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The Perception of Teachers and Refugee Parents Regarding Refugee Children’s Education: A Parent Involvement Study

Fawzia Fazily
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The Perception of Teachers and Refugee Parents Regarding Refugee Children's Education: A Parent Involvement Study

**Abstract**
Using Coleman's (1987) social capital theory as a framework, this study examined the perceptions of refugee parents and school staff regarding the schooling and education of refugee children in a large upstate New York school district. The study specifically examined the perceptions of refugee parents and school staff prior to their participation in a family literacy program (FLP) and their perceptions as a result of participation in the program. This qualitative study used a descriptive research design based on data collected during observations, focus groups and in-depth interviews with refugee parents and teachers as well as the school principal. The study identified changes as a result of participation in the FLP with a small group of refugees and classrooms teachers. The study also identified connections between the amount of social capital refugee parents gained and their level of involvement in their children's education. Consistent with Epstein's (1992, 1995, 2001) typology, the results of the research findings suggest that multiple dimensions exist in refugee parents' involvement in their children's education. The study underscores the importance of programs that address the needs of refugee families and how these programs can lead to more collaborative and successful home-school partnerships. The findings also suggest that more targeted professional development would better prepare educational leaders to bridge the gap between schools and refugee families during resettlement. Positive forms of social capital can be generated when a genuine partnership based upon respect and a shared sense of responsibility exists between school and parents.

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The Perception of Teachers and Refugee Parents Regarding Refugee Children’s Education: A Parent Involvement Study

By

Fawzia Fazily

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
Dr. Marie Cianca

Committee Member
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St. John Fisher College

August 2012
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first to Almighty God, who has been my guide in everything I do. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, who made me who I am today; and my beloved sister, Najiba, whose sweet memories inspire me every day. I also dedicate this work to all Muslim and Afghan women who are trying to change the world for the better. God is with those who persevere.

I could not have traveled this journey without the love, encouragement and support of my husband, Zia and my beautiful children, Farrah, Haseeb and Rayhana. Thank you for believing in me, for your sacrifices, and for your tremendous patience and love. May you always be in Allah’s loving hand.

I am especially grateful to my dissertation chair, Dr. Cianca and my committee member, Dr. Hildenbrand who tirelessly read through countless pages and provided me with guidance and support to make this journey a success, and who lifted my spirit when I needed the most. Thank you Dr. Cianca for believing in me and for walking this journey with me and helping me grow both personally as well as professionally.

I am thankful for all my wonderful friends, family and colleagues for all their advice, support and prayers. It was because of your kind words, encouragement and your trust in me that I was able to achieve this great success. Finally, but importantly, I would like to thank Betsy Christiansen for her support and feedback throughout this journey.
Biographical Sketch

Fawzia Fazily has been a teacher at an urban school district in upstate New York since August 1999. Mrs. Fazily attended State University of New York Empire State College and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Business in 1998. She attended Washington Montessori Institute at Loyola College, Baltimore, MD from 1999 to 2002 and graduated with a Master of Education in Montessori Education. Mrs. Fazily also attended St. John Fisher College from 2007 to 2009 and graduated with a Master of Education in Educational Leadership. She began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in 2010. She pursued her research in refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education under the direction of Dr. Marie Cianca, Dissertation Committee Chair, and Dr. Susan Hildenbrand, Dissertation Committee Member.
Abstract

Using Coleman’s (1987) social capital theory as a framework, this study examined the perceptions of refugee parents and school staff regarding the schooling and education of refugee children in a large upstate New York school district. The study specifically examined the perceptions of refugee parents and school staff prior to their participation in a family literacy program (FLP) and their perceptions as a result of participation in the program. This qualitative study used a descriptive research design based on data collected during observations, focus groups and in-depth interviews with refugee parents and teachers as well as the school principal. The study identified changes as a result of participation in the FLP with a small group of refugees and classrooms teachers. The study also identified connections between the amount of social capital refugee parents gained and their level of involvement in their children’s education. Consistent with Epstein’s (1992, 1995, 2001) typology, the results of the research findings suggest that multiple dimensions exist in refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education. The study underscores the importance of programs that address the needs of refugee families and how these programs can lead to more collaborative and successful home-school partnerships. The findings also suggest that more targeted professional development would better prepare educational leaders to bridge the gap between schools and refugee families during resettlement. Positive forms of social capital can be generated when a genuine partnership based upon respect and a shared sense of responsibility exists between school and parents.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Immigrants leave their homes in various countries and enter the United States for many reasons. Some are attracted by a new way of life. However, not all immigrants come to the U.S. by choice. Some migrate here in desperate search of political freedom, religious tolerance, or to avoid prosecution or persecution from within their own countries. Others flee their homelands due to war or natural disasters, becoming refugees reliant upon the good will of their new host. Whatever the reason, the majority of immigrants, once they enter the United States, strive for academic growth, economic prosperity, and for better opportunities for themselves and their families (Hones & Cha, 1999; Tollefson, 1989). Unfortunately, immigrants encounter a multiple of cultural responses and conflicts that can present obstacles to the realization of their “American dream”.

Immigration in the USA

From its earliest days, the United States has welcomed immigrants from around the world and, over the past three decades, immigrants have flooded the United States (Rong & Preissle, 2009). Since the late 1980s, an estimated two million people have migrated to the U.S. annually (Rong & Preissle, 2009). To add perspective to this figure, the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR, 2006) estimated that children constitute more than half of any refugee population. As of 1997, approximately 20% of school-age children in American schools had at least one immigrant parent (Ruiz-
In 2005, eleven million school-age children in the United States were identified as children of immigrants (Rong & Preissle, 2009). Children of immigrants, diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity, educational level and life experiences (Hernandez & Drake, 1999), represent the fastest growing group of people in America (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

**Refugees versus immigrants.** Refugees are sometimes referred to as immigrants. However, it is important to explain the distinction between these two groups. Immigrants voluntarily resettle in a new country for better jobs and/or economic security. According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 brought 400,000 Eastern Europeans to the United States and represents the first refugee legislation in our nation’s history (USCIS, 2003). Most of the early refugees were sponsored and funded by private religious and ethnic organizations within the United States. Today, refugees are admitted into the U.S. under the Refugee Act of 1980 (Xu, 2007). Between 1980 and 2004, the U.S. resettled approximately 2 million refugees (USCIS, 2004).

The most common and narrow definition of the term “refugee” was established by UNHCR in 1950 by the United Nations, and is as follows: An individual with refugee status is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR, 1950). Such a status was initially established in order to identify Europeans displaced after World War II.
In 1967, the concept of what makes a refugee was augmented to include persons seeking refuge from war or other violence in their land of origin. In the same year, the United Nations Protocol relating to the status of refugees prohibited any nation from returning any individual with refugee status to their homeland if their lives might be threatened by doing so (USDHS, 2009). Currently, 147 nations take part in the 1951 Convention or the 1967 protocol.

Ogbu and Simon (1998) refer to refugees as people who were forced to leave their homelands and did not voluntarily settle in the United States for the purpose of improving their status, as immigrants do. Refugees often undergo life-threatening situations that compromise their physical and mental health, as well as their ability to obtain education (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010). However, in order to flourish in America and be successful in such educational pursuits, both groups understand that they need to adopt white American styles of language and attitude (Ogbu & Simon, 1998).

Refugees can be distinguished from immigrants in several ways. For instance, once forced to leave their homeland for whatever reason, refugees are not able to return to their country, leaving them with little or no hope to ever see their family and loved ones who are left behind. Conversely, immigrants can visit their native country whenever they wish (Cortes, 2001). Refugees do not have a voice in the determination of their destination, as do immigrants (UNHCR, 2000). Immigrants, prior to departure from their homeland, investigate and choose their destination for the betterment of their lives (McBrien, 2003). Refugees, on the other hand, may have to live in refugee camps for years before they resettle to whichever country accepts them (Hones & Cha, 1999; Tollefson, 1989). Lastly among the differences between these two groups, immigrants
enter their host country by obtaining one of a variety of entrance visas available to them, affording them re-entry to their host country. The only type of visa available to refugees does not allow them to leave the host country’s borders for a specified amount of time (Kerwin, 2011).

A refugee’s overall experience of transition is unique to that of immigrants in that refugees have no voice in determining their destination (Zhou, 2001). For instance, the number of Afghan refugees living abroad stands over 3.5 million (McMorran, 2008) who are dispersed in several countries around the world. During 1980s, Afghans who voluntarily migrated to the United States were mostly middle class, well educated and cosmopolitan. During 1990s, due to war in Afghanistan, many Afghans fled their homes; taking refuge in camps in the neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran. Many of these refugees were less educated and some were illiterate in their own language, as well as in English (Eigo, 2000). According to the Afghan embassy in Washington DC, there are currently over 300,000 Afghans living in the United States, a number that is growing because of the ongoing conflict in that country.

At the beginning of each fiscal year (October), the President of the United States consults with Congress in order to establish a worldwide refugee admissions ceiling into the U.S. and to approve federal funding for refugee resettlement for that year (Li & Batalova, 2011, USDHS, 2010). The President sets the number of refugees to be accepted from five global regions (Africa, Europe/Central Asia, Latin America/Caribbean, East Asia, Near East/South Asia), as well as an “unallocated reserve” in case of an unforeseen emergency (USDHS, 2010, Li & Batalova, 2011). The admission ceiling was increased,
in 2008, to 80,000 in response to an increase in refugee resettlement from Iran, Iraq and Bhutan (Kerwin, 2011, Li & Batalova, 2011).

In 2009, the leading countries from which refugees were admitted to the United States included Iraq (25%), Burma (24%) and Bhutan (18%) (USDHS, 2009). The determinant for the number of refugees from any specific nationality allowed into the United States depends on the regional demands of those outside countries.

There is a marked contrast in the number of refugee visas granted from year to year following the attacks perpetrated on September 11, 2001. In response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) initiated a comprehensive review of the refugee program (Kerwin, 2011). The United States temporarily froze admissions of all refugees into the country for three months, bringing total refugee admissions to their lowest point in the refugee program’s history (Kerwin, 2011). During this time, President Bush signed the Patriot Act into law on October 26, 2001 (Xu, 2007). In addition to limiting the number of refugee visas granted, the U.S. Patriot Act of 2001 dealt significant budget cuts to the services provided to refugees (Xu, 2007). In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security required the Bureau of Immigration and Citizenship Services (BICS) to adopt the Refugee Access Verification Unit (RAVU), which is responsible for reviewing and verifying the family relationship of each refugee applicant and their anchor relative in the U.S. (USDHS, 2003). In 2002, these new policies caused the number of refugees admitted into the U.S. to drop significantly and, by extension, contributed to the refugee resettlement program’s largest admissions drop in 25 years. The number of refugees settled in the United States dropped from 68,428 who arrived in 2001, to 27,508 in fiscal year 2002. The number did
not change much in 2003 as 28,422 refugees set foot on U.S. soil (USDHS, 2005; Li & Batalova, 2011). These low admissions figures persisted despite the President’s authorization, in concert with Congress, of the admission of up to 70,000 refugees (Kerwin, 2011). Post 9/11 immigration-related security measures prevented an unknown number of would-be refugees from entering the United States during 2001-2002 (Kerwin, 2011). However, the halt in the flow of refugees entering the United States, ultimately, proved to be temporary (Singer & Wilson, 2007).

The admission of refugees has rebounded in recent years (Kerwin, 2011) and, after 2003, the number of refugees entering the United States increased consistently. The number of refugees admitted in the United States increased by 25% from 48,218 in 2007 to 60,107 in 2008. In 2009, 74,602 individuals were admitted in the United States; a 24% increase from 2008. Growing since 2003, 2011 marked the highest level of refugee admission into the United States in a decade, as 80,000 refugees were admitted into the U.S. (USDHS, 2011).

With an increase in the number of refugees being admitted into the United States, the number of refugees New York State receives also increased. In 2007, New York received 2,978 refugees and 3,628 refugees in 2008. According to the Department of Homeland Security (2009), New York is the third largest state in terms of refugees received, behind California and Texas. In 2009, New York received 4,411 refugees (5.9% of the total refugees admitted into the U.S.). This number was raised again in 2010 when 4,559 (6.2% of the total refugees admitted into the U.S.) refugees resettled in New York State (Li & Batalova, 2011).
More than 41% of New York City students report that they speak a language other than English at home. There are 154,466 English Language Learner (ELL) students registered with New York City public school system (US Census, 2009). However, the refugee students in New York City are classified as part of the immigrant student population, as a whole, and do not experience recognition as a distinct subgroup of the larger immigrant population. With no overall tracking statistics for refugee students in New York City public schools, of the total population of ELL students in New York City public schools, 15,529 (10.1%) are Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). New York State defines SIFE as students who have entered a U.S. school after second grade; have had at least two years less schooling than their peers; function at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics; and are often pre-literate in their first language (NYC Department of Education, 2011).

Buffalo, the second most populous city in the state of New York, behind New York City, received 1,600 refugees in 2010 and is slated to receive 2000 more refugees in 2011 (“What Are Refugees”, 2011). According to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (2011), from 2007 to 2010, more than 4,100 refugees were resettled in Erie County, more than 2,200 in Monroe County, and nearly 2,000 in Oneida County. Rochester, the third largest city in New York State, has received 4,187 refugees in the past ten years and is expecting approximately 750 refugees in the fiscal year of 2011 (Catholic family Center, 2011). The Rochester City School District (RCSD) currently serves 1,100 refugee students from different countries in grades K-12 (RCSD, 2011). Refugee populations living in Buffalo and Rochester come from Bhutan, Burma, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, the

**Refugee Children**

Studies show that over 50% of the current refugee population has previously encountered a combat situation, witnessed murder of a family member, or suffered severe shortages of food, water and/or shelter (Mollica, Donelan, Tor, Lavelle, Elias, Frankel, & Blendon, 1993). Approximately 42 million people experience compulsory displacement from their homeland (UNHCR, 2006). Almost half of the people who are forced to leave their native countries due to war and violence are under 18 years of age (UNHCR, 2004, 2006). According to the Department of Homeland Security (2009), 34% of the total refugees admitted into the United States in 2009 were under the age of 18.

**Effects of trauma on refugee children.** War and other traumatic experiences can inhibit the fundamental systems that nurture and protect child development. For example, many children in war zones are exposed to physical, sexual and emotional violence, which contributes to the destruction of their homes and communities, undermining the foundation of their trust in adults. For instance, between 1993 and 2003, approximately two million children were killed and six million were injured or permanently disabled in war zones. Of war-exposed survivors, one million children have lost one or both of their parents and 20 million displaced to refugee camps or other camps (Williams, 2006).

Since World War II, researchers have documented the physical and emotional effects of war and trauma on children (e.g., Freud & Burlingham, 1943). Responses to these violent experiences vary based on the developmental level and personality of the child, as well as their specific situation. The degree to which children respond to such
atrocities depends on the exposure that the child endures and their ability to comprehend what is happening (Hodes, 2000).

As children develop, they change physically, intellectually and emotionally. Different child development experts describe this process in terms of different stages of development from infancy to adulthood. Children who live in the midst of war face many challenges while struggling to navigate these stages of development (Apfel & Simon, 1996).

Among the population that is directly exposed to trauma and violence, children are most vulnerable to the negative effects. Direct exposure to trauma, separation from parents, loss or devastation increases the level of negative psychological effects. Additionally, uncertainty about the future, social isolation and breakdown of the social network causes excessive stress and mental trauma on children (Zubenko & Capozzli, 2002). Some of the most damaging consequences of war on children are separation from family and the destruction of relationships (Leavitt & Fox, 1993).

Although some of the physical and visible ailments of refugee children coming from a war zone can be treated; the invisible psychological symptoms can be very serious and typically go undetected. Direct and non-direct exposure to war trauma increases the risk of often nonspecific, behavioral and emotional problems (Williams, 2006). Some of these symptoms such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be disabling and persistent for persons of all ages. A large body of research has documented that refugee children exhibit symptoms of PTSD at alarmingly high rates, as high as 75% in a community sample (Allwood, Bell-Dolan, & Husain, 2002). In addition to traumatic stress, refugee children from warring countries experience acculturative stress in their
new resettlement environment as well as stresses associated with migration, displacement and possible chronic poverty (Berry, 1994; Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov 2002; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996).

Mounting evidence indicates that exposure to war exerts significant long term effects on the mental and emotional health of children. For example, disruptive and aggressive behaviors, insecure and unusual attachment patterns, impaired relationships, isolation, and academic underachievement are known long term effects of war. Other symptoms include depression, conduct disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Joshi & O’Donell, 2003). Wars fragment families, leaving children isolated, physically and psychologically insecure for many years after their exposure to the war ceases (American Psychological Association, 2011; Lusting, Kia-Keating, Knight, Geltman, Ellis, Kinzie, Keane, & Saxe, 2004). Children who have experienced such atrocities deserve to feel safe and to have opportunities for personal development closely linked to their families and environments, such as school (American Psychological Association, 2011).

Academic regression of children from a war zone is common when the children have experienced psychological trauma as a result of their warzone exposure (Tsui, 1990). War can have profound, long term, psychological effects on emotions, behavior, thoughts, memory, and learning abilities. Some researchers also believe that, depending on the severity and exposure to war and trauma, some adults may also develop severe psychiatric problems (Freemont, 2003). Despite experiencing these severe horrors and traumas, the children, for whom the proper conditions are made available and utilized, have developed into healthy, vital and productive adults (Dugan & Coles, 1989).
**Effects of migration on refugee children.** As refugees flee their homeland, they undergo the experience of preflight, flight and resettlement (Lusting et al., 2004). During preflight, families decide to leave the homeland behind, frequently abandoning possessions, family members and friends. Leaving their familiar environment and disrupting their routine can impact children negatively, the effects of which can develop into behavior disorders later in life (Montgomery, 2008). During their flight, refugees go through a period of waiting in camps until a host country determines their fate in terms of where they are to be resettled. Camp conditions are often harsh, creating additional mental health problems for adults and care givers and rendering them incapable to care for their children (Robjant, Hassan, & Katona, 2009). Such an environment can detract from a child’s sense of insecurity, leading them to believe that adults are unable to protect them (Berman, 2001). Prolonged stay in refugee camps increases exposure to additional trauma, which may result in increased psychiatric disorders and long term behavioral issues in young children (Steel, Momartin, Bateman, Hafshejani, Silove, Everson, Roy, Dudley, Newman, Blick, & Mares, 2004).

In addition to stresses encountered during preflight and flight, refugee children and their families face secondary stressors during resettlement in their new country. Secondary stressors have a pronounced effect on a refugee child’s mental health, especially in the first years of resettlement into a new environment (Barwick, Beiser, & Edwards, 2002). Achieving acceptance at school, developing a personal identity in their new community, and assuming adult roles as cultural brokers for their parents are chief among additional stressors on young refugees (Fantino & Colak, 2001).
Not only are refugee children faced with home based stresses, such as structural changes within the family and financial issues, they also face a host of challenges at school. Language barriers, isolation and loneliness, a perceived lack of belonging, cultural clashes, identity confusion, gaps in education, lack of success at school, discrimination and stereotyping, combine to present a formidable challenge to immigrant children adapting to their new country (Hamilton & Moore, 2004).

Another struggle that refugee children face upon arrival to their new country is adapting to a new school environment. Children are often unable to advocate for themselves and, therefore, become more frustrated. They may even give up and drop out of school. School leaders engage in a variety of activities in order to prepare school facilities, curriculum and teaching staff to provide, for the newcomers, a smooth transition into their new environment (McBrien, 2005; Hamilton & Moore, 2004). Therefore, understanding the nature of refugee children and their unique needs is critical to the development of beneficial programs for all constituents, including students, parents and school personnel. Nevertheless, there is limited research concerning how to assist the refugee population, especially those from war torn countries, as they adapt to life in the United States. Developmentally, these children may not fully comprehend the issues surrounding their flight and may not recognize their need to become accustomed into a new society (McBrien, 2005). Furthermore, refugees from nations that are at war with the United States can be viewed as potential terrorists (Rong, 2006). As a result, Afghan children may be subjected to discrimination and stereotyping which may contribute to a host of academic and social detriments.
Problem Statement

In the past two decades, there has been an influx of the refugee population to the United States. As already described and in addition to the stress of resettling in a new country, refugee students also carry a large number of issues unique to the nature of their journey. Several researchers have conducted studies to explain the causes and effects of experiences of refugees during their journey and after their resettlement into their new country (Bhattacharya, 2000; Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010; Coll, Akiba, Palacios, Baily, Silver, DiMartino & Chin, 2002; Zubenko & Capozzli, 2002).

The major factors for academic and cultural achievements of immigrant and refugee students include the relationship between school and parents (Bhattacharya, 2000). A strong relationship between immigrant and refugee parents and teachers, as the primary socializing agents, is the key to the realization of student aspirations and guides academic and social adjustments (Bhattacharya, 2000, Coll et al., 2002). The physical presence of their parents may represent the only constant factor that refugee children have experienced since their flight from their homeland. Parent involvement is essential to the successful adjustment of refugee children. Without such involvement, these children are at risk of failing socially and academically (Hamilton & Moore, 2004). Therefore, refugee parents play a major role in assisting their children as they begin to allow themselves to trust other adults, such as teachers (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010).

The majority of research on this issue focuses on parent involvement among White and African American families (DePlanyt, Coulter-Kerns, & Duchane, 2007; Cotton & Wiklund, 2001; Fan, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Nord, Lennon, Liu & Chandler, 2000; Mullis, Mullis, Cornille, Ritchson & Sullender, 2004), with some
additional research on Hispanics and Asian immigrant families (Lahie, 2008; Ariza, 2000; Lopez, 2001; Ramirez, 2003; St Clara & Jackson, 2006). However, over the past two decades, society has become more ethnically diverse along with the increase of the number of refugees and immigrants entering the United States (USDHS, 2006, Li and Batalova, 2011; Kerwin, 2011; Singer & Wilson, 2007).

When discussing home-school relationships and parental involvement, most researchers do not distinguish between refugee and immigrant families and their unique and diverse needs and experiences. In order to have a better understanding on school, family and community relationships, further research that utilizes better measures and larger and more diverse samples is needed (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006).

Today, with an increased number of refugee families in the United States, virtually every nation is represented in American public schools. To date, there exists little research identifying refugee students by country of origin and, in particular, by refugee status (Department of Education, 2004). Furthermore, this lack of thorough research focusing specifically on the needs of refugee students does little to respect and learn from the unique experiences of such children, including war related trauma, acculturation and resettlement. This disparity suggests that risks and protective factors may be more complex and may manifest themselves uniquely among these students (McBrien, 2003; Kerwin, 2011; Zhou, 2001; Hones & Cha, 1999; Tollefson, 1989; Mollica, et al., 1993; Steel et al., 2004).

The educational demands of refugee students challenge schools and teachers to foster an environment that is conducive to allowing those students to meet their academic and social needs (Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). Too often, researchers focus on
barriers that prevent minority parents from being involved in their children’s schools, rather than focusing on the challenges faced within the school system (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000). Lack of school capabilities and resources, such as diversity in parental involvement programs, may contribute to perceived limitations to minority parent participation (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000; Wolff, 2002). Consequently, there is a gap between the increased number of refugee families and the corresponding services and programs available to them.

The diversity of refugees and ethnic groups presents new challenges to the educational system and social structure (Rah, Choi, & Nguyen, 2009). However, a lack of consensus between school staff and refugee parents on what constitutes parental involvement, dominates the salient parent involvement literature (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2009). Presumably, teachers report lower levels of refugee parent involvement, based on their specific understanding of the concept of parent involvement (Barnard, 2004; Chrispeels, 1996). Refugee and immigrant parents, on the other hand, frequently view their role in their children’s schooling differently from the way the mainstream English speaking parents do (Faltis, 2001). Accordingly, there is a need to identify the types of involvement described by Lopez (2001). For example, some parents try to instill the value of education by exposing their children to the hardships of limited schooling. Increasingly, families in the United States are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. English is often not spoken or understood in the homes of refugee families. As refugee students enter American schools, they are optimistic about their future and work hard to succeed (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Yet, school faculty and administrators raise concerns that these children misbehave in class and don’t pay attention because they have
the experience necessary for school. Teachers assert that these children lack social skills, they are lazy and that their parents don’t care (Kugler, 2009). These perceptions may be based on a perceived lack of communication stemming from the refugee family’s inexperience with the English language, as well as the teacher’s lack of awareness and sensitivity to the specific refugee family’s cultural background (Rah et al., 2009).

In summary, this study focuses on several gaps in the literature review that may inhibit effective refugee parent-school relationships. Most studies interchange the terms “immigrant” and “refugee”, virtually ignoring the various specific needs unique to each group and their families. Furthermore, because refugee parents are often not fluent in English, their participation in school related activities is impeded, as it is difficult for the parents and school staff to successfully communicate (Saurez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009; White & Kaufman, 1997; Bailey, 2002; Ibrahim, Small, & Grimley, 2009, Tinkler, 2002; Adult Learning Center, 2003). As a result of this dearth of communication, schools need to provide refugee students and their families with programs and services designed to expedite their social and academic acclimation during their resettlement in their new country (Mapp, 2003; Adult Learning Center, 2003).

Significance of Study

Information gathered from this study can be used as a basis for developing new programs aimed at improving the quality of education for refugee students. School practitioners and decision makers may be able to use the findings of this study to develop policies that would support the successful integration of refugee families into school settings. Schools and school districts will be able to have a clearer understanding and deeper appreciation for cultural differences and the factors that affect, initially, the
academic and social achievements of refugee students, and, ultimately, their successful graduation from high school. These findings can also be used as professional development for teachers and other adults working with refugee students. In addition to these potential benefits, teachers may acquire a better understanding of the children that they serve and a deeper appreciation for the subsequent cultural differences. As a result, teachers can be better equipped to create a welcoming classroom environment for refugee families and one that is conducive to refugee student learning. These improved schools and classrooms can help rebuild parental authority and self-esteem by reducing some parents’ isolation while building bridges to mainstream U.S. educational institutions. This study also provides educators and administrators with insight into what defines effective parent involvement for refugee children, even if it differs from traditional parent involvement. A better understanding of the nature of refugee parent involvement could initiate a more collaborative partnership between home and school that can lead to the long-term success of parent involvement in their children’s educational pursuits (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000).

The results of this study may also contribute to the education of refugee parents in order to improve their understanding and ability to relate to American schools. The information gathered in this study may help facilitate effective parent communication with teachers, school personnel and children. Active involvement in the schooling of their children enables refugee parents become better informed about the American education system and learn strategies to support their children’s learning. Parent involvement strategies help refugee parents develop new capacities, skills, and knowledge that they can use to strengthen their families and surrounding communities. Increased awareness
regarding parent involvement builds leadership among parents, making them feel valued and allowing them to play an active role in their children’s education (Daniel-White, 2002).

The study can help religious and cultural communities realize and understand the challenges that their young refugee member population faces in school and the importance of parent involvement. Based on these realizations, the religious and cultural communities may be able to implement plans to provide support for students and their parents by bridging the gap between school, community and home, while promoting active parent involvement in school.

Student attitudes, outlooks, and behaviors work as processes that promote achievement. These important processes are directly affected, for better or worse, by home, school, and community support. Students benefit most when all three contexts work in concert toward the shared goal of helping all students succeed in school (Epstein, 2001).

**Theoretical Rationale**

Coleman’s social capital theory explains how families and schools interact in order to provide a positive learning environment for students. Coleman (1988) posits that social capital, a form of capital that is accumulated by forging meaningful relationships with other people, affords individuals access to a broader range of resources.

Portes (1998) advises that, despite its current popularity as a socially relevant construct, the concept of social capital does not introduce new ideas to sociologists. He traces the roots of social capital back to the beginning of the twentieth century in Durkheim’s theory of social integration, which focused on the moral character of a
specific group. According to Portes (1998), Pierre Bourdieu (1985) produced the first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital. He defines the concept as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu 1985, p. 248; 1980, as cited in Portes, 1998; Saheb Zadeh & Ahmad, 2009). Bourdieu (1985) refers to social capital as a resource, “made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which are convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital” (p. 243). Coleman (1988) characterizes the concept of social capital as a means of bridging the gap between the socialists’ explanation of human behavior, as determined by social factors and economists’ assumption of rational self-interest (Saheb Zadeh & Ahmad, 2009). Even though there is no consensus on a specific definition (Kao & Rutherford, 2007), Coleman (1990) defines social capital by its function, stating that “It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: These entities consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (p. 302). This definition of social capital was later refined by Putnam (2000) to include the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness inherent in the social networks of individuals.

Coleman (1988) identifies two types of “capital” that parents provide their children in order to facilitate optimal development. The first of these types is financial capital, such as food, shelter, goods and services, including education, and the second is social capital, as previously defined. He further divided social capital into two components: family social capital and community social capital.
Family social capital can be defined as the amount of time and effort parents and family members devote to promoting their children’s cognitive-social development, school readiness and educational aspirations. Community social capital refers to connections to which parents provide their children, with regards to the world at large. In this type of setting, parents serve as advocates for their children in schools and other situations. They share their own knowledge and social networks with their children to help them transition into adulthood (Coleman, 1988). Family members often go out of their way to ensure the well being of their family in other systems, including educational systems (Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray & Hines, 2000).

Social capital in children’s educational aspirations, parents’ educational aspirations for their children, parents’ interactions with their children, and any other resource that is tied to education, is treated as a positive attribute (Portes, 1998). Kao (2004) cautions that social norms, within a family or peer group, can also promote behaviors that may have negative effects on academic achievement.

**Social capital and minorities.** Despite some researchers arguing that social capital may benefit minority groups, the majority of social capital research has neglected racial and ethnic minorities and their children (Kao & Rutherford, 2007). With regard to education, knowledge represents the single most important resource that may be obtained as an individual’s social capital. Kao (2004) states that information regarding the effectiveness of teachers, or how to apply for college are examples of types of information that significantly affect student academic and social outcomes during high school and graduation. The likelihood of an individual enrolling in college, for instance, is somewhat dependent upon that individual’s familiarity with the college admissions
process and the availability of financial aid (Kao, 2004). Nevertheless, this type of information is not easily obtained and requires an ability to navigate the system to gain access. Refugee parents with limited English and social norms may have difficulty communicating with other parents, and, subsequently, may encounter difficulty with successfully navigating this system on behalf of their children. On the other hand, refugee parents may have strong ties to members of their own minority communities, as they exercise a shared understanding of social obligations and expectations (Kao, 2004). It is important for schools to uncover the refugee students’ home and community assets, as they may help in the establishment of better home-school connections (Bigelow, 2007).

Existing theories and research are relatively explicit about how parent involvement affects their children’s school experience. Involvement in their children’s education provides an opportunity for parents to feel comfortable interacting with teachers and other professionals (Bassani, 2008; Devaney & Milstein, 1998). Similarly, parent involvement increases parents’ knowledge and familiarity with the school, teachers, and curriculum (Bassani, 2008; Kao, 2004).

James Coleman’s (1966) work portrays a family’s socio-economic status as a major factor in the academic success of their children. Coleman’s (1966) work led to legislative initiatives for the support of low income schools through pre-school programs such as Head Start, demanding the installation of parent advisory councils (Ascher, 1988). Subsequent studies indicate that school programs with comprehensive parent involvement components, such as shared governance and communication between home and school, have a longer lasting effect on a student’s ability to attain their academic goals (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, Gordon, 1979, Henderson, 1981).
Communication plays a profound role in the production of social capital, thus empowering refugee families. It is through such interactions, that families can build relationships, develop social networks, and gain social capital (Chrispeels, 1996). Nevertheless, since most refugee parents have limited proficiency in the English language, they often struggle to communicate or interact with other parents and school staff. According to Coleman (1988), when parents observe their children at school and talk to teachers and other adults about the child, they are able to establish norms, relationships and networks that strengthen their social capital. Shared norms, at school and at home, generate the type of social capital that can translate to strong educational outcomes for the child. In order to comprehend the influence of parent involvement in a child’s education, a more robust understanding of the social interactions between a refugee family and their children at school must be created and maintained. Moreover, to understand the developing child, one must understand the different systems to which the child is exposed, including both the family and the school (Belsky, 1984).

Utilization of social capital theory in this study is important for several reasons. First, the study seeks to cultivate a thorough understanding of the types of social capital available to refugee parents through a school-sponsored family literacy program. Second, the study explores what types of social capital the refugee parents may be able to develop, as a result of their interactions with other adults in the school during the course of their participation in a family literacy program. Third, the study explores how social capital enables refugee parents to support their children’s learning at home. Fourth, the study intends to determine whether refugee parents’ perceptions regarding the American education system, and the level of parent involvement in their children’s learning, are
influenced as a result of their increased social capital. Finally, by getting input from refugee parents and school staff, this study strives to evaluate teacher perceptions of refugee and immigrant children and their families, as they participate collaboratively in a family literacy program.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of school staff and refugee parents, based on their cultural and historical experiences and backgrounds, regarding the schooling and education of their children in a large upstate New York school district. The study examines, specifically, the perceptions of refugee parents prior to their participation in a family literacy program (FLP), as well as how their perceptions change as a result of their participation in the program.

