Teacher Training to Support Refugee Students in Maricopa County AZ Schools

by

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ABSTRACT

The United States is currently the world's largest reception and placement country of the nearly 22 million refugees worldwide. Of the numbers of refugees resettled, almost half of them are under the age of 18 and are arriving in American schools having experienced trauma, stress, and limited education during the conflict in their home country. Teacher experiences with refugee students can have a profound effect on the way refugee children feel they are received in the school community. Drawing on previous studies that emphasize the challenges that refugee students face, this thesis looks at the training that teachers receive that prepares them to work with refugee students in public schools in Maricopa County, Arizona. Through a review of the literature and data collected from teacher and former refugee student interviews, this research explores what teachers know and need to know to teach refugee students successfully. Innovative practices that teachers employ are also highlighted, and recommendations for further research, policy, and practice are provided.
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Refugee children – background and definitions

In the year 2016, 65 million forcibly displaced people lived throughout the world. Out of those, 21 million were registered refugees under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) for Palestinian refugees. According to the United Nations 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, a refugee is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” Individuals and families are required to register as refugees with UNHCR once they cross an international border into the country of first asylum. What begins next is a period of waiting in a camp or urban dwelling for either the conflict back home to subside or for the life-saving option of resettlement to a third country. However, resettlement is reserved for the most vulnerable and less than one percent ever get this chance (US Department of State, 2017).

Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria are the countries from which most refugees are fleeing, pointing to the rise of extremist groups such as Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, and ISIS (UNHCR, 2016). What has been seen in Europe since 2015 with masses of people on the move is a result of people in such countries losing hope for an end to conflict and seeking opportunity for safety and new life in more prosperous nations. Countries such as Germany and Sweden have received rising numbers of applications for asylum since 2014 as people fled across the Mediterranean Sea or crossed the desert into Europe.

As a result of such crisis and conflict, the number of children out of school around the world has been growing. More than any other population, youth and children bear the
greatest burden in living as refugees and over half of registered refugees are under the age of 18 (United Nations, 2016). In 2013, United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that 124 million children and young adolescents remain out of school due to reasons of poverty, gender discrimination, and war. In the beginning of 2016, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), asserted that nearly 22 million children living in crisis zones are out of school, which accounts for 35% of out-of-school children. The report stated that youth between the ages of 6 and 16, who either have never begun school or have dropped out of school, rose by 2.4 million within a two-year reporting period (UNESCO, 2015). Conflict areas represent the biggest barrier to education, particularly in South Sudan, with 51% of children not accessing education; and in Syria, where, in 2000, universal primary enrollment had been achieved. Currently, in Syria, 1 out of 3 children of primary school age and 2 out of 5 adolescents of lower secondary school age are not in school (UIS, UNESCO, 2015).

This current period presents a challenge for education worldwide as unprecedented numbers of people are on the move due to conflict, economic insecurity, and the effects of climate change. The implications for education and child safety are astounding, even in Western countries that are large receivers of refugee children, through formal resettlement processes or through the granting of asylum. The Brookings Institute reported that 467,649 formal asylum applications had been received in Germany in 2015 (Adelman, Nieswandt & Dryden-Peterson, 2016). As the numbers continue to rise in Germany, the schools are beginning to be overwhelmed, with not enough teachers or spaces to educate such children. Brookings also documented that teachers in Germany and Lebanon lack the information they need to approach teaching students with issues of
trauma and complex educational backgrounds (Adelman, Nieswandt, & Dryden-Peterson, 2016).

Similarly, many refugees have been resettled in the United States since World War II through the formal resettlement process, and they continue to arrive as conflicts grow around the world. The 1951 UN Convention is a rights-based tool that is undergirded by foundational principles of non-discrimination, non-penalization, and non-refoulement. The UN has established durable solutions to be available to refugees: repatriation, integration into the country of first asylum, or resettlement to a third country (UNHCR, 2016). In the United States, the State Department oversees the refugee resettlement program and states that, of the one percent resettled around the world, the U.S. accepts two-thirds of refugees. Arizona is the destination for many of these refugees.

**Social pedagogy and the school community**

These looming educational issues highlight the need for leadership--from school principals to policymakers--to take an interest in the integration of refugees and immigrants into society rather than neglecting, or even excluding, them. Paul Stephens (2013), Inaugural Professor of Social Pedagogy at the University of Norway, built on historic definitions of social pedagogy to explain this concept to English and American audiences: “Social pedagogy is the social scientific study of planned and impromptu socialization via the social learning and the emotional internalization of values and norms. Social pedagogues…seek to enable perceived self and group efficacy so that people can change their lives and society for the better” (p. 142). Society receives greater
benefit when introducing policy and legislation that works towards integration rather than isolation of refugees (Birman & Tran, 2015; Mercy Corps, 2015).

In addition to the head, hands, and heart of educational and social-emotional needs, social pedagogy also integrates a policy agenda for changing communities and bettering society (Stephens, 2013). A study published in 2012 looked at the way that secondary schools provided an education that is inclusive for refugees and asylum seekers. The United Kingdom passed the Education and Inspections Act of 2006 that was intended to promote community cohesion to support the needs of the most vulnerable populations including refugees (McCorriston, 2012). The Act encouraged school partnerships with community organizations to support student achievement and provide guidance for improving social cohesion. Community cohesion was said to be built by promoting equality of opportunity and inclusion for student groups with different backgrounds (McCorriston, 2012). Looking at two schools in areas of London with large immigrant and refugee populations, the study concluded that the ethos of community cohesion, embedded in school policy and leadership, helped to empower refugees and their families within their communities. By creating supports for refugee parents to participate in their children’s education, families were given important tools for empowerment and community inclusion.

Nothing can be done to give back refugee children the years of education and the opportunities they have lost. Schools cannot erase the challenges that refugee children will face as they grow up in this new society: learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, making new friends with people who have different values and lifestyles, etc. Social pedagogy can help clear the way to the classroom door. Such practices can change
communities to make them more welcoming and receptive and can provide opportunities for self-expression and a stronger voice for the students themselves. Social pedagogical interventions and programs in partnerships between schools and communities can help ease the transition and welcome refugee families to their new neighborhood.

Schools, by their very existence, are required to provide the answers for academic development and, if needed, improvement for all students, particularly low-income or minority students. Traditionally, this has included providing opportunities for tutoring, after school programming, or altering instructional methods in an attempt for student improvement. However, to our discredit, based on the educational data available, American school districts, individual schools, and teachers themselves are not even aware of the ethnic diversity of a growing number of students arriving in their schools or how to approach teaching in the new environment (Sugarman, Morris-Lange, & McHugh, 2016; US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2014). The United States’ approach to placing refugees in mainstream classrooms is exacerbating the strain on teachers, who are already expected to do more with less funding and support (Birman & Tran, 2015). Student and family housing typically depends on the financial feasibility for families to provide for themselves within a short amount of time. As a result of this difficult challenge, refugees live in poverty-stricken neighborhoods and attend low-resource schools.

Positive trends do exist, however, in certain parts of the country operating "newcomer" centers and even school districts implementing "newcomer" schools to facilitate the adjustment process (Roxas, 2011). These schools and classrooms are varied in what they provide, but typically they offer a parent and student orientation to the
American school system, teach classroom norms and behavior, and provide connections to community resources (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In addition to newcomer schools, other community-based programming, in partnership with resettlement agencies in Denver, Colorado, has shown promising results with positive outcomes in youth development (Downs-Karkos, Shriberg, & Weisberg, 2012). The Spring Institute in Denver provides workshops and training for community partners on the specific needs of immigrants and refugees. International KidSuccess partners with community organizations to offer tutoring and activities for refugee youth. Both programs described the need to educate teachers about refugee students, as well as the community at large, in order to understand who they are and how they came to the United States (Downs-Karkos, Shriberg, & Weisberg, 2012).

**Research question**

This thesis examines the ways that teachers in five primary and secondary urban public schools Maricopa County, Arizona, understand their refugee students with whom they work every day. Research indicates that teacher attitudes and beliefs about teaching in general are formed based on experiences in the classrooms and that teachers would benefit from knowing how to utilize different pedagogies as well as how to build on refugee students’ previous learning and experiences (MacNevin, 2012; McBrien, 2005; Roxas, 2011). This study emphasizes teacher knowledge of and training on refugee students. Three key questions guided this research: a) what do teachers of refugee students know? b) what innovative practices do they employ? and c) what are the main gaps in their knowledge and practice?
This thesis is organized into eight chapters. The second chapter consists of an analysis of the literature on the framework on ecosystems theory and dialogic narratives. The third chapter focuses on education in emergencies and teacher training worldwide. The fourth chapter centers on the refugee student needs specifically. The fifth chapter places the research in the contextual background of the Arizona educational system. The sixth chapter outlines the methodology used for data collection. The seventh chapter provides a presentation of the results of the research and the data collected. The final chapter provides a discussion of the results and recommendations for further research.

Through the examination of data collected from surveys and interviews, an analysis will be presented about what teachers know and what they need to know about refugee students in Maricopa County. Additionally, not only will innovative practices that teachers use be explored, but remaining gaps in a teacher's classroom approach will also be examined. Recommendations will be presented based on the research.
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Ecosystems Framework

In order to analyze the current pedagogical practices in our educational system vis-à-vis refugee students, a summary of the ways in which refugees have to cope with adaptation within our culture must be done. In addition, the experiences and knowledge of teachers as they seek to include these would-be alienated students must be understood. A brief description of the ecosystems framework based on Coughlan and Owens-Manley’s (2006) work with Bosnian refugees’ acculturation experiences since their arrivals in the U.S. during the 1990’s is appropriate when considering the experiences of refugees. Additionally, when examining the experiences of teachers, the work of Hones (2002) and his focus on narrative, cultural, and critical dialogues becomes particularly relevant. These theories provide a pertinent framework for understanding the lives of refugees and the work of teachers in an increasingly diverse American society.

The ecosystems framework has been utilized in social work and sociological practice as a way of illustrating the dynamic interactions between individuals, families, organizations and their environments (Coughlan and Owens-Manley, 2006; Lerner, 2012). This perspective looks at principles of ecology and systems theory when working with people. This framework places a strong emphasis on cultural values and beliefs due to the deeply ingrained nature of such characteristics in individuals and families. Coughlan and Owens-Manley place the experiences of refugees within the perspective based on five critical layers: individual, family, culture, environmental-structural, and historical. This perspective can be used to explore the context and background of refugee experiences. Social pedagogy also relates into the ecosystems framework in its guiding
principle of individual and group agency: “human beings can be educated to have a hand in shaping the social environment in which they live, provided they believe they can do so” (Stephens, 2013).

The ecosystems perspective places individuals in the niche and habitat of their social and physical surroundings as layers of their lives that either support or diminish their experience. This framework explores the interrelationships of people with each other and with their environment (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006). The unwelcoming attitudes displayed in the school enrollment of older youth, as well as the current discourse of denying certain ethnic groups and religious backgrounds from entering the United States will create a negative habitat for refugees entering the country in the future. These policies and attitudes favoring isolation have negative consequences for families and communities (Berry, 2005). The result is marginalization which produces both a lack of connection to the culture of origin and to the host culture (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996). This disconnection has the potential to open the door to negative influences and rejection has consequences in a greater likelihood for school dropout. For example, refugee youth are often targeted for gang recruitment, due to a teenagers’ natural inclination to seek to belong (McBrien, 2005).

Ecosystems theory shows that children and youth are experiencing acculturation differently from their parents, which results in disrupted or modified social relationships (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006; McBrien, 2005). Conflicts can arise within the family group that poses even more challenges for adolescents who seek autonomy from their parents and from their culture. Young children can easily lose their native culture and language leaving their parents behind as they grow older (Coughlan & Owens-
Manley, 2006). Just as these challenges on the internal family structure have implications for social integration, so too do external factors affect their integration experience. Discrimination has a negative impact on refugees’ mental health; loss of social status due to non-transferable job experience, as well as a lack of English-speaking ability affect the wellness of a refugee family and the community. On the other hand, a positive reception by the host community and a multi-ethnic community identity, places a positive influence on refugee adjustment into their new community (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006; McCorriston, 2012). Ecosystems framework looks at the many levels of adaptation (economic, socio-cultural, psychosocial, etc.) of refugees, which allows for a greater understanding of the refugee experience. Without this understanding, interventions would be limited to certain fields rather than the holistic approach that is needed to address complicated situations and experiences.

Coughlan also makes a distinction in the stages of refugee migration on their journey from war or conflict to resettlement (2006). The four stages described are: pre-war life, war and conflict, displacement and transit, and finally resettlement. When looking at the lives of Bosnian refugees in the 1990’s, Coughlan includes the first stage of pre-war life to make note of what refugees have lost from their lives before experiencing the trauma of war and conflict. Looking at life prior to war can serve as a frame of reference to compare refugees’ current experience in the new society and in school (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006; Driscoll, 2005).

**Dialogic framework**

The lives and experiences of teachers have a large impact on their effectiveness when working with diverse learners (Cole, 2008). Within 10 years between 2003 and
2013, the percentage of White students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools decreased from 59 to 50 percent. Comparatively, the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled increased by 6 percent. By 2025 the projected number of White students enrolled in school in the United States is expected to be around 46 percent of the total (NCES, 2016). However, the teaching force is made up of mostly White and middle-class individuals (Hones, 2002). With this shift in demographics currently underway, for teachers to be effective they need to be knowledgeable, responsive, and prepared to work with students of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds (Cole, 2008; Hones, 2002; Roxas, 2011a).

Schools and teachers have been on the frontlines of addressing societal change that arises from the influx of new and different cultural groups. Hones (2002) addresses such shifts in education in his approach to these cultural and educational changes by examining the lives of teachers (p. 5). He highlights the growth of research in transformation through dialogue that builds on the works of Paulo Freire, Peter McLaren, Mikhail Bakhtin, and others. Paulo Freire, the late educational activist in critical pedagogy, has utilized the dialogic approach in his many written works and practical activity. Freire writes: “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (Freire, 1970 p. 96).

