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Schools Are Very Different Here: Somali Refugees' Perspectives of Parent Involvement

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SCHOOLS ARE VERY DIFFERENT HERE:
SOMALI REFUGEES' PERSPECTIVES
OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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College of Education and Behavioral Science

Department of School Psychology

Ph.D., School Psychology

May 2014

This Dissertation by: Mary L. Van Korlaar

Entitled: Schools are Very Different Here: Somali Refugees' Perspectives of Parent Involvement

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education and Behavioral Science in the Department of School of Psychology Program of School Psychology

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ABSTRACT

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Qualitative case study with participant observation was used to explore the parent

involvement experiences of nine Somali refugee parents in a small city in an agricultural

area of the Rocky Mountain region. The parents of students who were attending classes

through a school-based Welcome Center program were invited to participate. Parents

were asked to discuss their own educational background, and their experiences prior to

immigration to the United States in an effort to understand the development of their

understanding, values and beliefs about education. Parents were also asked about their

experiences in the local school systems to better understand their children's adjustment to

schools in the United States, and factors which proved to be either supports or barriers to

parent involvement or empowering as related to their interactions with their children's

schools.

Limited educational backgrounds impacted parents' ability to assist their students

with homework, or to feel like they could approach the teachers about how they might

help their children. Parent perception of their role was clearly in the home, and they

typically deferred to educators for matters in the school. They had no previous parallel

constructs to volunteering in the schools or serving on committees or other school based

involvement. However, parents were quite ready to come to school if they were specifically requested to do so by a parent or administrator.

Key variables to student adjustment involved differences in pedagogy, discipline practices, and credit systems, as well as having interrupted formal education and the phenomenon of being over-aged and under-credited. Factors which posed barriers to parent involvement at school included differences in educational background, language barriers, perceived disrespect of culture and religion, and logistical barriers such as time, employment, and transportation.

The importance of building relationship with families was a common thread throughout the study. Parents experienced empowerment when schools were proactive in communications, met with parents to help them understand expectations and to address fear and mistrust. Parents realized that schools were there to help when school personnel learned of needs and connected families with resources to help them succeed. The stories of these refugee parents in a smaller city setting lent insight to strategies which may be used to help refugee students succeed with support garnered from collaboration between school, families and community resources.

Key Words: adolescents, case study, cultural adjustment, education, over-aged and under-credited, parent involvement, qualitative research, refugee, Somali, students with interrupted formal education

Next, I sincerely appreciate my committee members, without whose encouragement and guidance, this work would not be possible. Dr. Robyn Hess, my advisor and committee chair: your suggestions and challenges helped me articulate my thoughts more effectively, and I'll be forever in awe of your ability to spot typos and formatting errors that I consistently miss. Dr. Kathrine Hak, my professor and first partner in qualitative research: you have encouraged me, and believed in me, and have unswervingly championed partnership with parents. I look forward to celebrating life after graduate school with you. Dr. Betty Cardona, my encourager: your insights into multicultural issues and the needs of refugees and assylees has contributed much. Dr. Madeline Milian, my faculty representative: you have a way of asking pertinent questions and guiding my understanding of multiple perspectives, which has added richness and insight to this process.

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Mary Van Korlaar

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Amani slumped in her seat, hijab pulled over her face. Acting as if she did not know what was going on around her, she rarely spoke. When she did speak, it was only in Somali, her comments directed to her parents or the interpreter. She had recently been evaluated for special education services. This meeting was called to determine her eligibility and to discuss the best way to support her progress in school. The school psychologist reported that Amani's nonverbal cognitive tests had come out "extremely low," which had been duplicated with three instruments. However, the psychologist admitted that this finding was not completely supported by observational data, and may have been affected by her lack of interest in the assessment activities.

Amani's teachers reported that she had not made sufficient progress in her classwork as compared to her peers in English language acquisition classes, many of whom were also Somali refugee students. Behavioral concerns were presented and included cheating on tests, not doing her own work on assignments, and disruptive talking. Some of the teachers felt that she wasn't motivated, and spent too much time socializing with other students. Finally, the school counselor interjected his primary concerns which centered on credits. Amani was in ninth grade, and not enrolled in Algebra, nor in other ninth grade core credit courses, which put her at risk of not being able to meet graduation requirements, particularly in Math and Language Arts.

By this point, Amani could stand it no longer, and erupted in a long outburst of Somali. The interpreter shared Amani's refusal to go into special education and her threats to quit school if that were to happen. Amani declared that she would sit through mainstream Algebra if that were what was needed. Her teachers pointed out that she had not mastered prerequisite skills for Algebra, making this solution unlikely to be successful. She glared at those around the room, appearing ready to bolt for the door.

A month later, I had the opportunity to interact with Amani in the Welcome Center classroom, a setting designed to provide supplemental instruction to support successful transition for students with limited English, as well as those with limited formal education. In this setting, Amani appeared lively and socially engaged. Her traditional Somali hijab flowed gracefully about her as she moved. A red and silver scarf wrapped around her head and neck, framing her good-natured face. She laughed and bantered with her classmates both in Somali and English. Frequently, she voiced spirited opinions to me (in English), particularly on issues that she found troubling in school. I recalled my reflections at her eligibility meeting. Surely, she had understood much more of the discussion than she had let on at the time. It seemed that her quick sassy retorts to her classmates completely belied any significant cognitive impairment, as well. If educators are to understand students like Amani and her school difficulties, they (myself included) will need to look deeper into individual background and experiences, rather than focusing on credit deficits and language differences. Rather, we must look to available resources to inform our practices and learn more such that we can truly "welcome" refugee students like Amani into our schools. Ultimately, partnership with her

parents will be critical to constructing an understanding of Amani as a person, and of her school needs. (Amani's story is based on a composite story of real student experiences.)

Background

A total of approximately 44 million people are currently forcibly displaced, world-wide, including both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 15.4 million persons with refugee status, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2012). Individuals who become refugees first cross the border to neighboring countries where they may spend many years in these "refugee camps," where they register with the UNHCR and with foreign embassies, and await opportunity for resettlement. Intense economic pressure on host countries presents the need for resettlement of a significant number of these refugees to developed countries. The UNHCR facilitates resettlement to developed countries such as the United States, Europe, and Australia on an annual quota system.

In the United States, the Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is responsible for establishing annual quotas and assisting resettlement of refugees. An estimated 2.73 million refugees have been resettled into the United States since 1975. The mandate of the ORR is to provide assistance to refugees through a variety of programs and grants, aimed at helping refugees to achieve self-sufficiency and integration within the shortest time possible after their arrival (ORR, 2012). Each state has different organizations and processes to assist refugees. Refugee Resettlement in the Rocky Mountain Region utilizes the collaborative efforts of several organizations in the initial resettlement process. After refugees resettle into their new communities, additional community organizations

coordinate efforts to support them in transition, with the primary goal to assist them in becoming self-sufficient.

Significance of the Study

The Rocky Mountain Region has experienced a recent influx of refugee families, many of whom are from the Horn of Africa (i.e., Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, or Djibouti). As the children matriculate into local schools, challenges to effective partnership between home and school arise, due to cultural and language barriers. These differences are further exacerbated by the cumulative stressors experienced by refugee families and by interruptions to their formal education. While these aspects impact the child's learning and social-emotional adjustment to the schools, they may also present challenges to a holistic understanding of the child. Parents are most often in the best position to understand their children's unique histories, cultures, and environments. Yet, these parents may also experience significant difficulty in being understood by the school. Given the challenges to effective partnership with refugee parents, local schools will need a better understanding of the unique perspectives of refugee parents, and the practices and policies that can help facilitate communication and collaboration.

Effective partnership requires mutual understanding. Schools often have mechanisms by which they communicate their expectations and processes to families. Less is known about families and their needs and perceived challenges to effective partnership. Unfortunately, this often results in the misconception that parents do not care about their children's education. Yet when educators take the time and effort to understand specific groups of parents, they find this is not the case; parents do care (Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

Appreciating parents' needs, values, and the challenges they face can help to bridge the gulf between schools and families. Developing a basic understanding of those with whom we seek to partner seems a necessary step to improving outcomes for students, the ultimate goal of family-school partnership.

Theoretical Basis of the Study

The bio-ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (2005) was used as a framework for viewing the various systems impacting these students and their families. From the megasystems of global refugee contexts down to the microsystems of family and school, this use of a bio-ecological approach aides in constructing a richer understanding of these students and their parents. (See definitions at the end of Chapter One for a more detailed definition of the various components of this theory.) Of these various systems, the focus of the study is on the mesosystem, the interaction between school and home, as this is the primary context in which the child's educational needs can be fully addressed.

The importance of parent involvement is well-established in the literature (Christenson & Hurley, 1997; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010; Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2006). Mesosystem interactions between home and school are further informed by parent involvement models proposed by Epstein (1995) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

In recognition of the many forms of involvement, Epstein (2005a) developed her model of six types of parent involvement, which can serve as a guide for understanding what schools expect of parent involvement. These six types of involvement include (a)

parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision

making, and (f) collaborating with the community. Unlike earlier models of parent

involvement, this expanded model recognizes that specific forms of involvement may

occur at home, at school, and in the community.

School personnel play a key role in facilitating parent involvement activities.

School leadership is considered key to encouraging parent involvement (Epstein,

Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). Working together with school personnel, policies and

practices related to frequent and open communication with families can be implemented

by ensuring that there is someone at the school with whom parents can communicate

(Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Principals set the tone for ensuring that schools present a

welcoming environment for parents, scheduling staff trainings for developing effective

partnerships, and establishing programs that help families and students, such as after

school care. Further, they can collaborate with community services such as counseling,

school safety officers, and representatives from local agencies to facilitate a supportive

network between schools, communities, and parents.

Keys to effectively involving a greater number and a wider range of diverse

families in these parent involvement efforts will require greater understanding of both

families' and school personnel's perspectives. This process can help us to recognize

inequities in social structures, recommend strategies for systems change through robust,

intentional leadership, along with structures for systems change (Epstein, 2005a; Epstein,

Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). Epstein and Voorhis (2010) suggested the need for schools to

develop a clear plan to address linguistic barriers to communication and a process for

including diverse families' input to understand the needs and challenges to effective education for all children.

Less is known about how refugee parents are involved with their children's schooling, or what types of parent involvement are important to them. Preliminary work in this area indicates African parents may see their roles differently, with more focus on home involvement (e.g. parenting, ensuring children complete homework done) than on school-based types of involvement (Githembe, 2009; Nderu, 2005). While many have promoted the value of effective partnership with parents, we know little about how refuge parents might perceive or respond to those opportunities for involvement. Without specific information, it may be useful to utilize a theory to guide questions of how and why refugee parents are involved, what is important to them, and what encouragement or barriers they might perceive.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) developed a multi-component model that seeks to explain parents' motivation for decisions regarding school involvement. This model has been adapted over the years, but primarily considers variables related to parent factors (role construction and self-efficacy), parent perceptions of invitations to involvement (from the school, the teacher and the child), and finally life context variables (time and resources). Research on aspects of the model have supported these variables, primarily with parents of elementary students in the United States (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Walker et al., 2005). Further preliminary support has been shown with Latino immigrant families in elementary settings (Green et al, 2007). Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) studied the model with secondary students in Canada, finding that parent involvement tended to decline in

the high school years. While others have attributed this decline to lower parent self-efficacy for helping their students with higher level work (Garcia Coll et al., 2002), Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) suggested it may be more developmental, with parents giving more autonomy to older students. With each group, variations were found in the importance of different aspects of the model. Although used as a guide in this study, it is not known how these aspects will apply with Somali refugee families in non-metropolitan middle and high school settings.

<div align="center">**Relevant Literature**</div>

Needs of Refugees in the Schools

In recent years, many schools in the United States and other nations have experienced a substantial influx of refugee children, and teachers often feel ill prepared to respond to their needs (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services [BRYCS], 2010). Several factors complicate the issues for educating these children. A review of the literature suggested that mental health issues related to trauma, grief, and loss, interrupted formal education, acculturation stresses, and language acquisition are key factors that affect learning and school adjustment (BRYCS, 2010; Dreyden-Peterson, 2011). School personnel express concern for being able to adequately assess need for academic support, and the difficulty experienced in fairly assessing for special education needs, in the context of all of these confounding factors (Schon, Shaftel, & Markham, 2008).

Since refugee families often struggle with an expectation for rapid assimilation due to language barriers and lack of specific marketable skills, helping their children in school may be especially difficult. Many of these stressors act in a cumulative manner, further impacting family functioning. These stressors range from acculturation pressures,

acculturation gaps between parents and youth, and coping with trauma, grief, and loss. All of these issues contribute to the stress load of refugee families, in addition to the pressures related to learning to survive in a new setting (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010).

African Parent Involvement

Githembe (2009) conducted a mixed methods study of parent involvement with African parents of elementary students, some of whom were refugees. Key findings included the need for language support to assist parents in communicating with school personnel. Differences in practices, of how school was done, of the roles of the school and the home, and values (time and relationship orientations) further influenced parents' involvement with their children's schools. Nderu (2005) conducted a qualitative study specifically with Somali immigrant parents, some of whom were likely refugees, and described similar findings. African parents expressed differing role constructions compared to expectations of schools in the United States. They were more accustomed to being responsible for things at home, such as ensuring their children were fed, clothed, well rested, and had homework completed. In their home countries, the teacher was the authority at school, and parents would not challenge that. The teacher was therefore expected to handle things at school, and the parent would not interfere. Given this difference in role construction, African parents expressed frustration and confusion as to why the teacher would call them in to manage behavior or academic problems at school. Additionally, language differences created barriers for newer immigrants in particular, making it difficult to communicate or participate in school events. Finally, differences in parenting practices caused misunderstandings. Corporal punishment was often a cause for

misunderstanding, and some families expressed that the parental authority was challenged in such a way that it exacerbated the acculturation gap between generations. Somali parents shared their difficulties in trusting authority figures due to their past experiences. Discrimination based on phenotype (skin color) and religious affiliation was often an additional cause for misunderstandings and stress, as Somali students sometimes reported being taunted for their color, their dress, or their religious practices in their new schools (Githembe, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Nderu, 2005).

Conclusions

There is little doubt that parent involvement is important to children's education. Yet the unique situation in which refugee families find themselves calls for an in-depth understanding of these parents' perspectives in order to facilitate effective partnership with schools. Educators often have a fairly clear concept of what they expect from parents, which can easily shape how educators view family behaviors. Less is known, however, about how parents view that partnership, and how they are involved in supporting their child in school. There is a paucity of literature specific to parent involvement for Somali families. The few studies that were found were conducted in metropolitan areas which are likely to have larger refugee populations and more resources as compared to this smaller city setting. Two of the three studies available involved parents of elementary school children (Githembe, 2009: Nderu, 2005), with only one specifically looking at the involvement of refugee parents of adolescents in a metropolitan setting (Kanu, 2008).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of Somali refugee parents as they interact with their children's schools in a small city, in an agricultural area of the Rocky Mountain Region. The overall intent was to increase our understanding of parents' perspectives, and the ways in which they perceive empowerment or constraint in that partnership. In this way, I expect to become better equipped to work in respectful partnership with refugee parents, with the ultimate goal of improved outcomes for their children. Because the research involved questions of *how* and *why* regarding complex issues, the use of case study was chosen to allow an in depth examination of the issues in their natural contexts.

Research questions

Q1   How do Somali refugee parents define/describe their association with the schools?

Q2   How do Somali refugee parents interact with their children's schools?

Q3   What issues influence Somali parents' involvement with the schools, either encouraging or impeding effective interaction?

Delimitations

Several delimitations were defined for the study. First, I focused my topic on parent involvement issues, with recognition of the related issues and concerns which might impact that involvement. I specified my population as parents with refugee status from the Horn of Africa. Then, as there were several studies regarding parent involvement for elementary school students, I chose to limit my study to parent involvement of families interacting in middle and high school settings. As the existing

studies were focused in metropolitan areas, I chose to define my case as a specific

program serving refugee and immigrant students in a non-metropolitan area. Within that

program, students of multiple backgrounds were served. Thus I further bounded the case

to parents of students with backgrounds from the Horn of Africa. Eventually, I realized

that while some of my participants had lived in neighboring countries, they were all of

Somali origins. Thus, in the analysis and writing phase, I further delimited my case study

to Somali families, changing the verbiage referencing the Horn of Africa to specify

Somali participants.

Definitions

Acculturation: Many definitions and perspectives on the topic of acculturation exist. For

the purposes of this study, acculturation was defined as the process of behavioral and

attitudinal change that results from contact with a new culture. Acculturation

encompasses three broad areas in relationship to both home and majority culture: the

degree of participation in the activities, the acquisition of the language, and personal

identity (including values, beliefs and attitudes) as relates to one culture or another

(McBrien, 2005; Trickett & Birman, 2005).

Acculturation gap: This term refers to differential rates of acculturation between parents

and youth. It is generally assumed that the youth acculturate more quickly to the majority

culture, while parents tend to hold more steadfastly to the home culture (BRYCS, 2010).

Again, using the three fold model of acculturation in terms of activities, language, and

ethnic identity (Trickett & Birman, 2005), differences in acculturation are thought to

affect family relationships, particularly between parents and adolescents.

Acculturation stress: The emotional difficulties experienced due to the acculturation process. Stress is often produced by incongruences in practices, values, language, or by discrimination; its symptoms may include depression, anxiety, aggression (Ho & Birman, 2010).

Assimilation: The process of adopting the host (or dominant) culture ways, which assumes the giving up of home culture in that process. The term "melting pot" is often associated with this definition of assimilation.

Bio-ecological systems theory: A theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) that recognizes multiple nested systems which impact the development of the individual. Later versions depict development as a function of the interaction of the Person, Processes, Contexts, and Time, or the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The systems (contexts) are presented below from broadest to narrowest:

> *Chronosystem:* The chronosystem specifically focuses on the time in which the person develops, the age and frequency and duration in which they experience these interactions, as well as the time in history in which that development takes place. This subsystem permeates all other systems and contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

> *Megasystem:* The overarching pattern of micro-meso-and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or broader social context, including such aspects as belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, and life course options, the megasystem can be seen as the societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broad social context (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Macrosystems: The broad societal institutions that pass on these beliefs, values

and behaviors to the following generations through structures of legal systems,

and overarching systems of religious and educational institutions

(Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Exosystem: The linkages and processes taking place between two or more

settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in

which events occur which impact that individual. For a child, this could be the

parent's workplace, within which the child does not ordinarily interact, but is

impacted indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Mesosystem: The linkages and processes taking place between two or more

settings containing the developing person. Examples might include the

relationships between school, home, and workplace (peers for an adolescent).

That is to say, the mesosystem represents a system of microsystems

(Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Microsystem: The pattern of the activities, roles, and interpersonal relations

experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting. These

settings have particular physical and material features and contain other persons

and their characteristics, systems, and beliefs. (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Discrimination: The differential treatment of an individual or group based on racism,

cultural, religious, and other factors; the relative receptivity of the dominant culture group

in welcoming or stigmatizing the non-dominant group (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006).

English Language Learners (ELL): A very diverse group of students who are actively learning the English language and may benefit from language support programs. This term is typically used in the United States in the K-12 educational context (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008).

English Language Acquisition (ELA): The process by which people learn English. For the purposes of this study, the term was limited to those who have a first language other than English (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Note: Where participants used older terms, such as English as a Second Language (ESL), I have substituted the more current term in brackets, [ELL] or [ELA].

Family Involvement: Various definitions exist for family involvement, however, the overarching definition for purposes of this study was the effective communication between families and schools, and the shared responsibility across time and settings (United States Department of Education, 2010).

Hijab: Traditional dress worn by Muslim women because of their religious beliefs. Some people use the word to refer specifically to the head dress, but it also refers to the style of clothing in general (McBrien, 2005).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model for Motivations for Parental Involvement: a model which attempts to explain parents' decisions for involvement in their child's school. Key constructs thought to contribute are noted below:

> *Contextual Motivators:* Parents' general perceptions of invitation from the school, specific invitations from teachers, and specific invitations from their child (Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011).

Life context variables: Life context variables include knowledge and skills, as well as resources, time, and money (Walker et al., 2005).

Personal psychological motivators: Characteristics of the parent's thought and belief structures (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005). These include parental role construction and parental self-efficacy, in terms of their school involvement (Walker et al., 2005).

Internally displaced persons (IDPs): Persons forcibly displaced, but remaining within their home countries (UNHCR, 2012).

Parentification [of a child]: The phenomenon in which a reverse hierarchy forms between parent and child. Due to differential acculturation and language acquisition, parents may come to depend on the child for accessing information and services (Puig, 2002; Skuza, 2005).

Participant Observer: The researcher who is engaged for a relatively extended period of time in the setting to witness social interaction first hand, to take part in the daily activities and context of the people she is studying (Schwandt, 2007).

Refugee: In order to be designated a refugee, people must have a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugees legally enter the United States in search of freedom, peace, and opportunity for themselves and their families (ORR, 2012).

Relocation: Movement within the same state, most often undertaken to obtain more affordable housing (Weine et al., 2011).

Resettlement: The process of providing a new place to settle, along with resources and support to become integrated members of their new society (ORR, 2012).

Resilience: The phenomenon of relatively good outcomes despite the presence of risk factors; the resistance to environmental risk, or the overcoming of adversity (Rutter, 2007).

Secondary migration: moving to another state, most often undertaken to enhance employment, family reunification, and stability (Weine, et al., 2011).

Social Justice: In the school context, this term is defined as equal rights and protection for all, with an emphasis on psychological well-being for all students. Social justice is a systemic perspective of advocacy and responsibility, with emphasis on diversity, institutional power, and institutional v. individual change. (Nastasi, 2008; Shriberg et al., 2008).

Somali: In the context of this study, the term Somali refers to people of Somali ethnic origins, regardless of migration to or prior residence in neighboring African countries.

Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE): Immigrant students who come from a home in which a language other than English is spoken and (a) enter a United States school after the second grade; (b) have had at least two years less schooling than their peers; (c) function at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics; and (d) may be pre-literate in their first language (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Background

The influx of refugees into Western countries in recent years has required extensive adaptation on the part of schools. Educational institutions are one of the first resources available to help refugee students and their families integrate into their communities, and eventually to become productive citizens (Colorado African Organization, n.d.). Given the amount of time children spend in school, this setting often becomes a primary resource for supporting refugee children as well as their families.

Key challenges to successful adaptation for refugee students include English language acquisition and cultural stress (Bates et al., 2005; Roxas, 2011), as well as the effects of interruptions to formal education (BRYCS, 2010; Dreyden-Peterson, 2011). Grade placement issues and loss of family support structures are cited as further barriers to academic success for refugee youth (Kanu, 2008). Other salient issues facing refugee students include mental health stressors due to trauma grief and loss (Castex, 1992; De Haene et al., 2010; Farwell, 2003). Discrimination potentially increases risk for refugee students who, by definition, have come to this country to escape persecution, and now may find themselves the targets of suspicion and bullying in the host country as well (McBrien, 2005).

Because the issues faced by refugees span many different contexts, exploration of these and related issues may best be understood using the bio-ecological systems theory

(Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This model provides a conceptual framework from which to examine the interaction between families and school personnel. Embedded within this contextual framework, models for parent involvement put forth by Epstein (1995) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (Walker et al., 2005) may also helpful to understand school expectations and issues impacting parents' involvement decisions. These frameworks for parent involvement are used tentatively, with the recognition that cultural differences may affect the goodness of fit of these models to refugee populations.

Theoretical Frameworks

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) provides a useful model for understanding the different contexts (also called systems) of the child's ecology, and thus serves as the overarching framework for this study. His model of contextual influences focuses on the interactions between the individual and the environment. Of interest in this study, is the interplay between refugee families and schools. Therefore, a model of parent involvement is helpful. Epstein's types of parent involvement was used to understand the expectations of parent involvement from the perspective of the school microsystem in the United States (Epstein, 1995). Further, the work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler on parent motivation for involvement also provides an organizing framework (Walker et al., 2005). Caution is warranted, however, in that the use of models of parent involvement, and even the term itself, can unwittingly convey deficit imagery toward immigrant parents and their resources for helping their children. This consideration is particularly important in defining what is meant by parent involvement, and when topics of willingness and motivation of parents of diverse background are addressed (Lightfoot, 2004).

**Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological
Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner first presented his Ecological Systems Theory in 1979, in which he described various levels of a child's environment, which he likened to a set of nested Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Since then, his bio-ecological systems model has evolved, recognizing development as a function of the interaction of the Person, Processes, Contexts and Time, also known as the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The nested ecological systems provide the contexts for the interactions and processes through which the person develops.

The concept of time, or chronosystem, permeates each of the nested systems, and is critical to understanding the impact of proximal processes on the development of the individual. People live in physical and social settings, but also in time, in a given point in history. The chronosystem specifically focusses on the time period in which the person develops, and considers the onset, frequency, and duration of that person's interactions with given proximal processes, as well as the time in history in which that development takes place. Salient features of the chronosystem include the global historical context as well as the individual child's developmental history.

At the furthest reaches of Bronfenbrenner's model is the megasystem which represents the overarching structure of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or broader social context. Particular attention is given to those developmental belief systems (which cause a person to initiate action), resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange. The mega-system can be seen as the societal blueprint for a specific culture, subculture, or other broad social context (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Macrosystems, according to Bronfenbrenner (2005) include the broad societal institutions which pass on these beliefs and behaviors to the following generations through structures of legal systems, educational institutions, and overarching systems of religion. While the individual may experience these entities at a microsystem level in the family, school, or workplace, these microsystems are shaped by the larger institutions which govern their organization and activity.

Exosystems comprise the linkages and processes that occur between two or more settings, at least one of which does not include the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes which do impact the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). For a child, this could be the parent's workplace, within which the child does not normally interact, but the child may be impacted indirectly by parental levels of stress, parent availability, and family income. Mesosystems are the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, both of which do contain the developing person. Examples would be the relationships between school and home (for the child), and between home, schools and workplace (for parents). Stated another way, the mesosystem is a system of microsystems. The mesosystem between home and school is the focal point of this study.

Microsystems, then, are the pattern of the activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in face-to-face settings. These settings have specific physical and material features and include other persons with their own characteristics, systems, and beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The child's primary contexts of direct contact are typically the home and school.

Other key features to the newer model are the recognition of proximal processes and person characteristics as essential to the development of the individual. These processes help to explain how the interactions of the developing individual with the environment can either encourage or impede development. Finally, according to this revised model, the bio-psychosocial characteristics of individuals have three main characteristics which affect development. Bronfenbrenner (2005) refers to these as person characteristics which include dispositions, biological resources, and demand characteristics. Dispositions are a set of behavioral patterns and inclinations which are characteristic of an individual. Bio-ecological factors impacted by the interaction of heritable traits and environmental processes include ability, knowledge, and skills required for effective engagement with proximal processes at each stage of development. And lastly, demand characteristics either invite or discourage interaction with the social environment, which promote or impede those processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner's complex interaction of environments and individual characteristics then becomes the framework for theories more specific to parent involvement with their children's schools. Two such theories are Epstein's (1995) Six Types of Involvement for Families and Schools, and Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (1995) model for Parent Motivation for Involvement in their children's education, both of which were used as a framework for exploring parent involvement with Somali parents featured in this study.

Epstein's Six Types of Involvement
for Families and Schools

Epstein's model is useful in demonstrating the expectations of the host culture, particularly from the perspective of the schools (Epstein, 1995). In this model, Joyce Epstein defined six types of involvement for families and their children's schools. She further defined each type, and gave examples or suggestions as to how those types of involvement might occur. These types are listed as (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaboration with community.

Epstein recognized the role of parenting to establish a home environment to support children as students (Epstein, 1995, 2001, 2005a). She also suggested that the school can play a role in enhancing and empowering parents to do so. Parent education activities, such as workshops, audio-visual presentations, and classes on parenting and child rearing can be offered at each age level. Schools can also facilitate connection to family support systems which assist families with health and nutrition needs, social services, literacy, and GED programs for parents. Schools can conduct home visits during key transition points for students, and facilitate neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and schools to understand families during these critical times of change.

Communication between home and school can take many forms. Some examples include parent teacher conferences, frequent notes or phone calls to the home, homework folders sent home for parents' review and comments, clear communication on school policies, rules, and on choices regarding programs available within the school (Epstein

2005a). In the case of linguistically diverse families, it is important that written communication also be appropriately translated (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010).

Volunteering is another important aspect of Epstein's model of parent involvement. Parents can volunteer to help teachers, administrators, students and other parents. To facilitate parent volunteer activities, she suggests that schools dedicate space to families for meetings, volunteer work, and resources. She also recommends that families be surveyed as to interests and availability for various types of volunteer service. She further recommends parental activities involving school safety and operation of school programs, with the implementation of communication trees to keep all families informed of needed information (Epstein, 1995).

Parent involvement also includes learning activities at home (Epstein 1995). The author further suggests that school personnel can facilitate these types of activities by providing families with information about specific skill levels expected in each subject at each grade level and homework policies. They can also provide ideas to help students learn at home such as giving direction in how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home and how parents can help students improve specific skills. Ideally, homework should require students to interact with their families on what they are learning, and provide suggestions for family activities for math, science, and reading which are clearly related to what is happening at school. These activities can be augmented by summer learning packets to keep children learning throughout the year. For secondary students, she recommends seeking family input in goal setting and in planning for post-secondary education or work (Epstein, 2001).

The next type of parent involvement is at the decision making level. Epstein encouraged schools to develop parent leaders and representatives through implementation of active parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees for various topics of concern to parents. Schools should further encourage independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements. District-level councils and committees should be formed for family and community involvement. Parents should be provided with information on school or local elections for school representatives, and networks should be developed to link all families with parent representatives.

The final type of parent involvement is collaboration with the community. Schools and parents can work together to identify and integrate community resources and services to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Community health, cultural, recreational social support services can be accessed to provide community activities that link to learning skills and talents, summer programs, service learning, and community volunteer experiences for students. Alumni can also participate in school programs and learning opportunities for students as well. Finally, training educators to effectively partner with families and communities is needed if these partnerships are to be successful (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

Parent involvement, as described by Epstein, is instrumental in student achievement outcomes. For example, increased communication specific to helping their child with math at home resulted in positive outcomes for students' achievement in math (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sheldon et al, 2010). Communication is a key aspect of parent involvement, which has been shown to influence rates of attendance and chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Besides periodic reports of student progress,

schools can initiate communication to parents about absenteeism, for example. They can also provide a contact person with whom parents may communicate (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Collaboration with community services such as counseling, food, clothing, and housing resources, and vocational training programs allow schools to partner with the community and parents for student retention and success. Members of the community might also sponsor rewards for attendance, and thus reduce school drop-out (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Keys to effectively involving both a greater number and a wider range of diverse families in these parent involvement efforts requires that we recognize inequities in social structures, and the need for robust, intentional leadership along with structures for systems change (Epstein, 2005b; Epstein et al., 2011, Sanders & Epstein, 2000). Epstein and Voorhis (2010) suggest the need for a clear plan to address linguistic barriers to communication, and the inclusion of a greater number and wider representation of diverse families' input to understand the needs and challenges to effective education of all children (Epstein, 2005b; Epstein et al, 2011).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's
Parent Involvement Model

While Epstein's model has clearly demonstrated the positive relationship between parent involvement and student outcomes (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sheldon et al, 2010), the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model has explored the mechanisms and mediating factors contributing to that relationship (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, et al., 2005; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Key constructs in this model include personal psychological motivators within the parent, contextual motivators in terms of perceptions of invitation to be

involved, and life context variables affecting a parent's ability to be involved with their child's school.

Personal psychological motivators. The construct of personal psychological motivators includes parental role construction and parental self-efficacy as related to their belief that school involvement could help their child. Parental roles are seen on a continuum, ranging from parents viewing themselves as responsible for their children's educational outcomes to the school being responsible (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Somewhere between these two ends of the continuum is a vision of shared partnership. These roles are constructed through expectations influenced by personal, extended family, and cultural expectations of the role of the parent, what their involvement should be, and how they should do it. More recent work has shifted to include parents' perceptions of their involvement roles as being home-focused or school-focused, rather than merely whether or not they recognize responsibility for outcomes (Walker et al., 2011). This may seem a subtle shift, but it could be argued that the earlier definition linked to a more deficit perception of families, whereas the latter approach offers a different perspective on how parents focus their involvement efforts.

Contextual Motivators. Contextual motivators of involvement included general perceptions of invitation from the school, specific invitations from teachers, and specific invitations from their child (Walker et al, 2011). It is considered important that the school (and the teachers) consistently convey that parents are valued members of the community, valued participants in their children's education, and that this information is conveyed in a way that was perceived as positive, encouraging, responsive, welcoming, and empowering. Engaging families also requires cultural sensitivity, and conveys a

willingness to hear what parents have to say. There is some evidence that the voices of minority parents are often dismissed or overlooked (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). Unfortunately, some immigrant parents have expressed feeling unwelcome or disrespected in the school environment (Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010).

Specific invitations to involvement *from teachers* is grounded in empirical research indicating that in general, parents wish to know more about how to help their children learn and succeed in school (Walker et al., 2005). Further studies were able to demonstrate the impact of teacher efforts to involve parents by giving specific information as to how to help, and that these types of communications from schools and teachers have been linked to increased parent involvement in the schools.

Specific invitations to involvement *from the student* have been linked to increased parent involvement, particularly in home-based activities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Walker et al., 2005). These studies support the idea that parents are attentive to their child's characteristics and want to respond to their child's needs, whether it be a verbal "I need help" or "I don't understand" or other behaviors, such as displays of frustration or attempts to avoid homework.

Life context variables. Perceptions of life-context variables are also seen to be an important influence on parent involvement decisions. Life context variables include knowledge and skills, as well as resources, time, and money. Parent's perceptions of what they have to offer in the way of specific knowledge and skills may vary over time and settings. Some researchers have suggested that parents often perceive their guidance as adequate in elementary school, but less adequate in junior high and high school, a pattern

which coincides with typical declines in parent involvement (Garcia Coll et al., 2002). Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) offer another perspective, suggesting that by high school, parents may reduce this involvement, transferring more responsibility to the student to encourage a developmentally appropriate level of autonomy. Contrary to findings in the United States and Canada, Israeli parents tended to stay involved in their child's education through the high school years. These shifts in parent involvement across countries raise questions about potential cultural differences, and implications for subsequent effects on parent-teacher interaction barriers in the secondary school years (Griffin & Galassi, 2010).

Finally, decisions for parental involvement may be affected by schools' responsiveness to parental resources in terms of time and energy due to demands of their job(s), extended family needs, time, and transportation (Garcia Coll et al., 2002). Life context variables such as time and transportation did influence school-based involvement among Latino families. However, life context variables did not seem to influence family motivation for involvement as much as some of the other variables, such as invitation from teachers and students (Walker et al., 2011).