A family literacy program (FLP) is a type of literacy program offered by a school district in order to promote learning and literacy development at home, while focusing on family integration into the school culture. In an FLP, refugee parents from different ethnic backgrounds attend classes that support parent literacy development as well as family literacy in the home. The goal of most of these programs is to increase parental use of literacy skills outside of the school setting in the hopes of engaging their children in literacy activities outside of school (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000).

Parent involvement is often evaluated from the school’s perspective. Therefore, a secondary purpose for this study is to examine the perceptions of teachers and school officials regarding refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education prior to participation in an FLP. If parent activities do not fall under the school’s definition of parent involvement, it is often interpreted as a complete lack of involvement (Jackson &
Remillard, 2005). This study will examine teachers’ perceptions of refugee parents as they participate in an FLP at their child’s school in order to recognize significant changes.

**Research Questions**

Following review of previous research, the primary research questions are as follows:

1. What is the perception of refugee parents regarding their children’s elementary school and education program:
   a) prior to parent participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after parent participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

Research demonstrates that refugee and immigrant parents place a high value on schooling (Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, 2001). Accordingly, they often become frustrated with their children’s education (Ramirez, 2003; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, 2001). For instance, they may feel that the curriculum is not challenging enough, or that the school environment is not friendly toward their child because of their different speech pattern or what they wear (Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005).

2. How do refugee parents define parent involvement in education:
   a) prior to participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after their participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
Parent involvement in American schools includes activities such as volunteering at school, communicating with teachers, attending school events and parent-teacher conferences, and assisting with academic activities at home (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Most of these activities require the parents to be physically present at school. However, most countries outside of the United States do not have a culture that requires or even promotes parents to actively participate in their child’s educational experience (Nderu, 2005). This study seeks to build upon current research regarding how refugee parents from different countries define their involvement in their child’s education.

3. How do school personnel, including teachers and the principal, describe refugee parent involvement:
   a) prior to parents’ participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after parents’ participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

Parent involvement may be defined differently in other cultures than in the United States. Teachers would benefit from recognizing those varying definitions and using them to promote the academic and social achievement of their students. Refugee children and parents bring with them a wealth of skills and talents that can be used to enrich their educational and acculturation experiences in their new country. It is important for educators to discover their refugee students’ strengths and how they can be used to improve their areas of need.
Definition of Terms

**FLP:** The Family Literacy Program (FLP) is a strategy used to help both immigrant adults and children learn the English language and acquire literacy skills, while teaching parents how to support their children’s cognitive and social development in their everyday lives.

**Immigrant:** Is referred to an individual who voluntarily moves to a different country in pursuit of a better life, better economic conditions, for education, or for family reasons. Immigrants have the freedom to re-enter their homeland any time they wish (USCIS).

**Parent:** The term “parent” includes, in addition to a natural parent, a legal guardian or other person standing in *loco parentis* (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare). [*Section 9101(31), ESEA.*]

**Parent Child Together Time (PACT):** One of the components of the Toyota Family Literacy program, where parents volunteer in their child’s classroom two hours per week (http://www.famlit.org/)

**Parent Involvement:** According to Epstein (1992), there are six types of involvement that help educators develop programs to foster strong school-family-community partnerships. Each type of involvement includes many different partnership practices, along with unique challenges that negotiated to involve all families, as well as the required dismissal of any preconceived notions regarding the term “involvement”. Each type leads to different results for students, families, and teachers. The framework of six types of involvement includes, but is not limited to the following: parenting,
communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, and Simon, 1997).

**Refugee:** A refugee is a person who has fled their country of origin because of past persecution or a fear of future persecution based upon race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (USCIS, n.d. para.1).

**Summary**

Large numbers of immigrants and refugees enter the United States annually. This chapter illustrates the distinction between refugees and immigrants. It also defines some of the characteristics exhibited by refugee children and the influence they exert on each refugee child’s educational attainment and social behaviors in order to emphasize their unique academic and social needs.

Refugee children experience trauma during pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, & Frater-Mathieson, 2004). The issues discussed in this chapter emphasize the importance of considering the breadth of challenges and difficulties that refugee children encounter and the importance of focusing interventions at appropriate levels.

A strong relationship between refugee parents and their children’s school can only improve a child’s positive adjustment, mental health and, ultimately, their overall academic achievement (Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). Some refugee parents’ expectations for their children’s academic success is conveyed through their role as their children’s supporter, disciplinarian, provider and cultural historian (Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). The extent to which refugee parents adapt to their new environment is proportionate to their children’s educational adaptations (Anderson et al., 2004).
Anderson and colleagues (2004) also indicate that a positive relationship between the child’s social environments, such as school and the child’s family impact the child’s ability to thrive within school.

Adopting Coleman’s (1987) social capital theory as a framework, this study examines refugee parent involvement and its influence on their children’s education. Coleman (1987) refers to social networks as an integral component of social capital. According to Coleman (1987), social capital is comprised of the informational, attitudinal, and behavioral norms and skills that individuals can utilize in order to improve their chances for success in communities, such as schools. The study looks at the possible changes that may occur in perceptions of refugee parents and school staff regarding parental involvement, as a result of their participation in FLP, through the lens of social capital theory.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into four chapters. While chapter two summarizes the relevant literature regarding the relationship between students’ social and academic achievement and parent involvement, chapter three offers a detailed account of the research design methodology, context, participants, data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter four includes in-depth narratives and discussions of the study findings and, finally, chapter five provides a summary of the research process, a discussion of the findings, limitations of the study and suggestions for further study.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Given the severity and duration of social turmoil faced by refugee children, the needs of refugee students in the United States demand recognition and exploration. Education has evolved into an avenue through which international and local leaders can mediate conflict. These leaders argue that education should be viewed as a necessity alongside water, food, shelter and medical treatment (Johannessen, 2001; Save the Children Alliance, 1996; Sinclair, 2002).

Another crucial aspect to the successful integration of refugee children into American schools is an improved understanding of the role that refugee parents play in the education of their children in the United States. Initially, this chapter explores the significance of parent involvement in the education of their children, including that of immigrants and refugees. Secondly, this chapter presents definitions of parent involvement, as described in legislation and in various studies. Next, this chapter provides a brief history of how public school policy, in terms of parent involvement, evolved through federal legislation, after which the chapter examines the effect of parent involvement on academics and the social behaviors of children, as well as its benefits for schools. Sections five and six of this chapter review some of the factors that affect refugee parents’ involvement from the perspective of parents and teachers. Section seven describes some apparent trends in the conceptualization of social capital. Section eight examines the inter-relatedness of social capital, parent involvement and student
achievement. Section nine explores building successful school-family partnerships through review of literature and, finally, section ten investigates several existing governmental and non-governmental programs that provide literacy instruction and other support and services to refugee families.

**The Significance of Parent Involvement in the Education of Refugee Children**

Parent involvement in schools is perceived as an important factor in children’s academic success in the United States (Epstein 1987; Schechter & Sherri 2009; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; DePlanty et al., 2007). However, because of unfamiliarity with the practices and expectations of their new country, refugee parents can be at a disadvantage in this regard. The problem can be further exacerbated when refugee parents contrast school expectations against their own beliefs and expectations. For instance, some refugee families do not have the support to help them understand or become familiar with different contexts of parental involvement in American schools (Flaitz, 2006; McBrien, 2011). Other cultures may find it disrespectful to dispute teachers’ opinions regarding their child’s education (Coll et al., 2002; McBrien, 2011). Therefore, they do not get involved in their child’s school, out of respect for the teachers and administrators, whom they believe have their children’s best interests at heart (Adult Learning Resource Center, 2003).

**Definition of Parent Involvement**

The definition of parent involvement varies throughout the research from an exclusive focus on specific activities to a wide range of activities that support children’s learning (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005). However, due to emphasis placed by major educational policies and legislations on parent involvement, the need for a broad
definition of parent involvement has increased. For the first time in the history of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which is a reauthorization of ESEA, contains a definition of parent involvement:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including ensuring that (a) parents play in integral role in assisting their child’s learning; (b) parents are encouraged by actively involved in their child’s education at school; and (c) parents are full partners in their child’s education and being included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child (Title IX section 9101(32)).

In research studies of parent involvement, the most widely cited contemporary definition of parent involvement is the one based on the model described by Epstein (1987, 1995). Although the definition of parent involvement continues to evolve, the typological definition proposed by Epstein (1987, 1995) is employed in the majority of research studies on the effects of parent involvement. Thus, this study uses Epstein’s typology to define parent involvement, embedding cultural knowledge and experiences into the framework in order to accommodate for the refugee parent population.

Research also indicates a lack of coherent terminology on the subject of parent involvement in the literature (Christenson & Lake, 2007; McCarthy, 2000). The term "parent involvement" is used throughout this study to describe the range of activities used by refugee parents as they try to help their children succeed in school.
Public School Policy Related to Parent Involvement

The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) created the Title I program without a mention of parent participation. However, by 1967, the United States Office of Education (USOE) required local school officials to create “appropriate activities and services” that would involve parents (Mizell, 1980). This language was expanded in 1967 wherein the goal of parent involvement was defined as building “the capabilities of parents to work with the school in a way that supports their children’s well being, growth, and development” (Mizell, 1980, p.2).

In 1973, the National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents was established by fifty parents from across the country who sought to provide information, training, and technical assistance to Title I parents whom the law (Title I, ESEA, 1965) had granted the right and authority to participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of local Title I programs (National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents). The Coalition was instrumental in the passage of the Educational Amendment of 1978 (Witherspoon, 1996) and the “Save Title I Coalition” in the early 80’s (National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents). The Coalition continues to be a strong parent advocacy group and conducts professional development conferences and workshops on current education laws, legislation and educational issues, with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Education, for parents across the country (National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents).

The reauthorization of ESEA, Improving America’s Schools Act, was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994 and included a more comprehensive model of parent involvement. Under Section 1118, Title I schools were required to develop a written parent involvement policy and school-parent compact, developed with and
approved by parents that would outline how students, parents, and school staff would work collaboratively to meet academic standards. The 1994 law also required Title I schools to spend at least 1% of their Title I funds on multiple types of parent involvement (PTA Issue Brief, 2009).

ESEA of 1965 was reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. It also recognized parent involvement as a crucial component of school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The law mentioned parent involvement in several sections, most notably in section 1118 and, for the first time in the history of ESEA, it included a definition of parent involvement, described in the previous section. Upon its release, NCLB called for educators and parents to contribute by sharing information and making decisions regarding the development of programs and activities that promote family involvement. According to the parent involvement provisions of NCLB, schools are required to develop programs that allow parents to make choices about their children’s education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). They are required, for instance, to provide materials and trainings for parents, including parents with limited English proficiency, to serve as equal partners in efforts to help their children become successful in school (Mole, 2001).

According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), when strategies are designed to engage families and students in the development of specific knowledge and skills, and are related to student learning, they have a greater effect on student achievement. However, prior to discussing strategies for how to improve the home-school relationship, it is critical to review what the literature says about the significance of parent and family involvement in student education.
Effectiveness of Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is not only beneficial to students, but it is equally beneficial to schools and parents, as well (Comer, 2005). According to Epstein (2001), positive relationships and strong partnerships among parents, schools and communities, are beneficial to all constituents, especially students. One way to decrease the existing achievement gap between native, English speaking students, the clear majority, and speakers of other languages in the United States is through increased parent involvement in schools (Lahaie, 2008). Research studies have provided evidence that children whose parents are actively engaged in their education tend to obtain better grades, have better school attendance, and enjoy school more than children whose parents are not engaged (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson, 1987; Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005). Studies also indicate that parent involvement is particularly significant for minority and refugee students (Bhattacharya, 2000; Jeynes, 2003; McBrien, 2005).

Parent engagement literature espouses strong reciprocal partnerships between home and student education programs as the main conduit for improved school performance among immigrant and refugee children. Positive home-school connections have been linked to greater academic motivation, grade promotion, and socio-emotional skills across all young children, including those from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds (Christenson, 2000; Mantzicopoulos, 2003; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004).

A study of seventy Title 1 elementary schools, conducted for the U. S. Department of Education by Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001), revealed that, in schools where teachers and administrators had a collaborative and engaging
relationship with parents of their students, test scores were 40% higher than in schools with lower levels of parent involvement.

The following section discusses some of the findings regarding different aspects of parent involvement and its impact on children’s academic, social, emotional and behavioral achievements.

**Parent involvement and students’ academic achievement.** Numerous studies point out the correlation between parent involvement and students’ academic and social behavior. Positive academic outcomes of students, from early childhood to adolescence and beyond, is said to stem from parent involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Partikakou, Weissberg, Redding & Walberg, 2005). Henderson and Berla (1994) report that students with active parents tend to have fewer placements in special education, do better with their homework assignments, have increased school attendance, higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in postsecondary education.

DePlanty et al. (2007) conducted a study that sought to investigate the type of parent involvement that parents, teachers and students believe has an effect on academic achievement of adolescent learners at the junior high school level. In this study, parents, teachers and students voiced their belief that parent involvement, at home, was more effective at positively impacting student achievement than parent involvement at school. The parents in this study believed that nurturing their children, encouraging them, and providing resources such as food, shelter and clothing, encompassed sufficient involvement in their children’s school. While teachers and parents felt that involvement at home was important, their differing opinions over what constitutes parent involvement
caused the teachers to believe that parents were not as involved in their children’s education.

Cotton and Wikelund (2001) observed a strong relationship between parent involvement in children’s learning and their academic achievement, regardless of differences in children. Furthermore, they stated that the increased level of parent involvement resulted in an increased level of achievement in their children’s academic learning.

Fan (2001), conducted a study with the purpose of finding and explaining the relationship between varying degrees of parent involvement and high school students’ academic achievement. She found that parent involvement had several relatively independent dimensions. For instance, parents’ educational expectations for their children’s academic attainment showed a higher influence on students’ academic performance and growth than any other dimensions, regardless of ethnicity.

Similarly, Lahaie (2008), reported that parent involvement translated to an increase in math and language scores for children in kindergarten. She discovered that parent involvement had a positive effect on English proficiency for all children. She also reported a similar effect that parent involvement exerted on bringing the math scores of immigrant children up to the level of those of native born children (Lahaie, 2008).

Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan and Evans (2006) conducted a similar study, concluding that parents of Caribbean immigrant children reported gains in the academic achievement of their children, as a result of their active involvement in their children’s schools. Research has also shown that improved language and reading skills, in particular, are a direct result of parent participation in their children’s school activities.
When parents engage in reading activities with children at home, those children tend to be more interested in reading, portraying improved attitudes toward reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Wade & Moore, 2000). Furthermore, parent involvement has a significant influence on reading, more than any other subject (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Considerable improvement in reading fluency and comprehension in children has been reported when their parents read to them, or with them, at home (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich & Welsh, 2004).

According to Flouri and Buchanan (2004), the influence of parent involvement in their children’s language and literacy development at home is much more significant than other factors, such as social class, family size and level of parent education. When the home environment is rich in literacy, children exhibit higher levels of reading knowledge and skills when they enter kindergarten (Nord et al., 2000; Mullis et al., 2004).

St. Clair and Jackson (2006) followed a group of 14 kindergarten children whose parents participated in a parent involvement program offered by the school. The parent involvement program, paired with one of the community’s parent literacy programs, offered parents a total of 25 one-hour training sessions over the course of one year. The content of the program, drawn from the kindergarten curriculum, offered modeling and application of language and literacy practices for parents to use at home with their children. Parents were provided learning aids and resources to extend the literacy activities in the home environment. Findings from the study indicated that, by the end of first grade, children whose parents participated in the program reported a significant increase in language skills. The results of this study suggest that immigrant children will
have higher language skills if their parents are equipped to support them at home (St. Clair & Jackson, 2006).

Morrow, Kuhn and Schwanenflugel (2006) argued that students’ academic achievement is enhanced when the activities suggested by the school are implemented at home, as well. Several researchers have emphasized the importance of parent involvement on student achievement at the elementary level (Eccles & Harold, 1996). However, Hill, Castellino, Landsford, Nowline, Dodge, Bates, and Pettit (2004) also found parent involvement to be an important factor in influencing student achievement at the secondary level.

**Parent involvement and students’ social and emotional behaviors.** In addition to academic benefits, studies also report improved social behavior and positive attitude toward school for students whose parents participate in their school activities. Social and emotional behavior, a fundamental component of students’ academic learning, as well as motivation toward achievement, mental well-being and citizenship, seem to be more pronounced in children whose parents are active in their schools (Patrkakou, 2008).

In a study of 261 kindergarten children, and their parents, participating in a Head Start program, Mantizicopoulos (2003) reported that children whose parents were actively involved in the program, and continued with the activities at home, had less difficulty with social adjustment and academic achievement and were promoted into first grade accordingly. Findings also indicated that, after kindergarten, children who were enrolled in public schools with educational and family services in place to support transition into public schools had lower retention rate. The students in the study experienced success in the schools emphasizing collaboration between home and school,
and fostering family-school connections. The same children were rated by their teachers as better behaved and more socially competent (Mantizicopoulos, 2003).

Regardless of parents’ socio-economic or cultural background, parent involvement results in increased school attendance and reduced dropout rates (Tinkler, 2002). Hill et al. (2004) reported that adolescents from families with higher education levels had lower behavioral problems. Overall, research evidence supports that parent involvement plays a positive and significant role in children’s academic and behavioral learning, regardless of any difference in their backgrounds (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

**Benefits of parent involvement for schools.** Parent involvement activities that are effectively planned and well implemented are not only beneficial to parents and students, but also to communities and schools. The National Parent Teacher Association (2009) indicates that students with parents who are engaged in their education earn higher grades and test scores, have high attendance rates, possess advanced social skills, adapt easily to the school environment, and, more often than their counterparts, go on to higher education. All parents, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, educational and cultural backgrounds, express a genuine and deep-seated desire to help their children be successful at school (Mapp, 2004). Parents and teachers share responsibility and desire to improve student learning. Therefore, parents’ voices and ideas help to inform school decisions about programs related to the improved education of students (Epstein, 2001).

According to Henderson and Berla (1994), parent involvement in schools results in improved teacher morale, increased support from families for school programs, and
improved collaboration across the school communities. Schools in which educators effectively communicate with parents and engage them in targeted content, such as behavior, homework, attendance and specific subject areas, evince positive student outcomes (Epstein, 2005).

Factors that affect parent involvement – parents’ perspective. López, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) conducted a qualitative study of four school districts with large migrant populations, finding that, before parents could participate in their child’s education in a meaningful way, their social, economic, and physical needs had to be addressed. In order to successfully involve parents in their children’s school, the recognition of cultural and educational strengths, as well as the economic and structural barriers of the migrant families came under scrutiny (López et al., 2001).

Immigrant and refugee parents may face many barriers and challenges to their active participation in their children’s educational experiences in the United States. Whatever the reason, refugee parent participation in their children’s school may be hindered in many ways. Sometimes, this lack of participation is misinterpreted, by teachers and school administrators, as indifference to their children’s education (Walker_Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). However, many factors affect parent involvement in their children’s education and they deserve consideration.

Language. Limited proficiency in the English language is considered to be one of the major barriers for parents who wish to get involved in their children’s education (Saurez-Orozco et al., 2009; White & Kaufman, 1997; Bailey, 2002; Ibrahim et al., 2009). Most schools do not have bilingual staff available to translate or otherwise assist in the orientation of new families to the school (Adult Learning Center, 2003). Therefore,
immigrant parents are often reluctant to participate in school activities in which spoken English is necessary. For example, participation in parent-teacher conferences and volunteering in classroom and field trip activities can become uncomfortable for immigrant parents (Tinkler, 2002; Adult Learning Center, 2003).

In some cases, children play the role of translator and/or deliverer for their parents. Children may not be the most reliable translators, as they, too, may not be proficient in English. Therefore, the messages sent home from school may get lost in translation, resulting in a lack of response by the parents (Blakely, 1984; Adult Learning Center, 2003).

*Cultural expectations.* School personnel may perceive refugee parents as uninterested in their children’s education. However, these perceptions may be based on the language issues described above or on cultural misunderstandings between parents and school personnel (Rah et al., 2009). Refugee parents may come from cultures where parents are not expected to take an active role in their children’s educational experiences, or where the role that parents take is very different from the role expected in the United States school system. In some cultures, parents simply “trust the school” and find it disrespectful to question the decisions and, by extension, the authority of school personnel. In some cases, refugee parents may perceive school as a threat to the preservation of their native language and culture and, thus, be reluctant to fully participate in the school experience (Nderu, 2005).

Perceptions related to concepts of time are different for people around the world. Many refugee families are unaccustomed to making appointments weeks in advance, keeping a calendar, or being punctual (Ariza, 2000). In many countries around the world,
individuals can not influence, or do not have the power to change, the infrastructure of established systems. The idea that parents can potentially create change in their children’s schools may be new and alien to them (Ariza, 2000).

Klein (2008) explored the experiences of five immigrant fathers, from Mainland China, who were concerned about their children’s education in American schools. The study focused on Chinese fathers’ perspectives on parent involvement in their children’s education in the United States. Through the interviews conducted, the immigrant fathers offered their definition of parent involvement, based on their cultural values and beliefs, which were not necessarily aligned with the beliefs found in American schools. The fathers believed they were highly engaged in their children’s education by helping them maintain a daily schedule in order to cultivate a sense of self discipline. However, their involvement in their children’s schoolwork was based on their deep rooted culture and values, and was not regarded as parent involvement defined by American standards (Klein, 2008).

Ndero (2005) indicates that it can be challenging for refugee parents to learn how to discipline their children in their new context. Somali refugee parents, who participated in a study conducted by Ibrahim and his associates (2009), expressed their confusion about the disciplinary system in their children’s school. The parents indicated that the negative social behaviors exhibited by their children are a result of an undisciplined school environment. These parents tended to favor other forms of punishment for their children over the common practices of the school, such as time-out and suspension. Furthermore, in cultures where elders are highly respected, parents might become upset
when hearing that their children are speaking up in class or sharing their ideas (Ndero, 2005; Ibrahim et al, 2009).

**Isolation.** There are many factors that lead refugee parents to live lives isolated from the community at large, including the school community. For instance, limited English language skills often cause a sense of isolation (Atwell, Gifford, & MacDonald-Wilmsen, 2009). Some parents do not own a car and live in areas that do not provide access to safe, reliable public transportation; therefore, coming to the school becomes a difficult and sometimes impossible task. Still, other parents may not have access to childcare for their young children, making it difficult for them to attend school functions (Adult Learners Resource Center, 2003).

**Busy personal lives.** One of the barriers that may hinder refugee parents from being regularly involved in their children’s schools can be obligations to their families in native lands. As many refugees escape from their homelands, they are often separated from their family members and loved ones and, as they settle into their new country, they feel obligated to send money back home to support whomever they have left behind, all while making a better life for the family members that accompanied them to their new country. Therefore, they may hold two or three low paying jobs, which do not leave much time for them to be involved in their children’s school (Rah et al., 2009; McBrien, 2011). These factors may hinder them from participating in school activities, as they may be unable to miss work in order to attend a special activity at their child’s school.

In their interview of Laotian families, Townsend and Fu (2001) found that refugee parents and their children had little time for sharing their feelings. Their material needs
required the parents to work long hours at low paying jobs, leaving little time to get involved in their children’s education, at home or in school (Townsend & Fu, 2001).

If parents did not visit the school, teachers assumed that parents were, simply, not interested in their children’s education and, as a result, the teachers formed a negative perception about the parents (Johnson, Brookover, & Farrell, 1989). In such cases, the school may lower its expectations for the child (Grant & Sleeter, 1988).

**Trust.** As with most families, trust is a major issue with refugee families. Having often left their homeland to avoid persecution and torture, many refugees struggle to trust authority figures (Earner, 2007; Hynes, 2003; McBrien, 2011). Additionally, they may have faced repressive governments and bureaucratic procedures during their flight, which engenders a mistrust that may persist through their resettlement into their new country and their children’s schools, impacting any relationship with school staff.

**Family trauma.** Due to experiences of trauma and violence, many refugee families leave their homelands. However, before arriving to their new country, they may spend a significant time in refugee camps while waiting for a country to accept them. During this waiting period, additional stresses, such as an insufficient amount of food, shelter and education, can compound an already stressful for refugees (UNHCR, 2004). As a result, they might suffer from significant psychological and physical issues, which can represent obstacles to their involvement in their children’s schools (Hill & Taylor, 2004; McBrien, 2005).

In a study conducted by Moon and Lee (2009), the researchers examined factors that directly, and indirectly, affected students’ academic achievement. The researchers (Moon & Lee, 2009) stated that factors that are strongly associated with students’
academic achievement are also interconnected. For instance, the study establishes a strong relationship between parents’ education levels, family income and student academic achievement. They also found that family income was associated with their psychological well being and involvement in their children’s school. However, by the same token, a parent’s psychological well being significantly influences levels of parent-child home activity. Their well being, in turn, influenced their children’s academic achievement (Moon & Lee, 2009).

_Lack of welcoming atmosphere in some schools._ Sadly, the environment in some schools is not what some refugee parents would consider to be warm and welcoming (Ndero, 2005). This truth may be attributed to school personnel who lack cultural sensitivity or do not speak the parents’ particular native language (Adult Learning Center, 2003). A study initiated by Mapp (2003) suggests that parent involvement in schools is directly influenced by a school culture that values a strong, respectful and trustful relationship with parents. The parents identified the school principal’s leadership as integral to the creation of an environment conducive to strong parent involvement.

Based on the stories told by 18 parents who were interviewed by Mapp (2003), most parents, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, are strongly interested in their children's education, and possess high hopes for their futures. They also understand and believe in the importance of their involvement in their children's educational development. Moreover, these parents agree that, when school staff treat parents with respect and recognize them as equal partners, they are more willing to participate. The study suggests that caring and trustful relationships between parents and
school staff have a major effect on enhancing parent involvement in their children’s school (Mapp, 2003).

In a similar study, Saurez-Orozco, Pimentel and Martin (2009) found that supportive, school-based relationships among peers, teachers, school personnel and adults within the community strongly contributed to student academic engagement and school performance. Students, in this study, also express the essential role their parents play in their academic and behavioral advancement and achievement. Due to their assumed limited proficiency with English and/or utter lack of experience within the American education system, parental involvement in school is varied. However, the researchers purport that positive family relationships bolster their children’s academic performance and emotional development (Saurez-Orozco et al., 2009).

In another study, White and Kaufman (1997) examined the interconnectedness of ethnicity, generational status, length of time that a family has lived in the United States, English language proficiency, social capital, and completion of secondary education. They indicated that the high school dropout rate was higher for immigrants who had lived for less time in the U.S. than those who had lived here longer. The researchers concluded that proficiency in the English language and social capital for the child, including parental presence involvement in homework, has a stronger influence on high school completion than the child’s ethnic background. Social capital, then, proves to be highly important in the model, and its inclusion reduces the effect of other measures (White & Kaufman, 1997).

Factors that affect parent involvement – teachers’ perspective. As a link between home and school, teachers’ perceptions of refugee parent involvement are
instrumental in the formation of relationships with their students (Patrikakou, 2008). According to Ascher (1988), teachers want parents to champion the importance of education to their children, they want parents to support teachers by making attendance, homework and good grades a priority, and, above all, for the parents to be willing to participate in school activities. Given the family structures and the cultural and socio-economic diversity of refugee families, teachers describe several factors that influence the level of active participation of refugee parents in their children’s school.

**Language.** Many educators interpret any lack of parent participation as a lack of interest in their children’s education (Ascher, 1988). Rah, Choi, and Nguyen (2009) studied the perceptions of school practitioners who have served refugee parents and children from the Hmong culture. The researchers identify several areas that stand as barriers, impinging upon refugee parent participation in their children’s schools. Among these barriers, school practitioners identified language to be the most serious. Many of the refugee children's parents were illiterate, without the benefit of formal education. Therefore, they can not understand the policies and expectations of their children’s schools. Teachers in the study describe communication with parents, for instance parent teacher conferences, as uncomfortable because of their inability to fully comprehend and respond to invitations to discourse (Rah et al., 2009).

Practitioners queried in this study employed strategies aimed at enhancing their relationships and encouraging parent participation (Rah et al., 2009). For example, bilingual liaison positions were created as a means to connect schools and Hmong refugee parents. These liaisons also helped organize the collection of common items needed for incoming refugee families. In addition, the liaisons helped develop monthly
evening English language classes, as well as assisting them with day to day concerns (Rah et al., 2009). On one occasion, a meeting was held that educated Hmong parents about the internet and its safety.

**Cultural expectations.** Problems in cross-cultural communication often arise when parents’ values and the implicit values of the school do not align (Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000). Many schools offer parents insight into their philosophies on issues such as discipline and academic tutoring (Epstein, 1995), but parents do not always receive this assistance in the spirit it is offered, and are often offended by being told how to parent their children (Onikama, Hammond, & Koki, 1998). Another adverse reaction, the parents may be reluctant to assume an academic teaching role with their children (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). When parents don’t accept the roles that schools expects them to take, teachers may negatively evaluate them as being not interested (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993).

**Education.** Refugee parents’ educational level and lack of previous exposure to American education system can present an obstacle to immigrant and refugee parents. School personnel believe that this lack of schooling can limit refugee and immigrant parents’ ability to understand and support their children’s developmental and educational needs (Carger, 1997; Trumbull, Rothenstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001).

On the other hand, studies also show that teachers are often ill-equipped to work with refugee students and parents, due to their own limited tools and strategies. Teachers report that such reluctance to assist this sub-group of their student population is caused by a fear of getting overwhelmed by refugees’ needs and expectations, which extend beyond
academic support, making the educators feel inadequate, due to a lack of preparedness of their own part (Bolloten & Spafford, 1998; Rutter, 2003).

**Trends in the Conceptualization of Social Capital**

Bronfenbrenner (1979) insists upon the existence of a logical relationship between the individual and the environmental context, arguing that the individual can exert an influence over his or her environment at the same time that the environment exerts an influence on the individual. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological model conceptualizes human development as a series of nested, influential factors.

According to Brofenbrenner (1986), the child resides at the center of a series of concentric circles, known as microsystems. These microsystems are described as relations between a person and the environment in their immediate vicinity, such as home, family, toys, peers, classrooms and teachers. The immediate environments, or microsystems, are directly influenced by the next level, called the mesosystem, a social and economic context. Mesosystems are relations among the major settings in which a person spends time, such as the relationship between family and school, including the parents’ social support networks. The next circle of influence for a given person is called the exosystem, which are not direct influences on the child, but on the settings in which the child exists. One example of an exosystem is the interaction between the parents and the adult prayer group at a religious center, which facilitates the development and growth of an individual by encouraging the fulfillment of the adult family members' spiritual and religious needs. Finally, macrosystems are the cultural contexts which comprise the overarching and influential, institutional patterns of the culture. The cultural mores,
beliefs, values, and guidelines shared by people in a particular society are examples of macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Epstein broadened Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory by adding the influence of community and peer group to the developmental contexts, in order to create her own theoretical model of “overlapping spheres of influence” (Jacobs, 2008). Similar to Bronfenbrenner’s model and designed from a social and organizational perspective, Epstein (1994) perceives child development occurring in several overlapping contexts. She suggests that communication between the different contexts will benefit children, in terms of their development. Epstein further indicates that parent-school relationships will help students “increase their academic skills, self-esteem, positive attitude towards learning, independence, other achievements, accomplishments and other desired behaviors that are characteristics of successful students” (Epstein, 1994, p.42). The theory integrates educational, sociological, and psychological perspectives on social organizations, as well as research on the effects of family, school, and community environments on educational outcomes (Epstein, 1987).

While Bronfenbrenner (1989) reports that a sense of family exerts a powerful influence on a child's development, and that, therefore, it is important for educators to solicit the cooperation of the parents and guardians of their students, Epstein (1987) expounds on this idea, pointing out that the types of activities prepared by teachers determine the level, and type, of parent participation in their children’s school work.

Within this ecological approach and beyond it, social capital theory provides an explanation for how families and schools interact to provide a positive learning environment for students (Anguiano, 2004). Coleman (1987) refers to social networks as
an integral component of social capital. Accordingly, he defines social capital as the informational, attitudinal, and behavioral norms and skills that individuals provide in order to improve their chances for success in communities, such as schools. Epstein’s (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence also emphasizes the importance of schools, families, and communities working in concert in order to meet the needs of children.