Hones applies this dialogue to focus on the lives of teachers and the cultural work that they practice in American classrooms today. In his work, he highlights three dialogues of transformation: the narrative dialogue, the cultural dialogue, and the critical
dialogue. Through these dialogues, he argues that teachers can take on cultural roles at the intersection of family, school and society (Hones, 2002).

The narrative dialogue can be viewed as a way of understanding and interpreting life in society through stories. Hones (2002) defined it as: “The use of narrative research as a mode of inquiry which allows teachers’ lives and voices to enter research texts and public forums on education” (p. 5). Teachers can examine their own lives and beliefs through conversations with students, journaling and reflecting, and creative writing.

The cultural dialogue narrows in on the enormous weight of culture by forcing actors to acknowledge existing cultural conflict between their former lives and their current lives. In dialogues, participants are urged to recognize the conflict that exists within different cultures and to seek to understand and expose such conflict. Hones provided an example of a staff development exercise using this technique in which teachers of Euro-American background were asked to engage in reflective analysis of cultural differences in their community while also relating their personal experiences to conceptions of culture. Hones (2002) connected this reflective cultural dialogue back to Vygotsky’s cognitive theories that examine the way children learn about the world through interaction and social construction through language (p. 6). This interaction provides a valuable opportunity for schools and communities to engage together and learn from each other.

With such dialogues of cultural and social change, the critical dialogue emerges naturally. Paolo Freire (1970) emphasized the importance of all voices to be heard, particularly marginalized groups, and allowing them to name the world in which they live: “Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can
be no true education” (p. 93). In so communicating and naming the world participants thus examine and, in the process, also change it. Teachers must engage in critical dialogue to allow entry for marginalized students to join the new American society and eventually to change it. Hones (2002) writes

As cultural storytellers for our society, teachers can use the study of their own lives to help them better understand the lives of students, and, by facilitating the telling of student lives, help us to better understand who we are as a people (p. 17).
Key definitions and historical development

Refugee children have experiences that remain with them throughout their lives. The experiences range from moments of devastation and loss to empowerment and triumph. Each child’s experience will be different from everyone else’s and cannot be lumped into a single “refugee experience”. However, understanding, at least in part, some of the educational experiences that refugee children have had will give a basic foundation for teachers to know where to begin. By looking to the field of education in emergencies, teachers would be able to build on previous educational research that has been implemented in programming for refugee children worldwide.

Education in emergencies has developed as a field of research in the last 20 years and has been used in crisis contexts to improve learning and safety for children affected by conflict around the world. The Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergency’s (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises, and Early Reconstruction, which were created in 2006 to support the learning of vulnerable children in conflict settings, has very rarely been studied or utilized in third country resettlement contexts to support refugee students in Western educational settings. This chapter examines the field of education in emergencies, with a special focus on the Minimum Standards. By exploring the field of education in emergencies and the Minimum Standards, teachers can begin to build a framework for prior education and the potential to use the Standards in third country resettlement education systems to support refugee students.
Education in emergencies refers to the education of children and youth under 18 years of age that have been impacted by unforeseen circumstances such as armed conflict or natural disasters. Education in emergencies is mainly delivered in situations where children lack access to their national and community education systems due to the human caused emergency or natural disaster (Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003).

The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 states that in situations of military occupation, the occupying power must facilitate instructions devoted to the care and education of children. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees protects refugee children’s right to education and that signatories should provide the same opportunities to refugee children as the host country’s children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) helped to give ground to the concept of “education as a humanitarian response” and since the 1990’s the field of education in emergencies has grown (1989). According to the CRC, education is a human right which also enables access to other rights, such as healthcare, gender equality, and protection (Pigozzi, 1999).

After refugees flee their home and they cross the border into the neighboring country of first asylum, the goal of humanitarian relief is to provide for the basic and essential needs first, such as food, water, and shelter (Sphere Project, 2011). This short-term perspective traditionally ignores the fact that many refugee situations are long-lasting, on average more than 5 years (Qumri, 2012). The main challenges in host countries’ education of refugee children lie in over-crowded classrooms, teacher availability, and limited resources that schools face (Adelman, E., Nieswandt, M., & Dryden-Peterson, S., 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Qumri, 2012). Because access to quality education for refugees during a crisis is often fraught with difficulties, education
is increasingly being raised up alongside humanitarian relief as a priority in a crisis situation, to address child protection concerns (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003; Sinclair, 2007).

Education systems are vulnerable to emergencies and schools are often damaged or used as temporary accommodation for people rendered homeless due to such conflict or disaster. Schooling can also be highly politicized in a society in conflict, such as in Rwanda and Burundi in the 1990’s when education was used to heighten ethnic tensions between Hutu and Tutsi populations (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003). A UNICEF study highlighted the ways in which education can be manipulated in conflict settings and found education used as a weapon in cultural repression; the denial of education as a weapon of war; education as a means of manipulating history for political purposes; and segregation in education as a means of ensuring inequality and inferiority over others (Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003). In protracted situations, the quality of schooling may deteriorate if governments are unable to pay for teachers’ salaries or maintain the safety and security of communities. Additionally, conflict also impacts refugees who return to face the arduous task of rebuilding after the conflict has ended. The rebuilding phase is also emergency-like since systems will need to provide space, teachers, and materials to the larger population quickly (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Sinclair, 2007).

Qumri (2012) explored educational opportunities for Iraqi children living in Jordan between 2008-2010 and found that the majority of Iraqi refugee children were not afforded educational opportunities due to school fees and other Jordanian policies that prevented access (p. 198). Currently, there are around 1.3 million Syrians living in Jordan, a country of just over 6 million (Van Esveld, 2016). Human Rights Watch called
for an increase in donor funding to support the education of Syrian refugee children in Jordan, as well as for a change in Jordanian policies (Van Esveld, 2016).

Education provides a sense of normalcy, while also supporting psycho-social healing from traumatic experiences and calls for education to play a larger role in enhancing child protection have been heard in recent years (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003; Pigozzi, 1999). However, emergency and post-conflict situations also provide an opportunity in which change is possible (Pigozzi, 1999). Responses to emergencies allow for the reconstruction of social institutions to shape the way a society will respond to or prevent future emergencies. Peace-building and conflict resolution skills can be taught in schools within a context that experienced ethnic tension (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003; Pigozzi, 1999). Health education can be incorporated into curriculum in an area dealing with a public health crisis such as in West Africa after the Ebola crisis in 2014. These examples emphasize the ways that societies and governments can adapt and provide lessons for education systems around the world confronting change.

In emergency or crisis situations, the responses need to be quick as changes occur day by day and hour by hour. Institutions and governments can learn from the mistakes of the past and respond to avoid possible devastating consequences in the future. Other approaches continue to emerge as the need for the education of displaced and conflict-affected children worldwide continues to grow.

**INEE minimum standards**

In the year 2000, the world’s education ministers gathered in Dakar at the World Education Forum to address and affirm the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which enforces governments to facilitate or promote access to
education for children in their territory, regardless of their status. A follow up convention on the Forum in 2000 led to the formation of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. The governing body of INEE comprises UNICEF, UNHCR, UNESCO, the World Bank, and leading NGO’s, such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Norwegian Refugee Council. This network brought together leaders in the field of emergency education and brought about the *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*. The goal of the INEE is to “promote access to and completion of education of high quality for all persons affected by emergencies, crises, or chronic instability.” The development of the Standards was a highly participatory process that included over 2,000 contributors worldwide all focused on a common goal of educating the most vulnerable (Kirk & Cassity, 2007).

The Minimum Standards contain five categories and each category contains two to four specific standards. These categories are (1) community participation and analysis, (2) access and learning environment, (3) teaching and learning, (4) teachers and education personnel, and (5) education policy and coordination. When looked at as a whole, the Minimum Standards promote good practice for educational structure across all components of a crisis (Kirk & Cassity, 2007). Additionally, the standards demonstrate priority relevance for refugee and host community contexts. When looking at third country resettlement, education and schools are locations where refugee children experience the upheaval of community integration and adjustment (McBrien, 2005; Roxas, 2011a). As in conflict settings, the school in the host or resettlement community can be a sanctuary for children to recover from traumatic experiences and begin to hope for the future.
As has been established, education provides a protective factor for children who are experiencing conflict and instability (Bromley and Andina, 2010; Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003; Pigozzi, 1999). Education has been shown to be a preventative measure to fight against recruitment of child soldiers, abduction and trafficking, and gender based violence (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003). The Minimum Standards highlight the impact of gender, ethnicity, and disability on children in educational communities around the world (Pigozzi, 1999). While these concerns have profound meaning for children in crisis settings, it also highlights aspects of education that provide benefits for all children, even in the United States and other traditional resettlement countries. In viewing education as a right and place of healing for refugee youth, the Minimum Standards also provide a relevant framework for educators and youth workers (Kirk & Cassity, 2007). Children benefit from a greater sense of identity and worth that comes from being a student as well as the development of a social network, adult supervision, and structured, ordered activity (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003; Pigozzi, 1999). Adapting to the school context in the country of resettlement is not without challenges and the refugee child’s difficult journey is only beginning when they enter school in their new community.

**Application for resettlement countries**

Refugee educational experiences in countries of resettlement has been under-researched, but is now rising to new importance in resettlement countries. Teacher professional development has been identified as a potential for improving the educational experiences of refugee students (Cole, 1995; Goodwin, 2002; MacNevin, 2012; Naidoo, 2012; Roxas, 2011; Hoot, Szente & Taylor, 2006). This previous research, mostly
conducted in Canada and Australia with little attention in the United States, highlighted the very different needs that teachers will be addressing with refugee students and the creative solutions that teachers, schools, and municipalities have implemented to meet those needs. These solutions have focused on specific teaching strategies, special school programs, and school-university partnerships.

Research on education in emergencies and the application of the Minimum Standards can also impact the integration of refugee youth into the resettlement countries (Kirk & Cassity, 2007). With unprecedented numbers of refugee and asylee children entering schools in Europe and the United States, the imperative lies on educational researchers in crisis contexts and resettlement contexts to come together and learn from each other. Kirk and Cassity (2007) identified applications of the Minimum Standards to working with refugee youth in Australia (p. 54). Not only do the Minimum Standards provide guidance for quality education worldwide, they also provide continuity for students who have experienced a refugee background. The Minimum Standards can help educators to understand and respond to the previous education of refugee youth. The participatory nature of the Standards development and implementation also promote good practice for working with refugee youth and can empower teachers and communities to work together (Kirk & Cassity, 2007). The Minimum Standards acknowledge the role of social and emotional learning and protection for youth and children affected by crisis, conflict, and poverty, which also exists in the poorest communities across America.

Research conducted in Australia has demonstrated the relevance of education in emergencies for teachers working with refugee students. This work has further highlighted the need to bridge the gaps between “over there” and “over here” (Kirk &
Recommendations were made to focus on the community participation principle in Australian education. Other standards, however, are equally as relevant, such as teacher professional support and development. In 2013, leading experts in teacher professional development participated in an online forum, *Teacher Professional Development in Crisis*, to discuss the state of the field. Participants discussed their views on teacher professional development in “fragile” contexts from Lebanon, South Sudan and as well as urban, at-risk schools in the United States (Burns & Laurie, 2015). This knowledge-sharing helped form the INEE Toolkit for Teacher Professional Development to be used in a multitude of contexts. The Minimum Standard of Teacher Professional Development provides 7 recommendations for teacher professional development including providing teachers with on-going support, creating professional development opportunities that promote teacher collaboration, and using Information Communications Technology to provide access to content, professional development, and professional learning communities (Burns and Lawrie, 2015).

Nicolai and Triplehorn (2003) recommended that any individual providing educational programming to children should receive training to help them understand and identify child protection concerns (p. 26). Others have also highlighted the need for professionals to be trained and prepared to work with refugee students (Kirk & Cassity, 2007; MacNevin, 2012; Naidoo, 2012; Roxas, 2011b). Hones (2002) focused on the cultural understanding that teachers bring to the classrooms and proposed a dialogic process for improving teachers’ knowledge and awareness of diverse students (p. 7). The awareness that comes through dialogue is a transformative process that pushes for inclusion and acceptance (Freire, 1973).
Refugee students present a very unique subset of the growing diversity in classrooms across America. Preparing teachers to be culturally competent and more sensitive to the previous trauma that their students may have faced will provide a benefit to the classroom as a whole. More than just linguistic development, teachers need to ensure that students are prepared to learn no matter what their background. Having explored the backgrounds of education that refugee children may have faced prior to coming to Arizona, it is now imperative to examine what refugee children struggle with after resettlement. In the next chapter, the literature on the needs of refugee children in the United States will be examined, with an emphasis on the way teachers respond to refugees as well as refugee students’ unique needs.
Chapter 3: THE NEEDS OF REFUGEE YOUTH

Refugee youth in the U.S. overview

Much has been said about the educational needs and barriers for refugee students in American schools (McBrien, 2005; Birman and Tran 2015; Hoot, Szente, & Taylor 2006; Roxas 2011). However, refugee students’ integrative experience and academic success is largely dependent on how they are received by their community, which in the first year after arrival consists largely of the school community (Birman & Tran, 2015; Berry, 2005; McCorriston, 2012; Roxas, 2011). Addressing the needs of refugee children and youth wherever they are on the road, but particularly as they arrive in the United States, has never been more important and crucial for the future of peaceful communities.

Berry (2005) describes acculturation as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (p. 698). Refugee students’ academic success is dependent not only on their English acquisition, but also on their social and emotional development if they are to learn properly and be prepared for schooling (McBrien, 2006; Birman and Tran, 2005). Oftentimes, refugee students are the targets of bullying and humiliation due to their lack of English, customs and traditions that might be unusual to American born students, and lack of experience in formal educational settings (Roxas, 2011a).