These key constructs constitute the first level of a five level model. Most of the research using the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model has focused on these first level factors. An intermediate level of the model suggests relationships between these parent factors, and the types of involvement the parent chooses, whether at home or at school. Home-based activities include communicating values, goals, and expectations to their children, and involvement with school activities at home. School-based forms of involvement include parent-teacher-school communications and participation in activities

at the school. (This level shares much of what was presented in Epstein's (1995) six types of parent involvement.) Further levels hypothesize the learning mechanisms used by parents, such as encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction, as well as student perceptions of these mechanisms as employed by their parents. These aspects of the model remain to be studied in depth, but they do offer interesting hypotheses regarding the mechanisms and mediating factors that may impact student outcomes. The final level connects all of these components to student achievement outcomes as determined by various summary measures, including both academic achievement and student self-efficacy for doing well in school.

An Ecological Perspective of the Refugee Population

An ecological perspective can also be useful for conceptualizing the systems which impact refugee populations, beginning with the larger global contexts of wars and upheaval. These events are followed by the recent influx of refugees into the United States, and then on to the state, and ultimately to the local community. The ecological perspective is further examined in terms of the mesosystem in which school and home microsystems interact.

Global Contexts

For refugees with Somali backgrounds, the global context includes recent decades of African wars and political upheavals, international involvement in the resettlement of refugees via the United Nations and other agencies, and concurrent global politics such as media coverage of Somali piracy and the September 11th attack on the United States. The influx of African refugees can be framed within this broader global refugee context, and then traced through international resettlement processes and ultimately to state and local resettlement. However, it is beneficial to understand the current refugee issues from a

broader historical context to give additional understanding of the current refugee resettlement system.

Singer and Wilson (2007) offered a brief synopsis of refugee policies and populations in the United States over recent decades, which helps to trace the history and create a context for understanding the situation of current refugee populations. The initial refugee policy in the United States, the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, was enacted in response to the needs of Europeans in the wake of World War II. Approximately 650,000 displaced Europeans were admitted during that time. In the 1960s and 1970s, many people from the former Soviet Union and Cuba sought refuge. Since that time, several waves of refugees and asylum seekers have come to Western countries such as the United States, Canada, various European nations, and Australia. Arising from the conflict in the 1970s, immigrants were largely from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, many of whom had spent time in refugee camps in Thailand. To date, over 1.4 million refugees from these Southeast Asian countries have been resettled in the United States. The Refugee act of 1980 was enacted in response to the need for a systematic process for entry and standardized domestic services for all refugees. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, nearly 150,000 refugees came to the United States from the former Yugoslavia and its successor states as a result of political upheaval in the Balkans. This influx included people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, as well as Kosovar Albanians (Singer & Wilson, 2007).

The most recent influx of refugees has resulted from civil conflicts in Africa and in the Middle Eastern regions including Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, there was a temporary halt of all refugees. Once

refugees were again allowed to enter, there were stricter caps on the number of refugees admitted each year. In recent years, those caps have risen with current annual caps for refugee arrivals set at 70,000 per year. Approximately 20,000 of this quota is designated for African refugees. Burmese refugees were also recently added to this growing list of refugees. Their country (officially known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar) has had a fifty year history of struggle, climaxing in an uprising in 2009, after which 10,000 people fled to neighboring countries (Singer & Wilson, 2007).

Somali refugees currently represent one of the largest global refugee groups. Attacks on the government of Somali President Siad Barre began in 1988. Anarchy resulted when civil war broke out in 1991, destroying this country's government, economic, and education systems. Nearly half of the people were displaced, approximately one million Somali people eventually became refugees in neighboring countries such as Kenya, Yemen, and Ethiopia. Refugees have stayed an average of 10-12 years in camps where conditions have been harsh and often violent. Northern Kenya hosts some of the largest refugee camps in the world, many of which are plagued by threats such as kidnappings, rapes, hijackings, banditry, and even murder. This violence hampers the efforts of aid organizations to bring basic human services such as food, water, and medical care, as well as to provide protection to these people (UNHCR, 2012; McBrien, 2005). Many adults and children witnessed these violent events against family members. Some of the young girls were kept as sex slaves. Thus, violence and trauma are a major issue for Somali refugees (Birman, Trickett & Bacchus, 2001). An estimated 100,000 of these Somali refugees have eventually come to the United States (UNHCR, 2012).

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2012) reports a total of approximately 44 million people forcibly displaced, world-wide, including both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 15.4 million persons with refugee status. IDPs are those persons displaced within their home countries, and refugees are defined as those who have been forcibly displaced into other countries. Initially, many people internally displaced within their home countries, hope to be able to return to their homes. Unfortunately for many, this is not possible, and as conditions worsen many are forced to flee to neighboring countries, many of which are also developing nations. When refugees enter a neighboring country, they register with the UNHCR to confirm their refugee status. They are then referred to an appropriate embassy to register for relocation, but wait lists are very long. Only rarely do individuals get to choose the country of relocation. Instead, the process is regulated by quotas or caps designated by host countries (BRYCS, 2010). Even when individuals are officially granted status as refugees in a neighboring country, most hope to repatriate to their home countries once conditions become less hostile. For many, this too is never realized.

Economic pressures for refuges and their host countries can be overwhelming. Three quarters of the world's refugees reside in their neighboring countries, of which approximately 80% are also developing nations (UNHCR, 2012). The host countries hardest hit in terms of numbers of refugees have been Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Economically, the hardest hit host countries have been Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Kenya. With this intense economic pressure on host countries, the need for resettlement of a significant number of refugees to developed countries becomes obvious. The UNHCR works with various

countries to facilitate resettlement. These global situations and policies for refugee resettlement provide a megasystem context for the refugee situation.

Recent Influx of Refugees
into the United States

The United States Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is instrumental in establishing annual quotas and facilitating resettlement of refugees to the United States. The ORR provides assistance to refugees through a variety of programs and grants, aimed at helping refugees to achieve self-sufficiency and integration within the shortest time possible, after arriving in the United States (ORR, 2012). Working collaboratively with other federal and state agencies, ORR ensures that data-informed placement decisions are made, and that ORR resources are available to support resettlement in each of the receiving areas. When people have been selected for relocation, they must take a loan to pay for transportation and expenses to the appointed resettlement community. They are then sent to the host country, and usually greeted at the airport by the local agencies, who assist in resettlement from that point (UNHCR, 2012). Once they arrive in the United States, a host of new laws, policies, and cultural variables are introduced, representing a new macrosystem for the group or family unit.

Individual states oversee the resettlement process in each of the major resettlement cities In the Rocky Mountain Region, the state works with three organizations are the African Community Center, Ecumenical Refugee Services, Inc., and Lutheran Family Services. The African Community Center (ACC) is a non-profit organization, which is part of the larger Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) based in Arlington, VA. The ACC welcomes newcomers who have fled persecution in their home countries and assists with housing and employment skills

(ECDC, 2011). Ecumenical Refugee and Immigration Services, Inc. (ERIS, 2011) is a local affiliate of Church World Services and Episcopal Migration Ministries. As such, ERIS works closely with ORR and with local church congregations to provide assistance to first-year refugees. The primary goal of ERIS is ease the stress on refugees in the resettlement process and to help them to establish self-sufficiency as soon as possible (ERIS, 2011; Frias, 2003). Lutheran Family Services (LFS) provides a variety of family oriented services to vulnerable populations including children, elderly, and refugee populations (LFS, 2011). LFS serves the needs of refugees through housing, employment, and community-based services up to five years after their arrival in the United States. Collectively, these organizations facilitate the initial immigration process and the settling of refugees into designated communities where they assist with housing and connection to local community refugee services. Once refugees settle in these areas, other agencies assist in the provision of health care, mental health services, food, emergency assistance, youth programs, and other community supports.

Within this overall influx of refugees into the state, there has been an increase of refugees of East African origins in recent years. The United States Census Bureau (2010) reports would suggest a rough estimate of approximately 23,000 persons in this state alone. This estimate must be interpreted cautiously, however, as there is no designation of refugee status in the 2010 Census Bureau figures, and no way of accounting for transitions in or out of the state due to secondary migration factors. Secondary migration involves moving to another state, and is most often undertaken to enhance employment, family reunification, and stability. Families may also experience additional moves after initial resettlement. Relocation is movement within the same state, and was reportedly

most often undertaken to obtain more affordable housing (Weine et al., 2011). Because of these movements, obtaining accurate and up-to-date statistics on state and local refugee populations is limited to best estimates at any given period.

Critical criteria for resettlement agencies include the capacity of a community to sustain and integrate refugees. Employment is a key issue to self-sufficiency for adults with limited English proficiency, and often limited employment skill sets in this new context. Affordable housing, with landlords willing to rent to refugee tenants is another vital consideration. Of the refugees who come to this region, most will arrive in a major metropolitan center, but many will then be drawn to agricultural areas because of accessible jobs requiring little English language or specialized skills, and more affordable housing. In the local agriculturally based economy, employment is thought to stimulate these additional movements, drawing friend and relatives from other states as well. In the north central part of the state, two main cities house large agricultural industries that employ significant numbers of employees. Immigrant populations, including refugees move between these smaller cities for better job opportunities, more affordable housing, and also to be closer to relatives.

Economic issues further exacerbate the situation of refugee families. Nearly one third of the state's children living below the poverty level are children of immigrant parents, regardless of refugee status or country of origin (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Often, accessible employment positions are low paid, with little room for advancement, leaving many refugee families living below poverty level. Through coordinated efforts in community supports and education, the ORR's primary goal is to assist these families in becoming self-sufficient productive members of society in the

shortest amount of time possible. In reality, families find many barriers to this rapid assimilation, such as language barriers, lack of specific marketable skill sets, and stressors from acculturation pressures. Parents are also coping with trauma, stress, grief and loss, in addition to survival in a new setting. Yet, many refugee families demonstrate remarkable resiliency despite these multiple challenges to adaptation to their resettlement environments (De Haene et al., 2010).

Education for the children is also vital to this integration process (BRYCS, 2010). Larger metropolitan areas often absorb significant numbers of refugee students into urban schools, admittedly increasing pressure on schools that had already demonstrated a significant capacity for working with multilingual multiethnic students. The smaller cities have also had a history of working with ELL students due to the high percentage of migrant agricultural workers who are primarily Spanish speakers. However, this influx of global immigrants has added many new challenges in the community and in the schools, stretching their limited resources. African students with refugee status will be influenced by processes affecting parent employment, resettlement policies, state and district level education policies, community resources, and many other factors.

The Local Context

The exosystem for the study is embodied in a small city with an approximate population of 12,000, surrounded by rural areas. The school district, which provides the site of this study, serves a total of 3,444 students, 65% of whom are classified as other than White, not of Hispanic origin. Table 1 reflects the student ethnicity demographics for the school district; immigration status is not included in the available information.

Table 1

Ethnicity of the School District

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
American Indian or Alaskan Native	20	0.6
Asian	16	0.5
Black, Non-Hispanic	107	3.2
Hispanic	1945	59.0
White, Non-Hispanic	1175	35.6
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islands	2	0.1
Multiple Races	32	1.0
Total	3297	100

The largest ethnic group is Hispanic, comprising 59% of the student body. Federal classification codes for race and ethnicity do not distinguish between black students of African American heritage and those directly from African countries. However, before the arrival of the African refugees, the population of the town was less than one percent black, suggesting that the majority of the 107 Black, non-Hispanic students are of recent African origins. Immigration status is not collected by the school system, but from my observation, there were currently between 20 and 25 students enrolled in the newcomer's program, which serves students in their first three years in the country. An estimated 60 to 70 percent of these students are from Horn of Africa backgrounds. While school personnel have been long been accustomed to working with Mexican/Latino immigrants, the addition of African refugee populations was a more recent phenomenon, for which additional skills and training were needed.

The Family-School Mesosystem

The family-school mesosystem, the context of interaction between caregivers and schools, was the primary focus of this study. While less is known about parent involvement specific to refugee families, research on family involvement provides a framework from which to begin constructing an understanding of the issues. In primarily North American contexts, parent involvement has been shown to be connected to parents' construction of roles, self-efficacy for being able to impact their children's educational outcomes, parents' perceptions of invitation for involvement, as well as life context variables related to time and resources (Walker, et. al., 2005).

Schools who engaged diverse students, family and community in mutually beneficial activities found improvements in attendance and reduction in chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Poor attendance (chronic absenteeism) is considered a precursor to school drop-out. Thus, engaging students, parents, and communities is considered to be one strategy for effectively preventing school drop-out. This strategy is consistent with findings on the importance of connection to family and community (Halle-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007). Collaboration between schools and families has been further supported through collaboration with communities, especially in cases of diverse populations. Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines (2010) cited collaboration with organizations and programs as key connections to understanding and communicating with African American communities. Community liaisons from the African American community were utilized to increase understanding between schools and African American parents. Halle-Lande et al., 2007).

It has been suggested that collaboration with community liaisons may prove useful in addressing the many confounding factors for African refugee families as well (BRYCS, 2010). Linguistic barriers were a primary concern for African parents of elementary school students, many of whom found it hard to communicate with school personnel, and thus found it difficult to be involved (Githembe, 2009). Often the students knew more about what was going on than their parents, leaving parents feeling disempowered (Githembe, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Nderu, 2005). Cultural differences also impacted parent perceptions and involvement choices (Githembe, 2009). Differences in discipline practices, particularly corporal punishment, resulted in perceptions of disempowerment for parents, and misunderstanding of the extent of repercussions from legal systems protecting children's rights in the United States (Birman et al., 2001). Cultural values impacted the roles of the school and the home. Many African parents saw these roles as clearly distinct, and would defer to the teacher on all matters pertaining to school (Githembe, 2009; Nderu, 2005). These differences in role expectations for teachers and parents also impact parent involvement in the new setting. Some African parents expressed confusion as to why teachers didn't just take care of things at school (Nderu, 2005). Many indicated that their homeland experiences included the provision of after school supports, such as activities and homework support, which were often not provided by schools in the United States (Githembe, 2009). Culturally influenced values of time and relationship orientations further influenced parents' involvement with their children's schools (Githembe, 2009). Nderu (2005) conducted a qualitative study with Somali immigrant parents, and found that of Epstein's six types of involvement, these parents tended to be involved in only the parenting role. However, it is important to note

that this finding was not construed as parents not caring about education. These parents enthusiastically endorsed the importance of education, but had a very clear view of their role as parents in the home, and deferred to the teachers' role in the classroom.

Along with these differences in culturally defined roles, language barriers, and differences in discipline practices, discrimination was noted to make effective partnership more difficult (Kanu, 2008). Parents also cited resources and logistics (such as lack of transportation, or long work hours), as barriers to involvement at school (Githembe, 2009; Nderu, 2005).

In summary, it is clear that many factors have a bearing school success for the children of refugee families, some of which exceed the capacity of the school to address. The impact of this influx of refugee students into our schools is being addressed in part through the ORR's *Refugee School Impact Grant (RSIG),* which funds expenses directly linked to refugee students in their first three years in the schools. In this region, the RSIG is administered through three different agencies working together to meet the needs of refugee families. Based on perceived needs, each of these agencies has been awarded grants to deliver programming that will meet the needs of refugees and their families.

Jewish Family Service's (JFS) *International Kid Success* program is a school based counseling program. This program provides cultural adjustment support for students, fosters connections with mainstream peers, offers training and support for school personnel working with refugee students, and fosters collaboration with school and community. This training typically focuses on awareness and understanding of the psychological, cultural, and practical issues for these students and their families, with an

understanding of how these issues can affect a student's ability to succeed in school (BRYCS, 2010).

Colorado African Organization (CAO) offers the *Refugee Parent Engagement Project*. This project aims to support refugee student success by addressing unique needs and challenges in engaging parent involvement. Cultural and linguistic barriers are addressed with the help of community navigators, who serve as points of contact for newcomers and the school system. Community navigators facilitate communication between families and schools, and ensure that the voice of refugee parents is heard in school decision-making processes. Navigators provide information to parents about schools, and also help schools understand families and cultures (BRYCS, 2010).

Lutheran Family Services' (LFS) provides initial resettlement services which includes connection to housing, temporary financial supports, and community integration resources, including language support for newcomer refugee students transitioning into K-8 schools.

The School Microsystem

While the interactions between school and family are the focus of this study, each of the microsystems of school and family contribute uniquely to this model. The school contributes to partnership by providing support from leadership, creating positive welcoming school climates, and developing specific plans for communicating with parents of diverse cultures, including the provision of linguistic support for those who need it. Epstein's (1995) model of parent involvement has not been specifically applied to refugee populations, but aspects of her model are consistent with programming options for refugee families. School leadership is known to be a key factor in creating a

welcoming environment for parents, and intentionally designing structures and processes for good communication with parents (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). Epstein and Voorhis (2010) further suggest the need for a clear plan to address linguistic barriers to communication, and for including diverse families' input in order to understand the needs and challenges for effectively educating all children.

Because of the myriad of factors and the limited time since the influx of refugee students, school personnel have had little opportunity to assess their policies and practices related to this new group of learners. Respectful bidirectional partnership between families and schools is likely to require intentional communication of roles and expectations for families (Nderu, 2005). School personnel will also need specific training on awareness and understanding of the psychological, cultural, and practical issues for these students and their families, with an understanding of how these issues can affect a student's ability to succeed in school (BRYCS, 2010). These influences can be expected to have effects on the child's behaviors and academic achievement and parents are often the best source of information in understanding their children.

Another important variable in the school microsystem is the attitudes and approaches of the teachers. Some teachers expressed frustration over the overwhelming nature of the demands, or their perceptions of student's lack of engagement (Kanu, 2008). Other teachers strove for a balance between compassion for the refugee student, and fairness to all students.

Canadian teachers expressed the need for extended English language support and professional development for teachers to help teachers understand their African refugee students and how best to teach them. One Canadian principal commented on the need for

outreach programs which connect the school and the home communities, and emphasized that schools could not bear the financial responsibility alone (Kanu, 2008).

Given the overwhelming needs stemming from multiple systems in the lives of these refugee students and their parents, pressures on the schools can become overwhelming as well. Because refugee families tend to settle in the same neighborhoods or apartment complexes, specific local schools may be more highly impacted than other schools in the same district. Schools are not able to affectively address all of the needs of refugee families on their own. Therefore, partnership with community agencies and accessing outside resources for refugees are important steps for building capacity.

The Refugee School Impact Grant (BRYCS, 2010) is designed to facilitate support for schools heavily impacted by refugee students and the accompanying demands on the school system. This resource lists programs which demonstrate promising practices with refugee populations across the United States. Collaboration with community resources is a key element in many, if not all, of these programs. School administrators can contribute by facilitating training for educators in working with families, networking for connection to resources for schools and for families, and facilitation of communication, which are all benefits of collaboration with community agencies serving refugee families, and helping them gain access to involvement with the schools.

In the site chosen for this study, cultural and linguistic differences are addressed through collaboration with community organizations and networking with outside agencies and service providers to leverage additional resources and expertise. As a result, they are able to engage the services of liaisons who work with school and community

organizations to bridge these cultural and linguistic barriers for African refugee families

(CAO, n.d.). The various community organizations indicated that they also strive to listen

to the refugee community, to better understand the needs, and respond appropriately. The

Welcome Center featured in this study reflects a collaborative effort between the school

district, a community integration agency, counseling services, a workforce center, and the

local police and fire services, as well as outside resources.

The Family Microsystem

Families also bring a variety of characteristics into the partnership. Individual

personalities, skill sets, and self-efficacy are likely to impact the nature of the relationship

in the home-school mesosystem. Language(s) spoken in the home impact the ways in

which families may communicate with schools. Educational experiences can be

considered family resources, which also vary from one family to another. Some refugee

parents may have had little or no education, while others have skills in their home

countries which are not recognized here. Doctors and lawyers from other countries may

end up working in migrant and blue collar jobs when they arrive in this country, because

their licenses are not recognized here, or language differences bar entry to similar

positions to what they held in their home countries. Economic factors contribute to the

ways in which families interact with schools. Parents working agricultural jobs requiring

long hours, or those working multiple low paying jobs will have limited availability for

attending school meetings. These parents may not be visible at school, but may well be

contributing at home, in ways less visible to school personnel, by encouraging their

children and supporting their readiness for school. For refugee families, family resources

are also impacted by who is present in the home. Loss of a parent or other family member

may affect the way a family functions. Further, if a parent is suffering from PTSD symptoms, this may result in poor attachment for the affected parent and child (De Haene et al., 2010).

Cultural norms also affect the way in which youth and parents function at school. It is common in the United States to confer many responsibilities of adulthood at age 18 or after high school, and other responsibilities and privileges at age 21. In recent decades, with the shift to a more education based economy, the onset of adulthood is further extended to allow for a level of financial dependency until after completing higher education. For many Africans, youth have specific rites of passage which prepare them for adult responsibilities. Ceremonial cleansings may happen as early as age 6 to 8 years of age, marking an early stage of maturation. Young girls begin to assist their mothers in the home, and boys are entrusted with responsibility for grazing the smaller livestock such as sheep and goats. Additional rites of passage occur at puberty, approximately ages 12 to 14 for many groups. Youth are socialized in gender specific traditions and responsibilities, further preparing them for adulthood (Abdullahi, 2001). Lewis (1962), a mid-century European anthropologist indicated that the age of marriage for girls was between 15 and 20 years of age, with males marrying at slightly older ages. More recent work by a Somali scholar, Abdullahi (2001), states that marriage is a prerequisite into adult community affairs, and the birth of children further enhances ones adult status. Abdullahi (2001) reported that Somali culture does not celebrate birthdays, but rather marks maturity by physical and emotional characteristics. Therefore, he gives no specific ages for marriageability, but indicates that the maturity of the youth wishing to marry is evaluated by a local council. Customs and practices may vary between groups. For

example, Morland (2010) found that Somali Bantu refugee youth in the Northeastern United States reported that marriage was commonly undertaken between the ages of 13 and 15, and the young couple would stay in the home of the young husband's family home until he was 17 years old. There are indications that Somali refugee youth may tend to marry at a somewhat older age due to educational and economic demands of Western host cultures (Morland, 2010).

<div align="center">**The Needs of Refugee Children in Public Schools**</div>

National research on the needs of refugee students, has identified one of the key issues as the prevalence of mental health concerns. These mental health concerns arise because many refugees have experienced grief and loss, and many suffer from trauma-related conditions. Adjustment to schools is further impacted by the high proportion of students with interrupted formal education (SIFE). Additional challenges include linguistic barriers requiring English Language Acquisition (ELA) for both children and parents, and acculturation stresses (Schon et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). A significant stressor for some students involves discrimination (Birman et al., 2001; Kanu, 2008; McBrien, 2005). All of these stressors, discussed in more detail below, have the potential to affect learning, and the success of refugee children in schools, increasing both the need for, and the challenges to family engagement.

Mental Health Considerations
for Refugee Students

Mental health consideration**s** for refugee students include both resiliency factors and risk factors. Both aspects are examined with the purpose of leveraging resiliency

factors as strengths for coping with risk factors (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Trickett &

Birman, 2005).

Resiliency factors in successful adjustment for youth. While the negative

impact on mental health of some refugees cannot be ignored, it is also important to

consider the resiliency of this population. Despite all of the challenges and risk factors,

many refugees also demonstrate remarkable resilience. Resiliency is the phenomenon of

relatively good outcomes despite the presence of risk factors, resistance to environmental

risk, or the overcoming of adversity (Rutter, 2007). Variables in this process are thought

to include genetic factors, disposition, what happens immediately following trauma,

physiological responses, individual coping mechanisms, connection to family and friends,

and the network of social support systems. The process of developing resilience is

thought to be an interaction of these personal and environmental variables, as neither in

itself is sufficient to account for the development of resilience.

Rana, Bates, Luster and Saltarelli (2011) studied factors related to academic

resilience in Sudanese unaccompanied minors. They found risk factors included limited

English skills, limited formal education opportunities during their time in refugee camps,

lack of resources, low teacher expectations, mental health concerns, and problems with

American peers. Protective factors included individual attributes (motivation, aptitude,

self-efficacy, optimism, biculturalism), relationships (foster parents, teachers/staff, and

peers) and community (resources and opportunities to engage). The 19 youth in this study

listed education, helping family, and rebuilding Sudan as their top three goals. All

finished high school, and 13 enrolled in either two year or four year colleges. Sudanese

youth who were separated from their parents also demonstrated resiliency in foster family

settings. Key protective factors were seen to involve not only the foster families, but the communities and systems into which they were embedded.

Belonging and connection were also found to be associated with lower depression and higher self-efficacy for Somali refugee youth, regardless of their experiences of trauma (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). It is possible that cultural coping patterns may also contribute to resiliency in refugee populations. The cultural value of dealing with emotions quickly, and then "getting on" and not to "moan or dwell on problems" was apparently of high value to one group of Somali women studied in the United Kingdom. (Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis & Buchan 2005, p. 181).

Despite the recognition that acculturation gaps may present challenges to the family, Trickett and Birman (2005) suggest that there may also be a resilience factor provided by the parents in this differential acculturation, because youth benefit from having strong cultural identity, which can be lost in the rapid assimilation process. The adult generation can provide ongoing connection to their home-cultural identity as the youth acculturate more quickly to the host culture in the schools, thus providing a stronger basis for bicultural identity. Rather than being seen as an acculturation deficit for the parents, Trickett & Birman (2005) suggest that parents' retention of home culture potentially offers significant protective factors for immigrant and refugee youth. Family loyalty and strong personal connections were shown to be associated with positive social and academic outcomes for Cuban immigrant youth (Vega & Gil, 1993) as well as Rwandan refugees (De Haene et al., 2010). In fact, strong connections to their past history and identity were also considered protective for empowering traumatized Rwandan parents in exile to maintain secure attachments with their children (De Haene et

al., 2010). Resilience is further associated with optimistic outlooks, non-aggressive assertiveness, and sensitivity to developmental and cultural differences (Lee, Lee, Troupe & Vennum, 2010).

In the United Kingdom, Whittaker et al. (2005) found differences in how young Somali women, ages 17 to 28 years old, conceptualized mental health, but also differences in accessing Western mental health services. Strength, resilience and social support were reported to be high values in the African refugee community. Support of family, friends and community was also considered important to mental well-being. These women shared that it really helped to have someone to talk to when they felt depressed, whereas staying alone was seen as a risk factor for developing problems. The concept of evil spirits or demon possession was frequently discussed in relationship to what Western counselors might conceptualize as depression, anxiety, or other mental disorders.

Faith and community also contributed to well-being. Religion was seen to be a personal and family source of strength. Cultural values impact the way in which people viewed mental health, and the way in which one might seek help when experiencing difficulty. Help was typically sought through reciting the Quran, prayer, confidential help from someone they considered a "truly religious" wiser person. Imams, or religious leaders, were seen as those able to help release people from jinn (evil spirits). However, seeking professional medical help was not prohibited (Whittaker, et al., 2005).

The young Somali women interviewed by Whittaker, et al., (2005) said that in their culture, it was expected that one would deal with their emotions quickly, and "get on with it". The ability to cope under duress was seen as a valuable, mature trait. These

Somali women further explained that the concealing of concepts and emotions was valued. One does not actually talk about these things (mental illness). Personal difficulties or psychological distress are seen as weakness, and not easily revealed. Crying, anger, and violence were associated with mental illness or demon possession.

Understanding families and systems appears to be crucial to aid in adjustment. Resiliency has been shown to be highly connected to cultural identity, support from family and peers, and a sense of belonging. These factors appear to have more influence on adjustment than language proficiency (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). Thus, to better serve the needs of children, there is a need to foster understanding and collaboration with parents and refugee communities

Grief, loss and trauma. Given the impact of mental health on academic learning and school behaviors, an understanding of the unique mental health stressors experiences by refugee families is important to supporting success for students. Factors such as grief, loss, and trauma impact refugee youth and their parents. Kaplan (2009) provides a framework for understanding behaviors which may be connected to trauma, grief and loss which can be helpful in interpreting student behaviors such as hyper vigilance, aggressive outbursts, withdrawal or lack of concentration. Developing clarity as to underlying issues behind the behaviors allows for a more accurate analysis of the behavior, and reduces the likelihood of responses which exacerbate the situation.

For many refugees, the United States may be a safer environment, but many of the social systems on which they had relied are now gone (BRYCS, 2010). By definition, refugees have experienced significant multiple losses. Due to persecution in their home countries, they have experienced the loss of their way of life. Many have also

experienced loss of family members and companions (Castex, 1992). For others, there is a sort of loss of childhood, as they have experienced or witnessed violence, and at the very least, they have lost precious childhood opportunities because of major disruptions to family life and school opportunities (De Haene et al., 2010). For most, the refugee process has been a series of disruptions as they have migrated out of their homes, often initially as displaced persons before crossing over into neighboring countries as refugees. Many were relocated multiple times in the primary host country prior to resettlement, and then frequently moved again, due to secondary migration or relocation. Each of these transitions presents a substantial disruption to the child's ecosystems across multiple levels.

In contexts of severe trauma, such as war or political upheaval, there is a greater likelihood of separation of the family unit and higher risk of associated psychological symptoms which may impede adjustment to the new school environment (Suárez-Orozco, Hee, and Onaga, 2010). Parent trauma may also contribute, in that parents who have been traumatized may have difficulty with attachment and responding to the child. This reduced emotional availability from the caregiver further impacts the child's development, resulting in a sequential traumatization effect (De Haene et al., 2010).

The majority of the existing literature which identifies the mental health needs of global refugee students focusses particularly on trauma and acculturation stress. Farwell (2003) conducted an extensive study with Eritrean youth exposed to chronic war situations. Youth exposed to war violence still showed symptoms of PTSD ten years later, even if they had been relocated to 'safer' environments. Similar findings have also been reported among Somali youth. . Indeed, of the 144 Somali youth (ages 11-19 years

old) surveyed in a study conducted in the New England states, 94% reported having experienced or witnessed trauma. The average number of trauma events per student was seven, with a range of 0 to 22 (Birman et al., 2001). Yet these same authors also comment on the strength and resilience of these youth, indicating that despite having witnessed the death of family members, they did not perceive themselves as traumatized. Rather, they believed that God will not give them more than they can bear, so they knew that they could cope with their experiences, and felt they were more tightly bonded as a group because of those experiences.

Students who have suffered war time trauma or other violence may have symptoms of hyper vigilance. They may over-react to school stimuli, such as bells, fire drills, or lock down procedures (BRYCS, 2010). Typical indicators of trauma in young refugee children included hyperactivity and inattention. Refugee youth may also exhibit irritability, disruptive behavior, aggression, distrust, anger, or withdrawal (Hodes & Tolmac, 2005; Kaplan, 2009). Therefore, those who work with refugee students need to consider underlying trauma when dealing with behavioral problems with these students (Kaplan, 2009). These students may end up being disciplined for unacceptable behaviors, without a complete understanding the individual's underlying background experiences. Again, collaboration with parents can be a valuable step in understanding the background of the individual child and in gaining insight into how that background might relate to school behaviors.

Exile itself can be a chronic stressor. Severe economic stress can trigger symptoms and feelings of anxiety and inadequacy in youth. Those experiencing hardship conditions in exile showed more negative effects than those who had experienced more

stable conditions and access to resources. Youth reported tensions related to staying in school, inadequacy of basic food and shelter resources, and concern for lost or missing family members. Loss of a male breadwinner was shown to intensify symptoms for affected youth, leaving them feeling alone in the world (Birman et al., 2001).

As trauma related symptoms are common among refugee students, it would therefore be important to consider these cultural and contextual factors in assessing the mental health needs of refugee students, and to align them to appropriate and available services. Access to mental health services is moderated not only by the availability of affordable services, but by culturally acceptable modes of seeking help. Cultural values of caring for your own family can clash with mental health services approach to hospitalization for more severe cases (Whittaker, et al., 2005). The natural connections of family, community and religion may be more acceptable for some refugee families. Semi-structured interviews with refugee youth in Liverpool, England revealed that the youth preferred to access school-based mental health services rather than community- or medically-based services (Chiumento, Nelki, Dutton, & Hughes, 2011). One explanation for this could be tied to the cultural value of keeping personal problems hidden, as strong negative emotion (crying, anger and violence) as associated with mental illness or possession, or a sign of weakness (Whittaker, et al., 2005). Another possible explanation for this preference may be that in African culture, it is expected for teachers and schools to have that problem solver role (Nderu, 2005). Also, because Somali culture tends to value privacy (Whittaker, et al., 2005), it may be more difficult to share personal information with outsiders. However, students would have that established relationship with school personnel.

The Gateway Provider Model (Ellis et al., 2010) suggests family, religion, school and community organizations as pathways to accessing help in culturally acceptable ways. The use of school-based mental health services as an access strategy is also suggested by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Refugee Trauma Task Force (Birman et al., 2005). Considering the differences in role construction expressed by African parents, it would seem that school based services would likely be more culturally acceptable.

Given the challenges of multiple disruptions to their ecosystems, and the primacy of the family and the school to the child's adjustment, the home-school mesosystem becomes critical to the school's work with families to gain understanding of how best to support these children's adjustment. As with other interventions, effective partnering with parents will enable school personnel and parents to work as a team to develop a holistic understanding of the child, and plan acceptable interventions (Miranda, 2008; Ortiz, Flanagan & Dynda, 2008). Collaboration with community resources is also needed for acceptable modes of access to mental health resources (Birman et al., 2005; Ellis et al., 2010).

Unique Needs of Students with
Interrupted Formal Education

Many refugee children have experienced an interrupted formal education due to circumstances prior to their arrival in the United States**. (**BRYCS, 2010**).** In fact, some resettled refugee students have limited or no past experience with schools. Statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics indicated that the numbers of children who were out of school in any given year ranged from over 106 million in 1998 to over 67 million in 2009. Nearly

half of these numbers are accounted for by regional statistics from Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2010). This, along with the multiple relocations inherent to the refugee process, suggests the likelihood that Somali refugees may have had significant interruptions to their formal education.

In the case of Somali Bantu students, there is also a social hierarchy factor which further limited their access to formal education, even in their home country (Roy & Roxas, 2011). Many of these students were forced out of their homeland into refugee camps, where the average stay was 10 to 12 years. Resources were limited in these camps, and education hampered by inadequate infrastructure and a lack of trained teachers (Dreyden-Peterson, 2011).

Adolescents who are resettled into schools in the United States may face further institutional obstacles to successful engagement in education. Sudanese refugee youth cited academic challenges including the need for English language support and lack of formal education. These students reported a lack of exposure to some culturally specific topics (such as American History). They further reported that they needed to learn basic skills, and needed to take a heavier than normal credit load to ensure graduation (Bates et al., 2005).