**Parent Involvement, Social Capital and Student Achievement**

In their study, Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, and York (1966) argued that family factors, especially their socio-economic status, have a significant influence on student achievement. Coleman and his associates argued that familial and school factors are intimately associated with student achievement. In this research, Coleman et al., (1966), showed that family factors, such as their socio-economic status exert a greater influence on student success than school related factors, such as books, teacher training and school facilities (Coleman et al., 1966).

As Mayeske, Okada, & Beaton (1973) re-analyzed the aforementioned Coleman data, they identified three family related activities that seemed to influence students' levels of academic achievement: (a) Expectations, shared by parents and children, regarding children’s academic achievement, (b) Amount of time the family spent supporting the shared expectations, and (c) Children’s attitudes toward successful performance at school. Similarly, Bloom (1984) identifies family values and parenting practices, such as work habits and daily schedule of the family, as well as activities that foster language development, to be factors that promote student learning. Walberg (1984) identifies “a curriculum of the home”, which supports student academic achievement.
This curriculum includes informed parent/child conversations about everyday events, encouragement and discussion of leisure reading, monitoring and joint analysis of television viewing, deferral of immediate gratification to accomplish long term goals, expression of affection and interest in children’s academic and personal growth, and perhaps even occasional doses of caprice and serendipity (Walberg, 1984, p.400).

Accordingly, both Bloom (1984) and Walburg (1984) concluded that, when parents from both high and low socio-economic statuses engaged in these activities, their children will, likely, experience relative success at school. If the teachers do not share a common language with parents, or have little contact with them, the teachers will remain unaware of the high aspirations that these parents have for their children, as well as the support that they offer toward their children’s education (Chrispeels, 1996).

Figure 2.1 summarizes the findings reported by three separate, but related, studies conducted by Mayeske et al., (1973), Bloom (1984), and Walberg (1984) that demonstrate the family practices that support student success in school.

As evidenced in Figure 2.1, when parents are familiar with the education policies and system of their children’s school, they feel comfortable enough to participate in open dialogue with school staff about their children’s education. Also, they become more involved and encouraged about the school experiences of their children. Additionally, research indicates that, regardless of the families’ educational level, income or ethnic background, children are more likely to attend school regularly, and be inspired to transcend their current situation academically, as well as socially (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
In another study, Wilkinson (2002) connected the length of time that refugee and immigrant families spend in their new country to positive outcomes for refugee youth’s academic achievement. Other factors observed by this researcher, as significant in refugee youth’s academic success in school, included their specific ethnicity and their demonstrated confidence with English language. She argued that the sense of family exerts the greatest influence on refugee youth’s academic achievement. The students did better in school when their parents enjoyed both social and physical health. These healthy parents encourage and support their children’s academics and are more involved in their education. However, a poor family life represents an impediment to children’s academic achievement (Wilkinson, 2002).

Using the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS), Kao and Rutherford (2007) examined the determinants of social capital and their effects on immigrant and minority students’ academic achievement with respect to their native-born and white counterparts. The researchers suggested that encountering difficulty with the English language and unfamiliarity with school customs may account for any perceived
scarcity of immigrant and refugee parent involvement in school activities. They also found that social capital, in the form of parent-school interactions, in general, positively influence students’ educational outcomes. Social capital, however, causes different outcomes for immigrant and minority students, depending on the nature of the specific social capital in question (Kao & Ruthford, 2007).

Further informing this study, the researcher utilized data from a four year longitudinal study, in which Ibrahim, Small and Grimley (2009) examined the involvement of Somali refugee parents in their children’s school in New Zealand. Findings, from the subsequent interviews with parents, suggest that Somali parents place a high value on their children’s education. However, due to several barriers, such as language, lack of financial and social capital, and lack of transportation, the parents could not satisfy the expectations of the schools. Somali families frequently changed residences to increase their proximity to other Somali families, or places of worship. Therefore, their children changed schools frequently, exerting a negative influence on the parent-school relationship. The schools' staff, often incorrectly, categorized this lack of parent participation as a general lack of interest in the status and quality of their children’s education (Ibrahim et al., 2009). When interviewed, parents indicated that, because of their limited social capital, they did not enjoy the support of their community and, as a result, were unable to share any burdens with the community at large (Ibrahim et al., 2009).

**Building Successful School-Family Partnerships**

The world’s top three refugee resettlement countries, the United States, Australia and Canada, have gone to great lengths to promote refugee parent involvement in the
education of their children (McBrien, 2011). These countries have developed a variety of strategies for establishing and improving the connections between students' home life and their school life. However, some refugee parents can be disadvantaged and/or misunderstood when their beliefs and values do not match those of their children’s school. According to McBrien (2011), providing liaisons who would help build a cultural bridge between refugee parents and their children’s schools can be instrumental in the development of a strong parent home connection.

To strengthen the effectiveness of such liaison programs, a study was conducted to evaluate a specific nonprofit US refugee agency’s liaison program. The study sought to increase refugee parent participation in schools. The program offered a variety of activities for both parents and children that were designed to stimulate participation, specifically, among Iranian, Somali and Vietnamese parents and their children’s schools. As part of the program, a group of resettled refugee adults, fluent in the refugees’ native languages, were hired to serve as liaisons between refugee parents and school staff. To evaluate the liaison program, the study focused on observing and defining the fears, needs and diverse experiences expressed by different refugee groups (McBrien, 2011).

As a result of the measurements put in place by the school in order to promote home-school connections, McBrien (2011) reported a significant increase in communication between refugee parents and school staff. All groups expressed an appreciation for liaison support and the school's high expectations for the education of their children.

In a somewhat recent study, Julie Mathews (2008) indicated that Australian schools are unprepared for African and Middle Eastern refugee students. She discussed
the importance of educational interventions that focus not only on the pre-displacement conditions of refugees, but also on their post-displacement conditions and issues. Mathews (2008) emphasized that refugee students, especially those from African and Middle Eastern countries, possess unique needs, urging schools and policy makers to sculpt school environments in which refugee children can participate, communicate, make friends, and achieve a sense of belonging while learning about themselves and others (Mathew, 2008).

Rousseau, Drapeau and Rahimi (2003) conducted a study, evaluating the relationship between the ability of refugee students to adjust to their transition into adolescence in their host country and the extent to which they were exposed to trauma and political violence in their native countries, prior to their escape. Most of the refugees that participated in this study lived in a community with a large number of other Cambodian refugees. The schools for the refugee children served a significant number of registered Cambodian students. In their quest, the researchers found that the collective identity developed by Cambodian refugees became the source of a collective self-esteem, a positive group identity and pride (Rousseau et al., 2003). Schools may facilitate the development of social and cultural capital through the discovery of assets that may lie imbedded, and previously unnoticed, within immigrant students’ homes and communities (Bigelow, 2007).

**Parent Involvement Programs**

Since Coleman’s 1966 report first argued that variables, associated with students’ homes, were significantly associated with student success (Coleman et al., 1966), a
number of studies have strengthened the correlation between parent involvement and positive student outcomes.

The past three decades have ushered in an emerging consensus, among researchers, which re-enforces the idea that a parent's involvement in their child’s education is a particularly important aspect of the school-family relationship, with significant implications on student achievement (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson, 1987). These studies emphasize the significance of the relationship between parents’ involvement and children’s academic achievement. Henderson (1987) declares that parent involvement in education is a consistent predictor for children’s long term academic achievement. At the national level, parent involvement has played a part in all major, educational reform legislation, and is one of the six targeted areas in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez & Kayzar, 2002). Nevertheless, barriers to parent involvement have also been identified, including but not limited to school and community characteristics, teacher and parent beliefs and attitudes, parent adjustment and emotional concerns, as well as parent and teacher practices (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

A host of efforts have been made by schools and teachers in the hopes of facilitating a viable and productive relationship between home and school. Lee, Bryke and Smith (1993), as cited in Hamilton and Moore (2004), proposed a three-fold process of creating parent liaison positions, using the existing services of community service organizations, and providing parent education programs by schools in order to facilitate meaningful home-school connections.
In their study, Rah and her fellow researchers (2009) explained that bilingual parent liaisons facilitate interactions between school and families that transcend the mere translation of words. The liaisons, according to the families that participated in the study, created a comfort zone for refugee parents that succeeded in promoting parent involvement in school. One of the schools in the study, participating in an outreach program called Family and Schools Together (FAST), reported that parents believed that the positive changes in their relationship with school personnel resulted from their participation in this program. FAST utilizes multifamily group interaction as a means to strengthen families while encouraging parent involvement in order to: a) build relationships between parents and schools, and improve the parent-child bond, b) impart values and norms including personal accountability and family relationship management, and c) empower parents to become the primary protective agents for their children. The researchers cite parent education and outreach programs as a salient method of acquiring new forms of social capital for refugee parents (Rah et al., 2009).

There are several government funded, and privately funded, programs specifically designed to help with resettlement of refugees and immigrant families in the United States. For instance, on August 9, 2011, the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) announced that more than $3.6 million had been awarded to organizations in Buffalo, Rochester and Utica in order to help their local school districts support the needs of refugee students, and their parents, as they settle in their new country. The federally funded program provides services, including language translation, to minimize the number and difficulty of issues faced by refugee students. In addition, programs are provided to effectively orient school staff to the students' needs, promoting
refugee parents' involvement in schools (OTDA Press Release, 2011). Some of the programs that provide support for refugee and immigrant family-school relationships include:

**The newcomer program.** Newcomer programs were developed as a response to the needs of the growing limited-English-proficient (LEP) population growing in American classrooms. Newcomer programs function as temporary, transitional stopovers for recently arrived LEP immigrant and refugee students who would benefit from a period of adjustment to their new educational system, as well as to the greater U.S. social environment (Friedlander, 1991, BRYCS, 2008). These students face such challenges as language limitations, less than age-appropriate education, lack of familiarity with the U.S. school system, and personal trauma and low self-esteem (Friedlander, 1991).

A variety of newcomer programs are in place in California, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. Three models of newcomer programs are (a) all day, school within a school; (b) half day, separate site; and (c) all day, separate site. Newcomer programs are typically funded by a combination of federal, state and local sources. Federal funding may come from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which provides funding for high-poverty schools or Title III of ESEA, which allocates grants to states based on their share of the country’s LEP populations. The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement provides additional funding through their Refugee School Impact Program (BRYCS, 2008).

**Refugee school impact program.** The Refugee School Impact Program is part of the Division of Refugee Assistance (DRA) and provides grants to some school districts, paying for activities that will lead to the effective integration and education of refugee
children. These services target school-age refugees between the ages of 5 and 18, and provide activities that include English as a Second Language instruction, after-school tutorials, programs that offer paths to high school completion and full participation in school activities, after-school and summer club activities, parent involvement programs, bilingual/bicultural counselors, and interpreter services (http://otda.ny.gov/programs/bria/programs.asp).

**Family literacy programs.** Family literacy is a strategy that can help both immigrant adults and children learn the English language and acquire literacy skills, while teaching parents how to support their children’s cognitive and social development in their everyday lives. Research indicates that high-quality family literacy programs can increase the cognitive and social development of children and help them to become better prepared to learn in school (Hayes, 2006).

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), established in 1989, has developed several family literacy programs. NCFL has also taken community-based initiatives that advocate for literacy for families and individuals. The following programs were initiated by, or provided for, through NCFL:

**Toyota family literacy program.** TFLP serves English as Second Language (ESL) families with children in elementary school. Today, Toyota funds 256 family literacy sites in 50 cities and 30 states and has impacted the lives of more than 1 million families. Established in 2003, TFLP addresses the growing needs of Hispanic families and other immigrant families by increasing English language and literacy skills for adults, while also supporting parental involvement in their children’s education.
**Family and child education.** The FACE program serves American Indian families with children within the age range of birth to grade three, and is supported by the Bureau of Indian Education. Now operating in 44 American Indian schools, this program provides culturally responsive education, resources and support to American Indian parents and children. To date, the FACE program has reached more than 25,000 families.

**McDonald’s family mealtime literacy nights.** Since October 2006, NCFL and the Southern California McDonald’s Restaurants have teamed up for the highly successful Family Mealtime Literacy Nights program, which was designed to show parents of preschoolers how they can use simple household routines to teach literacy, math and science to their children. These fun and interactive workshops not only allow families special time to spend together, but they also improve school readiness for children while increasing the parents’ excitement to support their children’s learning.

**Toys for tots literacy program.** NCFL, The UPS Store® and Mail Boxes Etc.® network, and the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation place books in the hands of children in communities nationwide.

**Parents + schools = successful children series.** NCFL’s extensive work in the Hispanic community has led to the development of some highly useful and important resources. The most recent of these resources is the foto-novela series. The foto-novela is an extremely popular form of media in Spanish-speaking cultures. NCFL capitalized on its knowledge of this trend in order to create a resource that truly speaks to Hispanic families and inspires them to become more involved in their children’s educations, while acting as a guide to improving their understanding of the American school system.
These foto-novelas, made possible by funding from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, have been met with enthusiasm by educators (http://www.famlit.org/).

As a result of their seven year longitudinal investigation of the internal and external conditions that impact elementary school improvement, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu and Easton (2010) suggest five essential elements for school improvement: (a) strong leadership, (b) instructional guidance, (c) professional capacity, (d) a student-centered learning climate, and (e) strong parent and community ties. They identified these five elements as organizational features of schools that interact with what happens inside classrooms and are essential to improving schools and student achievement. In their study of 200 elementary schools, they indicate that schools with strong family engagement were four times more likely to improve student reading over time, and were ten times more likely to improve student learning gains in mathematics (Bryk et al., 2010).

**Summary**

As explained in the first section of this chapter, the literature review clearly indicates that parent involvement exerts a significant force on the academic and social achievements of students, regardless of their background (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lahaie, 2008; Wang, 2008; DePlanty, et al., 2007; Wade & Moore, 2000; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

Section two of this chapter presented several definitions of parent involvement, as provided in various legislation and studies. Next, in section 3, came a brief history of how public school policy on parent involvement evolved through federal legislation was explored, followed by an attempt to demonstrate the effectiveness of parent involvement
in students’ academic, social and emotional behaviors and its benefits for schools, through a review of the literature, in section 4. Research shows that students, especially minority students and refugees can be successful when they are surrounded by adults who serve as role models and motivators (Bhattacharya, 2000; McBrien, 2005; Jeynes, 2003; Adger, 2001; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson, 1987; Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005).

Sections five and six discussed the factors that affect parent involvement from the refugee parents’ perspective as well as from school staff’s perspective. As refugee families settle in their new country, they continue to face many challenges, such as poor accommodations, separation from their family and community, and persecution and/or racism (Rutter, 2003; Anderson et al., 2004). As Webster and Robertson (2007) write: “Most asylum seekers and refugees have escaped conditions of discrimination, domination and exploitation in their home countries, only to confront similar experiences in their host country” (p. 158). Some of these challenges serve as barriers to their involvement in their children’s school, which can be misinterpreted by school staff as a lack of interest in their children’s education (Adult Learning Resource Center, 2003; Lightfoot, 2004; Ndero, 2005). American teachers and administrators often emphasize that parents’ presence within their children’s schools is beneficial to their children’s academic attainment (Rah et al., 2009). However, many refugees may be unaware that, in the United States, involvement in their children’s education includes visiting their child’s school for various meetings and events. Many refugee parents may be vaguely aware of such expectations, but they are often not sure what those expectations entail (Nderu, 2005).
Section seven investigated trends in the conceptualization of social capital by looking at Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory and Epstein’s overlapping of influence theory. Epstein’s (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence emphasizes the importance of schools, families, and communities working together in order to meet the needs of children. Acknowledging the “interlocking histories of the major institutions that socialize and educate children” (Epstein, 1992, p. 140-41), an essential component of this theory is that these institutions may share mutual interests, such as student success, which are best achieved through their cooperative action and support (Epstein, 1992).

Connections between parent involvement, social capital and student achievement were discussed in section eight, followed by section nine, in which the establishment of successful school-family relationships was viewed through a review of the literature. Teachers must acknowledge that their refugee students’ lives, development, experiences and achievements are impacted by their culture (Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). It is important that schools reach out to refugee families and create welcoming environments within their walls. Creating programs that would help engage refugee parents will provide opportunities for the parents to become familiar with academic policies and school expectation, also helping them to become part of a new community. When parents are happy and their needs are met, they become a source of inspiration for their children. In turn, the children develop a sense of belonging within their new school, which contributes to their overall academic achievement (Coll et al., 2002; Trueba et al.,1990).

Section ten of this chapter described parent involvement programs and the correlation between parent involvement and positive student outcomes. With the
growing number of refugees in American schools, teachers must be aware of their refugee students’ needs so that they can prepare classroom environments that nurture those needs (Szente, Hoot & Taylor, 2006). Involving refugee parents in their children’s school can strengthen cross-cultural awareness and cultural exchanges between families and schools (Klein, 2008). For example, refugee parents may be engaged in their children’s education in non-Western/untraditional ways that can be misinterpreted by educators as indifference (Akiba, 2010). As American schools experience influxes of refugee students from around the world, it is important to revisit traditional notions of parent involvement to better serve the needs of this unique population (Rah et al., 2009; Klein, 2008).

Refugee children have displayed tremendous courage in journeying to the United States and pursuing their education, despite the persistence of obstacles at every level. As a result, educators must recognize and support all children’s hopes and dreams by taking steps to work with refugee children's families in order to maximize the academic and social attainment they experience in their new country.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

In the past two decades, there has been an influx of the refugee population to the United States. In addition to stressors caused by resettlement into their new country, refugee students carry with them a host of other issues caused by the very nature of their journey (Anderson et al., 2004). Much research has been done to explain the causes and effects of experiences of refugees during their journey and after their resettlement into their new country (Hones & Cha, 1999, Tollefson, 1989; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Anderson et al., 2004).

Among the major factors that contribute to the academic and cultural achievements of refugee students is the quality of the relationship between the school and refugee parents (Anderson et al., 2004). The presence of their parents may be the only semblance of consistency that refugee children encounter following their flight from their homeland. Therefore, parents play an enormous role in assisting their children as they begin to allow themselves to trust other adults, such as teachers (Hamilton & Moore, 2004). Little research is available to inform us of how the educational system in the United States is perceived by refugee parents and how their involvement has affected their children’s schooling, which is why this research is being conducted.

In addition to parents’ perceptions of school, it is equally important to understand how teachers perceive refugee students and their families. The diversity of refugees and ethnic groups has presented new challenges to the educational system and social
structure. Little is known about how refugee parents’ involvement in school can affect the classroom environment and the teachers’ relationship with their refugee students and families, offering another reason for this current study.

This study examined the perceptions of refugee parents, based on their cultural and historical experiences and backgrounds, regarding the education of their children in a large upstate New York school district. More specifically, this study examined the perceptions of refugee parents prior to their participation in a family literacy program (FLP), as well as their perceptions following their participation in the program. Parent involvement is often evaluated from the school’s perspective. Therefore, an additional purpose for this study was to examine the perceptions of teachers and school officials regarding refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education prior to participation in an FLP. The study also examined teachers’ perceptions of refugee parents after they participate in an FLP in their children’s school in order to examine any variation in those perceptions.

Chapter three presents a detailed description of the methodology used in this qualitative study, including a description of the research context, study participants, data collection and the step by step procedure used for the collection of data. A description of the process for data analysis and the role of the researcher are also included in this chapter. Pseudonyms are used, where appropriate, to protect the identities of the school, school district, as well as the participants and their families.

**Study Methodology**

This study is a qualitative research study, which employed a descriptive research design, based on data collected during observations, focus groups and in-depth interviews
with refugee parents, teachers and the school's principal (Glathorn & Joyner, 2005). Qualitative research examines lived experiences, in an effort to better understand them and ascribe meaning to them, and is usually achieved by systematically collecting and analyzing narrative materials through methods that ensure the credibility of the data and the results.

This descriptive study, through multiple methods of data gathering, answered the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of refugee parents regarding their children’s elementary school and education program:
   a) prior to parent participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after parent participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

2. How do refugee parents define parent involvement in education:
   a) prior to participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after their participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

3. How do school personnel, including teachers and the school's principal describe refugee parent involvement:
   a) prior to parents’ participation in a family literacy program within an elementary school in upstate New York?
b) after parents’ participation in a family literacy program within an elementary school in upstate New York?

McMillan and Schumacher (1993) define qualitative research as, “primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories” (p. 479). This definition implies that data and meaning emerge “organically” from the research context.

According to Morrow and Smith (2000), qualitative research helps individuals to better understand and explain the meaning that participants give to the central phenomenon of the research study. Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding, based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand the issue of parent involvement from the perspective of teachers and refugee parents, through multiple sources of data collection, such as classroom observations, focus groups, in-depth interviews, audio materials and field notes (Cresswell, 2007).

Prior to selecting the participant populations, permission was obtained from the school district to conduct the research (Appendix B). After obtaining permission, the researcher identified the parent, teacher and school staff populations and began the process of forming the focus groups.

**Study Context**

The study took place in a large urban district in upstate New York. The city has received 4,187 refugees in the past ten years and is expecting approximately 750 refugees in the fiscal year of 2012. Upstate City School District (UCSD) is the pseudonym used for the school district to protect the identities of the school district and the participants.
The Upstate City School District (UCSD) is a large urban school district that serves 34,000 students, pre-K through grade 12, and 10,000 adult students. It has a diverse student population of 64% African American students, 22% Hispanic students, 11% Caucasian students and 3% Native Americans/Asian/East Indian/Other students. Students speak 92 different languages and eighty eight percent of the students are eligible for free and/or reduced-price lunches. The school district has the highest poverty rate among NYS large districts with 22% of schools at 90% poverty or higher and students with special needs make up 18% of the total student population. The UCSD has 6,500 employees, which includes 3,900 teachers, 300 administrators and 2,300 support personnel. The Upstate City School District (UCSD) currently serves 1,285 refugee students from different countries in grades K-12.

In order to conduct this study, the researcher identified a school site that, at the time of the study's inception, was housing an abundance of newly-arrived refugee students. The Global Elementary School (GES), one of the 39 elementary schools in UCSD, reports a population of approximately 300 students, half of which are immigrants and refugees. Global Elementary School has been in operation since 1991 and was initiated by a group of teachers. Enrollment in Global Elementary School is open to any child, and selection is done by lottery. In addition to the lottery, children who are speakers of other languages are enrolled in Global Elementary School by the district’s language assessment and placement center.

Global Elementary School boasts a diverse population of immigrants and refugees from around the world, with its population, racially and ethnically, accurately reflecting the demography of the city. Approximately 36 different languages have been represented
in the school at various times throughout the years. The school was one of six in the
district that operated as a “pilot school-based budgeting” school, which afforded it a
much greater discretion in terms of how it used its funds in order to meet the needs of the
school. The pilot aimed to promote equity and flexibility in school budgeting. The
biggest supporters of the school are community volunteers who provide help in all
aspects of schooling, from reading to children in the classrooms, to helping in the
lunchroom.

Global Elementary School has designed its “school-based planning team” around
unique governance of six work groups, which is comprised of parents, guardians,
teachers and the principal who serve as the ultimate decision makers in the school. These
governing groups include the Organizational Development Work Group, the Facilities
Work Group, the Staff Development Work Group, the Assessment Work Group, the
Stake-Building Work Group, and the Teaching and Learning Work Group.

The cornerstone of instruction at this school is its three teacher “family” structure.
There are seven grade-level “teaching families.” Each teaching family is comprised of
two conventional class sections and three teachers. Two teachers (one for each class
section) are allocated by the district and one English as a Second Language (ESL)
teacher, as “push in”, is allocated by the school, through a reconfiguration of the staff.
This process creates one teaching family with three teachers per grade level, sharing
instructional strategies within classroom families and providing small group, student-
centered, integrated curriculum to all students.
Family literacy program (FLP). Another unique feature of the school is that Global Elementary School has been a participant in a Family Literacy Program (FLP) since 2010. The Family Literacy Program’s (FLP) main goal is to support the academic achievement of children in kindergarten through third grade (K-3), by bringing together parents and their children as learners in an elementary school setting and educate immigrant and refugee families about the American schooling system.

The Global Elementary School, as a recipient of the FLP grant, is expected to establish a four component, family literacy program model that includes:

1. Adult Education that focuses on teaching refugee parents to speak and write the English language for a minimum of six hours per week.

2. Child Education, which occurs in its natural K-3 classroom setting.

3. Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time, which happens two hours per week in the child’s classroom, offering ample time for parents to practice supporting their children’s learning.

4. Parent Time, which is two hours per week spent addressing issues relevant to cultural diversity, familiarizing parents with attributes specific to the American schooling system, preparing for effective support of their child’s education, investigating life and parenting skills, defining family support, and discussing transition-to-work issues.

This study assessed the perception of the influences of FLP after their participation in the program for one school year and whether parent perceptions, regarding their children’s education and their role as parents, changed based on their literacy program model.
Study Participants

Global Elementary School launched the Family Literacy Program (FLP) during the summer of 2010, when the program recruited some refugee families who had just arrived in the U.S. and registered their children in the Upstate City School District. The sample population, for the purposes of this study, was limited to FLP’s current and returning refugee parents, whose children are attending Global Elementary School. This study gained insight into the perspectives of parents who are not yet completely adapted in the United States.

Parent participants, for this proposed study, included eight refugee parents from Nepal and one parent from Afghanistan. All of the participants were attendees of the FLP and had at least one child enrolled at Global Elementary school. Volunteer participants were solicited through personal visits by the researcher to Global Elementary School. The researcher and an interpreter met with potential participants and discussed the purpose of this research and its procedures, obtaining informed consent. The volunteer participants were given consent forms in their native language. A reliable Nepali interpreter assisted the researcher in conducting the study during parent focus groups. The researcher conducted the interview with the Afghan participant, as she is fluent in Dari, the native Afghan participant’s language.

In addition to an in-depth interview of the school principal, separate focus groups were convened by the researcher and included 4 teachers of the children of participating refugee families. Three of the participant teachers began with the FLP, upon its inception in 2010. One teacher joined GES, and the FLP, during the current school year. The representation in the teacher focus group allowed for the inclusion of the perspective of
teachers who have been with the program since its inception and have experienced program's growth and the participation of new refugee parents. The focus group also included the perceptions of teachers who were new to the program in 2011. Demographic details of teachers such as age, gender, ethnicity and teaching experience were not a consideration when obtaining participants for this study.

**Data Collection**

The researcher applied a phenomenological approach in order to understand the perceptions of refugee parents and teachers with regards to refugee children’s education and parent involvement in school. The study used a combination of three methods of data gathering (Cresswell, 2007): (a) focus groups, (b) participant observations, and (c) semi-structured, audio-taped, individual in-depth interviews were conducted in January of 2012, and again in May of 2012. Interviews were conducted during these two periods in order to capture any changes in participants’ perceptions that may have occurred. The triangulated qualitative design provided several perspectives for understanding the perceptions of individual participants. Creswell (2007) indicates that, in order to establish credibility and trustworthiness of the data, it is important to triangulate the data through various “sources, methods, and investigators” (p. 204). In addition, the “multiple strategies” of triangulation “build a coherent justification for themes. If themes were established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191).

**Focus groups.** According to Zeller (1986), focus groups have the potential to be an excellent source of qualitative data. Focus groups offer researchers the opportunity to
see "process" in action and the chance to observe transactions between and among participants and how they respond and react to each other (Goldman, 1962).

Goldman (1962) suggests that quality group interviews require objectivity, reliability, and validity. He suggests that, to promote objectivity, or the "avoidance of the bias of the interviewer and client" (p. 66) it is important that the moderator (researcher) refrain from contributing to the discussion as much as possible, while carefully monitoring their actions (Goldman, 1962).

At the beginning of each focus group, a general explanation of the purpose of the study was provided to the participants in their native language. The participants were reminded that the interview would be audio taped and that the information would be transcribed by an outside transcriptionist who had already signed a confidentiality statement. The researcher also emphasized that confidentiality would be protected throughout the interview and analysis processes. They were also reminded that participation was voluntary and that the participants could refrain from answering any question or leave the interview at any time and without any consequence.

A set of open ended questions guided the conversation in each of the focus groups to maintain consistency and facilitate analysis and coding. The questions in Appendix F facilitated the conversation with parents. A separate set of questions (Appendix G) guided the conversation with school staff. As the moderator in each of the focus groups, the researcher was cognizant of their role in the group, and observed the quality of the information that the discussion had produced. The conversations were audio taped, using a dual electric and battery operated tape recorder, and were later transcribed.
Additionally, the researcher took field notes using pen and paper to ensure accurate reporting.

**Participant observation.** The researcher observed refugee parents as they participated in their children’s classroom activities, also observing teachers as they interacted with refugee parents. Visiting the classrooms, staff meetings, school events, parent teacher conferences and other informal observations allowed the researcher to build rapport with parents and school staff. Participant observation involves the process of establishing rapport within a community in such a way that its members can act naturally while being observed. It is vital, then, to remove oneself from the setting or community and immerse oneself in the pursuit of data, in order to understand what is happening and to be able to write about it free from passion or prejudice. The participant observer must maintain a nonjudgmental attitude and an open mind (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). According to Patton (2002), the environment and the context within which the participants interact can be better understood through observation. However, Crosswell (2007) warns of limitations and challenges that the researcher may face, such as forgetting to take field notes or getting overwhelmed by the amount of data collected and being unsure as to how to narrow the data so it can be easily and accurately reported. Therefore, an observational protocol worksheet (Appendix H) was used to record the interactions between refugee parents and their children, as well as the interactions between teachers and parents. The observations were recorded immediately following the classroom visits at Global Elementary School.

Merriam (1988) notes the importance of observation within qualitative research, stating that it offers “a firsthand account of the situation under study” (p. 111). The
observations provide a rich description of the participants’ experiences and, in this study, the interactions between teachers with families, specifically parents and their children were explored.

**In-depth interviews.** In addition to observation and focus groups with Nepali parents and classroom teachers, in-depth interviews with the Afghan refugee parent and the school principal were conducted in order to strengthen the study. According to Patton (2002), “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods” (p. 247).

Conducting in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to thoroughly explore the respondents’ feelings and perspectives, which resulted in the gathering of rich background information that shaped further questions relevant to the topic. The in-depth interviews included open-ended questions, a semi-structured format that allowed the interview to be conversational. The researcher posed follow-up questions when possible. The open-ended questions remained similar for all interviewees for continuity of responses (Patton, 2002). The researcher used active listening skills to reflect upon what the speakers said (Appendix J), seeking clarity and understanding throughout the interview.

The responses were audio-recorded, transcribed, and supplemented with written notes (i.e., field notes) by the researcher. Written notes included observations of both verbal and non-verbal behaviors, as they occurred, and immediate personal reflections about the interview. In other words, in addition to asking questions, the researcher systematically recorded and documented the responses, continuously probing for deeper meaning and understanding throughout the process.
Field notes. Data was collected during classroom observations, in-depth interviews and focus groups through the researcher’s observation of participants’ actions, reactions and gestures using the observation protocol worksheet (Appendix H). A notebook was kept as a method of keeping the field notes organized. As a participant-observer, the researcher took field notes during observations. These notes included “analysis-in-description” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 8), meaning that they represented the themes that the researcher identified in relation to the research question, which affected the ongoing focus of observations.

Data Collection Procedures

During the summer of 2011, the researcher met with Global Elementary School's principal, in his office, where they discussed a brief preliminary design and the purpose of the study. The principal exhibited a desire to participate in the study and offered support. The researcher then contacted the UCSD’s Office of Accountability in order to request the permission needed to conduct the study. The permission request letter included a brief description of the purpose, place and participants of the study (Appendix A). In order to develop rapport with refugee parents, the researcher became a frequent informal visitor and observer of the FLP during the Fall of 2011. The permission to conduct the research from the Office of Accountability (Appendix B) was ultimately granted.

Upon approval of the proposal, the researcher sought to obtain permission from St. John Fisher College’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once the IRB process was completed and approved, the researcher took the following steps to launch the study:
1. The researcher met with the school principal and more thoroughly discussed the details of the study, obtaining the principal's signature on the consent form (Appendix E).

2. In order to recruit reliable interpreters, the researcher contacted the district’s English Language Learner (ELL) department and sought referrals and recommendations. Since the researcher did not speak Nepali, she obtained the services of an interpreter. The credentials of the person providing translation services were closely scrutinized, as they directly affect the quality of the translations provided to the researcher, becoming especially important during the qualitative coding and data analysis processes (Adamson & Donovan, 2002; Edwards, 1998). Therefore, the use of the ELL department was appropriate for recruiting interpreters, since the department had already investigated interpreters’ backgrounds and credentials prior to their employment by the district. An interpreter who was working fulltime at a high school in the district was located and he agreed to assist the researcher with conducting the focus groups with Nepali refugee parents.

