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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

ART AS INVITATION: THE EFFECTS OF INCLUDING  
ART EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM  
OF A PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM  
OF REFUGEE STUDENTS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Nancy Heckmann Erikson

College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Art and Design  
Art Education

December 2018

This Thesis by: Nancy Heckmann Erikson

Entitled: *Art as Invitation: The Effects of Including Art Education in the Curriculum of a Preschool Classroom of Refugee Students*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in  
College of Performing and Visual Arts, Program of Art Education

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## ABSTRACT

Erekson, Nancy Heckmann. *Art as Invitation: The Effects of Including Art Education in the Curriculum of a Preschool Classroom of Refugee Students*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2018.

This study is about how art constitutes an invitation for marginalized people. Refugees are the *uninvited*, and often remain on the periphery of host communities. This research examines how artmaking acts as an invitation for refugee preschool students and their families to connect with the broader community. I approached data collection through the method of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism and the theory of relational aesthetics. I analyzed data from observations conducted in a refugee preschool classroom and from interviews with six families. Further, I analyzed observations and surveys from a public exhibit of children's art. These sources provided data about how invitations were made and accepted through artmaking. Results of the analysis showed how processes and materials of artmaking mitigated student distress and changed dispositions of fear to trust and engagement. Choice in artmaking empowered students and built confidence. Close quarters and the need to share desirable materials prompted collaborations, forming connections among children of different languages and cultures. Artmaking invited sharing of verbal narratives and created feelings of relatedness in the classroom community. The public art exhibit expanded understanding between refugees and the host community. The key features of successful invitations were the attractive qualities of art processes, art materials, and opportunities for choice

and relatedness in artmaking. These invitations connected refugee preschool students and their families with the school and the broader community.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to Jim. Thank you for loving me and my thesis. I also acknowledge my thesis committee, Dr. Connie Stewart, Dr. Donna Goodwin, and Professor Tom Stephens for their guidance and encouragement through this process. I began this project with a vague idea about how art can make a difference in the lives of refugees. Connie, Donna, and Tom taught me how to design a framework to give my ideas clarity and purpose. I am grateful to my professors not only for their excellence in scholarship, but for their excellence in humanity. It has been a grand experience to be mentored by the best.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Rationale

##### Observing the Invitation

Greeley, Colorado is named for Horace Greeley, the editor of the New-York Tribune who first came to Colorado during the 1859 gold rush. He financially and philosophically backed the establishment of Union Colony, the utopian society that was eventually named after him in 1869. Horace Greeley is generally credited with the famous aphorism: Go west, young man. Urging his readers with slogans such as westward, ho, he encouraged them to make a new start in the West when they couldn't make it in the East (Taylor, 2015).

Over a hundred and fifty years after Horace Greeley promoted his vision of Westward expansion, people seeking a better life continue to settle in the city that bears his name. Rather than bringing wagons, dry goods, and livestock, the new settlers of Greeley and the surrounding Northern Colorado area bring little more than what they can carry from home countries which they have fled. Among the new settlers arriving in Greeley are refugees from many countries, including Myanmar, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Unlike immigrants who have voluntarily left home countries to seek new lives elsewhere, refugees have been *uninvited* from their home countries. In a new host country, refugees continue to

experience the uninvited feeling as they face new languages and cultures. I believe art can act as an invitation for refugees, and create opportunities for them to connect with the broader community.

As the art teacher at the Colorado Center for Refugees (CCR), I had the unique opportunity to observe how art impacted the lives of refugee students. I taught two art lessons per week for CCR Preschool, a program serving children of adults attending English Classes at the CCR campus. During my experiences at the refugee center, I realized that artmaking was a way for refugee children to learn from a position of ability rather than deficit. Refugee children experience challenges to learning typical for any immigrant, including differences in language and culture. However, refugees also experience trauma from forced displacement due to the horrors of war, genocide, or other persecution. Art in the curriculum provides young refugee students means for telling stories, engaging with learning, and building a sense of self in a new environment (McArdle & Spina, 2007).

I have seen storytelling, learning and new sense of self develop through art experiences for the preschool children I teach. One day last spring, a new girl, Mina, arrived with her parents for check-in at CCR Preschool just as I was setting out materials for the art lesson. Mina was very afraid of entering the classroom, and clung to her mother's leg, sobbing and shaking. Late for their English class, Mina's parents were anxious to speed through the paperwork so they could drop her off. The preschool teacher assisted with the forms while I continued to set up supplies for the art lesson. I squeezed out brightly hued tempera paint into pie-tin palettes and unwrapped the potato stamps cut the night before for printmaking. Nearby, Mina's parents finished up paperwork and

attempted to soothe her, speaking and explaining rapidly in one of the many languages spoken in Myanmar. Mina was not interested in being soothed or coaxed. She had wrapped her legs and arms tightly around her mother's leg, refusing to move. When her mother attempted to loosen Mina's grip, she became even more agitated, screaming and sobbing at the thought of being left behind in the unfamiliar setting. I suddenly had the idea that if Mina knew how fun it was to make a potato print, she might be willing to stay in the classroom. I took a palette and some potatoes over to the doorway where Mina and her parents were at an impasse. Mina didn't stop crying, but watched as I set a piece of paper at her feet. I dipped the potato in blue paint and then stamped it on the paper. Intrigued, Mina continued to watch as I dipped a new potato with yellow paint. Without breaking my potato printmaking rhythm, I watched Mina's posture change. Her face changed. She stopped crying and she loosened her desperate grip on her mother's leg. I offered her an invitation in the form of a potato, first dipping it in purple paint, then pointing to the paper at her feet. With one hand still grasping her mother's leg, Mina took the potato, bent toward the paper, and stamped purple shapes next to the blue and yellow ones. I left her there with the palette, and returned to the table where the other children had gathered for artmaking. The preschool teacher continued to make prints at the door with Mina, and within a few minutes, Mina was sitting at the table with the other children, happily making potato prints while her parents were out of sight at another classroom on campus. Art is magic. I was awed by this experience, and I wanted to understand what it was about the artmaking process that changed Mina's demeanor from near hysteria to a participatory student.

Through art, the refugee child is invited to interact with materials, ideas and processes. With this accessible participation in learning, perceived deficits of language and culture are bypassed because art is a language that does not require verbal English skills or specific cultural knowledge (McArdle & Spina, 2007). In Mina's case, before artmaking was introduced, she was unwilling to enter an unfamiliar environment. Something about artmaking enabled her to enter the school community on sure footing. It was a visible, dramatic change. The goal of my thesis research was to learn how artmaking among refugee children acts as an invitation for connection between the refugee family and the community.

### **What Attracted Me to this Topic: Experience Prompted Inquiry**

A combination of factors prompted my interest in studying art as invitation. I am a white, middle-aged, middle-class American woman. I understand that I benefit from a positionality that is privileged in the world. For most of my adult life, I have realized that my friendships and acquaintances are based mostly on my current geographical location. I live in the Western United States. The dominant group in this region is also white and mostly Judeo-Christian. Subsequently, most of the people I associate with daily are white. However, some of my most valuable life experiences have come from associating with people who identify with positionalities quite different from my own. I appreciate how "the interaction among all these voices becomes a vibrant and interesting mix" (Congdon, Stewart, & White, 2002, p. 117).

Through the opportunities of travel and church service, I met and became friends with First-American Cree people in Canada, and spent many hours in their kitchens listening to their stories and sharing their food. For a six-month church assignment, I

worked with a congregation of Filipino immigrants, and I struggled to learn a few words of Tagalog so I could communicate with the older people who didn't speak any English. Sometimes my bilingual friend Josie would translate stories of sacrifice, love, and loss. The year my husband and I were married, he took an internship in Frankfurt, Germany and we lived with a mixed-nationality family. Frau Lamann was a Yugoslavian immigrant, and her husband was native German. They were children during World War II, and knew both the deprivations and depravities of war early in life. These time-intensive experiences of being with people of different cultures were not only challenging and rewarding, but also shaped my worldview. I felt invited and welcomed by these people who connected with me regardless of my different positionality. When I began teaching the CCR Preschool art lessons at the refugee center, I recalled these experiences and saw an opportunity not only to connect personally with the refugees, but also to explore how artmaking could be an invitation for disparate communities to connect.

### **Why is Research on This Topic Beneficial to Me and Others?**

Classrooms have become increasingly diverse in communities hosting refugee resettlement programs. Educators must continue to explore how to scaffold learning for students who have differences in language and culture. The differences are not just between educator and student, but between the students themselves. At the refugee center, the students were often unable to communicate with each other since they came from different countries. For this research, I proposed that art projects could be designed as acts of invitation for refugee children and their families to participate in new learning and community environments. Conversely, art pieces with accompanying narrative text



displayed at an outreach art exhibit invited community members to interact with refugee families.

In the current political discourse, one of the hot topics is the world-wide refugee crisis. America was colonized by immigrants fleeing religious persecution and populated by repeated surges of refugees of one kind or another. Considering this shared history, it is ironic that people feel threatened by the current wave of refugee immigration. President Donald Trump signed three travel bans in 2017, dating January 27, March 6, and September 24, primarily focused on people from Muslim-majority nations (Almsay & Simon, 2017; Schallhorn, 2017). In years leading up to these travel bans, media stories of mass shootings in California and Florida by home-grown US terrorists inflated fears about Muslim refugee immigration. Although I empathize with concerns for safety and security, I sometimes wonder about the idealized pride our society often expresses for its immigrant heritage and religious freedoms. I wonder if the words of Emma Lazarus' nineteenth century poem are just nostalgic sentiments, or if there is actually room for "the tired, the poor and the huddled masses yearning to breathe free" (Lazarus, 2018, para. 1). In my study of art in the preschool refugee classroom, I was intrigued by the benefits of dialogue between refugees and the broader community.

Art can be an effective medium of exchange. Through artmaking in the classroom, young refugee children may have an increased sense of competence while participating in learning that does not require English language proficiency or specific cultural knowledge. Outside of the classroom, dialogue created through an art exhibit may help refugee families feel more connected with the community, and may afford members of the host community a new awareness and empathy for the refugee families' lives.

## Background and Context

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016) estimated 10.5 million people were newly displaced in 2016. The number of global asylum claims has risen dramatically in recent years, as has the number of asylum claims made in the US (see Table 1). The number of displaced people has escalated as people flee conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and other areas of the world undergoing political and social upheaval (UNHCR, 2014, 2015, 2016). The majority of the students included in this study were children of refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and DRC.

Table 1

### *Asylum trends 2014-2016*

Reporting Year	Global Asylum Claims	Annual % Increase	US Asylum Claims	Annual % Increase
2014	866,000	45	121,200	44
2015	2,000,000	131	172,700	42
2016	2,000,000	0	262,000	52

The preschool program at CCR in Greeley, Colorado was based on typical models of preschool programs with a mix of play-based and academic activities. During my study, attendance fluctuated from 4-20 children per class period, and children were admitted on a rolling basis throughout the school year. One paid teacher organized and planned the curriculum for the class, and several work-study students assisted with implementing activities throughout the preschool day. In addition, several adults, including myself, volunteered in the classroom. The ratio of adults to children was

sometimes 1:1 or even higher. Occasionally, there was only myself, the preschool teacher and one volunteer working with the children in the classroom. The preschool class was concurrent with adult English language classes, community navigation services, and citizenship classes. Parents were not permitted to bring children into their own classes, so the refugee center provided free preschool classes and childcare for children. The age range of children in the preschool was approximately 1 year to 5 years old. For the study, I only included children over the age of 2 years.

In 2017, The CCR underwent a merger that combined two entities serving refugees. The Colorado Center for Refugees and a Weld County adult literacy program became a single organization with one mission: *Empowering refugee and immigrants, connecting communities, and advocating for successful integration*. The refugees served by CCR have come to Greeley through UNHCR resettlement programs. Residents of Weld County have a history of mixed sentiments about the refugees coming to the area. The recent political tumult over immigration policy in the US has uncovered a deep divide in Weld County. President Donald Trump ran his 2016 presidential campaign with tough views on immigration, including plans to build walls and ban Muslim refugees. He won 57% of the votes in Weld. Although many voters were in harmony with these tough views, the area's refugee population continued to increase. Lutheran Family Services, an organization that helps refugees with food and financial assistance, had over 360 clients in 2017. Although many residents of Weld County are eager to welcome refugees to their new home, others did not want refugees in the community and supported Trump's travel bans of people from Muslim-majority nations (Brasch, 2017). With tensions high about the changing population of the area, my interest in addressing the topic of successful

refugee integration and connection with the larger community through artmaking was timely and purposeful. Questions arising from the context of the preschool classroom and the larger community guided the research of this study.

### **Research Questions**

- Q1        How does artmaking act as an invitation for refugee preschool students and their families to connect with the broader community?

To answer this main question, I needed to answer the following sub-questions:

- Q1a        How does artmaking in the preschool classroom invite refugee students to participate in unfamiliar contexts?
- Q1b        What can be learned from the verbal and art-based narratives of refugee children?
- Q1c        How can art act as an invitation for a dialogue of understanding to occur between new refugee residents and established area residents?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Refugee:* A refugee is a person who has been forced to flee his home because of persecution, war or violence. The refugee may be persecuted or fear persecution because of their membership in a particular group, including political, religious or social (UNHCR, n.d.). In my study I have also used the term refugee to describe children of adult refugees, whether or not the children were born in the home country or the United States.

*Burma/Myanmar:* I have interchangeably used the country names Burma and Myanmar because many of the refugees refer to their home country as Burma, not Myanmar.

*Connection:* For the purposes of this study, connection refers to enhanced understanding between different cultural groups through social exchanges.

*Invitation:* An invitation is a request to do something or participate in an activity with others in a community.

*Artmaking:* Artmaking refers to the production of art pieces appropriate for the preschool age group. These activities include painting, drawing, working with clay, arranging collage materials, play, and exploration with media.

In summary, my thesis addresses the current issue of welcoming refugees into a new host community. My experience in the CCR classroom working with distraught children led me to consider the value of art curriculum. Additionally, I wanted to learn how art could be used to connect the families of these young children with the larger community. In the following chapters, I provide the research structure necessary to answer the main question, how does artmaking act as an invitation for refugee preschool students and their families to connect with the broader community?

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Invitation is an interdisciplinary affective concept that has been examined as a cultural universal by anthropologists, sociologists, and in literary criticism. A well-known example of the dichotomy of invited/uninvited appears in the Grimm's tale of "Hansel and Gretel" (Grimm & Grimm, 2013). Like refugees, the children in this story are uninvited from their home. They experience hardship until they are reunited with their repentant father. He invites Hansel and Gretel to belong with him once more. Not all refugees are as fortunate as these storybook characters. Today's refugees have also been uninvited from their homes, and continue to experience hardship as they seek to navigate new languages, new cultures and new environments. How does someone who has been uninvited on such a large scale feel welcomed, comfortable, and engaged in a new community? Those positive outcomes are the basis of invitation.

In this literature review, I have interpreted the work of theorists and educators in terms of invitation. Although many of these theorists and educators do not use the concept of invitation explicitly, they do suggest how art helps refugees feel comfortable, welcomed, and connected in new communities. Invitations posed through art may encourage fruitful collaboration and promote appropriate social connections. Art is a unique disciplinary subject because invitations are offered to engage in process through

art materials and activities. Learning can happen without words and across disparate cultures. For young refugees with emerging language skills, artmaking offers an invitation to communicate and to express themselves in multi-modal literacy. Those who experience trauma or exhibit maladaptive behaviors due to the refugee experience may benefit through artmaking (Bash & Zezlina-Phillips, 2006). Existing research provides insights about how art may offer genuine invitations for refugees to connect positively with new experience and new communities (Brunick, 1999; McArdle & Spina, 2007; Yohani, 2008; Cumming & Visser, 2009; Brown & Bousalis, 2017). Researchers also assert that further study focusing on the needs of young refugee students is necessary (Hamilton & Moore, 2004a; Yohani, 2008; Hoot, 2011; Prior & Niesz, 2013). This literature review focuses on art theory and educational practice as a basis of invitation through art. The invitations offered and accepted in artmaking extend beyond the classroom, and may provide means to connect refugee families to the broader community.

### **A Need for Research on the Specific Needs of Preschool-Aged Refugees**

There is a need for specific research on the educational needs of preschool refugee students. When looking at the current refugee crisis, it is helpful to consider the differences between the wars of previous centuries, fought primarily between countries, versus the current armed conflicts experienced as civil wars and nation-centric genocide. For example, many of the civil wars in the African continent are fueled by greed for rich natural resources such as diamonds, oil, and lumber, and these conflicts are often compounded by the financial support of foreign business interests. As a result, thousands of refugee children migrate from dangerous conflict zones to refugee camps and many eventually resettle in safe countries (Hoot, 2011). Other refugees such as the Muslim

Rohingya ethnic group, living in Rakhine province in western Myanmar, face the threat of genocide (Ibrahim, 2016). The large population of refugees entering the US creates challenges for educators who are unfamiliar with the conflicts faced by refugee families in home countries. The UNHCR (2017) estimates that of the 22.5 million refugees in the world today, over half are children. Additionally, educators have little or no knowledge of the languages spoken by these children, and often are not equipped with professional skills to address the special needs of young refugee children.