Similarly, Roxas (2011) studied three Somali Bantu high school boys' experiences and found institutional barriers such as credit systems, and lack of resources such as professional development support for teachers further complicated their learning. He further noted difficulties in connecting classroom learning to their life experiences. Many of these same concerns were described in a UNHCR report (Dreyden-Peterson, 2011), which identified complicated power structures, limited resources, poor quality

education, and poor connection to future livelihood as some of the major challenges to refugee education.

As noted previously, further complications to educational continuity for children result from secondary migration and relocation. While these choices are made with the needs of the whole family in mind, it does further disrupt the children's schooling. These students require yet another adjustment period in the classroom, and experience further disruption to their relationships with community and peers (Weine et al., 2011).

English Language Acquisition
for Refugee Families

Language differences greatly compound the stressors of adaptation to a new environment. Language acquisition often presented barriers to parents who may have had training and skills in their homeland, but could not practice them here due to linguistic barriers (Nderu, 2005). Many African parents struggled with language barriers when trying to communicate with their children's schools, but also in understanding homework and other papers sent home from the school (Githembe, 2009; Nderu, 2005).

For children, conversational English is likely to develop faster than academic English. Many sources indicate that the acquisition of academic language proficiency can be expected to take seven to ten years (Shon et al., 2008; Thomas & Collier, 1997). There is some evidence that children who have not adequately developed their first language may have a more difficult time in developing academic language skills in their second language (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Of particular interest to refugee students' language acquisition, the cumulative effects of PTSD symptoms have also been demonstrated to have adverse effects on the rate of language learning (Söendergaard & Theorell, 2004).

In studies with Somali boys in secondary school, Roxas (2011) found that some students complained that teachers went too fast, and didn't give them time to understand expectations. In early stages of language learning, students reported taking tests and quizzes they didn't even understand, or being given assignments they had no idea how to complete (Roxas, 2011).

Teachers also expressed frustration and disappointment with student behaviors. Students' difficulty with English comprehension and reading of class texts caused concern. Late submission of assignments, failure to submit assignments, being late, or missing class were further causes for teacher frustration. It seems a combination of language barriers and limited prior education worked together to produce overwhelming workloads to maintain credits. Students coped by doing the best they could and prioritizing assignments they felt carried the most weight. Teachers too, were overwhelmed, and perceived student behaviors as evidence that they didn't care, and were not engaged. Ironically, some teachers then disengaged with students. Others expressed regret at not being able to better address their needs (Roxas, 2011).

Additional partnering with community resources can be very helpful for after school and summer support in languages, academics, and social interaction. For example, Lutheran Family Services' *English Express* program is designed for newcomer refugee youth (K-8) to help build their English and math skills. This program conducts summer camps as well as school-based academic support services in several Rocky Mountain region communities. Summer programs not only include rigorous academic training, but also offer field trips, arts, and sports opportunities. After school classes include activities aimed at development of vocabulary and conversational English

language skills. Academic language development is also interwoven into the programming.

Acculturation and Families

Acculturation can be defined as the process of behavioral and attitudinal change that results from contact with a new culture (Ho & Birman, 2010). These changes most often involve adoption of the dominant cultures ways, to some degree. The use of the term acculturation allows for the protective aspects of biculturalism or pluralism, referring to the ability to function and relate in both cultures. Acculturation encompasses three broad areas in relationship to both home culture and majority culture, including the degree of participation in the activities, the acquisition of the language, and personal identity (including values, beliefs and attitudes) as related to one culture or another (McBrien, 2005; Trickett & Birman, 2005).

While a broad and general understanding of some of the issues is important, it is also critical to remember differences in experiences both within and across groups of refugees. Even within groups of refugees from the same country of origin, their experiences both during and after the conflicts may be vastly different. For example, differences in language, culture, and social hierarchy exist among Hmong refugees (DePouw, 2012). Somali Bantu were less privileged than other Somali people groups, both prior to fleeing Somalia and in their experiences as refugees (Roy & Roxas, 2011). Another important consideration is the nature and degree of the differences in specific cultural practices and values as compared to the host culture. These differences are likely to impact the degree of stress caused by conflict between the home and host cultures (McBrien, 2011).

Acculturation stress refers to the emotional difficulties experienced due to problems in the acculturation process. Stress is often produced by incongruences in practices, values, language, or by discrimination. Symptoms may include depression, anxiety, or aggression and result in family discord (Ho & Birman, 2010; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006).

Many refugee parents experience stress due to the pressures of daily living and providing food and shelter for the family in a new setting. This adjustment requires learning the economies and practices of the host culture, and for many, it entails long hours of work (Birman et al., 2005; Kanu, 2008). Lifestyle values were different for some Africans who had been content with agriculturally based livelihoods in their homelands before the war, but now found themselves in an education based job market (Nderu, 2005). Similarly, these lifestyle differences can be expected to be pronounced for those refugees who had been accustomed to working on the small family farm in their home countries, but now work in large agriculturally based industries in the United States.

While schools present the primary settings for acculturation of refugee youth, they are also the primary arenas in which these youth must resolve the many pressures of acculturation. For students, different practices related to "doing school" can be a factor. For example, Sudanese refugee youth reported many challenges in adjusting to the schools (Bates et al., 2005).

One of the key differences in cultural practices occurs in the area of discipline. This discrepancy confuses both the youth and their families. Corporal punishment and collective parenting are two major areas identified as conflicting with Western child

protection laws (BRYCS, 2007; Lewig, Arney, & Salveron, 2010). Corporal punishment was reported to be the norm for many Africans, and upon arriving in the United States, they were not allowed that option. This perceived loss of parental authority was cited as a source of ongoing emotional stress for parents, and particularly for adult males (Kanu, 2008). One father expressed it like this, "In this country, children come first, then the woman, then the dog, and then the men, in that order of importance. Men come last. I have lost my manhood and my children in this culture" (p. 933).

Role expectations for discipline were also notably different for Somali parents. *The Somali Youth Report* discusses the Somali perception that discipline begins in the school, and is reinforced at home. Parents described corporal punishment administered in front of other students as an example. Fathers further noted that cultural differences in discipline undermine their authority in the home, because the youth tell them they will be reported for child abuse, creating an inverted power structure in the home (Birman et al., 2001).

Somali parents also expressed differences in practice, particularly as far as expectations for roles for teachers and for parent involvement. The translator explained that in Somalia, the educator's role was at school, and the parents was at home. This caused some confusion when parents were asking the parents for involvement with school problems, the parents felt that it was the teacher's job to take care of it (Nderu, 2005).

Competing values between home culture and host culture can cause tension within individuals as well as between family members. Tensions around religion, daily prayers, and dietary restrictions caused some Somali youth to feel that they did not

belong (Kanu, 2008). Hijab style of dress (which is a visible statement of religion for Somali girls, in particular) caused stress for many, in that host culture peers often did not understand or respect those values (Kanu, 2008; McBrien, 2005). View of elders was very different between Somali and United States systems. Somali women expected to take care of their elders in their homes, and to be taken care of by their children when they aged. North American systems of care which sometimes pressed for hospitalization or institutionalization presented a conflict in cultural values (Nderu, 2005; Whittaker, et al., 2005).

Social practices are embedded with cultural values. Adolescent Sudanese males reported different social expectations such as fighting amongst students, lack of respect for teachers, and female assertiveness in relationships (Bates et al., 2005). Differences in styles of pedagogy, and in homework expectations were also concerns for these students. Sudanese mothers were concerned about the emphasis on play for young children, preferring more emphasis on academics (McBrien, 2011). Many African parents have expressed concern that discipline is too lax, expectations for academic rigor are too low, and that students do not have enough homework (Githembe, 2009; McBrien, 2011).

Expectations for community were also different for many Africans. Some Kenyans, for example, were accustomed to the school providing extra support after school (Githembe, 2009). Somali groups had expectations of after school activities and homework support from the community (Nderu, 2005). Western culture tends to be more individualistic, and school personnel tend to see the responsibility for facilitating homework completion as the role of individual families. More collectivist or community based cultures might share that responsibility, and thus have a more collective style of

parenting. This difference in social structures is likely to impact how the African community perceives parent involvement as well, tending to be more community based, rather than restricted to individual families. Nevertheless, African parents were also found to be actively involved at home in facilitating homework, in teaching children values, and in taking care of their needs. In her study with 25 Somali parents of elementary school students, Nderu (2005) found that most parents reported helping with homework. If they could not help directly, they made sure that other community members and resources were enlisted to assist.

Parents reported that they were diligent to teach their children to work hard and be respectful. The role of the mother was seen as taking care of the needs of the children, including education, while the role of the father was seen as taking care of matters outside of the home, acting as a liaison between the home and the community. Yet one Somali father's statement revealed that he clearly saw the child's education as shared responsibility, with separate, but important role distinctions (Nderu, 2005). He stressed the role of the parent in feeding and clothing the child, and ensuring that the children get enough sleep, do their homework, and are sent to school.

African parents also expressed struggles with different orientations to time and relationships. Their relatively higher value on relationships and lower value on time (as compared to Western cultures) caused them to feel rebuffed by teachers who did not take time for them outside of the school setting, or even acknowledge them if they met them in the street or while shopping. In turn, these perceptions of not being valued or welcomed had a negative impact on these parents sense of invitation for school involvement (Nderu, 2005).

Other cultural misunderstandings can result in hurt feelings, as well. For the Sudanese refugees, types of foods, preparations, and amounts caused misunderstandings with their foster families. For these youth, eating well was associated with greed. Differences in the use of eye contact with adults were often misunderstood, with negative assumptions toward Sudanese youth (Bates et al., 2005). Muslim girls frequently cite their clothing as a source of misunderstanding and even ridicule. (McBrien, 2005; Birman et al., 2001). Different expectations for gender roles also causes frustration and misunderstanding in Western systems (Kanu, 2008). Expression of same gender affection, which was normal for Sudanese, was seen as aberrant here (Bates et al., 2005).

Discrimination. Discrimination is the differential treatment of an individual or group based on racism, cultural, religious and other factors. Smokowski and Bacallao (2006) describe this as the relative receptivity of the dominant culture group in welcoming or stigmatizing the non-dominant group Discrimination further assaults the individual's sense of identity, competence, and worth in the new culture, negatively impacting adjustment and school success (Kanu, 2008; McBrien, 2005). Traditional hajib clothing can become the target of ridicule for girls, making their religious affiliation obvious. The suspicion of Muslims is further exacerbated by fears connected to terrorism, in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks or by media reports of Somali pirate activity. Some girls have been harassed, and called names such as "Hussein's sister." Students of both genders have been taunted and told to "go back to where they came from" (McBrien, 2005, p. 86). The negative impact of discrimination have been associated with aggression, defiant behaviors, socially deviant behavior, as well as reduced family cohesion. Discrimination also has negative impact on self-efficacy,

competence, and academic motivation (Roy & Roxas, 2011; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006; Vega & Gil, 1993)

Acculturation gaps. Acculturation gaps occur due to differential rates of acculturation between parents and youth. It is generally assumed that youth acculturate more quickly to the host culture, while parents tend to hold more steadfastly to the home culture (BRYCS, 2010). Differences in acculturation are thought to affect family relationships, particularly between parents and adolescents. This assumption has been tested using a three-fold model of acculturation in terms of activities, language, and ethnic identity (Ho & Birman, 2010; Trickett & Birman, 2005). Acculturation gaps have been further described in terms of youth adapting to host culture norms while parents wanted them to hold on to home culture norms. Examples of these conflicts occurred in areas of autonomy, cultural identity, and dating. Parents often did not fully understand the host culture norms, and youth were left to negotiate dual identities between the two cultures, resulting in stress and conflict for both generations (Birman et al., 2005).

Differential rates of acculturation between the generations can put additional stressors on families. It is frequently easier for the child to acculturate to the new culture, and parents find themselves depending on the child for accessing information and services. For example, parents who do not speak English may have trouble accessing medical care and other important services (BRYCS, 2010). However, as children frequently speak English better than their parents do, they often begin serving as liaisons between their parents and the American culture. This parentification of the child may create more stress within families and disrupt children's social development, as children assume more authority and parents become dependent on them (Puig, 2002; Skuza,

2005). This role reversal can be especially frustrating to the parents, as reflected in the remarks from a Somali parent (Nderu, 2005). "They speak English, and they understand the letters that they bring home and they start acting like they are the adults at home because they have information we don't understand" (p. 87).

Cultural differences in parenting styles may also lead parents to feel disempowered in relationship to their youth. McBrien (2011) also reported some parents perceived that schools and police encouraged their youth to challenge parental authority. In fact, some parents reported that their youth threatened to call the police if parents enforced limits (Lewig, et al., 2010). Parents are not the only ones to suffer from these discrepancies in acculturation. Previous research with immigrant populations have suggested that this generational acculturation gap, in combination with perception of reduced opportunity due to minority status, can increase risk of delinquent behaviors in youth (Rocques & Paternoster, 2011; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006; Vega & Gil. 1993). Younger children seem to be less affected by these acculturation stressor than older students (McBrien, 2011).

This gap between generations in the acculturation process presents another motive to explore the connection between home and school. Connectedness to family has been shown to be a powerful protective factor for adolescents from a broad variety of backgrounds (Hall-Lande et al., 2007). The importance of connectedness to family is consistently shown to be linked to positive youth outcomes (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007), yet the differential acculturation process for immigrants and refugees often leaves parents and their youth feeling disconnected (Ho & Birman, 2010; Puig, 2002).

Acculturation and school engagement. Considering what is known about the importance of school engagement to prevention of dropout for other groups of immigrant students (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007), there is reason to consider the effect of acculturation and school engagement. Students' ability to engage with content, their perceptions of how school relates to life goals, and their connectedness to teachers and peers are all aspects of engagement. The protective nature of connectedness to teachers and peers has been demonstrated to improve student engagement for diverse students (Anderson, et al., 2004; Halle-Lande, et al., 2007; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). While looking at student engagement, attendance and participation behaviors for a diverse group of students with high risk of academic failure, Kortering and Christenson (2009) also found that students' perceptions of belonging, the belief that school work was relevant to their future goals, and students' perceptions of their own competence were vital to success.

Promoting good understanding of how parents can become involved in homework support, communicate with teachers, encourage their children, and take initiative to approach the school when they have questions is half of the equation. The other half is training school personnel to understand parents and value them as partners with important information to share.

Conclusion

Current models for family involvement which have considerable support in Western societies may not fully explain the issues impacting parent involvement for refugee families. Less is known about how well the existing models will fit for this population, or whether other issues will emerge as salient to partnerships between these

parents and their children's schools. This study focused on understanding the mechanisms and processes by which refugee parents are involved in their secondary students' schools, and the influences which encouraged or impeded that involvement. Based on data from the BRYCS (2010) website for refugee youth services, and on the few parent involvement studies conducted with African elementary students' parents (Githembe, 2009; Nderu, 2005), language is likely to be a barrier for many African refugee parents. The available literature also suggests differences in cultural values and norms may frame a mismatch of expectations for parent involvement between Somali culture and school culture in the United States (Nderu, 2005). Other scholars have studied challenges to refugee youth in secondary schools (Kanu, 2008; McBrien, 2011; Roxas, 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

While these studies lend useful information to the issues of education of adolescent refugee students, they do not specifically address the issue of parent involvement, and the influences which enhance or impede that involvement. By extending the exploration of parent involvement to secondary students, and to a smaller city setting in an agricultural area, this study adds to the literature base on the issues surrounding parent involvement for Somali refugee parents.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach is recommended when complex detailed information is needed to address the questions of interest (Creswell, 2007). This type of study helps to empower individuals, give voice to their stories, and minimize the power hierarchies which often characterize relationships between researcher and participants. Qualitative methods enable us to capture the complexity of a problem for a given population (Creswell, 2007), particularly when current theories may not fully explain the issues, or to more fully understand the deeper thinking and meanings people bring into the issues we study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998).

The research question therefore drives the choice of methodology. The three research questions were first "How do Somali refugee parents define/describe their association with the schools?" then "How do Somali refugee parents interact with their children's schools?" and finally "What issues influence their involvement with the schools, either encouraging or impeding effective interaction?" Current theories may not be fully adequate to explain the complexities of parent involvement from the perspective of refugee families. Power differentials are already inherent in relationships between families and schools (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999) and between researcher and those researched (Norton & Early, 2011). For refugee families, these power differentials were further complicated by language, cultural, and experiential differences. To access the

families' deeper thought processes and the meanings they ascribe to involvement in their children's schools, I interacted with them in their natural settings including school, home, and community sites. This approach allowed me to build trust and rapport, as well as observe their interactions in those settings. In this way, I attempted to gain better insight into the contexts and meanings that they constructed from their experiences. The detailed and deeply personal aspects of qualitative research were intriguing to me, and also necessary to the kind of understanding I was searching for in this study.

Philosophical Foundations

This study was based on social constructivism and social justice worldviews. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory was used as a framework to examine the refugee families' construction of meaning in view of their life experiences with various systems and contexts. The partnership between families and schools was further informed by models of parent involvement proposed by Epstein (2005a) and most extensively by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005). Figure 1 illustrates this progression of philosophical stance, as it informed theoretical frameworks, which further guided my choices in methodology and methods.

Each of the theories serves as a conceptual framework from the outsider's or etic perspective. For the purposes of this study, I used the terms *etic* and *emic* in the sense of a continuum, with etic referring to the outside researcher's conceptual frameworks and perspectives, and emic as pertains to the perspectives and concepts of the participants in their contexts (Schwandt, 2007).

The Elements of Research
(adapted from Crotty, 1998)

Epistemology:

Constructivism

Theoretical Perspectives:
Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory
Social Constructionism
Social Justice

Methodology
Case Study
Instrumental
Single Case with Multiple Embedded Units

Methods
Semi-structured Interviews
Participatory Observation
Documents and Artifacts

**The Research
Paradigm**

Figure 1. The Elements of Research

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, how it is acquired, defined, and how we know what we know. Our epistemological beliefs shape how we approach a study, what we want to know, and how we propose to learn it. I approached this work from the epistemological stance of social constructivism, which has its roots in the works of Piaget (1952). Constructivism proposes that people construct knowledge and generate meaning through the interaction of their experiences and ideas. Knowledge and learning take place through conceptual frameworks through which people view the world. Crotty (1998) argues that in its purest form, constructivism is an individual perspective. Social constructionists, on the other hand, view construction of meaning as accomplished in the context of social interaction and shared experiences. Meaning is thus constructed in social events, which occur in cultural and historical settings. Social constructionists specifically look at shared meanings and interpretations of specific life circumstances.

In this study, I examined the experiences of refugee parents in their interactions with their children's schools, both in terms of the meanings and interpretations given to these interactions as well as the factors that influenced how they came to be. Because each of the parents experienced their involvement with the schools differently than one another, I expected differences in their perspectives and how each person constructed meaning from the situation. The same was true for school personnel participants who experienced these interactions with different parents in various settings.

Social constructionism is often, but not always, associated with a desire to change some social practice or circumstance (Schwandt, 2007). In that sense, my study was compatible with a social justice stance as well. As a school psychologist, one of the core competencies expected of my profession is to be aware of diversity and to be sensitive in

the delivery of services to all children. School psychologists are further mandated to ensure equal access to education for all children (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). These mandates can be applied to individual children and to the frameworks of organizations and systems. Implied within the very need for such mandates, is the need for advocacy and social justice (Shriberg et al., 2008). Through the process of reflexivity, I have attempted to monitor my language and interpretation for the use of a deficit perspective. Lightfoot (2004) aptly points out that the habitual use of the language embedded in these models of parent involvement, and even the term itself can unwittingly convey deficit imagery toward immigrant and refugee parents and their resources for helping their children.

Each of these aspects of my philosophical stance therefore impacted the kinds of research questions that I asked, guided the theoretical frameworks and methodology used, and the methods by which data were collected and analyzed. The social construction of meaning requires time and in-depth interaction between researcher and participants afforded by case study.

The Researcher

As a researcher, I recognize my role as a primary tool in this research (Merriam, 1998), and therefore explicitly identified several major lenses through which I perceive the world and make meaning out of my own interactions with my environment. I began with those personal developmental processes that shaped my view of the world since childhood. I then extended that to professional perspectives that I brought to the study.

Personal developmental processes. I am the grandchild of Dutch immigrants who came to this country in 1920 to escape ethnic and religious pressures, as well as to pursue more economic opportunities. As I listened to the stories passed down by my

father and other relatives, I heard of the many factors and challenges that affected their ultimately successful adaptation to the new country. A Dutch-American historian with profound personal impact on my early scholarship, Robert Schoone-Jongen (2007), has further strengthened my understanding of these ecological systems and processes over my adult lifetime and contributed to my interest in immigration and resiliency.

I am the third-born (and youngest) biological child, and also the oldest female sibling of my family. My parents took in numerous foster children throughout my childhood, including my African American sister who remains part of the family constellation to this day. Growing up in the 1960s and 70s was a time when the institutions of our country and those of our more immediate communities were being challenged in the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights issues of the day helped shape a social justice concern that has carried over into other aspects of my personal and professional life as an adult.

Equal access to education is a concept that has evolved greatly over the course of my lifetime. Segregated schools gave way to integrated schools during my elementary and secondary school years. Expectations and opportunities for women have seen major changes in these last decades as well. I was raised in a rural Midwestern setting, in an era where many viewed college for women as a waste of time and money.

I am the mother of three children, the youngest a young adult with special education needs. Working with her schools over the past 14 years, both in African and American settings, has been a journey of learning, adjusting, and sometimes of frustration. These experiences contribute to my thinking about the need for effective

partnership with parents, and some of the benefits and barriers associated with that partnership.

Professional developmental processes. Salient professional experiences include nearly 14 years of working in international education settings in Central and East African countries. During my time on that continent, I was exposed to some of the situations that lead to the large influx of refugees in 1994, and to the Rwandan crisis which spread into parts of eastern Zaire. This conflict escalated until 1996, when our family and community were forced to flee from eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) to Kenya. The destruction of our homes and schools, and the ongoing war conditions made return to our life in Congo impossible, which triggered feelings of grief and loss. Disruption to home, school, and community was painful, to say the least. Yet, while none of this was easy, I am soberly aware that at a much more devastating level, the Congolese communities were scattered. Their families were separated in the chaos of war; many died or were tortured. They did not have access to the external networks on which we depended, nor would they be greeted with the same hospitality and cooperation from the governments of receiving countries. Over the many years my family and I lived in Africa, I acquired an immense respect for the resourcefulness, dignity, and resiliency of the African spirit in the face of great hardships. Issues of trauma, grief, and loss are therefore tempered with a keen interest in the factors that promote resilience in spite of extreme difficulties.

As an educator in Africa, my responsibilities included acting as a liaison for students with special needs, their parents, and teachers. Lack of adequate services and resources for these students (and for my youngest daughter in particular) motivated my

family to return to the United States. I utilized this opportunity to seek additional training to become better equipped to more effectively address the needs of marginalized children. I am currently studying for my doctorate in School Psychology at the University of Northern Colorado. Each of these life experiences has contributed to my sense of the importance of multicultural competence, drives my desire for empowerment and self-determination for children and families, and motivates me to help restructure institutional barriers to access and equitable treatment for all children. It also fuels my desire to work effectively with parents, with the mutual interest of the children in mind.

As I reflected on these aspects of my own personal and professional development, I realized how much these processes have motivated my interest in immigration, refugees, acculturation, and parent involvement in schools, but also have the potential to cloud my perceptions. While there are many parallels in my family's immigration experiences, there are profound differences as well. For example, my grandparents experienced the acculturation gap resulting associated with the faster rate of language acquisition and acculturation experienced by their children in the schools. My father was often cast in the role of language and culture broker for his mother. Yet, in contrast, my family was of European descent, acculturating into American mainstream culture, which at that time also consisted primarily of those with various lines of European heritage.

My grandparents immigrated in the context of a network of other Dutch immigrants who had arrived within the previous 20 years, and had organized a rather extensive support network of Dutch ethnic communities, whereas the Somali immigrants came to this community within the last five years. They represented a distinctly different culture, and a significant religious difference to this community. They arrived at a point

in history in which Americans were especially sensitive to conflicts such as the 9/11

attacks on our country by other Muslim countries. They moved into a small city that

previously had less than one percent black population, and their traditional clothing stood

out in this community where many have settled to access employment opportunities.

My experiences in Africa were primarily with East African cultures in Kenya,

Ugandan, and the eastern perimeters of Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While many similarities exist amongst the various African cultures, there are also

significant differences between groups. My experiences with Somali culture had been

limited to some early resettlement groups within the Nairobi city limits, and exposure to

journalistic reporting of conditions in the camps.

As an educator, my knowledge, training and experience with parent involvement

in the schools was largely based on schools in the North American setting, or with strong

ties to North American and European systems. While had I taught for several years in

Africa, these schools were international schools with a mix of African, North American,

European, Asian and Australian families. In that context, many of the parents had at least

a college education, and often held graduate degrees. This demographic contributed to a

much different dynamic between parents and schools than the participants in this study

had experienced. Thus, as I conducted this study, I made a conscious effort to recognize

the participant's unique perspectives, rather than seeing their lives only through the lens

of my own experiences.

Research Methodology

**Instrumental Single Case Study
with Multiple Embedded Units**

Case study methodology allowed me to explore a complex phenomenon as experienced in its context, using a variety of data sources. A unique feature of case study is that it allows a researcher to study an issue through a case or cases, over time (Creswell, 2007). A case is a bounded system, a specific complex functioning entity, often involving people or programs. It is this system which becomes the unit of analysis. These units of analysis may be purposefully chosen because they are typical, unique, experimental, or highly successful (Merriam, 2002).

The use of case study methodology is encouraged when several of the following conditions apply. These conditions might include if the focus of the study is "how" or "why" questions, or when you cannot (or should not) manipulate behaviors in the study. Alternately, case study may be used when the issues are sufficiently complex, or you want to study them in their contexts, believing the contexts are relevant to the study. Finally, case study can be useful when the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and the context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). To some extent, each of these conditions applies in the case of refugee parent's involvement with their children's schools. I was interested in how these parents related to the schools, and the factors that would help me understand these patterns of involvement. The complexity of parent involvement alone would support the usefulness of a qualitative case study inquiry, and more so due to the complex issues facing refugee parents. I therefore explored contextual variables in the life situations of the parents as well as the school's approach to impact

the ways in which parent interact, and their motivations and choices regarding interaction with the schools.

I initially chose this particular school district for the case, because it seemed to have some level of success with refugee families. I was interested in finding out what was working, what factors contributed to successful interactions between schools and families, and also to explore the challenges that these families faced. The district's Welcome Center for migrant and newcomer education provides supplemental services for intense language learning, academic skill building, and socio-cultural readiness for the school environment. The program is designed for secondary school age students with limited formal education and limited English proficiency. A major goal of the program is to provide pathways to graduation for these students.

While this case was of personal interest to me in the course of my studies, I was more interested in the case as an example in which I could study the broader issues. In light of the multicultural competency mandates of school psychology, potential social justice issues, and the broader interest in improving parent involvement experiences for refugee families, I chose an instrumental case study design, as described by Baxter and Jack (2008) and Stake, (1995). The case is therefore defined as the Welcome Center program, and all of the participants are related to that one program. However, because there are two distinct components to the program, namely the high school and the middle school divisions, it becomes a single case with two embedded units (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Therefore, the case in this study was bound by defining it as families with students in a Welcome Center program in a school district situated in a small city in a

predominantly agricultural area. The case was further limited to families under refugee

status, of Somali origin, who have been in the United States for less than three years.

Two subunits were examined, the middle school and the high school "Welcome Center"

families.

Methods

      Context/Setting. This study was conducted in the natural settings of the

participants. The school district was situated in a small city in the Rocky Mountain

Region. Major industries in the area were related to agriculture. In recent years there had

been a major influx of refugees to the area, largely due to employment opportunities

there. The town was comprised of approximately 12,000 residents, which included a

recent influx of approximately 1,200 African immigrants, arriving within the last five

years. Historically, the area had a large number of Spanish speaking immigrants, and less

than one percent African Americans. This sudden change in demographics posed a

significant challenge to the school district, particularly because the needs and

backgrounds of the new wave of African immigrants brought languages, religions, and

traditions that were considerably different than what they had experienced with the

Spanish speaking immigrants. Community agencies were brought together by a local

non-profit agency who sought to provide collaborative support and equitable access to

services for all residents of the community.

      Demographic information provided by the school district at the beginning of the

study indicated that at the combined middle and high school levels, the student

population was 57.6% Hispanic, 37.3% White, and 3.4% Black. Nearly all of the Black

students were recent immigrants from African countries, and many more were enrolled in

elementary school. The school district has developed an approach to working with a variety of migrant and immigrant students by providing opportunities to work in a small setting while they focus on English language acquisition. They also work on skills needed to access high school level courses and credits. The "Welcome Center" in this school district serves migrant and refugee students in middle and high school classes. At the onset of the study, all of the middle school students and approximately half of the high school students in the Welcome Center were from the Somali backgrounds.

The program model was divided into two sections. High school students were served in the mornings, focusing on language acquisition and on mastery of skills needed to succeed in the general education curriculum. Acculturation support was also provided through explicit teaching of expectations and through support groups to address acculturation stress. High school students then return to the main campus for their afternoon classes, which were typically provided in ELA settings. Middle school students followed a similar pattern, but with reversed order, attending ELA classes on the main campus in the mornings, and coming to the Welcome Center in the afternoons. Over the course of the study, some of these logistics shifted to accommodate school and staffing schedules. Depending on the level of need, students may stay in this program up to three years. Initial access to the site was gained through volunteering as an extern at the Welcome Center. Further access was facilitated by the use of networking with Welcome Center staff, including the Somali graduate advocate.

Participants. In order to investigate multiple perspectives, I collected data from the parents, school personnel, and the graduate advocate. Initially, I had planned to interview students as well, but after working with the parents, I understood that they were

not comfortable with involving their students in the research process. Out of respect for parental concerns, student participants were not included.

In consideration of the possibility of disruption to families connected to their history as refugees, parent participants were defined as the adult household members responsible for the students in the Welcome Center. The term caregiver is thus used interchangeably with parent, regardless of biological connection. However, selection was limited to caregivers of Somali origins, who were judged to be at least 25 years old. (Due to the disruptive nature of the last several decades, not all parents were exactly sure of their own age, nor of their children's ages.) Of the 12 families who met this criteria, nine families volunteered to be represented in the study.

In the interest of anonymity, parent information is aggregated so that individual responses could not be tied to identifiable participants. Thus, rather than pseudonyms, I listed participants using the letters of A, B, and C and only for the purpose of presenting general information on the different parents' backgrounds (see Table 2). The caregivers who participated in the study represented a total of nine families. Information regarding parent participants, the grade levels of their children, number of months in the United States, and number of months living at the study site at the onset of the interview process.

Not all families arrived together as an intact family unit. For example, Parent F had been in the United States for almost five years, but one of her children had arrived only three months prior to the initial focus group, so she was currently a student at the Welcome Center, and the family was included in the study. All families had students who attended the Welcome Center for part of the school day. Some had students in the high school (HS), others in the Middle School (MS), and some had students in both. One

family had a student who was actually in sixth grade, but was included in the Welcome

Center (WC) programming, and thus that parent was also included in the study.

Table 2

Parent Participants

Participant	Parent Gender[a]	Grade Level of Student(s)[b]	Months Since Immigration[c]	Months in Locale[d]	Original Resettlement Site[e]
A	F	HS/MS	31	27	RM
B	F	HS	7	<1	SE
C	F	HS/MS	6	6	RM
D	F	MS	15	8	W
E	F	HS/MS	10	3	MW
F	F	HS/MS	58	5	PNW
G	F	HS/MS	16	4	MW
H	F	WC only	31	19	RM
I	M	HS/MS	NA	NA	NA

Note. [a]Parent Gender. F = Female; M = Male. [b]Grade levels of the students. *MS* = Middle School; *HS* = High School; *WC* = Welcome Center only. [c]Months since primary immigration. [d]Months at local study site. [e]Region of original resettlement. *MW* = Midwestern Region; *PNW* = Pacific Northwest; *RM* = Rocky Mountain Region; *SE* =Southeastern Region; *W* = Western Region; *NA* = Not available.

With the exception of parent F, whose daughter had a recently immigrated, all

parents had been in the United States for less than three years, and had lived at the study

site for a span of just a few weeks to almost two and a half years. Originally arriving in

the Unites States through various major resettlement cities, the families had spent time in

a broad variety of cities prior to their secondary migration to the study site. Hopes of employment and affordable housing were the primary reasons participants cited in discussing how they came to be in this small Rocky Mountain region town. At least one participant entered the United States through a major resettlement city, stayed just long enough to process initial paperwork, and then moved to the study site to join friends and relatives already there. Only one father participated in the initial focus group. As he did not share his background history, so this information is listed as not available (NA) in Table 2.

Later interviews included other participants including two administrators, two ELA teachers, and the graduate advocate, for a total of five school personnel interviews. These participants represented both the high school and the middle school, as well as the Welcome Center sites. In addition to his teaching role at the Welcome Center, the graduate advocate served as translator/interpreter and liaison between the Academy, the parents, and the larger community. The advocate was himself a Somali, having arrived in the United States approximately three years prior to the onset of this study.

Finally, I count myself as a participant observer (Schwandt, 2007) in this study as I held multiple roles within the school district during the course of the research, and thus was able to be immersed in aspects of the school and community culture. I held the role of school psychologist extern, facilitating cultural adjustment groups for elementary through high school ages during the proposal phase of the research. I also held the role of school psychologist intern in the school district during the data collection and analysis phases. This unique vantage point as participant observer allowed me many opportunities to observe and interact with families and school systems. This level of involvement both

enriched my understanding and required careful reflection of my own interaction with the participants and the data.

Selection Criteria. This school district was chosen as the case to be studied through purposeful sampling, based on my interest in the district's Welcome Center program, which appeared to have some success with refugee students. Of the 12 caregivers who met criteria, all were invited to participate in focus group sessions. I used purposeful sampling to choose participants for the smaller follow up focus groups selected from families to represent a minimum of two families with middle school students and two families with high school students in the Welcome Center program, thus representing the two embedded subunits of the case. While I originally believed that the students were of multiple countries of origin, it became clear from talking with parents that some families had arrived in the United States by way of camps in neighboring countries, but all were originally of Somali origin. Although all but one of the caregivers were female, the students they represented were of both genders. School personnel were selected on the basis of their relationship to the students represented, such as administrators and ELA teachers representing each of the sites, as well as on their willingness to participate.