3. The researcher conducted separate informational meetings with teachers and refugee parents (with the help of the interpreter) to further discuss the research study. At these meetings, the participants were presented with a letter, in their native language, that highlighted the purpose of the interview and provided contact information (Appendices C and D). The researcher explained the purpose of the study, discussed the process of data collection and presented the volunteer participants with consent forms that required their signatures. In addition, the researcher advised that the interview process would be audio-taped, stipulating that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained at all times to
encourage participation. Participants were provided with time to ask questions and seek further clarification. The participants received a letter that reiterated their rights and confidentiality and also included the researcher's email address and phone number.

4. Soon after the meeting, the researcher contacted participants to schedule times and locations for interviews.

**Confidentiality**

The participants were asked to sign an informed consent statement (Appendix E) prior to being interviewed. This statement provided the specific measures needed to protect the confidentiality of each participant in the interview and evaluation process. Each participant signed an informed consent and a copy of the signed consent was provided to them for their own records. Confidentiality was maintained during the audio-taped interviews by using pseudonyms as identifiers during the interview process. The transcriptionist also signed a confidentiality agreement prior to receiving the transcriptions.

The researcher was the only person who had access to the individual participants’ names and identifying information. Further, the data was not shared among the participants or any other individuals. Confidentiality of interview data, transcripts, audio-tapes, and any supporting documentation will remain in a locked, secure area in the researcher’s possession for a minimum of three years upon the conclusion of the dissertation process.

As noted earlier, prior to the start of the research study, permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained through St. John Fisher College to ensure confidentiality, informed consent, and the safety of all participants.
Ethical Consideration

All of the ethical guidelines of the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed. The ethical consideration in this study is reciprocity. Marshall and Rossman (2006) point out that “qualitative studies intrude into settings as people adjust to the researcher’s presence,” therefore the researcher should “reciprocate” (p. 81), or give something back to participants. During this study, the participating school staff and refugee parents gave their time, their experiences, life stories, and insights throughout the duration of the data collection process. As a way to reciprocate, the researcher provided food and refreshments upon completion of each of the two rounds of interviews. At the end of the data collection process, a grocery store gift card and a coffee mug were presented to each participant as token of appreciation.

Data Analysis

In this qualitative research, the data analysis involved three analysis strategies (Cresswell, 2007). First of all, qualitative studies created a large amount of data that the researcher had to organize. The interviews were captured on audio recording and were logged with date, time, and the names of the participants. The field notes were stored in a word file in the researcher’s personal computer, which were also logged and backed up in an external hard drive.

Before the data could be analyzed, they were transcribed. The process of transcription allowed the researcher to become acquainted with the data and to begin considering salient emergent themes (Riessman, 1993). The selected data were transcribed, verbatim, by an external transcriptionist.
In the second step in the analysis of the collected data, the researcher used a three-step coding process:

1. **Open Coding**: As the first step towards coding the data, open coding involved identifying concepts. Data that was collected from observations, interviews, and artifacts were compared and sorted according to themes. Open coding also involved the categorization of data.

2. **Axial Coding**: In the axial coding stage, the researcher investigated relationships across categories. Axial coding allowed for the establishment of connections among different conditions, contexts, and interactions through the exploration of different influences that may have affected the phenomenon that was being studied. Axial coding is named as such because analyzing the data “revolves around the ‘axis’ of one category at a time” (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p.32).

3. **Selective Coding**: The researcher searched for recurring patterns and themes in the categories. The researcher then categorized the data in order to establish themes or “clusters of meaning”, based on a coding process. Using the Epstein’s typology of Parent Involvement and Coleman’s social capital theory, the researcher created a code list, which was derived from Epstein’s typology, as well as from topics generated by the interviews and focus groups. The researcher developed a matrix, incorporating Epstein’s typology, as well as Coleman’s social capital categories (see Appendix I), that facilitated the coding process. Codes derived from Epstein’s framework include: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1992).
As the third step in the analysis of the data, the researcher presented the data in the form of a rich narrative, accurately and thoroughly describing the participants’ experiences. The resulting final themes were, then, discussed with the researcher's dissertation committee to achieve additional clarity in the wording and descriptions of the themes.

The Researcher

As a former refugee, the researcher is well aware of the experiences and challenges that refugee families’ face throughout the resettlement process. As a parent of three, first generation American children, the researcher can also relate to the frustration experienced by refugee parents who are struggling to preserve their own heritage, while simultaneously striving to provide the best education for their children. And finally, as a teacher in the UCSD, the researcher feels a sense of responsibility for the welfare and education of all children, including those of refugees and a passion to help raise awareness regarding the struggles of refugee students and their families who attend American schools. It is the hope of this researcher that, as a result of this research, educators and policy makers will pay more attention to the perspectives of refugees from different cultures and develop programs based on the facts regarding refugees' needs, and not their opinions of what is best for refugees.

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the research methodology that was employed in the qualitative study, which is that of a phenomenological research design, while providing a description of the research context and the study participants. Also included in this chapter, was information about the data collection process, as well as data analyses,
which includes the identification of relevant themes, based on the answers provided by the participants during the focus groups and interview discussions. Finally, this chapter discussed the appropriateness of the research design, confidentiality and ethical assurances. Looking forward, chapter four presents the results of this study, examining and assessing them in detail.
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of school staff and refugee parents, based on their cultural and historical experiences and backgrounds, regarding the schooling and education of their children in a large upstate New York school district. The study specifically examined the perceptions of refugee parents prior to their participation in a family literacy program (FLP) as well as how their perceptions changed as a result of their participation in the program. The study also examined the perceptions of school staff working with the refugee parents regarding their school involvement and participation in FLP.

The data analysis and results of the study are presented in this chapter which is organized in ten sections: (a) brief description of research questions being addressed in this study, (b) qualitative methodology, which describes the methods used in gathering data, (c) demographic characteristics of the research site selected for this study, (d) a brief review of Family Literacy Program (FLP), (e) description of research participants including refugee parents and school staff, (f) themes identified through gathering data used to answers to research questions one and two, (g) themes identified and narratives used to answer research question one, (h) themes identified and narratives used to answer research question two, (i) themes identified and narratives used to answer research question three, and finally, (j) an overall analysis of research findings in chapter four.
Research Questions

Following review of previous research, this research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perception of refugee parents regarding their children’s elementary school and education program:
   a) prior to parent participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after parent participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

2. How do refugee parents define parent involvement in education:
   a) prior to participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after their participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

3. How do school personnel, including teachers and the principal describe refugee parent involvement:
   a) prior to parents’ participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after parents’ participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

Qualitative Methodology

A series of questions was generated by the researcher, in alignment with the research questions. These questions were created to gain insights from experiences and
perceptions of refugee parents, teachers and the principal in order to answer the research questions. These focus group and interview questions can be found in Appendices F and G. Additional probing questions supplemented the central interview questions to extrapolate participants’ perceptions and concerns. Qualitative data generated through focus groups and interviews were used to provide descriptive narratives.

The focus groups with refugee parents were conducted with the use of a digital recorder and presence of a Nepali interpreter. All the narratives related to parent focus groups were based on the interpreter’s translation in third person, and not the parents’ direct quotes. The interview with the Afghan parent was conducted in Dari with the researcher as the interpreter. The narrative for the Afghan parent is translated by the researcher as the interpreter and not the Afghan parent’s direct quotes.

The focus groups with teachers and the interview with the principal were conducted by the researcher using a digital recorder. The narratives provided for this chapter are direct quotes from the participants. Following the interviews and focus groups a verbatim transcript was generated through a transcriptionist and verified by the researcher to confirm validity.

The researcher applied a phenomenological approach to understand the perceptions of refugee parents and teachers with regards to refugee children’s education and parent involvement in school. A combination of three methods of data gathering (Cresswell, 2007): (a) focus groups, (b) participant observations, and (c) semi-structured, audio-taped, individual in-depth interviews were conducted in January, 2012, and again in May, 2012 to capture any changes in participants’ perceptions that may have occurred
during this time. The triangulated qualitative design provided several perspectives to understand the perceptions of individual participants.

**Demographic Characteristics**

This study was conducted in a large urban district in upstate New York. The city has received 4,187 refugees in the past ten years and received a closely estimated 750 refugees in the fiscal year 2011. Upstate City School District (UCSD) is the pseudonym used for the school district in this study to protect the identities of the participants.

The Upstate City School District (UCSD) is a large urban school district. It serves 34,000 students in pre-K through grade 12 and 10,000 adult students. It has a diverse student population of 64% African American students, 22% Hispanic, 11% Caucasian and 3% Native Americans/Asian/East Indian/Other. Students speak 92 different languages. The school district has the highest poverty rate among NYS large districts with 22% of schools at 90% poverty or higher. The Upstate City School District (UCSD) is currently serving 1,285 refugee students from different countries in grades K-12.

Global Elementary School (GES) is one of 39 elementary schools in UCSD. Almost half of its 300 students are immigrants and refugees. Global Elementary School has a K-6 grade configuration.

**Family Literacy Program (FLP)**

One of the unique features of Global Elementary School is its Family Literacy Program (FLP), which began in 2010. The Family Literacy Program’s (FLP) main goals are to support the academic achievement of children in kindergarten through third grade (K-3) by bringing together parents and their children as learners into elementary school
setting and to educate immigrant and refugee families about the American education system.

Global Elementary School, as a recipient of the FLP grant, is required to establish a four component family literacy program model that includes:

1. Adult Education that focuses on refugee parents learning English language for a minimum of six hours per week.
2. Children’s Education, which occurs in its natural K-3 classroom setting
3. Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time, which happens two hours per week and it occurs in the child’s classroom and offers ample time for parents to practice their skills in supporting their children’s learning to take place
4. Parent Time for two hours per week that includes issues relevant to cultural diversity, familiarizing parents with the American education system, preparation for effective support of the child’s education, life and parenting skills, family support, and transition-to-work issues.

This study assessed the influences of FLP on refugee parents and school staff after their participation in the program from September, 2011 through May, 2012, and if school staff and parent perceptions regarding their children’s education changed based on their literacy program model.

**Research Participants**

Global Elementary School (GES) launched the Family Literacy Program (FLP) during the summer of 2010. The program recruited refugee families who had just arrived in the U.S. and registered their children in the Upstate City School District (UCSD). The
sample population for this study is limited to FLP’s current and returning refugee parents, whose children are attending Global Elementary School.

Parent participants for this study included refugee parents from Nepal and Afghanistan. All of the anticipated participants were currently attending the FLP and had at least one child enrolled at Global Elementary school. A reliable Nepali interpreter assisted the researcher in conducting the study during interviews. The interpreter’s reliability was based on his credentials as a trusted UCSD employee, and the only interpreter who could be located in the community. The researcher conducted the interview with the Afghan participant, as she is fluent in Dari, the native Afghan participant’s language. Data was collected during January, 2012 and again in May, 2012.

Study participants for each phase of data collection are introduced in the following sections:

**January, 2012 study participants.** The parent participants in this study consisted of one Afghan father, three Nepali mothers and five Nepali fathers. All of the parents interviewed were married. Their length of stay in the United States ranged from four months to three years. All of the parents spoke their native languages at home. None of them spoke English at home with the exception of occasional reading of books in English or helping their children with their homework. The Afghan father, Naseem, was a former Afghan military commander with a four year college degree from his native land. Five of the Nepali parents had no formal education and stated that they had never stepped into a school building prior to attending school in the United States. One Nepali father, Davy Ram, was a former high school teacher, who completed high school in refugee camp and received college degree from Nepal. Two of the Nepali parents attended up to seventh
grade in refugee camp. All of the volunteer study participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Refugee Parents’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Length of stay in the USA</th>
<th>Total number of years in refugee camp</th>
<th>Total number of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naseem</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>23 months</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>17 months</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rekha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baem Bahadur</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>21 months</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don Bahadur</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levy Chan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hary Bahadur</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davy Ram</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Global Elementary School principal, the FLP teacher, a Teacher on Special Assignment (TSA) and three classroom teachers participated in this study during January, 2012. Demographic data of the participants are presented in Table 2. The principal and the FLP teacher were interviewed separately. Additionally, a focus group consisting of three classroom teachers and the TSA was conducted by the researcher (see Table 4.2).
Table 4.2

*Global Elementary School Staff’s Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff’s pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>How many years in this position</th>
<th>How many years at GES</th>
<th>Length of exposure to FLP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Adams</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Teacher – FLP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Teacher – 2nd grade</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Teacher – 5th grade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Teacher – Creative</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Teacher (TSA)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

May, 2012 study participants. The refugee parents who participated in phase one (January, 2012) were included in the second phase of the data collection (May, 2012) with the exception of one Nepali father (Davy Ram) who was employed at the time of the second focus group and could not participate. The same interpreter accompanied the
researcher for the January and May, 2012 focus groups. Additionally, the Afghan father was interviewed separately by the researcher in his native language, Dari.

In addition to Joy, Ellen could not participate during the May, 2012 data collection because she was out on maternity leave. A separate interview with the principal and a focus group with the remaining three teachers were conducted in May, 2012.

**Research Themes**

This section reports the findings of the study thematically and is organized around the three essential research questions. A total of seven distinct themes emerged during the research conducted with refugee parents through interviews and focus groups. Seven themes emerged during the research conducted in January, 2012 (see Figure 4.1), and the same themes emerged during research conducted in May, 2012 (see Figure 4.2).

The themes that emerged during January, 2012 data collections with refugee parents are organized as (January-theme-1p) through (January-theme-7p), and themes that emerged during May, 2012 data collection are organized as (May-theme-1p) through (May-theme-7p) respectively. January-theme-1p and January-theme-2p answer the first part of research question one (question I.a) and are as follows: January-theme-1p describes refugee parents’ concerns and aspirations for their children, while January-theme-2p describes refugee parents’ relationship with their children’s school.

January-theme-3p through January-theme-7p answer the first part of research question two (question II.a) and are as follows: January-theme-3p explains refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education in their native countries. January-themes-4p, 5p and 6p discuss refugee parents’ involvement at their children’s school, at
home and outside of school respectively. Finally, January-theme-7p describes barriers to parents’ involvement in their children’s education. Five subthemes emerged from barriers to parent involvement: language, transportation, unfamiliarity with area, family responsibilities and personal safety (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1. Themes That Emerged During the January, 2012 Research with Refugee Parents.**

May-themes 1p and 2p answer the second part of research question one (question I.b) and are as follows: May-theme-1p describes refugee parents’ concerns and aspirations for their children. May-theme-2p describes refugee parents’ relationship with their children’s school.

**Figure 4.2 Themes That Emerged During the May, 2012 Research with Refugee Parents.**

May-themes 3p through 7p answer the second part of research question two (question II.b) as follows: May-theme-3p explains refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education in their native countries. May-themes 4p, 5p and 6p discuss refugee parents’ involvement at their children’s school, at home and outside of school,
respectively. Finally, May-theme-7p describes barriers to parents’ involvement in their children’s education (see Figure 4.2.)

**Research Question I: What is the Perception of Refugee Parents Regarding Their Children’s Elementary School and Education Program?**

This section will include responses to research questions I.a, and I.b. A brief summary of findings is discussed as the last part of this section.

**Research question I.a: what is the perception of refugee parents regarding their children’s elementary school and education program prior to parent participation in a family literacy program?** January-theme-1p and January-theme-2p discuss perceptions of newly arrived refugee parents with regards to their children’s education in their children’s school prior to their participation in FLP.

**January-theme-1p: parents’ concerns and aspirations.** All Nepali parents in the focus group expressed happiness and satisfaction with the education that their children receive at Global Elementary School (GES). The refugee parents interviewed in this study exhibited optimism with the educational opportunities that are available to their children in their new country. The following statements, conveyed through the interpreter, reflect refugee parents’ enthusiasm regarding their children’s education at GES:

Rekha: She is happy compared to her country, the kids are learning very fast, very nicely, and it has been a kind of high standard education.

Rose: Even though she doesn’t speak good English, she said the kids are learning very standard education so she is extremely happy.
Baem Bahadur: This is the beginning of education so he’s expecting good things to happen.

Levy Chan: So compared to Nepal it’s great it’s almost as good as far as it is so he is very happy.

School admission policies, particularly the requirements for immunizations, require many trips to the doctor’s office and a series of paperwork to be filled out. Lack of transportation and interpreters make it difficult for refugees to fulfill these requirements in a timely manner. Therefore, there are extensive delays in children’s admission to school, which can be frustrating for refugee parents. This frustration was expressed by Naseem, as he indicated that it took him one and a half months before his children were enrolled in schools after their arrival to America, largely due to lack of an interpreter and transportation.

Raising children within the US cultural context can expose refugee children to values that are different and often conflict with the family’s core values. This exposure is a bittersweet experience, and contributes to stress for refugee parents. The following statement reflects the level of concern and anxiety caused by unfamiliarity with the American culture and environment.

Naseem: I was worried because their (American) culture is different from ours and I didn’t know what kind of culture they had. And the habits we have they don’t have. I was worried that God forbid the kids don’t go in a bad direction. From the time they (children) would go to school until they arrived home… and if they were even one minute late we used to become very worried about what has happened to our kids.
January-theme-2p: parent-school relationship. This theme provided insight in terms of parents’ perceptions regarding the school environment and whether they felt welcomed in their children’s school. In the context of their focus group or individual interview, all parents expressed high regard for the teachers, school staff and the principal. Refugee parents’ endorsement and level of comfort in their children’s school are indicated in the following statements:

Naseem: They are very nice. The teachers, the principal are very nice.

Susma: She feels happy, feels kind of excited to be in the school where the kids are.

Rekha: She has got a good relationship, she’s happy to be in a good relationship between the school and herself.

Data gathered during January, 2012 indicated that parents generally had a positive view of the education their children were receiving in their new school. All of the parents were very optimistic about their children’s future in America. None of the Nepali parents discussed any significant concern regarding their children in America neither culturally nor academically. Naseem was the only parent who indicated that he was very worried about his children getting mixed up in situations that would be against their cultural values.

Research question I.b: what is the perception of refugee parents regarding their children’s elementary school and education program after parent participation in a family literacy program? Based on data collected during May, 2012, May-themes-1p and 2p discuss perceptions of refugee parents regarding their children’s education in school after parent participation in FLP.
May-theme-1p: parents’ concerns and aspirations. All parents in the focus groups and interview expressed satisfaction with the rate of their children’s progress. Two of the parents were able to purchase computers for their children and continue to practice at home what is being taught in school. As the children continue to improve their English language skills, they help their parents and siblings with learning the language as well. The following participant statements exemplify responses concerning their perceptions regarding their children’s education:

Levy Chan: The kids are focused more on their studies, they’re doing homework sometimes and then since they have access to computer now the kids explore the computer and find different new things. So he feels that things are more improving and changed.

Don Bahadur: His children are helping him also to read. Yeah, even they get homework help from the kids.

Hary Bahadur: His kids actually didn’t know how to choose a book, which book to read, but now they can at least choose the book, find the book for themselves, read the correct book.

Baem Bahadur: So since he doesn’t know how to speak English, how to write in English a lot, the elder daughter helps the younger brother and the father together to read and write at home.

As the parents became more familiar with American education system, they were able to compare some aspects of the methods used in their children’s school. For instance, all of the Nepali fathers expressed some concerns regarding their children’s behavior and how it was being handled in school. Parents explained that in Nepal, if
children got into a fight in school, regardless of the reasons, they would either be sent home or more often they would get beaten by “sticks.” While here in America, the children can justify their reasons for fighting, and may get away without being punished. Therefore, children may take advantage of this method:

Hary Bahadur: Kids come from a different kind of educational system where the teachers would punish the kids if they ever broke a fight. Here the kids are never punished by the teachers, so … kids might take advantage of that … education in Nepal is very strict…they will be punished by the teachers, but here punishments are not allowed.

The Nepali parents in both focus groups agreed that their children speak better English and have made more friends. Even though they were satisfied with this, they were also worried. Most parents expressed their fear that since the children are not fluent in English, they may miscommunicate with other kids from other countries, who are also English learners, and may end up fighting each other, which may cause them to be expelled from school or fail in class. They expressed great aspirations for their children’s education and bright future, and did not want bad behavior to become an obstacle in the way of their academic progress. When asked to provide a justification for this rationale, the intensity of their concern became evident as their voices became louder and each of the participants tried to make a statement. The interpreter tried to sum up the heated discussion that had taken place among the parents as he provided the following reasons for their fear: first, the parents pointed out, that their children may look different from other kids and can be discriminated against, and second, they may not be able to articulate their intentions clearly because the children are not fluent in English, and that
may cause a miscommunication. The following statements by parents reflect their deep concerns:

Baem Bahadur: His (son) is Asian and he might pick up a fight with someone else, or somebody might beat him in the school since he doesn’t fit in with the other kids. So he’s scared for if some people… if the students attack the kids.

Lavy Chan: He’s concerned about the kids’ education, he doesn’t want the kids to fail the exam, he doesn’t want the kids to be attacked at school…he’s more concerned about the physical safety of the kids in terms of like a fight in the classroom.

Hary Bahadur: He just tried to share the story of his kids having friendship with the other American kids and other kids from the other different ethnic groups… they might pick a fight at any time, or they might not understand each other’s language and there might be a problem and the education is the thing that he’s more concerned about. He doesn’t want the kids to fail.

**May-theme-2p: parent-school relationship.** All parents affirmed the friendliness of the school staff and environment. They indicated that their presence at GES on a daily basis has helped them develop a positive relationship with their children’s teachers and other school staff. The warm and positive interactions between refugee parents and the school staff were observed by the researcher during her multiple visits to GES. The following statements provide examples of parents’ perceptions regarding their relationship with GES staff:

Lavy Chan: This program (FLP) has helped him build a good relationship with the school and they also sit together with the kids (during PACT) and they can
also understand what things are going through the kids. So he says his child when he came from Nepal (didn’t understand what was being said in class) but now he’s been able to respond to the teachers and understand the context of the study. So he’s been very happy to be in this program and feels that the school and him has been brought closer.

Baem Bahadur: So he’s very happy. The relationship with the teachers have been very nice. Since the (FLP) program has started he knows all the teachers of the kids, sits together with the kids which makes him understand the educational status, the educational capabilities of the student.

Hary Bahadur, whose children are enrolled in four different schools mentioned that: This is the only school where he can go to the kids where he has a very fine relationship with all of the teachers and all the people who are working together so that has made him feel more happier.

Parents pointed out that their presence has made them become part of the school community and has helped them alleviate some of the pressures of being in a new country:

**Question I Summary**

At the beginning of the school year, refugee parents expressed strong hope regarding the education their children received at GES. None of the parents expressed any concern regarding the quality of the education their children received. Only one parent was very concerned about the social aspect of his children’s education in their new country, because he understood the American culture to be very different from his own. As the year progressed, with increased familiarity with the American education system
and improved English language, the refugee parents were better able to assess and compare the American education system versus their own cultural values and the education systems placed in their native countries. Consequently, they began to question some aspects of the education their children received and acquired higher expectations for their children. The methods by which children are disciplined here in the United States, stood out as an area of cultural conflict for refugee parents.

During both the January, 2012 data collection and May, 2012, all of the parents reported that the school provided a friendly and welcoming environment from the beginning of the school year. According to the researcher’s observation, every morning, the principal stood outside to greet the students and their parents as they entered the school building. The principal shook hands with parents and took the time for a polite conversation. As the researcher was waiting in the office meet with the principal one morning, she observed many students after getting off the school buses, walked in the office to greet the secretary, who would walk around her desk to hug and greed each child. Refugee parents and children, who were new to America and to GES, were treated with respect, understanding and sensitivity by the school staff. As a consequence of their presence at GES on a daily basis, they were able to develop strong ties with their children’s teachers, other parents and the school staff.

Research Question II: How Do Refugee Parents Define Parent Involvement in Education?

This section will provide answer question II.a, and question II.b. A brief summary of findings is discussed at the end of this section.
Research question II.a: how do refugee parents define parent involvement in education prior to participation in a family literacy program?

This section provides a detailed description of refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education prior to their participation in FLP from several perspectives. In January-theme-3p, parent participants discuss the similarities and differences that may exist in the level and types of parent participation in American schools versus in their native lands. January-themes 4p, 5p, and 6p describe how refugee parents are involved in their children’s education by participating in their school activities, at home and outside of school. Finally, a list of barriers is detailed in January-theme-7p that may prevent refugee parents from participating in their children’s education.

January-theme-3p: parent involvement in native country. Most Nepali parents acknowledged that parent participation in their native country is similar to what is expected of parents here in the United States. The parents stated that they used to receive invitations to attend parent-teacher conferences and social functions at their children’s schools in Nepal as well. However, parents were more active in their children’s schools in Nepal since it was much easier to communicate and express what needed to be said because both the teachers and parents spoke in the same language, as indicated in these statements through the interpreter:

Susma and Don Bahadur: They used to get called for the meetings and kind of social functions also they would attend. It was more easier there that it was the same language so they could express more things compared to the American education system.
Levy Chan echoed the above statement and added: …, he would understand everything so he would explain things more clearly and precisely.

Hary Bahadur: He doesn’t really find a difference in between parent and school relationship in comparison to the American and the Nepali school system…they used to get letters from the school, they used to get kind of invitations for the meetings and also they would go. So… the parent and school relationship was more similar.

Even though Davy Ram was not a parent when he was in Nepal, but he remembers his parents being involved in his education. After his parents died, those responsibilities were transferred to his older brother:

Davy Ram: He was a student back in his country so he also remembers that his parents would come to the school frequently and take care of his educational things. They used to ask the teachers how his education was going.

Naseem, on the other hand, stated that the education system in Afghanistan was completely different from the one here in the U.S. Parents were not expected to come to school unless there was an issue. Educating children was primarily the responsibility of the school.

Naseem: We have a different culture back home, and parents are not required to come to school as much as here (America). When our kids went to school in Afghanistan, we were not required to participate in any events or meet with teachers as much as it is required here in America.

*January-theme-4p: parent involvement at school.* Most school functions happen after school and in the evening, which makes it difficult for many new arrivals to take
part in those activities. All of the parent participants reported inconsistent participation in school activities with the exception of Harry Bahadur who reported that despite having difficulties, he has not missed any of the activities in his children’s schools. All refugee parents in this study exhibited a strong desire to participate in their children’s school activities. Nevertheless, there are many factors that made it difficult for them to do that as indicated by the following statements:

Maan Bahadur: He’s extremely happy that the kids are in this school, so he’s been making frequent visits to the school.

Don Bahadur: He has also focused on the distance between his house and the school and the problem and barriers that he has been facing to be able to come to the school during the social events and meetings…he has been able to be here for a couple of times in the past.

Rose: She has been able to come to the classes apart from the problem of bus passes and transportation she’s been trying her best to be here to support, to get supported also.

Levy Chan: … language has been a big, big barrier so we have not been able to attend …because of language…

January-theme-5p: parent involvement at home. Parents reported a host of activities that they considered as supporting children’s education at home. These activities ranged from helping with homework to watching educational television programs with their child(ren.) Parents also reported reading to their children either in English or in their native language. Three of the parents stated that because they don’t know how to read, they ask their children to read to them using books they bring home
from the school library. Parents used different strategies and resources available to them in order to support their children’s education at home as demonstrated in the following statements:

Susma: She has papers, writing pens, markers and she writes the sentences and she tries to teach the sentences that she knows to the kids.

Rose: she’s got two kids, one boy, one girl, the girl has got after school programs so right after the end of the regular school system she remains in school,…after she goes home either she watches some programs related to education or she directly goes to the library… and the boy has been entered for the extra tutoring on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Other parents followed Rose’s comments and pointed out that they are doing the best they can with their own limited familiarity with the English language. Sometimes they ask their older children to help the younger ones, or ask their friends and neighbors to assist their children with school work:

Baem Bahadur: he lets the kids watch programs on television about cartoons and the programs related to education and he’s got a smaller kid and the other three are at least 10th grader so he himself is not educated but he wants the sisters to take care of the brother that’s very young.

Don Bahadur: He lets the kids watch programs related to education on TV and on computer,…he lets the kids go to the nearby house where the other boys are more educated and he wants the kids to get involved with them for their homework,… they come home around 8:00 and he tells the kids to sleep and he makes them wake up early in the morning and… they come to the school..
Parents also indicated that they support their children’s education via other methods such as providing them with good nutrition, enough sleep, school supplies and time to do homework:

Naseem: I do not want my kids to remember those hardships (during our flee from Afghanistan until arrival to America) and want to erase all of those bad experiences from their minds so they can be very well educated, have good nutrition and worry free life so they can have a great future (in America.)

Other times, parents said, they just have to trust their children:

Maan Bahadur: …the problem that he doesn’t speak English and he doesn’t understand the writings of the English. Whenever he asks that kids that if they are done with those they say yes, he understands that they are done but he cannot really check what’s going on because he’s not educated himself.

Naseem: At night, after dinner, I help my children with their homework. Sometimes when I could not help them with homework because of my lack of English, then (the homework doesn’t get done.)

After exhausting their strategies and resources, parents reported that they relied on teachers to help their children with school work.

*January-theme-6p: parent involvement outside of school.* Not all refugee groups have organized communities. As indicated by Nepali parents, they do not have organized native communities that would have organized social events for them to attend. Nevertheless, when there is a special event such as the birth of a child, funerals and weddings, some of the families come together and attend these social events with their children.
After a lengthy dialogue among the parents, the interpreter summed up the discussion in the following statement:

Interpreter: They (Nepali parents) don’t really have a community center or they don’t have any kind of association related to community but they all get a chance to meet each other when during time of funeral… birthdays,… social events… so those are the times when they can at least meet with their people and talk to each other.

Rose: Her kids go to church every Sunday …on Saturdays they go around to visit the reading center.

Four of the parents also pointed out that they visit their friends at their homes with their children. Seven parents reported that they visit the local public library and local Chinese and Indian stores with their children. When asked if they go to the museums or movies, they all chuckled and through the interpreter responded that they had no idea where those places (the movies and the museums) were.

**January-theme-7p: barriers to parent involvement.** Refugees encounter a variety of difficulties as they attempt to navigate their way through the American education system. Multiple items were identified as barriers to parents’ involvement in their children’s education. These barriers are based on unfamiliarity with the English language, transportation, family issues, personal safety and times of the events. The following sub-themes summarize the primary barriers experienced by refugee parents participated in this study (see Figure 4.3).
Language. A strong theme across participant statements concerned the importance of learning the English language and being able to communicate effectively. With the exception of Davy Ram, the parent participants had no or extremely limited exposure to the English language prior to their coming to America. On the other hand, the school staff was unfamiliar with refugee parents’ native languages, and locating a reliable interpreter who would be fluent in English was scarce. Therefore, the parents and school staff were unable to verbally communicate with each other as much as they wanted to, which made it frustrating for both parties. Inability to effectively communicate in English as an added stress, affect refugee families at different levels as exhibited in the following statements made by refugee parents:

Naseem: Because I do not understand English well, I can not communicate my problems with our case worker. Most of the times there is no interpreter and so I can not express my issues clearly. The landlord demands his rent, and sometimes our money from DSS (Department of Social Services) comes late and the landlord wants us to empty his house. When I go to see my case worker, …because I can not clearly explain my issues, and sometimes, when there is a translator, he
explains some but not all of my problems, and therefore, our problems remain unsolved most of the time. My problems affect my children. When they see me worried, they are worried too. In the past, our kids have seen war and difficulty in Afghanistan. We don’t want to worry them anymore. I can not even work because of my English. Lack of English is our biggest problem.

These comments were echoed by all of the parents in the focus group as well. According to parents, their inability to communicate in English had an effect on their children, because the parents were not able to help them with their homework or communicate effectively with school staff.

Susma: … she has the problem of language so she is not really able to express everything that she wanted to. She feels very happy when she meets (with the teacher).

Naseem: Because we (my wife and I) did not know English. The kids knew some – not much – but some English they could talk a bit, but my wife and I had a lot of difficulties because we could not express what was in our hearts to their teachers. Sometimes, there were interpreters, but what they were translating was not to our satisfaction.

Most of the time parents rely on their children because they speak better English than their parents do. At times, this creates mistrust between parents and their children because what the children relay to their parents do not correspond with the messages parents receive from the school.

Don Bahadur: He knows the value of relationship between the school and the parents but the problem is he cannot speak the language, … he also can’t afford
with interpreter for every visit to the school so …he is kind of feeling unhappy that the kids go home and say that we’ve been studying well,… that the home works are done, …things are going well in the school, but he gets a letter in the mailbox stating that the kids are failing.

