emancipatory education in mainstream schools?

I will ask some, or perhaps all the following questions (not necessarily in the order listed) below:

1. What do the words "refugee" or "asylee" mean to you?
2. How would you explain what it is like to become and be a refugee or asylee as a child?
3. How are we currently promoting teaching and learning between refugee or asylee students and their teachers and nonrefugee peers in mainstream schools? What are they learning from each other? What should they be learning?
4. What are your goals for the education of forcibly-displaced youth?
    - Why are those your goals?
    - How do you plan to or how are you now achieving those goals?
    - What and/or who is helping you to achieve those goals?
    - Why are those things/people/structures helping?
    - What obstacles are in the way of achieving those goals?
    - Why do you see those as obstacles?
    - How do you think you or others can overcome those obstacles or do a better job of achieving those goals?
    - Do you always make decisions in the best interest of achieving the goals you mentioned?
        - If yes, how do you know they are in the best interest? If no, why did you make decisions that you knew weren't aligned to your goals? Can you provide an example of such a decision?
5. What drives the decisions you make about educating refugees or asylees?
6. If you could design an education program specifically for refugee students, what would it look like? That is, what would be its components, its drivers, and its measures of success?

    - Would any ideological shifts need to occur prior to implementing such a program, or do you think those shifts would occur after people change their practices and see a change in outcomes?
        - Explain what those ideological shifts would be from and to, and how they could be changed prior to implementing the program or how they would change after the program was implemented.
7. What can an emancipatory education for refugees and asylees look like in mainstream public schools?
    - What changes need to be made in order realize this type of education?
    - What can be done to help make those changes?
    - How are you working to realize this type of education for refugees and asylees in mainstream public schools?

    One definition of emancipatory education is a model of education that:
    - Explicitly addresses social oppression, situating community problems (and targets of primary prevention) within historical context
    - acknowledges students as agents for social change, and
    - affirms cultural resources for healing and social transformation.

    Do you think these are essential elements of an emancipatory education model for forcibly-displaced youth?
    - **If yes:**
      How, or in what ways do you think teachers, school leaders, and educational stakeholders at varying levels of influence (local, state, national, and international) can address each of the three elements of emancipatory education that I just mentioned? [repeat each bullet in #7, if necessary]
    - Would you add any elements to the three in the model of emancipatory education that I mentioned?
    - **If no:**
      What do you think are essential elements of a framework for emancipatory refugee or asylee education in mainstream public schools?
8. Many things can drive change. In what order do you think the following things need to happen for people to change the way they approach the education of refugees and asylees?
    - Professional development
    - Change in belief
    - Change in practice
    - Change in outcomes

    Why did you order those things in the way that you did?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX E: Congressperson Chester's Copied and Pasted Response of U.S. Code

**2. What do the words "refugee" or "asylee" mean to you? (or what do you think about when you hear those terms?)**

United States Code covers my understanding:

The term "refugee" means (A) any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, or (B) in such special circumstances as the President after appropriate consultation (as defined in section 1157(e) of this title) may specify, any person who is within the country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, within the country in which such person is habitually residing, and who is persecuted or who has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

**APPENDIX F: Faraq's Paper on Racism**



HBAA Essay Competition

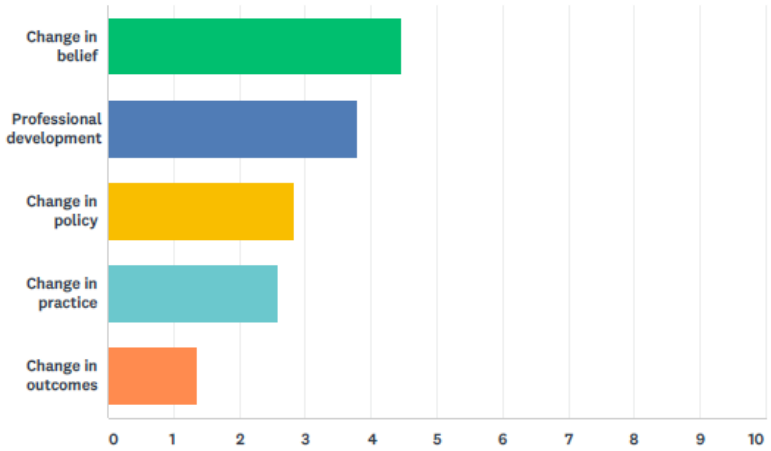
Racism is when you judge people based upon the color of their skin. I have been a victim of racism. I see racism in school. People make fun of other people in school a lot, because of what they are wearing and the way they talk and what they look like. My community has been affected by racists throughout history. I feel like I have been treated differently because I am Muslim and speak Arabic. It makes me feel bad and makes me mad. Treat everyone the same to make people feel better. Please help stop racism by talking to people you know who can stop racists.

## APPENDIX G: Participant Responses to Question About Change Drivers

**Question:**

Many things can drive change. In what order do you think the following things need to happen for people to change the way they approach the education of refugees and asylees? If there is a driver not present on this list that you feel should be listed, please say so.

**Scored responses:**




| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | TOTAL | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Change in belief | 55.56%<br>15 | 25.93%<br>7 | 3.70%<br>1 | 0.00%<br>0 | 3.70%<br>1 | 11.11%<br>3 | 27 | 4.46 |
| Professional development | 25.93%<br>7 | 29.63%<br>8 | 22.22%<br>6 | 11.11%<br>3 | 0.00%<br>0 | 11.11%<br>3 | 27 | 3.79 |
| Change in policy | 7.41%<br>2 | 29.63%<br>8 | 18.52%<br>5 | 7.41%<br>2 | 25.93%<br>7 | 11.11%<br>3 | 27 | 2.83 |
| Change in practice | 0.00%<br>0 | 3.70%<br>1 | 44.44%<br>12 | 40.74%<br>11 | 0.00%<br>0 | 11.11%<br>3 | 27 | 2.58 |
| Change in outcomes | 0.00%<br>0 | 0.00%<br>0 | 0.00%<br>0 | 29.63%<br>8 | 59.26%<br>16 | 11.11%<br>3 | 27 | 1.33 |

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