Educational research on the needs of refugee students has been critiqued for combining together the educational experiences of refugees with those of immigrants in general, or focusing primarily on adult or adolescent refugees (McBrien, 2005; Hoot, 2011; Prior & Niesz, 2013). Art educator Lisa Brunick (1999) considered the work of Ascher (1985) describing the effects of war and dislocation on children at ages when they are first acquiring language. Those refugees ages 12 months to three years old “will likely suffer language-learning problems and related neurotic behavior as a result of the trauma which disrupted the developmental learning process” (Brunick, p. 14). Although infants six months to two years appear to adjust to immigration easily, this group may suffer the most long-term effects because of inability to adequately deal with nightmares having origins in preverbal memories (Ascher, 1985). Accordingly, the age-group of children who may need the most educational supports are pre-school aged children. In her review of the literature addressing educational needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States, McBrien (2005) emphasizes the work of Sinclair (2001), arguing that education should be seen as an essential humanitarian response to crisis, and the earlier



the better. Early education can support emotional and social health while restoring a sense of normalcy and hope.

### **Art Poses the Invitation**

Art educators are well suited to pose invitations for connectedness and belonging in the classroom and in the larger community. Inability to communicate with refugee children with language presents a serious challenge for teachers in addressing academic and social needs (Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006). In the preschool classroom at CCR, the effects of limited communication were frequently evident as new children registered on a rolling basis. One child included in this study, Liang, was admitted to the preschool mid-semester. Bewildered by the new environment and his inability to communicate, Liang spent most mornings crying behind a bookshelf, rolled up in a ball with his eyes tightly closed. The preschool teacher and other adult volunteers spent hours trying to coax him into participation, but efforts to communicate with unfamiliar English words seemed to escalate Liang's fear, and appeared to prompt episodes of self-harm. When common language is not available between teachers and students, other means of engagement become necessary. As a language, art mitigates other language barriers and offers a means of working without words (Brunick, 1999; McArdle & Spina, 2007; Cumming & Visser, 2009). McArdle and Spina (2007) contend that "art is a language that can provide young children with the means to engage, build identity, and tell their stories, bypassing the deficit position they may be placed in because of difference, which can include language, cultural and social capital" (p. 51). Art is just one of several activities which invite connection and opportunities for meaningful learning. Szente et al. (2006)

interviewed a school counselor who described the benefits of incorporating playful activities without words in working with refugee students:

Since children are not able to communicate in English and I am not able to speak their native languages, we utilize a lot of playful, hands-on activities. These activities utilize the universal languages such as art and music, and enable children to start sharing their experiences. The activities also enable us to provide children with strategies for coping with their experiences. (p. 17)

Additionally, McArdle and Spina (2007) have noted that refugee students are engaged in artmaking as a process. The materials, actions, and alchemy of parts that happen during artmaking are attractive in themselves, and invite engagement. Yohani (2008) argues that the imaginative, creative process is an active expression of hope.

### **Art Invites Relief**

The experience of young refugee children may leave them feeling traumatized and isolated. Some have survived untold horrors not only in their conflicted countries, but also in refugee camps while awaiting passage to safe countries. The affective results of these experiences are almost certainly fear and apprehension (Bash & Zezlina-Phillips, 2006). McArdle and Spina (2007), McBrien (2005), and Brunick (1999) contend that art has therapeutic benefits for the refugee child. A child's traumatic experiences and resulting problems can be externalized through narrative therapeutic interventions such as art, music, dance, poetry, and storytelling. This process helps to "integrate the past, present and future in a way that restores a sense of identity, meaning continuity, and belonging" (Frater-Mathieson, 2004, p. 33). The UNHCR reports that many children withdraw into themselves when they are unable to use words to express how they feel. In camps where children have been provided with art lessons and art materials, they have access to a less-disturbing means of reliving memories (UNHCR, 2007, in McArdle & Spina, 2007). More than half the children interviewed following the 1999 violent

conflicts in Freetown, Sierra Leone reported a sense of relief when they drew pictures, or wrote or talked about their war experiences (McBrien, 2005).

Art can be a survival tool for those who have lived with violence or fear. In working with refugee children, Brunick (1999) suggests using art therapy approaches such as non-directed drawing opportunities, tolerance of shocking images, and respectful listening. Resilience, hope, support, and a safe environment for expression can be promoted in artmaking, changing maladaptive behaviors (McArdle & Spina, 2007). Although art educators are not all trained as art therapists, close readings of art produced by refugee students may assist in identifying reasons for maladaptive behaviors. Unidentified needs may be expressed in student artwork, allowing adults to address growth and development concerns. Bash and Zezlina-Phillips (2006) examined the drawings of Demë, a young refugee from Kosovo, which depicted several views of his school. The drawings provided some semblance of reality, but omitted or misrepresented important features such as the dining hall, a study hall room and the library. However, details such as video cameras for surveillance, TVs, and even cut TV wires appeared in his drawings. Demë explained that his drawings also included hiding places for people who “watch” him (p. 121). In his drawings, Bash and Zezlina-Phillips detected “a fundamental anxiety about the possibility of being watched from the outside” (p. 121) and perceived a desire to “break out” (p. 121) of the school and a fear of others “breaking in” (p. 121) with sinister purposes. Demë’s drawings indicated that he did not feel as safe as he could and should at school. However, McArdle and Spina (2007) caution educators against “reading too much of a therapeutic nature into the content of children’s art,” with a reminder that “exhibitions are compilations and constructed by the curator” (p. 52).

### **Art Invites Communication and Expression**

In 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy theory, research looks beyond the linear forms of reading and writing and favors multi-modal forms of literacy. As one of these multi-modal forms, art is a meaning-making system with signs that can function in the absence of language (Halliday, in Maagerø & Sunde, 2016). Communication and expression rely on a person's facility with meaning-making systems and interpretation of signs. In our visually saturated culture, experience with art prepares young learners to access new multi-modal literacies. Because it takes time to develop the highly symbolic written forms of language, images are among the first lasting meaning-making systems children use and understand. Not only can children express thoughts and emotions through art, but they can also share these drawings with others, and use them as prompts for communication when language proficiency limits verbal conversation (Maagerø & Sunde, 2016).

Artmaking is an opportunity for refugee children to be heard, to discover, and to tell about experiences and emotions (Szente et al., 2006; McArdle & Spina, 2007; Hoot, 2011; Maagerø & Sunde, 2016; Brown & Bousalis, 2017). Counselors and teachers of refugee students recommend the use of visual meaning-making strategies to enhance communication with newly arrived refugee students. Images may be used to teach children about basic emotions such as happy, sad, mad, and worried. Educators may also design other art activities “which allow children to communicate feelings, experiences and their knowledge regarding certain topics” (Szente et al., 2006, p. 17).

In a study comparing drawings made by Norwegian children and Palestinian refugee children, Maagerø and Sunde (2016) found significant differences between what the two groups expressed. The Palestinian children were living in refugee camps in

Lebanon while the children in Norway represented those living in a politically secure environment with relatively little crime. Each child in the study was asked to make two pictures with instructions to draw what made them happy and what made them scared. Intriguingly, similar themes emerged in many of the children's drawings regarding what made them happy, including a bright sun, family members and friends, flowers and trees. Drawings depicting what made the children scared didn't follow such clear patterns. In both groups, some children were afraid of wild animals. However, the Norwegian children drew animals they would never come in contact with in natural environments, such as tigers, lions and crocodiles. The Palestinian children drew domestic animals they would normally encounter such as dogs and cats. Other drawings by Norwegian children depicted fantastical scenes including ghosts and monsters, while fearful scenes drawn by Palestinian children included thieves and "bad men." The researchers found that Norwegians seemed to be more afraid of symbolic fears than of anything in their actual environment, but that the refugee Palestinian children used the art to express real fears present in their daily lives. In their work, Maagerø and Sunde (2016) contend that drawing remains an important way for children to make meaning because "drawing makes it possible to realise ideas, thoughts and emotions and to represent phenomena in the world outside and inside us" (p. 303).

### **Art Invites Collaboration Despite Difference**

In the CCR Preschool classroom, many of the students experienced difference in culture and language from teachers and peers. Students from the same country were often not able to communicate with each other because they were from different linguistic regions, and some among those who shared languages could have been reluctant to

communicate with each other due to difference in caste or culture. Collaborative artmaking poses an invitation for developing social bonds despite difference. In their recommendations for best practices for educators, Szente et al. (2006) contend that peer group experiences may support academic development of young refugees during the silent period of English language learning. In addition to academic development, group processes in class can be used to facilitate the development of friendships for refugees (Hamilton & Moore, 2004b). Group work specifically invites children to negotiate boundaries, co-operate within their own space, and show consideration to others in a group. Other benefits of collaborative artmaking include learning how to make social connections through turn taking, and improved language (Cumming & Visser, 2009; Brown & Bousalis, 2017).

Preschool age students benefit from learning contemporary studio art practices such as collaboration. Tannis Longmore (2012) suggests purposeful approaches to teaching such as a collaborative “friendship” (p.60) painting, emphasizing the children’s opportunity for choice and autonomy within the activity. In demonstrating routines, describing actions and naming materials, the art educator offers tools for basic collaboration in a painting activity. Longmore contends that “simple guidelines, patiently taught and re-taught, will protect materials, keep children safe, and guide learners toward productive work” (p. 61). Observing more experienced students during group work may allow newcomers to acquire learning and skills which would be elusive in other environments.

### **Art Invites Refugees to Connect With Their Communities**

Refugees may find it difficult to participate in new communities for many reasons, including differences in culture and language, time constraints, and fear of rejection (McBrien, 2005; Rah, Choi, & Nguyễn, 2009). Muslim refugees currently experience a significant barrier to achieving connection within their new American communities. They are a newer refugee group in the United States, and their identity is conspicuous because of dress and cultural practices, making it more likely for them to be stigmatized (McBrien, 2005). A student wearing a hijab and observing religious practices of fasting and prayer during school hours may feel alienated from others in her school, and peers may reject her from social groups. McBrien notes the correspondence of rejection with a higher likelihood of school dropout. Invitations for community participation may also be different from culture to culture.

Westerners often consider written or printed forms of communication to be meaningful, while people who speak languages without a writing system may find oral communications preferable. Notes home from school may not be perceived as important by refugees who come from cultures relying primarily on oral communications (Rah et al., 2009). Additionally, parents and families of young refugee students may feel that they are actively participating in children's schooling and community activities, but differences in what constitutes participation may make it difficult for westerners to perceive participation.

Despite these challenges, Rah et al. suggest that school involvement offers invitations to greater community participation for refugee families. Honoring student home cultures focuses on acculturation rather than assimilation, and avoids negative

effects of colonization and subtractive schooling. Additionally, Prior and Niesz (2013) found that bridging home and school, and building connections through friendship with peers were strategies refugee students used to adapt to classrooms and new environments. In their study, refugee students created stories in artmaking, and used storytelling about positive experiences at school which linked them to their new peers through common interests. Educators must see themselves primarily as initiators and facilitators to successfully bridge home and school for refugees. The school is an access point for refugee families, and the attitudes of local populations such as acceptance of diversity, inclusiveness, warmth, and friendliness are facilitating factors for the task of adaptation faced by refugees (Anderson, 2004).

Encouraging cultural pluralism through a community art event was one of the goals of this thesis research. A study conducted in Canada also utilized a community art event as a means to encourage cultural pluralism and understanding. Researchers Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, and Bickel (2006) posed questions about what artistic products might be produced in a community-engaged process examining the Chinese-Canadian experience in the city of Richmond. Emphasizing the benefits of cultural pluralism, the researchers explored ways that culture and memory are transformed and maintained through place and community. An art exhibit featuring memories and images of several families representing diasporic culture was curated by the researchers, with attention focused on the potential of a relational aesthetic experience between cultures.

The art exhibit occurred in two locations in China, with varying influence on those in attendance. Some saw the work as politically charged. Many were engaged with the images in thoughtful ways while others questioned the exhibit as art. Intriguingly,



some attendees used the exhibit as an opportunity to practice their English skills. Irwin et al. (2006) noted that their research journey was similar to a rhizome, which was not necessarily chronological and had no beginnings or endings. Rather, the relational experience offered divergent situations for further inquiry. Findings included personal shifts of understandings about individual immigrants and the necessity of confronting stereotypical views. In my research, I proposed that art offers opportunity for refugees to connect with community. I was also open to the divergent results that occurred from a relational aesthetic experience.

### **Invitation in Art and Educational Theories**

It is important to theorize how art comprises an invitation in educational settings and beyond. Questions such as what comprises an invitation, what is the purpose of extending an invitation and what are the outcomes of accepting an invitation are relevant to the topic of refugee acculturation and education. In a school setting, an art educator may offer invitations throughout the artmaking process, by offering materials to work with, demonstrating the use of the materials, and creating a safe environment for expression. Students accept the invitation by participating in artmaking activities, adapting and expanding on demonstrations, and making connections with others in the environment. The process is a reciprocal cycle, with invitations and acceptance of invitations happening simultaneously and overlapping with each other.

Yohani (2008) examined Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development, often referred to as bio-ecological theory, noting the purposes and outcomes of reciprocal processes. In outlining the theory, Yohani illustrates how child development is influenced by the reciprocal relations of subjective personal factors and objective environmental

factors. Some of these processes include reading, learning new skills such as art, and participating in group or solitary play. Yohani also considers hope theory in arts-based interventions with refugee children, suggesting that hope itself is a reciprocal process between people in relationships. Early relational experiences build trust between children and caregivers, including educators, developing hope and later influencing psychosocial development. Connectedness to others plays an important role in enhancing hope. Yohani proposes that “hope, like despair, anger, or love, is viewed as a powerful emotion emerging from within a person and acts as the ‘fuel’ that drives interactions between people and their environments” (p. 312). Refugee children participated in the Hope Project, a series of art experiences designed to enhance hope. Various hope stories were observed in the children’s art work, including “journeys of survival,” “memories of playing with new friends in Canada,” and “cultural metaphors such as a broken jug meaning good luck” (p. 316). The artmaking allowed children to move beyond their current contexts, reflect on the past and look forward to future goals. The hopefulness the children experienced in artmaking enhanced their ability to feel invited.

The need for connectedness is found in other theory, including Nel Noddings’ care theory and Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory. Humans have a basic need to feel belongingness and connectedness to others. When invitations are extended and accepted between individuals, relatedness is achieved and development and learning are supported. Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that a primary reason students are willing to accept proffered classroom values is their feeling of being cared for and respected by the teacher, or the level of relatedness the student feels. Noddings (1995) also promotes the need for relatedness, and the overt teaching of care. She contends that we should want

more from our educational efforts than mere adequate academic achievement, and that students cannot accomplish even this meager goal if they do not believe they are cared for or learn to care for others. Teachers may teach care through creating opportunities for learning in realms of moral issues and existential questioning. However, Noddings cautions that there is a “real danger of intrusiveness and lack of respect in methods that fail to recognize the vulnerability of students” (p. 677). Refugee students are among those most vulnerable. Noddings recommends careful preparation and planning to scaffold instructional methods that use narrative forms and encourage personal expression.

Bourriaud’s (2002) theory of relational aesthetics focuses on the reciprocal nature of invitation posed by art. He writes, “art has always been relational in varying degrees, i.e. a factor of sociability and a founding principle of dialogue” (p. 15). Bourriaud proposes that art produces empathy and sharing and is capable of generating a bond. In contemporary art, relational work is not confined to gallery settings or traditional notions of the picture plane. For example, artists may render little services which “fill in the cracks in the social bond” (p. 36). Bourriaud describes the work of artist Christine Hill who takes on menial tasks such as working at a supermarket checkout and shining shoes. She is driven by the notion that these tasks carried out in tandem with the real economic system may re-stitch the relational fabric. Bourriaud describes the work of another artist, Phillipe Parreno, who inspired by the concept of “party” creates art that occupies two hours of time rather than square meters of space. Whether art is produced in contemporary or traditional modes, Bourriaud contends that art is made of the same material as social exchanges. Successful art is open to social dialogue, discussion, and

inter-human negotiation. In terms of art education for young refugee children, empathy and sharing are invitations offered in artmaking, art viewing, and art display.

Dissanayake's (1995) theories seek an explanation of ubiquitous practices of art in human cultures, including the many variations of art in different settings. Art is meaningful for species survival. The adaptive benefits of art allow human life to become more productive and durable. In Dissanayake's estimation, art occurs when humans *make special* something within the cultural space by noticing and attending to forms and practices within life. Marking bodies (tattoos and scarring), making deliberate actions (dance), and composing narratives (drama and story) are just a few of the human forms which relate to this broad definition of art (White, 2013). White interprets Dissanayake's work in terms of invitation, defining art experience as placing the participant in a position of having to respond, and the necessity of viewing their own response as part of a work of art. Intriguingly, White (2013) emphasizes the reciprocal nature of Dissanayake's *making special*, stating, "for Dissanayake, the satisfying sense of mastery drives the pleasure to be had from listening to well told stories as well as telling them, wearing elaborate clothes and body decorations, as well as making them, and, in post-traditional and technological societies, the accumulation and replaying of recorded music, via record collections, ring-tones and radio stations" (p. 200). Experiences in art education for preschool refugees make possible the observation of relational aesthetics as well as the production of art works. Invitations to make things special become part of the design of artmaking opportunities, promoting a sense of mastery, autonomy, and relatedness.

## Conclusions

Research on the specific needs of young refugee students is timely and necessary (Hamilton & Moore, 2004a; Yohani, 2008; Hoot, 2011; Prior & Niesz, 2013). The literature I have reviewed supports and develops my research questions on art experience in the refugee community. I have reviewed the work of researchers in art education, art theory, educational theory, and sociology to build the construct “art as invitation” for my research. I have drawn on theorists in relational aesthetics, hope and human ecology, care, and self-determination to build my ideas about art as invitation.