Parents pointed out that several times they have received phone calls from school, but because of their unfamiliarity with English and inability to communicate, they missed parent-teacher conferences and other important events at their children’s school.

The written communication from school is in English. Therefore, the parents do not understand that as well. When asked whether it would help to have the letters translated in their native languages, parents who were illiterate in their native language, said it was not a solution for them.

Parents asserted that sometimes they have a translator helping them out, but not all the time. They accentuated the importance of having a full time translator at the school or having an adult who spoke their native language on the school staff.

*Transportation.* Transportation was another sub-theme that emerged from the interview and focus groups with refugee parents. Refugee parents live in different locations in the city and most of them live far from where their children attend school. None of the nine parents in this study either owned a vehicle, or a driver’s license to operate a vehicle. Even if they tried taking public transportation to come to school for an event or meeting, they might have to take multiple buses to travel. Furthermore, because some of them live far from a bus station, it becomes difficult for them in the winter to wait in the cold for the bus at a bus stop. Likewise, since refugee parents can not afford to pay for a baby sitter, they bring their children along with them to school. The
combination of the cold weather, money for the bus passes for the family, and the time it takes for them to travel to and from the school, makes it very difficult for refugee parents to attend most of the school functions. Lack of transportation has resulted in missing appointments and meetings at school, as was reiterated by several parents:

Maan Bahadur: He is also focused on transportation, that he has to at least travel a couple of buses by the time he has to reach here, so he’s also emphasizing on the language that had he had some interpreters to translate at the time of his visit he could have expressed more things that he wanted to.

Don Bahadur and Levy Chan: They told the school that they had to walk alone to stand in the freezing cold waiting for the bus, the changing buses. The meeting (at the school) probably ended at 7:00 (pm) and they were home for 10:15 or 10:30 (pm).

Susma: So apart from English our problem is sometimes she has a problem with transportation, she doesn’t really have bus passes on time sometimes, that’s one reason that she can’t regularly come to the school.

Efforts have been made by the school to help relieve some of the transportation issues by asking volunteers to provide refugee parents with rides back to their homes, but these efforts have been inconsistent.

Unfamiliarity with the area. Many parents lived a long distance from where their children attend school. Insufficient public transportation and unfamiliarity with their new environment made it difficult for them to be involved in school activities.

Naseem: Because we are unfamiliar with the city and directions, we would end up in a different location and eventually miss whatever it was in our kids school that
we intended to attend. Sometimes, even if we have the address, and the address is not clear, we end up someplace else.

One parent pointed out that if his children miss the school bus, they will have to miss school that day.

Baem Bahadur: Because he does not have transportation to take his children to school and since he lives far from the school, he has to take two buses each way and it will take him a long time to travel by the city bus to bring his kids to school, and is afraid to get lost.

*Family responsibilities.* Most parents explained how they are overwhelmed with doctor’s appointments, grocery shopping, appointment with the Department of Social Services and other family responsibilities. Due to lack of transportation, unfamiliarity with the community and lack of English, it takes them a long time to accomplish these responsibilities. For example, they have to wait for hours in the DSS waiting room until it is their turn to meet with their case worker. By the time they find their way back home exhausted, it is evening and they have to prepare meals for their children and put them to bed. This issue was also observed by the researcher during her visits to GES. Parents had to miss school in order to meet their family obligations. At times, one appointment can take an entire day, and does not leave any time for them to attend school events.

Naseem: During the week, I spend around 50% of my time with the children and the other 50% I spend taking care of other responsibilities for the family. Because I do not have a car, I walk to public market once a week and carry vegetables home.
**Personal Safety.** Parents reported a few incidents of being attacked in their neighborhoods. Since most of the functions at the school take place in the evenings, it is very dangerous for them to walk home when it is dark at night. Several parents gave details of some of the attack incidents against the refugees in their neighborhoods. Through the interpreter, they tried to convey that:

Maan Bahadur: …he also focused on one of the attacks that he faced from some boys in the street so he has been attacked once, he has been jumped so he stopped coming (to evening functions at school).

Don Bahadur: he has also attended at least four to five kinds of events and meetings so he does focus on personal security, that’s been one of the issues for the whole community at the moment.

Davy Ram: at the moment there are numerous incidents that suggest that our people (the Nepales) who are new to this country have been jumped,.. robbed… hit… and made victim of the streets, so they don’t want to be in that kind of situation where they can be out of their personal security. So that’s one thing that’s really hindering them to come to the school.

Each of the Nepali refugee parents in the focus group shared their unique but similar stories that sent a strong message about their fear of walking in their neighborhoods, especially at night.

**Research question II.b: how do refugee parents define parent involvement in education after participation in a family literacy program?** This section provides a detailed description of refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education after their participation in FLP, from several perspectives. May-themes-4p, 5p, and 6p describe
how refugee parents are involved in their children’s education by participating in their school activities, at home and outside of school. Finally, a list of barriers that may still exist is detailed in May-theme-7p that prevent refugee parents from participating in their children’s education.

May-theme-3p: parent involvement in native country. In conversation regarding the similarities and differences in parent involvement between the United States and their native countries, the Nepali parents indicated that parents in Nepal were expected to participate in their children’s education as in the United States. Naseem, however stated that it was not the case in Afghanistan. Parents are more involved at home to support their children’s education such as providing help with homework, school supplies…etc. Parents were not expected to physically come to school unless there was an issue. This theme remained the same throughout the data collection both in January, 2012 and again in May, 2012.

May-theme-4p: parent involvement at school. All parents reported that they are more active in school functions now than they were at the beginning of the school year. According to parents, one of the reasons for their increased ability to participate in school activities is that the teachers and the principal provide them with rides to and from the school.

All parents enthusiastically volunteered to share information regarding the progress they were making in learning the English language, American education system and culture. They described how much easier life has become due to feasibility of communication with school staff and other individuals. It appears that these individuals were motivated to a higher level of participation and learning because they felt welcomed
and accepted by the teachers and staff at GES, and the opportunity for them to advance
their learning was provided. The following participants’ statements reflect their
enthusiasm and increased comfort level:

Naseem: in the morning, we go to gym - a big hall where all the kids and adults
get together. First they sing the pledge of allegiance. Then the kids sing songs
…through songs and poems, they (the teachers) encourage children to love their
country. It is a great idea for the kids and also for us (adults). I am used to it now,
and as I listen and sing with them, I am also learning a lot.

Naseem also claimed that when he visits the doctor’s office, even though he is
not familiar with the medical terms, he knows enough English to explain his problem and
make the doctor understand the issue. The parents pointed out that since their English has
improved, they have become more confident and can talk to their children’s teachers and
explain what they want to say:

Rose: One time when her son missed the bus, she was able to call the school and
the school sent another bus for her son to be picked up. This was something she
was not able to do at the beginning of the school year because of lack of English.
If the kid is not home by the time (they are) supposed to, she calls the school and
asks what’s going on.

Don Bahadur: There has been a lot of improvement since the (last) time we
talked. So they actually learned a little bit more English and… how to talk to
people. Things have been more comfortable for them to come to the school.
Hary Bahadur: They’ve been very much courageous since last time. They have the courage to at least speak to the teacher, at first they would not respond to the teacher, but now they can …ask the teacher of their concern.

Some of the parents also indicated that as they are increasing their knowledge of English, they have become more independent. Even though their English is not perfect, if they can’t find interpreters, they have enough vocabulary to hold a conversation. The researcher observed parents initiating conversations with the school staff and among each other in English; these interactions were rarely observed at the beginning of the school year.

*May-theme-5p: parent involvement at home.* All parents reported that they continue to support their children’s education at home in the same manner as they had done in the past. Additionally, since their English has improved they have become more involved in their children’s homework.

Naseem: unlike in the past… now that I have learned more English, I am interested more in their (children’s) homework…I also want them to learn about what is going on in the world…of the most current news. I read more English now and less Dari(native language). We read more English, because I want to learn it too.

Rose: she checks the homework …and… wants the homework to be first and then go TV and then go to computer.

Susma: They (Susma and her husband) do help the kids do their homework, so the father/mother sometimes sit together with the kid and they help the kids do the
homework. So now that they understand more English they understand more what the homework is.

Naseem: When they (the children) read, I listen and sometimes, I read to them and I ask them to listen to how I read. Sometimes, I don’t pronounce some words correctly… so, I ask the kids to listen to me and correct me if I don’t sound right.

**May-theme-6p: parent involvement outside of school.** Parents indicated that no significant changes had taken place in this area. All parents affirmed that they still visit their families and friends occasionally. However, since the older children have expanded their social lives and have found new friends, they do not always join their parents on their visits to market or friends’ houses. Younger children continue to accompany their parents whenever they are asked to go.

Rose: They (the children) are more engaged with their friends at home so they don’t really want to go around with the parents, so the kid went to the zoo once. They are more interested in friendship with other kids,.. they play together. They don’t really take the kids but… shopping… they take them. The parents don’t have access to go to places like Planetarium, Auditorium, Museum, I’m not sure if they really know where those places are.

Rose, whose husband used to teach in Nepal, insisted that the reason she and her family have progressed in speaking English was her decision to isolate her family from her native friends who were close neighbors. She stated that when they were close to her Nepali neighbors, the children spoke in their native language, but now that they live in a different area (where they moved two months ago), the children are forced to speak English with the kids in their new neighborhood, who are not from Nepal.
From the conversation with the fathers, it appeared that the local church has been taking the children to different field trips around the community, as stated:

Levy Chan:…wants to participate in child’s activities outside the school but some people from the church come and pick the kids up and took the kids to the church and they bring them back home. So they went to the zoo.

Naseem reported that he still keeps a tight schedule: On Thursdays, we go to a church where they teach English to kids…every Thursday. Saturdays and Sundays, we take the kids to Park, beach or some other places that we still have not seen so they have a rest. We go to the library a lot, we also go to museum sometimes.

Hary Bahadur stated that on Saturdays his family attends another local school that offers English classes to refugee families. All of the Nepali parents mentioned that apart from a few libraries, they still have no idea where the local planetarium, auditorium or museums are located.

**May-theme-7p: barriers to parent involvement.** This section discusses the factors that still remain as barriers to refugee parents’ participation in their children’s education including language, transportation, family issues, personal safety and times of the events (see Figure 4.4):
Figure 4.4. Sub-themes That Emerged as Barriers to Parent Involvement During the May, 2012 Research with Refugee Parents.

Language. When asked if language still remains the primary barrier in communication, the focus group participants unanimously agreed that it remains a strong barrier, despite improvements in their ability to communicate better. Since they have been able to somewhat communicate better verbally, the written communication remains a big issue because all of the school correspondence is sent home in English:

Susma: all the letters are in English so they take it to the one who knows English in the community and someone translates for them.

Rekha: she has some problem, she takes the letter to the ones who know English in the community and gets help from the community and they translate so they understand.

Because of their limited English, the parents feel helpless in checking their children’s academic progress and ensuring that the children are living up to their parents’ high expectations:

Hary Bahadur: the kids really don’t speak exactly the same English that the teacher speaks, so he want the kids to be very attentive to the classroom and learn the activities, and he’s a little bit afraid that if the kids are really participating in
learning activities, if they are really concentrated for the studies, if they are really listening to the teachers.

Transportation. Transportation continues to remain a strong factor that hinders refugee parents’ participation in school activities. Overall, with the exception of Baem Bahadur, parents reported increased participation in school events in the last few months. The main reason for this perception was explained in the following statement:

Don Bahadur: They (parents) have been able to come to the meetings cause the teachers come pick them up and drop them off.

Baem Bahadur: So for him it’s kind of same because he doesn’t have the car so he’s got to go find public transportation and safety issue since he looks different from all the other American community so it’s not easy for him to walk about if the conferences are at evening time. So he feels that things are still the same.

Unfamiliarity with the area: Even though refugee parents indicated that they were better familiar with their neighborhoods than they were at the time of their arrival to America, they remained reluctant to travel anywhere alone due to fear of getting lost.

Family responsibilities. One Nepali mother, Rekha, indicated that she can not participate in school events because they are usually at night and she needs to stay home with her children. The other two mothers, Rose and Susma agreed:

She has a small baby at home; but she participates sometime when the teachers provide rides. Her husband works at night and she has to stay home with the children, so she doesn’t go to meetings if they are at nighttime.

Personal safety. Responses from the participants highlight some of the difficulties refugee parents face, regarding personal safety, as they try to adjust in their new
community. For instance, throughout the interviews, the participants typically appeared very relaxed, but as soon as the participants expressed concerns regarding personal safety, their voices became forceful and their bodies became tense. It was obvious that these parents felt very stressed and concerned about their own safety as well as their families:

Susma: most men are jumped, robbed, face the physical aggressor from the boys but the cases (that are) more common in women… are… groceries are stolen, they stole the food stamps, mobile phone, gold chain from the ladies while walking on the street.

Baem Bahadur: He’s been jumped once by some boys and… his friend was jumped. He still feels that things are not that much improving in terms of security, and the distance from his home to his school is one of the reasons that he has not been able to attend the meetings. Last Saturday his friend was attacked. The fear of the violence against them, especially in the evening was clearly evident in the statements made by the parents. Most of them refused to take the bus or walk, mostly because of a fear for personal safety. After an emotional discussion among fathers, the interpreter indicated to the researcher what was discussed in the following statement:

Nepali parents: Most of the meetings are in the evening time… when most bad people are acting… if the teachers don’t pick them up and drop them off it’s not an easy thing for them to catch the bus and come to the meeting.

Rekha: If the meetings and other kind of activities are organized during the time of her (husband’s) job she will not come.
Question II Summary

Several barriers existed that limited parents’ physical presence in many of the after school events at the beginning of the school year. Most of the barriers remained the same after participating in FLP for few months. However, with increased English, parents were able to communicate better and use strategies to advocate for themselves. For instance, they were able to ask school staff for rides to and from school and therefore, were able to participate in some of the after school activities.

The parents reported increased social capital after being in school for several months, which also resulted in their interest to participate in school activities. They reported more comfort in the level of communication with school staff and with other parents. Due to their daily involvement and presence at school, especially during PACT where they were present in their children’s classrooms, the parents became exposed to methods in which their children were being taught and acquired different strategies to help their children at home. Additionally, they became keen observers of the interactions that occurred between the teachers and the students. Even though they appreciated the teachers’ love and affection towards the children, they became critical of the discipline strategies used at school.

Research Question III: How do School Personnel, Including Teachers and the Principal Describe Refugee Parent Involvement?

This section is divided into three parts, Research Question, 3.a, Research Question 3.b, and Section Summary. A total of five distinct themes emerged during the research conducted with teachers and the principal through interviews and focus groups. Five themes emerged during the research conducted in January, 2012 (see Figure 4.5),
and the same five themes were identified during research conducted in May, 2012 (see Figure 4.5).

The themes that emerged during January, 2012 data collection is identified as (January-theme-1s) through (January-theme-5s) and the themes that emerged during May, 2012 data collection are identified as (May-theme-1s) through (May-theme-5s) throughout this section.

Research question III.a - how do school personnel, including teachers and the principal describe refugee parent involvement prior to parents’ participation in a family literacy program? This section report findings of the study conducted during January, 2012 concerning the perception of teachers and the principal regarding refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education prior to refugee parents’ participation
in FLP. Five themes emerged during the January phase of data collection, which are described in detail as following:

**January-theme-1s: refugee families’ strengths.** Some of the words that the teachers and the principal described as refugee parents’ strengths include: deep love for their children, tenacity, patience, sacrifice, hard-work, perseverance, courage, experience, knowledge, determination, resiliency, desire for independence, and gratitude.

In general, refugees value education and view it as an important tool for ensuring success. Learning the English language in particular is considered a priority for refugees as it will help them with many aspects of their lives in the United States. Inability to speak English is the utmost stressor for refugees so much so that they are willing to sacrifice their own health in order to attend English classes, as explained in the following statement by Ellen, the FLP teacher:

They (refugee parents) are incredibly, incredibly hard workers. If they break their leg and it’s the middle of a blizzard they will still be at school. They have determination and drive that I’ve never had. Their learning comes first and foremost. Sometimes that has to come before their families too. Learning their English and being a part of our community …

Despite the immense difficulty of resettlement and recovery from past experiences, refugees often make remarkable progress and bring a wealth of resources and strengths to their new communities. Participants emphasized that refugee experiences can bring about qualities such as resilience and resourcefulness, adaptability, strong commitment to the family, the value of community, and strong desire to achieve
educationally. The following statements provide examples of what the school staff perceives as refugee families’ strengths:

Julie: I am just in awe of … what they put on the line for their children and to come here … the children grow to recognize some of that it has such an impact on them and there’s so much…so befuddling and so confusing and just their patience with us… I just learned so much from them. They’re such wonderful teachers about how we can welcome other children and families who are coming. That’s an amazing strength.

Teachers indicated that refugee parents show extraordinary strength in bringing their families to the United States, yet they often feel powerless as they try to navigate a new country and culture, as described in the following statement:

Joy: …just their experience and knowledge about so many things that we can’t even begin to understand…what they’ve gone through and …it’s amazing that they’re able to come… to school and it’s got to be terrifying. I can’t imagine going to a school in another country where I don’t understand what’s going on…the systems that are in place…they’re strong people and I really admire that.

The following statements reflect on how refugee families cope with many challenges as they acclimate in their new environment. Refugee families are remarkable assets who can offer many contributions to school. They bring new perspectives in school. Their customs and cultures can create a fertile learning environment about the world:
Mandy: The resiliency is very striking… not only love of their children but that sense of family and community… it’s really truly part of who they are and how they live.

Principal Adams:… whenever someone uproots themselves not because they wanted to but because they had to leave their country for safety… that’s very traumatic and it’s difficult to try to resettle in a completely different country with sometimes different cultural values… there’s definitely a level of grief that the families have to experience.

Refugee students often carry greater responsibilities that go beyond schooling. Some refugee children are often recovering from the effects of torture and trauma, which may mean they feel depressed or angry among other symptoms. Others may have been too young to consciously remember their experience but may be living with relatives who express their pain in ways the young person may not understand or feel able to cope with, as an example provided by Ann:

…one of the most dramatic stories… was when I was teaching cello to the kids and letting them play it and I showed a picture of YoYo Ma… to the kids… there was a Vietnamese girl who started crying… because the music was so beautiful and she’s like ‘he looks like me, can I please take this music home to my mom… if I play this music for my mom I think it will heal her heart. She told me her mother was a slave in Vietnam and she had been beaten and had all these scars on her back and at night it was this girl’s job to rub salve into her mother’s back and she loved playing this YoYo Ma CD.
All teachers pointed out the importance of education for refugee parents through examples and stories of how, despite difficulties and challenges, they make sure to come to school. The principal offered the example of one newly arrived Nepali father who was jumped in his neighborhood and badly beaten. The next day he came to school with his face wrapped with a scarf. When he removed his scarf, the principal noticed his broken jaw and helped him get medical attention.

Participants stated that through patience and understanding, working with refugees can be very rewarding, because it becomes a mutual learning experience for both the refugees as well as the school staff.

Ellen: The best part is I don’t just work with one parent, I work with their entire family…and I get to influence their entire family.

Principal Adams: They are teaching me about different global perspectives and I always feel it’s very rewarding working with the (refugee) families.

Mandy: our family literacy parents won an award for being good neighbors via the Red Cross and it was for their work in the garden, for the fallen soldier who had died in Afghanistan, and one of the parents knew the region where he had been killed and it was very touching for that parent to be able to give the gift of that garden to this soldier’s family… a poem and…a song that was sung but it was just so touching to see the gesture of the heart for this gift that was given by this parent for this family who had given him the gift of their son and their husband…

January-theme-2s: refugee families’ challenges. All six participants including teachers and the principal cited several items as challenges for refugee families that may
prevent full participation in their children’s schooling. The following are sub-themes based on the feedback received from all participants (see Figure 4.6):

**Figure 4.6.** Sub-theme –2s: Refugees’ Families Challenges - January, 2012

*Language.* Language barriers are a fundamental hurdle for refugee parents in this study and appear to stop them from making vital connections in their children’s school. The following statement reflects on how lack of familiarity with the English language, and the inability to clearly communicate intentions can not only effect communication between school and refugee parents, but can also cause misunderstanding among parents of different cultures:

Mandy: There was a time when we had parents that were very angry about something that was shared and because it was so different culturally we had Muslim parents and Jewish parents that were battling out after a performance and I was so frustrated because we didn’t have translators there, and when people get very emotional you go back to your native tongue immediately and it just escalated and got higher and higher and finally we had to step away and agree to come back again to the table when we could truly communicate.
It becomes difficult to advocate for self if one does not have the language to do so. Inability to communicate in English can be intimidating for refugee parents and it leaves them powerless to stand up for their rights as indicated by Ellen:

They (refugee parents) are very intimidated to ask questions. They don’t have the language to be their own advocates and they are just nervous at the doctor’s office to ask the doctor a question for clarification, …. As soon as an American says no they don’t know how to keep going forward or maybe they just don’t have that courage yet and I think that they sometimes hide behind their language barriers.

A language barrier can also be a source of frustration for parents due to occasional role reversal in families, causing tensions between parents and their children.

Principal Adams: The children tend to learn English much quicker than the parents and the parents are still the patriarchs and matriarchs of the family, but having… the child interpret and translate and take care of what is usually considered adult tasks like paying bills or contacting certain service organizations like gas and electric… the parents have to give over some of their power as adults, which is very difficult.

_Transportation_. Transportation is another major hindrance for refugee parent participation in school activities. Most of the refugee parents do not own a car and have to use the public transportation system. Because they don’t usually live in close proximity of the school, they may have to take more than one bus, which can take hours for them to travel to and from the school:

Ellen: I make a lot of after school activities mandatory, but the biggest hurdle that we’ve found is that parents are uncomfortable leaving the house when it’s dark
and a lot of our activities happen after school and... around 5:00 or 6:00 and because they only use the bus system for transportation they have to get all of their children on the bus, that’s a $3 bus pass each, a day bus pass.

Teachers reported concerns about refugee families’ limited transportation options. Getting themselves and their children to and from school is their biggest concern. Many refugees need to walk long distances, sometimes late at night and through unsafe neighborhoods, because they have no other way to get home:

Ellen: They have to come... here and then they have to go back on the bus in the dark and sometimes it takes two or three buses. It’s not that these new citizens don’t want to be a part of the school it’s that they’re intimidated and they’re nervous to get here.

Perception of self. According to the participants, sometimes refugee parents are not able to identify their own strengths and gifts that they bring to their new environment. Perhaps they have never been given the opportunity to recognize what they can contribute, or they are too intimidated to exhibit their competencies:

Mandy: It’s a struggle... the weakness is not fully understanding how hard it is to be successful in America, and part of that too is that you have to let go of the mindset that I am a refugee and not letting people put you into that kind of pigeonhole.

Ann: Being able to have a self perception of themselves as equals and as extremely capable of bringing their incredible gifts to the table to share. There’s a lot of differences and some of that is cultural or... the process that we need to go
through to help them to see themselves that they are equally on the same ground that everyone else is on now that they’re here. It’s a perception.

*Discrimination.* According to the FLP teacher, many of the refugee parents are discriminated and biased against and are looked down upon due to their different ethnic and cultural background, inside of the school as well as in the community. The intimidation that is caused as a result of prejudice and discrimination that refugees report they encounter, as well as the cultural differences, may deter them from seeking and receiving services. Language barriers and economic struggles that refugee families are faced with only add to this problem:

Ellen: There’s a stigma on them (refugees) that makes them seeking help very difficult. People have a fear of the unknown and, my students work very hard, but they only receive a certain amount of government assistance so some of their children come in every day in the same clothes or some of their meals are not what you would call nutritional because they’re inexpensive, but … some of them, have better parenting …and nutritional techniques than we as Americans do. I think that just because they may appear or speak or… do things differently, Americans …have this discrimination that automatically comes over them and… until that can be overcome my students are never going to feel 100% comfortable in this environment.

Discrimination impacts negatively on a person’s life chances and is a powerful barrier to successful settlement among refugees. Many refugees have been discriminated against because of their physical appearances, language, culture, nationality and religion. Discrimination is a major cause of social inequality and has a negative impact on the
distribution of life chances for refugee families, including access to education, employment, housing and good health.

*American education system.* Education many be viewed differently by refugee parents from their cultural perspective. Some refugees may feel that it is best not to interfere with what the school teaches, that the teacher knows best. Sometimes refugee parents have a difficult time comprehending the procedures and culture of the U.S. educational system and get frustrated with their children’s placement. In some countries, students are promoted to next grade based on their proficiency in their current grade. Students may have to repeat the same grade multiple times until they are determined to be ready for promotion to the next grade level. In the American education system, student placement is done based on their age. Telling refugee parents that their children are performing multiple grades below their current grade can be upsetting to them as in this story described by Joy, the fifth grade teacher participant:

This student in our class who is… struggling with reading and math and she was evaluated… but the services that she’s receiving (does not show) as much progress… we met with her father …he… voiced his frustrations with our school system… not understanding how that whole process works- how kids are evaluated and why is it that kids are passed on to another grade level if they’re not performing at that grade level …. he didn’t understand how a child could be let’s say in 5th grade but they can’t do 3rd grade math…

Navigating systems that may be very different than their own can be confusing for refugees. Most refugees come from countries where they were not able to participate in decisions made about them or their families. They may have not always trusted the decisions made for them in their countries by the systems, but they might not have had
the freedom to oppose or reject those decisions. Therefore, it will take time for them to
learn that in America, they actually have a right to express their opinions and make a
difference in decisions made about their children’s schooling:

Joy: Sometimes it’s difficult to understand the systems that are in place here, the
educational system, the government,… We need to do a better job about
educating parents about their rights …to make decisions about their child’s
education …refugee parents, sometimes… trust the school to make the best
decision, when they should really be voicing what they feel their child needs too.

Julie indicated that as soon as the refugee children acquire some English, their
parents expect them to be at the same academic level as of native English speaking
students “…while it is appropriate to encourage and support and I suppose push some
things, but other things are just going to take some time. So the kids seem to be really
discouraged.”

Ideology versus reality of America. Prior to their arrival into the U.S., refugees
have a different perception of American life. For instance:

Mandy: They have an idea of America that’s been painted as very idealistic and it
isn’t what America is when you get here. It’s a struggle… not fully
understanding how hard it is to be successful in America, and part of that too is
that you have to let go of the mindset that I am a refugee and not letting people
put you into that kind of pigeon hole.

The reality of the American experience for some newly resettled refugees may not
always compare their expectations. Harsh realities of their new life, such as lack of
resources, a social network and employment sometimes replace their expectations of
prosperity and opportunity. They may have to learn to survive and adapt to a new culture, a new language and differences in family values and traditions.

**Safety.** One of the teachers indicated that the school is very concerned that some of the Nepali refugee parents have been attacked in their neighborhoods and they don’t feel safe coming to school evening events, riding public transportation. Ellen, the FLP teacher attempted to provide some explanation for what the Nepali parents have been targeted:

Ellen: The Nepali families seem to not have a solid community base like the Koren (Tibetan-Hemalayan) families do. They are power in numbers, they have a nice support group with each other. The Nepali community seems to still be settling and they’re settling in all different separated parts of the city so it’s hard for them to all come together and my opinion is that there’s not one set religion that seems to have a church for that support group…they don’t have a set support group within each other.

**January-theme-3s: school challenges and concerns.** All participants agreed that there are many practical issues occupying refugee parents’ minds that get in the way of their academic learning, making it challenging for the school to help refugee families with their transition into their new country. The following statement explains why the FLP teacher felt being challenged to teach content to refugee parents:

Ellen: …working with refugees is a challenge. Sometimes I leave here thinking that I only covered half of what I wish I could have gotten to. …so many other issues are influencing them…such as their rent checks, DHS money,…just getting
them used to paying their bills, answering the phone,.. things like that takes precedence over teaching reading and writing.

Based on input from the school participants, three subthemes emerged and described below:

*Communication.* Due to unfamiliarity with the English language, communication was considered one of the main issues when working with refugee families. Teachers and the principal needed to use a variety of strategies to facilitate communication as described in the following statements:

Joy: We didn’t have translators available for parent conferences. I do have a little slip that’s translated that just says that this is important, have somebody explain it to you kind of thing that we can send home with notes and things like that in the native language. For parent conferences, I pulled in some of my former high school students to translate. But that’s about it, or else having the kids just relay messages to parents.

Principal Adams: I think the biggest challenge always is the communication and making sure that things are explained clearly …that we don’t misinterpret things based on culture too.

All participants agreed that lack of interpreters causes many challenges for effective communication with parents, especially during parent-teacher conferences, and in the case of an emergency. Current and former students are used at times as interpreters, but Mandy warned by saying: “if we only use the children to be the ones that are translators for us a lot is lost…I don’t like that role reversal…” Julie acknowledged that it is not appropriate to use children as interpreters in certain situations such as
“…something that is individual and private, family and child, a report card conference, a medical issue, something with another child, you know, some kind of a conflict or whatever.”

Julie described a time where two newly arrived children had a conflict on the playground. No one in the school spoke their native language and interpreters were not available. It became challenging for the school staff to find out what the issue was and became even more challenging to get the parents involved, “…it was a real challenge. I think that was most challenging.”

According to Ann, school staff has been creative in discovering ways to communicate with refugee parents. They have used different strategies such as repeating questions or statements, miming, using visuals, “and also giving them voice…honoring them as parents and asking for their opinion individually.”

Ann: …most effective meaningful time of communication ….when I was working with another staff member to teach the (refugee) parent how to sew because there was a specific skill involved, the communication had to be succinct and I feel like I grew in my ability to use communication, actual demonstration and visuals, having charts, pictures…the reason I enjoyed that so much…when you’re sharing a common goal to learn how to do something new, you have to develop the vocabulary and then it breaks down the walls…you start seeing each other as fellow workers and human beings and you can start developing a sense of humor.

Principal Adams stated that in addition to relying on former students, he has used people in the community to interpret in the school and recently, he has tried to build
connections with local university and colleges to get help from their international students.

Mandy: I use a variety of ways to communicate. When there is an adult who can translate for me then I utilize their services whether they’re from the district or someone who is within our family literacy program, or who has come to the school as a neighbor or friend, gestures, a lot of repeating, visuals.

Lack of resources. Joy, who has been working at GES since September, 2012 after teaching in another school in the district last year, acknowledged her surprise for not having enough resources available to GES with a large refugee population as compared to her former school with a much smaller number of refugees. The principal stated that the resources available to school have been “dwindling.”

Principal Adams: There are a few home school assistants that would come out half a day…but they are often pulled in other directions because they are in such high demands. We are supposed to have them half days during the week….last year we had them a whole day each week.

Cultural differences. Sometimes refugees come from cultures that are very private and it is considered a disgrace to ask for help when their children are suffering, which may be in conflict with American system. The following statement provides a clear viewpoint of this issue:

Joy: I had a student who had written something in his journal that indicated that he was thinking about suicide and it was really challenging …we tried to make contact with the family… to get him some help and it was just really challenging because there was definitely cultural differences as far as how the family would
deal with something like that versus how we here view something like that. It was really difficult to communicate with the family… they were very resistant to getting any kind of help. … They were very private and they… didn’t want (him) to go to any kind of counseling.

The FLP teacher described how she had to work on minor cultural behaviors such as shaking hands and looking the person in the eye during a job interview that is considered polite in American culture, but considered disrespectful in others. These behaviors, if not explained properly, may hinder refugee families’ progress in this country, such as during job interviews. Therefore, teachers agreed that sometimes they have to focus on the issues that play an important role in living in America, which may require extra time and as a result, slow down the speed of the academic progress for refugee families.

**January-theme-4s: school initiatives to encourage parent involvement.**

According to participants, many steps are taken by the school staff to meet the needs of refugee families and to encourage their participation in school events.

*Making refugee families part of the school community.* Participants specified two main methods that helped bridge the gap between school and refugee parents. The first method was to provide opportunities for parents to participate in school initiated events such as field trips, parent nights and ice cream social nights. The second method was for the school staff to develop relationships outside of school with refugee families and their communities, and maintain relationships with former students and their families. As described by Mandy and echoed by other participants, sometimes, through these
connections, the families whose children have attended GES encourage new families from their community to get involved in the school:

Mandy:…historically, parents are welcome to come to all of those events, open house, school picnic, family fun nights, briefing, field trips, ice cream social, international dinner…fundraising events such as jump for heart,…the new baby, …church things. Families that we’ll contact again when their children are graduating from high school….or some kind of reunion..and then it leads often to connections that we can make that offer to support the current families.