Data Collection. The use of multiple sources of information is recommended to add to the thick rich description of the case, and for triangulation of the data to enhance trustworthiness (Merriam, 2002). Data sources therefore included a focus groups, in-depth interviews, observations in naturalistic settings, field notes, and my own journals. I included artifacts or documents as appropriate, but found myself limited by constraints of the school system as well as parental concerns for involving youth. Of particular interest

were a series of documents, articles, and studies conducted by various outside researchers for a non-profit community organization. These documents gave me insights into the history of the community's reactions and responses to the influx of refugees, and additional detail regarding the community meetings referred to by a school administrator. Community navigators and other cultural insiders were consulted to determine what approaches and venues were likely to be most effective in obtaining parent involvement.

Focus groups. Focus groups are a type of group interview, in which people with salient characteristics in common provide insights in a focused discussion to help understand the topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The power of focus groups lies in the interaction of the group, allowing the discussion to be stimulated by response from other participants. Researchers gain a breadth of information and a range of responses and opinions from the group. Consultation with cultural insiders in the community influenced the decision to begin with group formats to make people more comfortable responding, and to build a sense of community support for the process. Unfortunately, one of the disadvantages of focus groups is that one or more individuals can dominate the group.

Parents were initially gathered together for a larger focus group session. The dynamics of this session were helpful in that much discussion and interaction between parents occurred. However, it was also difficult to hear individual experiences in that setting. Consistent with the guidelines described by Krueger and Casey (2009), when one individual monopolizes a group, follow-up interviews can be used to gather additional information. A total of seven and a half hours of focus group and interview data were collected parent participants.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data which might otherwise be unobservable, such as experiences, perspectives, thinking processes, and feelings of the individual participants (Merriam, 1998). However, three of the four follow up interviews were done in pairs and triads, at the suggestion of the interpreter, thus forming mini focus groups rather than one on one interviews. He informed me that the women were uncomfortable with individual interviews, but happy to discuss in small groups. I found that more in-depth information was forthcoming in those smaller groups, and that the second sessions provided saturation. One individual interview was conducted with a parent who expressed preference to be heard individually. Individual interviews were also conducted with administrators, teachers, and the graduate advocate.

Initial question sets included both topical and etic issue questions for caregivers and can be found in Appendix D. Consistent with Stake's (1995) model for case study research, the interview questions included topical questions to elicit rich descriptive details of the backgrounds and perspectives of each participant. These questions were designed to elicit stories of the parents' experiences prior to coming to the United States. Information about the ages and grade placements of their students was also used later in making comparisons between the middle and high schools in the case analysis. Issue questions included topics of how parents interacted with the schools, what they found to be barriers in their relationship with the schools, and what factors enhanced their relationship to the schools. These questions were formulated around the issues which were deemed pertinent to understanding the main research question in the context of these small group or individual interviews. Originally, many of these questions were also guided by the conceptual frameworks for parent involvement from the etic perspective,

which arose from the literature review and my own perspectives. Models for development as presented by (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) guided the background questions to understand the systems and experiences of these families. Models for parent involvement presented by Epstein and by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (Epstein, 2005a; Walker et al, 2005) served as a framework for exploring parents' involvement in the schools. However, as the case study evolved, I included follow up questions on issues that emerged from the participant's responses. This evolution in questions allowed for an exploration of emic issues, which were salient to the participants themselves, but may otherwise have been overlooked.

Corresponding question sets for school personnel and community navigators can be found in Appendix E. School personnel required single interviews, as less detailed background information was needed as compared to the background information requested from refugee parents and caregivers. I found that that fewer clarifications were necessary when interviewer and interviewee had shared language and similar cultures. Additionally, as my primary research questions focused on parent perceptions, school personnel were interviewed as a secondary source for contextual triangulation. These individuals were asked about their interactions with refugee students' parents, how they accomplished these interactions, what was difficult in those interactions, and what helped them the most as they worked with refugee families in the schools. A total of six hours of interview data were collected from these school-based participants.

Observations in natural settings. Observations were conducted at the schools or Welcome Center events, using a participant observer approach (Merriam, 1998). As such, initial observations were holistic, with observation data noted either during or

immediately after the observation period. Observations of parent interactions also occurred at a primary school in which many of the participant parents also had children, and at a cultural event which included performances by the middle and high school students. These observations in natural settings were used to increase understanding of the contexts of the case, as well as interactions of the various participants (Merriam, 1998).

In keeping with the research question, the primary focus of my observations was on parents' perspectives and parent involvement with the schools. These observations, although limited by restrictions imposed by the district, were conducted as holistic observations of parent involvement at home or at school. Observations also included any evidence of efforts by the school to encourage or facilitate parent involvement. Observation data were kept in an electronic journal with particular notice of any evidence of invitation from the schools or teachers, parent interaction with the teacher, interpreter or navigator, as well as any indication of barriers or enhancements as discussed in focus groups.

Field notes. Field notes are the raw data collected in the field. Field notes may be considered evidence of the information that was collected, and may take a variety of forms (Schwandt, 2007). For this study, raw data included audio-recordings and subsequent transcriptions, hand written notes, diagrams, artifacts, and my own reflections.

Artifacts and documents. Artifacts and documentation included rosters of focus groups and interviews, parent and student demographic information provided by the schools, as well as information documented by a local non-profit organization's website.

These documents provided a rich context regarding the history of the recent immigration and efforts to organize the community during the transition. Several documents originated from previous studies and interviews done with a local non-profit organization. The non-profit was founded with the purpose of fostering relationships among diverse people and organizations to strengthen the inclusive nature of the community.

Procedures

  Informed Consent. I received permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting the study. The IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix A. Consent forms were translated into the caregivers' languages by the Welcome Center graduate advocate. Through this process, it became apparent that many of the parents had limited literacy in their home-language, so consent forms were made available and read aloud to the parent/caregiver participants. Separate consent forms were generated for parents and for school personnel, including community navigators. These consent forms can be found in Appendices B and C, respectively. The language in all appendices includes the original phase *Horn of Africa* rather than *Somali*, as it was not until well into the study that I realized the participants were all of Somali origin, despite having arrived via camps in various neighboring countries. All but one parent agreed to digital audio recording of sessions. That participant was interviewed separately, and the information was recorded as field notes.

  Translation and interpretation. Due to language differences, parent consent documents were translated into the caregiver's home language. The translated consent form is found in Appendix B along with the English version. I enlisted the help of the graduate advocate and the community navigator in the interviews with non-English

speaking participants. These support staff were already in place in the school system, and trained in the ethics of translation and confidentiality. Review of these procedures was conducted prior to beginning interviews. The community navigator and graduate advocate served as cultural and linguistic liaisons, aiding communication and understanding. However, the use of an interpreter introduces additional potential for bias or interaction with participant response (Birman, 2005; Pernice, 1994). Particular attention was paid to reducing the potential for introducing bias from the interpreter's interaction with participant responses, to the extent that was practical in the group context. This bias was reduced to the extent I was able to encourage reflexivity through ongoing dialogue with the interpreters, and feedback from participants.

Data Analysis

Using an adaptation of a case study analysis template proposed by Creswell (2007), I began by presenting a rich description of the case itself, as well as the context for the case. Then, I conducted repeated readings of the transcribed data, and/or listening to the audio recordings. I utilized NVivo data analysis software to help organize data and sort themes and categories. Within the framework of the research questions, themes were allowed to emerge, rather than be structured by theory, to allow for parent perspectives to be heard, and parent emphases to emerge, including those that didn't neatly fit the existing theory. Emergent themes were then collapsed into a more manageable set of overarching categories which meaningfully addressed the research questions.

In reality, most of the participants had students in both the middle and high schools, making it difficult to make absolutely clear distinctions between the two. However, the parent responses brought out sufficient differences to warrant distinction

between the two subunits, despite limitations in conducting separate analyses. Because of the great overlap between subunits represented by parents with students in both the middle and high schools, I initially developed themes across the entire case, and finally conducted some broad cross unit analysis, defining similarities and differences between their perspectives of the two subunits (see template for analysis of data in Figure 2).

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                    ┌──────────────────────────────────┐                       │
│                    │  In Depth Portrait of District    │                       │
│                    │  Welcome Center                   │                       │
│                    │  Parent-School Involvement        │                       │
│                    └──────────────────────────────────┘                       │
│                                                                               │
│   ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────────┐    │
│   │Whole Case│  │Whole Case│  │Whole case│  │Cross Unit│  │Assertions and│    │
│   │Context   │  │Descript. │  │theme anal│  │theme anal│  │Generalizations│   │
│   └──────────┘  └──────────┘  └──────────┘  └──────────┘  └──────────────┘    │
│                                                                               │
│   Middle school  Middle school  Middle School  similarities                   │
│   context        Description    Themes                                         │
│                                                                               │
│   High School    High School    High School    differences                    │
│   Context        Description     Themes                                        │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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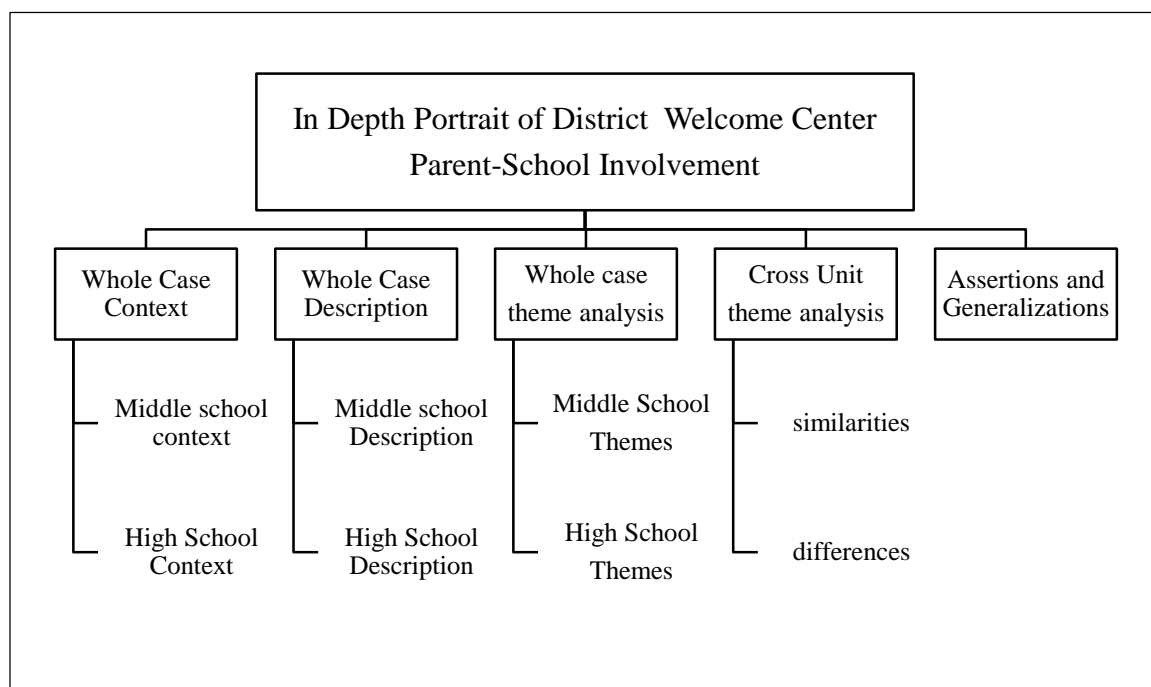
Figure 2. Template for Analysis of Data.
Note: Model adapted from Creswell, 2007.

In this process, emergent themes were compared and contrasted to existing theory to further enhance understanding of the interaction between home and school, particularly in relation to implications and recommendations for practice. Finally, the writing process itself became part of the analysis (Wolcott, 2009) as I wrote and rewrote sections, recognizing and rearranging new patterns in the themes.

Trustworthiness

Triangulation procedures were used to check the integrity or validity of responses by comparing responses from different vantage points (Schwandt, 2007; Stake, 1995). *Data source triangulation* was conducted, comparing the data collected from multiple sources, namely caregivers and school personnel, including teachers, cultural insiders, and administrative staff. Comparing the perspectives of multiple participants was conducted to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. *Investigator triangulation* allows for trustworthiness in interpretation. The potential effects of researcher bias was reduced through the use of reflexivity, as evidenced in the disclosure of researcher stance and the journaling process. Because I was the primary investigator, investigator triangulation was conducted through the use of *peer review* as two fellow graduate students reviewed initial and emergent themes and through consultation with my advisor and committee members. *Methodological triangulation* involved the comparison of multiple types of data (such as focus groups, interviews, and observations). A major strength of this case study is its use of all these forms of triangulation (Stake, 1995).

An audit trail was included in the NVivo software entries so that changes in the evolution of the study could be carefully documented, along with rationale for changes and decision processes. Multiple revisions in the writing process also documented the progress of the analysis and decisions made regarding data analysis and themes.

Schwandt (2007) defines thick description as more than just rich detail. He argues that thick description has the characteristic of interpretation embedded into it, so that we begin to see social actions not only in terms of the action itself, but also with what circumstances, intentions, strategies and meanings the action is associated. This thick,

rich description was accomplished through portrayals of participants themselves, of their social interactions, interactions between parents and schools, and of settings.

Finally, the member checks allowed me to verify my findings and interpretations with selected participants. I asked the Welcome Center's graduate advocate (who served as my primary interpreter) to read rough drafts of material representing caregiver input, and to offer corrections, suggestions, and alternate interpretations. This individual was also asked to compare the themes and observations to his own perceptions of those interactions and events. I asked him to review an early draft of the findings manuscript (Chapter 4) to provide feedback as to whether I had adequately and accurately represented the themes in parent perspectives, and avoided unnecessarily objectionable portrayals. I also asked him to reflect on any parts of the findings which made him uncomfortable, particularly as he is the participant most difficult to discuss with any degree of anonymity. As a result, no significant deletions were made, but clarifications were added regarding the university he had attended, the name of the games (Jar or Shax) which was somewhat different to the Kenyan game I had originally connected to those stories. The graduate advocate also pointed out areas in which my descriptions of the schools in the refugee camps read as if that were the organizations of the schools in Somalia. He therefore gave me additional information as to his experience in pre-civil war Somalian schools which allowed a comparison to the conditions in the camps.

Summary

The case study focused on a specific population of Somali refugee parents with middle or high school aged youth enrolled in the Welcome Center program in a school district in an agricultural area of the Rocky Mountain region. A total of nine families'

perspectives were included in the study, as well as supplementary interviews with school personnel. Focus groups, in-depth interviews, observations in naturalistic settings, field notes, and documentation were used to better understand parent involvement with schools among refugee families. Emergent emic perspectives were intentionally included as the study evolved. Themes were developed across the entire case, because most caregivers had students in both the middle and high schools. Finally, these themes were compared and contrasted across the two subunits as far as this differentiation was possible from the available data. From this process, assertions (findings) and generalizations were made, including notation of appropriate limitations.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Major themes were originally based on coding parent transcripts, and then supplemented with information from administrators, teachers, and other participants. Where school personnel responses are included, I have endeavored to label it as such, and have used first person pronouns to indicate my own thoughts and reflections throughout the text.

Themes with similar content were collapsed and the resulting themes were then grouped into larger categories for presentation. Major categorical themes included the contexts of families, adjustments to schools in the United States, perceived barriers to parent involvement, and enhancing family-school relationships. Each of these major theme categories includes several themes and subthemes, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Overview of Themes and Categories

Categorical Themes	Themes	Subthemes
Contexts of Families	Life in the Refugee Camps	Survival
		Loss of former way of life
		Lack of formal education for parents
	Differences in Education	Common languages between home and school
		Differences in expectations
	Roles of Family and School	Parents preoccupied with feeding family; survival
		Parents defer to teachers for educational concerns
	Lack of accountability in refugee camp schools	Systems concerns
		Teachers not always there
		Students truant
		Minimal home-school communication
		Differences to pre-war conditions
	Loss of cultural norms	Systems of education
		Employment opportunities
		Role of fathers changed
Adjustment to school in the United States	Corporal punishment	Cultural norm at home
		Cultural norm in schools
	Perceptions of child protection systems	Over-generalizations
		Fear of children being taken away
	Fear as motivator	Homework
		Behavior
		Inconsistency between home and school
		Limit setting

Table 3. Overview of Themes (continued)

Categorical Themes	Themes	Subthemes
(Adjustment to School, continued)	Views of Integration	School perceptions
		Parent concerns
	Academic Adjustment	Differences in pedagogy
		Interruption to formal education
	Confusion About Credits	Exam based v. credit hours
		Remedial v. high school credit levels
	Over-aged and Under-Credited	Plight of older students (on arrival)
		Perceptions of discrimination
Perceived Barriers to Parent Involvement	Educational Experiences	Limited Formal Education
		Expectations of deferring to teacher
	Language Barriers	The initial challenges
		Attempts to remedy
	Perceptions of Approachability	Problem focused, punitive approach of some educators
		Disrespect of culture (including race and religion)
	Logistical Barriers	No public transportation
		Shift work
		Teacher's work hours limited
Enhancing family and school relationships	Proactive Approach	Welcoming
		Parent education of school systems and expectations
	Addressing Fear and Mistrust	Meetings with newcomers, schools and community
		Common goals, common concerns
		Trust through relationship building and meeting needs.
	Schools as Resources	Support for practical needs
		Parenting support in new cultural context

Contexts of the Families

In an effort to understand the various systems shaping the perspectives of the parents, I asked questions about their backgrounds, their experiences prior to and after immigration, and their own experiences with formal education. The parent participants had been in the United States anywhere from a few weeks to about three years as reported at the onset of the study. Most of them could tell me the month and the year, and many of them told me the exact day they had arrived in the United States. Each of the nine parents introduced themselves, and briefly described how they came to be in this small city in the Rocky Mountain Region. Major factors in relocation to the study site were primarily related to the availability of employment opportunities, and connections with other refugee families who had previously moved to the area and found jobs. Affordable housing was also mentioned by at least one participant.

> The reason that I moved from [there] is that before I came, one of the organizations sponsored me, and they had an office there. So they paid for my rent and my food. After five months, you need to get a job, and so that is why I moved here. They helped me for five months, and after that, you are to help yourself.

Another woman shared a similar experience:

> I lived in [another state], I didn't find any job there. I looked for a job, and my husband also looked for a job there, he didn't get. He moved to a different state to find a job. And then I called some relatives here, who lived in [the study site]. They said, you know, if you can find work at [the meat packing plant], or we can find a job here for the meat product. That is why I moved.

Not all families found the employment they had hoped for when moving to the study site. One of the women stated that she had been in the United States for one year and four months, but her husband was living in another state. "First he came here to get a job here. He applied [at the meat packing plant], but he didn't get any job. He was not

hired. He left. He moved to a different state." Many of the families had one or more members employed in the local meat packing industry. They spoke of their lives in the refugee camps, of their adjustments to life in the United States, and their experiences in the school systems.

A Lot Gets Taken Away

The history of the caregivers varied across families, but it was not uncommon for them to have stayed in the camps for at least a decade, some even stayed just over two decades. Most of the children were born in the refugee camps. Birth records were often non-existent, and immigration documents not always believed to be accurate. However, correcting documents presented even more problems, as the parents talked of strict regulation of documentation as part of the resettlement process. Therefore they feared to have any of the documentation changed, lest the altered documents be suspected as forgery, and thus risk denial of resettlement.

One mother told of having fled Somali in 1991, living in a refugee camp in Kenya for 20 years prior to resettlement in the United States. Two women fled the civil war in Somalia and lived in a refugee camp in Ethiopia for 20 to 22 years. Their children were born in the camp, and the families depended largely on food from aid organizations for sustenance until they were granted resettlement. The two women met each other standing in long lines for drinking water and rice. They spoke of crowded conditions, day-long food queues, and how the business of survival consumed virtually all of their time.

One teacher, who has reportedly spent a lot of time on home visits and outreach to these families, said that it was not uncommon for families to care for children who had been orphaned in the camps. These children were included in the households of older

brothers and sisters, aunts, or even cousins, confirming the idea that not all of the caregivers were the biological parents of the children. This teacher described her experience as she learned more about her students and the vast differences in their experiences as refugees:

> Some of the kids would show me pictures. And it was like wow you lived in a nice apartment. You lived in makeshift houses. You lived with a tent between two trees. I'm surprised at how long some of these kids lived in those environments. [A least] one of my boys' mom was born [in the camp].

Women found much demand on their time and energies in the hardships of the refugee camp; they played a critical role in their family's survival. The men, however, faced a radical life change when they entered the camps that may have been more difficult to navigate. One man explained the dynamic of camp life in relationship to the roles of men.

> A lot gets taken away from you when you get stuck in a refugee camp. And there is a fence, and you cannot go beyond. And there are no real career opportunities [The boys] come to be adults, and have children of their own, and are still unemployed. So that role model, respecting father, and working for father, if father is working, is gone. It is just gone. In refugee camps, the parents, especially for the man, they started chewing khat, and sitting, you know...just eating khat and drinking tea, and the woman are in the business of caring for the family, in the markets, buying-selling, making the food.

The topic of khat was a serious concern in the community, as it was mentioned with a great deal of animation by several mothers and at least one educator. I had heard these concerns before from my interactions with the students at the Welcome Center. Khat, the substance they referred to, is a common herbal stimulant frequently used in African settings. According to the National Institute of Health (NIH, 2013), khat is cultivated from the Catha edulis shrub. Because the drug has potentially serious medical

side effects, and no known medical use, it is considered illegal in the United States. Khat is most commonly chewed, similar to chewing tobacco, but can also be smoked, or even sprinkled on food (NIH, 2013).

There is some disagreement as to the potency of the drug, which can be at least partially contributed to vast differences in potency related to degree of freshness, and how it is preserved or consumed. The drug releases stress hormones and the neurotransmitter dopamine, resulting in euphoria and effecting movement patterns. Side effects of the use of the drug include paranoia, delusions, irritability, sleep disturbance, cardiac problems, gastrointestinal distress, and depression (NIH, 2013). Some argue that khat is no different from coffee or marijuana, while other sources indicate that khat is sometimes used as a substitute for methamphetamine (NIH, 2013). Yet clearly, the participants in this study were quite adamant in their perception of khat as a destructive force in their families and communities, as is illustrated in later sections of this chapter.

We Don't Know How to Help

The parents themselves had varied educational experiences as well. Most of the women had very little or no education in their own childhood. In fact, six of the eight mothers indicated they had no formal schooling. Several of them also indicated that school was often taken more seriously for boys than for girls, and that males traditionally had more access to education than females. This seemed to be true both before fleeing their homelands, and in the camps, and was confirmed through other discussions in the community, as well as comments from the mothers. I came to understand that it was more common for the men to have at least a primary level education, and some had opportunity for secondary school. The only father who participated in the initial focus group went to

school through 9th grade. There were apparently other men in the community who also had higher levels of education, although they were not participants in this study.

Three mothers explained that there were no formal schooling opportunities, although different reasons were cited. When the Siad Barre government of Somalia sent teams to educate rural youth under the age of 12 in 1971-72, one participant said she apparently did not qualify. Another mother stated, "No, I didn't go to school. I was from a rural area, I was staying with my family's cows." Another mother recalled that the turmoil prior to the war was also a deterrent to formal education. "I didn't go to school. When I came to the war and saw everything [that had] happened, I never had the opportunity to go to school."

It seems that only one mother had the opportunity to go to school as far as the 7th grade, and her experiences were in the Kenyan city of Nairobi, rather than in the camps. Finally, one woman who had no formal schooling, but had learned to read and write, presumably from informal training at home, explained her limitations this way. "I can read. I can write, but not a lot. So, even English I can try to read, but I still need to learn. I also will start school to write."

Unfortunately, her limited knowledge of reading and writing was not helpful in her new home as she only knew Arabic letters which are far different from the alphabet used in English. She drew symbols on my paper to illustrate her point. She told me that if her children brought home books, she was not familiar with the English alphabet, beyond A, B, and C. She was, however, determined to go to Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes to learn to read and write in English.

Several of these women indicated their desire to take adult education classes. They cited classes offered through one of the major employers, from the community college, and parent classes at one of the local elementary schools. They noted that not everyone was eligible for all of these options, and that some were fairly costly. Time to take classes while working and caring for families posed another barrier to adult education opportunities for the women. Lack of public transportation was also cited as a barrier for some parents.

Their stories also revealed insights into the level of skill and competence these women possessed in business and agriculture. While they acknowledged the differences in formal education, they also talked of running businesses, buying and selling camels, paying employees, and other activities which required a significant level of skill with numbers. These operations took place in their heads, not with paper and pencil. As they spoke, I remembered many similar situations in open air African markets, where no cash registers existed, but complex mental math was obviously mastered by many merchants.

Given such differences in their culture, historical context, the major changes in multiple systems, and the differences in their own experiences in formal education, I probed deeper to explore how these parents might make meaning of the idea of parent involvement in the schools. I reflected my thoughts to them for their input. As I acknowledged their skills in their home country, as well as their obvious skills in adaptation and survival, I also acknowledged the many differences in how things are done in the current school settings. "It must be very difficult to know how to help your children when they are struggling [in the schools here]."

The whole group responded in agreement, both verbally and non-verbally. As one woman put it, "[It is a] problem because of parental lack of education. [We] cannot talk to the school. How can we go and talk to them when we don't even know what it is we are talking about?" Later, in smaller groups, I queried the women for insights as to how they do find ways to support their children's education, despite these differences in formal educational opportunities. "We just tell them go to school. That's all we can do. We can only say, 'It is good for you to learn, to graduate, to go to college.' But we can do nothing else. We don't know how to help."

In Africa, Schools are Different

Stories of the children's educational experiences had two distinctly different phases throughout the course of the data collection, with somewhat different information revealed in the larger initial group, as compared to the thoughts shared in the smaller follow up groups. The parents reported a wide variety of experiences with their children's schooling in Africa. Some children had gone to school in refugee camps, while others had gone to school in major cities, such as Mombasa or Nairobi.

Initially, in the large group, parents expressed the belief that their children had learned the basic academic skills in their previous schools, and that most of the current barriers were due to language and culture. They said that their children did better in schools in Africa, because they were taught in bilingual or multilingual approaches, using combinations of Ahmaric/Arabic and Somali, and sometimes English, depending on where the children attended school. Because the parents had a shared language with the teachers, most parents said that felt that they could (and did) communicate with their

children's teachers in Kenya. There was some agreement that the quality of the schools differed in the camps compared to the schools in the larger cities of Kenya.

Yet in the smaller group discussions held at various later dates, mothers told more difficult stories of their children's education, particularly if they were educated in the refugee camps. From these discussions, two major themes arose around their previous experiences with their children's schools prior to immigration. The first theme included the different expected roles between home and school, as well as the division of responsibility between men and women inside the camps. The second theme related to communication and accountability structures in their children's school settings. .

Roles of Family and School

Parents noted differences in roles of family and school were largely influenced by practical considerations. The role of the parent in providing basic sustenance for the family consumed most of their time and energies. Differences in school structure meant that there was less communication, and different expectations for parents' interactions with schools.

Feeding the family is the first priority; school issues are left to the school. Mothers told of how they sent their children to school, but spent the rest of their day just trying to provide food for the family. They described a more separate role definition for families and schools in the African context in general, as well as in the refugee camps in particular. "In Africa, schools are different.… The parent doesn't know what [the students] are doing. [The parent is] just looking to feed them." Another parent added to this by saying, "They are just looking for daily bread. School issues are left up to the

teacher. Feeding the family is a parent's first priority; the child's education comes

[later]." This idea was elaborated by the comments of another woman.

> [It was] because we were just trying to find life, for our families. For example, we stayed home and cooked something, and tried to go to the countryside to get sticks or something to cook the food, or wash the rice, so that is what we used to do…. You know, when it was summer and very hot, we would go through a queue, and wait to get water like 8-9 hours, with a lot of people waiting in that queue.

The parents also spoke of deferring to the teacher. They indicated that a parent

would not easily question the teacher's opinion, nor advocate for their child even if they

disagreed with the teacher. "Even if the teacher is wrong or bad, in the country, doesn't

matter. He is the right one, the students are wrong. We [parents] are always [siding] with

the teachers, even if the teachers weren't correct."

Parents were not aware of what was going on. These mothers said there was

often no communication between the parents and the teachers or administrators, and

limited accountability systems to oversee the schools.

> Sometimes they didn't go to school and I didn't know about it. I went to work at 8 am, and I came back in afternoon, with no way to know what happened between. If I don't come to school, the teachers don't care. Parents are not getting the message. The teachers… were not being paid good salary. So they just didn't care.

The lack of organization and accountability systems in the refugee camp schools

were also a topic that surfaced during the smaller group discussions. Several mothers, on

different occasions talked about the loosely organized school systems, which were often

funded by aid organizations, but with very little systematic governance or accountability

systems. They spoke of teachers being underpaid, and therefore not caring what went on

or whether children even attended the schools. Stories of teachers writing lessons on the

board, and then leaving, using drugs (sometimes even with the older students), and

generally neglecting their duties were told by several participants on different occasions

as well.

> Not for the young, but for the students who go to the high school, above
> 15, they used to eat khat with the teacher. Sometimes they eat late in the
> night, so they cannot get up in the morning, so they cannot get up. They
> slept late, then go late time to the school, and the door of the school is
> closed. It is finished for the day, they cannot get inside to learn.

Another mother interjected,

> They were only wasting time. Most of the people who had money used to
> send kids to the big city, or in Kenya, they send their kids to the big cities
> so that they can learn. But in refugee camp, there is nothing. They were
> given school supplies and textbooks, but the teachers were wasting time,
> not feeling responsibility. They were not teaching, most of them just
> smoking, chewing khat, things like that.

When I asked who was in authority over the teachers in that refugee camp, who

might hold them accountable, the women held an animated discussion amongst

themselves before answering.

> There is a gap between the parents and the principals or the schools.
> Usually, every school has a principal, but the school teachers and
> principals are funded by some aid organizations. They get paid money,
> and take salary every month, but they were not accountable, they were not
> asking what they were doing. No one was there asking what they were
> doing, No one was there to make sure what they were doing, the
> classroom, the materials, the curriculum. They were just coming and doing
> whatever they want, and leaving.

Other mothers told similar stories.

> And the teachers write a lesson on the blackboard, and the students just
> write that lesson. And sometimes the teacher doesn't explain what he
> wrote. He just writes, and then goes to get khat, or whatever. Sometimes,
> the principals came [to talk] with the parents, but it was very rare.

While the overall system of education in some of the camps sounded rather

chaotic, I learned from a later discussion with the graduate advocate that this was not

always the case in pre-civil war Somalia. This was another example of how much of their

culture had been disrupted by decades of war. Those who were educated pre-civil war in

Somalia would have experienced a system of school districts that was overseen by a

Ministry of Education. Officials went to the schools to observe teachers, evaluate their

lesson plans, and if teachers were not prepared, they could lose their jobs or be sent to a

less desirable post. In his experience, there were no general communications from the

schools to families, but if a teacher wanted to speak to the parent of a specific child, they

sent a note home, and the parents would come to school to meet with the teacher.

However, only a few of the parents I interviewed would have experienced that system,

and of course, none of the children had been educated in pre-war Somalia.

As the discussion of communication with teachers and administrators continued,

one of the mothers pointed out another side to the problem, owning a share of

responsibility for the parents.

> There is another problem. We didn't even go to the schools, or ask our
> children what are they doing, or what are they learning. Our children go
> off to school in the morning, and sometimes the school suspended them
> and sent them home. But we don't know about it. They just went to the
> movie or cinema, and they stay there and watch movies. They know the
> time that the school is finished or closed, and they came out, and came
> home with the other students when it is finished. So we thought that [our
> child] has been in school, but he has not. So that is a problem. We as a
> parent didn't get in touch with the principals and the school, and we didn't
> know what was going on. And the school did not try to talk to us about it.

One mother suggested that she now feels they should have asked. Others were quick to

set the context for why they didn't ask. The prioritization of survival resurfaced in this

and various other contexts.

When I asked about the fathers of the children, and whether they did anything

about the school situation, another heated discussion arose among the women. The tone

of the conversation seemed to be one of exasperation, and speaking over one another,

even more than in usual dialogue. The interpreter spoke over them as he summarized their discussion:

> They are saying that the men, they always were sitting under trees and playing games. It was known as Jar or Shax, a traditional Somali strategy game in which you move stones. So they waste time sitting under that tree and playing.

Adjustment to School in the United States

Responses regarding adjustment into the schools in the United States focused primarily on academic adjustment, but there was also mention of socio-cultural adjustments. Often the two were interwoven. Socio-cultural adjustments included differences in discipline and differing views of integration. Academic adjustment included differences in pedagogy styles and interruption to formal education. Other academic issues included confusion about credits and learning that their children were at risk for not graduating because they were over-aged and under-credited. In their consideration of schooling in the United States, parents routinely compared their current experiences to those from their past, as this was their only context for understanding schools. Both parents and educators perceived that younger children were more likely to experience successful academic transitions. Socially, parents indicated that their younger children were more welcomed at the elementary and middle schools, as compared to their high school students. Many parents praised both the elementary and middle school administration for the ways in which they received families. Surprisingly, the school personnel tended to attribute these differences in adjustment to developmental differences in the youth. They believed elementary school students were able to learn the language more rapidly, were not yet influenced by adolescent social and identity struggles, and had the advantage of more time to build skills prior to entering the high school credit system.

Discipline is Different Here

Differences in methods of discipline were pointed out by several parents, who generally agreed that kids are also less accountable here. One mother stated, "The difference is the discipline style between US and in our country. But here, children are not at all fearful of the teachers." When I delved deeper into the concept of fear as a prerequisite to respect or obedience, there was a general consensus to say that if children were not afraid of the teachers or parents, they would do whatever they [the children] wanted. One parent shared frustration in the limitations placed on parents in the United States, and the effect this had on [especially the older] children's attitude toward their parents.

> In Africa, if they don't do what they are told, they are beaten, they are punished. Physically. So, here it is different in America. Do not beat your children. If you beat them, maybe you are arrested, or taken to jail, or the children are taken away from you. Someone will come and take your children. This is the problem, but back in the country, the teachers used to beat. We also beat them. We tell them we need to do this, [to] beat them if they don't want to go to school, but here is different. We don't do that. We can't.

Parents expressed concerns about their older students adopting attitudes and behaviors from their new culture, particularly as related to respect for adults in limit setting and lifestyle concerns. Parents said it was hard to motivate their students to do their homework in this setting, and once again, related this to differences in discipline styles.

> Here they don't care because they have homework but they know the teachers won't beat them or punish them. Why should we do this? But back in the country, they would work for the teachers. If the student doesn't do his homework at home, the next day he will be punished.