The needs of young refugee students are specialized, and specific instructional strategies are called for in the school setting. In the classroom, the processes and materials of artmaking offer ideal learning opportunities for refugee children. Art is a unique language, and invitations to engage in process and learning can be offered without words and accepted between disparate peoples. For young refugee students with emerging language skills, artmaking offers an invitation to communication and personal expression in a multi-modal literacy approach. Art invites collaboration and promotes appropriate social connection. A sense of participation, accomplishment and self-identity can be built regardless of barriers in language and culture. Refugee children who experience trauma or maladaptive behaviors due to their past experiences can find relief through art expression. The invitations offered and accepted in artmaking extend beyond the classroom, and may provide means to connect refugee families to the broader community. A public exhibition of art created by refugees is a reciprocal relational event encouraging cross-cultural exchange in the broader community. Stereotypes may be

confronted and mitigated through a public art exhibit. Art offers genuine invitations for refugees to connect positively with new experiences and new communities.

In review, my research question was how does artmaking act as an invitation for refugee preschool students and their families to connect with the broader community? Because my questions were about the relational qualities of invitations, qualitative data were necessary, such as verbal and art-based narratives of refugee children, observations of what they say and do during artmaking, and how people interact around a public display of the art works. These kinds of data helped me learn how artmaking makes people feel invited, how it encourages connectedness, belonging, and engagement.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Methods**

Elliott Eisner's method of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism provided principles and procedures necessary to answer my research question. Eisner (2002) argues that his method of qualitative inquiry is much like the work of artists and art critics, who render "the essentially ineffable qualities of art into a language that will help others perceive the work more deeply" (p. 213). The purpose of the criticism is not to reduce what is being perceived into abstractions, but rather to illuminate qualities and relationships to effectively make an appraisal of value. Anything can be the subject of criticism, and in education this method can be especially useful because quantitative studies, although well suited to defining cause and effect, usually neglect how and why human phenomena occur in context. A critic in arts or education must have the disposition of a connoisseur, who appreciates and perceives what others may not see. Eisner points to perception of what is subtle, complex, and important as the first necessary condition of criticism. The critic must first be a connoisseur and then have the inclination to draw attention to what is significant. Eisner states, "Connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure" (p. 215). Educational criticism embraces multiple ways of knowing and expressing something about the phenomena of

educational life. There are four aspects of educational criticism: descriptive, interpretive, evaluative, and thematic.

The descriptive aspect is an account of what has occurred. The educational critic reconstructs events, situations or objects by distilling relevant qualities she encounters. Eisner (1976) explains that critical description may include what types of questions students have during class, how much time is spent in discussion, or the type of image a teacher presents in class. In description, the educational critic does not write about everything, but rather about “what he or she brackets, what he or she chooses to attend to” (Eisner, 2002, p. 227).

The interpretive aspect explains what an occurrence signifies. In interpreting, a critic asks what various situations mean to stakeholders involved in the situation. Attention is focused on what actions mean in a social setting. Theories from the social sciences are useful in the interpretive aspect. An empathetic participation (Eisner, 1976) in the life of others is required to interpret meanings of rules, modes, and structures encountered in education. Utilizing various concepts and theories, the educational critic makes sense of observable facts and seeks to explain deep structure of the social events these facts appear in (Eisner, 2002).

The evaluative aspect applies a judgment of educational value (Eisner, 1976). Whereas the interpretive aspect is closely related to the social sciences, the evaluative aspect is unique in seeking to improve the educational process through criticism. Eisner (2002) defines *education* as different from schooling, learning or socialization because “education implies some personal and social good” (p. 231). By evaluating, a critic determines how well the purposes of education are being accomplished. In educational



criticism, these value judgments are based on knowledge of history and philosophy of education as well as practical experience. A meaningful evaluation can be a vital link between educators, policy makers, and the public. One role of a critic is to inform and teach. Eisner explains that the public will often interpret and evaluate quantitative phenomena in education, such as low test scores, to be proof of poor-quality schooling. The educational critic is a professional who can interpret the complexity of educational events and apply multiple perspectives in making judgments.

The thematic aspect of educational criticism is closely related to each of the other aspects. Distilling the major ideas and conclusions, the critic summarizes and illuminates larger lessons of a particular educational criticism (Eisner, 2002). Generalizations can be drawn which can guide teaching practices.

In addition to Eisner's educational connoisseurship and educational criticism, I analyzed data through the lens of relational aesthetics. Bourriaud's (2002) theory of relational aesthetics suggests a shift in focus from art objects to artfully designed social circumstances and exchanges between people. Kyle Chayka (2011) explains "the goal of most relational aesthetics art is to create a social circumstance; the viewer experience of the constructed social environment becomes the art" (para. 5). Relational aesthetics as a mode for my educational criticism enabled me to look at the social aspects of artmaking more deeply, and the social moments shared between diverse community members.

The method of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism and the theory of relational aesthetics allowed me to arrive at answers for my thesis question, "How does art act as an invitation for refugee families to connect with the broader community?" In Chapters IV and V, I have examined and explained data in terms of each

of the aspects of educational criticism. Eisner's framework was a good match for my question because it allowed me to draw attention to what was significant in the phenomena I observed. I subsequently evaluated data in terms of educational value. I focused on the descriptive and the interpretive aspect in Chapter IV of this thesis, and conclusions in Chapter V were arrived at through the evaluative and thematic aspects. Eisner (2002) states, "What is rendered by someone working as an educational critic will depend on his or her purposes as well as the kinds of maps, models and theories being used" (p. 220). For the purpose of learning more about how people feel invited, I approached the data through the theory of relational aesthetics. When considering the social or relational characteristics of art, attention to the events of artmaking and actions of participants become the significant aspects (Delaney, 2014). Although my thesis data included artifacts in the form of artworks made by children, the focus was not on the objects themselves, but rather on the stories of the creators and the social experience the art objects sparked. Rachel Delaney states, "When we move our focus from the objects to the stories, we come to realize that objects and things are often more interesting when they are supporting cast members of the ideas and not the lead performers" (p. 26).

### **Procedure**

I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my research project (see Appendix A). The data were collected over a period of approximately ten weeks beginning in the fall of 2017 and culminated with an art exhibit of student work in January of 2018. I collected the data in two phases. The first phase occurred in the preschool classroom at the refugee center. Parent and child interviews were also conducted at the refugee center. The second phase of data collection occurred during the

public art exhibition of student artwork at the Centennial Park Public Library in Greeley, Colorado. All data were analyzed through the method of educational criticism, using concepts from relational aesthetics theory as tools.

### **Participants**

I collected data as a teacher-researcher in the preschool classroom. The primary participants of the study were fifteen preschool children aged two to six years old and six parents. Students generated some data in the form of art pieces. These artifacts were displayed in the art exhibit at the Centennial Park Library. Parents of fifteen refugee students signed consent forms to allow their children to participate in the study and the children agreed to participate by verbal consent per IRB protocol. Some students in the study were siblings. Of eleven families who were included the study, six families were interviewed with varying degrees of participation because of time constraints or language barriers. The refugee center provided translators to help recruit participants who explained the study in my behalf. Translators assisted with interviews and other communication. Four translators speaking Rohingya, Burmese, Tigrinya, and Somali assisted in data collection. All translators were English learners. The families in the study were refugees from the nations of Myanmar, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and DRC. Although it is difficult to condense hundreds of years of bizarre colonization and horrific human rights violations into one brief chapter section, I provide here a brief summary of each of these countries as context for the research. It was important for me as a researcher to understand what participants may have experienced in their home countries in order to know whether and how the artmaking became an invitation to them.

## Myanmar

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2018a) has designated the Rohingya refugee crisis as an emergency. Between August 2017 and January 2018, over 647,000 Rohingya refugees escaped Myanmar and flooded into Bangladesh. Most refugees reaching Bangladesh were women and children, including newborns. Rohingya refugees often walked through the jungle and mountains for days or risked dangerous sea voyages across the Bay of Bengal to escape ethnic genocide at the hands of anti-Muslim militia groups and the Myanmar Military. Muslim communities scattered throughout Myanmar have lived peacefully with the Buddhist majority for centuries. However, the largest of these communities, the Rohingya, live in a small, resource-rich area of the country on the Indian Ocean coast bordering Bangladesh (Rieffel, 2017). In addition, anti-Muslim sentiments among the Buddhist majority fueled a conflicting narrative about the origins of the Rohingya people and their right to live in Myanmar. Many Rohingya have lived in Myanmar for centuries, but during British rule from the 1870s to 1948, more Muslims immigrated to Myanmar from Bangladesh, and it was not clear how many settled in the Rakhine state after Burma's independence. Muslim ethnic minorities throughout Myanmar have been stateless people, without rights of citizenship in modern Myanmar. The concentration of Rohingya Muslims in the Rakhine area was seen as a threat to the Buddhist majority, who feared the Rohingya would outbreed them and become the country's only Muslim-majority state. Serious atrocities occurred starting in 2012, prompting hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee to dismal refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh (Rieffel, 2017). Remarkably, a free and fair election in 2015 was won by the National League for Democracy led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who had

been under house arrest by the country's military rulers for the previous 25 years. The top priority of Daw Suu's government was to bring peace to Myanmar. Yet ethnic genocide continued as a threat to the peace processes she attempted to set in motion (Rieffel, 2017).

Another group of Burmese refugees, the Karenni, fled the country during the 1990s-2000s during persecution by the military regime in Burma (Cardozo, Talley, Burton & Crawford, 2004). 'Karenni' is a collective term constructed during the colonial period to designate a group of ethnic minorities that speak related Tibeto-Burman languages. The ancestors of Karenni people are believed to have migrated from Central Asia to Tibet and China before settling in the region of the Kayah State of Burma during the first millennium BCE. During the British colonial era, they were dealt with as a nation or state separate from Burmese people. When Burma gained independence, fierce separatist movements fueled military action against the Karenni over ensuing decades (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Refugee families included in my study were from both the Rohingya and Karenni ethnic minority groups. One family identified as Burmese without specifying a particular ethnicity.

### **The Democratic Republic of the Congo**

DRC experienced a violent civil war from 1997 to 2003 which claimed up to six million lives. Other African countries were drawn into this war, and some observers have called it "Africa's World War" (BBC, 2017, para. 1). Continued fighting along the Rwandan border between the Congolese army, Rwandan forces, and rebel groups was an ongoing source of violence. Other instances of violent outbreaks plagued the nation as armed groups fought among themselves and with the government in attempts to gain control of regions loaded with mineral wealth (Egerstrom, 2016; BBC, 2017). The

UNHCR (2018b) classified the refugee crisis as an emergency, stating “Fresh waves of unrest in the DRC have displaced over 1.9 million people since January 2017 – chiefly in the Kasai, Tanganyika, and Kivu regions” (para. 1). Most refugees in this crisis were from historically persecuted ethnic groups such as the Banyamulenge, Hutu and Tutsi people. Conditions for Congolese refugees in camps of host countries were unsafe and unhealthy and refugees faced high rates of sexual and gender based violence.

Additionally, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia imposed restrictions blocking refugees from obtaining employment (Egerstrom, 2016). A family included in my study was from DRC.

### **Eritrea**

After Eritrea gained independence from Italian and English colonial control in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the United Nations established it as an autonomous region within the Ethiopian federation in 1952. Ethiopia attempted to fully annex Eritrea 10 years later, sparking a 30-year battle for independence ending in 1991 when Eritrean rebels defeated government forces (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2018a). The border between Eritrea and Ethiopia continues to be a conflict zone. Tens of thousands of soldiers were killed on both sides in a bloody war focused on the border town of Badme in 1998. A commission based in The Hague was established to deal with the conflict’s fallout. But very little was achieved in terms of definite border changes. In recent years, violence has continued along the border between Eritrean military and Ethiopia’s ruling coalition, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (Gaffey, 2016). Years of repeated droughts, dwindling agriculture resources and the compulsory conscription program prompted many refugees to flee the country. UNHCR Spokesperson Adrian Edwards (2014)

reported that in 2014, over 34,000 arrived in Italy by boat across the Mediterranean, making Eritreans the second largest group of asylum seekers, outnumbered only by Syrians. In its World Factbook, the CIA (2018a) identifies other sources contributing to the Eritrean diaspora, including the increase of human trafficking and kidnapping by Bedouins in the Sinai Desert, “where they are victims of organ harvesting, rape, extortion and torture” (para. 3). Refugee families from Eritrea were included in my thesis study.

### **Ethiopia**

Unlike other African countries, Ethiopia maintained its ancient monarchy and was free from colonial rule, with the exception of an Italian occupation from 1936-41. The emperor Haile Selassie was the final monarch, ruling from 1930 until deposed by the Derg military dictatorship in 1974. Although Ethiopia experienced subsequent military coups and widespread drought, for decades it claimed relative stability compared with neighboring countries Somalia, South Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti (Hussein, 2015). Ethiopia generally maintains open borders and hosts 855,000 refugees seeking protection (UNHCR, 2018c). However, Ethiopian citizens also face unfavorable living conditions. In recent years, border disputes with Eritrea erupted in violent clashes. Despite the relative stability of Ethiopia, erosion of political freedoms, human rights violations and ever-growing disillusionment have all prompted many Ethiopians to seek asylum as refugees. Many have left to escape violence among various ethnic groups (CIA, 2018b), or have left because Christian-Muslim relations have been increasingly strained due to religious-inspired violence (Hussein, 2015). Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned on February 15, 2018. For the previous two years, security forces killed hundreds of Oromo and Amharic people during numerous anti-government protests. The

government declared a state of emergency following Desalegn's resignation (Maasho, 2018). One Ethiopian family of the Oromo ethnic group was included in my study.

## **Somalia**

For nearly two and a half decades, armed conflict in Somalia was compounded by drought, famine, and natural disasters, posing severe risks to the most vulnerable citizens (UNHCR, 2018d). Since 1991 when President Murad Siad Barre fled the country to escape the power struggle between two warring clans, Somalia has lacked stable government. Islamist group Al-Shabaab is influential in Somalia and gained support by promising safety and security to citizens. However, continued violence, chaos and denial of Western aid eroded Al-Shabaab's credibility (Jacobsen, 2017). The group's presence in Somalia contributed heavily to the refugee crisis. The world's largest refugee camp, a rambling city made of mud and sticks called Dadaab in northeastern Kenya has hosted over a half million people fleeing Somalia's civil war. As wealthy nations accepted fewer refugees through the formal United Nations resettlement program, the few refugees who could afford it pursued the illegal journey to Europe. But the vast majority lived permanently in Dadaab (Rawlence, 2015). A family from Somalia was included in this study.

In addition to preschool refugee students and their families, adult participants of the broader community were also included in this study. During the art exhibit, thirty-six adult participants voluntarily completed a questionnaire in accordance with IRB procedure. Centennial Park Library staff assisted with the study by providing not only space for the art exhibit, but also food, live music and a button-making activity for children.



### **Data Collection**

In order to answer my research question, “How does artmaking act as an invitation for refugee preschool students and their families to connect with the broader community?” I collected several different types of data. I collected verbal and art-based narratives generated by preschool children. I kept a research journal during class time to record children’s responses to artmaking including storytelling and conversations. My research journal spanned the length of the study, with the purpose of observing change over time. I collected artifacts in the form of art pieces as data and also displayed these at the exhibit.

My weekly art lesson designs, developed in accordance with Colorado Visual Arts Standards for preschool, provided not only opportunity for exploration of art materials and processes, but also for exploration of the affective content important to my question. Students responded to prompts such as, “what makes you happy?”, “what makes you sad?” and “what makes you laugh?” By examining children’s verbal and art narratives, I planned to gather information on how artmaking would invite children to connect with the school and the larger community and to participate as stakeholders in unfamiliar contexts.

I also conducted interviews with parents and children (see Appendix B). I interviewed six parents and recorded responses on paper and in digital audio. Although all parents had signed consent for audio-visual recordings, four of the families requested not to be recorded at the time of the interviews. In those cases, I collected responses with written notes only. Translators assisted with some interviews, and in others participants spoke English well enough to answer questions without assistance. For some of the

languages spoken by participants, translation was unavailable, and English was used as a common language. One purpose of the interviews was to learn how art invited refugee children to participate and connect with others in an unfamiliar setting. Another purpose was to collect narratives to include with the art exhibit. I designed the exhibit with narratives displayed adjacent to the artworks as a relational aesthetic circumstance to be experienced by refugee families and others from the broader community—an invitation for dialogue.

During the art exhibit, I collected data from thirty-six adults attending the exhibit on a survey questionnaire, included in Appendix C. The questions were designed to assist me in answering the research question by discovering what meaning attendees made of the exhibit.

### **Data Analysis**

Notes taken during classroom observation were transcribed into a journal of collected notes. I examined notes for trends in participant artmaking and for narrative themes relevant to my research question. In addition to analyzing research journal notes, I examined interviews for similarities and differences in the responses of each participant. Responses were examined for themes relating to invitations and connectedness. I summarized some responses to biographical questions as artist stories which were displayed with artworks at the art exhibit. I examined results of the art exhibit questionnaires to find similarities and differences in perceptions of refugee integration in the broader community, and to learn how participants perceived the effects of an art exhibit as a community outreach event.