By respecting their ideas, teachers stated, refugee parents see themselves as equal partners and contributing members of the school community. For instance:

Mandy: I had a student in primary grade who was really having some behavioral difficulties, and the parents would see the student going back and forth to the office and so the fathers got together and said … we would like for the student to sit with us while we have our class because … we can show our love and concern for them, …that was the message that came across and so that happened for a couple of days and that student went in there and sat with the (parents) while they were having class and he was very well behaved. But (refugee parents) were seeing themselves really as part of the bigger community and less part of being the solution to an issue that we had.

Participants emphasized the importance of creating events that are less intimidating for refugee parents to participate in. Refugee parents are more willing to participate in events when other parents from their community are present.
Julie: I try to use things in context as much as I can so if we have a parent who’s been to a family fun night and speaks the language and one parent to another parent calling or inviting and a lot of the communities know each other so it’s very comfortable anyway. It’s harder when it’s something that’s individual and it’s private, family and child, a report card conference, a medical issue, something with another child, you know, some kind of a conflict or whatever.

With the exception of Ellen (the FLP teacher), four teachers and the principal indicated that they have participated in refugee parents’ cultural events or have made home visits in order to remove the authority image that refugee parents may have painted of them. It creates a channel through which the school is able to enhance communication with refugee parents. Some of their experiences are described in the following statements:

Joy: I went to one of my students’ church service in another language and I had no idea what was going on, but I was able to meet a lot of parents there and I found that after that (experience), it was much easier to communicate with those parents and to get them to come in (school) and they felt so much more comfortable because you put yourself out of your own comfort zone …and gone to their community and celebration and that’s something that I think really, really helps.

The principal of the school viewed exhibiting interest and participating in refugee families religious and social events, as a crucial component of creating a culture of trust and inclusion. It sends a strong message to families that they are valued members of the school community.
Principal Adams: I have been to a couple of Mosques to talk to the Imam about different activities, especially during Eid…making sure that we (the school) value their holidays and that we want to respect….and want to celebrate those holidays with them (refugee families).

Ann: the principal allows our building to be used by many different cultural groups that come in here and share our space on weekends.

During a separate interview, this statement was supported by the principal: “We want this (school) to be a safe haven…I never mind opening up the school to one of our community organizations because by doing that, they get to know our school, ….that this is a good place where they are welcomed”. Recently, the principal opened up the school for 75 newly arrived Somali youth group one weekend, where they had listened to speeches, performed traditional songs and celebrated with native food. “…given that perception that it is ok to be proud of your culture…and you are welcomed here (at the school)”. As another example, the school hosted the World Refugee Day, where 500 people from different communities joined the celebration with traditional foods, dances and songs. The principal admitted that opening up the school may not bring resources, but it sends a strong message to refugee communities that they are welcomed and it helps develop strong relationships.

Provide a safe environment. All participants pointed out the efforts the school is making in providing a safe environment for refugee families. The school is engaged in partnerships with community organizations that assist in supporting refugee families’ educational and practical needs, as they try to acclimate in their new country. The school, in attempt to provide an environment where refugee families feel welcomed and safe, has
reached out to different community organizations to assist them in this mission. In the following statement, the FLP teacher describes some specific support systems made available to refugee families:

Ellen: This school is the biggest form of support, all of the teachers… the principal…the… Church, they come over and teach a second class in the afternoon for their work experience program… teaching (parents) about passing the driver’s test, citizenship test… sewing, carpentry, building their resume skills. Also the…Baptist Church… offered to do after school activities for my students and their children, or Saturday morning classes…the public library…we go there a lot and there are free classes that are available for computer skills that the students can do independently when they’re not with me.

In order to address the safety issue that the Nepali families, in particular, have faced in their neighborhoods, the school’s Stake Building Workgroup (one of the six governing groups at GES)) initiated a community meeting. Local partners such as the police department and advocacy groups were invited to participate in the meeting.

Ann: So there is a level of fear so the State Building Workgroup invited many people in the community to come to a forum where we can discuss with local police officers, community service organization, several churches, that have adopted the refugee families….and we’re all coming together to try to come up with an action plan on how to make this horrific situation get improved so that our parents are not terrified of going out at night.

As one of the participants in the audience, the researcher observed many refugee families from different communities who participated in this meeting. Many emotional
discussions took place in this two-hour meeting, where refugees described how they were being victimized in their own neighborhoods, and how they were afraid to go out at night. At the end of the meeting a list of volunteers and possible interpreters for different languages was developed and made available for the school and the police department that could be used in case of an emergency. The issues addressed were important and concerning enough that the participants agreed to continue these meetings on a monthly basis to encourage more refugees and other community organizations’ participation. It provided a forum for the refugees to voice their fear and concerns to authorities. Community members and school staff provided transportation for all refugees who participated in the meeting.

*Parent empowerment.* All teachers agreed that despite language barriers, they have made attempts to include refugee parents in some of their decision making regarding some of the activities in their classrooms. Three of the participants agreed that the refugee parents do not always feel comfortable to provide their opinion out of respect for the teachers and the principal. In many cultures, they may not have been asked for their opinion in school matters, and therefore, at times, they are reluctant to respond to requests for ideas. The following statements represent the efforts made by the staff and some of the challenges they may have faced in order to accomplish this mission:

Principal Adams: We always ask their (refugee parents’) opinion and…sometimes they feel a little stand offish because they don’t want to tell us how to do our (school staff) jobs…to create the event, and…that’s something new to many of them. Maybe they came from countries where their opinion or feedback may or may not be valued by the school but here (in America) we actively seek their
opinion because that’s what makes us a better school and they hold us accountable…

Joy described her success with using a different approach to solicit ideas from refugee parents by asking them “… how was this taught in your country or how this was taught when you were in the (refugee) camp?”

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, all participants referred to refugee parents as equal partners, for instance:

Principal Adams: We want this school to be owned by our parents as well as our students. The objective of our program is not to do things for the families but teach them how to do it so that they’ll be sustainable.

Refugee parents do not want to depend on others. They want to learn how to do things so they can become independent. In the following statement Ellen describes how she has allowed time into her daily schedule for answering refugee parents’ practical questions such as how to pay their bills, who to call for a late payment or how to make a doctor’s appointment:

Ellen: I ask them (refugee parents) what they want to learn about…but it’s difficult for them to express to me what it is that they want to learn and then, usually every day …the students come to me with any questions – how do I read this bill, I need to make an appointment and those are kind of things that they are really itching to learn how to do independently and I kind of walk them through it that way.

The principal also explained that PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) meetings are used to teach parents about different topics such as methods of helping their children
at home, how to stay healthy, and what to do to prevent illnesses. He mentioned that
during a recent event with representatives from the State Department of Education at the
local Convention Center, refugee parents represented the Global Elementary School.

*January-theme-5s: impact of FLP.* In the past two years of its implementation,
the Family Literacy program has influenced different aspects of schooling at Global
Elementary School. In this section, the study participants describe how FLP has had an
impact on the school, refugee parents and the students at GES:

*Impact of FLP on the school.* The Family Literacy Program is viewed by the
teachers and the principal not only as a program that helps the refugee families
academically, but a valuable resource for the school as well. Refugee parents’ daily
presence at school and interacting with teachers and staff has brought both groups closer
and has improved their relationships. Teachers indicated that refugee parents serve as
advocates for the school:

Mandy: Refugee parents attended a meeting with some officials from the district
…they (refugee parents) came, sat, wrote letters… imagine how difficult it was to
write a letter not in your native language to express how much this school means
to you…it’s not only the social things but the really hard core things that we need
parent advocates. They are truly advocates for our school.

The principal views the FLP as a program that has provided an environment of
social connectedness and feeling of belonging for refugee parents and a systematic
approach to ensuring that a culture of inclusion is embedded and sustained where parents
have a voice in school decisions:
Principal Adams: I think the Family Literacy Program is one of the best things that has happened to our school…when we strengthen that bridge between home and the school, it makes our school more successful and it connects our families with our teachers.

The PACT time serves as a time where parents are educated about the curriculum and the education their children receive at school. As the parents become better informed about American education system, they are better prepared to ask questions and it provided an opportunity for the school to evaluate their classroom practices.

Principal Adams:…by having the parents in the classroom, by having the parents get to know the teacher, by having this opportunity for me to get to know the parents, they (the refugee parents) hold us accountable and that’s what they should be doing.

*Impact of FLP on refugee parents.* The FLP teacher emphasized the value of continuous, intense and consistent exposure to English and American culture provided to refugee parents through the FLP program. All participants stated that when parents are present at school, they are exposed to the American education system and American culture on a daily basis; therefore, they become better informed and better prepared to transition into their new country.

Principal Adams described the significance of PACT in the following statement:

Principal Adams: …the parents go into their child’s classroom,… they get to know what their child is working on, they get to ask questions from the teacher,…take notes,…know what their child’s homework is,… know something
about the topic (being taught), learn the vocabulary, and that way they are better equipped to help their children when they go home.

*Impact of FLP on students.* According to research participants, in addition to refugee children, FLP also has a positive impact on all students in school, especially in the classes where refugee parents participate during PACT. For instance, Julie described a time when a refugee child became ready to lead a vowel chart in class for the first time, but wanted his mother to see his accomplishment. So, he waited until his mother arrived in class before he got up and lead the vowel chart:

Julie: …and it was just wonderful and they (mother and child) are making dictionaries for spelling…and I was so thrilled when she (the mother) asked me if she could make her own dictionary. I think it’s just been wonderful in so many ways for so many students.

Mandy told the story of a time when a father came in class and wanted to work with the students, but didn’t know how to use the Smart Board. Children, including his son came up to show him how to use it, and “…it was so precious.” All teachers agreed that having their parents in the classroom for a part of the day has helped refuge students with self esteem. It has also helped other students in class understand that learning can happen at any age. It has provided them with a sense of appreciation for other cultures.

**Research question III.b: how do school personnel, including teachers and the principal describe refugee parent involvement after parents’ participation in a family literacy program.** This section report findings of the study conducted during May, 2012 concerning the perception of teachers and the principal regarding refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education after refugee parents’ participation in
FLP. Five themes emerged during this phase of data collection, which are described in detail as following:

**May-theme-1s: refugee families’ strengths.** All the participants continued to discuss the strengths of refugee families such as their tremendous devotion and commitment to their children, strong family ties, intense rooted cultural values as well as their resilience, eagerness to learn new things, courage to take risks, and insightfulness.

Julie: (parents have) this tremendous devotion and commitment to whatever my child needs I’m going to find a way to do…Just their eagerness and their enthusiasm is tremendous strength.

Ann: they’re astute at reading body language and vocal tone, and maybe coming through some really difficult things and having mistrust and having been mistreated… they have honed that skill to the epitome, they’re excellent at it and… has helped them feel comfortable here because it becomes aware to them how much we love their children. They then want to work with us and love us because we love their children.

The caste system is very prevalent and very complex among the Bhutanese refugees. It is the same system followed in Nepal. There are a total of 64 castes, groups and parties represented in the refugee camps. However, here at the GES, refugees are connected by a common bond of being uprooted from their homelands. Becoming a refugee is a humbling experience, but also a great opportunity to learn about self and others, and appreciate life in its simplest forms. This bond has helped build strong friendships among refugees regardless of their religions, nationalities and physical appearances as stated by Mandy:
The families really work together. They go in sometimes in the back (of the school where the picnic tables are) and the one family has brought lunch and they’re sharing their noodles … sharing all of the food. I rather recently learned about the caste system that is existent among the Nepali group and to see them really that not being an issue here has been tremendous because we do have families from all of the different caste systems here and so that’s been incredible…I think the humility with which they put themselves forth to learn … It’s a tremendous thing for an adult.

The principal pointed out their profound respect for authorities. For instance, the parents will hold the door to the building and will not enter ahead of the principal, or they would call the principal by his title and not his name because “…it is very hard to break down those barriers and the levels of respect.”

**May-theme-2s: refugee families’ challenges.** All the participants agreed that it takes time to overcome some of the challenges refugee parents face in America. Some of the ongoing challenges refugee families face include communication, seeking employment, lack of transportation, facing discrimination and stereotypes. Nevertheless, lack of the English language remains the foremost challenge that refugee parents encounter.

Principal Adams: They (refugee parents) have ongoing struggles…they continue to have a lot of stressors in their lives, …making sure their housing is appropriate, making sure their families are safe. I think learning English is an ongoing struggle and I think those challenges continue.
Learning new methods of disciplining their children, as well as becoming familiar with American laws regarding domestic abuse, can be challenging for refugee parents. The American education system, and especially the method of punishing children in America seems ineffective to many refugee parents.

Principal Adams: … corporal punishment is acceptable in their countries…and …, now that they feel comfortable talking with us, …the next level may be for them to be critical of us…that’s good..

Parent involvement for refugees also means access to information they otherwise might not be privileged to know. As Mandy stated, refugee parents communicated a desire to know what is going on in their child’s school, in their own languages:

Mandy: They would like to have reading materials in their home language … even for those who are not literate in their home language, but some of them in the community certainly is, then we could strengthen their ability to read in their home language and read in English and also have the children not losing that ability either.

Refugee parents continue to be reluctant to advocate for themselves. Although some of them have started to trust the American system and speak up, it will take time for them to accept the fact that in America you have the freedom to voice your concerns if you want to make a change.

Mandy: (during the community meetings, the refugee parents learned that) you need to stand up for your rights… speak the truth of the situation repeatedly and not just one time and then expect that a result is going to come about … being able to share about being accosted at the bus stops…when their stories were told,
… the power of saying okay I can tell my story and that gives courage for other people to tell theirs… So that was a real challenge getting them to speak…to really understand how to negotiate the system here.

**May-theme-3s: school challenges and concerns:** Teachers discussed several items that continue to challenge them as they work with refugee parents:

*Communication.* Despite general agreement for continuous improvement, all participants indicated that language and communication remain among the top challenges.

Principal Adams: There are still of course language barriers that are sometimes hard, but as the parents improve their English that also improves communication. Julie: Telephone is tough…really tough because I wasn’t aware of how much the visuals really matter and body language, and the tone (of voice)…and now they (parents) call more…

Regardless of their age, children often have a personal stake in the information being passed between the school and the parent. Children may be embarrassed by the information, not agree with the information, or may edit the information giving their own version of the situations. It is also possible that the children may withhold important information from the service provider because they do not want their family to look bad and the family may not receive appropriate care. Other times, because children are also learning English, they may not have developed the vocabulary yet to convey the message clearly.

Julie:… You have to rely on your interpreters…other students to interpret and sometimes it works and sometimes it backfires because a lot of times parents
don’t want to hear from children that their children have had an accident or have fallen down and there’s a great degree of concern and urgency and a lot of times they come directly to the school. We could use a lot more interpreters and translators.

Cultural differences. Differences in culture as well as education and governmental systems were other areas of challenge for some of the teachers. The following statements highlight how refugee parents struggle to embrace American culture, as they try to maintain some of their own. Ann reported on a situation in her classroom, where a refugee parent was present and she tried to discipline the child because he was not following classroom rules despite her warnings:

Ann: …maybe he was excited and was showing off to his mom and I had to discipline him in the room and then I found out that mom really gave him a very good major beating because of what he did in my room…and then he got it from dad. So he got like a triple whammy and I felt that maybe was a bit too much for the indiscretion and I didn’t have the language skills and an interpreter to try to smooth it out. So I feel that culturally, we discipline so differently.

Julie: One of the biggest challenges for me other than the constant communication with languages was the difference in cultures and how they discipline their children.

Refugee parents’ unfamiliarity with the American education system also remains an issue. Lack of mutual understanding of beliefs regarding the purpose and outcome of schooling can be challenging for both the parents as well as the educators.
Mandy: One of the biggest challenges for me is helping the parents understand how to interface with the American system and the way that we do things here, and how different it is from some of the ways that they’re used to interfacing with the government or the school system in their homeland.

*May-theme-4s: school initiatives to encourage parent involvement.* A high level of devotion, deep love and a strong commitment to refugee families was clearly visible through conversations and the emotional statements made by each participant throughout this study. Global Elementary staff made strides tapping into community resources including colleges, universities and local food markets to help refugee families and strengthen their school cause. The following statements provide a few examples of how the school staff managed to discover these resources and use them to benefit the school community.

As stated by Ann, one of the local universities offered to provide interpreters in different languages, using their community of international students to assist the school when needed, in exchange for community service credit:

Ann: Stake-building work group was contacted by the University … and we made a list of all the languages we have in our school and the University…will get somebody that speaks every language that we want somebody for. They’re going to give us their cell phone number so they could be contacted in case of an emergency. They would come in for field trips so we could invite parents and they would go for translating. The … students are going to get community service credit for this, so it behooves them as well.
The same university’s School of Nursing students conducted a fundraiser and collected healthcare bags containing a variety of health hygiene items, which was distributed to refugee families:

Mandy: They (the students) actually went to their professors and they asked for them to donate either materials or money so that they could buy hygiene items for our students and they then distributed them.

It is important for refugee children to be exposed to the American education system and understand that with hard work and education, they have the opportunity to excel. To inspire the children, the School of Nursing students arranged for an exclusive field trip for refugee students to visit their school, taking an active role in refugee students’ education:

Mandy: The other thing that they did is they arranged for our 6th grade to go visit the School of Nursing… STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) labs and their skill labs, they (refugee students) were really getting a bird’s eye view of what it is to be a nurse which was tremendous.

Several local organizations have also provided materials to help teachers in educating refugee children from science equipment to gardening tools and materials:

Ann: …Science Company has done a tremendous job in terms of science education (STEM) for our students. Garden Factory has been supportive in terms of plant material and things that we need for not only the garden but helping understand what’s it about…connection with your food and the earth …

The monthly community meetings (also called safety meetings), which were initiated by the school after reports of violence against the Nepali families in their
neighborhoods, have been well attended not only by the refugee families, but by the members of different community organizations as well. These meetings have served to bring awareness to the community about the struggles of refugees, giving voice to an underserved community of refugees. Additionally, representatives of several advocacy groups and the local police department and governmental agencies have made the refugees aware of their rights as the new citizens and have provided them with valuable resources that they can take advantage of, when needed:

Principal Adams: The biggest rewards have been strengthening the parents’ voice (through) the safety force… that meet to talk about some of their concerns… in the neighborhoods…and what rights they have as new citizens and they’ve become familiar with law enforcement in their neighborhoods. Also we can coordinate an interpreter (at the meetings) so that their voice is heard…Recently Dr…from the State came and we wanted the parents to have exposure to him because he’s in charge of the Department of English Language Learners at the state level. So just giving parents opportunities where their voices can be heard and where they can ask questions I think has been a big improvement.

**May-theme-5s: impact of FLP.** The Family literacy program’s impact on the school, the parents, and the students is described by the participants as follows:

*Impact of FLP on the school.* According to all participants, parents who are participants of FLP have served as partners and advocates of the school. Without waiting to be asked, they volunteer to help with anything they deem appropriate; from helping teachers with planting in the garden to walking in line with students during transition and
helping teachers move instruments or help the school raise funds. They also attend meetings, when they can to advocate for the school.

Mandy: (parent participation) increased by the fact that they’re here every day and the opportunities present themselves on a daily basis and the FLP teacher is always terrific about having the parents come and help and be supportive in any way that they can … nothing too large or too small for them to really put their efforts into to help us. They (parents) see the need because they’re here…(otherwise)…they’d be a little removed from the need and may not even know it, so it makes a huge difference that… the families are here on site.

Refugee parents are role models for their children. Refugee parents’ participation in their children’s school sends a strong message to their children on how much education is valued by their parents. When other children see refugee parents are at school, they encourage their own parents to participate as well. As a result, the teachers reported that GES experienced large parent participation during 2011-2012 school year. Daily presence of refugee parents has resulted in their daily communication with teachers and school staff. This has forced teachers to develop strategies so they can effectively communicate with refugee parents, as Mandy described in the following statement:

Mandy: One thing I’m really aware of is that where I would have rushed in before to do so many things with them(refugee parents), I’m not doing that now and I really think about how I can scaffold their independence like I would scaffold a lesson. So I’m going to give you the help and then I really find myself pulling back more and more so that their independence can grow and any dependence that
they might have had upon me is going to lesson…So that has been the impact for me in my teaching.

Many refugee parents do not speak English fluently and may feel uncomfortable or hesitant about approaching school staff and discussing questions or concerns. Many of these parents are also unfamiliar with aspects of U.S. school systems. Similarly, many school staff are not familiar with the experiences of the refugee parents, which can result in a lack of awareness of the knowledge these parents bring or the questions that they may have. For these reasons, it may be valuable for school staff to offer open-ended meetings for refugee parents. While it can be guided by points of information that have been determined to be of value to parents, it is essential that the primary focus be on facilitating opportunities for parents to ask any questions or raise any concerns regarding their children’s education. Teachers at GES have been able to recognize this need as stated by Julie:

With report card conferences… I schedule an hour for the refugee parents… because they need to… see their child functioning more, I need to have them (the children) explain some of the work that they have done…so the parents understand what’s going on and I hadn’t provided that kind of opportunity previously. That has been really an impact on helping them communicate more with each other and then making sure that there’s an understanding of where we’re headed. That’s been powerful.

In the following statement, Ann described how she has to be careful about her conversations with refugee parents so they can have a clear understanding of what she is saying to them:
Something that’s changed for me which is I’ve learned by having the parents in my classroom consistently that my sense of humor is connected to their vocabulary and I’ve had to change my sense of humor so that it’s understood. I’ve also learned that I have to really focus on not being verbose; I want to have the most clear succinct directions possible.

Impact of FLP on parents. The existence of FLP at Global Elementary School has provided refugee parents with the opportunity to meet other parents and school staff and have exposure to a variety of resources that would not have been available to them otherwise. Since refugee parents see teachers and other school staff on a daily basis, they are more comfortable addressing their issues and concerns with the school staff. In addition, refugee parents have become more independent as to locating resources such as interpreters, and as Mandy stated:

They will ask someone who is more proficient in English to be an interpreter for them, where before they would look at you and smile and struggle through whatever was being said. Going and speaking to teachers now and asking for help for all sorts of things. The fact that they’re questioning is really good right now.

Ann credited the progression of self-confidence and independence in refugee parents to FLP, which requires the parents to be in school daily. As a component of FLP, Parent And Child Time (PACT) requires parents to actively visit and participate in their children’s class. This level of consistency has resulted in refugee parents’ awareness of their rights as new citizens, and how to navigate different systems that are in place in America:
Ann: …I’ve seen really increase… over the last two years… is the comfort and the confidence, and the courage…by constantly being in this space, sharing this space with us and being here in this building builds up… confidence and… comfort which makes you then able when something happens such as the issues of being accosted to be able to exercise your voice.

Often times, refugees spend many long years in refugee camps with little or no education. More than half of the parents in this study had never stepped into a classroom. As a result of daily lessons provided through FLP, they are able to read and write for the first time in their lives:

Mandy: …One of the fathers just began reading, he has had no school in his homeland. He was 20 years in the refugee camp and to see him now reading in English is such an exciting moment that was a real, real treat.

Hary Bahadur: Since he never went to school so he thought never in his life that he would be able to at least recognize read and write English. Since the program (FLP) he has been able to understand 50% of which his teacher (the FLP teacher) speaks in class which is matter of pride for him.

All teachers supported the idea that FLP has helped refugee parents in several areas, especially improved ability to communicate in English and understanding about the American education system. Parents’ growth and learning is seen by the school staff as a positive experience for the students as well:

Ann: It was the learning curve, not just of the parents but as myself as a teacher and how to include parents and to make them such an integral part of the classroom. When we first started having them come in during PACT time… they
were a little overwhelmed …, then eventually you see them showing the words with the kids, running the lyrics with their fingers and then eventually they’re singing along...and for the whole class to see that growth from just being observers to now being implementers of the instruction, …and to see all the kids applauding them and understanding that this is such a cool thing to witness this rapid growth that happens.

According to the principal, PACT as a vital component of FLP has played a major role in teaching parents about the curriculum and their child’s learning. They become aware of what is being taught in the classroom and learn strategies to support their children at home:

Principal Adams: The parents take a more active part in their children’s academic work because they are in the classroom (during PACT) and know where we are academically and what’s now required for the New York State tests, so that has been a change, they have attended those meetings.

Parents’ physical presence at school on a daily basis has facilitated school-parent communication and helped develop a strong bond between both parties:

Principal Adams: Regardless of what the event is at school, our parents are here in the family literacy program every day, so it’s very easy for us to go there (in their class) and tell them about events and teach them about events and coordinate transportation, interpretations so if they need translators they can have that. …relationships have strengthened.

Impact of FLP on the students. Students have equally been impacted by the presence of refugee parents at GES, particularly the parents active involvement during
PACT has had a positive effect on the students. Julie explained how by her presence during PACT, a mother who was an English learner herself, helped her son accelerate in reading in an unexpected rate. When parents come to school regularly, it reinforces the view in the child's mind that school and home are connected and that school is an integral part of the whole family's life.

Julie: One of our students is just soaring academically and he’s the one with the mom that comes in with him (during PACT)...and she had stopped coming for a while and he was (taking copies of his work home)... to share it with his mom at home and so it was really important and it really, really mattered and his growth on the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) has just been enormous.

Since refugee parents are English learners as well, sometimes the children teach their parents what they have learned at school. This provides the students with extra practice, and eventually improved skills as Ann indicated: “when a child is re-teaching somebody else you learn it in a deeper more integral way yourself”.

**Question III Summary**

Question three explored the perceptions of the school personnel, including teachers and the principal regarding refugee parent involvement prior to and after parents’ participation in a Family Literacy Program. Findings of data collected during January, 2012 and May 2012 were presented in this section.

Teachers and the principal believed that refugee parents possess many qualities and tremendous strengths. They realized and appreciated the sacrifices refugee families have made in order to bring their families to safety. They also believed that refugee parents value education and want their children to become successful in their new
country. However, once their children begin to learn some English, the parents increased their expectations to such a level that sometimes can be discouraging to their children. The participants identified deep love for their children, tenacity, patience, sacrifice, hard-work, perseverance, courage, experience, knowledge, determination, resiliency, desire for independence, and gratitude as some of the refugee families’ strengths. The participants described refugee families in the same manner during both phases of data collection during January and May, 2012.

During the January, 2012 data collection, the school staff identified several challenges that hindered refugee parents to physically participate in their children’s school. These barriers included: an inability to understand the English language, lack of transportation, negative self-perception, discrimination, unfamiliarity with the American education system, and having an ideology of America that is far from reality. Despite impressive progress made in learning the English language, which alleviated the intensity of some of these barriers, obstacles remained the same during May, 2012 data collection. However, according to school staff, refugee parents made strides towards gaining increased social capital, which enabled them to better advocate for themselves.

According to participants, the school was faced with several challenges as well. Inability to effectively communicate with refugees due to lack of understanding each other’s native languages and scarcity of interpreters were identified as the main challenges for the school. Yet again, the challenges remained the same throughout this study with minimum improvement. Cultural differences among refugee parents and the school was another major challenge identified by school staff.
At the beginning of the school year, the existence of FLP at Global Elementary School was perceived as a positive factor in developing strong relationships between refugee parents and the school. Participants identified its impacts on the school, the parents, as well as the students. These perceptions remained as strong among all participants. As a result of parents’ daily presence at the school and their participation in FLP, the study participants concluded that they were able to identify issues that refugee parents were struggling with that would not have been noticed otherwise, such as encountering violence in their neighborhoods. This persuaded the school to develop a community task force, which attracted many community organizations to act on behalf of the new citizens.

**Comparisons of Perceptions of Parents and School Staff**

This section provides a comparison of perceptions across participant groups. In examining participant perceptions regarding the elementary school education program, all parents in this study expressed their satisfaction with the education their children received at GES. They found the school staff and environment to be friendly and conducive to their children’s education. They believed their children were loved and well taken care of by the school staff. Parents also expressed their overall satisfaction with the American education system. However, they voiced their concerns with regards to the way children were disciplined at school. They believed when teachers ask the children to justify their inappropriate behavior, students take advantage of the situation by explaining their way out of being punished.
All teachers and the principal recognized the disagreement regarding disciplining children as an issue. They saw this as a cultural conflict between American education system and systems placed in refugee parents’ native countries.

Regarding parent involvement in education, all Nepali parents confirmed that parents are expected to be involved in their children’s education in the same manner in Nepal as it is in the United States. The Afghan parent was the only one who stated that in Afghanistan, parents were not expected to participate in their children’s school activities or come to school unless there was an issue. However, all parents indicated that they are involved in their children’s education at home by meeting their children’s necessities such as school supplies, nutritious food, and structured schedule for sleep and activities.

Both refugee parents as well as school staff listed several items as barriers to parents’ physical involvement in their children’s school:

**Language.** Both parents and school staff stated that lack of proficiency in English language hinders parents’ participation in school. Parents articulated their frustration and sense of helplessness, not only in regards to their children’s education but also life in general in the United States. Consistent with the responses provided by the school staff, parents’ responses in this study revealed that the main obstacle in refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education at home and in school, is lack of proficiency in English language.

**Transportation.** This study revealed that none of the parents owned a vehicle. This can be explained by the fact that first, none of the parents held a job to earn enough money to purchase a car, and second, none of the parents held a valid drivers’ license to
drive a vehicle. Lack of transportation as one of the major barriers for refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education was reiterated by the school staff.

**Personal safety.** this study revealed that Nepali parents were being attacked in their neighborhoods, especially in the evening, when most of the school activities took place. Therefore, parents expressed that they were too afraid to walk on the streets in the evening. Because they did not have transportation, the only way they were able to travel to school was by public transportation. However, walking to, and waiting at the bus stop was considered too dangerous. Concern regarding parents’ personal safety was emphasized by school staff not just as a barrier to their participation in school activities, but as an overall daily life issue.

**Family responsibilities.** family responsibilities such as doctors’ appointments, shopping, appointments at the Department of Social Services, and other daily family responsibilities hinder refugee parents’ participation in their children’s school activities. Results of this study revealed that lack of proficiency in English and transportation make it more difficult for refugees to accomplish their daily tasks as quickly and efficiently as a person who does not face these barriers.

**Time of events.** school staff admitted that most school activities take place after school hours and in the evening. Evening is when parents are intimidated to leave their homes due to fear of being victimized. Therefore, parents listed times of events as a barrier to their participation.

**Perception of self.** according to school staff, parents perceive themselves as less capable of becoming successful in America. During the focus groups and interviews with parents, four of the Nepali refugee parents who were middle-aged, repeatedly indicated
that they were too old to learn English. Yet, teachers emphasized on the wealth of talent and knowledge refugee parents possessed, mainly as a result of their life experiences and backgrounds. Nevertheless, the parents did not see themselves encompassing those qualities. The school staff believed that mindset that they are unable to accomplish becomes an obstacle in the way of refugee parents’ progress and thus being involved in their children’s education.

*American education system.* in response to whether parents were expected to participate in their children’s school in their native countries, except Naseem, the Afghan parent who stated otherwise, Nepali parents’ response was yes. School staff, on the other hand, focused on the unfamiliarity of parents with American education laws, their rights as parents, and how to navigate the education system.

*Discrimination.* school staff cited discrimination to be an obstacle for refugees, not only in terms of their involvement in their children’s education, but also the distribution of life chances including access to education, employment, good health and housing. Refugees are being discriminated against based on their physical appearances, economic capabilities, language, nationality and religion. Fear of discrimination and intimidation was evident throughout focus groups and interviews with parents as one of the daily struggles of life in America.

*Ideology versus reality of America.* refugees have a different image of America prior to their arrival into United States. Their perception is based on the glorified image of America reflected in movies, commercials and pictures. Refugees, especially from nations where corruption, tyranny and religious intolerance reign, all dream of a better life in America. Focus group discussions made it clear that teachers perceive refugee
parents to have a difficult time realizing the fact that it requires labor and hard work to become successful in America.

A comparison of the barriers listed by the refugee parents versus what the school staff perceives as barriers to parents’ participation is demonstrated in table 4.3.

Table 4.3

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<th>Identified by both refugee parents and school staff</th>
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<td>Language</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
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The results of this study indicate that all school participants agreed that refugee parents have great aspirations for their children’s future and place a high value on educating their children. However, one of the main conflicting views was teachers’ lack of awareness of some of the sacrifices refugee parents made in order to stress the importance of learning English on their children. For instance, the FLP teacher believed when “parents are at home, they sink behind their native languages.” On the contrary, Parents indicated that they have used multiple strategies to ensure their children learn English at home, such as practicing what they know, increased reading in English,
increased conversation in English, watching the news and practicing vocabulary, and even moving away from the neighborhoods where their native speaking friends lived into the neighborhoods where their children are forced to converse in English with their friends and neighbors.