These comments from the parents resulted in the conversation turning to the idea of discipline strategies that did not involve corporal punishment. Some parents seemed to believe that in the United States they could not tell their children what they could and could not do. Their fear of being reported to the police or child protection authorities was linked not only to neglect and abuse, but even to setting limits on their behavior.

> The issue is when they come to the US we can no longer talk to our kids, or cane our kids. We can't do anything with the kids [in regards to punishment]. In the US, there is a big difference in the discipline styles between teachers and parents. Back home, it feels like teachers and parents are saying the same thing, which is not the case here in US. Here there is inconsistency between the home and school environments. The kids tell us 'we are free, we can do anything.'

As these discussions continued, it appeared that some of the parents interpreted child protection laws in a manner which included the prohibition of setting limits on children's behavior. To some extent, the youth themselves may have held or perpetuated this perception. Parents expressed frustrations and a sense of disempowerment as they adjusted to these very different expectations from the host culture, and did not yet fully understand the boundaries of these limitations on parental discipline. I found myself reflecting on how these parents, who had experienced so much disruption and disenfranchisement in their refugee experiences, now expressed fear and a sense of powerlessness, both in educating and in disciplining their children. Differences in cultural norms and expectations put them in a position in which fears of the legal system appeared to invert power hierarchies within the home, and perhaps contributed to parents' fears and mistrust of the schools as part of that system.

In relationship to concerns about limitations in discipline styles in the United States, I was told stories of students who were out in the streets, using drugs, and getting

involved in fights, while parents felt helpless to stop them. Other forms of disrespect appeared to be related to differences in parent educational background, and perhaps the growing acculturation gap between parents and their adolescent children. In my experiences in the school district, I frequently heard some of the older Somali students remark about how their parents "didn't know anything." These individuals did not temper those statements with any kind of recognition of things their parents knew and skills sets they possessed outside of formal education or their new community.

Views of Integration

In contrast to parent perceptions of differences in acculturation between generations, some educators saw the integration issue more in terms of the African students' willingness to adopt the ways of the local community. One educator highlighted the importance of students' ages on arrival and their willingness and ability to integrate with those of other ethnicities, particularly in English Language Acquisition (ELA) classroom settings. This participant expressed the belief that the elementary students integrated easier than older students, and that adolescents were more willing to integrate than adults. One administrator put it this way:

> Now, the younger age group actually tends to be more willing to open up and talk to those other groups. It has been especially interesting to watch the Hispanic and Somali students who interact... especially the Somali students who are trying to learn Spanish, so that they can talk to other [ELL] students in their own languages. I think it has to do with the willingness to experiment socially, because kids want to fit in more than the parents do. The parents are more set in their ways...in the culture. And with a lack of willingness to take risks, doing the things that they feel safe without...so it makes it harder for them to integrate. But the students, high school teenagers have the desire to integrate, to connect with their peers. So I think that makes a difference with what they are willing to do.

Whereas many of the educators appeared to frame the language issue in deficit terms (i.e., the lack of English language skills), no one seemed to view their language

differences as a strength, either in terms of knowledge and skill in multiple languages or willingness to learn other languages, including that of another minority culture. Interestingly, neither did any of the mainstream educators acknowledge the potential impact on integration stemming from actually being in the school setting. While each day students navigated the majority culture within the context of school, parents had much less opportunity to interact with others who did not share their culture, except for the brief, structured interactions that might occur within a work setting. However, despite the increased exposure described by school personnel, a young Somali woman confided that students might integrate in school to some extent, but after school, there was very little if any interaction between students of different ethnicities.

Academic Adjustment

Several factors were seen to affect the children's academic adjustments to school in the United States. Differences in pedagogy styles and homework expectations were factors in academic adjustments as well. The age of the student on arrival in the United States seemed to influence their adjustment in terms of the amount of interruption to formal education. This was particularly of concern as age often determined placement rather than their academic skills. Older students then had less time to learn language and academic skills prior to reaching the high school credit system. The credit system itself created difficulties for older students who found themselves in the position of being over-age and under-credited, and therefore at risk for not being able to graduate.

Differences in pedagogy. A parent of two girls who had schooling in Kenya noted differences in pedagogy styles between their experiences in the Kenyan city schools and what they now experienced in the United States.

> My [older] daughter went to school for about eight years. The other went to school for 4 years. I think the systems in Kenya and in the US are totally different. In US, we see that students have sheets and something like that. The way the teachers are teaching. So the way they get the information from the teacher is one [difference]. And it seems to me that here is the easiest, but in the US, they cannot learn writing so fast because they don't write a lot here in the US. In Africa, the teachers write on the blackboard. The students write again and they are tested, but here I don't think they will learn writing.

Not only were teaching styles different, but her concern may also have extended to the lack of practice in writing in relationship to development of good penmanship.

Interruption to Formal Education. In relation to integrating into the curriculum, the older children definitely experienced the most difficulty. The parents told me that their children were usually placed in a grade level based on their age at time of school registration. The educational background of the child was often not in alignment with the coursework in that grade level, particularly for the older students coming in at high school age.

> They see their age, that [a child is] 11, they put him in 5th grade, but he has to take all the classes, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th grades. [Or others are put in high school.] They come home with homework that the mothers do not know, as they don't speak English. Who is going to help them? No one is going to help them. They come back to the school with the papers and nothing is done and the teachers give them F.

Others told me that documentation problems meant that sometimes children's ages were listed incorrectly on their documentation. Any attempt to have that changed would have resulted in denial of resettlement, due to suspicions of document falsification or forgery. Parents felt that some schools handled this issue better than others, but it complicated graduation issues for the older students. One mother expressed it this way:

> I am very worried about one of my children. She is turning 21, and I think that maybe she has good grades now, but when she came to the US, she is old. She [was] not 20 or 21. She was younger than that. When she came here, [the school] put her in the class. I am just very worried that she won't graduate from this school.

Several factors contributed to interruptions to formal education. Some students simply did not attend school for large periods of time while in refugee camps. Some families could only afford to send part of their family to school, usually in early primary years, while others stayed behind to help with basic survival needs. In some cases, it seemed that education for boys may have been prioritized over education for girls, even in the camps. For those who were enrolled in school prior to immigration, many apparently also experienced interruptions to formal education as portrayed in earlier stories from parents. For example, some students were enrolled in school, but neglected to show up, or left to engage in other activities such as going to the cinema or using khat, thus further impacting their educational experiences. The older a child was before immigration, the more potential impact these interruptions had to their educational standing. Finally, the number of relocations and secondary migrations experienced by a child after initial immigration, the more often they experienced interruptions to continuity in their education in this country.

Confusion About Credits

The high school credit system itself was a mystery to both students and parents. Most of them were somewhat familiar with school systems influenced by the British system. One of the more educated participants explained that in these systems, students moved forward based on achievement and aptitude, as measured by successful examinations. If by early adolescence, a student was not performing well in math and

science, they would usually be placed in an arts track, with a view to developing a trade, rather than going on to university.

The graduate advocate contrasted this to the typical school system in the United States where students are expected to earn credits based on successfully completing a certain number of specific classes. These classes are typically tied to a time based system of instructional hours, the Carnegie Unit, such that one semester of class time (assuming one hour per day) is equivalent to one half credit. There are also requirements for the skill level of the work that is accomplished to be eligible for these high school level credits. Finally, to graduate in this system, all students are required to have a minimum number of credits in various academic disciplines. In the case under study, the requirement was for four credits in language arts and math, which meant they needed one credit for every semester in high school. Additional requirements for science and foreign languages were also challenging for refugee students learning language as well as content. Ironically, there is often no credit given for English as a foreign language for students who are fluent in one or more languages prior to entering the English language based school system in the United States.

These differences in systems were further complicated by the fact that many parents had little or no experience with formal schooling, much less an understanding of the requirements of secondary level education credit systems in the United States. It made little sense to many of the parents that all high school students should be expected to take four years of secondary level math in order to graduate, for example. Nor did they understand why their students could be enrolled in high school, and be doing work that

did not merit high school level credit. This situation added to the parents fears of discrimination against Somali students.

Over Age and Under-Credited

The age of students added one more compounding factor to their challenges within their new school system. In the free public education system, attendance is generally accessed by students up to 18 years of age, but under certain circumstances can be extended to age 21. In other areas of the world, school attendance is often fee based, and age is less of an issue. So these students with limited formal education and limited access to content due to language barriers found themselves in a situation where they were learning material that was necessary to access the content in more advanced classes, but were not eligible for high school credit. Depending on the age and academic skill level of the student, many found they had insufficient time to access enough of those credit level courses to accomplish graduation requirements before being too old for the K-12 school system. Many of the credit level courses they were enrolled in allowed them to maximize elective credits, but they had less success mastering credit level requirements in math, language arts, and sciences before aging out of the system.

The over-age under-credited (OAUC) phenomenon was particularly a concern for the students who were approaching age 18, and were being asked to leave the school system. In fact, this issue appeared to be at the center in some of these parents' more difficult interactions with the high school. Several students had been expelled or suspended, and other parents were very concerned that their students would face the same fate when they turned 18. The mother of the two boys was openly angry on this subject, and stated that "most African students were expelled at age 18, due to racism." Teachers

and school officials offered alternate explanations for why some of the students were

asked to leave such as being involved in serious behavioral problems, fighting, and drug

abuse. Many times, these students had also been truant for a considerable number of days

prior to suspension or expulsion. In at least one instance, the student was offered

alternative school options, but refused. However, even without behavioral complications,

many of the parents expressed concern about their students who were, or would soon be

in that OAUC category. It seemed that poor communication with the school heightened

their fears, and they associated the expulsions with aging out of the system and possibly

with bias and racism toward Somali students. The mother of the two young men who had

been expelled said that the very first time she was called in to see the principal, she was

told to take her son home.

> I ask her to please help my son, she says 'No, take him to the community
> college.' Then, later on I was called to take the other boy home. Why? I
> don't understand. I need your help. But she says, 'No, they are older, [we]
> don't have classes for them.' But I have to pay money, if I am to send
> them to the community college. I didn't know the system. I wanted help,
> not kick my kids out. Who can explain the system? I am new to the US
> and [to this town], no one explains. Now I ask a lot.

Other parents expressed fears regarding graduation issues. Without an understanding of

the credit system, parents were only able to view educational outcomes. One mother said

that while her daughter received good grades, she was unsure if the daughter would even

graduate. This mother was concerned because as she saw it, 'most Somalis never

graduate on time.'

About a year prior to beginning this study, I had the opportunity to volunteer in

the Welcome Center, and witnessed this confusion over the credit system and graduation

requirements amongst high school students as well. Many of them were taking [ELA] and

remedial courses to build skills which would then allow them to access high school credit level courses in English, math, and sciences, while they were rapidly filling the maximum number allowed for elective courses in other subjects. When they realized that some of the courses they had been working so hard to complete were actually remedial coursework in preparation for high school level credits, they felt they had been wasting their time in the Welcome Center and [ELA] classes. Yet it was difficult for them to understand that particularly in mathematics the school felt they would not be able to succeed at the credit level work without the foundational skills from these pre-credit level classes.

I also learned that the Welcome Center administration has been working with the high school and several community resources to develop alternate pathways to resolve these problems for the OAUC students. Online classes, GED classes, and community college classes were among the options offered. Unfortunately, while there was considerable effort to find other sources of funding, some of those options involved costs to the students, which some of their families found prohibitive.

Perceived Barriers to Parent Involvement

Parents discussed their perceptions of barriers to involvement in their children's school. A major factor was their own educational background, as described earlier. Other major factors included the language barrier, difficulties of connecting via an interpreter, as well as logistical barriers due to employment, time, and transportation. Other barriers included perceptions of the approachability of the school, and tensions relating to a sense of disrespect for their culture and religion.

How Can We Go Talk to Them?

As discussed previously in the section on parental educational background, it was understandably difficult for parents, not only to help their children with schoolwork, but even to conceptualize what was expected of them in terms of parental involvement with the schools in this culture. There were culturally based differences in the perceived roles of parents as related to schools in that they did not come from a culture where parents were typically involved in schools. Here too was another area where parents' lack of formal education created a significant barrier. As one mother queried, "How can we go and talk to them when we don't even know what it is we are talking about?"

The middle school ELA teacher was aware that most of the parents had limited literacy in their own languages. She talked of how that impacted their involvement as well as some of the strategies she used to try to help bridge those barriers.

> When we think of our traditional parent type of involvement activities, we have parents who don't even read in their own language and are just learning English. That has got to impact the ways in which they can help their children, but they still want to help their kids. So I sent home a lot of picture cards. During the Saturday school, we teach [the parents] how to use them. We practice with them ourselves, knowing that they're not as much helping their kid as they are helping themselves. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that they are sitting together. And reading. That is another big thing. Pushing them to read at home. And trying to educate them about Goodwill as it is a great place to get books for little money. I have also taught them how to shoulder read. You know, sit side by side. Look at the pictures. And I tell them, even if you don't understand, let them read to you.

Administrators also acknowledged that many parents had low levels of literacy skills both in English and often in their home language as well. Some suggested a connection to the types of jobs that attracted them to [the study site]. However, one administrator also noted that a few of the men were more highly educated. The most

notable example of this was the migrant education graduate advocate, who came with a Masters degree from an Egyptian university. The administrator recognized the barriers that parent education and literacy levels might have on some of the students, but in general, he characterized most of the program's African refugee students as "very intelligent." In fact, he said that most of the Somali students were now ready to transition out of the Welcome Center program and spend their entire days in the regular middle and high school settings. This sentiment was echoed by the middle school ELA teacher who pointed out that lack of educational opportunity was definitely not the same as lack of intelligence. Unfortunately, she admitted, when students or parents have difficulty with language barriers or limited opportunity for formal education, it can be incorrectly perceived by some as a lack of knowledge, or even a lack of intelligence.

No Way to Communicate

At the onset of the migration of Somali families to the study site approximately five years ago, both parents and teachers recalled difficulties in communication with families. For the last several years, in response to that need, the school has employed bilingual (English and Somali) speakers who can support communication between families and schools. The director of the Welcome Center noted the value of having this adult interpreter to connect with parents, and also to prevent the problems that are often associated with putting children in the role of language and information broker to their parents. Meetings for families were held monthly at the Welcome Center, to foster understanding between parents and the schools. The graduate advocate also served as facilitator/translator for many of these meetings. Parents were often notified of these meetings by the advocate. Sometimes he also provided transportation for parents who

might not otherwise be able to attend. The middle school administrator saw the role of the graduate advocate and the other district interpreter as being utilized less now than in the early years. He recalled the initial days when the first influx of Somali students came in about a short period of time and there were few resources and limited knowledge about how to meet family needs.

> We had no way to communicate. There were no translators. I mean we were literally going, 'Can you speak English?' We found some people who spoke English and Somali, or whatever language it may be and we tried to offer them jobs. It was all within about 6-8 months.

Then, with the addition of the graduate advocate position, they found this individual to be extremely helpful and he was utilized on a daily, sometimes hourly basis. He contacted parents, assisted in communication, and helped to build a level of understanding, to where the middle school administrator now believed the parents had less anxiety, and a greater comfort level.

> He was jack-of-all-trades. Sometimes he would help parents with paperwork, not necessarily school paper work either. A lot of it has to deal with discipline. We were approaching kids with behavioral concerns who had been getting in trouble quite a bit. We would call the parents and talk about what both of our expectations were. He was the jack-of-all-trades. He did it all. Now it is more [a matter] of attendance, which is still of great value in communicating with parents.

This high praise for the role of the advocate was echoed by the ELA teacher and the parents, who felt like they could count on him for problem solving with the schools, as well as communicating information from the schools to the families. The graduate advocate taught classes at the Welcome Center, communicated with parents on issues of grades and attendance, and assisted parents in finding out how their student was doing at school. He also assisted in communicating any concerns or information the parents might wish to convey to the school.

In the case of the school that had taken a more proactive approach in meeting with parents, the administrator reported that the needs were currently much less than they were in the early days of refugee arrivals, and the problems that they had earlier were now almost nonexistent. An ELA teacher also recognized the value of the advocate in problem solving in the high school, referring to a specific incident in which there was a misunderstanding between a teacher and the girls regarding use of the restrooms in preparation for prayers.

> [We had a] very bad time there. And my four [Somali] girls were just sobbing in class. And we were trying to just calm them down and comfort them. We were finally able to get some communication. We had the advocate come over, he represented the girls, and he helped with the situation very much.

This teacher went on to say that unfortunately, most of her colleagues did not connect directly with the advocate, which she attributed to teachers not being comfortable with that process. She thought it was a shame, because the advocate was university educated, had a good grasp of school systems, and seemed to have a foot in both cultures as he was able to explain things well on both sides.

> He has only been here three years, and [yet] because he is so good at things, we forget that he is still very new himself. He is really doing parent education also. Like, 'look, this is how it is here. He needs to be in school. He needs this for his future.' He really does a good job about trying to educate the parents about the best ways of how it works here for their kids to have success.

It would seem obvious that the advocate, himself a Somali, would serve as a cultural resource to school personnel as well, but both the advocate and the ELA teacher at that school bemoaned the underutilization of the advocate by most of the high school staff. However, other community resource leaders have utilized this advocate on several occasions for communicating with the Somali community. He also organized the students

to perform a dance at a recent cultural festival, an event that brought together students and families from diverse backgrounds to share their cultures. At the time of my interviews, there was some indication that future funding for his position was in question, since most of the Somali students were now moving out of the Welcome Center and into full days at their regular school sites. I was later told that funding had been continued for at least the next school year.

The district also employs a translator/interpreter, who is responsible for many buildings throughout the district. The middle school administrator noted that this individual dropped in a couple of times per year to see how they were doing, or to ask if they needed anything. Both parents and educators noticed that it was difficult to connect with the district interpreter, who was also employed through a refugee resource organization to serve as the community navigator for all of the district schools. Some parents felt that this person was often caught in a bind between fully representing the parents, and protecting his own job with the district. They recognized that he was spread very thin across the whole district, and administrators and educators found that email and phone calls were not as effective a means of communicating with him as they would have liked. As part of his role with the district, this person also served as a paraprofessional in classes with some of the high school students, which further limited his availability when someone might want to utilize his support with language and cultural communication. These men also expressed some frustration in that the district translators were paid by the hour, had inconsistent hours, and no income during the summer months. The translators experienced a sort of feast or famine on the demands for their time and inconsistent

income as a consequence. This resulted in rapid turnover of translators/interpreters in the district, adding to their frustrations.

At the time of the study, both the graduate advocate and the translator had multiple roles both in the schools and in the community, stretching their time, and thus their availability, very thin at times. Serving in multiple roles in the school system also complicated aspects of the research process. With my own role as participant researcher and school psychology intern, I was obliged to be very careful to address any conflict of interest in terms of making sure that our research was not interfering with our contract hours in the schools. Conversations with the district translator and graduate advocate indicated that they also experienced this tension of roles in the research process. Difficulties due to availability of time and confusion regarding other projects undertaken by other University researchers also caused some conflict and misunderstanding between the three of us regarding who was responsible for what portions of the research projects.

Perceptions of Approachability

Parents noted that there were differences in how the various schools received families. The key factors mentioned included differing styles of communication, creating a sense of welcoming and respect, and overcoming logistical barriers. While parents and school personnel sometimes described the barriers and the ways they had been addressed in their answer, I have separated those aspects to highlight each. In this section, the focus is on perceived barriers for parents, and later, I will address factors which helped to overcome those barriers.

Interaction with the school was perceived very differently by parents, depending on which school their children attended. One school was seen to be very welcoming and

proactive, interacting with parents, inviting them to school, and openly discussing school culture and home culture concerns. Yet in regards to another school, parents expressed distress because they said they were called to the school only when things had escalated to the point of suspension or expulsion. This finding was more common in situations with their older students, and the parents felt that they often were not made aware of day to day issues or developing problems, and were only notified after the problems had reached a crisis level.

Disrespect of Culture

Parents' perceptions of respect was also a factor in their relationship with the schools. It was important that they felt welcome, well received, and listened to, particularly when there were issues creating problems for their students. Some parents expressed distress in that they felt disrespected by school personnel, which some felt was perhaps due to their limited English language skills, or limited literacy. As one mother put it, "They just think we are stupid because we can't read and write."

Religion was another area of potential for parents to feel unwelcome, disrespected or misunderstood. Concerns about times for prayer, accommodations for appropriate cleansing rituals, and especially dietary concerns were potential barriers in their relationship to the schools. Parents also expressed concern that some students were experiencing harassment from other students, particularly disparaging remarks about their traditional hijab dress, taunts to "go back to the jungle", and misinformed relationships to terrorist and pirate activity. Again, it seems that these issues were handled differently by different teachers, administrators, and building policies. A great amount of concern centered on the cafeteria, and foods served which may have pork or other taboo products

in it, such as in canned beans (sometimes known in local culture as 'pork and beans'). The community navigator and graduate advocate both played a role in facilitating these communications, but it appears that they were more or less effective depending on the reception of other school personnel involved.

Cultural barriers in addition to language and religion were also cited. For example, behavioral norms in one culture cannot be assumed in another. These differences create opportunity for misunderstanding or misreading of intent. One example given was the way in which people express themselves. Several school personnel told me that it was not uncommon for the Somali students and parents to be considered rude, due to a tendency to speak loudly, particularly in public places, such as the library, where this might violate norms of mainstream culture. Ironically, one Somali participant told me that the Somali's consider it rude for people to speak softly in front of other people so that they cannot hear what is being said. Additionally, expressing one's anger and verbal fighting was seen as "normal" by some of the Somali parents, whereas their adolescents were getting in trouble for this behavior at school. In fact, fighting was frequently involved in the high school suspensions. Loud, apparently heated verbal exchanges were common in the student groups in which I had participated. The parents also had heated exchanges, particularly in the initial larger focus group. A particularly distraught mother remarked later that she "wanted to be heard being angry." The interpreter told me that she had expressed to other parents that they did not have as many issues with the school, and therefore they did not have as much to say, but she needed her concerns to be heard.

I also observed a situation at a family function at the elementary school which exemplified the animated verbal interchanges exhibited during conflict. The cultural

differences were highlighted when an adult, non-Somali male bystander became physically involved in an escalating verbal fight between some of the older adolescent Somali girls. I had the distinct impression that the "intervention" was intended to prevent the dispute from becoming more violent, but that his involvement actually escalated the situation. The situation was exacerbated further when he grabbed a young woman, restrained her, and knocked off her hijab headpiece in the process, exposing her entire head and neck. The adult who "intervened" apparently saw the verbal fighting itself as being problematic, even threatening, but seemed to have no concept of the gross violation he had committed from the Somali girl's perspective.

Logistical Barriers

Logistical concerns sometimes posed a barrier for parents, particularly in relationship to transportation, employment, and time factors. These three factors interplayed to the extent that it was not possible to separate them into distinct categories. Parents cited time as a reason for not being able to take [English] classes after work because of the need to care for children. Time also complicated transportation needs, particularly for getting children to school when shift changes often take place just prior to school getting out.

There is no public transportation here. The absence of a public transportation system, was particularly challenging to parents who either did not drive or did not own vehicles. The district school bus service was limited to those who lived outside city limits, leaving some families with fairly long walking distances to school, which was particularly difficult for them in the winter time in a climate which was much harsher and colder than their home country. In this district, schools are organized a bit differently than

other school districts in that there are five different school grade levels rather than the traditional three to four. For example, preschool and kindergarten take place in one building, elementary schools house Grades 1-4, students enter another school for Grades 5-6, and then will move on to middle school through Grade 8, and finally, high school. Many families had children across these ages, and therefore found themselves escorting children in multiple directions on cold winter mornings.

A lot of that has do to with the shift work. Parents also sometimes noted that lack of time was a factor in being able to come to the school to meet with teachers. However, despite these challenges, most of the parents said that if they were called to the school, they would make every effort to come. The advocate and the translator would frequently go to parents home to deliver communications or invitations to come to the school for various reasons. It was common for them also to provide transportation to the school for some of the parents when they were able.

Logistical concerns were echoed by the observations of one administrator after a series of meetings with parents. He noted that what may have originally been interpreted as lack of parental interest was now framed in terms of barriers to participation related to work and time constraints, and also recognized other family needs which can represent barriers for parents trying to get to their children's schools.

> I think a lot of that has to do with jobs, the shift work, trying to find consistency with when [would be] a good time. It's funny how the shift times fall on really odd times for us too; they either get home or go to work at 2. So they are either sleeping or getting ready to go. It's just really odd times…. Sometimes just having a large number of people in the family and having only one person watching them at all times. We have people coming in with six or seven [children] in tow. Just a lot of little pieces.

Several school personnel recognized the difficulties presented by the parents'
work schedules. Even when attempts were made to hold parent conferences or meetings
on weekends, there inevitably was a conflict with a parent's work. As one administrator
lamented, "It seems no matter when we meet, it is a problem for some." An ELA teacher
noted that many of her students' parents worked the evening shift as well, not only
making it very hard for them to come to school for conferences or other meetings, but
even to communicate with their youth about school related concerns. Time was also a
factor for students doing homework, or participating in other school related events. This
seemed especially an issue for many of the high school girls, who had taken over
household responsibilities while their mothers were at work.

> A lot of kids only see their parents on the weekends. You know, it can
> cause trouble, because at the beginning of the year, when they get the
> handbook, the teacher will say, you need to bring this back tomorrow,
> signed. Yeah. And then they get docked, because they don't have it signed,
> because they don't see their parents for another few days or so…. And
> some of it is their schedules, because the school is not built around their
> work schedules at all, especially our parent teacher conferences. That
> doesn't help them to be able to come in.

OK, school is over. Leave the building. One administrator noted that
time constraints were also a problem on the side of teacher availability and
contract times. He saw one of the unfortunate side effects of these contracted
work times was that it made schools and teachers less accessible to students as
well as parents.

> Many schools, and I think this is especially true for the high school, or it
> has been in the past...Is that school is there for teaching. They do have
> extra-curricular activities, but they are specific, they have specific starting
> times, and as soon as that time is over, you have to leave. I have been
> there at the high school, and they say, "OK, school is over. Get out. Leave
> the building. Go sit out front and wait for your ride. You are not to be here
> anymore." And you also have the teacher's perceptions of what their job

is, when it actually ends, and you know. When you have a teacher, and especially if their contract says that they have to work from 7:30 in the morning to 3:30 in the afternoon. And then you have these other things, they expect to be paid extra because it is a different job. And a lot of times the money isn't there and essentially they say, "I can't do this because I don't work for free."

And finally, as noted in previous discussion of linguistic barriers, time was a factor in being able to connect with interpreters, since they are responsible for multiple buildings, and may be pulled in multiple directions in any given time frame, and sometimes were not available at one site, because they were busy at another.

Enhancing Family-School Relationships

Initially, parents were very reluctant to suggest things that might be helpful to their involvement with the schools. It seemed there was some sense of it not being their role to tell the school how to run its business, and a sense of not wanting to be perceived as complaining or making unreasonable demands. Perhaps there were other factors which I failed to interpret in this matter. Yet, as I spoke with parents and teachers, there was a definite sense of contrast between the perceived climate and interaction between the different schools. I explored this further by seeking interviews with various administrators. Based on responses from many parents, one school in particular seemed to have made some significant efforts in reaching out to the Somali community and had established a significant level of trust. It also seemed that another school had taken more of a problem focused approach, often calling parents to school only when the student was in trouble, or likely to be suspended. I was unable to find a mutually agreeable time to interview the principal of the latter school. However, interviews with the administrator of the other school and the Welcome Center were helpful in conceptualizing factors which likely contributed to the higher level of trust and acceptance in those buildings.

Proactive Approach

      In contrast to communications that came only after the situation reached crisis level mentioned in the section on barriers, parents were grateful for the efforts other schools made in reaching out to them. Some schools met with them to discuss expectations, listen to their concerns, and teach them how to monitor their child's attendance and progress. While some of the differences were age related, in terms of increased independence given to older students, resulting in less communication with parents, it also appeared to be a difference in philosophy and approach of various school officials.

      This more proactive approach to problem solving seems to have resulted in a much more positive relationship with parents of students who were struggling. For example, the same mother who was so distraught over how her older sons were expelled from school went on to compare how things are done in other schools in the district, where she has other children. She named specific people in those schools with whom she had more satisfactory interactions. "There they are good people, they talk to me. That principal is helpful, calls parent in, sits in her office with them." This was the same mother who had asked the middle school for help with another son. It seems that the open communication and sense of caring had a major impact on how potentially difficult discussions were received by the mother in each of these settings. Unfortunately, the family left the school district during the course of this study, but it was interesting to note that the goodbyes at that school presented a very different scenario than what she had described at her older sons' school. The ELA teacher said that the family was dearly

missed in the school where their younger son "belonged and he was safe," and he had a chance to catch up.

> All the teachers knew him. [The assistant principal] loved him, and when that family left, that father cried, that mother cried. They went into the classrooms, and people they didn't even know would hug them. It was hard to see them go.

Addressing Fear and Mistrust

Another key factor which arose in these discussions was that of fear or mistrust. Parents talked of having no understanding of the system, and then later, asking a lot of questions. The administrator noted that early on, parents seemed to think that the education system was unapproachable, and that no one was interested in looking at the students as individuals, nor could a parent approach the school to ask questions, or 'interrupt' the educators. Parental fears seemed highest regarding child protective laws, particularly as related to discipline. One administrator noted that it seemed to them that the American system was focused on taking their children away from them. Other fears related to religious practices concerning prayer and food hygiene practices. As mentioned previously, there were also misunderstandings and fears surrounding the credit system and students being asked to leave without graduating. Parents feared that it was a racially driven issue, and thus the school attempted to address better understanding of the credit system requirements.

School personnel, on the other hand, had fears and misgivings of their own. While they wanted to talk to the parents about basic simple things, they too seemed to think the parents were unapproachable, largely on grounds of language and culture. One teacher expressed fear of causing offense because she didn't understand their culture and religion. Others noted difficulty in communication, which was partially remedied by the

use of interpreters, but often could not happen in the moment, because of the logistics of connecting through an interpreter.

Meetings with newcomers, schools, and community. Administrators described meetings that were held for parents and school personnel. In these meetings, parents had the opportunity to express their fears. Fear and mistrust was recognized as bidirectional, and the meetings seemed to help break down that barrier for both parents and school personnel. The administrator involved in these meetings with parents remarked that originally, there had been a lot of fear and mistrust, but after several meetings with families, and the utilization of Somali speaking interpreters, "We don't have the anxiety; the anxiety just isn't as high as it once was."

Documentation gathered from a community non-profit organization indicated that early in the timeline of the influx of Somali refugees into the community, there had also been significant fears and misunderstandings on the part of both the newcomers and the local community. The local non-profit organization was involved in bringing people together to discuss concerns and differences. A series of community meetings were held, in which community members, school representatives, and families came together to discuss various issues affecting the children in the schools, as well as parent involvement.

We found we had the same goals, the same concerns. When teachers and administrators discussed problems students were having at school, they often found that the parents were struggling with similar issues at home. Once both parties began to understand that they had the same concerns, and the same goals for the students, it was easier to discuss ways to help solve the problem. The school's interpretation of what had been perceived as a lack of parent involvement was now tempered by understanding of

the needs of the families, and the difficulties of the timing of shift work. Families began

seeing the school as more approachable, and as a resource for helping their students, and

even for helping the parents understand the local systems.

They have a lot of trust in me. From these exchanges, ideas for how to

overcome barriers and increase parental involvement were also offered. Language

concerns were addressed through the organized use of interpreters, intentional

relationship building, and consideration of logistical concerns for the parents. For

example, one teacher described her intentional relationship building with families, and

how this had led to a better understanding of their needs.

> At parent teacher conferences I make sure that I do my refugee parent
> teacher conferences myself with the graduate advocate, or have a
> translator. That works out great because it builds that relationship and they
> have a lot of trust in me. They really do trust me explicitly with their kids.
> I have done [conferences] early in the morning I have done them at night I
> have done them in their homes because of transportation. I have done
> them at the high school where I would take everything to the high school
> because they would already be there for their high school student's parent
> teacher conference. They want to do it, they sometimes just do not know
> how.

We always come when we are told we need to be there. As understanding was

built and logistical barriers addressed, parents indicated that they "always" came when

they were told it was important for them to come. It seems as though any event that was

published in a more general fashion may be seen as "optional" and therefore not

important. Yet if parents got specific invitations or were told that they "needed to be

there" they interpreted it as important, and did their best to come. However, from

speaking with the graduate advocate, it did seem as though the delivery of the invitation

was critical to how it was perceived. It also stands to reason that written communication,

although translated into the Somali language, may have been less accessible to parents

with limited literacy skills in their own language. It may also have been perceived as more general, and therefore not something directly related to them individually. I heard a general consensus, both from parents and the graduate advocate, indicating that a direct and specific invitation communicated by the advocate or by the community navigator was more likely to get a positive response.

The Schools Were There to Help

An administrator described a "fact meeting" in which the school personnel sat down with a particular family whose children were struggling at school, and learned what the needs were, and discussed potential solutions. He noted that they were previously unaware of some of the needs of the families.

Support for practical needs. These discussions also resulted in the discovery of practical needs. For instance, one woman was caring for ten children, and her husband was working in another state. They had no beds, and no furniture. Once this need was communicated, donated furnishings were supplied within the week. As various needs were identified in these interchanges, parents found connections to sources of support from the school, and they learned to trust the school and developed confidence that the school genuinely cared for their children.

Medical needs were also addressed as the school became aware of children with hearing problems which were surgically correctable. Connections were made to appropriate medical services, and the navigator or graduate advocate would often facilitate communication for the parents and medical staff, and frequently provided transportation for these and other needs of the families..

Help me understand how to be a parent in your country. As various needs were identified in these interchanges, and parents found connections to sources of support from the school, they learned to trust the school and developed confidence that the school genuinely cared for their children. Some parents also asked for support in parenting. The administrator reported that one parent had been rather distraught at a meeting regarding some problems her child was having in the middle school. At one point, she sat with her back to the group, crying silently, wiping her tears with her hijab. Discussion included setting limits and expectations for her child's behavior, and yet she was frightened by the perception that she was not allowed to discipline her children in this country. Ultimately, she turned group and pleaded with them, "Help me to understand how to be a parent in your country."