I compiled noteworthy data into tables according to similar sources: a. observation notes, b. artwork and images, c. interviews with families, d. art exhibit questionnaire, and e. art show observation notes. On the tables, within and between categories, I color-coded data for frequently occurring topics relating to invitation in artmaking. The topics I identified were: a. expression, b. choice, c. materials and processes, d. collaboration, e. conversation and social interaction in the classroom, f. engagement, g. conversation and social interactions between adults, h. connection with learning, i. connection between school and home, j. connection with community, k. collaboration between institutions. This analysis of the data provided means to draw conclusions from the research. All data were approached using the method of educational criticism, with Chapter IV of my thesis focusing on organizing data from the above topics under the descriptive and interpretive aspects of the study and Chapter V comprising the evaluative and thematic aspects.

By examining children's verbal and art narratives, I learned how artmaking invited children to connect with the school and the larger community and to participate as stakeholders in unfamiliar contexts. My data yielded similar results to studies by other researchers (Rah et al., 2009) who learned that school participation is an access point for students and families to connect with the larger community.

In this research, the dual approach of physical and emotional exploration in artmaking is similar to that of researchers Brunick (1999), McArdle and Spina (2007), and Cumming and Visser (2009) who found that processes of artmaking provide a means to engage, and invite refugee children to participate despite language and cultural barriers. My data collection and analysis methods were selected to help me expand and elaborate

on these previous findings. The design of my study also built on the work of researchers Brown and Bousalis (2017), Szente et al. (2006), Hoot (2011), McArdle and Spina (2007), and Maagerø and Sunde (2016) who argued that artmaking is an opportunity for refugee children to be heard, to discover, and to tell about experiences and emotions.

In addition, like researchers Irwin et al. (2006) I found that relational art experiences support cultural pluralism and combat stereotypes. In my study, artworks and the collected narratives served as a medium for conversation during the exhibit between people who may not have otherwise come together. A unique contribution of my research is that the first phase of research was conducted at a specialized preschool in a refugee center. Most of the preschool children were unable to use a common language to communicate with each other or with teachers and other adults in the preschool. The majority of existing research about refugee students interprets the refugee student experience in refugee camp schools or in an integrated public school setting. Some new insights from my research may reflect our unique school setting and be useful and applicable for educators in similar host-country contexts.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations arose during the course of the study. Initially, my research was designed to follow specific students and families over the course of a ten week period in order to observe any growth or changes in participants. I planned to interview families once at the beginning of the study and again at the end of the study. However, it took several weeks to recruit participants for the study, and some participants joined the study only during the last weeks. During the fall semester of 2017, the refugee center registered adult students and their preschool children on a rolling basis and attendance was often

sporadic. Some participants who were recruited and interviewed during the first weeks of the study either stopped attending preschool or did not attend on days when I was there for art lessons. After learning about the unpredictability of attendance, I combined questions from both interviews, assuming I might only have one opportunity to interview participants.

Another limitation of my study was the language gap. Although the refugee center graciously provided access to translators, availability of both translators and participants was difficult to arrange. Ali, the Rohingya translator, went to Bangladesh shortly after the beginning of the study in order to find his wife and children. Some of the translators spoke several languages, but only one, Ali, spoke Rohingya. He assisted participants with consent forms, but was absent during the majority of the study. A newspaper reported that Ali came to the United States as a refugee after being extorted and tortured by police (Brasch, 2017) but had to leave his wife and children behind. After the ethnic genocide escalated in Myanmar during 2017, his family fled Myanmar for Bangladesh. During much of the fall of 2017, Ali was in Bangladesh looking for his family and then working with advocate groups to arrange application for asylum in the United States.

Ali's story was not unique for people in the refugee center community. With various family members and friends still in harm's way, the lives of refugees involved in the study were often unpredictable. These circumstances affected participants' abilities to engage regularly in activities of the CCR community, including but not limited to my research study.

Additionally, cultural differences posed limitations for my study. When I invited families to attend the art exhibition, many expressed hesitation or indicated that they

didn't have time. Dara Gutierrez, assistant director for the CCR, indicated that students and their families often did not attend community events or after school extracurricular activities that other school families might typically attend (Personal communication, October 2017). This assertion was confirmed by at least one of the children in the study, Arsema, who spoke fluent English. She told me that she wanted to see her artwork displayed at the library, but expressed doubts about her attendance at the event, as recorded in my field notes, "But I don't go there." Only two of the six families included in interviews attended the art exhibit. However, others from the refugee community attended, which allowed for interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds.

Much of what I analyzed included anecdotal data from personal observation, which is appropriate for a qualitative study. However, such self-sourced observations posed limitations to generalizability. When possible, I have used digital audio recordings to support the data of my research journal. In addition, some quantitative data from the questionnaire added trustworthiness to results from my observations.

### **Conclusions**

To answer my research question "How does art act as an invitation for refugee families to connect with the broader community," I examined and explained data in terms of each of the aspects of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism in Chapter IV, Analysis. Observations, interviews, conversations, artifacts in the form of artworks produced by children, and questionnaires were the primary data sources of my thesis study. In Chapter IV I have considered the data in terms of the descriptive and interpretive aspects of educational criticism, while in Chapter V I have derived evaluative

and thematic aspects from the data. Although some of my results were similar to those of other researchers, my question helped me focus specifically on how and why art acted as an invitation for refugee families to connect with the broader community.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

To answer my research question—How does artmaking act as an invitation for refugee preschool students and their families to connect with the broader community—I arranged data analysis based on the three sub-questions which I designed to provide specific context on what it means for refugees to feel invited. First, I analyzed data to learn how artmaking in the classroom invited participation in unfamiliar contexts. Next, I examined what could be learned from the verbal and art-based narratives of refugee children, by considering how artmaking invited expression and communication. Finally, I analyzed data to discover how art acts as an invitation for dialogue between new refugee residents and established area residents. In this chapter I have organized these results by using the descriptive aspect of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism to present supportive data. Then, I have used the interpretive aspect of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism to explain what is signified by the relevant data.

#### **Artmaking in the Classroom Invited Participation in Unfamiliar Contexts**

##### **Teachers Invited Trust with Process and Materials**

**Description.** On September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Dehab came to class for the first time. The three year-old from Eritrea spoke Tigrinya at home with his family, but did not have



verbal English speaking skills. His mother, Madihah, spent a few minutes at the classroom door with Dehab in her arms, filling out registration forms. Dehab appeared reluctant to leave his mother's arms, despite invitations from Allison, the preschool teacher. Playfully improvising a game of hide and seek with a stuffed bear as a prop, Allison attempted to coax Dehab into the room. He seemed almost convinced, so his mom set him down and dashed upstairs to her English class. Allison closed the classroom door, eliminating Dehab's chances to run after his mom. He immediately started crying and stood still in one spot, unwilling to explore the toys, dress-ups, books and play spaces of the new environment. The refugee center was housed in several rented rooms of a church in an urban setting. The church had been built originally in 1870, but has been extensively remodeled or rebuilt twice since ("First Methodist", n.d.). The preschool for refugee children was in a large room on the second floor. The room had been designed as a children's nursery decades ago, with half of the room carpeted in a durable muted brown for active play, while the other half of the room was covered with aged pale-green floor tiles. Eating and artmaking occurred in the tiled portion of the room. Conveniently, a small child-sized bathroom and a prep room with a sink were both attached to the main preschool room. Opposite the half-door where parents and children entered the room was a bank of large windows, starting halfway up the wall. Although the windows were old, they could be opened on hot days, allowing air to circulate in the stuffy room. Despite the dated fixtures and features of the room, natural sunlight from the windows created a cheery atmosphere for play and learning.

On the first day Dehab came to class, this environment was new, his situation was new, and the people he encountered were all new. He spoke a different language from

others in the room. His apparent fear and reluctance to participate was not uncommon or unexpected among new preschool students. On this first day Dehab came to class, I had planned an open-ended artmaking experience that was more play- than product-oriented. As Dehab cried by the doorway, I set out squeeze bottles of homemade puffy paint on the large semi-circle table which was the gathering spot for most of the art lessons. The other children in the classroom came to the table, and after a short two-minute demonstration, they were squeezing and dribbling the brightly-hued salt-and-flour concoction in random squiggles and puddles. The delighted giggles from the table interested Dehab, and I asked Allison to inch towards the table as he tightly gripped her hand. When they arrived, Dehab refused to sit, but he watched the artmaking in progress, apparently fascinated by the children making swirls and bright splashes of color with their squeeze bottles. I offered him a blue bottle, but he turned away, and appeared to be too frightened by his new circumstances to join in the fun. I suggested that Allison take the bottle and demonstrate the squeezing and dripping action. Dehab watched while standing closely to Allison at the table. After a few dribbles, she put the bottle down and Dehab grabbed her hand, directing her to pick up the blue squeeze bottle. Allison followed his lead, and while Dehab still had his hand over hers, she squeezed the blue paint on the paper. He directed her again to grab another bottle, and guided her hand as she squeezed a different color next to the blue. He repeated the process several times, without crying and apparently having been distracted from his fearful dilemma of being dropped off in an unfamiliar environment with strangers speaking a strange language.

This was not the only such occurrence with Dehab. During two additional lessons, I observed how the art materials and processes appeared to change his demeanor. For one

lesson, I prompted children to think of what made them laugh. Some of the older children were able to respond to the prompt in drawings made of oil pastels. Dehab was distressed when his mother left the room, and stood away from the group of children making art, but quietly watched as others created swaths of saturated colors in overlapping scribbles and shapes. One of the girls in the group had used up her pastel down to the paper wrapper, and I demonstrated how to peel away a bit of the paper to expose more pastel for use. Dehab came to stand by the table, and carefully watched the paper spiral away from the pastel as I peeled. When I offered him a pastel and some paper he pushed it back to me. Meanwhile, another child needed help peeling the paper wrapper to gain more pastel. Dehab leaned toward the pastel as I peeled, and I realized that it was the action of the peeling that was captivating his attention. I passed him another pastel, and he passed it back to me. Instead of setting the pastel down, I peeled a little paper from the edge and passed it back to him. He made a few marks with it and set it down. We repeated this exchange a few times, and it was apparent that he was more interested in peeling the paper from the pastel than making marks with it. The art materials fascinated him in a very specific way that had to be discovered before he could feel invited to participate in activity.

After this lesson, Dehab's attendance dropped off. I didn't see him again until toward the end of the study. On that day, we were making marbled paper with shaving cream and food coloring. When he arrived, I was at the table across the room, mounding shaving cream into foil baking pans. The other children were laughing and tentatively poking the fluffy white piles while squeezing drops of color onto the surface. Allison (the preschool teacher) reminded me that Dehab might not come to the table on his own.

However, the mounds of shaving cream and swirls of color invited him to the table immediately without any adult intervention. The materials were so exciting that Dehab forgot his fears and appeared to trust his position in the environment. He willingly played with the materials and created several prints (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Dehab's shaving cream and food coloring project.

Other students also followed a similar pattern of being reluctant and fearful of participating in the classroom, but then overcoming reservations when they began working with art materials. In Table 2 I provide an overview of instances when teachers used art materials and processes to help students feel invited in similar ways.

Table 2

*Students for whom teachers used art materials and processes as invitations*

Name	Dates	Evidence student felt uninvited	Teachers used materials to invite	Response to invitation
Liliana	10/9/17	Mom had to stay with her during beginning of art activity.	Trading dot paint markers back and forth with teacher in playful game.	Mom could leave classroom. Liliana created art for 40 minutes.
Liliana	10/25/17	Cried when mom left.	Opportunity to work at the easel.	Stopped crying, created paintings at easel.
Liliana	12/13/17	Appeared frightened when mom left, would not independently come to the art center.	Took shaving cream and food color to her and demonstrated marbling technique.	Came to the art center to use shaving cream and food colors.
Faisal	10/18/17	Wandered independently while others engaged in artmaking.	Offered an oil pastel when he came to stand by the artmaking.	Engaged in artmaking at the art center with other children.
Faisal	10/25/17	Wandered independently while others engaged in artmaking.	Opportunity to work at easel.	Engaged in artmaking at the easel independently and collaboratively.
Khadra	11/8/17	Cried and banged on the door when mom left.	Brought paint, brush and clay to her location by the door.	Stopped crying while squeezing paint from the container. Came to art center to join the group.
Liang	11/8/17	Hid in bookshelves and cried when dad left.	Painting together when dad came back to intervene.	Liang became calm enough for dad to leave the room again.

Conversations with other adult stakeholders in the classroom also confirmed the phenomena with Dehab and the other students in Table 2. On the date that both Khadra and Liang experienced fear or reluctance, Allison the preschool teacher and Karen an

adult classroom volunteer, both commented that art activity often seemed to compel distressed children into happier classroom participation. Additionally, on the first day of the new semester, Emma the preschool coordinator commented on the choice of material for the art project as being perfect for drawing students into calm participation when the beginning of the class had been a distressed frenzy for many of them.

**Interpretation.** The teacher's overture with the blue paint bottle was a successful invitation to Dehab. Materials and processes of artmaking were key factors in helping refugee students feel invited. I observed Dehab and other children who appeared distressed and I negotiated pathways for their participation by making invitations with materials and processes. In doing so, I was a facilitator of a relational aesthetics experience for the children. Relational aesthetics proposes that an artist designs and invites social exchange, with the actions of the participants becoming the artful result of the process. A school setting is already designed as a social experience. Yet for preschool children in the refugee community, participation in this social situation may be daunting because of differences in languages and culture. For example, Dehab spoke no English and had no language in common with anyone in the classroom on the first day he came to class. In approaching the classroom as a site for a relational aesthetic experience, each child was viewed as a participant in a social circumstance. The attractive qualities of art materials and processes made reluctant children feel invited to participate in the unfamiliar context of a traditional classroom setting. Dehab appeared frightened and reluctant to enter the classroom, but engaging with paint allowed him to forget his worries and become an active player in the unfamiliar environment. Focusing on process

rather than product in the art lessons was an invitation to explore and invent and to trust the safety of the new environment.

George Szekely's (2015) writing on art and play underscores the importance of "messy play" (p. 44). With materials that allow for pouring, spilling, dropping, and other experiments, students develop self-sufficiency as artists and feel safe because of classroom activity that encourages multiple outcomes. Art materials and processes which invited curiosity and play were the catalyst for engagement. I found myself thinking frequently about what kinds of materials would be more attractive than others—not in a purely visual or product-oriented sense, but rather in how the materials might be played with during the process of artmaking. Moreover, the materials alone were not sufficient without direct invitations and negotiations initiated by teachers, who assessed the situation carefully to discover what in the materials and processes might be perceived as inviting by the student.

### **Choice Invited Confidence and Engagement**

**Description.** Choice and flexibility in artmaking invited 3-year-old Samuel to engage in an unfamiliar classroom setting and to experience the sense of accomplishment associated with autonomy. His family was from the DRC, and like many other children in the classroom, Samuel was non-verbal in English. During an interview, his mother, Jelani, reported that Samuel was not yet speaking Swahili either (see Appendix B). To communicate, Samuel would use gestures, sometimes physically miming an action to represent a question or idea. For example, if he was thirsty, he would gain the attention of an adult by tapping them on the arm, then cup his hand as if he was holding a glass, and then pretend to drink. During an artmaking session in November, I presented the method

of creating a colorful fabric scroll with rolled strips of felt. Inspiration for this art activity came from artists and brothers Steven and William Ladd, who created *Scrollathon*, a unique social project. In the Ladds' project, children and people in diverse communities participated in group art works by creating tightly rolled scrolls to be placed together in a large composition ("Steven & William," n.d.). Many of the children in the refugee classroom completed their own scrolls enthusiastically, if messily. Samuel was not interested in creating a series of scrolls. He laid his strips flat to the backing board, attaching each one securely with dabs of white glue (see Figure 2). Each time he glued a strip down he smiled, raised his arms above his head, and pumped his fists in the air three times in a silent celebration. His completed art project included one scroll, yet the whole composition was a product of his autonomous choices to use the materials in the way that he wanted.



Figure 2. Samuel's self-directed art project.

Other children also exhibited confidence and motivation to learn and explore through choice in artmaking. In my data analysis, I compiled other instances from my observation journal when choice invited engagement and confidence (see Table 3).



Table 3

*Choice in artmaking invited engagement and confidence*

Date	Name	Description of autonomous choice	Result/Benefit
9/27/17	Casho	Used tips of squirt bottles to swirl puffy paints, used hands to mix colors.	Expressed surprise and delight with effects produced.
10/25/17	Faisal	Declined to paint at table but chose Easel painting.	Parallel play with other children in artmaking.
10/25/17	Liliana	Chose to paint at Easel.	Exhibited enhanced motivation and problem-solving by pushing a chair to the easel so she could use it.
11/1/17	Khadra	Used clay to create convex joined discs rather than demonstrated pinch pot.	Expressed confidence by stating, "I did it! I can!"
11/1/17	Liliana	Attached shells to clay rather than use texture tools.	Fear and reluctance apparently subsided during artmaking.
1/15/17	Samuel	Painted stencils rather than canvas.	Exhibited independent thinking and problem solving.
12/5/17	Samuel	Stacked dot paint markers to build. (Rather than paint.)	Student directed learning.