Additionally, refugee students carry with them the burden of a traumatic past they may have experienced before arriving in the United States. The Migration Policy Institute issued a report titled, “The Educational and Mental Health Needs of Syrian Refugee Children”, which found that these children had experienced high levels of
trauma such as experiencing a death in the family (79%), witnessing violence (60%) and experiencing violence done to them (30%) (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

Roxas’ (2011a) work with Somali Bantu students in an urban school setting revealed the need for more teacher preparation in order to meet the specific needs these students present (p. 545). He recommended teachers to rethink their instructional practices with refugee students and to consider the multi-dimensional reasons why these students may be performing poorly on school work and participation. This presents a challenge to teacher educators and teacher education programs which often do not differentiate immigrant children from “children of color” or “minority children” and do not mention this important component of teacher training (Goodwin, 2002).

**Trauma and social emotional learning**

Refugee children experience varying degrees of stress and trauma throughout their journey, from pre-migration, flight, and post-resettlement experiences (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006; NCTSN Task Force, 2005). Children who have seen or experienced violence, often repeat these experiences through acting aggressively towards others (NCTSN Task Force, 2005). This aggressive behavior can be explained by the effects of toxic stress that children are coping with that has a distinct toll on a developing brain. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network lists some general symptoms of children who have been exposed to traumatic events such as trouble managing behavior or emotion, fear or anxiety, as well as behaviors such as aggression, anger, sadness and withdrawal from others (NCTSN, 2016). Additionally, the Harvard Center on the Developing Child (http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/) has found that the excessive or prolonged activity in the body’s stress response systems
can have an effect on the healthy development of the body and brain. Toxic stress in the Harvard research is defined as frequent and prolonged exposure to adversity such as abuse, neglect, as well as exposure to violence without adequate adult support (Harvard Center for the Developing Child, 2017).

When discussing the needs of refugee students, it is important to discuss and define “social-emotional needs” (Sidhu & Taylor, 2012). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social-emotional learning (SEL) as the learning process through which children gain knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are needed in understanding and managing emotions, achieving goals, and showing empathy for others (www.casel.org, 2016). Social and emotional learning is embedded in many schools and districts as a framework for improving overall academic environment. Different SEL programs have core competencies that are taught, but many are focused on self-regulation, relationship skills, and decision making among others. The IRC lists social-emotional skills development as one of the major outcomes of its education and learning programming and has developed specific curriculum and tools for educators around the world to help refugee children recover from trauma (IRC Healing Classrooms, 2016).

**Successful programs**

Although the research is relatively new, recommendations have been emerging for best practices with refugee students. Han and Moinolnolki (2017) identified five strategies: a welcoming environment, funds of knowledge practices, culturally relevant teaching, bilingual integration, and inclusive teaching (p. 6). In addition to the teacher and school community learning about refugee students and families, refugee parents also
need education on parental roles in schooling. Roxas (2011b) described the purpose of the newcomer center as a place to provide language support, academic support, and social support, when families first arrive in the United States (p. 3-4). The International KidSuccess program at Denver’s South High School has objectives to empower refugee and immigrant students for leadership opportunities and address social, mental, and emotional needs of students during the adjustment process (Downs-Karkos, Shirberg & Weisberg, 2012). In addition to parent and teacher education, working with the refugee students in cultural adjustment groups emphasizing creativity, expression, and storytelling showed outcomes of students being able to adjust to their new school without focusing on the disturbing thoughts and memories of their pasts. The students reported being able to understand themselves better and communicate with teachers better. They also showed greater involvement in school activities while reporting positive feelings about the school environment (Downs-Karkos, Shirberg, & Weisberg, 2012). These outcomes echo the goals of social pedagogy relating to self-efficacy according to Stephens as well as to successful acculturation relating to the environmental psychosocial context and functioning in the ecosystems theory (Stephens 2011; Coughlan & Owens-Manley 2006).

Downs-Karkos et al. (2012) also looked at an adult non-formal education program called WorkStyles at the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning based in the Denver area (p. 144). This program is designed to develop pre-employment, competency-based skills with newly arrived refugees. The program has a focus on promoting well-being, however tension exists between the need for employment while also addressing an individual’s psychosocial needs. While the WorkStyles program targets adult refugees in
the workplace, the intent is similar to the need to address the holistic development of refugee youth in the school setting. According to the program, nurturing psychosocial adjustment in the beginning stages of the resettlement process will promote greater community integration and longer term employment (Downs-Karkos, Shirberg & Weisberg, 2012). Other studies have shown that students benefit from having a supportive and meaningful relationship with their educators (Bartlett, Mendenhall, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017).

These alternative educational programs show a positive trend to working with refugee students and families, and the specialized needs that must be addressed. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done. In the United States, there has been much research on the academic development of the Limited English Proficient (LEP) population of students, but refugee students are a very distinct group from the other students that might fall into this category. Lumping refugee students into this category misses the full picture of this vulnerable population, considering the emotional and traumatic experiences they have faced (Goodwin, 2002; McBrien, 2005; Roxas, 2011a). Particularly in the State of Arizona, there is no data on the graduation rates of refugee students, but rather the graduation rates of LEP students.

The history of education in Arizona is oftentimes divisive and complicated. School systems in Arizona have often treated non-native English speaking students in public school differently from Anglo, English-speaking students. A look into the history of some of these practices, particularly with English Language Learners will shine the light onto the environment that refugee students are now entering at unprecedented rates.
CHAPTER 4: ARIZONA EDUCATION

Role of education in society

Educational research and design has grown since the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of education as a field of study in America. With the Industrial Revolution came a new way of determining what individuals needed to know and be educated on in order to make a living. Indeed, the Department of Education was established by Congress in 1867 with the intent of “collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in several states and territories, and of diffusing information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems, and methods of teaching” (Knox, 1971, p. 2). It was after the turning of the 20th century that John Dewey, one of the foremost researchers in the field of education, emerged as a proponent of a liberating education based on the founding principles of a democratic society (Dewey, 1916; Shyman, 2011). John Dewey (1916) was influenced by ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, and the ideals of democracy. Paulo Freire (1970) emphasized the role that education can play to liberate the oppressed.

Education has had an important role to play in forming a society, while providing the basis of the cultural and societal values and direction that a given society chooses to pass on to the young (Dewey, 1916; McBrien 2005). Prominent theorists have explored the purpose of education in society and what education means for social formation (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Illich, 1970). In exploring the works of John Dewey and Paulo Freire education is viewed in the context of a democratic society that faces an unequal distribution of resources that tends to reproduce inequalities and oppression.
Education for these theorists is seen as a liberating force that empowers individuals, recognizes diversity as a benefit to society, and serves as a site for practicing democratic ideals such as participation, intellectual freedom, and non-dualistic sharing of information (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1971; Shyman, 2011). These ideals have guided the philosophy of a liberating pedagogy around the world.

Questions around the world in post-colonial multicultural and multi-lingual locations have been asked of education about the content of instruction, forms of knowledge, and particularly, language. Raina (2011) asks whether colonial pedagogies of behaviorism, grounded in indoctrination, need to be replaced:

The argument being that behaviorism negates the cultural and social location of the child, as also its historical knowledge system, thereby suppressing its identity; so as to ‘civilize’ the child by ‘removing’ from it elements of ‘inherited backwardness’ (p. 10).

The roots of behaviorism can be seen in the forced assimilation of the indigenous populations of America. Arizona provides the perfect backdrop for the unfolding of this American system that has historically oppressed, firstly, the indigenous populations in the early 20th century, secondly the Mexican-American population in the mid-20th century, and finally the non-Native English speaking population of today (Diniz Di Figueiredo, Garcia, & Lawton, 2012; Florez, 2012; Gandara & Rios-Aguilar, 2012; Nevarez & Wyloge, 2016; Powers, 2008; Trennert, 1979; Trennert, 1982).

**Arizona education history, trends, and politics**

Arizona managed one of the largest Indian schools in the Nation, the Phoenix Indian School, from 1891 until 1931, when the school changed its name and became
Phoenix Indian High School until its final closure in 1991. The Phoenix Indian School was one of many that were set up by the federal government with the intent of forcing the assimilation of the Native populations of America into Anglo-American society (Trennert, 1982). The Native peoples at the time continued to challenge the hegemony of the settlers during the period of expansion to the western territories and education was seen as the solution to this problem. The Carlisle Indian School, one of the first established in the US and set up with the belief that education would save the “red man”, was instituted by former Army officer Richard Henry Pratt in 1879. Pratt instituted military-style discipline and structure, student separation from family, and the destruction of Native culture. Thomas J. Morgan, chief of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1889 saw the need for this particular school in Phoenix and established the Phoenix Indian School in 1891. The Native populations of Arizona, mainly the Pima, Maricopa, and Papago tribes, were forced to assimilate through attendance at the Phoenix Indian School. In 1890, Phoenix, with a population of 3,000 inhabitants, was surrounded by a large population made up of these tribes and served as a test site for the educational philosophy of converting these children into industrious laborers for the city’s White inhabitants. The tribes’ children were brought to the boarding school, forced to cut their hair, learn English and Anglo-American manners, and reject their culture (Trennert, 1979; Trennert, 1982). The school continued to benefit the city economically, agriculturally, and socio-politically as Phoenix grew in size, at the expense of the Native Americans.

As the territory became a State in 1912, the Indian populations of Arizona had been outnumbered by the pioneers. Yet, another group of people in the state, the Mexican-Americans, also presented a challenge to Arizona schooling (Powers, 2008).
Although Arizona never formally administered segregated schools, Mexican-Americans suffered under informal segregation based on language. Similar to the forced assimilation of Native Americans, Mexican-Americans were viewed as inferior because of their under-utilization of the land and what was a perceived labor problem. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gave legal citizenship to Mexican-Americans in 1848 but it did not stop prejudice against this population in the territory. Citizenship after Statehood was also highly debated and often based upon racial category (Biggers, 2012; Powers, 2008). However, by 1930 Mexicans-Americans were the second largest demographic group in Arizona at 26.2% of the population. It was during this time, that school districts began establishing the informal segregation that played out in classrooms across Arizona.

“Whether institutionalized in law, or informally sanctioned by government officials, or enacted through local custom, Whites used segregation to maintain group boundaries and to denote the lower social, political, and moral status of non-White groups.” (Powers, 2008, p. 469). This can be seen most clearly in the Tempe, Arizona Tenth Street School, attended by White students, and the Eighth Street School, attended by Mexican students (Powers, 2008). The separation of the two schools was justified based on English Language learning, however, the difference between the two schools was seen in the fact that the Eighth Street school served as a training ground for new teachers as well as receiving castoff books, whereas the Tenth Street School attained better resources and teachers. From descriptions of school grounds, to the underprepared teachers and deteriorating school materials, informal segregation and resource distribution permitted inequality to flourish in educating Arizona’s children. Lawsuits filed on behalf of Mexican-American families up until the 1950’s paved the way for the Supreme Court’s
The historic decision to enforce desegregation of American schools in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Powers, 2008).

The claim that students’ poor English skills serves as a justification for the separation of students exists even today. A lawsuit filed in 1992 on behalf of Miriam Flores, a fourth-grade Limited English Proficient (LEP) student in the Nogales Arizona School District (NASD), claimed that the district did not provide suitably prepared teachers, adequate state funding, and equal resources thereby denying her and other LEP students an equal education under the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) (Gandara & Rios-Aguilar, 2012). The students spending time in the four-hour Structured English Immersion (SEI) block receive virtually no academic content and typically spend around three years in the program, but are still not proficient (Ryman, 2013). Over two decades have gone by since *Horne v. Flores* was filed and struck down in 2012 by the Supreme Court. This decision continued the practice in the current language learning policy of SEI that separates English Language Learners for four hours every day. It is not only Arizona that is facing this battle over language learning in public schooling. The U.S. Department of Education is also facing multiple civil rights complaints surrounding the learning of English. Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas carry the biggest burden in educating students whose native language is not English (Ryman, 2013).

However, the *Horne v. Flores* case has opened a whole new avenue for change to occur in the examples of school segregation based on language. The case highlighted the way that research is used in segregation court cases and how it can be ignored. After the case’s failure, a team of researchers came together to look at the issues of racial
polarization in Arizona and they examined how Arizona’s English learner students are faring under the language policies. Research findings revealed that the current model of SEI classrooms has a negative impact on EL students’ school success (Gandara & Rios-Aguilar, 2012; Garcia, Lawton, & Diniz De Figueiredo, 2012). The research team also released five papers highlighting their research with the hope that it could be used in further cases in the future. However, research is but one component of this case’s success or failure with debate being guided, more often than not, by politics and ideology instead of fact-based research findings (Gandara & Rios-Aguilar, 2012). While research certainly strengthened the argument in this case, it was not enough to undermine the politics surrounding education. This is an example of what Ioanide (2015) called the emotional economies that support institutional oppression (p. 11). The framework of the “epistemologies of White ignorance” teaches people how to ignore the ways racial oppression is reproduced, through court decisions, policies of prejudice, and institutions such as schools (Ioanide, 2015, p. 11).