Reflections as a Participant Observer

My own perspectives become part of the findings as I interacted with the parents, students and educators throughout the study in the role of participant observer. Initially, I had been introduced to some of the issues during an externship in which I offered some support in the form of cultural adjustment groups for immigrant students of all ages in the school district. The opening vignette is a composite of real stories which have been crafted in such a way as to illustrate issues while concealing details of the various individuals affected. It was these observations and experiences that spawned my desire to study this group as a case study. As researcher, I count myself as an active participant in the study, and therefore examine my own experiences in the process (Chenail, 2009)

Building trust with families was also both enhanced and complicated by my role as participant observer. Because of my connections with students, I was able to interface

with families outside of the school setting on several occasions. However, there were times in which I heard needs and frustrations from the families, yet my role in the school did not allow me to implement solutions. At times I worried that the perception that I was part of the school system would be detrimental to that trust in the sense that they shared their needs and concerns, but there would be little immediate change. While one of the purposes of my research was to build understanding, the outcomes would not be reported until much later at the end of the study. This created some concern whether from their perspective as parents, all of this talk was of limited use. Yet I hoped that the observations of Paulo Freire (2000, as cited in Thomas, 2009) would be realized in that the experience of being heard could itself be empowering to parents, and that the process of dialogue might help the whole community envision more equitable ways of relating.

Finding a balance in building trust with students and families was also challenged by incidents in which I took an observer stance, and thus did not intervene in situations, such as the argument that broke out between several of the girls. The intervention of another adult male resulted in a very volatile situation and humiliation of a young woman who had been restrained by the man, and dispossessed of her head covering in public. I wondered , too late, what response I might have given to defuse the situation, rather than merely observing her humiliation and the heated response of other friends and relatives before threat of police intervention dispersed the group. Was my lack of visible, vocal outrage perceived by the Somali students as apathy, or worse, as consent? Did my calm exterior deny my inner horror at what was happening? In retrospect, I suspect I may have been the only white person that had any idea of the shame he had brought on her. When I

replay that scene in my mind, I wish I had moved into the fray, taken the hijab, and covered her with it.

As researcher, I found myself in something of a quandary. On the one hand, I wanted to be as unbiased as possible, and record the participant's point of view. Yet as a participant observer within the school system, my own thoughts and interactions obviously played a role in how I came to understand the issues, and on the ways in which the research developed over time. While this shift in approach is common, even desirable in qualitative research settings, it was also complicated by the fact that I worked for the school district, and sometimes faced the necessity of making difficult decisions about the research because of the need to avoid conflict of interest with my responsibilities and schedule as an employee.

My framework of understanding based on experience in other areas of Africa were also challenged as I found many similarities in cultures compared to the more familiar East African cultures I had experienced. Yet, there were distinct contrasts in the customs and cultural norms of the Somali people, and I frequently had to reflect on my own interpretations, and whether they were accurate in this situation. While I would not presume to be able to adequately explain all of these cultural nuances, I did find my own understanding shifting as a result of my participation in this study.

Regarding mental health services, it was my experience that both parents and students were typically unwilling to talk about the possibility of trauma in their past, and appeared to take a more forward looking approach to dealing with the present and pressing onward into the future. In my role as participant observer, I found parents were often suspicious of anything connected to psychology or special education, and students

made remarks that we considered them to be "stupid" or "crazy." Both parents and students voiced concerns about being isolated from peers if found eligible for special education services. Parents and school administrators noted that parents tended to have much more trust in the ELA teachers, than in mental health professionals. An administrator who seemed to have developed good relationships with families confirmed this observation, noting that the teacher often became social worker, counselor, and general resource person for both students and parents.

Thus, I suspected that my role as school psychologist likely had an impact on parent perceptions, and the freedom with which they felt they could respond to my questions. It also framed my original assumptions, in that much of the collaboration I had done with various organizations serving the needs of refugees led me to believe that mental health issues, particularly trauma related issues, would be a primary focus of working with refugee students. Yet I found a reluctance to discuss those issues amongst both students and parents. I found it best to respect their reluctance, and allowed them to focus instead on the present, and the issues which faced them in the local settings.

I often wondered to what extent my purposes in research, although intended to bring understanding to their situation, may have actually been significantly different than what they perceived they needed. Consistent with my intent to bring a social justice perspective into the research, there were times I found I needed to sublimate my own perspective as researcher to the perspectives of the parents. For example, parents were not keen to have their students directly involved in the research, and thus I abandoned my plans to include their stories. While the student stories might have added richness to the research, I could see that this was not what parents desired for their students.

While I had participated in cross cultural focus groups before, I found this experience also challenged me as a researcher. Despite my efforts and planning and organizing for the focus group, there were several factors which did not turn out as I had expected. Time and transportation significantly lengthened the first focus group session. Participants trickled in over a period of about 45 minutes, many of them shuttled to the site by the graduate advocate, who also served as interpreter. Expectations and protocol were somewhat disjointed, as typical American customs were apparently unfamiliar to them, and while I had asked cultural insiders prior to the event, it became obvious that did not understand their cultural norms either. Snacks were served, but I could see that they were uncomfortable with coming to a self-service type of arrangement, so I began serving them individually at the table. The fresh fruit was not eaten, and there were some concerns about ingredients in baked goods, despite my attempts to clear this prior to the meeting. However, this experience was part of the learning process, as the concern for food hygiene in connection to religious practices was also a theme that arose on several occasions.

It would be difficult to overstate the need for good communication and partnership with cultural insiders and translators. Without the support and ongoing advice from these key people, the research would have surely come to a halt. The valuable insights and support of cultural insiders were the foundation of the research from the onset. Clear, honest communication, willingness to learn from their understandings, and open to change based on their knowledge was absolutely critical. These cultural insiders were vital to introducing me and the research to the community, connecting me with

participants, and guiding so many aspects of the work. They helped to negotiate understanding regarding consent forms and confidentiality, and many cultural nuances.

My own cultural perspectives and experiences were also challenged throughout the course of the study. While I sought to understand issues from parent perspectives, I also bring a framework of understandings and expectations from the American school culture, and from current research in the field. As an example, my original interpretation of a parent's concerns about writing was more focused on issues of copying as compared to composition. Two of my committee members, who were very familiar with international students and differences in education systems, suggested that the actual practice of handwriting in terms of perfecting penmanship was likely to be a greater concern, particularly in a culture with more ornate written symbols. I found that my research questions were posed in a way that asked for parents to define or describe their relationships to the schools. They certainly did so, but often their answers were embedded in stories, rather than succinct descriptions. There were also times in which my own observations and reactions collided with the perspectives of both parents and educators. For example, as I heard parents describe what they perceived as discriminatory practices related to credits, I found myself more empathetic towards their concerns, but also compared and contrasted their perceptions with what I knew of the educational systems. In reporting these issues, I have tried to clearly label the various points of view to distinguish between parent voice, educator voice, and researcher voice.

Summary

The primary focus of this study was to develop an understanding of parent perspectives in the area of parent involvement in the schools for this specific population

of Somali parents. Themes were developed from parent responses and supplemented with information and input from administrators and teachers to illustrate the development of understanding across cultural differences. Based on parent responses parent involvement was influenced by parental background, their refugee experiences, and their own educational experiences. Adjustment to schools in the United States included differences in pedagogy styles and discipline practices. The frequency and degree of interruptions to formal education connected to the many upheavals and transitions experienced by the families, and the issue of over-age under-credited youth presented further challenges to their understanding of and adjustment to local school systems.

Parent identified barriers to involvement with their child's schools included language differences, complications involved in connecting via interpreter, approachability of the school (communication, respect, religion, culture), and logistics of employment, work, and transportation. Parents identified factors which enhanced positive relationships with the schools to include a proactive approach to understanding families, and helping families navigate the school system as well as connect to outside resources aided the parents in developing the perception that the school was a source of support and collaborative assistance for their children.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School mental health providers have a unique opportunity to bridge understanding between schools and diverse families by listening to families, learning and respecting their perspectives, and building relationships which foster partnership in supporting children and youth (Shakya et al., 2010). I learned much from the families in this case study, as they shared their experiences, and their concerns for the students. Their particular place in history, in the context of decades of wars and refugee camps shaped who they were, the opportunities they had, and ultimately, their immigration to the United States. Their cultural systems were also disrupted, as parents and students no longer had access to Somali culture as it was, but to the altered existence in the refugee context. Societal contexts, including home, family structures, education, and religious institutions all influenced their way of knowing, and their frame of reference. So too, these institutions have been altered due to the impact of the refugee migration process.

Despite their many struggles, there is also a strong sense of the resilience in these caregivers and their children as they adapt to all of these major changes in their circumstances and to the new environments in which they have now found themselves. The norms of their primary culture are somewhat preserved in the home, but at school and surrounding community, they interact with groups who have vastly different experiences. The interactions between their new microsystems, particularly those of home and school, provided a context for the themes of this study.

Review of Major Themes

Major themes which emerged from this study included topics related to the contexts of the families, factors which affected their adjustment to the schools, barriers to parent involvement, and factors which enhanced the relationship between parents and schools. These themes were initially based on parent perspectives, with follow up inquiry conducted with administrators and teachers to further understand how the schools had addressed these needs. For the purposes of this chapter, themes will be revisited in the framework of the original research questions, addressing connections to current literature, and new insights or understandings which have been gained through the research process.

**RQ1: Defining Association
with Schools**

The first research question asked, "How do Somali refugee parents define/describe their association with the schools?" Before addressing this question, it was important to understand the contexts of families in order to understand the needs and challenges faced by the families in this study. Rather than giving me concise definitions, I found the participants were more likely to tell me anecdotal stories from which I derived the answer to this question. Parents spoke of their experiences over the past decades in the context of African wars and refugee camps, relocation, and secondary migrations. As many as two decades of life in refugee camps had impacted systems of daily living, reduced employment opportunities for fathers, and forced mothers into the role of fighting for their families' survival. Prior to arriving in the United States, they reported little time or opportunity to interact with schools, and limited resources within the schools. However, when they did have questions or wanted to meet with the teacher in previous African contexts, the shared language had allowed them to easily do so. As with

immigrant groups from other parts of the world, these Somali parents tended to defer to the school for matters pertaining to education (Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Githembe, 2009; Nderu, 2005). For some parents, their view of the schools in refugee camps was tainted by disillusionment in the limited accountability of teachers and principals in poorly organized systems in which their children might not go to school, or fail to stay the day, and parents would have no way of knowing.

From their stories, it was clear that while parents clearly saw their role in supporting education at home, they did not initially expect to have an active role at the school. Culturally, the parents generally viewed their role in their children's education to be applied in the home, to provide food and clothing for the children, and to send them to school. In this sense, the role of the parent was consistent with that of other immigrants African immigrant parents (Githembe, 2009; Nderu, 2005). While they viewed school as important, language and educational background were barriers to helping their children with homework. Beyond that, many constructs of parent involvement which are often assumed by schools in the United States, such as volunteering and decision making were foreign to them, even if language had not been a barrier. In relationship to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model for parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), parent responses were somewhat consistent in terms of parent perceptions of their roles, and of their ability to impact their students' success in school.

RQ2: Interactions with Schools

The second research question asked, "How do these Somali refugee parents interact with their children's schools?" In essence, they relied on interpreters and community navigators to relay information from the schools and to serve as liaisons

between parents and schools. Parents gained understanding of the systems through parent education meetings facilitated by these language and culture brokers, and thus developed a better understanding of issues affecting their youth. They also communicated with teachers through specific invitations delivered by way of the interpreters, and attended parent teacher conferences aided by interpreters.

Parents were unaccustomed to concepts of volunteering at school or being part of the decision making process. Nor were they accustomed to systems for tracking the attendance or academic progress of their students. Many of the established systems for monitoring children's grades and attendance were internet based, and not particularly accessible to parents with limited literacy and computer skills. Once school administrators were aware of these differences, parents were able to access information about their children with the assistance of the graduate advocate.

Sometimes the interactions with the school were complicated by adjustments and misunderstandings. For these families, adjustment to schools in the United States included learning the differences in pedagogy styles, and differences in discipline practices. There was also some suggestion that the older students did not get enough homework, and did not take seriously the homework that they did receive, because of differences in discipline or relaxed consequences for failure to return finished homework.

Parents also described confusion about credits, and finding out that their students were over-aged and under-credited, and therefore at risk for not graduating. Parents and students encountered vast differences in secondary school systems, with credit systems in the United States based on time in class rooms, rather than on exam-based achievement. Both language differences and interrupted education posed a barrier for many students,

particularly in the initial stages of entry into the school systems. Many of the older students were placed in high school without the academic skills typically mastered in elementary or middle school. This misalignment of skills with placement necessitated taking remedial classes for basic skills before being able to access high school level courses. This was particularly problematic in math and English classes, where students needed to take four years of credits for graduation, but first needed to take courses to build foundational skills in things they had missed during those interruptions. Initially, parents and students did not understand that these remedial courses did not count for credit, which further exacerbated the challenges of students who were over-age and under-credited, and some parents interpreted this as discrimination. Unfortunately, for students who arrived in the United States as adolescents, it often meant that they "aged out" of school prior to completing their degrees, only leaving them with the option of earning a GED. The processes through which parents interacted with the schools to resolve these issues became clearer as themes were discussed in relation to the third research question.

RQ3: Encouragers or Impediments to Involvement

"What issues influence their involvement with the schools, either encouraging or impeding effective interaction?" In developing and understanding of these concepts, the answer to the second question of how they interacted with the schools was also clarified. As parents discussed barriers and supports, the discussion also addresses ways in which these issues were addressed, and how parents and schools found ways to build understanding.

Barriers to parent involvement. Parents perceptions of barriers to involvement in their children's school included differences in their own educational background, language barriers, specific challenges of connecting via an interpreter, factors related to their perceptions of the approachability of the school, including respect for culture and religion, and finally, logistical barriers due to employment, time and transportation.

Parent background often included little formal education. This meant that even in their own languages, many mothers did not read or write. While it seems that the fathers may have had more literacy skills in their home languages, many of them did not speak English when they arrived.

Another aspect of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model suggests that contextual motivators include the degree to which parents feel invited to participate by the school, the teacher, and their students, in a manner which is positive, encouraging, welcoming and empowering (Walker et al, 2011). Parents made little mention of invitation from their students, but the manner in which they were invited by school administrators and teachers did appear to have great relevance to families. Cultural sensitivity seemed to hinge on linguistic support and relationship. Administrators and teachers who intentionally built relationship with families by listening to them, understanding their needs, and respecting their differences were seen as welcoming and empowering.

Parents noted that there were differences in the approachability of schools in terms of how they were received. Some parents expressed a sense that their students were being discriminated against at times, and that their cultural and religious values were not respected. For schools which were less intentional in their outreach to parents, it seemed

that communications centered on problems after they had reached a crisis level rather than forging solutions in a preventive manner. Other schools were more intentional in the way they received parents, which seemed to result in greater levels of trust and understanding between families and school personnel.

While the importance of invitation is consistent with Hoover-Dempsey et al., (2005), a key factor in the impact of invitation was the mode of delivery. Electronic communication was difficult to access, and paper copies of school communication translated into their language were of limited impact. This appeared to be primarily due to literacy levels of many of the parents, but also seemed to have a cultural factor as well. Direct verbal invitation, usually through a translator was typically the most effective means of ensuring parent attendance at a meeting or event. Parents said that when they were directly told that it was important for them to come, they came.

Finally, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that life context variables such as time and transportation influence school based involvement for families (Walker et al., 2011). These variables include parents' knowledge and skills, which did appear to influence their perceptions of how they could help their students, and in this case, included linguistic knowledge and basic literacy skills for many parents. However, while other life context variables such as time and transportation presented barriers, they were overcome with support from friends, the graduate advocate, or the community navigator. Parents declared that they did their best to come when they perceived the invitation was specifically for them.

Limited resources in terms of time and transportation also presented barriers to parent involvement. However, consistent with the findings of Garcia Coll et al. (2002),

responses of parents and educators indicated the schools' responsiveness to parental resources in terms of time and energy due to demands of their employment, and transportation did influence their involvement. For example, shift work meant that many parents were not available for conferences at the traditionally scheduled times. The teachers who accommodated parent schedules had greater rates of attendance. The interpreter and graduate advocate often played a role in both communication and transportation, thus facilitating parent attendance at parent teacher conferences and other school meetings.

While communications were enhanced by the utilization of these Somali speakers who spoke some English, there were challenges to connecting with parents and interpreters. The translators covered many schools throughout the district, and both parents and schools noted that it was sometimes difficult to connect with them at the right times. Translators indicated that hourly pay, inconsistent demands on their time, and no summer income resulted in rapid turnover of translators/interpreters in the district, adding to the frustrations.

Enhancing relationships of families and schools. Several factors seemed to enhance the relationships of the families with the schools. In the two years prior to my introduction to the community, several strategies were put in place to improve communications with families. Language barriers were initially a major barrier to communication between parents and the school. The community was unprepared for the unexpected arrival of relatively large numbers of Somali refugees. Initially, schools had no way to communicate, and they looked fervently for anyone who knew even a little English. Eventually, a few men were found who had enough English to communicate

with the school and the families. A Somali teacher was also located, and was hired by the Welcome Center as graduate advocate to support middle and high school students. A community navigator was found to aid in communication with families and schools (BRYCS, 2010).

Understanding between cultures was intentionally addressed through meetings with parents, and with the broader community. By listening to parents, and though collaboration with other community services, school personnel were able to connect families to appropriate resources. Respectful, bidirectional communication with families was an important part of the success of the school system in this study. Gathering educators and parents together to listen to one another's perspectives, hear their needs, and provide support for families in adjusting to the new culture, language, and education systems was key to breaking down barriers of fear and mistrust. Parents emphasized the importance of relationship, and were quick to praise those teachers and administrators who took the time to talk with them, to listen to them, and to understand their situations. They were distressed in situations where they felt unwelcome, or unheard when their youth experienced difficulty in school. They welcomed the support of the graduate advocate who helped them to realize when their students were not in class, or struggling in school. They also expressed appreciation for his intervention in matters related to misunderstandings of culture, religious practices, and dietary concerns.

Parents and educators found that they shared many of the same concerns for students, and also shared goals and dreams for their futures. Educators learned that some of their own perceptions had been incorrect, particularly regarding the level of concern parents had for their children's education, and their desire for them to succeed.

Understanding the needs of families and their frustrations with differences in discipline styles allowed schools to support parents in parenting strategies for this country, and in connecting families to resources which would allow children a better chance for school success. Based on various participant comments as well as my own observations, it would seem that differences in discipline styles were discussed at length, but continued to be an area in which the cultural values of home and school were often poorly aligned.

Limitations

The primary research questions were that of parent perspectives, yet there were several layers of interpretation though which I had to sift to gain this understanding. It stands to reason that some of the data would be lost or altered in that process. The extent of what parents were willing to discuss may represent only part of what the parents actually thought about the topic. The parent participants appeared to have been somewhat reluctant to disclose some aspects of their experiences. I could only speculate that this might have been due to differences in how they viewed their role and relationship to the schools, fear of misrepresentation or repercussions, or other factors unknown to me. As mentioned previously, there may also have been a hesitation specific to my role as school psychologist. This role was unfamiliar to them prior to coming to the United States, and one which had been associated with some difficult situations regarding special education decisions for some of their children. Fear and mistrust of the child protection systems may also have been associated with the school psychologist's role.

The second layer of ambiguity is an artifact of the interpretation process. Not only does the interpreter have to reframe the response into another language, but the tendency of participants to talk enthusiastically over one another increased the amount of

summarizing the interpreter needed to do as he related their responses to me. As an illustration, I noticed that many times he would begin his response with the phrase, "What they are saying is…."

Another layer of interpretation is introduced as audio files are transcribed into written documents. There were instances in which I could not hear what was being said. At times, the transcriptionist may hear the words differently than originally stated, or use punctuation in ways that may alter the flow of the original conversation.

The final layer is that of my own interpretation of the conversations. My perceptions affected how I perceived meaning and relative importance of various aspects of the participant's responses. As a researcher, I approach family involvement through the perspective of educational research and practice in the United States and other westernized countries. This is a very different lens than that of the participants, and I often found that I needed to step back and clarify their voices from the voice of my own perspectives and experiences. The interpretation of the writing concerns (penmanship as compared to composition) is another example of the different lenses through which we viewed educational concerns.

Parent participants were almost entirely female, which greatly limited the voice of the fathers. Given the traditional cultural role of the fathers as heads of household and liaisons with the community, this would seem a particularly important limitation. Holding separate focus groups specifically for men might be more culturally acceptable (Nderu, 2005). The addition of a male researcher might also be a helpful strategy to encourage more fathers to participate.

Observations and participation were limited by parameters set by the school district and the constrictions of my role in the district as an intern. Much rich information might have been gained from more extensive interaction in the targeted schools, had I been able to be present for interchanges between schools and families during regular school hours. In this sense, my role as participant observer was both a help and a hindrance to the research process, as I moved from volunteer extern to a full internship role. As an intern serving an assignment in a different building in the district, it became a conflict of interest for me to be present in the middle school, high school, or Welcome Center during school hours. Yet, because of my prior involvement at the Welcome Center, and my continued presence in the school district, I was able to have ongoing participation in the school system, albeit a less direct participation than I had hoped.

Implications and Recommendations

Gaining an understanding of the cultures of refugee students is critical to developing good communication with families. This understanding can be accomplished through intentional meetings with parents, school leaders, and community organizations. Schools can work to develop system wide strategies, rather than relying on the efforts of outstanding but isolated individuals. Programming and service can be greatly enhanced by partnership with refugee organizations, and access to publicly available cultural resource databases, including those designed specifically for service to refugee children and youth. Finally, culturally sensitive approaches to mental health services should be considered.

Relationship with Parents

Kozleski et al. (2008) suggest that the most positive educational experiences occur when educators develop relationships with families in which educators go beyond the typical "expert" role to learn from parents, working together to create better support for student learning. Family support systems are key resilience factors for refugee students, and working with families only serves to optimize this important resource (Weine, 2011). When parents feel welcomed, valued, and empowered, they are more likely to be involved in partnership with their children's schools (Walker et al, 2011). Cardona, Jain, and Canfield-Davis (2012) suggested that the importance of relationship between families and school personnel is a more critical aspect of parent involvement than what the parents actually do.

Consistent with the perspective of some of the participants in this study, minority parents are often dismissed, overlooked (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010), or have expressed feeling unwelcome or disrespected in the school environment (Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Therefore, it is critical that school personnel make intentional effort to include refugee parents to improve outcomes for students. Educators can learn from parents to gain understanding of the child's educational background, the extent of interruptions to their education, parents' expectations for their children, and basic questions regarding the process of schooling in their former context. Through this process, school personnel also can explicitly describe the ways that the pedagogy is similar or different as well as their expectations for parents and students. Clear communication and orientation would be helpful for both teachers

and parents in terms of understanding expectations and helping to bridge gaps between differing expectations.

The outreach efforts of the more welcoming school sets an example for importance of educators being willing to become learners. Cultural understanding becomes truly bidirectional when educators intentionally build an understanding of culture by learning from parents. By listening to parents, school personnel also found that parents had much information to share about their children's backgrounds and specific challenges faced by their children. Educators also learned that parents specifically needed help with understanding various aspects of the school system, such as the credit system and graduation requirements. Because some students may spend their first year of high school earning few, if any, credits toward graduation, it is critical that both parents and students have the credit system explained to them and be helped to understand the opportunities and limitations in terms of elective credits, and balance those classes with the need to achieve proficiency in basic skills. Further, schools may look at alternative ways to offer courses so that older refugee students have ways to accelerate their ability to earn credits once they have gained English proficiency.

Parents appreciated the support they received from the graduate advocate and community navigator for understanding how to access information regarding attendance and progress reports. They also indicated a need for help with understanding the child protective system, particularly as it related to parenting and discipline strategies in this country. Parents specifically noted a desire for help with homework, and often the need for transportation was evident in that parents complained of a lack of either public transportation or school bus within the city limits. Other needs for practical support also

surfaced in this process, and the schools were able to connect families to medical and physical resources to address those needs.

BRYCS (2010) highlights several resources which address needs of families, such as Head Start programs that have collaborated with refugee resettlement agencies to specifically address the needs of refugee children in Phoenix, Arizona and Syracuse, New York. Child welfare services are available to address the needs of children, often including nutritional and medical care. By creating these enhanced networks that begin very early in a child's education, families will be better prepared to address the more complex educational needs of adolescents. Additionally, this ongoing contact, facilitates trust and understanding.

Schools can play an important role in supporting the role of the parent. Epstein (2001) suggested parent education activities, classes on parenting and child rearing and facilitation of connections to family support systems which assist families with health and nutrition needs, social services, literacy, and GED programs for parents. School personnel can conduct home visits and facilitate community meetings to help families understand schools and schools to understand families. In the case of the refugee families in this study, I found that a willingness to go to their homes, to sit and drink tea with them was instrumental in building that sense of being valued and respected.

System-Wide Strategies

System wide strategies should be built to support the unique needs of immigrant and refugee students. When these strategies are system-wide, they have greater chance of sustainability and long lasting effectiveness, as compared to the efforts of individual teachers and administrators. Individual teacher efforts seemed to make a difference for

their students to some degree. However, to the extent that building administrators made efforts to connect and include the parents, school climate in their buildings reflected a greater degree of trust and a sense of community.

A systems-wide approach was demonstrated in several ways, and appeared to create a successful, unified systemic change to the extent that early efforts were supported by the district superintendent and key community leaders. One of the strengths of the Welcome Center was the creative planning for older students which had been pursued. Initially, much effort went into looking for alternate paths to graduation for students who found themselves over-age and under-credited. Yet, leadership proved to be an important factor in that there appeared to be some loss of momentum for these ideas with variable levels of buy-in depending on administrative support and changes in leadership over the duration of the study.

Morland (2007) recommends partnering with whole families (especially parents) and community from the outset of welcoming refugee families into the schools. Refugee service organizations can provide valuable information, structure and resources. Local businesses and mainstream community organizations can provide connections to community services, activities, and programs, as well as build community cohesiveness in helping newcomers adapt. In this way, students have real life examples connecting learning to choosing career paths and goal setting. These cognitive aspects of engagement play an important part in self-efficacy and increased school completion (Kortering & Christenson, 2009).

System wide strategies to address linguistic barriers for immigrant students are also recommended. Collaboration between content area teachers and ELA teachers is a

strategy that is recommended to empower ELL students to learn content and language simultaneously. Language based approaches to teaching vocabulary and literacy in the content areas are an effective way to address language barriers which might otherwise be overlooked by mainstream teachers (Miller, 2009). Systems can provide leadership and training for teachers as a necessary step to accomplishing these strategies.

School completion involves more than just academic and behavioral supports (Kortering & Christenson, 2009). Involving refugee students in non-academic aspects of school life can be useful to increase a sense of belonging and psychological well-being. Other strategies which have been used with success include theatre and arts performances in which newcomer students can share their experiences and celebrate their cultural identities. Youth in this case study had several opportunities to share their culture through food, music and dance. Others found involvement in soccer an effective way to connect with the mainstream community, and participate in mutually enjoyable activities.

Partnering with Refugee Organizations

Understanding where these students and their families are coming from is key to building a successful working relationship (Birman et al., 2005). Refugee organizations can serve as resources in building that understanding. Collaboration with refugee organizations can also put schools in touch with translators, interpreters, and community navigators. Hiring school staff proficient in the home language also facilitates communication, cultural understanding, and linguistic support for families and students (Morland, 2007). Not every community will be fortunate enough to have qualified teachers who speak the language and understand the culture, but involving staff members such as office assistants, paraprofessionals, even crossing guards who can also serve with

cultural-linguistic support can be critical to facilitating understanding for families and schools. Schools can further empower these staff members by ensuring that the majority culture teachers are encouraged to utilize these home language colleagues as resources to increase cultural competency of educators, support learning, and mediate in behavioral problems with the students. The graduate advocate or an individual with a similar role can be included in teacher meetings and problem solving teams, to further ensure culturally appropriate mediation of conflicts and concerns. Administrators can also ensure that cultural-linguistic support staff are not over-burdened with so much responsibility that they are unable to be available for the very support they were intended to deliver.

Cultural Resource Databases

Schools can access resources to better understand the cultures of their refugee students, as well as the challenges faced when these students enter the local school systems. Morland (2007) provides a practical list of cultural considerations for social service providers, addressing cultural norms such as differences in discipline, work responsibilities for children and youth, and differences in hygiene practices which are easily misunderstood as abuse or neglect in the American context. For example, school psychologists and social workers would particularly benefit from knowledge of cultural practices such as scarring which might otherwise be mistaken for abuse. Hygiene practices such as diapering babies is also an issue for many refugee parents who are accustomed to letting children go undiapered because of limited resources and water supplies in their home countries. School psychologists and social workers would also benefit from knowing that refugee families are often exposed to concepts of child

protection laws before they immigrate. This information can be valuable in breaking down barriers because the child protection and reporting systems may be overly embellished, and thus create fear of social service workers, and misunderstandings such as the parents' concern that they couldn't say no to their children.

Cultural resources can also inform schools of tensions between various subgroups of a culture, such as hierarchy among various clans. Having this type of background information, can potentially help schools to understand conflicts between students, and provide suggestions for addressing these differences when problem solving between students and when using interpreters for parent meetings. Misunderstandings can arise when refugees from antagonistic groups in their home country are assumed to be homogenous in resettlement processes. For example, Birman et al. (2001) described the tensions between the Somali and the Somali Bantu groups, the latter having been historically the more oppressed group.

Schools can maximize their efforts by learning from experiences and promising practices in the areas of culture and language learning, and specifically from other newcomer programs across the nation. The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL, n.d.) has a wide variety of online resources for understanding culturally and linguistically diverse students, and for helping newcomers adjust to our culture. Various forms of research and information on a variety of specific cultures including Somali and Somali Bantu are available. Best practices and language acquisition strategies are condensed into digest form and brochures. Access to information about other secondary newcomer programs is available and indexed by various characteristics such as level of program

(middle or high school), community (urban, suburban, rural), and type of programming, as well as many other features.

Additional resources specific to work with refugee students in the schools can be found on the BRYCS website. A primary goal of BRYCS is to build capacity for various service providers for successful development of refugee children, youth and families. The website is designed as a clearinghouse for information and resources to support those efforts (BRYCS, 2010). Networking between refugee organizations and the various schools who receive the Refugee School Impact Grant allows for sharing of ideas and programs that work. The BRYCS site also has a wealth of materials in their Family Strengthening Program, supporting refugee children and youth by facilitating the adjustment of refugee families.

Finally, the Cultural Orientation Research Center (COR) offers cultural profiles of various refugee populations by region to help schools and other service providers with condensed information regarding the culture and history of refugees from around the world. COR also provides resources for refugees and for those working to welcome them into our communities and schools. These resources can be especially useful in building cultural awareness and sensitivity to refugees in host culture students as they prepare to receive newcomers (COR, n.d.).

Partnering with Community
Educational Institutions

Creative funding may be needed to support credit recovery in after-school, weekend, or summer classes. The level of need is likely to exceed the capacity of the school system to address those needs. The strain on school resources implies that schools may be able to multiply their resources by dedicating adequate personnel time to research

and connect with outside funding sources for these programs. The schools in this case study frequently partnered with the local community college to pair support to refugee students with practicum experience for community college students who tutored them.

The needs of the students and families also becomes a concern for the wider community. Educators in this study demonstrated that school leaders can collaborate with employers and community organizations which provide ELA and Adult Basic Education classes or GED options for older students. Other adult education options can be offered in the community to enhance the prospects of students who were approaching age limits on arrival, and equip parents to support their students. Schools can partner with these organizations to provide these resources in the school buildings on evenings and weekends as a way of connecting the school to support for families.

School leaders can further promote academic success and career opportunities by collaborating with businesses, community colleges and universities to advocate for career opportunities or college admission for students who earned GED status. Students who are over-aged and under-credited, but see that there is hope for them will be less likely to lose their motivation than when they see that there is no way they can graduate or compete in a better job market. Morland (2007) lists seven principles for promoting success for refugee students. Among these principles, she lists promoting opportunities and expectations for success for refugee and immigrant students, as well as leadership opportunities for students within those programs. High expectations and connection to information and resources for post-secondary education also helps refugee students attain their educational goals (Shakya et al., 2010) A wide variety of options should be available for vocational, career, and college options to fit the needs of individual students.

Providing Culturally Sensitive
Mental Health Services

While the literature suggests mental health concerns are of great import in the

adjustment of refugee students (Birman et al., 2005; Ellis et al., 2010), this group of

parents did not dwell on past trauma. My interactions with students also revealed that

they were often unwilling to discuss trauma, and preferred to cope with current school

issues, and look toward the future. Therefore, a resiliency focused approach may be more

acceptable (Hughes & Beirens, 2007; Whittaker et al., 2005). Differences in

conceptualization of mental illness, as well as treatment appeared to be more focused on

friends, family, and faith. Connection to support and resources was more acceptable from

the teacher, particularly the ELA teachers who had built close relationship with the

students. Some promising practices in addressing mental health needs in the school were

demonstrated by Weine (2011) who worked with groups of families rather than

individual clients. In this way, he was able to build on the assets of family and

community to enhance resilience in youth and families. Birman, Weinstein, Chan &

Beehler (2007) also recommended that schools build relationships with the whole family

to greatly reduce acculturative stress for refugee students.

Rogers, et al. (1999) recommend that school psychologists acquire an

understanding of their diverse students' coping skills and support systems to build

interventions that capitalize on student strengths and collaborate with cultural resources

such as extended family support networks. Doll, Jones, Osborn, Dooley & Turner (2011)

advocate for a proactive approach by building resilience through strong academic

engagement, with a few homework problems sent home on a regular basis to allow

parents and students to interface over schoolwork and values surrounding their education.

Attention to building effective peer friendships and strong connections to adults were further recommended for building resilience. However, the authors caution that this proactive resilience approach be balanced with monitoring individual students' situations and risk factors which can change over time (Doll et al., 2011).

The key to all of these approaches hinges on relationship building. When refugee students and families have strong relationships with educators and mental health professionals in the schools, they are more likely to feel understood and accepted. When students are struggling, changes in behavior or mood will be recognized more quickly, and it stands to reason that support can be more readily sought and delivered when trust has already been established.

Mental health services can be offered in the format of cultural adjustment groups for newcomers. In order to support efforts to address cultural adjustment groups with refugee students in the school setting, International Kids Success has compiled the RESPECT Guide (ISK, 2012). This guide was compiled as a result of over a decade of experience working with refugee youth, in conjunction with Jewish Family Services and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. By conducting cultural adjustment groups, students have the opportunity to learn and share their cultures and experiences, meet new friends, and discuss challenges. This can be done in a culturally sensitive way, and can help avoid the stigma and expense barriers to community mental health care services. Many strategies which have had some measure of success have included less threatening approaches to dealing with stressors. Art, music, drama and story-telling have been avenues for communication which allow students to communicate with limited English skills, and in ways which likely seem like more natural school activities (BRYCS, 2010;

Choi, 2010; Cumming & Visser, 2009; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2009). These approaches also allow refugee students avenues to share their cultures and stories with other students, and build a stronger cultural appreciation between the various groups. The RESPECT Guide is available online as a free download from International Kids Success. Similarly, resources for families are also available to help families adjust to their new communities (BRYCS, 2007, 2010). Schools could also offer parallel programs for newcomer parents, addressing such issues as understanding aspects of their new culture, stages of cultural adjustment, the expectations of the school culture, and acculturation gaps between immigrant children and their parents.