**Interpretation.** Samuel's freedom to choose what to do with the materials invited him to feel confident and accomplished. As the researcher, I had conflicted feelings about allowing children to have complete control over their creative processes because I knew I would be collecting samples for an art exhibit at the end of the research. On the one hand, I wanted children to have complete freedom to explore the transformative qualities of art materials, yet I also felt compelled to guide some artmaking into products that would visually appeal to viewers of the art exhibit. It was necessary for me to balance these two conflicting goals in order to allow students the freedom to experience autonomy, but also

to guide some students as they made products that would work well for display at the exhibition. When students are offered choice in artmaking, they experience confidence in their own decision making powers and thought processes. Samuel expressed his confidence in autonomous decision-making by silently cheering as he completed each stage of his art project. Art that is more about play and exploration than about a pre-determined product allows students to build confidence. George Szekely (2015) noted that play-based art will “allow a young artist to feel their power, use their own judgment, make decisions and act independently” (p. 158). For the young non-verbal artists in this preschool classroom, art activity emphasized their strengths in critical thinking and problem-solving.

### **Shared Spaces and Limited Material Invited Collaboration**

**Description.** Participation in the social aspects of a preschool setting is unique in a refugee preschool classroom. Because many of the students spoke different languages from each other and from the adult teachers and volunteers in the classroom, play, communication, and social exchange were not taken for granted. Additionally, these refugee students came from different cultural backgrounds. Artmaking in the classroom was an opportunity for them to come together and collaborate, bypassing the need for a common language or culture. Some of the artmaking activities were designed as group projects, such as friendship painting, an idea adapted from Tannis Longmore’s (2012) work. Large sheets of butcher paper or large canvases for painting invited students to work together on a common project. During one activity, small paint rollers and stencils of alphabet letters were available for children to experiment with. After I demonstrated

their use, collaborative exchanges based on the use of these tools occurred. Sometimes students elaborated on each other's mark-making by painting around it or next to stenciled letters, but other times by painting through and erasing the marks of another child.

During some art activities I provided the standing easel for students to use individually while other students worked at a project at the art center. Initially I guided students into taking separate turns while other children were at the table working on a different project. During the first session with the easel, Casho indicated she would like a turn. Casho had some English language skills. Her family is from Somalia, and her younger sister, Khadra, was also a student at the preschool. When Casho came to the easel, Khadra followed her and stood by, watching as Casho dipped the brush into the brown paint. Khadra seemed transfixed as Casho drew her brush across the paper, creating a swath of smooth color. Without any break in her painting activity, Casho called out, "Want to paint with me, my sister?" Khadra immediately came up beside Casho at the easel, took a brush and started painting. Remarkably, two other girls who were working at the table saw this collaboration between the sisters as an invitation for their own participation. Noushin, a three-year-old from the Rohingya group of Myanmar, and Beza, a two-year-old from Eritrea left the art center table, squeezed in between the two girls at the easel and began painting with them. The two newcomers at the easel did not speak English or another language in common. After a couple minutes, Casho complained that Khadra "took her brown," but she chose another color and continued to paint with the other girls. The spontaneous collaboration was prompted by limited access to desired materials, and by Casho's verbal invitation (which was comprehensible to

three other children, even if the actual words and grammar were not), and it ended only when it was time to clean up the art activity.

Other observed instances of artmaking inviting collaboration are catalogued in Table 4. I have indicated whether the collaboration was designed as part of the lesson, or if it was a spontaneous collaboration prompted by close proximity in a shared space, or a limited supply of desired materials. Additionally, I included the home language of the participant to indicate when collaboration occurred without common language and culture backgrounds.

Table 4

*Instances of art inviting collaboration*

Date	Name	Home Language	Description of Collaboration	Spontaneous	Designed by Teacher
10/9/17	Liliana	Rohingya	Painted together at the table to help Liliana feel prepared for separation from mom.	Yes	No
	Maw Moe (Mother)	Rohingya			
10/9/17	Amir Hassan Noushin Casho Khadra Arsema	Rohingya Rohingya Rohingya Somali Somali Tigrinya	Students created a large group painting on paper using tempera paints and paint dot markers.	No	Yes
10/18/17	Haniya	Rohingya	Seated next to each other, began to color on each other's papers.	Yes	No
	Noushin	Rohingya			
10/25/17	Faisal Khadra Haniya	Rohingya Somali Rohingya	Worked together at the easel on a single painting.	Yes	No
11/8/17	Khadra	Somali	Seated next to each other, painted on each other's paper.	Yes	No
	Liliana	Rohingya			
11/15/17	Liliana	Rohingya	Painted collaboratively on canvas with other artists. Average length of participation in the collaboration: 27 minutes.	No	Yes
	Arsema	Tigrinya			
	Bontu	Oromo			
	Samuel	Swahili			
11/29/17	Khadra	Somali	Khadra created scroll from strips of felt, gave it to Bontu, who added it to her composition.	Yes	No
	Bontu	Oromo			

**Interpretation.** Although I designed some art activities purposefully to invite collaborative acts, it was revealing to discover that the circumstances of artmaking in a classroom setting invited spontaneous collaboration. Even though spontaneous collaboration between Casho and Khadra may have been expected because they are siblings, their collaboration was unexpectedly expanded to include two other young artists of other language and cultural backgrounds. The single easel was a desirable instrument of play and exploration for all of these students, and they were willing to collaborate in order to share it. I only provided one easel for all of the children to use, and although I originally planned for children to use it one at a time, children were so intrigued by the easel that they were willing to share its use and collaborate. In addition to the limited supply of desirable tools and materials, close proximity while working on individual projects was a catalyst for collaboration. From the perspective of relational aesthetics, the communal act of creating artworks together was the core of the art experience, and any object produced was a mere byproduct of the sociality. Kyle Chayka (2011) explains that in terms of relational aesthetics, what happens between people in a designed social moment exceeds the quality of any physical art associated with the experience. The moments of social exchange in the refugee classroom were limited by language and possible cultural barriers. However, the act of creating artworks in close quarters increased the frequency of social exchange, with necessary sharing and turn-taking with desirable tools and materials. Social play was often restricted or strained by language barriers. However, artmaking invited playful collaboration and interaction between children. Even for those students who did not overtly collaborate with another child, coming together at the table to make art at the same time in close proximity was a

collaboration in parallel play, known to be a necessary developmental precursor to social play (McLeod, 2014).

### **Open-Ended Nature of Artmaking Invited Connection With Other Learning**

**Description.** One of the learning goals in the refugee classroom was for children to use verbal English language for communication. On several occasions, artmaking encouraged students' verbal language learning. The felt-scroll artmaking activity was particularly compelling for four-year-old Haniya. Her family is from the Rohingya group of Myanmar, and they speak Rohingya at home. To communicate during class, Haniya relied on gestures and body language. Because I only saw Haniya once a week during the art lesson, it seemed like a monumental breakthrough when she started spontaneously singing in English during the felt-scroll activity. Haniya watched intently while I rolled a fuchsia strip of felt together with a lemony-yellow strip, forming a tight scroll. During the demonstration, I repeated the word *roll* until the scroll was complete, and then narrated Haniya's actions as she began to roll two strips of felt together. Suddenly, Haniya enthusiastically started singing to describe her actions. While some of the words in her song were likely borrowed from a familiar favorite she had heard in class, she adapted the lyrics to include *roll, roll, roll* as a repeated refrain. As she rolled her felt strips and sang her song, I identified a few other words in her cheerful song such as *beep, run, and fast*, but she most clearly and emphatically sang *roll* as a confident way of naming what she was doing. She would often make eye contact with me as she sang, and I repeated *roll, roll, roll* to verify her language learning. It was thrilling to me since I had not heard her speak any English before. When she became disinterested in rolling the felt strips into

scrolls, the open-ended nature of the project allowed for other learning and play. Haniya laid two felt strips across her eyes as a makeshift mask and peeked at me through partially concealed eyes while giggling. Then she took the felt strips and balanced them on my face, indicating that I needed to experience her spontaneous mask design. I exclaimed my surprise and she was apparently delighted with our playful exchange.

I observed other connections to developmental learning prompted by artmaking throughout the course of the study. The combination of play and artmaking motivated non-verbal Samuel to engage in speaking. Artmaking activities often included exploration of a variety of toys and materials. I capitalized Samuel's fascination with a pump-handled spinning top by requesting him to repeat the word *spin* each time I pumped the handle. On another occasion, Arsema spontaneously arranged alphabet stencils in order to paint the letters of her name.

**Interpretation.** A motivating and engaging artmaking activity prompted Haniya to make meaning and to share her learning verbally. Teachers in the classroom created an environment conducive to play and exploration, which allowed Haniya to confidently express her language learning. In their artmaking activities and exploration as young learners, the refugee students relied on multi-modal literacies for making meaning. The interface of traditional linguistic modes of literacy with multi-modal forms including visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial patterns of meaning enables learners of diverse backgrounds to develop their abilities and interests (Kalantzis, Cope, Chan & Dalley-Trim, 2016). Young refugee students may accomplish more with attention to multi-modal literacies during artmaking than if they were required to do so with English language. As Kalantzis et al. (2016) indicated, “an ability to work across literacies in the plural opens



paths to social participation, ideally enabling learners from different cultural, social, gender and socio-economic backgrounds to make meaning and succeed” (p. 7).

### **Art Products Invited Dialogue and Connections Between School and Home**

**Description.** During interviews with parents and children, I included an open-ended question about artmaking at school. I simply asked parents and children to tell me about artmaking at school. I wanted to find out whether or not artmaking had a life beyond school. I wondered how the artmaking experiences impacted the children, and whether they shared these experiences with their families. In an interview with Semret, the mother of five-year-old Arsema, I learned that Arsema saved art pieces she made at school and talked about them to her parents (see Appendix B). Semret smiled broadly as she explained how Arsema would point to each figure in her artwork, and identify which family member each represented. The value Arsema placed on these self-created artifacts of aesthetic experience was also evident in a conversation I had with her. I asked her if she would like to have her art pieces displayed at the public library. Her eyes fluttered wide in surprise and excitement and she seemed thrilled by this opportunity. “Yes!” she shouted, but then quickly added with a note of disappointment, “but I don’t go there.” Arsema placed value on the art works she created and wanted to share them at home and beyond. Intriguingly, her comments also hinted at the challenges of bringing diverse groups together in a broader community setting.

Four of the six families I interviewed also identified connections made between school and home through artworks (see Figure 3). It was surprising to learn that Liliana,

who is mostly non-verbal at school, would use her artwork at home to practice color names in English with her mother.

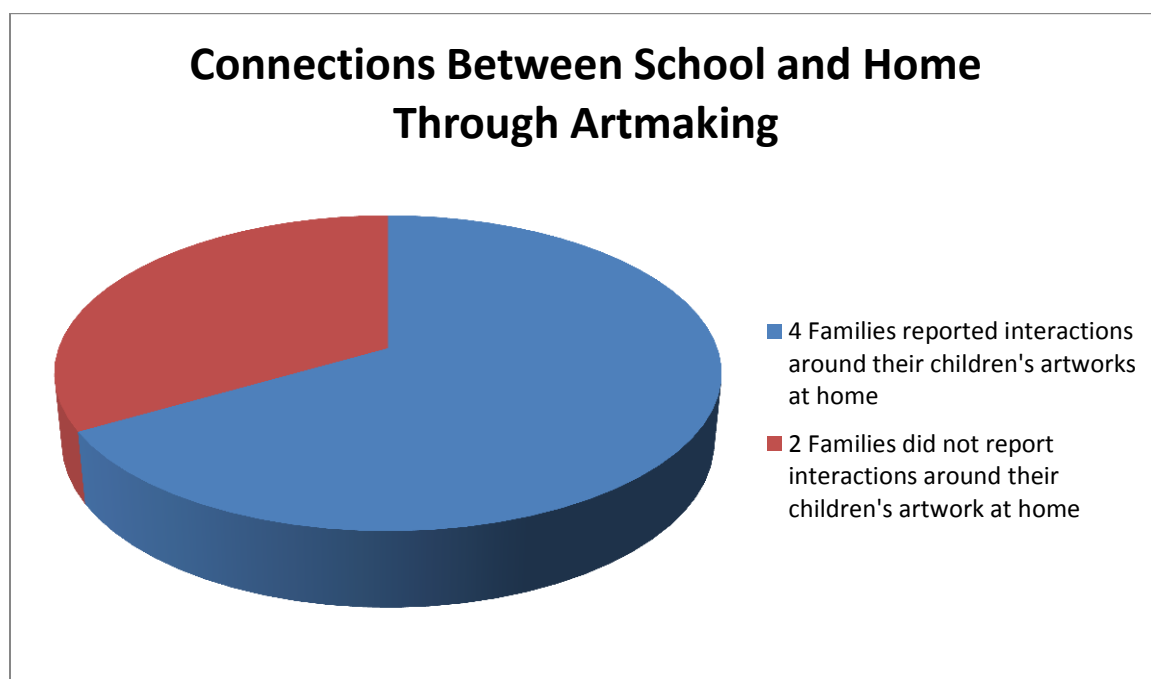


Figure 3. Connections between school and home through artmaking. Interviews revealed students made connections between home and school through art.

As a researcher and invested stakeholder in the refugee center community, I observed how the art products themselves created reasons and means to learn more about the students, their families and cultures. I found it particularly challenging to extend invitations for refugee families to attend the art exhibit at the public library. The administrators, English teachers and translators at the refugee center all collaborated with me and other teachers in the preschool classroom to invite and encourage families to attend the opening reception event. Paper invitations, provided by the library, were given to each family along with an individual verbal invitation from preschool staff. English teachers announced the event in each adult English language classroom. A few days before the event, Selassie, a Tigrinya translator, explained that many students, translators,

and teachers from the center planned to meet beforehand and come to the event together. The migrant and refugee services coordinator from the district BOCES office contacted family case workers and arranged for rides. However, despite all these efforts, I discovered that there was still a linguistic or cultural disconnect from the idea of invitation to a public event. Just a few days before the reception, I asked Suleekho, the mother of Casho and Khadra, if her family planned to attend the reception. When she looked confused, I showed her the invitation and explained how Casho and Khadra's artwork would be displayed at the library. Suleekho said that she didn't think she would be able to come because she was very busy. I suspected that she didn't understand what the event was for, and that perhaps nothing that had happened so far felt inviting to her. I tried to think of different ways to explain the invitation, and included the idea that others from the refugee center planned to come, that there would be free food and drinks and fun activities for the children. Suddenly, she looked at me with a glimmer of apparent understanding and asked me if it was a *celebration*. Relieved, I confirmed that it was a celebration. Then Suleekho said she said she would try to attend with her children.

**Interpretation.** The art pieces Arsema produced at school provided a point of dialogue for her family, connecting the new context of school with the familiar context of home. While creating art work, Arsema's aesthetic experience included personal expression and meaning making. In addition to Arsema's experience, four of the six families interviewed reported that their children saved artworks made at school and brought them home. Some children used those pieces as prompts for discussing identity, expression and learning. The questions I used were typically open-ended, so it is possible all of the children discussed artworks at home but did not report it. For me as a teacher in

the classroom, talking about art, the research study and the art exhibit with families also offered opportunities to share experience and cultural understandings. I learned more about the family backgrounds of students with limited means of verbal expression. While extending an invitation to Suleekho, it was apparent that an oral invitation with opportunities to clarify the event was more successful than a formal paper invitation. The idea had to be talked around extensively before the concept Suleekho found inviting could be discovered. During the course of the study, both Murad the Somali translator and Ali the Rohingya translator emphasized the need for oral rather than written translations, explaining that many of the refugees were not literate in their own languages. This finding resonated with research results of Rah et al. (2009) who indicated when refugees come from pre-literate cultures, verbal forms of communications are more successful than written forms. The artworks, the organized art exhibit, and the structures for data collection (such as interviews) provided opportunities for connecting home and school.

### **Verbal and Art-based Narratives of Refugee Students Invited Expression**

As a sub-question for my research, I asked *what can be learned from the verbal and art-based narratives of refugee children*, with the purpose of discovering how art acts as an invitation. Some of the data I analyzed emphasized children who were non-verbal in English, and most of these children did not respond to verbal prompts in artmaking. Additionally, when considering Lowenfeld's (1947) stages of artistic development, the majority of the preschool children at the refugee center reflected age-appropriate qualities found in the *scribble stage*, where mark-making ranges from uncontrolled markings to the exploration and naming of controlled repetitions of various

forms and scribbles. Because many of the children's interests and development fit into the scribble stage, most of the artmaking during the study emphasized process and exploration of materials in mark-making and play. However, the artmaking of older students at the refugee center fit into the next developmental phase, the *pre-schematic stage*, marked by circular images with lines seeming to suggest human or animal figures. Visual ideas are developed during this phase, and children have started to use identifiable representation in their artmaking. For these older students in my study who also had facility with English language, I introduced verbal prompts for artmaking based on generalized human emotions, with the purpose of discovering what could be learned from children's expressive artmaking.

**Description.** Inspired by the research of Maagerø and Sunde (2016), I instructed children on several occasions to create a painting or drawing about what made them happy, what made them laugh, and what made them scared. In response to what made her happy, Arsema painted a picture of her house, narrating her ideas as she painted. "This is my house," she said as she carefully dappled black paint in the top third of a tall pink rectangle, creating recognizable shapes of house and roof. Next she quickly painted a green, yellow, and brown small arched form next to the house, declaring, "and this is a little house" (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Arsema's house painting. This painting was created in response to "What makes you happy?"