**Charter schools, teacher vacancies, and English language learning**

Another growing form of schooling in Arizona that bears discussion is the rise of charter schools in the State. Since 2000, Arizona has seen an increase in the number of charter schools operating, while at the same time, also accounts for one of the lowest amounts of per student spending in education (US Census Bureau, 2015). However, the ethnic makeup of such schools needs to be questioned and examined especially since Hispanic students now make up the greatest portion of Arizona’s school age population (Nevarez & Wyloge, 2016). Charter school demographics have not been examined formally, but reporters from the Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting examined the
situation in charter schools and the reasons behind the uneven ethnic distribution. They found that while Hispanic students make up 44% of all Arizona students, they account for only 36% of charter school students (Nevarez & Wyloge, 2016). At the same time, White students make up 40% of Arizona students and account for 48% of all charter school enrollments. Data from the report show that charter schools in most cases, tend to be Whiter than their surrounding neighborhoods. The report quoted Tim Ogle, the executive director of the Arizona School Board Association as saying,

The mission of public education is to give every child in our state the equal opportunity to excel to the maximum of their capabilities. When you have disparities of opportunity, you are systemically inhibiting some groups over other groups through public policy and that’s just inherently wrong. (para. 3)

Charter schools, it seems, tend to be serving as a refuge for White families in a changing Arizona demographic. The Civil Rights Project at UCLA found that access to charter schools and other school choice options is limited by language barriers, socioeconomic status, and parents’ social networks (Nevarez & Wyloge, 2016). Another group that fits in with these populations based on the limitations listed above is the refugee school age population of Arizona.

Recent attention has also been drawn to the lack of teachers in Maricopa County schools over the last few years. Teacher vacancies in Arizona has been a rising epidemic in classrooms across the state. In 2015, the Arizona Department of Education acknowledged the problem of teacher shortage by creating a task force to look into factors contributing to the problem (ADE, 2015). A survey was conducted and educators reported that low pay, limited educational resources, and restrictive teaching guidelines...
and testing requirements were the main reasons behind the dissatisfaction (Strauss, 2015). The report also provided recommendations for policymakers that included simple fixes such as publicly acknowledging the value of the teaching profession. Other solutions focused on continuing the discussion to develop solutions for teacher retention and developing a strategic plan for professional development of all teachers. The report stated:

   New teachers need ongoing, job-embedded, applicable professional development and mentoring support since lack of assistance and supportive teaching conditions are two chief reasons why teachers leave schools or the profession entirely” (Educator Recruitment & Retention Task Force, 2015, p. 4).

The report went on to say that this is felt particularly hard in low resource schools and schools with a wider range of cultural diversity and ELL students. The Arizona Department of Education provides guidelines on their website for Arizona State Board of Education approved Structured English Immersion endorsement training for teachers working with English Language Learners. This endorsement can be achieved in 45 clock hours of instruction with classes and workshops that are provided at universities and colleges across the State. The SEI curricular framework has objectives that are broken down into six categories: 1) ELL Proficiency Standards; 2) Data Analysis & Application; 3) Formal & Informal Assessment; 4) SEI Foundations; 5) Learning Experiences: SEI Strategies; 6) Parent/Home/School Scaffolding (Arizona Department of Education, 2016).

According to the Arizona Department of Education, teachers are recommended to “teach to the High Intermediate level and scaffold back depending on the student’s
identified proficiency level” (ADE, 2016a). For ELL students in grades 9-12, the “high intermediate” listening and speaking standard is described as:

A student at this level is able to comprehend information shared in social and academic conversations. The student initiates and responds to conversations using expanded vocabulary in varied sentence structures. The student demonstrates control of productive language. Minimal errors in phonology and syntax do not impede communication. (ADE, 2016b; p. 2)

This level is determined by the results of the AZELLA test, which is given every year to students whose home language is anything other than English. Students may be placed on an Individual Language Learner Plan (ILLP) or be placed into an SEI classroom (ADE, 2016a). No data is available on refugee student language proficiency levels, but based on anecdotal evidence, refugee students typically fall into the “pre-emergent category”. Pre-emergent is described as “A student at this level has no ability or very limited ability to communicate in English” (ADE, 2016b; p. 1). Shortly after refugee students enter an Arizona school for the first time, they are given the AZELLA test, often before they are even able to write out their name (V. Ntibushemeye, personal communication, March 17, 2016). Refugee students are bringing a new dynamic to Arizona schools that needs to be examined further. Through this research, the real experiences of refugee students and their teachers will be documented.
CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

Determination for the research design

Mixed-methods research is an approach to research that involves the collection of data in two forms, such as qualitative and quantitative data. The mixed-methods approach to research design is relatively new, having been employed in data collection for social sciences research since the 1980’s (Creswell, 2014). By using the two forms of data collection, a more complete understanding of the research problem can be reached (Creswell, 2014). The benefit to using qualitative data in this research is to put into perspective the complex experiences of teachers in Arizona and their refugee students’ needs. By using quantitative data, the research is able to demonstrate the magnitude and measurement of the need.

I compiled results from interviews and a survey to present data that is both qualitative and quantitative, which was approved under the University’s Institutional Review Board. Since the research is based on teachers’ and refugees’ attitudes and awareness, it was important to be able to analyze the research participants’ experiences. Therefore, I transcribed each interview and used open coding to organize the interview responses. In organizing the data collection and analysis, grounded theory was used to guide the methodology. Grounded theory has a set of procedures that are designed to create a cohesive set of concepts, which explain the social problem being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Open coding is an approach to data analysis that categorizes trends as they appear in the results and uses comparison for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I also examined the results using the framework established through Hones’ narrative, cultural, and critical dialogic approach to working with teachers.
(Hones, 2002). The interviews and survey responses were analyzed with this framework in mind and open coding categories were used to classify the responses.

**Research design**

When seeking teacher participants, I contacted participants via email, in person, and through personal contacts. Teachers were sought, based on their experience working with refugee students. These professional contacts were made through convenience and recommendations provided to me from personal contacts within schools, as well as through *snowball* sampling. This resulted in willing participants who made time to meet for the interview after school hours in their classrooms or on the school campus in a location, such as the school library.

Refugee participants themselves were recruited through personal contacts and through *snowball* sampling. All participants were over the age of 18 and spoke English, except for one participant who needed to communicate through a volunteer interpreter. Participants were chosen based on their experience with primary and/or secondary education in Arizona and had all been in the United States for a minimum of five years. In addition, they had attended school in United States, with the exception of one participant who was the mother of two school-aged children. I had anticipated higher participation by refugees; however, since the interview criteria sought English speaking adults who attended school in the United States, many of the refugees who were willing to participate had not attended school in the United States or were not over 18. Altogether, four refugee’s experiences were collected, including a mother of two school-age children who are currently in school. All interview subjects were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.
Coding and analysis

Each interview was transcribed word-for-word shortly after the conclusion of the interview session. This allowed for immediate reflection and a chance for clearing up any confusion. Minimal grammatical or syntax changes were made to the language used by the participants to preserve each individual voice and manner of speaking. After transcribing the interviews, the responses were coded by hand using open coding to identify themes that were pertinent to the study (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). The emergent categories for the refugee interviews were as follows: positive experiences in school, negative experiences in school, interactions with teachers, and recommendations for support. The categories for the teacher interviews that developed were: difficulties in the classroom, refugee students’ social-emotional and behavioral concerns, school policy, successful interventions, and innovation. Based on the purposes of this discussion, the results were compiled by separating the refugee students’ experiences from the teachers’ experiences. Refugee stories are presented first by individual experience. The teacher interviews are organized by main themes that emerged during coding rather than being separated by individual interview subject response.

The purpose of employing a survey for the research was to produce a more well-rounded picture of the experiences of teachers with refugee students. By including an anonymous survey, quantitative measurements were collected to show the greatest needs for teacher training and the biggest challenges facing teachers. The questions on the survey followed a similar line of investigation that the interviews were seeking to uncover, namely what training teachers have received for working with refugees, what they would like to know, and what they struggle with the most. Questions were drafted
in multiple-choice, “yes or no”, and open-comment response format. The open-comment responses were categorized and calculated to present the results in a percentage and numeric display.

I have worked at the International Rescue Committee for three years within the organization’s education department. A large part of the department’s goal is to provide training to teachers who work with refugee students. I have had a large role in this task and have supervised the development of various training for school districts in Arizona. School and community leaders often express the need to support teachers and provide training on teaching refugees students, but these comments and requests have not been documented to provide an overall view of the need. Because of my position with IRC, I was able to access school enrollment information for refugee families that the IRC has resettled, as well as to utilize my connections with the school districts to arrange my interviews.
CHAPTER 7: BREAKING THE MOLD: REFUGEE CHILDREN IN ARIZONA

SCHOOLS

Maricopa county challenges

Metropolitan Phoenix’s refugee population has grown considerably in the last twenty years and continues to “boom” as refugees arrive from diverse countries, such as Iraq, Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and, more recently, Syria. The International Rescue Committee in Phoenix is the largest of four refugee resettlement organizations in Arizona. The agency is required to enroll refugee children in school within thirty days of their arrival, per the Refugee Reception and Placement Cooperative Agreement between Voluntary Agencies and the United States Department of State (US Dept. of State, BPRM, 2011). Refugee student enrollment records from the education program at IRC Phoenix, in fiscal year 2016, state that over 400 refugee children were enrolled in schools in Maricopa County by IRC alone.

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) is required to track refugee student activity for three years after their arrival, per Refugee School Impact Grant requirements. After this time, the ADE fails to track their long-term school progress; consequently, no solid data exists on refugee student progress, enrollment numbers, or rates of success in the State of Arizona. Schools have seen refugee students as threats to their academic achievement since many of the children have gaps in their education, do not speak English, and are facing a variety of risk factors to their overall academic success. Certain schools and classrooms in Maricopa County have a disproportionate number of refugee students on their rosters. Oftentimes, school staff and personnel are unaware of the background of these students on their campus.
The Arizona Department of Education records dropout rates of students based on their race and also tracks graduation rates based on the cohort into which they are categorized. Refugee students mostly fall into the categories of “Limited English Proficient” (LEP), which has a dismal graduation rate of 19%. Other racial categories for graduation rates miss the full story of refugee students as well. For example, families from the Middle East prefer to be classified as “White” which has an 82% graduation rate; Congolese and other African families of refugee background fall into the “Black” category with a graduation rate of 71%; and students from Burma fall into the “Asian” group with an 85% graduation rate (V. Ntibushemeye, personal communication, 2015). This does not tell us anything about refugee students, especially when looking at the 19% of those who graduate with the limited English proficiency category (Sidhu & Taylor, 2017). This data shows just how complicated and important it is to pay attention to the number of LEP students who are refugees. Goodwin (2002) highlighted this issue in educational data and the need for teachers to access pertinent information about their students from various backgrounds (p. 160). Data information would help to distinguish between students who are foreign-born or English Language Learners (ELL).

In their own words: stories of educational experiences from former refugees

Azra’s story

I met with Azra, a former Bosnian refugee in her mid-thirties who has been in Arizona over fifteen years. She described herself as being from a “mixed marriage” family with her father coming from a Serb-Orthodox tradition and her mother from a Muslim tradition. Because of this, she and her family were at considerable risk for persecution, even though she explained that her family did not practice their individual
religions. Azra and her family fled her native Bosnia and had to consider options on
where to try to live in 1992. They had family in neighboring countries but decided to go
to Germany, where many other Bosnians had also fled and started to establish small
communities. As for her education in Bosnia before the war, she described her schooling
as being “harsh”:

It was all about studying. It was not some kind of fun things, like, say some kind
of sports. It was very strict. Teachers were considered, something way up there,
like a queen or a king. You have to treat them like that… like teachers were
always right. It was very, very strict. You had to know everything to pass,
everything to memorize, every single page. It was not to get the knowledge, but
just to be extreme. It was just more pressure to be too much.

That strict academic upbringing proved to be her greatest asset when continuing her
education in different cities as her parents sought the best opportunities for their
children’s safety. She entered school in Southern Germany upon her family’s arrival.

Because I came after the 5th year school, they placed me first in hauptschuler,
which is for kids who are the lowest. It was for everyone who needed to learn
German. So, there were kids from Russia, from Poland, from Greece. Whoever
didn’t speak German and was allowed to live in Germany, that person was
allowed to enroll in classes.

Azra and her family lived in Germany for about almost two years. She spoke positively
of her time in German schools and even continued to study German throughout her life
afterwards. On her achievement in learning German, she commented to me:
But it was really good for me because I learned all the grammar rules, so I learned German better than the Germans do and because I was really young, I didn’t have an accent either.

But her situation began to change after the flow of refugees continued into Germany:

I had to move after 10th grade. I was kicked out and I was moved to 10th grade and it was a different school – a few of us moved. It was a different town and it was just one year – not even a full year – when all the Germans decided that all Bosnians just had to leave and my parents decided to go wherever we can.

Azra explained that her father began to seek resettlement as an option and at first sought support from the Bosnia community in Australia. Her father spoke with a priest of a Serb Orthodox church that was considering sponsoring them, but when he told the priest his daughter’s name, a traditional Bosnian name of Muslim background, the priest’s accepting attitude began to change. Because of the fear of continuing an ethnic conflict into a new home and country, her father withdrew his application from Australia. Not long afterwards, her family was accepted for resettlement in Phoenix, Arizona.

Azra began school immediately after arrival, but her parents, seeking the best opportunities for their daughter, decided to drive her across town every day to what they had heard was one of the best schools in Phoenix. Because of this, she was away from her neighborhood school and cultural community. The school she entered at age 17 was in a wealthier neighborhood with higher levels of academic achievement, but did not have an English Language Learning (ELL) program. She described the school:
My English level was zero. I didn’t end up with the refugee kids, my parents heard about the best school, where the all rich kids went, there were no problems; no kid has ever had any problems. And I was the outsider.

The absence of an ELL program initially appeared to be a challenge for her academic development, but she soon realized that the difficulty was more than just learning English. As a result of her experience learning German quickly, learning English did not intimidate her. The school even accepted some academic credits from her time in Germany and she was placed in 11th grade. Her lack of English, however, was an isolating factor.

So, I was lost, they were lost, it was hell. Somehow, I thought at the time, that teachers didn’t care. But now I understand they just didn’t know what to do. Nobody wanted to work with me nor did I understand what they want! I’m just sitting there. No one wants to work with me, I’m just by myself.