Future Directions

When embarking on cross cultural research, the wise researcher will intentionally build partnerships with cultural insiders, and always take the stance of learner. Respect of culture and interdependence with cultural insiders is likely to foster better understanding, and help to repair any misunderstandings along the way. Researchers hoping to study refugee issues should be especially careful to be informed of the wide range of issues, and to be sensitive and open to making changes to the research based on impact to the community. Ongoing respectful dialogue with cultural insiders and interpreters proved to be critical to this study, and is highly recommended for future studies.

While these Somali mothers of secondary students were able to express their successes and challenges as related to their children's schooling, there were other perspectives that went unheard. A study with fathers would add valuable insights, and would likely be more acceptable to cultural norms by respecting the father's role as head of the family (Morland, 2010). Traditionally, a father's role is to interface with the

community, while the mother's role was more in the home (Abdullahi, 2001; Nderu, 2005). As little work has been done specifically with fathers, this may add a new dimension to the understanding of parent involvement and support of refugee students from Somalia. Specifically recruiting fathers may be necessary to engage more male participants, and separate focus groups for fathers may be more culturally acceptable to Somali customs and traditions.

A deeper understanding students' perspectives would be helpful. Inclusion of young adults who have already exited the system would add valuable insights for the outcomes for refugee students, and the factors which empowered or impeded their success. Shakya et al., (2010) suggest that systems and policies also present barriers to higher education for refugee youth. These authors recommend promoting leadership among refugee youth, and including them in research to impact policy.

While case study was a useful approach in building an initial understanding of parent perspectives, the limitations and logistical barriers might be better overcome with more of an insider approach. An ethnographic approach to the study might allow the researcher to gain more of an "insider" status, and could thus add additional richness to understanding the culture as well as the home side of parent involvement.

The perception of efficacy in the research process should also be considered. If the role of the researcher is perceived as having limited ability to respond to needs or implement systemic changes in a more timely fashion, participants may feel less inclined to participate in the study. For parents and school systems to gain a greater sense of vested interest in the outcomes of the research, it may be advantageous to consider a participant action research model (Merriam, 2002), which moves beyond the

investigation of perspectives to a joint pursuit of solutions to the problems identified in this study.

Conclusion

The stories of these Somali refugee parents revealed extensive challenges in adapting to school in the United States, but also a remarkable strength and resilience in adapting to their new community. As educators seek to understand these families, the importance of building trust and respectful relationships cannot be overstated. In spending time with these parents, I was struck with a deep sense of respect for their courage and strength in finding ways to support their families through conditions which most of us cannot imagine. For many, their own backgrounds had not allowed them the opportunity of education, but they had a wealth of knowledge and skills not measured by academic standards. Many of them expressed deep desire for their children to have the opportunities afforded by education now available to them in this country. While many of them lacked basic literacy skills, they had shown great tenacity in surviving decades of war, the tumult of multiple moves, and the stresses of adjusting to a new culture. I came to consider myself privileged to have heard their stories, and to have walked with them on a short segment of their life journeys. I am grateful for the opportunities to share their insights, and to encourage educators to invest in the time for building meaningful relationships to overcome barriers and empower students for success.

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APPENDIX A

IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

May10, 2012

TO: Heather Helm
            CEP

FROM: Gary Heise, Co-Chair
            UNC Institutional Review Board

RE: Expedited Review of Proposal, *Parent Involvement Perspectives of Refugee Parents From the Horn of Africa,* submitted by Mary L. Van Korlaar (Research Advisor: Robyn Hess)

First Consultant: The above proposal is being submitted to you for an expedited review. Please review the proposal in light of the Committee's charge and direct requests for changes directly to the researcher or researcher's advisor. If you have any unresolved concerns, please contact Gary Heise, School of Sport and Exercise Science, Campus Box 39, (x1738). When you are ready to recommend approval, sign this form and return to me.

I recommend approval as is. _____ 6-13-12
                            Signature of First Consultant   Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is approved as proposed for a period of one year: 7/9/2012 to 7/9/2015.

_____ 7/9/2012
Gary D. Heise, Co-Chair   Date
as revised

Comments: *emailed 7/2/2012*

APPENDIX B

CONSENT: PARENT FOCUS GROUPS

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Parent Involvement Perspectives of Refugee Parents from the Horn of Africa

Researcher: Mary L. Van Korlaar, Department of School Psychology

Phone Number: (970) 397-6778   E-mail: vank0439@bears.unco.edu

Parent/Caregiver Consent Focus Groups

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of families from the Horn of Africa interacting with the schools of their middle and high school youth. If you agree to participate, I hope to meet with groups of parents/caregivers on two to three occasions (over the course of the 2012-13 school year), for group discussions lasting approximately one hour. The group will be asked questions to describe how their families interact with the school, how they communicate about school related topics, and what is helpful or not helpful to that process.

My assistant is a graduate student at the University of Northern Colorado, familiar with research methods. She will take notes and digitally record the session so that I can remember everything that people tell me. She will not share information with anyone (other than myself) outside of this session. We will not use your real names, but will allow each person to choose a pretend name for yourself. Interpreters will be provided to ensure that you understand and are comfortable with the interview process.

At the end of the group discussion, you will be given opportunity to indicate if you are willing to allow me to spend time with you in the community, to better understand your interactions with the school. This will be indicated with a check box on today's consent form. Later, you may also be asked if you are willing for me to meet with you individually to follow up with questions that came up during the group discussions. This individual interview will be addressed in a separate consent form.

At the end of the study, I would be happy to share what I learned with you, and to confirm that I have represented your thoughts accurately. I will take every precaution in order to protect your confidentiality. You may choose a pseudonym (pretend name), or I will assign one to you. Only the lead investigator (myself) and my research assistants will know the name connected with a pseudonym, and when we report data, your name will not be used. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office, which is only accessible to myself. Consent forms will be kept in a locked file in the office of my Faculty Advisor (Robyn Hess, Ph.D., McKee Hall 293, Campus Box 13, Greeley, CO 80639-0001,phone: (970) 351-1636 email: robyn.hess@unco.edu).

Potential risks in this project are minimal. Participants may find it somewhat uncomfortable to express their views in a group, particularly if they are challenged by others. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of participants through the use of pretend names. Participants are advised of the researcher's legal obligation to report suspected mistreatment of children and serious threats against self or others.

Families of Horn of Africa origins who have children in the local schools are likely to most benefit from the results of this study. However, upon completion of each scheduled focus group discussion, you will receive a small gift certificate as appreciation for your time and assistance. Similarly, gift certificates will be given to family members who are chosen for follow up interviews.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

_____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____
Researcher's Signature   Date

After the meeting, please sign if you agree to the following statement:

I am willing for the researcher to spend time with me in the community in order to better understand my interactions with the school.

(Please add any comments on the types of activities and place(s) of observation.)

_____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____

Researcher's Signature   Date

Jaamicada waqooyiya Colorado

Foomka aqbilitaanka ee ka qaybgalayaasha dadka ee cilmi baarista ee jaamicada waqooyiga Colorado.

Cinwaanka mashruuca: ka qaybgalka aragtiyada waalidiinta qoxootiyada ee ka yimid geeska afrika.

Cilmi baaraha: Mary L. Van Korlaar, Qaybta waxbarshada ee cilmi nafsiga

Numbarka Taleefoonka: (970) 3976778   Email:vank0439@bears.unco.edu

Waalidka/aqbalitaanka daryeelka ee kooxda bartilmaameedka

Ulujeedada iyo qaabaynta: ulujeedada koowaad ee daraasadan waxa ay tahay si loo fahmo khibradaha waalidiinta ee ka soo jeeda geeska afrika iyadoo lala falgalaayo iskuulada sida dhalinyarada iskuulada sarre iyo kuwa dhexe. Haddii aad ku raacsantahay in aad ka qaybqaadatid waxaan rajaynayaa in aad la kulantid koox waalidiin ah ama daryeelayaal ah xilliyo labbo ama seddex dhacdooyin ah (taas oo soconaysa xilliyada sida sannadka 2012-2013 ee sannad dugsiyeedka) doodaha koox kooxda ah waxay ku dhamaanayaan muddo hal saac ah. Kooxda waxaa la waydiinayaa suaalo si ay u cabiraan sida ay qooysaskoodu ula fal galaan iskuulka, sida ay ula macaamilaan waxyaabaha la xiriira iskuulada, iyo sida ay noqon karaan caawinitaanka arimahaasi la xiriira.

Gargaarkaygu waa qalanjebinta ardayga uu ka qalanjebinayo jaamicada waqooyiga Colorado

Aqoon u leh qaababka cilmibaarista. Waxay qaadandoontaa qoraalo yar yar ah waxayna si dhagaysi ah u duubi doontaa xisada si aan u xusuusto waxwalba oo ay dadka ii sheegaan. Lama wadaagi doonto warbixinta qofna (marka laga reebo aniga keliya) wax ka baxsan xisaddaan. Ma isticmaali doono magacyadiina rasmiga ah, laakiin waxaaan u ogolaan doonaa qofkastaba in uu doorto magac uu ku metelo oo kuu gaar ah. Tarjumaanku waxaa la siindoonaa si uu u suurageliyo in aad fahamtid kuna maqsuudsan qaabka tarjumaada.

Dhamaadka dooda kooxda kadib, waxaa lugu siin doonaa fursad aad ku tilmaantid haddii aad danaynaysid in aad ii ogolaato in aan kula qaato adiga wakhti bulshada dhexdeeda si aan si wanaagsan ugu fahamno sida aad ula falgashid iskuulka. Tani waxaa lugu tilmaami doonaa sanduuq la sixi doona oo ah foomka aqbilitaanka. Ugudanbeeytii, waxaa suuragal ah in lugu waydiiyo haddii aad iga rabtid in aad si gaar ah aad iila kulantid si loo dabagalo suaalaha ka soo dhexbaxay inta lugu guda jiray doodihii kooxda. Wareeysigan shakhsiga ah waxaa lugu wajahayaa foormka gaarka ah ee aqbilitaanka.

Dhamaadka daraasadan,waxaan aad ugu faraxsanaan doonaa in aan la wadaaga wixii aan idinka
bartay kadibna aan qiro in aan matalay fikradihiina si sax ah, waxaan qaadayaa wax walba oo
ka hortag ah si loo difaaco waxyaabihii aad ii sheegteen si sir ah. Waxaad dooran doontaan
magacyo aad wax ku matalaysaan ama aniga ayaa magacyo idiin dooraya. keliya hogaamiyaha
wax baaraya(aniga naftayda) iyo caawiniyaasha cilmibaaristayda waxa ay ogaandoonaan magaca
ku xiran magacbixinta iyo marka aan sheegayno warbixinta, magacaaga lama isticmaali doono.
Qoraalku waxa uu ururiyay oo uu sharxay daraasdan taas oo lugu xifdin doono qaanad xiran
oo xafiiskayga ku dhexyaala kaasoo aanan cidna u dhaafikarin aniga mooyee. Foomamka la
waafuqsanyahay waxaa iyagana lugu xiri doonaa meelo xiran oo feelasha lugu xiro oo ku yaala
xafiiska la taliyaha qaybtayda ee (Robyn Hess, PH.D., Mckee Hall 293, qaybta Box 13 Greeley,
Co 80639-0001, Taleeefonka: (970)3511636 email: robyn.hess@unco.edu).

Halista imaankarta ee mashruucan waa kuwa aad u yar. Ka qaybgalayaasha waxaa laga yaabaa
in ay helaan waxyar oo nafis la' aan ah kuwaas oo ay ku cabirayaan aragtidooda ee kooxda
dhexdeeda, gaarahaan haddii ay la kulmaan waxyaabo adag oo ay kala kulmaan kuwa kale.
Dadaalkasta waxaa loo samayn doonaa si loogu hortago sheegashada ka qaybgalayaasha inta
u dhexaysa insticmaalka magacyada la iska dhigdhigayo. Ka qaybgalayaasha waxaa lugu
waaninayaa waajibaadka sharciga ah ee cilmibaaraha si loogu sheego caruurta loogu shakiyo in
si xun loola macaamilo iyo handadaada dhabta ah ee ka horjeeda naftayda iyo kuwa kaleba.

Qooysaska ka yimid geeska Afrika asal ahaan kuwaasoo leh caruur u dhigta iskuulada gudaha
kuwaas oo intaba u qalma faaidooyinka ugu badan ee natiijada daraasadan. Sikastaba ha ahaatee
marka uu dhamaado jadwalka dooda kooxda bartilmaameedka ,waxaad helaysaa shahaadooyin
yaryar ah oo hadiyad ah oo mahadnaq u ah wakhtiga iyo caawinitaanka aad bixisay ah.si siman
shahaadooyinka hadiyadaha ah waxaa la siin doonaa xubnaha qoyska ka tirsan kuwaas oo loo
doortay in ay dabagalaan waraysiyada.

Ka qaybgalku waa mid xur ah. Waa laga yaabaa in aad goaansatid in aadan ka qaybgalin
cilmibaaristan iyo haddii aad bilowdid in aad ka qaybqaadatid waxaa laga yaabaa ilaa hada aad
goaansatid in aad joojisid ama aad dib u guratid wakhtikasta. Goaankaaga waa mid la ixtiraami
doono weliba aan natiijo ka noqon doonin waynta faaidooyinka ee taasoo aad adiga haddii kale
cinwaan u noqotid. Iyadoo marka la akhriya kadib waxa sarre lana helo fursad lugu waydiinayo
suaalo , fadlan saxiix meesha hoose haddii aad jeceshahay in aad ka qaybgashid cilmi baaristan.
Koobiga foomkana ayaa lugu siin doonaa si aad ugu haysatid marjac ahaan mustaqbalka. Haddii
aad wax suaal ah aad qabtid oo la xiriirta doorashadaada ama la macaamilada ka qaybqaadashada
baarista, fadlan la xiriir xafiiska u qaabishan barnaamijkan, Kepner Hall Jaamicada Waqooyiga
ee Colorado, Greeley, Co 80639; 970-351-2161.

Saxiixa Ka qaybgalaha:_____ Taariikhda:_____

Saxiixa Cilmi baaraha:_____ Taariikhda:_____

Shirka kadib fadlan saxiix haddii aad waafuqsantahay hadalka soo socda:

Waxaan cilmi baaraha ka rajaynayaa in uu ila qaato wakhti bulshada dhexdeeeda ah si aan u gaarno isfaham wanaagsan oo la xiriirta sidii loola falgali lahaa iskuulada.

(fadlan ku dar wax alaale wixii aad kudari kartid ee aad ka sheegaysid noocyada nashaadaadka iyo meelaha laga fiirinkaro.

Saxiixa Ka qaybgalaha:_____ Taariikhda:_____

Saxiixa Cilmi baaraha:_____ Taariikhda:_____

APPENDIX C

CONSENT: STAFF AND NAVIGATOR

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Parent Involvement Perspectives of Refugee Parents from the Horn of Africa

Researcher: Mary L. Van Korlaar, Department of School Psychology

Phone Number: (970) 397-6778   E-mail: vank0439@bears.unco.edu

Staff Member Participant Consent

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of families from the Horn of Africa interacting with the schools of their middle and high school youth. If you agree to participate, I hope to meet with you as a staff member on one or two occasions (over the course of the 2012-13 school year), for discussions lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour. You will be asked questions to describe how the Horn of Africa refugee families interact with the school, how they communicate about school related topics, and what is helpful or not helpful to that process.

I will take notes and audio record the session so that I can remember everything that people tell me. I will not use real names, but will allow you to choose a pretend name for yourself. At the end of the study, I would be happy to share what I learned with you, and to confirm that I have represented your thoughts accurately. I will take every precaution in order to protect your confidentiality. You may choose a pseudonym (pretend name), or I will assign one to you. Only the lead investigator (myself) and my research assistants will know the name connected with a pseudonym, and when we report data, your real name will not be

used. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office, which is only accessible to myself. Consent forms will be kept in a locked file in the office of my Faculty Advisor (Robyn Hess, Ph.D., McKee Hall 293, Campus Box 13, Greeley, CO 80639-0001,phone: (970) 351-1636 email: robyn.hess@unco.edu).

Potential risks in this project are minimal, as participants may experience mild discomfort in discussing the challenges of interactions with their students' families. Staff members will be asked to discuss their roles and interactions, and will be asked to give 45 minutes to an hour of their time for each interview. It is expected that any selected staff member may be asked for one interview, with the possibility of one additional follow up interview later in the school year. Participants are advised of the researcher's legal obligation to report suspected mistreatment of children and serious threats against self or others.

Families of Horn of Africa origins who have children in the local schools and the teachers who work with these children are likely to most benefit from the results of this study. However, upon completion of each scheduled interview session, you will receive a small gift certificate as appreciation for your time and assistance.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

_____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

PARENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTION ROUTE

Focus Group Facilitators:		Interpreter:	Note Taker:
Date:	Duration of Focus Group:	Location:	Attach list of participants

Things to SAY before you begin:

π   *The purpose of this focus group is to gather information that will help schools, teachers, researchers and policy makers to understand the experiences of children with special schooling needs.*

π   *This focus group will last for one and a half hours.*

π   *Whatever you say here will remain anonymous. That means that we won't reveal what was said here by individual name, although we will share the information that you give in general. It also means that all of you agree not to share the comments made here with others outside this group, although we can't guarantee what each of you will do. It is extremely important that we all understand and honor the confidentiality of the other members of this group since it will help us to get as clear and honest a picture of your experiences as possible.*

π   *(Check with navs on taping v notetaker v. both).We will audiotape this focus group and transcribe the tape. Where needed, fictional names will be substituted for the names mentioned here.*

π   *We need to make sure that everyone gets a chance to express their opinions and no one takes too much of this precious time.*

π   *I will take responsibility for time keeping and making sure that we get to all of the questions in this focus group.*

π   *Use your best strategies to express your opinions without making others feel uncomfortable.*

Things to REMEMBER:

π   After your brief introduction, ask all members of the group to introduce themselves, giving their name so that the transcriber can identify speakers.

π   Sign up sheet with names and addresses for those who want copies of the report.

π   Make sure that you have extra tapes on hand for the recorders.

π   Check your watch when you begin & track the time.

π   Make sure that you test the sound quality on the tape right before you begin your session.

π   Label your tapes: Date and time of focus group, focus group label (e.g., parents group 1, 3/05/02 – Denver, CO USA)

Things to SAY at the END: *Thank your participants.*

π   *Let them know that they will receive a report at the end of the study via written summary or oral report, depending on group consensus.*

Questions	Detail Probes or Expanders	Elaboration and Clarification Probes
Make sure that you get a chance to ask all of these questions.	*These probes are the basic who, where, what, when, why, and how questions. Use them to obtain a complete and detailed picture of some activity or experience.*	*These probes help to keep participants talking more about a subject. Use non-verbal as well as verbal strategies. Pick the ones that fit the context. These probes are used to make sure that you've understood what the participant has just said. Pick the ones that fit the context.*
Background 1. **Please tell me about your family, and how you came to this area.**	• Participant Age, gender, ethnicity • country of origin, • Family Make up (May use pictoral representations for family make-up) • refugee status, relocation process/sequence • general idea of their refugee experience in terms of SIFE for self and children • number of years in the USA • How long in Fort Morgan	Tell me more …. How much…. How often…. When….. How long…..
Parent's educational history 2. **Please tell me a story about your own education.**	• What age were you when you started/completed your schooling • What country/ language? • Was this typical for others in your context? (age, country, setting, gender) • What expectations did your parents have for you?	What kind of activities occurred? Give some examples of what you mean.

Questions	Detail Probes or Expanders	Elaboration and Clarification Probes
Make sure that you get a chance to ask all of these questions.	*These probes are the basic who, where, what, when, why, and how questions. Use them to obtain a complete and detailed picture of some activity or experience.*	*These probes help to keep participants talking more about a subject. Use non-verbal as well as verbal strategies. Pick the ones that fit the context. These probes are used to make sure that you've understood what the participant has just said. Pick the ones that fit the context.*
		You said it was a "unusual." What do you mean by unusual? How was that unusual? What was that like for you? You said it was difficult? What makes it difficult?
Child's educational history 3. **Please tell me about your student' education experiences prior to coming to this school**.	Follow up questions to probe for student's education and interruptions.) Did the student have formal education prior to refugee experience? Did the student receive any formal education while in refugee status in another country prior to arrival in the United States?	I'm not sure I understand what you mean. Could you say more about that? What was that like? What kinds of things did they do?

Questions	Detail Probes or Expanders	Elaboration and Clarification Probes
Make sure that you get a chance to ask all of these questions.	*These probes are the basic who, where, what, when, why, and how questions. Use them to obtain a complete and detailed picture of some activity or experience.*	*These probes help to keep participants talking more about a subject. Use non-verbal as well as verbal strategies. Pick the ones that fit the context. These probes are used to make sure that you've understood what the participant has just said. Pick the ones that fit the context.*
	Did the child attend any other US school prior to this one?	
Parent Involvement History 4. **In your country, how did parents and schools work together to educate children?**	• **Tell a story about something that happened that shows what you mean.** • **Tell me a story about how you helped your child at home** • **Tell me a story about when you went to your child's school, what happened?**	You helped your child _____, Why was that important? Who initiated the contact? What was the reason you went? Tell me about that. Was it helpful? Is that typical?

Questions	Detail Probes or Expanders	Elaboration and Clarification Probes
Make sure that you get a chance to ask all of these questions.	*These probes are the basic who, where, what, when, why, and how questions. Use them to obtain a complete and detailed picture of some activity or experience.*	*These probes help to keep participants talking more about a subject. Use non-verbal as well as verbal strategies. Pick the ones that fit the context. These probes are used to make sure that you've understood what the participant has just said. Pick the ones that fit the context.*
	Probe to find out which of the following types of involvement they may have experienced in their previous country(ies) (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaboration with community.	How did you (they) do that? What kinds of things did you do? Who decides that? How is that done?

Questions	Detail Probes or Expanders	Elaboration and Clarification Probes
Make sure that you get a chance to ask all of these questions.	*These probes are the basic who, where, what, when, why, and how questions. Use them to obtain a complete and detailed picture of some activity or experience.*	*These probes help to keep participants talking more about a subject. Use non-verbal as well as verbal strategies. Pick the ones that fit the context. These probes are used to make sure that you've understood what the participant has just said. Pick the ones that fit the context.*
5. Stories of what that is like in the USA	**Assuming the allotted time will be finished, assure parents that we will discuss these issues in the US context at the next meeting**	Question routes for the next meeting will parallel today's topics, and be developed more specifically based on today's responses.

APPENDIX E

STAFF AND NAVIGATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewer:		Interviewee:	(Note Taker):
Date:	Duration of Interview:	Location:	Comments:

Things to SAY before you begin:

π *The purpose of this interview is to gather information that will help schools, teachers, researchers and policy makers to understand the experiences of children with special schooling needs.*
π *This interview will last for approximately 45 minutes.*
π *Whatever you say here will remain anonymous. That means that we won't reveal what was said here by individual name, although we will share the information that you give in general. We understand and honor the confidentiality of participants in the study, since it will help us to get as clear and honest a picture of your experiences as possible.*
π *We will audiotape this interview and transcribe the tape. Where needed, fictional names will be substituted for the names mentioned here.*
π

Things to REMEMBER:

π After your brief introduction, ask participants to introduce themselves, giving their name so that the transcriber can identify speakers (substituting psuedonyms).
π Sign up sheet with names and addresses for those who want copies of the report.
π Make sure that you have extra batteries on hand for the recorders.
π Check your watch when you begin & track the time.
π Make sure that you test the sound quality on the tape right before you begin your session.
π Label your tapes: Date and time of interview, interview label (e.g., parents ABC 1, 3/05/02 – Denver, CO USA)

Things to SAY at the END:

π *Thank your participants.*
π *Let them know that they will receive a report at the end of the study via written summary.*

Questions	Detail Probes or Expanders	Elaboration and Clarification Probes
Make sure that you get a chance to ask all of these questions.	*These probes are the basic who, where, what, when, why, and how questions. Use them to obtain a complete and detailed picture of some activity or experience.*	*These probes help to keep participants talking more about a subject. Use non-verbal as well as verbal strategies. Pick the ones that fit the context. These probes are used to make sure that you've understood what the participant has just said. Pick the ones that fit the context.*
Background 6. **Please tell me about your interactions with refugee students' families, and how you go about that?**	• How long have you had Horn of Afric students in your classroom? • How many H of A refugee students do you currently have in your class • How do you interact with parents, and for what purposes?	Tell me more …. How much…. How often…. When….. How long…..
Child's educational history 7. **Please tell me briefly what you know about the background of those H of A refugee students.**	Follow up questions to probe for understanding of students' histories. student's education and interruptions.) Did the student have formal education prior to refugee experience? Did the student receive any formal education while in refugee status in another country prior to arrival in the United States?	I'm not sure I understand what you mean. Could you say more about that? How did you discover that? What kind of stories have you heard, and from whom?

	Do you know if they attended any other US school prior to this one? Do you know anything about how they may have interacted with their youth's schools in home countries or other countries of refuge?	
8. **Tell me more about interacting with parents, caregivers or family members**.	• **Tell a story about something that happened that shows what you mean.** • **Tell me a story about when you contacted that caregiver about something related to school. Why (and how) did you contact them, and what happened?** • **Tell me a story about how your student's parent helped with the child's education at home** • **Tell me a story about when that caregiver came to see you at school, what happened?**	You parent helped you _____, Why was that important? If you parent talked to your teacher, who initiated the contact? What was the reason they went to the school? Tell me about that. Was it helpful? Is that typical?
	Probe to find out which of the following types of involvement you observe with families from Horn of Africa countries. (a) parenting,	How did you (they) do that? What kinds of things did you do? Who decides that? How is that done?

	(b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaboration with community.	
9. **What would help you the most in interacting with the caregivers of your H of A students?**	**What has been helpful in the past? Why was that helpful? What would make it even better?**	Tell me more about that… How did that come about? Who helped with that process?
10. **What is most difficult in interacting with the caregivers of your H of A students?**	**What has been difficult in the past? Why was that difficult? What would make that less difficult?**	Tell me more about that… How did that come about? Who/What would you have liked to have helped with that? Tell me what that might look like.

Cultural Navigator staff will be asked question along these lines, but with emphasis on facilitating these interactions. Additional questions may be developed based on responses from school staff and from the families.

APPENDIX F

JOURNAL ARTICLE

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Somali Refugee Parent Involvement in a Rural Setting: An Instrumental Case Study

Abstract

The parent involvement experiences of nine refugee parents from the Horn of Africa were examined through qualitative case study with participant observation. Parents were asked to discuss their own educational background, and their experiences prior to immigration to the United States in an effort to understand the development of their understanding, values and beliefs about education. Parents were also asked about their interactions with their children's schools in the United States, and to identify factors which proved to be either barriers to parent involvement or empowering for their interactions with their children's schools.

The majority of parents had little or no formal education, making it difficult for them to assist their students with homework, or to feel like they could approach the teachers about how they might help their children. Parent perception of their role was clearly in the home, and they typically deferred to educators for matters in the school. Key variables to student adjustment involved differences in pedagogy, discipline practices, and credit systems, as well as having interrupted formal education and the phenomenon of being over-aged and under-credited. Factors which posed barriers to parent involvement at school included differences in educational background, language

barriers, perceived disrespect of culture and religion, and logistical barriers such as time, employment, and transportation. Parents experienced empowerment when schools were proactive in communications, met with parents to help them understand expectations and to address fear and mistrust. Further suggestions are made to guide educators to promising practices and resources for meeting the needs of this population.

Key Words: adolescents, case study, cultural adjustment, education, over-aged and under-credited, parent involvement, qualitative research, refugee, Somali, students with interrupted formal education

Author Note

Mary Van Korlaar, [Ph.D.], is a practicing school psychologist in the Rocky

Mountain Region. This article is based on her doctoral dissertation. She can be reached at

mlvankorlaar@gmail.com .

Introduction

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of the perceptions and experiences of refugee parents from the Horn of Africa (i.e., Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, or Djibouti) and their involvement in the schools attended by their youth in a middle and high school in a rural small town setting. The researcher aimed to gain clearer understanding of the ways in which these parents interacted with the schools, and in what ways they perceived empowerment or restraint in that partnership.

Considering the sizeable influx of refugee children into the schools over recent years, this research contributes to the understanding of the needs of refugee students and implications for response from school systems to adapt to these new populations for which they are often ill prepared to receive (BRYCS, 2010). Strong family connections are often a key resource for building resilience for these students as they adapt to new language, culture, and academic demands (Birman et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2005). Yet, limited information is available to inform parent involvement practices with refugees from the Horn of Africa, and the studies that are available primarily focused on elementary school children (Githembe, 2009; Nderu, 2005). While there were a limited number of studies on the needs of secondary students (Kanu, 2008, McBrien, 2011; Roxas, 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011), these studies did not focus on aspects of parent involvement. Findings will be used to suggest strategies for educators and policy makers to improve outcomes for refugee students, particularly in secondary school settings.

Research questions and objectives

Preliminary discussion questions aimed at understanding the cultural and historical background of participants, and their prior educational experiences. Research

questions focused on their interaction with the schools, how that was accomplished, and what factors either enhanced or impeded those interactions in order to better understand the needs and develop more effective strategies for working with refugee families from the Horn of Africa in particular.

Q1   How do Horn of Africa refugee parents define/describe their association with the schools?

Q2   How do these Horn of Africa refugee parents interact with their children's schools?

Q3   What issues influence their involvement with the schools, either encouraging or impeding effective interaction?

Literature Review

Refugee Contexts

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2012) reports a total of approximately 44 million people forcibly displaced, world-wide, including both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 15.4 million persons with refugee status. IDPs are those persons displaced within their home countries, and refugees are defined as those who have been forcibly displaced into other countries. Initially, many people internally displaced within their home countries, and eventually, many are forced into neighboring countries, still hoping to be able to return to their homes. When those hopes prove unlikely, the refugees can apply for refugee status with the United Nations, and are resettled in Western countries based on an annual quota system. While total numbers of East African refugees and their specific origins are a little more difficult to obtain accurately, the Colorado Department of Human Services (2011) reports combined with

US Census Bureau (2010) reports would suggest a rough estimate of approximately 23,000 persons resettled in Colorado alone.

This influx of refugees into Western countries in recent years has required extensive adaptation on the part of schools. Educational institutions are one of the first resources available to help refugee students and their families integrate into their communities, and eventually to become productive citizens of Colorado (Colorado African Organization, n.d.). Given the amount of time children spend in school, this setting often becomes a primary resource for supporting refugee children and well as their families.

Key challenges to successful adaptation for refugee students include English language acquisition and cultural stress (Bates, et al., 2005; Roxas, 2011), as well as the effects of interruptions to formal education (BRYCS, 2010; Dreyden-Peterson, 2011). Grade placement issues and loss of family support structures are cited as further barriers to academic success for refugee youth (Kanu, 2008). Other salient issues facing refugee students include mental health stressors due to trauma grief and loss (Castex, 1992; De Haene et al., 2010; Farwell, 2003). Discrimination potentially increases risk for refugee students who, by definition, have come to this country to escape persecution, and now may find themselves the targets of suspicion and bullying in the host country as well (McBrien, 2005).

Because the issues faced by refugees span many different contexts, exploration of these and related issues may best be understood using the bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This model provides a useful model for understanding the different contexts (also called systems) of the child's ecology, and thus serves as the

overarching framework of the study. His model of contextual influences focuses on the

interactions between the individual and the environment. Of interest in this study, is the

interplay between refugee families and schools. Therefore, a model of parent

involvement is also helpful. Epstein's types of parent involvement will be used to

understand the expectations of parent involvement from the perspective of the school

microsystem in the United States (Epstein, 1995).   Further, the work of Hoover-

Dempsey and Sandler on parent motivation for involvement also provides an organizing

framework (Walker et al., 2005). These frameworks for parent involvement were used

tentatively, with the recognition that cultural differences may affect the goodness of fit of

the models for refugee populations.

Parent Involvement

Epstein's model is useful in demonstrating the expectations of the host culture,

particularly from the perspective of the schools (Epstein, 1995). In this model, Joyce

Epstein defined six types of involvement for families and their children's schools. She

further defined each type, and gave examples or suggestions as to how those types of

involvement might occur. These types are listed as (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c)

volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaboration with

community.

Epstein recognized the role of parenting to establish a home environment to

support children as students (Epstein, 1995; 2001, 2005). She also suggested that the

school can play a role in enhancing and empowering parents to do so. Parent education

activities, such as workshops, audio-visual presentations, and classes on parenting and

child rearing can be offered at each age level. Schools can also facilitate connection to

family support systems which assist families with health and nutrition needs, social services, literacy, and GED programs for parents. Schools can conduct home visits during key transition points for the children, and facilitate neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and schools to understand families during these critical times of change.

While Epstein's model has clearly demonstrated the positive relationship between parent involvement and student outcomes (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sheldon et al, 2010), the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model has explored the mechanisms and mediating factors contributing to that relationship (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, et al., 2005). Key constructs in this model include personal psychological motivators within the parent, contextual motivators in terms of perceptions of invitation to be involved, and life context variables affecting a parent's ability to be involved with their child's school.

The construct of personal psychological motivators includes parental role construction and parental self-efficacy as related to their belief that their involvement with the school could help their child. Parental roles are constructed through expectations influenced by personal, extended family, and cultural expectations of the role of the parent, as to what their involvement should be, and how they should do it. More recent work has shifted to include parent's perceptions of their involvement roles being home-focused or school-focused, rather than merely whether or not they recognize responsibility for outcomes (Walker, Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011).

Contextual Motivators. Contextual motivators of involvement included general perceptions of invitation from the school, specific invitations from teachers, and specific invitations from their child (Walker et al, 2011). It is considered important that the school administrators (and the teachers) consistently convey that parents are valued members of the community, valued participants in children's education, and that this information be conveyed in a way that was perceived as positive, encouraging, responsive, welcoming, and empowering. Engaging families also requires cultural sensitivity, and the willingness to hear what parents have to say. There is some evidence that the voices of minority parents are often dismissed or overlooked (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2007). Unfortunately, some immigrant parents have expressed feeling unwelcome or disrespected in the school environment (Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010).