Teachers and the principal identified communication as one of the major challenges when working with refugee parents. Several factors that impact communication include the existence of language barriers between refugee parents and school staff. Lack of interpreters was mentioned as a major problem by the staff, especially in cases of emergencies, thus sometimes requiring students to interpret. Lack of interpreters was also one of the major issues mentioned by refugee parents as well. Using children as interpreters had its own implications such as role reversals and miscommunications. Lack of resources was also cited by the school staff as a challenge. School staff insisted that compared to the population of refugees being served, GES is being challenged with many limited fiscal and personnel resources.

Cultural differences were another challenge mentioned by the school staff. Sometimes refugees come with a unique set of values, beliefs, concepts, and behaviors that can most certainly differ from that carried by members of American culture. These differences, if not explained properly may have a negative impact on refugee parents’ progress and success. School staff pointed out that, at times, they had to adjust their behaviors in order not to offend refugee parents.

Despite difficulties, school staff indicated that they have taken measures to help encourage refugee parents’ participation in their children’s education such as: 1) making refugee parents part of the school community, by providing opportunities to encourage
parents to participate in school initiated events, and for the staff to develop relationships outside of school with refugees’ families and native communities. 2) providing a safe environment through maintaining a warm and welcoming school climate, and addressing refugee parents’ neighborhood safety concerns with the local agencies and organizations. 3) empowering parents by including them in school decision making process, providing practical and educational materials, encouraging parents to voice their concerns and educating them about the American education and governmental systems.

Focus groups and interviews revealed that both refugee parents and school staff strongly believe that the existence of FLP at GES has had a positive impact on the school and parents. The participants agreed that because of their participation at FLP and daily presence at school, refugee parents are able to have daily conversations with the school staff on a variety of topics from small talks about their cultures and interests to formal conversations about the children. These conversations helped both parties to have increased knowledge of each others’ beliefs and values and therefore, are more sensitive to each other’s likes and dislikes. The dialogues that occur between refugee parents and the school staff have provided an environment of social connectedness and have served to bridge home and school relationships.

FLP has also had a great impact on students. When parents join their children’s classes during PACT, they send a strong message about how they value education. Children appreciate their parents’ struggles which instills in them the eagerness to learn and courage to take risks.
Summary

Through the narrative presented in this chapter, the researcher attempted to gain insights into the experiences of the refugee parents, prior to, as well as after their participation in FLP for nine months. A total of seven distinct themes emerged during the research conducted with refugee parents through interviews and focus groups. Through five distinct themes, the perceptions of school staff regarding refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education upon their arrival in the US, and identified changes that may have occurred as a result of their participation in FLP, have also been presented in this chapter.

The results of the study are compared and contrasted with the existing literature in chapter five. Recommendations for possible avenues of future research in this area are also included in chapter five. Additionally, strategies to raise awareness regarding refugee families’ needs for improved quality of education and successful integration of their children into American education system are presented.
Chapter 5: Discussion

One of the significant challenges that refugee children face upon arrival to their new country is adapting to a new school environment. Therefore, understanding the nature of refugee children and their unique needs is critical in developing beneficial programs for all constituents including students, parents and schools. Most studies, however, use the term immigrants and refugees interchangeably, virtually ignoring the different needs of refugee students and their families. Further, refugee parents’ lack of mastery of the English language makes it difficult for them to participate in school related activities, and successfully communicate with school staff (Saurez-Orozco, et al., 2009; Ibrahim, et al., 2009, Tinkler, 2002; Adult Learning Center, 2003). As a result, schools need to provide refugee students and their families with the unique programs and services that will expedite their social and academic success during resettlement in their new country (Mapp, 2003; Adult Learning Center, 2003).

Chapter 1 provided the conceptual framework and rationale for this study. In Chapter 2 an empirical review of literature presented the significance of parent involvement in the education of refugee children. Chapter 3 provided the researcher’s design methodology, and a description of the research context and study participants. Chapter 4 reported the results that addressed the research questions. Chapter 5 restates the research problem, purpose of the study and methodology used in the study. Chapter 5 also discusses implications, findings, limitations, and recommendations resulting from the study.
Implication of Findings

This study examined the perceptions of refugee parents and school staff regarding the schooling and education of refugee children in a large upstate New York school district. The study specifically examined the perceptions of refugee parents and school staff prior to their participation in a family literacy program (FLP) and how their perceptions changed as a result of their participation in the program.

The FLP’s main goal is to support the academic achievement of children in kindergarten through third grade (K-3) by bringing together parents and their children as learners into the elementary school setting. The FLP also provides education to immigrant and refugee parents about the American education system. There are four main components that constitute the FLP: the first component includes adult education that focuses on refugee parents’ learning English for a minimum of six hours per week; the second component focuses on children’s education in K-3 classroom setting; the third component consists of Parent and Child Together (PACT) time, where parents go in their children’s classrooms for half hour each day for a minimum of two hour per week. PACT provides parents the opportunity to practice their learned skills to support their children’s learning; and the fourth component of FLP consists of parent time that includes issues relevant to cultural diversity, life and parenting skills, strategies to support children’s education at home and transition to work skills to take place two hours per week.

Using Coleman’s (1987) social capital theory as a framework, the study examined refugee parent involvement and its influence on their children’s education. Results of the study provide compelling answers to the research questions introduced in chapter one:
1. What is the perception of refugee parents regarding their children’s elementary school and education program:
   a) prior to parent participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after parent participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

2. How do refugee parents define parent involvement in education:
   a) prior to participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after their participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

3. How do school personnel, including teachers and the principal describe refugee parent involvement:
   a) prior to parents’ participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?
   b) after parents’ participation in a family literacy program in an elementary school in upstate New York?

One of the major factors for academic and cultural achievements of immigrant and refugee students is the relationship between school and parents (Bhattacharya, 2000). A strong relationship between immigrant and refugee parents and teachers, as the primary socializing agents, is the key in determining students’ aspirations for academic and social adjustments (Bhattacharya, 2000, Coll et al., 2002). However, in a review of literature on
parent involvement, a lack of consensus between school staff and refugee parents around what constitutes parent involvement was revealed (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2009).

Consistent with Epstein’s (1992, 1995, 2001) typology, the research findings suggest that multiple dimensions exist in refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education (see Fable 5.1), and confirms that refugee parents are involved in their children’s education across community, home and school settings.

**Figure 5.1.** Adapted from Joyce Epstein’s typology of six types of involvement.

As in the previous research (Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, 2001), all participants in this study confirmed that refugee parents place a high value on their children’s schooling. However, contrary to teachers’ belief that refugee parents “sink behind their native languages” at home, parents indicated that they have used multiple
strategies to ensure their children learn English at home, such as practicing what they know, increased reading and conversing in English, watching the news and practicing vocabulary. One parent indicated that she moved away from where her native speaking friends lived into a neighborhood where her children were forced to converse in English with their friends and neighbors.

In accordance with previous literature (Ramirez, 2003; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, 2001), teacher participants in the study indicated that refugee parents, when better informed about the American education system and curriculum, voiced frustration with their children’s education. For instance, once their children learned some English, parents expected them to be able to learn all subjects at the same speed as their native English speaking peers. When children were not able to fulfill this expectation, parents felt that the curriculum was not challenging enough. Nepali parents in this study also expressed frustration with the way children were disciplined at GES. This finding was consistent with previous literature (Ndero, 2005; Ibrahim et, al., 2009), where parents indicated that the negative social behaviors exhibited by their children are a result of lack of discipline in the school.

Nevertheless, contrary to findings in previous literature (Adult Learning Center, 2003; Carreon et al., 2005; Ndero, 2005), the parents in this study believed that the school environment was friendly towards their children regardless of their accent in English or what they wore. Refugee parents in this study thought very highly of the school’s welcoming environment, staff, and especially of the principal. This may be due to GES’s mission that believes that learning must be interlaced with the child’s home culture and that the structure and curriculum in place must explicitly value and nurture
this bond through the development of multicultural respect, understanding, and awareness. The finding seems to be congruent with what Mapp (2003) suggests that parent involvement in schools is directly influenced by a school culture that values a strong, respectful and trustful relationship with parents. The parents identified the school principal’s leadership as pivotal to creating an environment that ensures strong parent involvement. The study supports the perception that a caring and trustful relationship between parents and school staff had a major effect on enhancing parent involvement in their children’s school, as suggested by Mapp (2003).

The findings of the study contradicted other studies, where refugee families were not used to making appointments weeks or days in advance, keeping a calendar, or being punctual (Ariza, 2000). The refugees in this study took multiple buses to make appointments and it was the community infrastructure not the native culture that created scheduling and timing issues. Similar to other studies, parents in this study did not own a car and lived in areas that did not provide access to safe, reliable public transportation; therefore, coming to the school became a difficult, and sometimes an impossible task to achieve. Still, other parents did not have access to childcare for their young children, which made it difficult for them to attend school functions (Adult Learners Resource Center, 2003).

According to research, refugee parents may come from cultures where parents are not expected to take an active role in their children’s educational experiences, or where the role that parents take is very different from the role expected in the United States school system (Nedro, 2005). The study found this not to be true for the Nepali parents, where Nepali schools had similar expectations of parents as the American schools. Yet,
since parents were not required to visit their children’s schools in Afghanistan, the Afghan parent, Naseem, feared that he would become unaware of his children’s social and academic activities in American schools. He was worried about his children not maintaining their cultural values that were very different from the one his kids were exposed to in their new country. Naseem’s attitude changed as he participated in FLP, where he learned about the American education system, his parental rights, and became involved in his children’s schools. He was relieved to know that could remain active in his children’s education and social life and guide them as their family tried to adapt to life in America. After his participation, it appears that the development of social capital helped Naseem to feel more comfortable with the American education system and his role as a parent in America.

Research also indicates that in some cultures, parents simply “trust the school” and find it disrespectful to question the decisions or authority of school personnel. In some cases, refugee parents may perceive school as a threat to preserving their first language and culture and thus be reluctant to fully participate in the life of the school (Nderu, 2005). Nepali parents in this study did not emphasize teaching their children their native language; instead, they wanted their children to learn English as a means to achieve success in America. Naseem on the other hand, encouraged his children to learn English as well as their native language. He wanted his children to preserve their native culture and language as they immersed in American culture. The difference between the Afghan and Nepali parents’ perceptions in this regard, may be because Nepali parents of Bhutanese origin, lived in Nepali refugee camps for nearly two decades. As a result, they may not feel as strongly about neither Bhutanese, nor Nepali cultures or languages. In
contrast, Naseem articulated a strong affection towards Afghan language and its ancient culture. He expressed his desire to go back to Afghanistan in the future to take part in rebuilding his native country.

In their study, Lopez and colleagues (2001) found that in order to successfully involve parents in their children’s school, the recognition of cultural and educational strengths, as well as the economic and structural barriers of the migrant families became significant. This finding is consistent with the findings of this study as both refugee parents as well as school staff listed several items as barriers to parents’ physical involvement in their children’s school:

**Language.** The study found that lack of proficiency in English language hinders parents’ participation in school as found in previous studies (Saurez-Orozco, et al., 2009; White & Kaufman, 1997; Bailey, 2002; Ibrahim, et al., 2009). For instance, one parent stated:

We’ve been coming to this school listening to the things we don’t understand, we feel strange, we feel kind of, really upset when we don’t understand things. We want to explain things…to express things, and we can not, because of the language barrier.

Lack of English prevented parents from effectively communicating with the school staff. Language is the most obvious obstacle facing newly arrived refugees. Development of higher order fluency and an advanced level of understanding may take some time and require on-going language support.

**Transportation.** Findings from this study revealed that none of the parents owned a vehicle. This can be explained by the fact that first, none of the parents held a
job to earn enough money to purchase a car, and second, none of the parents held a valid drivers’ license to drive a vehicle. Lack of transportation as one of the major barriers for refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education was reiterated by the school staff.

Personal Safety. This study revealed that Nepali parents were being attacked in their neighborhoods, especially in the evening time, when most of the school activities took place. Therefore, parents expressed that they were too afraid to walk on the streets in the evening as one Nepali parent pointed out:

Personal security is more important so they are in a strange place, they don’t know the people so they’re really scared of the hooligans and the boys who walk on the streets during nighttime so they are really afraid of those things.

One of the reasons that made Nepali refugees an easy target for criminals was their lack of social capital. As the FLP teacher indicated, Nepali parents did not belong to an organized community. They often traveled alone or in small numbers, that made self-protection difficult.

Family responsibilities. Family responsibilities such as doctors’ visits, shopping, appointments at the Department of Social Services, and other daily family responsibilities hindered the refugee parents’ participation in their children’s school activities. Findings of this study are consistent with previous studies (Townsend & Fu, 2001; Rah et al., 2009; McBrien, 2011) that family obligations may hinder refugee parents’ ability to get involved in their children’s academic attainment.

Similar to the study done by Ibrahim et al. (2009), parent participants in this study did not have the type of social capital to help with some of their obligations. For
instance, the parents did not know anyone who could have given them a ride to their appointments, or to taken them shopping, that could have saved the parents time to do other things such as getting involved in their children’s schooling.

**Time of events.** This study also found that most school activities take place after school hours and in the evening. This hindered refugee parents’ participation due to safety issues and lack of transportation, as described earlier. Presence of social capital may have affected this barrier in a different manner. As described earlier in this section, refugee parents in this study did not know many people who could have provided them with rides to their children’s school.

**Perception of self.** The study found that refugee parents did not recognize their strengths and capabilities and had a low self image. On the contrary, the school staff emphasized that refugee parents are exceptionally resourceful, resilient and strong enough to survive stressors beyond most people can imagine. However, parents may not be prepared to cope with the emotional aftermath of their experiences in the new context of their lives as refugees in a new society, where their children will grow up, unfamiliar to their parents.

**American education system.** School staff participants indicated that unfamiliarity of parents with American education laws, their rights as parents, and how to navigate the education system can be an obstacle to their involvement in their children’s schooling. Refugee parents often do not have the social capital or English skills to navigate the U.S. education system.

**Discrimination.** The study found that refugees were being discriminated against based on their physical appearances, economic capabilities, language, nationality and
religion. Discrimination also remained an obstacle in refugee parents’ involvement. In relation to discrimination against refugees, one teacher stated:

I think that they (refugee families) are on their way, but they have to be able to ask questions and they can’t be hassled on the bus, and … Nepalese are very different, they’re all grouped under they’re just a refugee… so they must not know anything… and that really harms their ability to learn independently because nobody wants to ask questions when you’re treated that way. The kids feel it too.

Lack of ability to stand up for their rights may be a result of refugee parents’ lack of knowledge about the laws against discrimination in America. It may also be a result of parents’ negative experience with authoritarian rulers in their native countries that did not allow for self-advocacy.

**Ideology versus reality of America.** School staff in the study indicated that refugees have a different image of America prior to their arrival into United States and this image is often far from reality. They perceived refugee parents to have a difficult time realizing the fact that it requires labor and hard work to become successful in America.

The barriers identified in the study during the first phase of data collection in January, 2012, remained the same during the second phase of data collection in May, 2012. However, changes occurred in the attitudes of parents and the school staff towards overcoming these barriers. The study found that FLP clearly contributed to the production of social capital and to a sense of connectedness among parents, school staff and students. Specifically, the success markers of building an inclusive school
community, refugee families’ relational development with their children and school staff, parent involvement with schooling of their children, and increased family connection to school, all indicate the development of social capital and greater social connectedness. By developing social capital, both parents and the school staff were able to develop strategies to ease some of the challenges they faced. For instance, refugee parents learned some English and increased their vocabulary due to their participation in FLP. Even though this process was slow, they managed to use what they had learned to get their point across when communicating with other adults. Meanwhile, through their daily interactions with refugee parents, the teachers also learned strategies that made it easier to communicate such as using visuals, speaking slower, repeating phrases, miming, and allowing extra time for conferences. Therefore, parent-school relationship plays in developing social capital as described in the next section.

**School-Parent Relationship And Its Influences On Developing Social Capital**

Experiences of refugees are undoubtedly unique in that they depart from their well-established social networks in their home countries and need to construct new ones in a new environment, possibly with significant language and cultural barriers. With a growing proportion of refugee children in U.S. schools, research on refugee parents' social capital is certainly relevant to the improvement of America's schools. Therefore, is important to understand how schools play a role in assisting refugee parents in developing social capital.

Schools can further the development of social capital within refugee communities because they are perceived as a source of opportunity and support, primarily because they provide students with the means to improve their lives. As previous literature suggests,
among the major factors for academic and cultural achievements of immigrant and refugee students is the relationship between school and parents (Bhattacharya, 2000). Schools that achieve positive academic outcomes from the majority of students they serve tend to rely heavily upon the support and cooperation of parents.

A strong relationship between immigrant and refugee parents and teachers, as the primary socializing agents, is the key to students’ aspiration and determination of academic and social adjustments (Bhattacharya, 2000, Coll et al., 2002). Landale (1977) states that “there are three types of resources that are central to the outcomes of immigrants and their families: financial and human capital (i.e. social class at entry), political capital (i.e. legal status at entry), and social capital (i.e. social networks, family structure and cohesiveness” (p. 284). Positive forms of social capital can be generated when a genuine partnership based upon respect and a shared sense of responsibility exists between school and parents. As presented in this study, the existence of programs such as the FLP, can lead to formation of social networks that promote the broader interests of refugee families and increase parent involvement in their children’s schooling.

**Social capital theory and FLP.** Previous literature suggests that schools need to provide refugee students and their families with the programs and services that could expedite their social and academic success during their resettlement in their new country (Mapp, 2003; Adult Learning Center, 2003). Research also indicates that school programs with comprehensive parent involvement components such as shared governance and communication between home and school have a longer lasting effect on a student’s academic attainment (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Gordon, 1979; Henderson, 1981). Under the framework of Social Capital theory (Coleman, 1988, 1990), parental
involvement can be broadly conceptualized across three domains of social relations: parent-child, parent-school, and parent-community and/or other parents (Kao & Rutherford, 2007; McNeal, 1999; Wang, 2008), as discussed in this section:

**Parent-child relations.** Participants of this study reported that students have equally been impacted by the presence of refugee parents at GES; particularly, the parents’ active involvement during PACT has had a positive effect on the refugee students’ self esteem, classroom participation and attendance. As teacher participants explained, when parents come to school regularly, it reinforces the view in the child's mind that school and home are connected and that school is an integral part of the whole family's life. The findings of this study are consistent with research that indicates that regardless of the families’ educational level, income or ethnic background, when parents are involved in their children’s school, children are more likely to attend school regularly, and be aspired to do better both academically as well as socially (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Parents’ presence during PACT also helped some children accelerate in reading in an unexpected rate. When parents participated in their children’s classroom, they learned different strategies to help their children with reading at home. Increased knowledge is a form of capital that refugee parents gained through learning new ideas, which were then able to pass it on to their children. As research indicates, when parents are engaged in reading activities with children at home, it leads to children’s increased interest in reading and attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Wade & Moore, 2000). Furthermore, parent involvement has a significant influence on reading more than any other subject (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Teachers in this study reported significant
gains in reading fluency and comprehension in refugee students as reported by similar studies, when their parents read to them or with them, at home (Gest et al., 2004).

As indicated in chapter 1, Coleman (1988) identified two types of “capital” provided by parents that facilitate optimal development of their children: financial capital, such as food, shelter, goods and services, including education, and social capital. He further divided social capital into two components: family social capital and community social capital. Refugee families usually lack the family social capital in their host country because they may have been separated from their larger family due to the nature of their flight. However, refugee families in this study were able to provide their children with family social capital via stories, pictures and videos of their family members. They were also able to provide their children with community social capital based on the relationships they made with teachers, other parents and community members.

When teachers became increasingly familiar with refugee families and their styles of learning, they were able to adjust their teaching styles to better match their students’ needs. Teachers became very creative in learning and implementing skills they believed were helpful in communicating with refugee families. Teachers and school staff visited refugee families’ homes and participated in their special events. Meeting their teachers in a different context outside of school helped develop strong ties between refugee children and the school staff. When other children saw refugee parents participating in their children’s school, they encouraged their own parents to participate. The staff participants in this study reported a high number of parent participants in school events for the year.
**Parent-school relations.** FLP provided the refugee parents with ample opportunity to come to the school and build social networks with other parents and the school community. Parents in this study asserted that when they attended their children’s classes during PACT, they had the opportunity to build relationships with the teachers and understand the education their children received as indicated by one parent:

This program (FLP) has helped him build a good relationship with the school and they also sit together with the kids (during PACT) and they can also understand what things are going through the kids. So he says his child when he came from Nepal (didn’t understand what was being said in class) but now he’s been able to respond to the teachers and understand the context of the study. So he’s been very happy to be in this program and feels that the school and him has been brought closer.

These findings are consistent with existing research that indicates involvement in their children’s education provides an opportunity for parents to feel comfortable interacting with teachers and other professionals (Bassani, 2008; Devaney & Milstein, 1998). Similarly, parent involvement increases parents’ knowledge and familiarity with the school, teachers, and curriculum (Bassani, 2008; Kao, 2004). When parents in this study became familiar with the education policies and system of their children’s school, they felt comfortable having a dialogue with the school staff about their children’s education. They became more involved and encouraged about school experiences of their children.

Consistent with Coleman (1988), the study found that when parents observed their children at school and talked to teachers and other adults about the child, they were
able to establish norms, relationships and networks that helped strengthen their social capital. According to Henderson and Berla (1994), parent involvement in schools results in improved teacher morale, increased support from families for school programs, and improved collaboration across the school communities. Schools where educators effectively communicate with parents and engage them in targeted content such as behavior, homework, attendance and specific subject areas, are the ones with strong evidence of positive student outcomes (Epstein, 2005).

The findings of this study indicate that refugee parents’ daily attendance in FLP classes, and thus their presence at GES on a daily basis provided the teachers and the school staff with the opportunity to engage in formal and informal conversations. By conversing with parents, school staff was not only able to develop connections with refugee parents, but also to share insights, ideas and resources. The role of this type of communication in development of social capital appeared to be central. The daily interactions and communication between refugee parents and the school staff created a sense of belonging for parents. The school staff was able to establish close relationships with the parents and thus gain their trust and ultimately their support.

The findings of this study were contrary to existing literature which states that school faculty and administrators raise concerns that refugee children misbehave in class and don’t pay attention because they have little or no experience necessary for school because these children lack social skills, they are lazy and their parents don’t care (Kugler, 2009). These perceptions may be based on lack of communication because of refugee families’ inexperience with the English language as well as teachers’ lack of awareness and sensitivity to refugee families’ cultural background (Rah et al., 2009). The
school staff who participated in this study strongly believed in the strength, resilience and parenting skills of refugee families. Because of their daily interactions and having the opportunity to communicate with and observe refugee parents, especially during PACT, the school staff was able to recognize refugee parents’ hard work and strong desire for their children’s success. The findings of this study clearly indicated that teachers’ familiarity and connection with parents improves their understanding and builds close ties with the families.

**Parent-parent/community relations.** As a result of their presence at GES and attending the FLP on a daily basis, parents had the opportunity to have formal and informal communications with their children’s teachers, school staff and other parents. Consequently, refugee parents felt comfortable and not only were able to become better familiar with the American education system, but also made personal relationships with other adults. This was especially significant for the participants of this study because neither the Afghan parent nor the Nepali parents belonged to an organized community. The people they met through FLP were the only close friends they had with whom they established a mutual bond. They shared their native foods, cultures, stories and ideas about how to help their children. They even helped each other find part time jobs. This is evident in one parent’s comments:

> When we first came, we did not know anyone and anything. We were sad and worried. A few months after, we began to get to know everyone and feel more comfortable and began to love and liking about teachers, parents and other people who come to this school from other places. Besides, they (the school) take us
everywhere – we go outing, we learn computers and there are other classes that we are learning. I am very happy.

This finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) findings that social networks act as channels of communication that help people identify the human and material resources they need. Parents’ social network has been viewed as social capital, a resource that enhances children’s education.

In many countries around the world, individuals cannot influence or do not have the power to change the infrastructure of established systems. The idea that parents can potentially create change in their children’s schools may be alien to them (Ariza, 2000). Through community safety meetings, the parents in this study were able to become familiar with their rights as new citizens and become aware of the resources that were available to them when needed such as police, ambulance and the advocacy centers. The current finding also confirms Coleman’s (1988) theory that social capital is a form of capital that allows individuals to have access to a broad range of resources, through relationships with other people. Coleman (1988) believes that social capital is important for children’s educational development and it is a resource that exists within the social relationships parents maintain with other adults.

In addition, Global Elementary School’s staff made connections with several community resources including colleges, universities, churches, and local businesses to support and strengthen refugee families. For instance, through these connections, the school was able to obtain resources such as volunteer interpreters, school supplies for refugee students, supplies for hygiene, volunteers to drive refugee families to and from school events. Volunteers from one of the churches also volunteered in classrooms to
assist teachers in working with refugee students. These findings support Lin’s (2008) definition of social capital as “resources embedded in one’s social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through ties in the networks” (Lin, 2008, p. 51). Higher amounts of social capital allow groups to overcome the typical barriers to collective action which regularly stymie mobilization (Olson, 1965).

Social Capital and Its Influences on Refugee Parent Involvement

When parents in this study increased their social capital, they were able to increase their level of involvement in their children’s education at school and at home. Furthermore, when school staff in this study increased their social capital through establishing relationships and becoming familiar with their refugee student population’s needs, they became better equipped to provide refugee parents with strategies to help their children at home. Refugee parents, by participating in an FLP, were able to develop social networks which led to their increased participation in their children’s school, and increased social capital influenced staff practices to improve school-family relationships, as described by Epstein’s typology:

**Type 1: parenting.** Parents in this study became increasingly involved in reading with and to their children. This supports the previous research findings that, when parents are engaged in reading activities with children at home, it leads to children’s increased interest in reading and attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Wade & Moore, 2000). As they acquired skills on how to read and write in English, parents were increasingly able to help with or monitor their children’s homework completion. Also, when the teachers became familiar with individual refugee family’s
strengths and weaknesses, they were better equipped to offer assistance specific to each family’s needs.

**Type 2: communicating.** Research indicates that communication plays an important role in production of social capital and empowering refugee families. It is through interactions that families can build relationships, develop social networks, and gain social capital (Chrispeels, 1996). Refugee parents in this study had a difficult time communicating with their children’s teachers prior to their participating in FLP due to their lack of familiarity with the English language. Refugee parents’ English acquisition along with their level of comfort in interacting with the school staff, due to participation in FLP, resulted in better and more effective communication between school and parents. In addition, teachers and school staff were able to tap into community resources and locate additional interpreters and volunteers to facilitate communication with refugee families.

**Type 3: volunteering.** Their daily presence at school not only provided the refugee parents the opportunity to become involved in many aspects of the school activities, but it also provided the opportunity for the school staff in this study to personally invite and inform them of the opportunities for volunteering. Some of the activities in which refugee parents participated included, but were not limited to: helped teachers carry equipment, made copies, sat-up chairs for school events, helped children stay in line during transitions, accompanied students during field trips, helped monitor children in the playground, and assisted with school beautification and gardening.

**Type 4: learning at home.** When refugee parents attended FLP, they learned strategies and ideas about how to help their children at home with their school work. For
instance, each parent received a copy of their child’s homework during PACT. Parents had the opportunity to complete the homework on their own and ask questions from the classroom teachers. Relevant to the type of homework, the classroom teachers provided parents with specific ideas on how to help their children at home. The lessons children received in their classrooms were also incorporated into the lessons parents received in FLP class. When parents returned to FLP class after attending PACT, further clarification and explanation was provided by the FLP teacher. This not only helped parents learn additional skills so they can better assist with or monitor their children’s homework completion at home, but it also helped with their own learning about the American education system.

**Type 5: decision making.** As discussed in chapter 4, refugee parents’ knowledge regarding the American education system increased, mainly due to their daily presence in their children’s school and their participation in their children’s classes during PACT. Consequently, they were able to question and ask for clarification regarding some of the academic and disciplinary practices used in their children’s school with compare to their native countries. This allowed the teachers to increase their cultural sensitivity and evaluate their discipline strategies before implementing them in the class.

Parents in this study were members of the Parent and Teacher Organization. They were able to present and implement their ideas on how to raise funds for several events. Additionally, as members of the PTO, refugee parents were also involved in decisions regarding their children’s social and academic activities at school. Furthermore, the school staff in this study provided refugee parents with the opportunity to represent GES during meetings with the district and state officials and advocate for school programs. For
instance, refugee parents wrote letters to one of the NYS Education Department official advocating to receive support for the FLP.

**Type 6: collaborating with community.** At the beginning of the year, refugee parents were faced with violence and physical attacks against them in their own neighborhoods. However, they did not report any of the incidents to authorities or the school staff. This may be, as McBrien (2005, p.344) notes that, ‘trauma experienced during flight, in refugee camps, and during resettlement causes many refugees to become distrustful or fearful of people in authority’. This may result in a lack of trust of teachers (Igoa, 1995), and may contribute to a reluctance to participate (Hynes, 2003), or to consult staff, difficulties in dealing with bureaucracy, and the lower likelihood of using support services (Horner, Khan & Paton, 2006). As a result of their coming to GES, the principal noticed the wounds on one of the Nepali parent’s face and was then informed how Nepali refugees were being discriminated against and attacked on the streets.

The school initiated community safety meetings where refugee parents became aware of many resources and support groups available to them. Refugee parents also learned from the local police department, specific strategies on how to stay safe. The parents and the school were then able to assemble organizational and legal resources, and expand their social networks in ways that enabled them to increase the support they received from churches, businesses, and community organizations. This type of collaboration between parents and GES staff is described as “bureaucratic navigating, which refers to staff’s role in helping immigrant families to achieve effective connections to the institutions with which they need to interact by helping them overcome barriers of
lack of English, distrust, not understanding U.S. systems and institutional non-responsiveness” (Scheinfeld, 1997, p.74).

Because of the shortages of resources due to the increased refugee population at the school, GES initiated contacts with local colleges, grocery chains, governmental and non-governmental agencies as well as other schools within the district to obtain additional resources, when needed. For example, one of the local churches helped to continue the program for two more years through a fund available to the church. The same church purchased several houses around GES and housed refugees in order to eliminate the transportation barrier that prevented the families from participating in their child’s school. It also provided the refugee families with affordable housing in a safe neighborhood.

As educational and community members plan to develop programs that would benefit refugee students as they transition in their new country, it is important to consider ways that promote refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education.

**Implications for Educational Leaders**

This study suggests the importance of social capital in promoting refugee parents’ education involvement across home and school. Refugee parents’ social networks with other parents and school staff were significantly positively associated with all the dimensions of parent involvement. When making decisions about programming for refugee students, educational leaders should consider the following:

1. There is a greater need for promoting school-wide policies and programs such as FLP that connect refugee parents, who are isolated and disadvantaged, to other parents and school staff. These programs provide refugee families with emotional, informational
and instrumental support essential to their educational involvement (Cochran & Niego, 2002).

2. Congruent with existing literature (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Kauffman, Perry & Prentiss, 2001; Peterson & Ladky, 2007), findings from parents and school staff in the current study revealed that language and communication were the greatest barriers to refugee parent involvement. Hamilton (2004) stressed the importance of building mechanisms that help immigrant and refugee parents acquire the host language by organizing language classes at school. The existing FLP at GES provides parents with the opportunity for language development. Parents indicated that they liked the FLP classes held at their children’s school because the classes allowed them to see their children, their classes and teachers on a daily basis. If they had any questions or concerns, they were able address them right away. The smaller class size and the one-to-one attention they received from the FLP teacher, helped them learn the language quicker.

3. Hamilton (2004) suggests that starting a bilingual volunteer program helps with interpretations and translation needs. GES took the initiative to establish a partnership with a local university to provide interpreters from their pool of international students in exchange for college credit. Volunteer interpreters can be utilized in parent-teacher conferences, parent orientation, student registration process, as well as other evening events. Additionally, a reliable interpreter can help with in-service training of teachers and school personnel to explain cultural and behavioral values of the refugee families.
4. For school and parents to have strong positive relationships, it is vital that school staff has an understanding of their families’ cultural, religious, and educational values. Collaboration with ethnic community organizations is crucial for successful involvement of refugee families in their children’s education. Partnerships and resource sharing between schools and ethnic community organizations can alleviate cultural and linguistic barriers that refugee families experience in their involvement with their children’s education. Ethnic community-based organizations provide valuable resources that can bridge cultural and religious gaps between schools and refugee families. These include bilingual translation, ethnic community networks, and skills working with refugee parents and children.

5. It is important for schools to assign an individual to serve as liaison between new ethnic communities and the school. The liaison, in collaboration with members of the ethnic community organizations may conduct workshops introducing how to navigate the American education system and interact with school personnel. Such programs also allow refugee parents not only to learn about the American education system, but also to express their own educational beliefs and expectations. Consequently, refugee parents might become more connected and confident with their children’s education.