However, bigger challenge grew when she experienced the negative attitude and limited ability of the teachers and counselors who should be helping her:

They accepted some classes from Germany. I remember that one too. I went to the advisor – that was a nightmare, the worst thing ever. I went to the advisor and I told him, I want to go to college. And he told me, you know, ‘don’t try’. When you hear that and you at least understand that part. Even with little English you understand that. That was like a heartbreaker.

She was, however, given an hour a day to practice English with other foreign students. This group proved to be one of the few high points throughout her high school experience. After talking with Azra, it became clear that the most important thing for her
feelings about school was her ability to connect with anyone – teachers, students, and her cultural peers. Azra described herself as a social person, and, like other teenagers, she wanted to belong.

But it was at that age, where it was very important to have friends so I think that was the thing that I focused on the most – to fit in. Because you don’t speak the language, people say “Hi” to you today and then the next day nothing. You just don’t know and nobody is explaining it to you. That was the hardest – to fit in.

Rather than academic support, Azra said the most important thing she wished she had, was social and cultural support, someone to guide her. With refugee communities sticking together by familiar language and culture, Azra said that it is important for someone from the host culture community to act as a sort of navigator:

Because I already know I have to study hard and it would be the best if someone from here would help us, to teach us how it really works here. Because if I learn from someone not from here, I would learn his experience. Whereas someone from here would [know more]. I wish I had that support.

Zainab’s story

I met with Zainab on a warm afternoon at the main café at her University campus where many students take breaks between their classes. Zainab is a young woman in her early twenties from Iraq and is in her year junior in a Bachelor program in Biomedical Sciences. On initial impressions, Zainab looks like any other American student in the area. She began by explaining her journey in Middle Eastern schools before arriving in Arizona. Education for Zainab’s family has always been important, even as her schooling in Iraq was incredibly uncertain in the late 1990’s:
It was so unstable because of the war and we didn’t have stable schooling, so I had always been out of school for a year or 2 years maximum. And I would always move schools just because it was so unstable.

Her family made its way to Jordan, where her parents immediately sought educational opportunities for Zainab and her two siblings. Her parents worked hard to ensure the best even though the host community in Jordan did not make schooling easy for Iraqi students. Many families hoped for resettlement in the United States and therefore, pursued private English-language schools in Jordan.

And when we moved out of Iraq it was 5th grade and I moved to Jordan. In the Middle East 5th grade is when you start learning English so I started learning English in 5th grade in Jordan.

Because of the tuition costs, Zainab’s neighbors and friends could not begin school. It was also a waiting period for many people, as resettlement in the U.S. was not guaranteed.

So, they [other families] had to wait for immigration to pass and they pass all the paperwork until they go to school in the U.S. But my parents didn’t want to wait. What if we don’t go to the U.S.? And we’re going to fall behind and then we get screwed over. It was really important for them to not skip years.

She went on to explain how important the right to education was for her parents.

I went to 2 private schools… And they had a couple of people that lived in the US and they came and taught us. And they also worked with CARE program, with the United Nations, so they helped pay for the second program. So, for the
second half of the year we didn’t have to pay- a couple thousands of dollars. My parents put all their savings in.

After arriving in Arizona in 2008, Zainab did not wait long to begin school in 7th grade. Having parents who supported schooling was a huge strength for Zainab. Her parents speak English, so she was at a greater advantage than many of her peers and her mother was able to interact with the school. Unlike Azra, however, Zainab began school in her neighborhood where she was placed by the resettlement agency, which she described as extremely unsafe.

We weren’t able to have a stable life because in the area we grew up in was really scary, two people died [after we arrived] so I still didn’t feel safe at all. And I still remember, after coming here expecting it to be safe, I was in a location that wasn’t so excellent and safe.

The school also had a larger ELL student population, so she began to pick up Spanish words along with English.

Because my first school was majority Hispanic – Spanish speaking – so I wasn’t learning as much English. Because most of my classmates didn’t speak that much English so it was difficult to communicate.

Many refugees had also been placed at her school as well, but she still found herself distinct from them.

There were a lot of refugees at the time- it was 2008. And I don’t remember any in my same classes, I felt like we were separate. I made a couple of friends but they were higher grades than me so we didn’t have any classes together.
Academically, this was an asset to her, as she was forced to use more English. However, she struggled forming a social group where she felt comfortable.

Actually, I didn’t have any classmates that were Iraqi or Syrian at the time—they were mostly international from other countries. I wish I did because then I would’ve been able to speak in Arabic…but then I would’ve backed up and socialized with more Iraqi people and not used as much English.

Isolation plagued Zainab throughout her schooling, but her language proficiency continued to develop. Zainab described herself as being very social, like Azra.

Seventh grade was more of like your teen time. I was really sad to lose all my friends. Back then it was a really big deal and it was extremely difficult to be able to learn when I don’t have enough friends. And I was very lonely and isolated the first year or two years.

Zainab’s innate drive for education pushed her to do well and she relished the recognition from her teachers. She had one particular teacher who pushed her harder and even helped her achieve a “Student of the Month” award quickly after she arrived in Arizona.

So, that was my math teacher she had the most impact on me and I ended up being really good at math, I even majored in science because of her impact on me. Even back then I still had that love for math so being able to not use language and still be successful made a big impact on me.

After two years in her neighborhood school, Zainab’s parents moved her to a private high school, where she was awarded an academic scholarship. While the school was academically advanced, it also lacked an English language learning program. Her
teachers realized that there was a difference with Zainab’s learning, even though she could keep up academically with her peers.

The English teachers recognized that I was an English learner and I got most of the help from them because they recognized and would take into account that I am improving and therefore my grade would be different. So that was really important that they recognized there’s a difference and even in a grading system.

This individual attention and awareness is something that is rare in public school settings, where teachers are held to achievement standards as well. If students are not passing the AZELLA (Arizona English Language Learner Assessment) test, teachers are held accountable (Florez, 2012). This is not to say that Zainab was given a free pass from her teachers, however. The teacher’s freedom to assess her independently allowed her to compete and push for college achievement.

I wasn’t reaching the level that they wanted me to so they also pointed that out.

When I got to junior year, that was when they stopped and they said ok, you’re going to apply to college now so you can’t have any more setbacks.

**Amina’s story and Ayan’s story**

I met Amina at a local Somali community center and she was eager to talk about her children’s schooling experiences. She had just finished her English class at the community center and she agreed to speak with me through a volunteer translator. The volunteer, Ayan, is also a member of the community that Amina belongs to. Ayan was able to interpret, but also explained more about the community that Amina belongs to. Amina is a woman from Somalia who has been in the United States for five years. She has two children – a middle schooler and a high schooler – who reunited with her in
2014. They entered a local charter school soon after arrival. Prior to arriving in Arizona, the children had never been in school. 

The only thing that was available was the Quran school in Somalia. And now that they have the opportunity they are doing really well, none of them have bad grades. Amina pushes for the school to include her children and makes sure they are succeeding.

When they were first new, I would keep them after school so the teachers would have enough time for them. And now, they have after school tutoring which is easier for them. They actually have a chance now.

Amina’s children attend a charter school that has many refugee students. This school has worked extensively to provide resources for its families. Amina has met with the teachers and understands how to get help for her children.

The teachers were very, very helpful, to the point where when I bring them to school on Saturdays and the teachers are available try to make time for me. If I can’t provide transportation, they will come to the kids at home. They helped them out with their English words. The teachers knew that already they were coming, so the teachers expected them.

Immediately, I was intrigued by the school’s efforts. Amina told me that the school has many refugees, but also American students as well. Ayan asked Amina more about the school, since, to both of us, the school’s specialized attention to the refugee community was surprising. Many Somali families live in the area around the school, so the school has welcomed them and established extra support services to help them.
Amina described huge aspirations for her children. She told me that her kids as well have high hopes for their future. The support of the community and the charter school seemed to give Amina and her children the confidence to do well. Both of the children play sports at the school and are involved in after-school programs.

I want them to be able to succeed in life. Sometimes when they talk with each other they talk about what they want to be in life. One says she wants to be a doctor, the other one wants to be a pilot. One is very passionate about being a pilot. He can’t wait to start. Since my kids are getting to the age of starting college, I would really like to know about college. What are the steps to take to get there?

Ayan and Amina continued in conversation until Amina needed to leave. I was able to talk with Ayan more about the schooling for refugee children in the area. Through talking with Ayan further, I discovered that she is very passionate about helping new refugees find success in school. I explained to Ayan the research that I am doing and she quickly agreed to an interview. Ayan told me that she had just arrived in Arizona two weeks prior but that she had been living in the United States for about ten years. Ayan is a young Somali woman in her mid-twenties. She is very personable and began talking naturally. She told me that she and her family were resettled in the United States in 2005 after having lived and grown up in Egypt.

All the schooling was in Arabic, but I moved there when I was little so it was easier to learn. I was raised in Egypt so everything was in Arabic. My siblings had the privilege of going to English school and I didn’t, so when I first got here and I was in 11th grade I couldn’t read anything.
Ayan’s education challenges echoed those of Azra and Zainab, both having arrived to schools that had never previously worked with refugees.

There wasn’t much after school programming accessible for kids with very limited English. I wanted to join but I can’t. The teachers would say, ‘no you can’t join because you can’t speak English.’ A big barrier.

She told me that there was not much that she liked about school. Ayan and her family were resettled in an East Coast community and then moved to the Midwest after six months. Her teachers, however, seemed to adopt her and worked after school hours to help her establish belonging in the community while also building her English.

She was an ESL teacher but I think she was really passionate about it. She would come drive us around and then pick up other kids. They were Hispanic but I would learn a couple of Spanish words and then English, which was hard, still is hard. But other than that, we moved to Nebraska after 6 months where there were no refugees anywhere.

Ayan expressed frustration in school policy in Nebraska that changed her grade level placement, even after she had already been to a US school for six months before she moved.

That was a different school system and teachers weren’t used to kids who didn’t speak English. And it was very hard to communicate with teachers to the point where I had to go back to 9th grade.

She did, however, benefit from a research group that helped to target her English learning and helped her improve. Because of this specialized intervention, Ayan was able to advance back to her appropriate grade level.
So then comes a group of researchers who were doing a study with refugees, from Minnesota. They started having a class where the ESL teachers would pick 5 kids where they would sit with us for an hour [to practice English] and then we would go back to class. They would check our level every year, to see whether we would need that next year or not. So I had to learn the numbers in English, geography, everything I had to learn in English. But English grammar was very difficult. I had the hardest on that, but they put me back in 11th grade, the last 10 days of the year and I had to take a test. I couldn’t take the regular test that the other kids had to take so they had an ESL version which made it easier for me.

These stories shed light on the profound experiences that students face when they first enter school in the United States. As has been seen, refugee students possess high levels of motivation to do well in school, but they face odds that are against them including the opinions and beliefs of the teachers and schools that are meant to educate all of America’s children. The task remains to explore the experiences of teachers who are working with these students.

**Teacher interviews**

Interviews with teachers of refugee students took place over the course of a year. The interviews were semi-structured with prepared questions that incited conversations, but also left room for follow-up questions. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviewees were eager to talk about refugee students and did not appear to hold back on describing their thoughts or experiences. A few of the teachers displayed very emotional responses about their work with refugees. In choosing the interview subjects, a deliberate effort was established to ensure that school professionals
had worked with large numbers of refugee students, whose education for whom they were responsible in some way. The teachers were recommended to me through connections at the school district level or through personal experience working with the IRC.

During the interview process, teachers were asked what training and professional development they had received to work with refugees, what they saw were the biggest challenges facing refugee students, and what could be done to improve educational outcomes for these students. The biggest theme that emerged out of the interview responses was the description of practices they used to adjust the prescribed model of English language learning policy in the State of Arizona. A large portion of the responses took to heart policy decisions – some that work and some that don’t work with refugee students – with each of the teachers questioning or altering the policy on their own in a way that could be described as subversive. The interviews will be discussed in three main categories focusing on the main themes of the preparation that teacher had to work with refugees, what teachers believe refugee students need help with the most, what innovation they have used to reach their refugee students, and what recommendations they have for how to work with refugee students.

**ELL teacher preparation and backgrounds**

All respondents have had extensive experience working with refugee students within the past five years. The teachers that were interviewed were Structured English Immersion (SEI) teachers, including three primary school teachers and one high school teacher. Each of them had classrooms that had 10 or more refugee students over the last year. Additionally, I was able to interview a primary-through-middle school principal
and a high school guidance counselor. The principal who was interviewed was a leader of a school that had over 200 refugee students enrolled in the 2016-2017 school year. The guidance counselor interviewed was the ELL specific counselor, responsible for working with refugee students at the school. The level of experience that these education professionals possessed was extensive and ranged from 9 years to 23 years in public school teaching. Four teachers and the school principal were available to meet in person to complete interviews, while the school counselor sent responses to the questions via email.

The teachers all received their Master’s degrees in Education and the principal had received her doctorate. The teachers all sought out English Language teaching endorsements and received specialized training in their teacher preparation instruction to work with English Language Learners. Even with the in-depth language learning educational theory, the teachers felt that they were unprepared. This lack of training corresponds with the results of the survey, which showed that 81% of respondents had not had any training on the needs of refugee youth. Following are excerpts from narratives derived from the teachers I interviewed, whose names have been changed: Mrs. Rich, Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Wilson, Ms. Masser, Mrs. Wall, Dr. Alvarez.

Mrs. Rich was a first-grade teacher who has been in Arizona for her entire teaching career but received her teacher education in English Language Development (ELD) from another state. It is important to note that months after the interview with Mrs. Rich, she quit teaching all-together, citing “burnout” as a cause.

Mrs. Allen teaches a sixth grade SEI classroom and received her teacher training in a more unconventional way:
I’ve been a certified teacher here for 9 years. But I’ve taught for almost 20, just uncertified. I taught in charter schools, overseas schools, stuff like that. I went back to school and got my certification here back in 2006…I’m currently going to [University] for my masters and I changed it so I’m doing my masters in English as a second language.