Specific invitations to involvement *from teachers* is grounded in empirical research indicating that in general, parents wish to know more about how to help their children learn and succeed in school (Walker et al., 2005). Further studies were able to demonstrate the impact of teacher efforts to involve parents by giving specific information as to how to help, and that these types of communications from schools and teachers have been linked to increased parent involvement in the schools.

Specific invitations to involvement *from the student* have been linked to increased parent involvement, particularly in home-based activities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Walker et al., 2005). These studies support the idea that parents are attentive to their child's characteristics and want to respond to their child's needs, whether it be a

verbal "I need help" or "I don't understand" or other behaviors, such as displays of frustration or attempts to avoid homework.

Life context variables. Perceptions of life-context variables are also seen to be an important influence on parent involvement decisions. Life context variables include knowledge and skills, as well as resources, time, and money. Parent's perceptions of what they have to offer in the way of specific knowledge and skills may vary over time and settings. Some researchers have suggested that parents often perceive themselves as adequate in elementary school, less adequate in junior high and high school, which coincides with typical declines in parent involvement (Garcia Coll et al., 2002). Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) offer another perspective, suggesting that by high school, parents may reduce this involvement, transferring more responsibility to the student to encourage a developmentally appropriate level of autonomy. Contrary to findings in the United States and Canada, Israeli parents tended to stay involved in their child's education through the high school years. These shifts in parent involvement across countries raise questions about potential cultural differences, and implications for subsequent effects on parent-teacher interaction barriers in the secondary school years (Griffin & Galassi, 2010).

Finally, decisions for parental involvement may be affected by schools' responsiveness to parental resources in terms of time and energy due to demands of their job(s), extended family needs, time, and transportation (Garcia Coll et al., 2002). Life context variables such as time and transportation did influence school based involvement among Latino families. However, life context variables do not seem to influent family

motivation for involvement as much as some of the other variables (Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011).

African Parent Involvement

Githembe (2009) conducted a mixed methods study of parent involvement with African parents of elementary students, some of whom were refugees. Key findings included the need for language support to assist parents in communicating with school personnel. Differences in practices, of how school was done, of the roles of the school and the home, and values (time and relationship orientations) further influenced parents' involvement with their children's schools. Nderu (2005) conducted a qualitative study specifically with Somali immigrant parents, some of whom were likely refugees, with similar findings. African parents expressed differing role constructions compared to expectations of schools in the United States. They were more accustomed to being responsible for things at home, such as ensuring their children were fed, clothed, well rested, and had homework completed. In their home countries, the teacher was the authority at school, and parents would not challenge that. The teacher was therefore expected to handle things at school, and the parent would not interfere. Given this difference in role construction, African parents expressed frustration and confusion as to why the teacher would call them in to manage behavior or academic problems at school. Additionally, language differences created barriers for newer immigrants in particular, making it difficult to communicate or participate in school events. Finally, differences in parenting practices caused misunderstandings. Corporal punishment was often a cause for misunderstanding, and some families expressed that the parental authority was challenged in such a way that it exacerbated the acculturation gap between generations.

Somali parents shared their difficulties in trusting authority figures due to their past experiences. Discrimination based n race and religious affiliation were often additional causes for misunderstandings and stress (Githembe, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Nderu, 2005).

Case Study Literature

A qualitative approach is recommended when complex detailed information is needed to address the questions of interest (Creswell, 2007). This type of study helps to empower individuals, give voice to their stories, and minimize the power hierarchies which often characterize relationships between researcher and participants. Qualitative methods enable us to capture the complexity of a problem for a given population (Creswell, 2007), particularly when current theories may not fully explain the issues, or to more fully understand the deeper thinking and meanings people bring into the issues we study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998).

The research question, therefore, drives the choice of methodology. The primary research questions include *how* and *why* questions about the parents interactions with the schools, and the factors which either encourage or impede effective partnerships. Current theories may not be fully adequate to explain the complexities of parent involvement from the perspective of refugee families. Power differentials are already inherent in relationships between families and schools (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999) and between researcher and those researched (Norton & Early, 2011). For refugee families, these power differentials were further complicated by language, cultural, and experiential differences.

Need for the Study

There is little doubt that parent involvement is important to children's education. Yet the unique situation in which refugee families find themselves calls for an in-depth understanding of these parents' perspectives in order to facilitate effective partnership with schools. Educators often have a fairly clear concept of what they expect from parents, which can easily shape how educators view family behaviors. Less is known, however, about how parents view that partnership, and how they are involved in supporting their child in school. There is a paucity of literature specific to parent involvement for families from the Horn of Africa. The few studies that were found were conducted in metropolitan areas which are likely to have larger refugee populations and more resources as compared to this more rural setting. Two of the three studies available involved parents of elementary school children (Githembe, 2009: Nderu, 2005), with only one specifically looking at the needs of refugee adolescents in a metropolitan setting (Kanu, 2008).

Role of Researcher

My interest in the needs of African refugee students and their families stems from both personal and professional developmental processes. I have come to understand more clearly the ecological systems which contributed to the strength and resilience of my own immigrant heritage and the resiliency of my parents and grandparents. An appreciation of the difficulties they shouldered in an effort to build a better life for their progeny has contributed to my interest in immigration and resiliency. My own experiences as an educator, both in African and in the United States, further stimulate my interest in the unique needs of this population. Each of these experiences has contributed to my sense of

the importance of multicultural competence as a practicing school psychologist and drives my passion for self-determination and empowerment for children and families. For me, these experiences underscore the importance of partnering with families to improve outcomes for children, as well as the need for removal of institutional barriers which impede access.

Methods Section

Case Study Design

As discussed in the literature review, case study is effective in exploring complex issues dealing with *how* or *why* questions involving participants of a particular population (Creswell, 2007). To access the families' deeper thought processes and the meanings they ascribe to involvement in their children's schools, I interacted with them in their natural settings including school, home, and community sites. This approach allowed me to build trust and rapport, as well as observe their interactions in those settings. In this way, I hoped to gain better insight into the contexts and meanings that they construct from their experiences.

The case study focused on a specific population of Horn of Africa refugee parents with middle or high school aged youth enrolled in the Welcome Center program in a rural school district in the Rocky Mountain region. The case was chosen as an example with some success in addressing an issue or process, and might therefore be an example for other school systems facing similar challenges. As the case was considered representative of a larger group of cases, rather than being of primary concern in itself, it is considered instrumental rather than intrinsic case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995).

Participants. Participants were selected from the list of parents with students in the Welcome Center, of Horn of Africa origins, and less than three years in the United States. All parents fitting this description were invited to participate. Final participant selection was based on willingness to attend the focus group session. Table 1 indicates the makeup of the nine parent participants.

Table 1

Parent Participants

Participant	Parent Gender[a]	Grade Level of Student(s)[b]	Months Since Immigration[c]	Months in Locale[d]	Original Resettlement Site[e]
A	F	HS/MS	31	27	RM
B	F	HS	7	<1	SE
C	F	HS/MS	6	6	RM
D	F	MS	15	8	W
E	F	HS/MS	10	3	MW
F	F	HS/MS	58	5	PNW
G	F	HS/MS	16	4	MW
H	F	WC only	31	19	RM
I	M	HS/MS	NA	NA	NA

Note. [a]Parent Gender. F = Female; M = Male. [b]Grade levels of the students. *MS* = Middle School; *HS* = High School; *WC* = Welcome Center only. [c]Months since primary immigration. [d]Months at local study site. [e]Region of original resettlement. *MW* = Midwestern Region; *PNW* = Pacific Northwest; *RM* = Rocky Mountain Region; *SE* =Southeastern Region; *W* = Western Region; *NA* = Not available.

Data Collection. The use of multiple sources of information is recommended to add to the thick rich description of the case, and for triangulation of the data to enhance trustworthiness (Merriam, 2002). Data sources therefore included a focus groups, in-depth interviews, observations in naturalistic settings, field notes, and artifacts or documents as appropriate. Of particular interest were a series of documents, articles, and studies conducted by various outside researchers for a non-profit community organization. These documents gave me insights into the history of the community's reactions and responses to the influx of refugees, and additional detail regarding the community meetings referred to by a school administrator.

Focus groups. Focus groups are a type of group interview, in which people with salient characteristics in common provide insights in a focused discussion to help understand the topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The power of focus groups lies in the interaction of the group, allowing the discussion to be stimulated by response from other participants. Consultation with cultural insiders in the community influenced the decision to begin with group formats to make people more comfortable responding, and to build a sense of community support for the process. Parents were initially gathered together for a larger focus group session. The dynamics of this session were helpful in that much discussion and interaction between parents occurred. However, it was also difficult to hear individual experiences in that setting. Consistent with the guidelines described by Krueger and Casey (2009), when one individual monopolizes a group, follow-up interviews can be used to gather additional information. A total of 7.5 hours of focus group and interview data were collected parent participants.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data which might otherwise be unobservable, such as experiences, perspectives, thinking processes, and feelings of the individual participants (Merriam, 1998). However, three of the four follow up interviews were done in pairs and triads, at the suggestion of the interpreter, thus forming mini focus groups rather than one on one interviews. He informed me that the women were uncomfortable with individual interviews, but happy to discuss in small groups. I found that more in-depth information was forthcoming in those smaller groups, and that the second sessions provided saturation. One individual interview was conducted with a parent who expressed preference to be heard individually. Parent focus groups and interviews generated 7.5 hours of audio recordings and accompanying transcripts and field notes.

Consistent with Stake's (1995) model for case study research, the interview questions included topical questions to elicit rich descriptive details of the backgrounds and perspectives of each participant. These questions were designed to elicit stories of the parents' experiences prior to coming to the United States. Information about the ages and grade placements of their students was also used later in making comparisons between the middle and high schools in the case analysis. Issue questions included topics of how parents interacted with the schools, what they found to be barriers in their relationship with the schools, and what factors enhanced their relationship to the schools. Additional questions were formulated around the issues which were deemed pertinent to understanding the main research question in the context of these small group or individual interviews. Models for development as presented by (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) guided the background questions to understand the systems and

experiences of these families. Models for parent involvement presented by Epstein and by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (Epstein, 2005; Walker et al, 2005) served as a framework for exploring parents' involvement in the schools. However, as the case study evolved, I included follow up questions on issues that emerged from the participant's responses. This evolution in questions allowed for an exploration of emic issues, which were salient to the participants themselves, but may otherwise have been overlooked.

As my primary research questions focused on parent perceptions, school personnel were interviewed as a secondary source for contextual triangulation. These individuals were asked about their interactions with refugee students' parents, how they accomplished these interactions, what was difficult in those interactions, and what helped them the most as they worked with refugee families in the schools. A total of six hours of interview data were collected from these school-based participants.

Observations in natural settings. Observations were conducted at the schools or Welcome Center events, using a participant observer approach (Merriam, 1998). As such, initial observations were holistic, with observation data noted either during or immediately after the observation period. Observations of parent interactions also occurred at a primary school in which many of the participant parents also had children, and at a cultural event which included performances by the middle and high school students. These observations in natural settings were used to increase understanding of the contexts of the case, as well as interactions of the various participants (Merriam, 1998).

Field notes. Field notes are the raw data collected in the field. Field notes may be considered evidence of the information that was collected, and may take a variety of

forms (Schwandt, 2007). For this study, raw data included audio-recordings and subsequent transcriptions, hand written notes, diagrams, artifacts, and my own reflections on the process.

      Artifacts and documents. Artifacts and documentation included rosters of focus groups and interviews, parent and student demographic information provided by the schools, as well as information collected from a local non-profit organization's website. These documents provided a rich context regarding the history of the recent immigration and efforts to organize the community during the transition. Several documents originated from previous studies and interviews done with a local non-profit organization. The non-profit was founded with the purpose of fostering relationships among diverse people and organizations to strengthen the inclusive nature of the community.

Procedures

      Informed Consent. I received permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting the study. Consent forms were translated into the caregivers' languages by the Welcome Center graduate advocate. Through this process, it became apparent that many of the parents had limited literacy in their home-language, so consent forms were made available and read aloud to the parent/caregiver participants. Separate consent forms were generated for parents and for school personnel, including community navigators.

      Translation and interpretation. Due to language differences, parent consent documents were translated into the caregiver's home language. I enlisted the help of the graduate advocate and the community navigator in the interviews with non-English speaking participants. These support staff were already in place in the school system, and

trained in the ethics of translation and confidentiality. Review of these procedures was conducted prior to beginning interviews. The community navigator and graduate advocate served as cultural and linguistic liaisons, aiding communication and understanding. However, the use of an interpreter introduces additional potential for bias or interaction with participant response (Birman, 2005; Pernice, 1994). Particular attention was paid to reducing the potential for introducing bias from the interpreter's interaction with participant responses, to the extent that was practical in the group context. This bias was reduced to the extent I was able to encourage reflexivity through ongoing dialogue with the interpreters, and feedback from participants.

Data Analysis

Using an adaptation of a case study analysis template proposed by Creswell (2007), I began by presenting a rich description of the case itself, as well as the context for the case. Then, I conducted repeated readings of the transcribed data, and/or listening to the audio recordings. I utilized data analysis software to help organize data and sort themes and categories. Within the framework of the research questions, themes were allowed to emerge, rather than be structured by theory, to allow for parent perspectives to be heard, and parent emphases to emerge, including those that didn't neatly fit the existing theory. Emergent themes were then collapsed into a more manageable set of overarching categories which meaningfully addressed the research questions.

These themes were initially based on parent perspectives, with follow up inquiry conducted with administrators and teachers to further understand how the schools had addressed these needs. Because of the great overlap between subunits represented by parents with students in both the middle and high schools, I initially developed themes

across the entire case, and finally conducted some broad cross unit analysis, defining

similarities and differences between their perspectives of the two subunits (see template
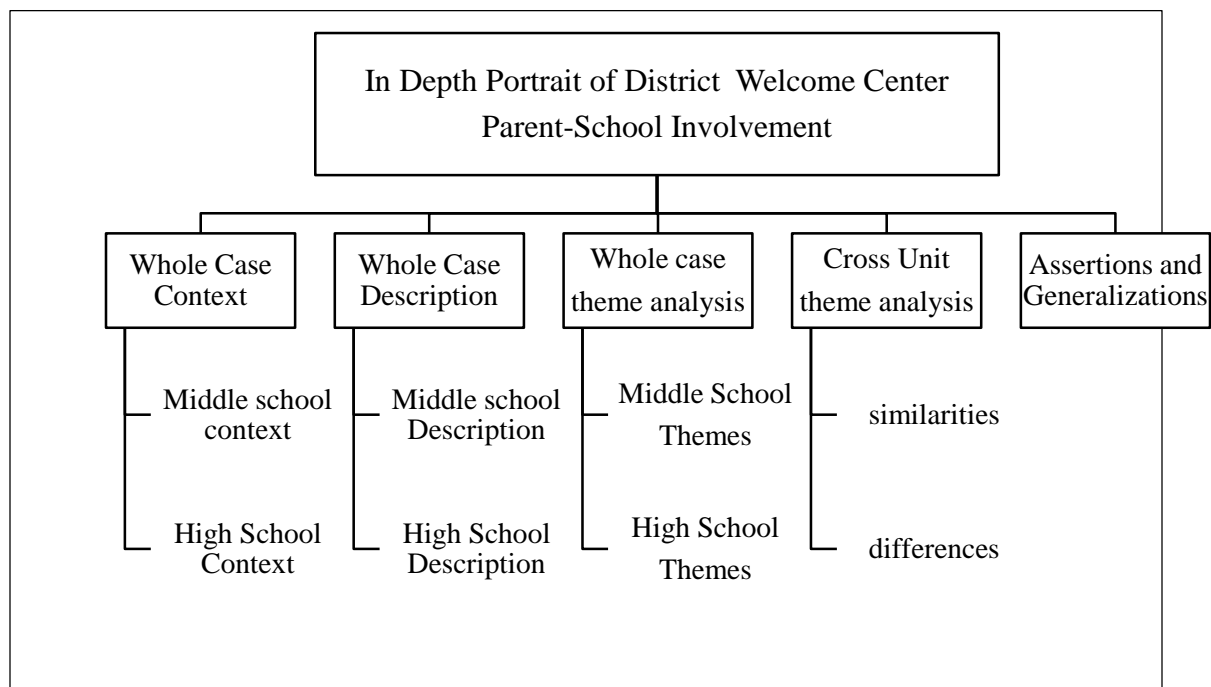
for analysis of data in Figure 1).

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │  In Depth Portrait of District  Welcome Center │
                    │      Parent-School Involvement       │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
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| Whole Case Context | Whole Case Description | Whole case theme analysis | Cross Unit theme analysis | Assertions and Generalizations |

| Middle school context | Middle school Description | Middle School Themes | similarities | |

| High School Context | High School Description | High School Themes | differences | |

Figure 1. Template for Analysis of Data.
Note: Model adapted from Creswell, 2007.

In this process, emergent themes were compared and contrasted to existing theory

to further enhance understanding of the interaction between home and school, particularly

in relation to implications and recommendations for practice. Finally, the writing process

itself became part of the analysis (Wolcott, 2009) as I wrote and rewrote sections,

recognizing and rearranging new patterns in the themes.

Trustworthiness

Triangulation procedures were used to check the integrity or validity of responses

by comparing responses from different vantage points (Schwandt, 2007; Stake, 1995).

Data source triangulation was conducted, comparing the data collected from multiple sources, namely caregivers and school personnel, including teachers, cultural insiders, and administrative staff. Comparing the perspectives of multiple participants was conducted to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. *Investigator triangulation* allows for trustworthiness in interpretation. The potential effects of researcher bias was reduced through the use of reflexivity, as evidenced in the disclosure of researcher stance and the journaling process. Because I was the primary investigator, investigator triangulation was conducted through the use of *peer review* of initial and emergent themes and through consultation with my advisor and committee members. *Methodological triangulation* involved the comparison of multiple types of data (such as focus groups, interviews, and observations). A major strength of this case study is its use of all these forms of triangulation (Stake, 1995).

An audit trail was included in the NVivo software entries so that changes in the evolution of the study could be carefully documented, along with rationale for changes and decision processes. Multiple revisions in the writing process also documented the progress of the analysis, and decisions made regarding data analysis and themes.

Schwandt (2007) defines thick description as more than just rich detail. He argues that thick description has the characteristic of interpretation embedded into it, so that we begin to see social actions not only in terms of the action itself, but also with what circumstances, intentions, strategies and meanings the action is associated. This thick, rich description was accomplished through descriptions of participants themselves, of their social interactions, interactions between parents and schools, and descriptions of settings.

Finally, the member checks allowed me to verify my findings and interpretations with selected participants. I asked the Welcome Center's graduate advocate (who served as my primary interpreter) to read rough drafts of material representing caregiver input, and to offer corrections, suggestions, and alternate interpretations. This individual was also asked to compare the themes and observations to his own perceptions of those interactions and events. I asked him to review an early draft of the findings manuscript to provide feedback as to whether I had adequately and accurately represented the themes in parent perspectives, and avoided unnecessarily objectionable portrayals. I also asked him to reflect on any parts of the findings which made him uncomfortable, particularly as he is the participant most difficult to discuss with any degree of anonymity. As a result, no significant deletions were made, but clarifications were added. The graduate advocate also pointed out areas in which my descriptions of the schools in the refugee camps read as if that were the organizations of the schools in Somalia. He therefore gave me additional information as to his experience in pre-civil war Somalia schools which allowed a comparison to the conditions in the camps.

Results: A Review of Major Themes

Major themes which emerged from this study included topics related to the contexts of the families, factors which affected their adjustment to the schools, barriers to parent involvement, and factors which enhanced the relationship between parents and schools. Originally, there was some overlap of themes, which were collapsed into broader definitions, and then grouped into the four larger categories as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Overview of Themes and Categories

Categorical Themes	Themes	Subthemes
Contexts of Families	Life in the Refugee Camps	Survival
		Loss of former way of life
		Lack of formal education for parents
	Differences in Education	Common languages between home and school
		Differences in expectations
	Roles of Family and School	Parents preoccupied with feeding family; survival
		Parents defer to teachers for educational concerns
	Lack of accountability in refugee camp schools	Systems concerns
		Teachers not always there
		Students truant
		Minimal home-school communication
		Differences to pre-war conditions
	Loss of cultural norms	Systems of education
		Employment opportunities
		Role of fathers changed
Adjustment to school in the United States	Corporal punishment	Cultural norm at home
		Cultural norm in schools
	Perceptions of child protection systems	Over-generalizations
		Fear of children being taken away
	Fear as motivator	Homework
		Behavior
		Inconsistency between home and school
		Limit setting

Table 2. Overview of Themes (continued)

Categorical Themes	Themes	Subthemes
(Adjustment to School, continued)	Views of Integration	School perceptions
		Parent concerns
	Academic Adjustment	Differences in pedagogy
		Interruption to formal education
	Confusion About Credits	Exam based v. credit hours
		Remedial v. high school credit levels
	Over-aged and Under-Credited	Plight of older students (on arrival)
		Perceptions of discrimination
Perceived Barriers to Parent Involvement	Educational Experiences	Limited Formal Education
		Expectations of deferring to teacher
	Language Barriers	The initial challenges
		Attempts to remedy
	Perceptions of Approachability	Problem focused, punitive approach of some educators
		Disrespect of culture (including race and religion)
	Logistical Barriers	No public transportation
		Shift work
		Teacher's work hours limited
Enhancing family and school relationships	Proactive Approach	Welcoming
		Parent education of school systems and expectations
	Addressing Fear and Mistrust	Meetings with newcomers, schools and community
		Common goals, common concerns
		Trust through relationship building and meeting needs.
	Schools as Resources	Support for practical needs
		Parenting support in new cultural context

Context of Families

Parents spoke of their experiences over the past decades in the context of African wars and refugee camps, relocation, and secondary migrations. Culturally, the parents generally viewed their role in their children's education to be applied in the home, to provide food and clothing for the children, and to send them to school. However, as many as two decades of life in refugee camps had impacted systems of daily living, reduced employment opportunities for fathers, and forced mothers into the role of fighting for their families' survival. Prior to arriving in the United States, they reported little time or opportunity to interact with schools, and limited resources within the schools. The parents tended to defer to the school for matters pertaining to education. However, when they did have questions or wanted to meet with the teacher in previous African contexts, the shared language had allowed them to easily do so. For some parents, their view of the schools in refugee camps was tainted by disillusionment in the limited accountability of teachers and principals in poorly organized systems in which their children might not go to school, or fail to stay the day, and parents would have no way of knowing.

Adjustments to School in the United States

For these families, adjustment to schools in the United States included learning the differences in pedagogy styles, and differences in discipline practices. Parents reported that in schools in Africa it was common for teachers to write the lessons on the blackboard, and for students to copy into notebooks. Some parents worried that their students would not learn to write here, because learning was often done with worksheets, guided notes, and students were not required to write as much as they had been in African schools. There was also some suggestion that the older students did not get enough

homework, and did not take seriously the homework that they did receive, because of differences in discipline or relaxed consequences for failure to return finished homework. Corporal punishment was the cultural norm, and parents believed that students were careless here because they knew they could not be punished. Parents misunderstandings and fears regarding child protection laws were sometimes generalized to thinking they could not set limits on their children's behavior, creating further stresses between generations.

Parents also described confusion about credits, and finding out that their students were over-aged and under-credited, and therefore at risk for not graduating. Parents and students encountered vast differences in secondary school systems, with credit systems in the United States based on time in class rooms, rather than on exam-based achievement. Both language differences and interrupted education posed a barrier for many students, particularly in the initial stages of entry into the school systems. Many of the older students were placed in high school without the academic skills typically mastered in elementary or middle school. This misalignment of skills with placement necessitated taking remedial classes for basic skills before being able to access high school level courses. This was particularly problematic in math and English classes, where students needed to take four years of credits for graduation, but first needed to take courses to build foundational skills in things they had missed during those interruptions. Initially, parents and students did not understand that these remedial courses did not count for credit, which further exacerbated the challenges of students who were over-age and under-credited, and some parents interpreted this as discrimination. Unfortunately, for

students who arrived in the United States as adolescents, it often meant that they "aged out" of school prior to completing their graduation requirements.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Parents perceptions of barriers to involvement in their children's school included differences in their own educational background, language barriers, specific challenges of connecting via an interpreter, factors related to their perceptions of the approachability of the school, including respect for culture and religion, and finally, logistical barriers due to employment, time and transportation.

Parent background often included little formal education. This meant that even in their own languages, many mothers did not read or write. While it seems that the fathers may have had more literacy skills in their home languages, many of them did not speak English when they arrived.

Parents noted that there were differences in the approachability of schools in terms of how they were received. Some parents expressed a sense that their students were being discriminated against at times, and that their cultural and religious values were not respected. For schools which were less intentional in their outreach to parents, it seemed that communications centered on problems after they had reached a crisis level rather than forging solutions in a preventive manner. Other schools were more intentional in the way they received parents, which seemed to result in greater levels of trust and understanding between families and school personnel. Cultural sensitivity seemed to hinge on linguistic support and relationship. Administrators and teachers who intentionally built relationship with families by listening to them, understanding their needs, and respecting their differences were seen as welcoming and empowering.

The mode of invitation was also important to parents. Electronic communication was difficult to access, and paper copies of school communication translated into their language were of limited impact. This appeared to be primarily due to literacy levels of many of the parents, but also seemed to have a cultural factor as well. Direct verbal invitation, usually through a translator was usually the most effective means of ensuring parent attendance at a meeting or event. Parents said that when they were directly told that it was important for them to come, they came.

Limited resources in terms of time and transportation also presented barriers to parent involvement. For example, shift work meant that many parents were not available for conferences at the traditionally scheduled times. The teachers who accommodated parent schedules had greater rates of attendance. The interpreter and graduate advocate often played a role in both communication and transportation, thus facilitating parent attendance at parent teacher conferences and other school meetings.

While communications were enhanced by the utilization of these Somali speakers who spoke some English, there were challenges to connecting with parents and interpreters. The translators covered many schools throughout the district, and both parents and schools noted that it was sometimes difficult to connect with them at the right times. Translators indicated that hourly pay, inconsistent demands on their time, and no summer income resulted in rapid turnover of translators/interpreters in the district, adding to the frustrations.

Enhancing Relationships of Families and Schools

Several factors seemed to enhance the relationships of the families with the schools. Language barriers were initially a major barrier to communication between

parents and the school. The community was unprepared for the unexpected arrival of relatively large numbers of Somali refugees. Initially, schools had no way to communicate, and they looked fervently for anyone who knew even a little English. Eventually, a few men were found who had enough English to communicate with the school and the families. A Somali teacher was also located, and was hired by the Welcome Center as graduate advocate to support middle and high school students. A community navigator was found to aid in communication with families and schools.

Understanding between cultures was intentionally addressed through meetings with parents, and with the broader community. By listening to parents, and though collaboration with other community services, school personnel were able to connect families to appropriate resources. Respectful, bidirectional communication with families was an important part of the success of the school system in this study. Gathering educators and parents together to listen to one another's perspectives, hear their needs, and provide support for families in adjusting to the new culture, language, and education systems was key to breaking down barriers of fear and mistrust. Parents emphasized the importance of relationship, and were quick to praise those teachers and administrators who took the time to talk with them, to listen to them, and to understand their situations. They were distressed in situations where they felt unwelcome, or unheard when their youth experienced difficulty in school. Parents welcomed the support of the graduate advocate who helped them to realize when their students were not in class, or struggling in school. They also expressed appreciation for his intervention in matters related to misunderstandings of culture, religious practices, and dietary concerns.

Parents and educators found that they shared many of the same concerns for students, and also shared goals and dreams for their futures. Educators learned that some of their own perceptions had been incorrect, particularly regarding the level of concern parents had for their children's education, and their desire for them to succeed. Understanding the needs of families and their frustrations with differences in discipline styles allowed schools to support parents in parenting strategies for this country, and in connecting families to resources which would allow children a better chance for school success. Based on various participant comments as well as my own observations, it would seem that differences in discipline styles were discussed at length, but continued to be an area in which the cultural values of home and school were often poorly aligned.

Discussion

Understanding this background, and their cultural perspectives on the role of the parent in relating to the school was important to understanding their approach to schools in the United States. In comparison to the six areas of parent involvement described by Epstein (1995), many constructs of parent involvement which are often assumed by schools in the United States were foreign to the participants, even if language had not been a barrier. They were unaccustomed to concepts of volunteering at school or being part of the decision making process. Nor were they accustomed to systems for tracking the attendance or academic progress of their students. Once school administrators were aware of these differences, they were able to make systems changes to assist parents in these processes.

In relationship to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model for parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005), parent responses were

somewhat consistent in terms of parent perceptions of their roles, and of their ability to impact their students' success in school. It was especially clear that the parent's perceptions of their involvement roles were home-focused rather than school-focused, as has been found with other immigrant groups (Walker, Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011). That is, parents were supporting their children's education by providing food, shelter, and clothing, and by sending them to school with expectations that they work hard and do well because education was seen as an important part of their future.

Another aspect of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model suggests that contextual motivators include the degree to which parents feel invited to participate by the school, the teacher, and their students, in a manner which is positive, encouraging, welcoming and empowering (Walker et al, 2011). Parents made little mention of invitation from their students, but the manner in which they were invited by school administrators and teachers did appear to have great relevance to families.

Finally, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that life context variables such as time and transportation influence school based involvement for families (Walker et al., 2011). These variables include parents' knowledge and skills, which did appear to influence their perceptions of how they could help their students, and in this case, included linguistic knowledge and basic literacy skills for many parents. Consistent with the findings of Garcia Coll et al. (2002), responses of parents and educators indicated the schools' responsiveness to parental resources in terms of time and energy due to demands of their employment, and transportation did influence their involvement. While these logistical concerns did present barriers, they were overcome with support from friends

and school personnel. Teachers who accommodated parent schedules also found greater parent involvement, particularly in attendance at parent teacher conferences.

Implications and Recommendations

The parent responses indicate the high importance of building trusting relationships support success for refugee students. Educators can benefit from understanding that families responded favorably to those who welcomed them, and treated them with respect. Bidirectional exchange of information allowed families to better understand the expectations and systems of the schools, and the schools to better understand the background and needs of the students and families. Schools can play an important role in supporting parents as they support their children's education. An important strategy is to focus efforts to strengthen the family, which is often the primary source of resilience for refugee students.

An important aspect of these support systems is that they be strategically implemented system-wide. Sustainability requires systemic support structures and consistency over time. Policy adjustments may be necessary to create alternate ways for credit recovery and paths to graduation. Partnering with parents and community organizations can enhance strategies for bridging cultural and linguistic barriers. Partnering specifically with refugee organizations can provide a broader understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of refugee families, and enhance collaboration between various resources which serve their needs. A notable benefit of partnership with refugee service organizations is the connection to linguistic supports such as community navigators.

Cultural consideration for educators can be supported through the understanding of cultures and subcultures, as well as cultural norms, practices, and beliefs (Birman et al., 2001; CAL, n.d.; COR, n.d.) Specific topics of interest to school mental health teams can help diffuse misunderstandings of childcare practices, hygiene, discipline, and other culturally specific practices (Morland, 2007). A wide variety of resources to support refugee students in schools can be found in a web based clearinghouse connected to the Refugee School Impact Grant (BRYCS, 2010).

Limitations of the Study

Cultural-linguistic barriers present a major barrier to communication with participants in this study. The use of translators and interpreters was necessary for communication with parents, and added several layers of filtering of the information, which likely resulted in some loss or changes of information. Parent participants were almost entirely female, which leaves the question of whether the fathers may have been more likely to participate if the researcher had been male. The researcher's limitations in common language resulted in frequent inability to connect specific verbal response to non-verbal communication. This is believed to have contributed to decreased understanding, and may have affected rapport with participants at times. It is conceivable that cultural factors may have contributed to misunderstanding or mistrust between researcher, participants, and even interpreters, particularly in light of the historical dominance of white Europeans over black Africans. While every effort was made to establish trust and rapport, the researcher believes that there may have been times when participants we cautious to present what they believed to be socially acceptable responses. It seems that the role of the school psychologists was unfamiliar to them prior

to coming to the United States, had been associated with some difficult special education decisions for some of their children, and perhaps with the fear and mistrust of the child protection systems.

Further limitations resulted from constraints of the researcher's role as school psychologist in other schools within the district of study. While the insider role may be seen to legitimize the participant observer role, it also limited the availability of the researcher to participate with the Welcome Center, middle school and high school during regular school hours. Yet, because of my prior involvement at the Welcome Center, and my continued presence in the school district, I was able to have ongoing participation in the school system, albeit a less direct participation than I had hoped.

Transferability of findings to other persons and settings is limited, because the sample was not representative of all Horn of Africa refugee families, nor of all rural school settings. However, the inclusion of thick rich description allows the reader to discern the degree to which the populations and settings in the study align with the populations and settings for which they are concerned (Stake, 1995). The use of multiple participants also allowed the portrayal of differences in experience and perspectives of parents within similar demographic groups.

Future Directions

In order to develop a deeper understanding of the students' challenges to academic adjustment, further study with students would be especially helpful. Since much of the parent concern revolved around difficulties faced by their youth, it would be helpful to explore student perspectives on barriers in their education, and what factors they found supportive. Inclusion of young adults who have exited the system would add valuable

insights for outcomes for refugee students, and factors which empowered them for success in post-secondary school life, including career and academic pursuits. Educators would benefit from this information in evaluating systems and policies to reduce barriers to higher education for refugee youth (Shakya et al., 2010).

Valuable insight could be gained by a study with fathers, as little research is available on the perspectives of fathers, although traditionally, their role has been to interface with the community, while the mother's role is focused in the home (Abdullahi, 2001). A focus on fathers' viewpoints might prove to be more acceptable to the cultural norms in respect to the father's role as head of family (Morland, 2010). The author recommends consideration that gender of the researcher may also impact the cultural acceptability of fathers to engage in this discussion.

Different approaches in methodology may allow for a deeper understanding of experiences of families in schools. Case study was a useful methodology for initial exploration of how parents interacted with schools, and their perspectives on the barriers and supports to that involvement. However, an ethnographic approach might allow a richer understanding of culture and the home side of parent involvement.

For parents and school systems to gain a greater sense of vested interest in the outcomes of the research, it may be advantageous to consider a participant action research model (Merriam, 2002), which moves beyond the investigation of perspectives to a joint pursuit of solutions to the problems identified in this study. The perception of efficacy in the research process should also be considered. If the role of the researcher is perceived as having limited ability to respond to needs or implement systemic changes in a more timely fashion, participants may feel less inclined to participate in the study.

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