Several other students used emotions indicated in the prompts as starting points for their own artwork. Haniya and Arsema both created funny faces in response to the prompt *what makes you laugh?* Khadra painted what she defined as a scary kitty in response to the prompt *what makes you scared*. Beyond this personal expression in the physical art pieces, I observed how children used the prompts and the artmaking as starting points for verbal narratives. The most sustained and detailed storytelling I heard from children during the length of the study occurred because of the artmaking prompts. On the day I presented the prompt *what makes you scared* there were only four children attending class. The reduced attendance contributed to a calm, intimate atmosphere, perfect for sharing verbal narratives. I started a conversation by asking children to raise their hands if they had ever been afraid during a scary movie, or in the dark, or from

something in their dreams. Not only did children seem riveted by this opportunity to raise their hands in affirmation, but they also seemed to be thinking of what was scary to them personally. An avalanche of storytelling ensued. Arsema reported that she and her friend Betsey were playing with pretend spiders, and they were scared. Khadra's story was imaginative. She began by shouting "I'm scared!" Then said she was scared about a big vampire. Khadra paused dramatically, and her eyes widened as she looked at the other children and teachers gathered around the table. When she had the full attention of her audience, she delivered the fatal ending of her story, claiming that the vampire ate her. She pointed to the corner of her mouth, stating, "He has blood right here." The other children squirmed and laughed, but Arsema quickly shifted the conversation to a more somber tone. She quietly and slowly spoke, confessing that if her mom told her to stay alone in the house in the dark, she would be scared. Arsema explained that one time when she woke up, she thought she was alone in the house and she couldn't find her parents. She looked everywhere but she couldn't find them. The tension in Arsema's voice melted as she ended her story. Luckily, she thought to check the laundry room and that is where she found her dad.

**Interpretation.** In responding to the verbal prompt *what makes you happy*, Arsema expressed her developing values and identity. The painting she created was not just a pictorial representation of her house, but was also the expression of the emotion, happiness, she associated with her house. For Arsema and others, the prompts drew out expressions of emotions such as happiness or fear. Responses to these direct verbal invitations included not only the use of these emotions in their art, but also verbalized narratives. The artmaking and the verbal narratives were not merely responses to an

assignment, but rather were acts of self-expression. By accepting the prompts, children demonstrated they felt invited and belonged in the artmaking and storytelling community of the classroom. The narratives were crucial in creating relatedness among students and between adults and students in the classroom. As students expressed their identities and values through narrative, I learned more about who they were. Additionally, when these artworks and narratives were displayed in a public art exhibit at the public library, individuals in the broader Northern Colorado community learned more about the refugee children in their neighborhoods.

### **Art as an Invitation for Dialogue Between New Refugee Residents and Established Area Residents**

Encouraging cultural pluralism and understanding between diverse people was one of the goals of this thesis research. A sub-question of this study was to learn *how products of artmaking acted as an invitation for dialogue* between new refugee residents and the broader community. I proposed that an exhibit displaying art produced by the refugee children would bring people of diverse communities together at a social event, with cross-cultural sharing as a result.

#### **An Invitation for Social Exchange**

**Description.** The exhibit of artwork with accompanying biographical stories about refugee families was put on display at the Centennial Park Library from January 18-February 23, 2017. I collaborated with the library staff to organize an opening reception for the art exhibit. Approximately 80 art pieces were exhibited, and six family stories were interspersed among the art (see Figures 5 and 6). The library provided food and drinks familiar to refugee families from Southeast Asia and Africa, including *injera*



flatbread ordered from Najah, a local East-African restaurant. A string duo was hired to provide music for the evening. The librarians also planned a button-making activity for kids. The phrase *the library is for everyone!* was translated into Somali and Burmese and printed on labels for button-making.



Figure 5. A partial view of the art exhibit. The exhibit, *Art as Invitation*, was shown at a local branch of the public library.



Figure 6. Preparing for the art exhibit reception.

Approximately 70 people attended the opening reception. The attendees included several refugee families. Some families of the young artists came, but it was a small percentage (see Figure 7). Translators who were also refugees or asylum seekers themselves from DRC, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Myanmar were present. Beyond the refugee community, attendees included library or refugee center staff, students and professors affiliated with University of Northern Colorado, friends and family of those present, interested members of the community and random library patrons. A questionnaire designed to learn more about reactions to the art exhibit was made available for voluntary participation.

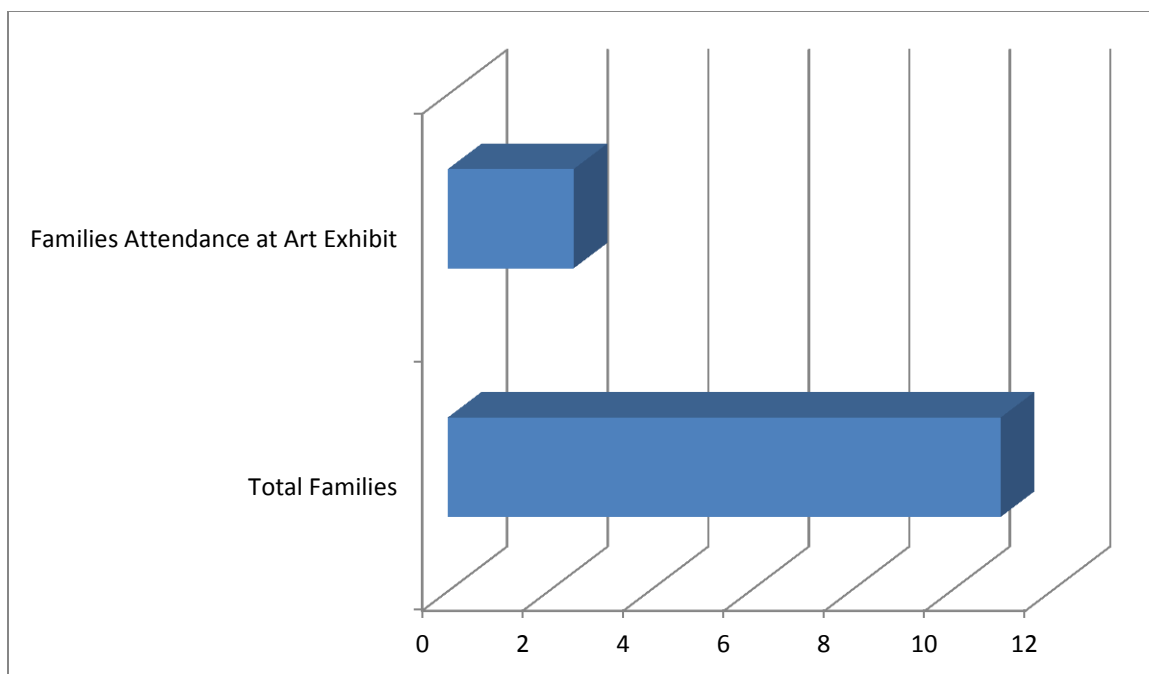


Figure 7. Number of families who attended the exhibit. This chart compares all families with children's artwork displayed to the number of families who attended the exhibit.

**Interpretation.** The choice of a public library as a venue for the art exhibit had an intended purpose that was partially achieved. The library is a community institution which serves diverse members of the public. In my conversations with administrators at the refugee center, I learned that some refugees decline to participate in community or public events for a variety of reasons, including lack of time and cultural differences. By accepting the invitation to attend a public event in a community institution, refugees demonstrated a willingness to connect to the broader community. In my research plan, I anticipated that by holding the event at the public library, random members of the community would participate in the event who had not planned to be there, creating a more diverse sample of participants. What happened instead was most of those attending the art exhibit event had purposefully planned to come, and many already had supportive affiliations with or sympathetic attitudes towards the refugee community. Because the

questionnaire data were collected from these people, the questionnaire served to create consensus on what the purpose of the event was for those who came.

### **Families Accepted Invitations for Social Dialogue and Community Activity**

**Description.** I observed conversations between refugees and members of the broader community, and also introduced people to each other who may not have met otherwise. Although I was not able to observe all the connections between people, it appeared that many people attending the event talked to new acquaintances. Families who brought their young artists to see their artwork expressed surprise and appeared delighted by the public exhibit. Liliana's parents attended with extended family, and we all walked around the exhibit together while I pointed out pieces created by Liliana. They were particularly impressed by Liliana's pastel-hued marbled artwork displayed in a pink circular mat in a pale wood frame.

Khadra and Casho arrived at the show accompanied by their mother Suleekho and their older brother Tawfiiq. They also seemed surprised and excited by the artwork display. I toured the exhibit together with them, starting with the larger framed pieces displayed near a biographical story about Khadra (see Appendix D for biographical stories displayed with the artworks). During my conversation with Suleekho, she mentioned that the children were familiar with the library because she had taken them there a few times. Tawfiiq apparently placed a high value on the library venue for the display, because he seemed amazed by his sister's artworks and stories displayed in this important public venue. Tawfiiq said that he couldn't wait to tell their father about the show, because "my sisters are famous." At each new piece, he grinned and repeated his

conviction about his sisters' fame. Although Suleekho's children spoke English well, her own English skills were still developing. I introduced her to a few people and she was able to have short conversations with them.

**Interpretation.** For both Liliana's family and Casho and Khadra's family, the public art exhibit was evidence that others in the community were interested in them and wanted them to feel invited. The artwork itself was presented professionally with matting and framing, signifying that it had been made special (Dissanayake, 1995). I and others who organized the exhibit initiated a reciprocal dialogue about the value of the children's work by displaying and honoring it. Families who participated responded with apparent pride and excitement. The exhibit was a relational aesthetic moment where the artworks themselves were secondary to the interchanges occurring between people of different cultures at the opening exhibit. When examining Suleekho's conversations with others through the lens of relational aesthetics, these social encounters were opportunities for exchange that would not have occurred otherwise.

### **Products of Artmaking Invited Cross-Cultural Understanding**

**Description.** During the exhibit, I spoke to several participants about their perceptions of the event. One woman indicated that although she enjoyed viewing the artwork, the biographical stories displayed with the art pieces were compelling and gave her a sense of who the refugee families were. Her sentiments were echoed by others who attended. Participants had the option to complete a questionnaire which gathered written responses to the art exhibit (see Appendix C). Thirty six participants completed the questionnaire, which represented about half of all people who attended the reception. The first four questions collected demographic data about participants such as age and length

of residency in the community. Question five gauged how well respondents felt that refugees were integrated into the Northern Colorado community (see Figure 8). Of the thirty-six respondents, the majority felt that refugees were only partially integrated into the Greeley community. Only a few respondents felt that refugees were either fully or not at all integrated into the Greeley community. Question six asked respondents if they felt more informed about refugees in the community after viewing the exhibit (see Figure 9). Ninety four percent of respondents indicated they felt more informed about refugees in the area after viewing the art exhibit. The questionnaire didn't originally have an option for choosing an answer other than yes or no, but one respondent drew in arrows to indicate a position of *somewhat* between yes and no. Question seven asked participants if they felt the exhibit featuring art and stories of refugees could assist in community integration (see Figure 10). Ninety four percent of questionnaire participants thought the art exhibit featuring art and stories of refugees could assist in community integration.

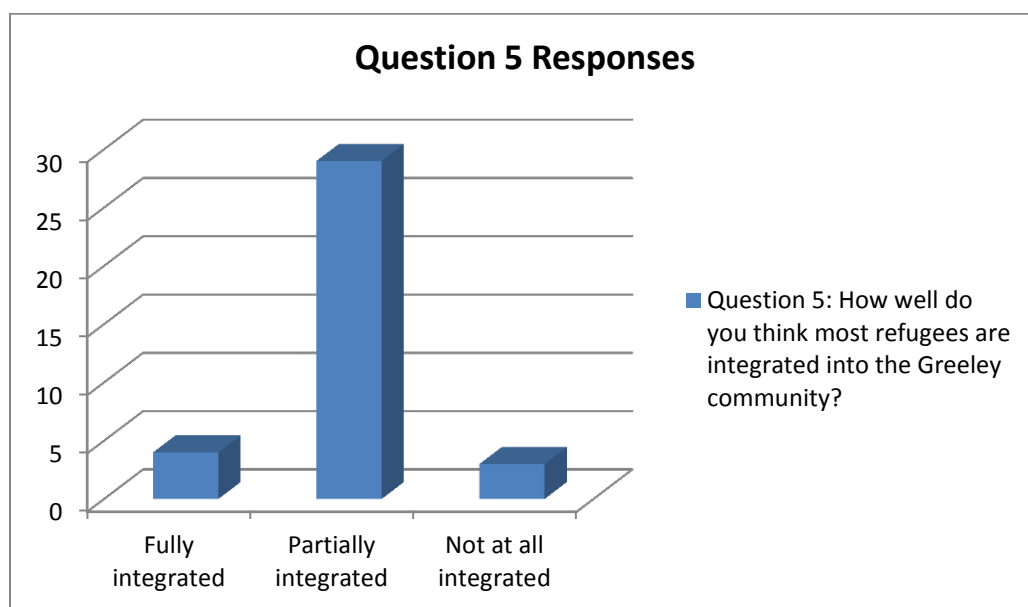


Figure 8. Responses to survey question 5. The question was: *How well do you think most refugees are integrated into the Greeley community?*

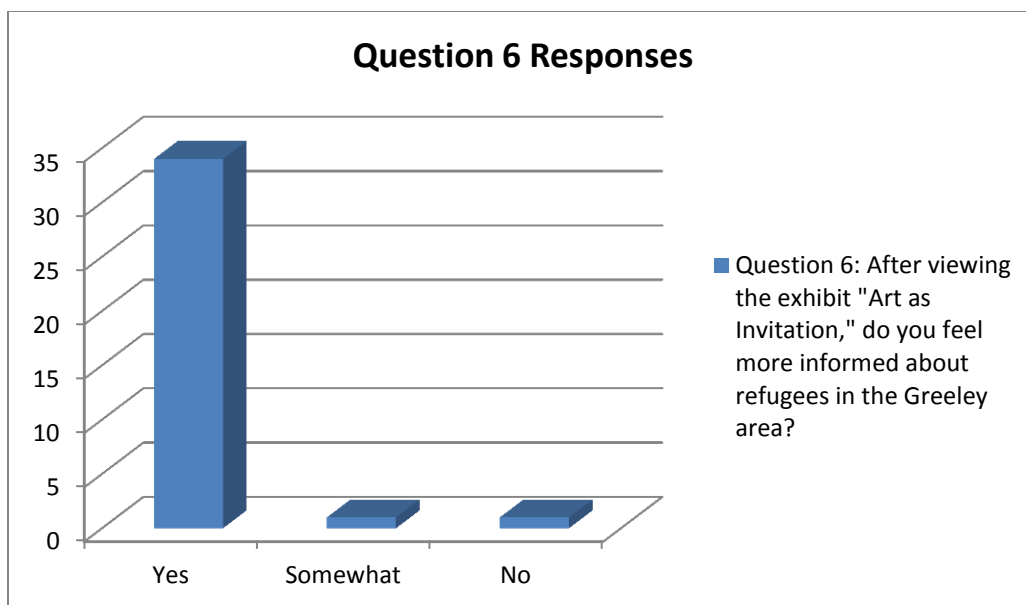


Figure 9. Responses to survey question 6. The question was: *After viewing the exhibit "Art as Invitation," do you feel more informed about refugees in the Greeley area?*

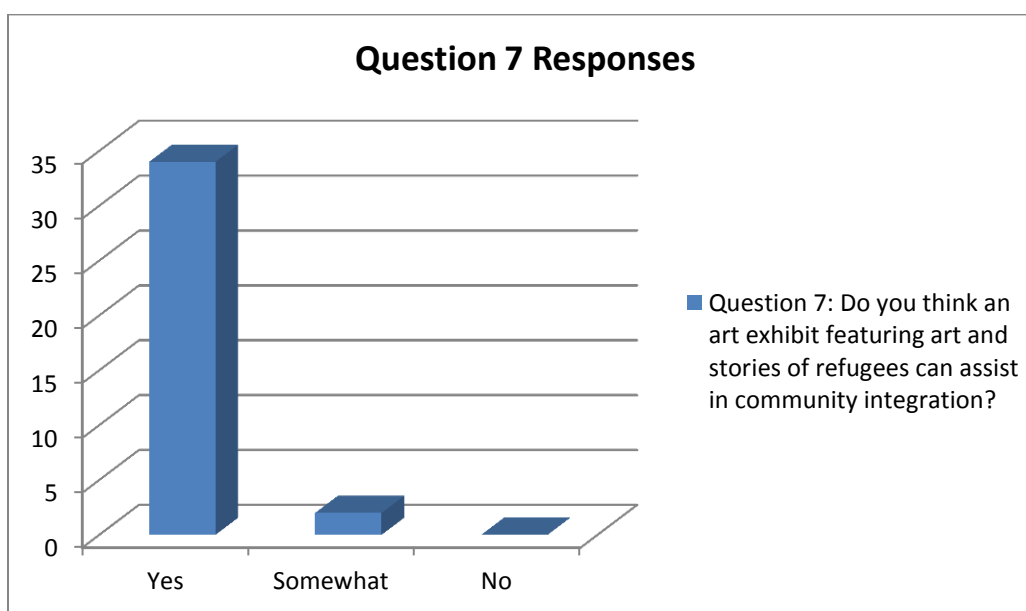


Figure 10. Responses to survey question 7. The question was: *Do you think an art exhibit featuring art and stories of refugees can assist in community integration?*

The questionnaire was voluntary and did not reflect observed responses of individuals opposed to refugee integration in the community. For example, toward the end of the evening, a man who self-identified as Native American expressed his negative

opinions about both white people and new refugee communities. Although he appeared to be drunk, his comments represented an outlier stance not reflected otherwise in the data.