Next, Mrs. Wilson is a teacher of first grade ELL students in a low-resource school in Phoenix where she has remained for her entire 23-year career.

I graduated from [University] in the College of Communication. Then what are you going to do with that? I thought I was going to go to Law School so then after that I got my teaching certificate from [different University]. And then I got my Masters in education – elementary education.

It was interesting to find that a many of these teachers knew what they were getting into with their current role in schools, teaching large numbers of refugees. Mrs. Wilson explained:

When I was growing up, my mom was a secondary teacher in a neighboring district and so when I decided that I wanted to be a teacher I knew I wanted to be in this area, that I knew the kids would have a lot of needs.

Ms. Masser, a high school SEI teacher, said that she sought out her current position at the school because she knew it was extremely diverse. Upon receiving her certification in ESL, she began working with students from all different linguistic and cultural backgrounds: “I was expecting to have a room full of Spanish speakers and it was a room full of Iraqis. And I was sort of in shock, ‘How am I going to do this?’”
Mrs. Allen was also confident in her ability to teach any student, but also experienced self-doubt when it came to refugee students:

You know when I first came, he [the principal] told me that I would be in the SEI class, which I am highly qualified to do. They didn’t tell me anything about the refugees, that it would be refugees at all, not even one refugee. That was a total surprise. And at first, after the first week, I didn’t know if I could do it. I went back to (the principal) and I said, you know, this is very unfair. I said, you need to give me a little bit more history on this situation. It’s unfair to me and to the kids, because they’re probably not going to get what they need to get at the beginning until I understand what I need to give them. And he agreed, but he said, you’re still the most qualified for it. I didn’t think I could do it, and he said, you can do it.

Mrs. Rich also took her concerns to the school’s principal about her classroom of mostly refugee students. Her critique of student placement had to do with having so many pre-emergent students in her class, few of them speaking more than a few words in English.

Well, at the beginning of the year I had 28 students. I had to talk to my principal to tell him that this isn’t fair. It’s not fair to the children, it’s not fair to the families. Each child needs so much attention. I get pretty passionate about this. They see it as a numbers thing. In Arizona, there is no limit on the number of ELLs in a classroom. So, if I have a class of 17, they see all the empty seats they can fill.

Dr. Valdez was also eager to talk about refugee students, having been a teacher for 10 years and a principal for four years. She brought a diverse range of experiences
and has helped teachers at her school work with refugee students for the past 5 years. Her school is located in an area of Phoenix where large numbers of refugee families were placed over the summer of 2016. In the first quarter of the 2016-2017 school year, her school was already at 105% of their capacity and had enrolled over 150 new refugee students.

When it came to specific instruction for working with cultural or diverse populations, none of the teachers had any classes or training on refugee students. Mrs. Wilson had some professional development but she did not think it was sufficient.

We had IRC come last year and talk about some stuff, but we’ve also had some speakers come and talk about generally traumatic experiences, being a trauma-sensitive school. But I wouldn’t say it was anything in depth.

Other teachers mentioned lack of preparedness. Ms. Masser was very conclusive when asked about her training on working with refugee students. “Never. It was never mentioned. I specialized in ESL education for my Masters and it was never mentioned in any class. I knew nothing.” Dr. Valdez mentioned that she had “a couple multi-cultural education classes but nothing to what we need now.”

This lack of training left an impact on these teachers and they spent the beginning experiences with refugee students trying different approaches. Mrs. Wilson took an approach to how she was thinking about her instruction:

I have definitely had to become better at differentiating instruction. It's very different when you have a monolingual, Spanish speaking student. And the letters are the same, and there are cognates and I can speak a little Spanish, and the numbers are the same. It's totally different than these little kiddos. And having to
find stuff that they can be busy with while I'm doing stuff they can't possibly do with the other kids. But having it be educationally relevant and something they need. That has been a challenge.

Ms. Masser had also taken a differentiated approach with a more hands-on learning pedagogy, but also expressed that she felt like she was back at the beginning of her teaching career.

I’ve always taught workshop style class and having to adapt that for ESL kids especially pre-emergent kids, has been really, really challenging and it took a lot of research. So, I’ve had to slow it down. It’s always fast fast fast everything. So just slow. A lot of repetition. Not lower expectations, but very different expectations. My first couple of months I took for granted that they knew a lot of stuff that they did not know. So, I feel like a brand-new teacher. I feel like a second-year teacher right now.

Mrs. Rich described her experience as “trial and error”: “I didn’t learn anything like this at all. I’ve learned just by failing, over and over. The students are just so different.” She also explained the pressure of teacher accountability that compared her work with refugees to the work of other teachers who had no refugee students.

I got out of teaching third grade because it’s the testing year and it was very discouraging because they were comparing my kids, the refugee kids, new kids to the country, with everybody else’s scores and they’re saying, ‘why aren’t your kids doing better’ and it’s like they just came here from Iraq they don’t speak English that’s why they’re not doing well.
Similarly, Ms. Masser explained her experience as “muddling through.” Dr. Valdez had a unique perspective on this comparison and teacher accountability that she also felt was unfair to teachers of refugee students.

But now the State says something different, their performance pay says something different. [I am] constantly reassuring [teachers] to find those small steps they’re making every day towards that big progress. But when you have regular-education teachers who become SEI teachers and they’re constantly comparing them and looking at our pacing guide going, how can I do this? It’s very challenging and you have to be able to value those teachers.

Dr. Valdez’ experience was particularly important since she had the task of monitoring her teachers who have large numbers of refugee students to teach.

And it’s hard…I’m constantly pumping up my teachers. The four most important things for an SEI classroom is that they’re safe, they’re respected, they’re loved and they’re valued. That’s it. That’s all I ask of you.

She even hand-selected her teachers because she knew the challenge would be great and she wanted to utilize teachers who would be able to last. “Because I have specifically asked them to be SEI teachers, there has to be that passion and that patience and resilience to meet those needs.”

The teachers seemed acutely aware of the needs of their students and had much to say about what they struggle with the most in the classroom. When it came to those needs, teachers seemed to pick up information based on experience, rather than relying on any research-based interventions or recommendations.
What do refugee students need?

When asked what refugee students need most, teachers could not deny the importance of learning English. Survey responses showed that 21% of teachers said the biggest challenge was language related. However, most of the responses had to do with helping the children adjust to classrooms in America. For example, 43% of survey responses focused on the social-emotional needs of children including trauma, adjustment, or social-emotional needs. Mrs. Rich discussed the importance of the social-emotional development in refugee kids. “Understanding the emotional part as well. You have to know what is happening with their experiences outside the classroom.” When pressed further about what specifically the refugee kids do differently from other students, she went on:

Our kids do behaviors that everybody is like, what are they doing? Like standing on the table, jumping off of things. And like, I don’t want to single kids out, but a lot of our Iraqi boys are very aggressive on the playground. Learning how to play with each other is a big thing.

Mrs. Rich described her first days with the first-grade children in her classroom: “All of it is behavioral, things they haven’t learned before. The first day, running, screaming, hitting, biting, it was so bad for the first month.” Similarly, Ms. Masser also explained the challenges her high school students face due to culture shock and that adaptation varies with each student.

I would have kids who wouldn’t talk for two months. I would think something’s wrong with them. And I see them now, and they’re like ‘Blah blah blah…’ and their English is good. I only know one kid, who is still not doing well. It just
happens. Some kids it happens in two or three months, some kids it happens in 18 months. It always happens.

Other needs that were described by teachers focused on the limited previous education that these students may have had. Mrs. Wilson also noticed the difference between refugee students and other immigrant students.

They [immigrant students] have been in school somewhere. I have a girl this year, who is from Mexico who has never been in school. But she’s not as frightened. And there are other people here who speak her language. Because there are so many people who speak Spanish, it’s not as scary.

Dr. Valdez was able to explain this difference as well and attribute it to the lack of the refugee student’s experience with the American education system. Having a larger proportion of refugee students in her school has also seemed to help since they are all learning at the same pace:

It’s a much slower process and they have to spend a lot more time just teaching behaviors. Just how do you sit down, and it’s always amazing to me the magic that happens here. Maybe it’s because we have an existing population, children are more apt to assimilate better here into the formal education process because they have peers that then kind of show them or tell them or they see other children like them and they’re more apt to follow and learn the way of the American education systems and rules if you will.

Other problems have arisen with how the entire school campus responds to refugee students and the seeming segregation of refugee students from the rest of the campus. All of these teachers and schools have seen dramatic increases in the refugee
student population in the last 2-3 years. Mrs. Rich attributed this to the placement of English language learners into classrooms based on State education policy. She explained that a few years ago, the English learner students were in the same classroom regardless of their language level. She explained that when the students were integrated by level, they were all able to help each other, though some of the higher-level students were not progressing. Presumably, this was the cause for the change in classroom structure and the reason why a single teacher’s refugee student numbers are so high.

Another cause for the change could be attributed to the large numbers of new students arriving in Arizona at a pre-emergent level. Consequences of this placement policy, however, mean that certain teachers are carrying a heavier burden of educating a needier population. Other teachers on campus have little-to-no experience with the refugee students.

I kind of snapped at somebody today because somebody was yelling at one of my kids to tie their shoes and I was like, ‘he doesn’t know how to tie his shoes and he doesn’t know what you’re telling him to do’. They [the students] are guessing and checking. And sometimes they’re right and sometimes they’re wrong.

In addition to limited exposure to formal education, language learning is a huge challenge for refugee students. Dr. Valdez described the Arizona language policy very clearly:

Normal language acquisition theory says that it takes 3-5 years [to learn a language] yet our AZELLA testing says its one year so that’s a big problem right there. And I don’t feel it’s appropriate, honestly, it’s a travesty that we make
especially new refugee students sit through an AZ Merit test when they are mono-
lingual. It’s a disservice. I am so torn on that.

The AZELLA test, the Arizona State placement test for students in English Language
Learning classrooms, proved to be a challenge for teachers and students across grade
levels. AZ Merit is the standardized testing that all students undergo every year to
determine school achievement and state standards are being met. Ms. Masser expressed
strict adherence to the standardized testing and student placements has led to a
“dysfunctional system”:

They tell us not to teach the first three weeks. Which I have never heard…ever.
It’s so that counseling can switch kids around. They place kids randomly. My
two-hour literacy block is just kind of a holding pen. If you want kids tested for
special ed[ucation] it really never happens. The State has turned the AZELLA
test into a bible. There’s hundreds and hundreds of cases.

Mrs. Allen described it as unfair for her sixth-grade students, some of whom were
held back a grade:

Because we lost a teacher and they didn’t replace the teacher, so anybody that
even if they passed the AZELLA, if they were low on the AZmerit, they gave
them back to me, which is really not fair to them because they worked so very
hard to pass that test. And they are right back where they were last year basically.
Does it mean that working at a slower pace won’t help them? No, it will help
them.
The high school guidance counselor, Mrs. Wall, was able to highlight an example of how the high schools rushing to graduation within four years is detrimental to refugee students.

The most difficult academic area refugee students struggle in is math, and is the biggest reason most cannot graduate within 4 years. Refugee students come in with 0 to kindergarten/1st grade level of math and their first math class we throw them in is Algebra 1-2.

Adding to the challenge is the school’s unwillingness to offer appropriate classes for students at certain academic levels, rather than what would be normal age levels.

If they're lucky, there's room in the pre-Algebra class that has an amazing teacher that loves the population and will help and accommodate any way they need to learn and pass the class. However, most are not so lucky, because our administration refuses to offer enough sections of the pre-algebra because it looks bad [on us].

The teacher narratives, so far, have highlighted a strong passion for social justice in the classroom. Teachers, it seems, more than any others at the schools, know what is best for their students, but are often hindered by school policy. This hindrance leads to creative and, sometimes secretive, practices to help their students.

**Subversive innovation**

As has been described so far, teachers practice teaching in a way that is focused on certain instructional strategies, such as differentiated instruction. However, some teachers have also been using practices that might be counter to what the State policy or school norms dictate. In response to the frustrations with the AZELLA testing, Ms.
Masser described the tension between student placement by guidance counselors and teacher’s recommendations. These tensions have led to questioning certain pedagogical practices by teachers.

I’ve got student who just came she is pretty fluent, but for some reason on the AZELLA test she did not write the essay, she just left it blank. So, she’s in very super easy classes, and she doesn’t need to be. She speaks English. She’s with kids who are learning the alphabet and she’s sitting there… and you can’t move the kid. It’s the law. So, what the teachers do, we are just moving them anyway and lying about it. We could get in serious trouble. Like if anything happened to the kid and the kid is in the wrong class… so we just do it secretly.

When it came to student promotion, Dr. Valdez listened to what her refugee parents requested, even if it was counter to traditional practice:

I had a family come to me last year with an 8th grade boy and the father was adamant that he did not want him going to high school. And we usually do not retain, for a lot of reasons, but I said, ‘Okay, if that is your wish.’ I felt it was best for him [the student] to retain him so I did.

In addition to student grade-level placement policies, teachers invested large amounts of personal time supporting refugee students inside as well as outside of the classroom. Mrs. Allen knew her students weren’t at grade level and sought help creatively from her administration to get appropriate resources:

So, what they had me do was do a phonics screener on all of them and then I graphed it out and sent it to district and the next day they sent me all low-level
books. You cannot expect someone who can barely write their name to work at a 6th or 7th grade level, you just can’t do it, they can’t do it.

Mrs. Allen also worked harder to make sure the materials were culturally relevant for the students. She changed curriculum and invented lessons that might be more meaningful for her students.