6. School practitioners need to promote the development and expansion of programs such as FLP that address the needs of newly arrived refugee families. In this school based FLP, refugee parents were empowered by having access to resources that would help them eliminate barriers to being involved in their children’s education. Access to these resources may have not been possible if they did not attend FLP.
Therefore, programs like the FLP should be expanded to include all newly arrived refugee families.

7. One of the issues GES faced was lack of physical space for the FLP participants. Allocating a designated space within the school building will allow more refugee parents to enroll in such programs.

8. The essence of FLP is that refugee parents are supported as the first teachers of their children. Through working with individual parents as well as with the family unit, the FLP provides developmental experiences for young children as their parents are offered instruction in parenting skills and parental support. FLP works to enhance the literacy skills and extend learning opportunities to include pre-employment and employment skills, for refugee parents, as they adapt to life in the U.S.

9. Even though the participants in this study did not have an organized community, school staff made attempts to make relationships with current families and maintained their relationships with families who were no longer part of GES. In other words, GES made attempts to establish a community of families who have been members of GES family. Therefore, collaboration between school personnel and ethnic community-based organizations is indispensible to bridge the cultural gaps between refugee parents and schools. Refugee parents may further build on their capacities as full, equal educational partners when the parent involvement programs and practices focus on their needs and strengths.

10. School personnel need to play a key role as cultural brokers to bring parents from diverse backgrounds together into the school community. Descriptive data on ethnic/cultural groups show that refugees vary in their socio-cultural backgrounds and
parent involvement practices. School personnel and practitioners should not overlook this diversity. In particular, programs and policies should reflect the specific needs of the refugee families, given that they may encounter additional challenges because of their lack of resources. The development of more inclusive parent involvement programs can promote intra- and inter-ethnic/cultural social network among refugee and parents. Such programs enable participants to share common concerns of refugee parents and to increase knowledge of each other’s cultures. Ultimately, refugee parents can build competence as parents in multicultural U.S. society.

**Implications for Community Leaders**

Refugees who are new to this country and are being attacked in their neighborhoods do not feel safe. As they indicated, refugee parents are also concerned for their children’s safety inside and outside of the school. Refugee families experience violence and trauma prior to their arrival into the U.S. Once they arrive in the U.S., they are often placed in temporary housing, usually in the poorest and most violent areas, where housing is cheap. The families are placed in houses where they may have to share the kitchen, living room and bathrooms with other refugee families. Their length of stay in temporary housings varies from a few weeks to several months before permanent housing is located. Permanent housing is usually found in the same areas as the temporary housing where the level of violence is very high. Ironically, refugee children and families continue to be exposed to levels of violence and fear that caused them to seek initial refuge. It is very important that community leaders address this issue and develop policies to make the safety of refugee families a priority. One of the local churches took the step of purchasing a few homes around GES to house refugee and
immigrant families whose children attend the school. This proactive approach can provide families with safe living environment that can also eliminate refugee families’ transportation barrier. As a result refugee families can increase their level of participation in their children’s school and help children increase their academic progress.

According to Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs, individuals have a need to feel a sense of belonging, emotional security, love, and affection, for and from others where one can nourish relationships with friends and family and establish an emotional support system (Maslow, 1970). The existence of FLP provided opportunity for refugee parents to establish close relationships with other adults. When they felt safe and wanted, refugee parents became motivated to increasingly participate in their children’s education. In addition, as indicated by the participants of this study, refugee parents preferred attending school functions with their friends and families they already knew.

Taking steps to eliminate some of the barriers that hinder families’ participation in school functions, will help further increase the number of parent attendees. Despite the barriers, one reason for high level of parent participation at GES was the nature of the school’s design that allowed for increased numbers of refugees and immigrants to enroll. Communities need to fund and advocate for development of such schools that promote the successful transitions of refugee families into the American society. When barriers are removed, refugee families can successfully transition as productive members into the American society. When some of the stressors are removed, refugee parents can support their children’s education so they can successfully graduate and transition into college. As refugee families succeed, so does the prosperity of the surrounding communities.
Implications for Teachers and Principals

While it may not be feasible for schools to address all the barriers to refugee parent involvement, there are several steps that schools can take to address some of the most significant barriers refugee parents face in order to become involved in their children’s education:

1. Teachers and principals can provide a warm and friendly environment to eliminate the intimidation refugee parents may feel when entering an American school.

2. Teachers and principals can take the time to make home visits or join refugee families’ during their special celebrations. At GES, the principal and school teachers often visited the families. The principal made a point to visit every refugee family’s home prior to the start of the school year. The effect of these visits can be maximized by presence of an interpreter.

3. Teachers and principals should visit refugee families’ cultural and religious centers to eliminate cultural and authority barriers. Principal Adams visited a mosque and asked about the local Muslim community’s celebrations and activities. These types of visits can serve a couple of purposes: first, it sends a message to refugee families that the school acknowledges their cultural values and cares about who they are; and second, the native community can serve the school as another resource when needed whether to help with refugee families or to provide the school staff with knowledge about the families.

4. School staff should recognize individual families’ cultural values as strengths and incorporate them into school activities. This helps students develop pride in their culture and makes the families feel they can provide valuable contributions to school.
5. Schools should provide professional development to all staff regarding different cultures and religions. This will help the staff become less intimidated when working with children whose culture is different from their own.

6. It is important to allocate enough time when meeting with refugee families. At GES, teachers doubled their usual half-hour parent-teacher conferences whenever they met with refugee parents in order for both parties to be able to communicate effectively.

7. It is important to provide parents with strategies to help their children at home. Refugee parents may not be familiar with the American education system, or they may belong to cultures where parents are not required to get involved in their children’s education.

**Implications for Faith Based and Native Communities**

Religious and native communities play a vital role in helping refugee families as they transition into their new country. They can support refugee families through strengthening partnerships that better link refugee children and families with school personnel and broader community service providers:

1. Native communities need to dedicate a group of people who can facilitate informal, participatory, educational workshops with newcomer refugee parents to help increase the social capital of refugee families. Workshops can cover a variety of topics such as attendance policies, homework, communication with schools, and parent-teacher conferences, and incorporate school-specific information from parent and student handbooks of their children’s schools. Other topics covered may include parent rights and responsibilities, discipline in American schools, the grading system, and report
cards/progress reports. Regular monthly meetings can be held and guest speakers such as school counselors, ELA teachers, or school district staff join.

2. Native and religious communities can disseminate information from schools to parents regularly through home-visitations, educational workshops, or phone calls. They can encourage community and parental participation in school meetings, events, and programming through advertising and parent/teacher conferences in native languages. They can help by arranging carpooling and walking groups to schools for events, and conveying the importance of parental involvement in workshops.

3. Native and religious communities can connect refugee families to school staff and provide teachers and school staff with defined links to communities for information, interpretation, and mediation. Teachers, school counselors, and administrative staff in partnership with native communities can identify and access informal community supports and resources to support individual student success. Native communities can serve as a channel of information from refugee communities to schools, reporting recommendations and ideas for best practices generated from parent meetings to school teachers, staff, districts, and other decision makers. They can also play a key role as advocates and cultural brokers for refugee school children and their parents.

Limitations

The following limitations should be considered when discussing the findings of this study: First, this study is comprised of a small sample of refugee parents and teachers who participated in a family literacy program. These participants were volunteers and a sample of convenience, especially the refugee parents (8 Nepali and 1 Afghan), due to lack of interpreters in other languages. This leads to limitations of generalizability of the
findings of the study to refugee parents from other countries. Also this study can not be
generalized to refugee parents who were not participants of the FLP or part of a different
type of family literacy program.

Second, Nepali focus groups were conducted with the presence of an interpreter
who translated the conversation from Nepali to English and vice versa. The complexity of
translating non-English focus-group data may have introduced unidentified bias (Squires,
2009).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of the study can be used for professional development of teachers
and other adults working with refugee students. In addition, teachers may have a better
understanding of the children they serve and a deeper appreciation for cultural
differences. As a result, teachers may be able to create classroom environments that
would be more welcoming to refugee families and conducive to refugee students’
learning. Welcoming schools and classrooms may help rebuild parental confidence and
self-esteem by reducing parents’ isolation and building bridges to mainstream U.S.
educational institutions. This study may also provide educators and administrators insight
into what parent involvement looks like for refugee children, even if it is different than
traditional parent involvement. A better understanding of the nature of refugee parent
involvement could initiate a more collaborative partnership between home and school
that can lead to the long-term success of parent involvement in their children’s education
(Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Kessler-Sklar, & Baker, 2000).

Further research in this area could include a follow up study with the same
participants when they leave FLP, to observe how the skills and information they have
acquired through FLP affect their involvement in their children’s education in American society. These individuals may have developed greater command of other factors impacting their lives and discuss how those factors assisted or impeded their familiarity with the U.S. public education system.

Another area of study might be efficacy of other family literacy programs for incoming refugee families. At present, the researcher believes that FLP provides exceptional resources to refugee families in both social and academic areas. Through FLP they learn, not only the English language, but how to live and function in the American society as an individual and as a parent. They are provided with the resources to help their families and their children’s become better educated and as a result, easily acculturate into their new country.

In addition, the age and educational level of refugee parents were not considered in this study. Student’s academic achievement can be considered both a predictor and an outcome of parent involvement. Literature indicates that reciprocal relationships exist between parent involvement and academic achievement (Chao & Tseng, 2002). The current study focused more on factors that influence refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education rather than how refugee parent involvement influenced children’s educational outcomes. Longitudinal research design may enable the examination of reciprocal relations between refugee parent involvement and student’s academic achievement.

**Conclusion**

Children of immigrants, widely diverse in terms of nationalities, ethnicity, educational level and life experiences (Hernandez & Drake, 1999), represent the fastest
growing group of people in America (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Refugees are sometimes referred to as immigrants. However, it is important to distinguish between refugees and immigrants, those who voluntarily resettle to a new country for better jobs and economic security. The most common and narrow definition of the term refugee was established by UNHCR in 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly, as follows: An individual with refugee status is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR, 1950).

As refugees flee their homeland, they undergo the experience of preflight, flight and resettlement (Lusting, Kia-Keating, Knight, Geltman, Ellis, Kinzie, Keane, & Saxe, 2004). In addition to stresses caused by their escape from difficult situations during preflight and flight, refugee children and their families face secondary stressors during their resettlement in their new country. Secondary stressors seem to have a greater effect on a refugee child’s mental health, especially in the first years of resettlement to a new environment (Barwick et al., 2002). Achieving acceptance at school, developing personal identity in their new community, and assuming adult roles as cultural brokers for their parents are some of the additional stressors on young refugees (Fantino & Colak, 2001).

Among the major factors for academic and cultural achievements of immigrant and refugee students is the relationship between school and parents (Bhattacharya, 2000). A strong relationship between immigrant and refugee parents and teachers is the key to students’ aspiration and determination for academic and social adjustments.
(Bhattacharya, 2000, Coll et al., 2002). The presence of their parents may be the only consistency refugee children have had in their lives since their flight from their homeland. Therefore, parent involvement is essential in refugee children’s success. Without parent involvement these children are at risk of failing and further isolation from school and community (Hamilton & Moore, 2004). Therefore, they play a big role in assisting their children as they begin to allow themselves to trust other adults, such as teachers (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010).

When discussing home-school relationships and parent involvement, most researchers do not clearly distinguish between refugee and immigrant families and their diverse needs and experiences. Unique experiences including war related trauma, acculturation and resettlement, mean that risk and protective factors may be more complex and manifest differently among these students (Kerwin, 2011; Steel et al., 2004; McBrien, 2003; Zhou, 2001; Hones & Cha, 1999; Tollefson, 1989; Mollica, et al., 1993).

The educational demands of refugee students challenge schools and teachers to provide environments that are conducive to student needs (Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). Lack of school capabilities and resources, such as diversity in parent involvement programs may contribute to limited minority parent participation (Kim, 2009; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000; Wolff, 2002). Consequently, there is a gap between the increased number of refugee families, and services and programs to accommodate their needs. In summary, this study focuses on several gaps in the literature review that may inhibit effective refugee parent-school relationships. Most studies use the term immigrants and refugees interchangeably, virtually ignoring the different needs of refugee students and their families. Further, because of refugee parents’
lack of mastery of the English language, it makes it difficult for them to participate in school related activities, as it is difficult for both refugee parents and school staff to successfully communicate (Saurez-Orozco, et al., 2009; White & Kaufman, 1997; Bailey, 2002; Ibrahim, et al., 2009, Tinkler, 2002; Adult Learning Center, 2003). As a result of this lack of awareness, schools need to provide refugee students and their families with the programs and services that could expedite their social and academic success during their resettlement in their new country (Mapp, 2003; Adult Learning Center, 2003).

Coleman’s social capital theory provides an explanation of how families and schools interact in order to provide a positive learning environment for students. Coleman (1988) believes that social capital is a form of capital that allows individuals to have access to a broad range of resources, through relationships with other people. Despite the fact that some researchers have argued that social capital may benefit minority groups, a vast majority of social capital research has neglected racial and ethnic minorities and their children (Kao & Rutherford, 2007).

This study has identified the effectiveness of FLP on a small group of refugees despite challenges the school faces to fully implement it. The program has been found to enrich educational based relationships among parents, children and school staff. This study explored the effects of social capital for refugee parents and its potential influence on their involvement in their children’s education. Refugee parents became increasingly involved as they developed social capital. The study also found that there is a correlation between the amount of social capital refugee parents gained and their level of involvement in their children’s education. As the parents become better familiar with the English language, they are able to better communicate with their children’s teachers and
other adults. When they participate in their children’s classroom during PACT, they will become more knowledgeable about the curriculum, and learn strategies to support their children at home. Consequently, it may result in students’ increased academic achievement, high school graduation, and employment for refugee children.

The social effects of the FLP are equally noticeable. Prior to coming to the United States, refugee families experience numerous hardships. Quality education is a scarce commodity for many refugees. Therefore, they place a high value on the education their children receive in America. They are extremely motivated and willing to make further sacrifices in order to help their children succeed in their new country, as indicated by the participants of this study. The existence of such a high level of strength and resiliency in refugee parents should motivate government agencies and other education funders to fully support programs such as FLP that are designed to strengthen these competencies and help refugee families become productive members of society.

Despite the fact that the number of refugee students in American public schools are increasing, there is limited research on refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s educational attainment. The refugee parents in this study were not optimally involved in their children’s education due to barriers such as limited language skills, transportation, and safety. Strategies to overcome these barriers were discussed in detail in this chapter. This study has addressed the need to further examine refugee parents’ perceptions of their children’s education in American schools.

Previous research indicates that parent involvement has significant influence on children’s success at school. This may be even more salient for refugees marked by violence, trauma, displacement, linguistic isolation and cultural contradiction and
dissonance. This study found that family literacy programs to be critical in gaining new forms of social and cultural capital. Thus, attending to voices and accounts of refugee parents as well as the school staff was critical in developing findings of this study. Consistent with Rah et al (2009) findings, creating family education programs such as FLP is salient in gaining new forms of social capital for refugee parents.

Family literacy is a strategy that can help both immigrant adults and children learn English and literacy skills, while teaching parents how to support their children’s cognitive and social development in their everyday lives. Research indicates that high-quality family literacy programs can increase the cognitive and social development of children and help them become better prepared to learn in school (Hayes, 2001).

Social capital is defined as actual and potential information, resources, and power to which one can access through his or her social networks (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Lareau, 2001). The findings support the social capital view of parent involvement, where parents actively construct their involvement strategies by negotiating available resources with their children’s school. In light of the social capital view, current findings also emphasize the importance of empowering social relations through which refugee parents can overcome their barriers to involvement and generate resources in order to promote their children’s academic success. Interviews with refugee parents as well as the school staff illustrates that FLP has bridged parents into the school effectively, which has enabled the development of social capital.

Utilization of social capital theory in this study was important for several reasons. First, the study found what types of social capital the school provided to refugee parents through a family literacy program (FLP). Second, the study explored what types of social
capital the refugee parents were able to develop, as a result of their interactions with other adults in the school, during the course of their participation in a family literacy program. Third, the study also explored how social capital enabled refugee parents to support their children’s learning at home. Fourth, the study found refugee parents’ perceptions regarding American education system and how the level of parent involvement in their children’s learning were influenced as a result of their increased social capital. And finally, by obtaining input from refugee parents and school staff, the study determined how parents were perceived by the teachers, as they participated collaboratively in a family literacy program. These findings are also consistent with previous research findings indicating that parents who maintained social networking with parents from their children’s schools obtained more access to and exchanged more school-related information including school policies (Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Sheldon, 2002).

One of the greatest strengths that comes through in this study is the high level of commitment of the school teachers and the principal to providing responsive services to refugee families and their great appreciation for the assets the refugees bring to GES, including their cultural values and resilience. Staff interviewed in this study recognized that there is more to do, more changes to be made and more people to convince of their vision to make FLP continue and thrive. They were often discouraged due to lack of, and loss of resources, but they were not defeated. Staff patience, competence, insight and resourcefulness are critical ingredients for any program to succeed. Their leadership and support from the district’s administration make the difference in overcoming the challenges they face.
As stated by (Rumbaut, 1997), “for immigrant group with little human capital, trying to adapt under often discriminatory conditions of often extreme economic, cultural and social disadvantage, the likelihood of success will hinge to a large extent on the availability of a strong family solidarity, centered on a cohesive, conjugal and parental bond and community support” (Rumbaut, 1997, p.28). The barriers faced by immigrant and refugee families not only relate to their personal experiences in their home country but also to the normal life transition that will be experienced differently than in their country of origin (Meld, 2002). Recognizing and building on countless strengths that refugees bring, by providing them with the opportunities to increase their social capital, create a powerful alliance between schools and families that will help build a stronger and richer community that all can benefit.
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Appendix A

October 4, 2011

Chief of Accountability

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Dr. Smith:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at Upstate City School District. I am currently enrolled in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, NY, and am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled The perception of refugee parents and teachers regarding refugee children’s education: A parent involvement study.

I am interested in the Global Elementary School as the location for the study. For the purpose of the study, I will recruit teachers and the school principal and refugee parents whose children are registered at the school to participate.

If approval is granted, parents, teachers and the principal will participate in focus groups and interviews in a quiet setting on the school site during school time, lunch, or after school. The process should take no longer than four hours. No costs will be incurred by either the school or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. You may contact me at my email address: ff06906@sjfc.edu, or you can call me on my cell phone: (585) 746-6491.

Sincerely,

Fawzia Fazily
Appendix B

October 31, 2011

Fawzia Fazily
2186 Westfall Road
Rochester, New York 14618

Dear Ms. Fazily:

This letter serves as [redacted] City School District preliminary approval your proposed study, *The Relationship Between Parent Engagement and Academic Achievement of Refugee Students in American Public Schools*, pending your IRB approval, in satisfaction of your Doctorate. Please feel free to share this letter with anyone deemed necessary, including St. John Fisher College's IRB. Please feel free to share with your IRB the fact that the Office of Accountability is already supporting this proposal through an assortment of data retrieval requests that you have proposed and that we have accepted.

With approximately one hundred and twenty (120) research, survey and intervention requests per year, there are specific criteria that must be met to gain District approval for a proposal. The request must tangibly benefit students, their parents, staff, schools or departments. Alignment with the Superintendent's Goals is preferred. Along with meeting District goals, it must be supportable by the schools or departments impacted. We believe your proposed study has met these criteria and has earned the support of the District. Like any IRB, once you have obtained STFC approval, we will need finished products with respect to all instruments and protocols that you intend to implement.

Please continue to work with us, as you have, as you move forward with this excellent study.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Chief of Accountability

[Redacted]

Office of Accountability Research/Survey Review Committee
Appendix C

Letter to School Staff Participants

Fawzia Fazily
2186 Westfall Road
Rochester, NY 14618
(585) 746-6491

Dear ________________,

I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College conducting a parent involvement study on the perception of refugee parents and teachers regarding refugee children’s education. I am requesting your participation which will involve individual interviews and focus groups. You do not need to prepare for either one.

Focus groups will be conducted with teams of teachers twice during the school year. The first one will take place on December, 2011 and the second will be conducted in May, 2012. The focus of our initial conversation will be on your experience in working with refugee parents prior to their participation in family literacy program (FLP). We will discuss the changes that may have occurred as a result of their participation in FLP, in our conversation later in the year. I expect our conversation to take no longer than an hour each time.

Some participants may volunteer or be asked to elaborate on specific areas as a result of the conversations during focus groups. In that case, individual interviews will be conducted.

I will record our conversations with a digital voice recorder. The interviews will be transcribed, analyzed and coded. For the purposes of protecting your privacy, recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location. The results of this research may be presented in conferences and publications in education journals. Your identity, as well as the identity of the school district and other participants of this study will remain anonymous during the study and after the dissertation is completed.

You may withdraw from participation in the study or refuse to answer a particular question without penalty at anytime. I will be asking you a few questions during the interview; yet, our conversations will feel more like a collegial exchange than a formal interview. The attached consent form describes the risks and benefits of participation in this study.

I plan to complete my dissertation in August 2012. Should you be interested in a copy of the report, I would be happy to provided it to you.
I appreciate your participation and assistance in completion of this dissertation.
Sincerely,

Fawzia Fazily

Appendix D

Letter to Parent Participants

Fawzia Fazily
2186 Westfall Road
Rochester, NY 14618
(585) 746-6491

Dear ________________,

I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College conducting a parent involvement study on the perception of refugee parents and teachers regarding refugee children’s education. I am requesting your participation which will involve individual interviews and focus groups. You do not need to prepare for either one.

Focus groups will be conducted with teams of parents who speak the same language, twice during the school year. The first one will take place on December, 2011 and the second will be conducted in May, 2012. In our initial conversation, I hope to focus on your experience as a newcomer to the United States and your initial perception of American education system as you enroll your child(ren) in school. We will discuss the changes that may have occurred in your perceptions as a result of your participation in FLP, in our conversation later in the year.

Individual interviews will be conducted with parents who are the only representers of their culture. In addition, some focus group participants may volunteer or be asked to elaborate on specific areas as a result of the conversations during focus groups. In that case, individual interviews will be conducted with them as well.

To ensure the accuracy of our discussions, I will provide an interpreter in your native language to facilitate our conversations during interviews and focus groups. I expect the interview to take no longer than an hour each time.

I will record our conversations with a digital voice recorder. The interviews will be transcribed, analyzed and coded. For the purposes of protecting your privacy, recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location. The results of this research may be presented in conferences and publications in education journals. Your identity, as well as the identity of the school district and other participants of this study will remain anonymous during the study and after the dissertation is completed.

You may withdraw from participation in the study or refuse to answer a particular question without penalty at anytime. I will be asking you a few questions during the
interview; yet, our conversations will feel more like a collegial exchange than a formal interview. The attached consent form describes the risks and benefits of participation in this study.

I plan to complete my dissertation in August 2012. Should you be interested in a copy of the report, I would be happy to provide it to you. I appreciate your participation and assistance in completion of this dissertation.

Sincerely,

Fawzia Fazily
Appendix E

St. John Fisher College Informed Consent Form

**Title of study:** The perception of refugee parents and teachers regarding refugee children’s education: A parent involvement study.

**Name of Researcher:** Fawzia Fazily

**Faculty Supervisors:**
- Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Marie Cianca 585-899-3878
- Committee Member: Dr. Susan M. Hildenbrand 585-385-7297

**Purpose of study:** The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of refugee parents, based on their cultural and historical experiences and backgrounds, regarding the schooling and education of their children in a large upstate New York school district. The study specifically examines the perceptions of refugee parents prior to their participation in a family literacy program (FLP) as well as how their perceptions change as a result of their participation in the program.

The study will also examine the perceptions of teachers and school officials regarding refugee parents’ involvement in their children’s education prior to participation in an FLP. In addition, the study will examine the teachers’ perceptions of refugee parents’ participation in their children’s school in order to determine any significant changes as a result of parent participation in an FLP.

**Approval of study:** This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Place of study:** The interviews and focus groups will take place at Global Elementary School.

**Length of participation:** Focus groups and interviews are estimated to last one hour. Additional time will be needed so the researcher can verify the accuracy of the information shared during interviews and focus groups by each participant.

**Risks and benefits:** The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained:
There are no identified risks or benefits for participation in this study.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:** Confidentiality will be maintained during the interviews and no identifiers will be used during the interview process. Confidentiality will be maintained by coding the respondents’ names. No information will be shared. Confidentiality statements will be signed by the transcription company. Interview data,
tapes, and any supporting documentation will be maintained in a locked, secure area in the researcher’s possession for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the dissertation process.

**Your rights:** As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Name (Participant) ____________________________________
Date_____________________
Signature ___________________________________________

Name (Researcher) ____________________________________
Date_____________________
Signature ___________________________________________

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.
Appendix F

PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – Pre FLP

Date ___________________________      Family ID __________________
Pseudonym ________________________

Introduction
☐ Introduce yourself
☐ Introduce interpreters if necessary
☐ Discuss the purpose of the study
☐ Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym)
☐ Ask if they have any questions
☐ Test audio recording equipment
☐ Make the participant feel comfortable (offer food/beverages)

Questions regarding the participants’ demographics:
1. What is your race or ethnicity?
2. What is your marital status?
3. How many children do you have in your home?
4. How long have you lived in the United States?
5. What languages do you speak at home?
6. What is the highest grade or year in school you completed?
7. Where did you attend school or college? Where did you attend school outside the US?

Questions regarding the participants’ experiences:
8. Do you feel welcome at your child’s school?
9. How would you describe your relationship with your child's school??
10. Do any barriers exist that make it difficult for you to be involved in your child’s school or classroom? Describe.
11. In what ways if any, you are active in your child’s school?
12. Were you expected to take an active role in your child’s school in your native country? Please elaborate.
13. In what ways if any, you are active at home with your child’s education?
14. What books or reading material do you have at home?
15. Are there times when you read with your children at home? Explain.
16. Are you currently employed? If so, how many hours do you work per week?
17. How often do you attend school/out-of-school activities (religious functions, museums...etc) with your child?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – Post FLP

Date ___________________________      Family ID __________________
Pseudonym __________________________

Introduction
☐ Introduce yourself
☐ Introduce interpreters if necessary
☐ Discuss the purpose of the study
☐ Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym)
☐ Ask if they have any questions
☐ Test audio recording equipment
☐ Make the participant feel comfortable (offer food/beverages)

Questions regarding the participants’ experiences:

1. Do you feel welcome at your child’s school?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your child's school??
3. Do any barriers exist that make it difficult for you to be involved in your child’s school or classroom? Describe.
4. In what ways if any, you are active in your child’s school?
5. Were you expected to take an active role in your child’s school in your native country? Please elaborate.
6. In what ways if any, you are active at home with your child’s education?
7. What books or reading material do you have at home?
8. Are there times when you read with your children at home? Explain.
9. Are you currently employed? If so, how many hours do you work per week?
10. How often do you attend school/out-of-school activities (religious functions, museums…etc) with your child?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
Appendix G

SCHOOL STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – Pre FLP

Date ___________________________ Teacher ID ________________
Pseudonym ____________________________

Introduction
☐ Introduce yourself
☐ Discuss the purpose of the study
☐ Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym)
☐ Ask if teacher has any questions
☐ Test audio recording equipment
☐ make the participant feel comfortable (offer food, beverages)

Questions regarding the participants’ demographics:
1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching in this program?

Questions regarding the participants’ experiences:
3. Tell me about a challenging time when working with refugee parents.
4. Tell me about a rewarding time when working with refugee parents.
5. What kinds of experiences have you had with refugee parents? (behavioral, cultural)
6. What are the refugee parents’ strengths?
7. What are the refugee parents’ weaknesses?
8. What works best for working with refugee parents?
9. How do you communicate with refugee parents? (oral, written)
10. What support systems are in place to facilitate communication with parents (in school, in district)?
11. What efforts have you made to solicit refugee parent’s participation in school activities?
12. What kinds of activities do you prepare to encourage refugee parents’ participation?
13. How do you support parents to help their children at home with their school work?
14. In preparing the classroom/school activities, have you asked the parents for their opinion?
15. What kinds of support have you inquired from the community?
16. Have you established any relationship with refugee families’ local native communities?
17. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
SCHOOL STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – Post FLP

Date_______________________________     Teacher ID_______________
Pseudonym____________________________

Introduction
☐ Introduce yourself
☐ Discuss the purpose of the study
☐ Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym)
☐ Ask if teacher has any questions
☐ Test audio recording equipment
☐ make the participant feel comfortable (offer food, beverages)

Questions regarding the participants’ experiences:
1. Tell me about a challenging time when working with refugee parents.
2. Tell me about a rewarding time when working with refugee parents.
3. What kinds of experiences have you had with refugee parents? (behavioral, cultural)
4. What are the refugee parents’ strengths?
5. What are the refugee parents’ weaknesses?
6. What works best for working with refugee parents?
7. How do you communicate with refugee parents? (oral, written)
8. What support systems are in place to facilitate communication with parents (in school, in district)?
9. What efforts have you made to solicit refugee parent’s participation in school activities?
10. What kinds of activities do you prepare to encourage refugee parents’ participation?
11. How do you support parents to help their children at home with their school work?
12. In preparing the classroom/school activities, have you asked the parents for their opinion?
13. What kinds of support have you inquired from the community?
14. Have you established any relationship with refugee families’ local native communities?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
## Appendix H

Observation Protocol Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Activity: ________________ Minutes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptive Notes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-child interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher-parent interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent-child interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent-teacher interactions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visual Sketch
Appendix I

Parent Questionnaire

Demographics questions:
1. What is your race or ethnicity?
2. What is your marital status?
3. How many children do you have in your home?
4. How long have you lived in the United States?
5. What languages do you speak at home?
6. What is the highest grade or year in school you completed?
7. Where did you attend school or college? Where did you attend school outside the US?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epstein's Typology</th>
<th>TYPE 1 PARENTING</th>
<th>TYPE 2 COMMUNICATING</th>
<th>TYPE 3 VOLUNTEERING</th>
<th>TYPE 4 LEARNING AT HOME</th>
<th>TYPE 5 DECISION MAKING</th>
<th>TYPE 6 COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coleman's Social Capital</td>
<td>Help all families establish home environments to support children as students</td>
<td>Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.</td>
<td>Recruit and organize parent help and support.</td>
<td>Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.</td>
<td>Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.</td>
<td>Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Parent-School Relations**
- Do you feel welcome at your child’s school?
- How would you describe your relationship with your child’s school?
- Do any barriers exist that make it difficult for you to be involved in your child’s school or classroom? Describe.
- In what ways if any, are you active in your child’s school?
- Were you expected to take an active role in your child’s school in your native country? Please elaborate.

**Parent-Child Relations**
- In what ways if any, you are active at home with your child’s education?
- What books or reading material do you have at home?
- Are there times when you read with your children at home? Explain.

**Parent-Parent/Community Relations**
- Are you currently employed? If so, how many hours do you work per week?
- How often do you attend school/out-of-school activities (religious functions, museums…etc) with your child?
## School Staff Questionnaire

**Demographics Questions:**
1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching in this program?

<table>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Parent-School Relations
- Tell me about a challenging time when working with refugee parents.
- Tell me about a rewarding time when working with refugee parents.
- What kinds of experiences have you had with refugee parents? (behavioral, cultural)
- What are the refugee parents’ strengths?
- What are the refugee parents’ weaknesses?
- What works best for working with refugee parents?
- How do you communicate with refugee parents? (oral, written)
- What support systems are in place to facilitate communication with parents (in school, in district)?

### Parent-Child Relations
- What efforts have you made to solicit refugee parent’s participation in school activities?
- What kinds of activities do you prepare to encourage refugee parents participation?
- How do you support parents to help their children at home with their school work?

### Parent-Parent/Community Relations
- In preparing the classroom/school activities, have you asked the parents for their opinion?
- What kinds of support have you inquired from the community?
- Have you established any relationship with refugee families’ local native communities?
Appendix J

Active Listening Protocol

Adopted from: Cooperative learning series: http://www.studygs.net/listening.htm

Actively listen

- Be focus on the person communicating

- Be aware: non-verbally acknowledge points in the speech
  - Let the argument or presentation run its course
  - Don't agree or disagree, but encourage the train of thought

- Be involved:
  - Actively respond to questions and directions
  - Use your body position (e.g. lean forward) and attention to encourage the speaker and signal your interest

- Give the speaker time and space for rest after talking
  - Express appreciation for the sharing to build trust and encourage dialogue
- Restate key points to affirm your understanding & build dialogue
- Summarize key points to affirm your understanding & build dialogue
- Ask (non-threatening) questions to build understanding
  - give the speaker space to regroup, to debrief after talking