Evidence of the event as a relational aesthetic experience was observed in conversations and sociality observed throughout the evening. Many participants stayed for the entire course of the evening rather than dropping in for just a few minutes. During a conversation with Murad, the Somali translator, he asked me when we would be holding a similar event again, and whether it would become a yearly occurrence.

**Interpretation.** The art exhibit provided an opportunity for Northern Colorado residents who are not refugees to learn more about the refugee side of their community. Diverse communities came together in a social encounter designed to promote greater understanding and awareness between diverse people. The majority of participants in the survey were people who already identified with the refugee community. Because the audience was focused instead of random, the survey data have not gathered a random set of public opinions as I may have hoped for in the early months of my design. Moreover, survey questions were clearly leading, and each had a socially acceptable response. However, when interpreting the survey data as evidence of relational aesthetics, I learned that the survey was less about quantifying participants' ideas about the event, and more about naming the relational aesthetic moment for those who came. Without these kinds of prompts, the event had only the generic tone of its title from the flyer, "Art as Invitation". With the survey questionnaire, the concepts and rationale behind the event were objectified in ways participants could confirm or disconfirm. Questionnaire data reflected that the majority of participants identified with learning about refugees in the area, and believed that the exhibit event could assist in community integration. These are likely



reflections of who these people already are: community members invested in helping refugees feel invited. Additionally, participants confirmed the value of the event as a reciprocal social exchange in their conversations, their comments, and how long they stayed at the event.

### Conclusions

In my analysis, I bracketed relevant data to answer my research question— *how does artmaking invite refugee preschool children and their families to connect with the broader community?* Using the tools of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism, I have focused on relational aesthetics and presented the analysis in terms of descriptive and interpretive aspects of my research questions. By analyzing the data in the research journal, interviews with families, artworks, and questionnaire responses I developed an educational criticism which resonated with findings of other researchers about the social and educational value of artmaking for refugees. Yet my results also offered new perspectives that answered my research questions about how art functions as an invitation.

I was interested in learning how artmaking in the classroom invited participation in unfamiliar contexts. I learned that teachers could invite trust with art processes and materials. In my research journal, I recorded several instances of frightened and reluctant children who found the materials and processes of artmaking inviting. My findings were similar to those in the research of Brunick (1999), McArdle and Spina (2007), and Cumming and Visser (2009), who observed that art process offers a means of engagement when other learning is complicated by language and cultural barriers. McArdle and Spina (2007) also found that refugee students engaged readily in artmaking

process. However, my results expanded on these researchers' work as I observed the role of the teacher as a facilitator who tailors invitations with process and materials.

By analyzing data in my research journal, I discovered how choice in artmaking invited confidence and engagement. Data in the form of artwork provided evidence of choice in artmaking. Samuel expressed his own sense of accomplishment and confidence as he followed his own plan. Existing research indicates that artmaking is an opportunity for refugee children to be heard, to discover and to tell about experiences and emotions (Szente et al., 2006; McArdle & Spina, 2007; Hoot, 2011; Maagerø & Sunde, 2016; Brown & Bousalis, 2017). My research confirms these results. Yet it was important to learn that choice in artmaking was also a key to students' feelings of confidence and engagement.

Another key to learning how artmaking in the classroom invited participation in unfamiliar contexts was also outlined in data from my research journal. I found that along with designed opportunities for collaboration, shared spaces and limited materials invited collaboration. Other researchers have learned that for young refugee students collaboration offers a means to engage in educational goals such as academic and social development (Hamilton & Moore, 2004b; Szente et al., 2006; Cumming & Visser, 2009; Brown & Bousalis, 2017). My results resonated with this previous research, and I built on this with observations about how collaboration happened more frequently when students worked in close proximity and needed to share materials.

My analysis of the research journal helped me see that the open-ended nature of artmaking invited connection with other learning. As a multi-modal literacy form, art invited meaning making beyond speech and writing. Kalantzis et al. (2016) described

how multi-modal literacy forms can open a path to social participation, enabling success for learners of diverse cultural backgrounds. In my educational criticism, I observed artmaking as the path to social participation. On several occasions, students attached meanings to actions and social exchange by engaging in art as multi-modal literacy.

Through data collected in interviews with families, I found that art products invited dialogue and connections between school and home. Open-ended questions about artmaking helped me learn how children used art to connect the new context of school with the familiar context of home. An unexpected finding was that children used art produced at school as a source for narratives shared at home with family. Rah et al. (2009) and Anderson (2004) consider the school as an access point to the community for refugee families. Analysis of my research journal supported this result and also clarified the role of teachers in initiating connections between school and family.

By analyzing data in the form of student artworks, I found that emotion-based prompts invited expression in artmaking. Maagerø and Sunde, (2016) found that children used prompts about what made them happy and what made them sad to express personal emotion and make meaning in art forms. Analysis of data in my research journal helped me see that prompted artmaking invited verbal storytelling, and was a catalyst for meaningful social exchange in the classroom.

Data from questionnaires and observations recorded in my research journal helped me arrive at the result that products of artmaking acted as an invitation for dialogue between new refugee residents and other community residents. The exhibit *Art as Invitation* provided a space and reason for people of diverse backgrounds to come together in a social moment. Researchers Irwin et al. (2006) designed an art exhibit to

bring diverse communities together and found shifts in stereotypical positions about diverse populations. Viewed through the lens of relational aesthetics, the art exhibit provided the circumstance for social exchange across diverse communities. By analyzing data from my observation journal and the questionnaire responses, I found that participants felt more informed about refugees in the area and believed the exhibit contributed to cross-cultural understanding.

The discussion that follows in Chapter V reviews implications and recommendations based on these results. The evaluative and thematic aspects of Eisner's (2002) educational criticism method provide a framework for this discussion. Educational values, defined by personal and social good are distilled into larger themes. With the results based on data analysis, I make recommendations for improved practice in educational and civic settings for those who work with similar populations.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Evaluation and Thematics

The point of this study was to learn more about how artmaking functions as an invitation for refugee students and their families to connect with the broader community. The evaluation aspect of the method positions the results in the context of social and educational benefits. Eisner (2002) emphasized the worth of education beyond mere schooling or socialization, stating, “education is a process that fosters personal development and contributes to social well-being” (p. 231). Refugee students and their families are the *uninvited*. They have fled from their home countries, uninvited by conditions of war, persecution and violence. They rely on institutions and individuals in a host country to offer meaningful invitations fostering personal development and social well-being. However, in a new host country, refugees do not automatically feel invited while surrounded by unfamiliar language and culture.

I join my voice with the body of research commending the benefits of artmaking for refugee students. Although many of the results I arrived at are fairly similar to what others have concluded, in this evaluation I uniquely consider the *invitations* possible via artmaking. The themes I have identified explain how invitations occurred through art materials and processes and choice and connection in artmaking. Fearful and reluctant children felt invited and found belonging in a new classroom community. I designed art

projects and an art exhibit as acts of invitation that prompted refugee children and their families to participate in new learning and community environments. Correspondingly, the art exhibit at the public library was an accessible invitation for community members to meet and interact with refugee families.

### **Invitations for Confidence, Choice, and Belonging**

A major theme emerging from my analysis was that teachers and adults in the classroom used artmaking to invite confidence, choice, and belonging. My conclusions were similar to those of researchers who learned that art works as a language without words to invite learning (Brunick, 1999; Szente, et al., 2006; McArdle & Spina 2007; Cumming & Visser, 2009). When Samuel raised his fists and pumped the air in a silent cheer after completing each self-determined act during artmaking, he expressed confidence achieved through choice in artmaking. His expression of confidence was evidence not only that he was building a colorful felt and paper composition, but also building identity and creating a composition of self. My conclusions resonate with those of McArdle and Spina (2007), who indicated that refugee children use art to build identity. In my research, choice in artmaking was a key principle for empowering Samuel and other refugee children in identity building.

Artmaking as bridge to relatedness was another theme clarifying the nature of invitations in my study. The value of relatedness is supported in both educational theory (Noddings, 1995; Yohani, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2017) and art theory such as relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002). Many students came to school visibly distressed, fearful, and reluctant to participate in the unfamiliar environment. When teachers and adults in the classroom offered direct invitations to participate in artmaking, students accepted

invitations. Willingness to participate in art process demonstrated students' sense of belonging. McArdle and Spina (2007) observed refugee students engaged by the process of artmaking, and used both art process and products to communicate with each other and teachers. For me, this was one of the most fascinating themes of the study. The art materials and the process of their use drew students in, a phenomenon I observed several times. Dehab was interested not in the pastel itself or mark making, but rather in the paper peeling away from the pastel in spirals. The objects and actions of artmaking and the materials signified what he could do in this new environment instead of what he could not do or did not understand. The art materials and processes were not just engaging for him and other students, but also empowering.

For those students who had some English language skill and were developmentally beyond the scribble stage (Lowenfeld, 1947), relatedness was achieved through expression in artmaking and in verbal narratives. When Arsema shared her story of waking up alone and afraid, it was evidence that she felt she belonged as a member of the classroom community. She demonstrated relatedness with her teachers and peers. In Hoot's (2011) research he found benefit in artmaking when it enabled students to express feelings and establish trusting relationships. The expressive narratives shared by students in my study established relatedness and trust. Young refugee children felt invited when they knew their stories were valued.

Artmaking helped students feel invited through collaboration, a component of relatedness. As students worked on art pieces together, social exchange and negotiation bridged language differences. The value of collaboration in artmaking for refugee students has been established by many researchers (Szente et al., 2006; Cumming &

Visser, 2009; Brown & Bousalis, 2017) and benefits include improved language, peer learning, and consideration of others. My results built on this research, demonstrating that patterns of collaboration established by teachers invited subsequent and spontaneous collaboration among students. It was remarkable to watch several students of different languages and cultures spontaneously share space and materials at the easel.

### **Artmaking as Accessible Invitation for Refugee Families**

Another theme was art as the medium of accessible invitations. In considering how art acts as an invitation for refugee families to connect with the broader community, it is vital to consider accessibility. In my research, evidence pointed to art as the medium of accessible invitations offered to refugee students and their families. Products of children's artmaking were the accessible physical artifacts connecting home and school. When Arsema narrated her art pieces for her family, she was connecting the new context of school with the familiar context of home, not only for herself, but also for her family. Similarly, Prior and Niesz (2013) observed this phenomenon in their research, noting that storytelling based on art brought home built connections between the unfamiliar and familiar worlds.

Moreover, the art exhibit, *Art as Invitation*, was another accessible invitation for refugee families to participate in a community event. The physical art produced by the preschool children was the starting point for a social exchange between diverse people. The design of a meaningful relational experience for refugees and community members required the collaboration of different organizations concerned with refugee assimilation. Staff of the public library, translators, and administrators of the refugee center, the director of the local BOCES organization, and professors and students from the



University of Northern Colorado worked together with me to plan the event and extend accessible invitations to the refugee community to attend. These accessible invitations led to reciprocal exchanges between diverse people, a meaningful civic exercise in civility. Bourriaud's (2002) theory of relational aesthetics positions the sociality of the art exhibit as a work of art. The exhibit of physical artwork was merely a catalyst for an accessible invitation for a social moment to occur between refugees and the wider community.

The design of the display also allowed participants to find emotional connection to the stories of refugees. For educators and those working for refugee acculturation, it is necessary to remember that meaningful connection to the new community is established through sharing of ideas and past experiences, not through subversion of culture. The family stories displayed with the artwork gave refugees an opportunity to share their own experience. Like Rah et al. (2009), I argue that honoring the culture of refugees can minimize the dangers of colonization common in assimilation, where difference is perceived as a deficit. The artwork and accompanying family stories at the art exhibit provided an accessible invitation to viewers to empathize with these refugee families. As I interviewed people and collected family stories for the display, my own understanding of the refugee experience changed and broadened. It was heartbreaking to learn of Maw Moe's early childhood in an orphanage and to hear from Jelani that her seven years in a refugee camp was not at all long compared to some who spend entire lifetimes in these makeshift homes. My analysis of the survey data and researcher notes provided evidence that those viewing the family stories displayed with the artwork found a means to build empathy. Brown and Bousalis (2017) confirm that promoting awareness of the refugee experience helps people to develop empathy.

### **Further Recommendations**

One of the limitations of this study was the unpredictable attendance of refugee children at the preschool. Several families agreed to participate in the study, and then only returned to the classroom once or twice more for the duration of the study. There are several factors involved in spotty attendance, including lack of time due to the unpredictable nature of settling in a new country and trying to assist family and friends left behind in unfavorable circumstances. Important next steps in this area of research should focus on how to learn more about family needs and how to bring art into existing family and cultural structures. Learning more about family needs and cultural structures may be vital in determining how invitations offered through artmaking could reach more people, and whether and how artmaking might be of value to these families.

In my study, a limited segment of the general population participated in the art exhibit reception. It was designed to bring refugees and non-refugees together in dialogue and shared understandings. However, many attending the event were already invested in or interested in the welfare of the refugee community. By holding the event at the public library, I envisioned the inclusion of a variety of spontaneous participants. But most of the participants had planned to attend the event through existing connections to the refugee community or connections to those working with refugees. Another approach to an art exhibit may be to change the venue to include a different demographic of the population. For example, a display in conjunction with a public community event may reach more people who have had little contact with the refugee population. Additionally, a different approach to collecting data for the duration of the exhibit rather than just during the opening reception may have yielded different results.

This research specifically addressed visual arts as an invitation for refugees to connect with the broader community. As a researcher, I am interested in learning what other broad genres and circumstances act as invitations for refugees to feel they belong. For example, music and drama may be similar access points between refugees and their new communities. Art educators are well positioned to assess invitation because art curriculum depends on intriguing material and process. The kinesthetic and sensory aspects of artmaking invite engagement beyond what language alone can accomplish. Teachers of other disciplines could also be well positioned to help refugees feel belonging and greater connection to learning by finding and using such multimodal invitations in their own disciplines. Effective invitations transcend language and cultural difference.

### **The Value of Process and Materials, Choice, and Connection**

Art has the power to change lives, and it can reach people in ways that other modes of learning and experience do not. I designed this research based on the question: how does artmaking act as an invitation for refugee preschool students and their families to connect with the broader community? In analyzing my data, I evaluated artmaking outcomes in the classroom and community response to the artworks the children produced. Artmaking processes and materials helped fearful, reluctant young refugee students to find comfort and meaning in an unfamiliar context. The types of moments identified in this study (such as Dehab forgetting his fear and reluctance during artmaking, and physical signs of success like Samuel's silent cheer) should be assessed by those who work with refugees. These moments point to whether or not students have been invited and how art curriculum has been a part of it. Additionally, I concluded that choice in

artmaking helped refugee students to build confidence and identity. Connections to peers and teachers were prompted by artmaking despite language and cultural difference through both designed and spontaneous collaborations. These refugee students experienced feelings of belonging when they expressed themselves in their visual and verbal narratives.

As a relational aesthetics concept, invitation in artmaking is a powerful tool for educators because the people we work with are increasingly diverse linguistically and culturally. In this study, artworks produced by the children were the means of generating social connections at the art exhibit at the public library. Moreover, artmaking was an accessible invitation for refugee students and their families to participate in new educational and social contexts. The invitations offered through artmaking were valued as points of access that crossed between familiar and unfamiliar worlds. As refugees accepted invitations to participate in artmaking and social dialogue, they connected with the broader community and actively contributed to expanded understanding among diverse people.

If education is concerned with the common social good, artmaking provides means for stakeholders in a community to promote this social good by extending invitations that mitigate fear. Refugee children and their families are on the fringes of their new host communities, and artmaking invites educational and social experience in the new context. In this study, the processes and materials of artmaking, along with opportunities for choice and relatedness, worked without words and beyond cultural difference to invite refugee students and their families into the community. Through art, meaningful invitations can be extended to marginalized people. Invitations offered

through art allow opportunities for equality in learning and meaningful participation in a community. Educators working with refugees can work to protect and empower the most vulnerable among us by finding and using features of art which invite them as valued members of our communities.

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## APPENDIX A

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: September 11, 2017

TO: Nancy Ereksen, BFA

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1107444-2] Art as invitation: The effects of including art education in the curriculum of a preschool classroom of refugee students.

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: September 8, 2017

EXPIRATION DATE: September 8, 2018

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration

date of September 8, 2018.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

**Nancy -**

**Thank you for submitting clear and thorough revisions based on the first reviewer, Wendy Highby. She has provided approval and subsequently, I reviewed your original and revised materials.**

**There are no requests for any additional materials or further amendments. Please be sure to use these modified materials and protocols in your actual participant recruitment and data collection.**

**Best wishes with your study.**

**Sincerely,**

**Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair**

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.



## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEWS WITH FAMILIES

Interview, Nadia, 10/18/2017

Mother of **Faisal**

Transcription of Audio Recording

*Nadia and Faisal speak Rohingya and Burmese. The translator who speaks Rohingya was out of the country at the time of the interview. The Burmese translator, Thet, was not at the refugee center at the time of the interview. The interview was conducted in English.*

NE: This is for Faisal. Can you ask Faisal what kind of art he made before he came to [preschool] class? Did he paint or draw?

N: I think paint.

NE: What was it like when you first started school? [Pause.] When he first came to school, did he like it? Was it hard? [Pause.] Can you ask him?

N: [Talks to Faisal in Rohingya, but Faisal won't answer. Nadia laughs and turns back to me.]