It’s a program that I invented a long time ago back when I didn’t have refugees, so I just tweaked it a little. A lot of them don’t celebrate Christmas they don’t even know what it is. It was ‘Christmas around the world’ that I tweaked it a little to be ‘winter celebrations around the world’. I made it a point that we went to every single country where each kid is from in here. We spent a day and I made little passports. I tried to have a food from their country, a couple parents brought in food. But I think it’s important not only for the teachers to learn about where they are from, but the students in the class also need to learn where the kids are from.

Mrs. Allen also met with her students outside of the classroom and knew that some of her activities with the refugee students went against policy.

I probably did something that was fairly illegal but it doesn’t matter, I did it anyway. Over the summer, I came down here and picked them up and brought them to my house for swimming. I know you’re not supposed to transport students. I figured it was in the summer and they were no longer my students. So, I brought them in groups of 3 or 4 and we went swimming and had a popsicle afterwards and I brought them back.
This experience that Mrs. Allen shared reflected similarly with what was most meaningful also for the former refugees that were interviewed. Teachers, who went out of their way for Azra and Ayan when they first arrived, helped them feel more comfortable and motivated to continue. Mrs. Allen went further and even provided supplies for her students.

You know, none of them had swimsuits, they were swimming in their clothes. And I was thinking well I could go to Goodwill and have boxes of them available for next year. But they were so excited and then I kind of felt bad too because when they walked into my house, their eyes were like “Whoa!” We’re not rich, it’s just a different culture.

In regards to helping her own staff adjust to the school demographics change, Dr. Valdez changed the way that she approached professional development for the teachers.

And we’re doing some differentiated PD now, we’re pulling our ELL teachers together and we have a district academic coach who is now supporting them. But its’ so multi-leveled. That’s what I’m trying to do here at my home [school]. But then bigger I would love. It’s just a whole systemic issue in education that we have to address.

Additionally, Mrs. Allen also echoed this need for further training for teachers who are newly working with refugees, “I just think that the teachers that are getting them aren’t getting enough pre-advice, training, knowledge, something.”

Finally, other teachers benefitted from a district administration that made changes in the way students were oriented to the school. Mrs. Allen’s district has a central registration location where new refugee families can meet with the district Refugee
Coordinator to go through the school handbook that has been changed to pictorial representation for school rules versus the written handbook. Other school districts have had to create similar positions as a refugee coordinator, to be able assist these families, in the same way that districts have a homeless or migrant student coordinator. The Refugee Coordinator also provides school supplies and other needed resources that new families might be lacking.

Also, Mrs. Wilson’s school district had opened a resource center that offers English classes for parents, among other things:

I think they were looking for a dentist and you know things like that would be great. In fact, yesterday, some of my kids were measured for a uniform and shoes. We [teachers] get them clothing, teachers will even buy, I have some shirts that teachers brought for them.

Teachers also expressed protectiveness over the refugee students in their district, believing that if they were placed in a less sympathetic system, the students would suffer.

Mrs. Wall, the high school guidance counselor expressed surprise that the refugee families wanted to attend her school:

Refugee students want to be at [school] and they tell their friends from other districts about how great it is for refugee students, so I guess we're doing pretty well in comparison to others. However, this scares me or rather causes extreme heartache to think if we're better than others, and I think we are not that welcoming, then how are others really treating refugee students? This honestly horrifies me.
Dr. Valdez knew that she had to be intentional about how her school welcomed new refugees:

Here, because it’s been a history, a passion of mine, I worry about other schools and what they’re doing or not doing and their lack of knowledge. I have a huge lack of knowledge and I’m still learning every day just to understand and meet those needs. And you know, I think, sometimes that peoples’ own perceptions and thoughts and knowledge prohibits them from understanding.

The subversive practices these teachers are sometimes initiating, can been seen a result of the school system’s inflexibility. The teachers’ personal experiences with and assessments of refugee students’ biggest needs seems to be driving this need to innovate in order to see results. The teachers are more than willing to go out of their way to find solutions inside and outside of the classroom. Building off of these personal experiences and assessments, teachers are able to provide relevant recommendations for school systems seeking to adjust to their changing student population.

Teacher recommendations

For all of the teachers interviewed, knowledge was gained through experience with refugee students and their families. They had also all conducted their own independent research around refugees, including searching for answers about specific cultural backgrounds and backgrounds on the conflicts from which the families were emerging. Mrs. Wilson recommended awareness:

Just remain cognizant of the fact that these kids have seen and gone through things that you probably can't even imagine. And to remember that, you know, their language and their everything is so different from ours, but they are just as
intelligent as anybody inside there. And we have to just find other ways to tap
into that and help the kid express what is going on.

Mrs. Allen also recommended increased knowledge around refugee backgrounds:

But there needs to be something deeper. There almost needs to be a class of some
sort for people who work with refugees.

Dr. Valdez went even further to say that the training should be on a system-wide
approach to working with refugee students and their families:

In a perfect world, we have a college of education program specifically designed to
meet refugee families’ needs. Cultural awareness, sensitivity, language needs, just
the whole gamut. How to reach communities, families, build partnerships and then at
the schools having specific classrooms that are not under the same guidelines of the
state testing model.

Ms. Masser did not see the Department of Education helping out much. Hence, she was
not so optimistic about change. This gave her information on what was not working for
her students:

Just be patient. Don’t expect the school to do anything for you. You’re on your
own. The State Department needs to change its policy… There’s no room for
teacher observation, teacher judgment. It’s one test and they stick them in a class
and that doesn’t work.

Expecting similar learning outcomes from non-refugee and refugee students is
considered, by many I interviewed, as being misguided. Dr. Valdez asserted that the
assessments for refugee students, as well as failed education policies did not work. In her
opinion, policies from the past such as *No Child Left Behind*, holding teachers accountable if their students did not pass a yearly standardized test, angered her.

Give them time just to acclimate and build those foundational skills. There are other assessments we can use to track progress. It was almost kind of a slap in the face if you’ve been in education for a while and *No Child Left Behind* … how dare you say that I’ve left children behind, I would never have left them behind. But we have to meet every child’s needs and this one size fits all test is not going to do it, nor is it appropriate for this population. I think having them on their own track… I’m all for accountability, but there are different ways to achieve accountability. That still takes into account the community we are trying to serve and meeting their needs.

Mrs. Wall, the guidance counselor, whose main responsibility is to help keep students on track to graduation, thinks that something should be different for the refugee students track to a high school diploma:

We should have a graduation program in place for refugee students. One that is clearly explained and students are placed according to language level with advancement options and availability.

And finally, Mrs. Allen, recommended a looping program so that she could remain with her refugee students as they advance in grade level. Since the majority of her students are refugees, it made sense for her to stick with them throughout their schooling.

So, that is another solution for a group like that, a large group like that all in the same grade – that the teacher can stay with them for a couple of years. I am
qualified to teach all the way through high school, so for me to move up with them to 7th grade would not have been a problem as far my certifications go.

Particularly since effectively teaching refugee students seems to be determined based on a teacher’s lived experience, Mrs. Allen’s suggestions for looping would be realistic, if teachers possessed the right certifications. This would seem to reflect the need for a specialized program for large groups of refugee youth in one school and classroom.

They do looping a lot in the younger grades where a teacher is with the class for two years and then you go back again as the class moves on. With SEI and refugees, I think it’s a good idea. Finally, finally by spring you really, really get to know not only them but their family’s situation. How they work how they handle different things. I ended up developing a good rapport with a couple of their parents.

It would be prudent for school systems to listen to the stories of teachers as they spend full days with refugee students. Their recommendations are based on experiences that they have struggled through and found a way forward to help refugee students in class. These experiences should be valued and heard.

**Survey results**

The survey reached 37% completion and showed that wide variety of teachers participated with the majority of responses coming from ELD and SEI teachers (27%) as well as general education teachers (37%). Other responses were from content area teachers, such as Math and Science (13%). The grade levels taught by participants were mainly from kindergarten through 8th grade teachers (72%). The majority of respondents
have been teaching for more than three years (91%) and 67% of respondents had worked with refugee students for at least one year.

When it came to the knowledge of refugee students in their schools, responses were mostly split, with 43% knowing that their school had refugees and 56% not knowing there were refugees. The large proportion of respondents had received no formal training on refugees – that is 81%; however, 64% of teachers sought out information independently to learn about refugees. When asked, what training would be most important for teachers to receive, the answers were split nearly evenly:

![Figure 1. Training Needed](image)

Figure 1. Training Needed. Survey responses to what kind of training is still needed.

On this question, teachers were able to select multiple answers, which could be the reason for the even split. This choice suggests that teachers would like training in all categories with a slight inclination for more training on being culturally competent as well as schools providing information on the backgrounds of refugees from particular countries.

When asked, “what resources, trainings, or strategies have you found helpful when trying to support refugee students in the classroom” the answers were quite varied.
However, the majority of responses (37%) were no response – written in “n/a” or, for example, “I have not received any trainings in this area”. Other respondents answered that certain ELL methodologies and strategies were helpful (24%); social-emotional traits (10%); or knowing the cultural background of their students (10%). The response to this question, suggests that teachers feel that they do not have sufficient strategies for working with refugee students, although having the ELL or SEI training helped slightly.

The question – “What information would you like to know about refugee students before they begin?” – elicited an almost even response and suggested that teachers would like to know as much as possible about their students when they enter the classroom:

![Figure 2: What would you like to know about refugee students before they begin?](image)

Teachers were very aware of what their biggest challenges were when working with refugee students, with most responses relating to their social and emotional needs. When looking at these responses, answers included:

- “being able to trust and feel safe”
- “understanding students’ unique needs (social skills, language development, cultural norms, etc.)”
- “the lack of formal social skills”

Responses including reference to the student’s potential previous trauma were also included in this third category such as, “The students who have been through trauma and how to deal with outbursts or expressions of violence” or “difficulty learning due to trauma”.

![Figure 3: Biggest Challenges with students](image)

Figure 3. Biggest Challenges with students. Survey responses to what are the biggest challenges with refugee students.

A final question was open for teachers to leave any additional comments about refugee students. The ensuing responses were interesting, even touching. Some responses questioned the level of assistance begin given to refugee students. The question received a 67% response rate with remarks, such as “I think people don’t realize this population needs more resources.” The majority of responses stated teacher
enjoyment working with the population – that is, it was “rewarding,” an “awesome experience,” “heartwarming,” and “I love them.” However, these responses also included the many challenges that teachers are facing. Four teachers responded with issues that are systematic in nature:

- “I wish teachers could use some judgment when placing students in classes”
- “It would be great to have smaller class sizes and/or more adults in the classroom to provide more individualized supports for these students when they first arrive”
- “the structure of the system now is such that I am not equipped to help my student succeed. However, I refuse to fail him”
- “We need more quality teachers! In order to retain them, we must restructure the public education system so that it provides teachers more incentive to remain in their position.”

This last respondent went on to say:

I personally left after three full-time years because the work load/behaviors/lack of administrative support was so overwhelming and the income so low.

Another respondent simply said, “I need genuine help and support.”
Refugee students are bringing with them an influential emotional factor that is driving the current discourse in American policy of immigration. In 2016, 31 state governors, including Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, declared that their states would not accept Syrian refugees in particular, with some states refusing to accept any refugees at all (Phillip, 2015). While this debate is mainly based on emotional politics, since the federal government decides immigration policy and not the states, it still to pushes forward a discourse against certain forms of immigration. As a result, some states are enacting damaging legislative bills that could essentially kill refugee resettlement in certain areas, including Arizona (Associated Press, 2016). This damaging discourse affects the most vulnerable of people entering the United States. Thirty-four percent of refugees admitted to the United States in Fiscal Year 2013 were under the age of 18 (Capps & Newland, 2015). Forty-seven percent of Syrians admitted to the United States are under the age of 14 (David Miliband, IRC internal communication, 2017). Negative attitudes towards refugees in the United States reached a heightened level of hostile discourse following the election of Donald Trump as the forty-fifth president of the United States. Shortly after taking office, President Trump signed an Executive Order barring all Syrian refugees indefinitely from entering the US, as well as refugees from seven other nations (White House, 2017). The Order also suspended the refugee resettlement program for a short period of time, before it was subsequently challenged in the judicial system. This order further underscored and validated the governors concerns in 2016. However, the battle continues, and it remains to be seen what the U.S. policy on refugee resettlement under Trump will be. These destructive opinions and attitudes affect
the most vulnerable of the world’s children. The benefits for communities to seek integration versus isolation would provide goals for long-term community cohesion rather than division, which leads to negative outcomes for children and youth in schools (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006; McBrien, 2005; McCorriston, 2012).

**Summary and analysis**

In this country, the culturally and linguistically diverse population has been steadily growing while a mainly White, middle-class teaching force is at the front line of this demographic shift. As advocates for multicultural and bilingual education seek to find solutions for this new American student, critics and politics have only doubled down on what are considered “traditional American values” and English-only policies that push diverse students to the outskirts or force them to assimilate (Hones 2002). In the context of this politicized nature of education in the United States, teachers have been ill-equipped to face the intersecting identities of the students they teach. By adopting a dialogue approach with their students, teachers enhance their understanding and become more effective in their role as a cultural worker (Hones, 2002). Using the framework of narrative, cultural and critical dialogues, the stories of both the refugee students and the teachers can be examined in a new light.

Hearing stories of refugees who have successfully navigated the school system demonstrates the need for teachers and school professionals to be culturally responsive to refugee students. The stories of Azra, Zainab, and Ayan showed the profound effect that a negative word from a teacher can have on these student’s feelings of inclusion. Each of these young women had expressed a strong desire to do well in school since they had all come from a background that emphasized hard work in schooling. Amina also described
her children’s lack of education in Somalia but had high hopes and did not see barriers for her children. Her children’s involvement in their learning was supported by the charter school’s independence. They were also encouraged by teachers that went out their way to meet her children, as well as many other refugee children, whenever they were needed.

The refugee students knew that they were behind their classmates academically and that the lack of English was a barrier. This was a challenge for which they were prepared. What they were not prepared for was the exclusion they experienced from being an outsider. Ayan explained that she was not able to participate in the fun extracurricular activities she was hoping for. Azra found herself excluded from the college preparation support that her guidance counselor should be able to provide. Zainab experienced high levels of academic motivation and could be described as trying to follow all of the right rules in order to get into college. However, by conforming to what was expected of her, she also felt that she did not truly know who she is: “I felt like I was going, just to say I participated and to say that I did sports in high school so that when I applied to college I would get into a good school. I didn’t do it because I liked it…looking at it now, I feel like I’m lost and I don’t know who I am.” Amina expressed gratitude that the school included her children in activities, such as sports and after school programs. Ayan felt satisfied when she was eventually allowed to participate in social activities through her teacher’s help in driving her and other students around the community, acting as a literal “navigator”. Azra found her only joy in school, when she was included in a group of other English language learners in a weekly English practice group. Each of these women explained their greatest need as one of social connection.
The difficulties that teachers faced ran parallel to the students’ needs, but were also related to the system in which their teaching roles existed. None of the teachers focused long on the perceived deficiencies of the refugee students or their inability to succeed. Rather, the restrictions placed on them by the school system itself was the source of their biggest concern. The main differences in educating refugee students from other students stemmed from the social and behavioral challenges exhibited by anyone who has experienced severe trauma. This included the need to teach certain classroom behaviors and norms that other American-born peers did not need. Cultural differences existed as well, but this can also be said of non-refugee immigrants in the United States, which only further emphasizes the growing need for teachers to be culturally aware. Cultural differences exist between White teachers and migrant students from Mexico, Native American students, even inner-city and urban students.

The language challenges could be traced back to the classroom structure that the SEI program required and a teacher’s inability to act according to what they thought best for the students. Since refugee children were mostly sequestered in ELL classes, the burden of educating them rested on a small group of teachers who needed to teach them English in the quickest amount of time possible. Teachers also found themselves as subjects in a system with a strict set of standards that were often impossible for refugees to meet. When teachers were acting independently, they were consciously aware of the possibility of going against school policy in order to meet the needs of their refugee students. Some teachers, such as Mrs. Allen and Ms. Masser, went out of their way to break the rules so that they could find ways to include refugee students both inside and outside the school. Other teachers, such as Mrs. Rich and Dr. Valdez, saw the need for
challenging the system to ensure refugee students aren’t just forced through an education process over meeting unique needs that refugee students have and must address when adapting to a drastically new cultural milieu.

Among all the teachers, the most practical and necessary step for teachers to be effective was teacher preparation. This kind of training included knowledge of refugee experiences, the culture from which they come, and the trauma they have experienced. Additionally, teachers also learned through hands-on experience of trial and error. Dr. Valdez recommended a comprehensive teacher training program that included how to teach using a trauma-informed and culturally responsive approach. An additional practicum requirement would give prospective teachers a real classroom experience with refugees before they begin their professional career.

Conclusions – dialogic process

Narrative dialogue

In listening to stories of refugees who have attended school in the United States, the most meaningful interactions appeared to be when teachers offered themselves as cultural workers. Once teachers become aware of the unique situations of their refugee students, they began to meet them outside of the classroom and find ways to facilitate acculturation, by driving around the neighborhood, hosting pool parties, and fostering cultural exploration in the classroom. This process of experiencing each other’s culture is a two-way street where both teacher and student begin to change. Berry’s definition of acculturation reminds us that acculturation is a “dual process” that changes both culture groups (p. 698). This can be viewed as a kind of storytelling as both parties share what
they know about themselves and their communities. For the refugees, this was the most
important lesson they could learn.

On a larger global scale, teachers can also learn from each other. Since the
teachers who work with the most refugee students have amassed new skills and
knowledge over time, they can best share this knowledge with those who are just starting
out. Educators in countries of resettlement can also inform the practice of working with
refugee children in countries of asylum or conflict through the shared knowledge of the
Minimum Standards and education in emergencies. Western-educated teachers can begin
a dialogue with their counterparts around the world to build upon a common experience
working with refugee and marginalized students. Recently, the IRC has sought to begin a
dialogue between teachers in the United States and Germany to continue to build upon
this shared knowledge of what works best in teaching refugee students. Following this
understanding of the differences and similarities between teachers and students,
awareness of merely being subjects in a system builds naturally into a critical dialogue
that can begin the transformation process for an American education system that will
need to respond to rising cultural diversity.

**Recommendations for policy and practice – dialogue and social pedagogy**

Teachers in Arizona are already beginning cultural dialogues in their classrooms
and schools with the refugee students they teach. Mrs. Allen’s efforts to create lessons
that are built around the sharing of cultural values is one example of this cultural dialogue
taking place. The children in her classroom not only share their own culture through
food, traditions, and others, but they also learn about each other’s culture. As Hones
emphasized the importance of the cultural dialogue in a diverse classroom, teachers play an important role as cultural navigator for students new to the United States.

Teacher development that is focused on understanding cultural differences, language rights, and parental involvement could greatly improve the ability for refugee students and families to participate equally in the school community (Goodwin, 2002). Teachers of refugee students have exhibited strong proclivities towards activism and advocacy for their students. School districts are also beginning to implement policies that meet the needs of these children and families, such removing pork items from school lunch menus or providing translated or pictorial versions of the student handbook. More and more attention is beginning to be directed towards refugee children because of their particular needs and vulnerability. With this attention, soon other policies can once again be taken up for the benefit of all language learners in public schools.

Refugee children also present an opportunity for Arizona schools because of their very vulnerability and the high degree of requisites they present to school administrators and teachers. These children cannot easily be ignored in the classroom since teachers are struggling with issues, such as communicating with them or their parents, negotiating the behavioral issues they often present, and managing the disruptions to the classroom (Goodwin, 2002; MacNevin, 2012; Roxas, 2011a). As a result, more schools are adapting to include culturally relevant pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and trauma informed teaching (Goodwin, 2002; McBrien, 2005; Roxas 2011a). Not only is this type of educational programming supportive for refugee students, but for the whole school environment including children in poverty and minority students (www.casel.org, 2016; Harvard Center for the Developing Child, 2016).
Individual schools and school districts tend to have the majority of refugee students enrolled, predominantly in low income neighborhoods. Policies are changing on the local level which can soon extend to the state level and beyond. This bottom-up transformation is unfolding in Arizona classrooms, being guided by the needs of students from the most vulnerable and conflicted parts of the world. Consequently, it has potential for the largest benefit of all, particularly in terms of English Language instruction in Arizona. Symbiotic transformation, when considering the structures of a capitalist society, involves bottom-up social empowerment for the benefit of the oppressed as well as the benefit of the oppressor (Wright, 2010). Arizona will have a need for this type of social transformation as these minority students will soon outnumber the traditionally White upper-class students and teaching force. This transformation should include the uniting of Arizona advocacy groups for Latino/a rights, immigrant rights, together with refugee advocates to create a larger voice that works together to ensure American democratic principles are passed on to the next generation. If the U.S. is to remain competitive in a globalized world, the education system will need to address this growing non-native English speaking demographic and ensure the democratic participation of all members of schooling and society. These democratic ideals will begin in the classroom, extending to neighborhoods and communities, with the integration of refugee students and other immigrant populations.

According to the democratic and liberatory philosophies of Dewey, Freire, and others, the full participation of all students is the ideal outcome. Schools exist to provide for the academic development of all students, but disparities abound on the basis of language access, cultural differences, and socio-economic status so that access to an
equal education is often barred. Keeping refugee and other English Language Learners incorporated in the school structure will have overall benefits for students, teachers, and parents alike (Garcia, Lawton & Diniz De Figueiredo, 2012).

Community workers and social pedagogues could greatly improve the community and social development of vulnerable refugee families as they come into contact with a new and diverse community in their country of resettlement. While not all schools have embraced the influx of refugee students in Maricopa County, certain schools have followed similar models described in this study of reaching out to students and families. Some schools have begun has made efforts to host refugee parent “coffee talks”, multicultural nights, ESL and Citizenship classes, among others. Teachers have reported being able to match a new student with another refugee child who speaks the same language. These are small efforts that teachers and school officials have made with limited resources. However, if policies and legislation in educational settings continue to promote exclusion of this population, refugee youth will continue to be overlooked facing further risk of discrimination and isolation. Schools in Maricopa County could begin to partner with community organizations, as was noted in the promising program examples highlighted in this research. First and foremost, a partnership with the resettlement agencies would help link refugee students and families to vital services needed during the early resettlement stages (Downs-Karkos, Shirberg & Weisberg, 2012). If the answer to this question on all levels, from student interactions, to district policies, and federal legislation all comes down to further education about the refugee experience perhaps the solution lies in telling the refugee stories and actually hearing their voices.
Recommendations for future research

In this research, the dialogues between the refugee students and their teachers took place *implicitly* through the everyday teaching activities going on between the teacher-student relationships. These dialogues were not witnessed or examined firsthand in this research, but would be a useful approach for further research using ethnographic, participant-observer methods or narrative-based inquiry to examine the lived experiences of teachers and/or students. However, the interviews with students and teachers provided a good starting point for understanding what both refugee students and their teachers know about each other and what more they would like to know. Further research could build on the English Language Learner policies in the State of Arizona and have implications for teaching refugee students, particularly in cultural competency training and training on trauma-related practice. Further investigation into innovative programs around the country, including the role of charter schools, could provide a best-practices guide for working with refugees. Examining the social interactions of refugee students themselves would help to understand the best way to allow for their inclusion in the school community and to facilitate the acculturation process. This could be done in a longitudinal study of a refugee student cohort entering Arizona schools for the first time and following them over the course of high school, for example. This focus on teacher training to develop the social and emotional needs of refugee students so they are prepared to learn would be a valuable source for future research and program development.

This research is but the tip of the iceberg in highlighting and celebrating the work of these teachers and the tenacity of the refugee students they teach. Words cannot
express my deep level of gratitude and respect for everything they have gone through and everything they continue to do. It is my hope that this study and research will help to drive future innovation in school systems through the United States, to the mutual benefit of all students, from whichever background they come.
REFERENCES


Trennert, R. (1979) “Peaceable if they will, forcibly if they must: The Phoenix Indian School, 1890-1901; *The Journal of Arizona History*, 20(3), p 297-322


U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2014). Dear Colleague Letter


APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION QUESTIONS
Interview Questions – Refugee

1. How long have you been in the United States?
   5 years

2. When did you enter a US school?

3. What was your education prior to entering school in the US?

4. Can you tell me about your experience when you first entered school after you arrived in the U.S.?
   a. What grade level were you enrolled in?
   b. What was your level of English?

5. What were your main challenges in school in the US?

6. What were some of the things you enjoyed about school in the US?

7. Did you have anyone who helped you at school?

8. What was one thing (eg., a person, a skill, a resource) that helped you succeed in school?
   After school program, tutoring, Saturday school

9. What support do you wish you had to help you when you were in school?

10. What would you tell a new refugee student entering a US school for the first time?
Interview Questions – Teacher

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Where did you receive your teacher education?
3. Did you receive special training in English language learning/acquisition? Any special training on refugee or immigrant students?
4. How many years have you had refugee students in the classroom?
5. What do you think is the biggest challenge that refugee students face?
6. Do you think that the school has been a welcoming school for refugee students? Why or why not?
7. What is one thing that the school (or the district) could do better?
8. How has having the refugee students in the classroom changed the way you teach?
9. Can you describe how you communicate with your refugee parents? How do you view their involvement in their children's education?
10. Do you feel that parents want to get involved?
11. How can the school support the refugee family’s integration into their local community?
12. What is one thing you would tell a new teacher who is just starting to work with refugees?
13. What are some ways that you have improved your own knowledge about refugee student experiences?
Survey Questions

1. What subject and grade level are you currently teaching?

2. Where did you receive your educational training? (University)

3. How long have you been teaching?
   a. Less than one year
   b. 1-3 years
   c. More than 3 years

4. How long have you worked with refugee students?
   a. Less than one year
   b. 1-3 years
   c. More than 3 years
   d. Never/ I don’t work with refugee students

5. Did you know that your school had a refugee population when you were hired?
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. Have you had formal training on refugee issues?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. Did you seek out your own information to learn about refugee students? If yes, what did you do? (For example: internet search, asking other teachers, etc.)

8. What training, content, or strategies do you believe are the most important for new teachers of refugee students?
   a. Cultural competency
b. Students with previous trauma

c. Refugee backgrounders (Ex: background on Congolese refugees)

d. Working with refugee parents

e. Other: _______________

9. What resources, trainings, or strategies have you found helpful when trying to support refugee students in the classroom?

10. What information would you like to know about refugee students from the family or school before beginning in your classroom? (Select as many that apply)

   a. Student’s previous formal education level

   b. Country of origin

   c. If the student spent time in a refugee camp

   d. Student’s family structure

   e. Other: _______________

11. What is your biggest challenge working with refugee students?

12. What is your biggest challenge engaging with refugee parents?

13. What techniques or strategies have been useful in working with refugee parents?

14. Any additional comments you would like to make about refugee students in your classroom?
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL
EXEMPTION GRANTED

Daniel Schugurensky
Public Affairs, School of
- 

Dear Daniel Schugurensky:

On 4/25/2016 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>Welcoming Refugees to Arizona Classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Daniel Schugurensky</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00004245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
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<td>Grant Title:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant ID:</td>
<td>None</td>
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Documents Reviewed:
- Online Survey Consent.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
- Social Behavioral Application.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;
- Refugee Interview consent form - IRB.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
- Survey for teachers.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);
- Recruitment survey.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- Recruitment script- refugee interviews.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- Teacher Interview Consent Form, Category: Consent Form;
- Recruitment script- teacher interviews.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- Interview Questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);
The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 4/25/2016. In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103)

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Joanna Henderson
    Joanna Henderson