NE: Too shy to answer? Does he like making the art at school?

N: I don't know.

NE: Painting or drawing?

N: Yes, I think he likes painting sometimes.

NE: How do you think he is adapting at school? Do you think he is happy here?

N: Yes, very happy. Yes, I am happy. Totally.

NE: Oh, okay, what about Faisal? Is Faisal happy?

N: Yes.

NE: In class?

N: Yes.

NE: What does he like to do?

N: Play. Little bit watch T. . .um games. Play games.

NE: Likes to play, play games?

N: Yes.

NE: What it was like for you to come to the United States? When you came here from Burma?

N: Burma.

NE: What was it like?

N: I like everything!

NE: Okay. How was your experience? Was it hard to come here?

N: I think fall time.

NE: Uh-huh. So when you came, was it difficult to leave Burma? Did you have trouble when you left Burma?

N: [No response, Nadia appears to be thinking about what the words of the question mean.]

NE: Is it different here or same as your country?

N: Mostly I think different.

NE: How different?

N: How different. . .

NE: How?

N: Little, because my country is no snow times.

NE: Because it's not what?

N: Snow times.

NE: There's no?

N: Winter times.

NE: Oh! No winter time.

N: No.

NE: Oh, okay. What did you bring from your country?

N: Clothes. Shoes. Uh, the jacket.

NE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

N: I bring all clothes. But I don't bring. I don't know, clothes.

NE: Did you have to leave things behind?

N: Yes.

NE: What did you leave? Behind? What did you leave in Burma?

N: I don't understand.

NE: Oh okay. So you brought clothes, and jacket.

N: Yes.

NE: Um, But did you bring, like, um, all of your dishes or books?

N: I think um, no dishes.

NE: No dishes, but you brought, like books? Yeah?

N: Yes.

NE: Okay. Maybe we can ask some questions too with [Thet.] With Thet? Upstairs?  
Because it's harder to talk. . . Your English is good, but I don't know if I can get all of. . .

N: [Inaudible, sounds like "Because I have another time."]

NE: Oh. Do you miss Burma?

N: Yes.

NE: You miss.

N: Yes.

NE: What do you miss?

N: Country, Family, and the friends. Everything I miss.

NE: Yeah.

N: Because my family is over in Burma.

NE: Your family is in Burma?

N: My mom is here, my brother's here, my sister is in Burma.

NE: Your sister?

N: In Burma.

NE: Yeah. So some are here, but some are there?

N: Yes.

NE: Yeah. Okay. Are they okay?

N: Yes.

NE: Yeah, okay. That's good. Well thank you, and maybe another time we'll talk with Thet. So you can go to your class.

N: Yes.

NE: Thank you so much.

Interview, Suleekho, 10/25/2017

Mother of **Casho** and **Khadra**

Conversation Constructed from Interview Notes

*Suleekho speaks Somali. Murad, the Somali translator at CCR, translated for the interview. Although Suleekho signed a consent form, she asked that her interview not be recorded.*

NE: Tell me what it was like when your girls first started school?

S: It was not too difficult. The children adapted so well. They were used to the language because they watch American cartoons and TV.

NE: Tell me about artmaking during school?

S: They like it. They like it so much that they talk about it at home.

NE: Can you tell me what it was like to come to the United States?

S: [Smiles, laughs.] It was like a whole different world.

NE: What are some of the differences between living here and living in your home country?

S: [No answer.]

NE: What do you miss from your country?

S: So many things. I miss my family, my friends.

NE: What were you able to bring with you from your country?

S: Only a few personal belongings. Necessities, just enough to cover basic needs.

NE: What do you wish people here knew about you?

S: [No answer.]

NE: What would make you feel more welcomed?

S: I came to this country with my mom, sister and other family members. Everyone was so welcoming when we came. [Smiles.] We feel like we have been welcomed.

Interview, Semret, 11/1/2017.

Mother of **Arsema**

Conversation Constructed from Interview Notes

*Semret's family is from Eritrea, and her first language is Tigrinya. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled in advanced English classes, and spoke English fairly well. The interview was conducted in English. Although Semret signed a consent form, she did not want any audio or visual recording of the interview.*

NE: Tell me about what kind of art Arsema made before CCR Preschool.

S: Arsema first started making art at school. She didn't make art before.

NE: Can you tell me what Arsema thinks about making art during school?

S: Arsema talks about the art she make at school. She show the pictures, she point and says, "This is my mom, this is my dad."

NE: How do you think your Arsema is adapting to school?

S: Today is Arsema's birthday.

NE: I remember. She is 5 today.

S: Yes. She also go to another school from 12:30-4:00 each day for the older children. She likes school very much. She speaks English well because of school. Arsema was going to the afternoon school, but she loves this one [CCR Preschool] so much that she want to come. She likes this school and her friends very much.

NE: So she goes to both schools? She doesn't want to miss this one?

S: Yes.

NE: Can you tell me what it was like to come to the United States? When did you come to the US?

S: I have been here a long time, 8 years. I didn't go to school at home. English class here was first time I went to school. I came to United States first, and my husband came three years after. Arsema was born here.

NE: What are some of the differences between living here and living in your home country? What do you miss about your country?

S: It is very different. Everyone, all the people here have happy faces. More here than in my country. I like my country, but it's so bad there.

NE: What were you able to bring with you from your country?

S: Nothing.

NE: Just small personal items?

S: Yes.

NE: What do you wish people here knew about you? What would make you feel more welcomed?

S: I feel very welcomed. There are very nice people here. They have gifted us clothes, blankets, chairs and other furniture, everything that we need here.



Interview, Lin, 11/9/2017

Father of **Liang**

Conversation Constructed from Interview Notes

*Lin and Liang are from Myanmar and speak Burmese. There was not a translator available during the interview, and Lin has limited English skills. Due to the difficulty in communication, the conversation was brief. Liang was present during the interview.*

NE: How long have you lived in the United States?

L: Seven [weeks, months or years.]

NE: Did Liang make art at home, or before he came to CCR Preschool?

L: Not make art at home.

NE: What was it like for Liang when he first started school?

L: Hard. Sad.

Interview, Jelani, 11/9/2017

Mother of **Samuel**

Conversation Constructed from Interview Notes

*Jelani speaks Swahili, but there was not a Swahili translator working for CCR at the time of the interview. The interview was conducted in English without a translator. Samuel and his baby sister were present for the interview. Although Jelani signed a consent form, she asked that her interview not be recorded.*

NE: Tell me about what kind of art Samuel made before he came to CCR Preschool?

J: He does some art at home, especially on the weekend because we have time then.

NE: Tell me what it was like when Samuel first started school?

J: He really liked it. Sometimes if he was sleeping in the morning, and I told him it was time for school, he would wake up and jump out of bed.

NE: Does he like art at school?

J: Yes, he brings home the art he makes at school.

NE: How do you think Samuel is adapting to school?

J: He is very excited to come to school.

NE: Can you tell me what it was like to come to the United States? When did you come to the US?

J: I came seven years ago. Samuel was born here. I came as a refugee from Congo [DRC]. I lived in the refugee camp in Tanzania for seven years. But that is not long. I knew some people stayed there for 25 years or longer.

NE: What language do you speak at home?

J: Swahili.

NE: Does Samuel speak Swahili?

J: Yes, if he was speaking at all. But he doesn't talk yet. He understands both English and Swahili.

NE: What are some of the differences between living here and living in Congo?

J: Peace. Here there is peace. In Congo it is very different. There is too much war.

NE: What do you miss about Congo?

J: The food. I miss cassava leaf. I miss the flour. How did you say it? Root. We make the flour from that. And fufu. We can make it here with something else but it is not the same.

NE: Do you have family in Congo?

J: Yes, my parents and brothers and sisters are all there.

NE: What were you able to bring with you from Congo?

J: Nothing. We brought nothing.

NE: What about the camp? Did you bring anything with you from the refugee camp?

J: Yes but all of it was old stuff. We had to put it in the trash when we came here.

NE: Do you think art can help different communities come together?

J: Yes.

NE: What do you wish people here knew about you? What would make you feel more welcome?

J: I feel welcome. [Smiles and laughs.] America is for everybody!

Interview, Maw Moe, 11/15/2017

Mother of **Liliana**

Transcription of Audio Recording

*Maw Moe speaks Karenni as a first language, but the translator for Karenni was not available during the interview. Maw Moe also speaks Burmese fluently. Thet Ko Lin, the Burmese translator, assisted with the interview. When Maw Moe responded independently in English, it is indicated with M. When Thet translated, it is indicated with M/T.*

NE: So these are questions about Liliana. Did she make art before she came to school?

M: No

NE: So that was her first experience?

M: Yes.

NE: And um what was it like for her when she first started school? Easy, hard, sad?

M: It was hard.

M/T: When she came to school, she was crying so much because it was hard.

NE: After that, okay?

M: Yes.

NE: Why do you think she was sad at first?

M/T: Before she never separated with mother, so she have afraid to stay with other people, and she was crying.

NE: Do you think she likes making the artwork at school?

M: Yes

NE: How do you think it makes her feel, happy at school, or?

M/T: She become happy with the friend and then she very much like artwork, and she likes the friends together so now because she is happy. And she is happy with teacher also.

NE: Okay that's great. I have another question. How long have you been in the United States?

M: 8 years.

NE: 8 years. Okay and you came from Burma? From Myanmar?

M: [Inaudible—affirmation.]

NE: And can you tell me what it was like when you first came here?

M: [Inaudible.] I don't know how to speak, I don't know how go, and everything is different.

NE: So what were some of the differences between your country and the United States?

M: Different in speaking, different how to go, in my country we walk.

NE: You walk?

M: Yes. You go on the bus and in the car.

NE: Here?

M/T: After 3 or 4 years, she became familiar with people from here, and started normal life.

NE: So after 3 or 4 years, she became familiar with people?

M/T: And started a normal life.

NE: What do you miss about your country?

M: [Laughs.] I miss my parents and homeland.

M/T: Her parents have also passed away but anyhow she remembers her mother's place and the village. She was an orphan when she was young. She was orphaned and then she stayed in the orphan school and she studied there and she then applied for recognition. She became refugees and she reached America. She settled with her [whole/host?] family in the United States. So what [were going on] she don't know. [Laughs.]

NE: Uh huh, [laughs.]

M/T: And she miss her motherland also she wants to sometime come and go and visit there.

NE: Uh huh, yeah. So you did some school when you moved here? You moved here with a host family? Is that right?

M: No

NE: Oh!

M/T: [Inaudible talking at once.]

M: One brother and one sister came.

NE: Oh! One brother and one sister came?

M/T: Three months ahead to her, her brother reached here, to the United States and after he came here, when they are young time their parents are pass away so all this brothers and sister live in the orphan school

NE: In the orphan school in Burma?

M: And maybe she [mother] was passed away, I was one year? I don't know.

M/T: One year, yes she was very young time.

NE: You were really young when your mother passed away.

M/T: Yes.

NE: Oh. So hard all of those experiences.

M/T: Yes.

NE: Yeah. So what do you wish that people here in this community knew about you? Or maybe you would feel more welcomed, or part of the community?

M/T: She think that the people from Greeley are very good and welcome to the refugees. And then she very happy to come to the [Colorado Center for Refugees] because the people are very good and very kindly to her.

NE: Good.

M/T: She is also happy with learning English.

NE: Yeah. Thank you so much. Is there. . . I have another question about art. Do you think that art can help different communities come together?

M/T: She not much participate in some of the community activity, but she think this is good for the people understanding each others but she have not much experience on the community.

NE: Uh-huh. Sure. Well thank you so much. We're going to have an art show in January and we'll show some of Liliana's art at the Library. So I hope that you can come.

M: Yes

NE: That would be so fun! Thank you

## APPENDIX C

### ART EXHIBIT QUESTIONNAIRE



## Art Show Questionnaire

Check the box that best describes your answer for each question. All responses are anonymous.

1. This research has been explained to me and I agree to participate by completing this questionnaire.  
☐yes      ☐no
2. Gender:  
☐Male      ☐Female
3. Age:  
☐18-26  
☐27-36  
☐37-46  
☐47 and older
4. How long have you been a resident of the Northern Colorado area?  
☐Under one year  
☐1-4 years  
☐5-9 years  
☐10 years or more  
☐n/a
5. How well do you think most refugees are integrated into the Greeley community?  
☐Fully integrated  
☐Partially integrated  
☐Not at all integrated
6. After viewing the exhibit "Art as Invitation," do you feel more informed about refugees in the Greeley area?  
☐yes      ☐no
7. Do you think an art exhibit featuring art and stories of refugees can assist in community integration?  
☐yes      ☐somewhat      ☐no

## APPENDIX D

### BIOGRAPHICAL STORIES OF REFUGEES

# Young Artist Story

## Colorado Center for Refugees

# Casho

## Somalia

Casho's family is from Somalia. She and her younger sister Khadra both attend the CCR Preschool and like it very much. Before coming to school, Casho learned English by watching American cartoons and TV shows. She enjoys making art at school and talks about art with her family at home. She uses her creativity to entertain classmates and teachers. While working on an art project about what makes her scared, Casho told a story about a big vampire who ate her. She enjoys playing at the school with her friends. Casho's mother, Suleekho, came to the United States with her mother, sister and other family members. She misses other family and friends who are in Somalia. Her family was only able to bring a few personal belongings to the United States. Everyone was so kind to them when they arrived, and they feel very welcomed here in Greeley.

# Young Artist Story

## Colorado Center for Refugees

# Khadra

## Somalia

Khadra's family is from Somalia. She and her older sister Casho both attend the CCR Preschool and like it very much. Before coming to school, Khadra learned some English with her sister by watching American cartoons and TV shows. She enjoys collaborative painting projects and was excited to work on a group "friendship" painting with her sister. Learning to make a pinch pot was a fun experience for Khadra. At CCR Preschool, one of her favorite things is to play with friends and pretend to sell ice cream. Khadra's mother, Suleekho, came to the United States with her own mother, sister and other family members. She thought it was like a whole different world when she arrived. Suleekho misses other family and friends who are in Somalia. Her family was only able to bring a few necessities to the United States. Everyone was so kind to them when they arrived, and their family feels very welcomed in Greeley.

# Young Artist Story

## Colorado Center for Refugees

# Samuel

## DR Congo

Samuel's family is from DR Congo. Samuel enjoys painting and drawing at home on the weekends, and likes making art at school. He often brings home the art made at school to share with his family. He is always excited to come to school, and his mom says that he will jump out of bed when she tells him it is a school day. Samuel understands both Swahili and English although he is not speaking either language yet. Jelani, Samuel's mother, lived in a refugee camp in Tanzania for seven years before coming to the United States. Although seven years seems like a long time, Jelani knew people who lived in the camp for twenty-five years or more. Jelani thinks the difference between the United States and DR Congo is peace. She said that DR Congo is very different because there is too much war. She misses the food from her homeland, especially cassava leaf and root. She makes a traditional dish, fufu, but it is not the same without cassava flour. Jelani misses her parents, brothers and sisters who are all living in DR Congo. When Jelani came to the United States, she brought very little from the refugee camp, and all of the items were so old and worn that they had to be thrown away. She feels very welcome here in Greeley and believes that America is for everybody.

# Young Artist Story

## Colorado Center for Refugees

# Liliana

## Myanmar / Karenni

Liliana's family is from Myanmar and they speak the Karenni language. Liliana's first experiences with making art were at the CCR Preschool. When Liliana first started school, it was hard because she had never been away from her mother, and she is just learning to speak English. Liliana quickly made friends and she felt happy at school. She likes her teachers and artmaking. Maw Moe, Liliana's mother, said it was difficult when she first came to the United States because everything was different. In her village in Myanmar, she was used to walking as the only form of transportation. Maw Moe and her siblings lost their parents when they were very young. They lived and studied at an orphan school, waiting to be recognized as refugees. Maw Moe's brother was the first to gain refugee recognition and move to the United States, and Maw Moe followed three months after. She feels happy to study English at the Colorado Center for Refugees. Although she misses her parents and her homeland, Maw Moe thinks the people from Greeley are very good and welcoming to their family.

# Young Artist Story

## Colorado Center for Refugees

# Arsema

## Eritrea

Arsema's family is from Eritrea. Arsema's first experiences with making art were at CCR Preschool. At home, Arsema often talks about the art she makes at school, and will let her family members know which drawings represent them. She learned to speak English well at school, and loves her friends and the various activities at CCR Preschool. Semret, Arsema's mother, was the first in the family to come to the United States, and her husband followed three years later. Semret finds the U.S. to be very different from Eritrea, because everyone seems to have happy faces here. She likes her country, but conditions there were very bad for her. When Semret left Eritrea, she was only able to bring a few personal items with her. Their family feels very welcomed, and when they first arrived, people gave them many items that were necessary to make a home here.

# Young Artist Story

## Colorado Center for Refugees

# Faisal

## Myanmar / Rohingya

Faisal's family is from Myanmar, and belongs to the Rohingya ethnic group. At CCR Preschool, Faisal likes to play games with friends at school. He is always excited to participate in painting projects at school, and especially enjoys painting at the easel. When Faisal's family came to the United States, one of the big differences they noticed was the winter. Myanmar has a tropical climate and there is no snow. Faisal's mother, Nadia, said when she left Myanmar, she could only bring a few things with her, such as a little clothing, a jacket and some books. Their family is very happy to be here in Greeley, but Nadia misses her family and friends who are in Myanmar. Her mother and brother are here, but her sister is still in Myanmar.