WHEN CARING ISN'T ENOUGH: MEETING THE NEEDS OF REFUGEE CHILDREN THROUGH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

As the population of refugee children continues to increase in the United States, it is critical to explore the impact teaching pedagogies, particularly culturally responsive teaching, has on this unique population. Through qualitative research approaches, this study examined an urban kindergarten-first grade classroom to determine the role teacher and student behaviors played in developing or impeding the development of a culturally responsive classroom environment. The unique needs of refugee children were considered and explored through the lens of culturally responsive teaching, funds of knowledge theory, and the role of ecological development. Using observations and interviews, it was determined that while the teacher was caring and frequently met the non-academic needs of refugee students, her instructional techniques and strategies for teaching did not support the main tenets of culturally responsive teaching thus resulting in varying student academic achievement and English Language Proficiency levels.

Keywords: refugee, early childhood education, culturally responsive teaching, refugee education, caring, culturally relevant

INTRODUCTION

According to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics, a total of 56,384 persons were admitted to the United States in 2011 as refugees with the majority coming from Burma, Bhutan, and Iraq (Martin and Yankay, 2012, p.1). The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) defines a refugee as a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (Martin and Yankay, 2012, p. 1). Currently, about 40 percent of refugees resettled in the U.S. are children. The vast majority of refugee children-about 95%-resettle in the U.S. with their parents (Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services).

As the population of refugees attending school in the United States continues to grow, it is becoming critical for educators to provide students with resources, experiences, and classroom environments that connect to and build on children's native cultures and languages. Education is vital in restoring hope, dignity, and needed structure to the lives of refugee children who have been driven from their homelands. In *Educational Interventions for Refugee Children*, Richard Hamilton discusses the significant task of adjusting to a new school environment as refugee children arrive in a new country. He explains:

In coming to grips with this task, the child brings many pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration characteristics and experiences that have the potential to facilitate or interfere; for example, the nature of the flight and the refugee experience, level of literacy in first language, and parental support. One set of post-migration variables that will critically influence the child's adaptation process resides within the school, namely the characteristics of schools and teachers. It is important to emphasize that not only will the refugee child be required to adapt but schools, teachers and existing students will also need to adapt. To know how best to prepare teachers to meet the needs of refugee children and how to create schools that can meet these needs is crucial (Hamilton, 2004, p.83).

Hamilton further explains that it is critical for teachers to be aware of their own beliefs and values and to develop foundational knowledge of the cultures that exist in their classrooms. Additionally, Hamilton states that teachers need to develop skills and expertise in engaging with both students and parents from different cultures, not only by acknowledging the differences, but by actively supporting and promoting diversity in all classroom and school activities (Hamilton, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to examine an early childhood classroom with refugee students for culturally responsive teaching. This study seeks to identify the role teacher behaviors play in establishing culturally responsive classroom environments, the ways teacher and students interfere with the development of a culturally responsive classroom environment, and the impact that a culturally responsive classroom has on addressing the unique needs of refugee students in an early childhood setting.

According to Hurley, Medici, Stewart, & Cohen (2011), there is a lack of research about meeting the needs of children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. The majority of research that is available about these students focuses on children who speak Spanish and are from migrant families. The research on young refugee children is limited, but necessary: "Given that children who are CLD are among the most vulnerable for academic failure and considered to be 'at risk' in today's schools, it is of particular concern that educators do not have sufficient evidence on which to build their practice (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008 as cited in Hurley, et al., 2011, p.160).

In an effort to address the need for research on refugee children in the early childhood classroom, this study will focus on a classroom with refugee students to examine the types of activities and interactions that occur and if culturally responsive teaching is present. This study seeks to identify the ways teacher and students interact and the impact the classroom environment and relationships have on addressing the unique needs of young refugee students. The specific research questions that are addressed are:

1. What role do instructional and non-instructional teacher behaviours play in establishing culturally responsive classroom environments?
2. What do teachers and students do that interferes with the development of a culturally responsive classroom?
3. What do schools and teachers do to support the unique needs of refugee students in an early childhood setting?

Theoretical Frame

This study is informed by Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Funds of Knowledge, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development. These theories provide a specific lens for examining the multiple facets of educational needs in refugee students. CRT provides the perspective of the *teacher* by describing the types of knowledge and pedagogical skills teachers need to be successful with refugee students. Funds of Knowledge theory focuses on the experiences and background knowledge that *children* bring to the classroom from their environments, families, and home lives and provides an opportunity for analyzing what children bring to the school and the classroom that support or inhibit their learning. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development addresses all phases of resettlement that refugees experience and the impact these phases have on children. Bronfenbrenner's theory combined with an understanding of Funds of Knowledge helps us better understand refugee children by considering the culture and experiences of refugee children beyond the current situation which is necessary for successful implementation of culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is using the cultural experiences and perspectives of students to help them learn more effectively. CRT is based on the assumption that "when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (Gay, 2002, p.106). Classrooms comprised of refugee students present a myriad of opportunities for teachers and students to develop their knowledge and understanding of other cultures and to promote teaching and learning based on students' backgrounds and experiences. By supporting and valuing the diversity of their students, teachers can address the unique needs of refugee students by building on their cultural backgrounds.

Funds of Knowledge

Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) believe that learning takes place not in one's head, but within social interactions and "is bound within larger contextual, historical, political, and ideological frameworks that affect students' lives (p. *ix*). By learning about their students and families, teachers can understand and identify the array of resources–both cultural and cognitive–and the vast experiences that their students bring to the classroom. Teachers can use these resources and experiences as a foundation for teaching and learning in ways that best meet the needs of all students, and refugee students in particular. The information that teachers learn about their students from their families, homes, backgrounds, and previous experiences are considered *funds of knowledge*. These *funds of knowledge* can provide teachers with additional resources and knowledge that can be implemented to provide a culturally responsive learning environment. According to Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) funds of knowledge operate under the assumption that the educational process can be greatly enhanced when teachers learn about their students' everyday lives (p.6).

Funds of knowledge theory is pertinent to consider in this study since I am examining the ways teachers and students interact and the impact the classroom environment and relationships have on addressing the unique needs of young refugee students.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development

Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the influence of the environment, or context, on child development (Bronfenbrenner 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1999) (as cited in Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen and Frater-Mathieson, 2004, p.3). Refugee students have often lived through a variety of diverse experiences and environments in their native countries, prior to resettlement, and after resettlement. These past, present, and future factors should be considered when examining the needs of refugee students and the ways that teachers can best support these needs.

Bronfenbrenner explains that the ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (Bronfenbrenner, 1992: 188 as cited in Anderson et al., 2004, p.3)

Bronfenbrenner's theory recognizes the critical role environment plays in development. This theory is relevant to investigating the needs of refugee children as it considers the impact that the environment and personal factors have on children and provides a frame to examine the impact diverse experiences and environments have on children, specifically refugee children. These three theories provided the lens for examining the actions, interactions, and behaviors of the teacher and refugee students in the present study and contextualize the students' needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Refugee Education and Unique Needs of Refugees

To explore the unique needs of refugee children in the primary grades, Szente, Hoot, and Taylor (2006) interviewed teachers, principals, social workers, and counselors who had been working for several years with refugee children and their families. The main issues identified through these interviews and discussions were helping children cope with trauma, supporting academic adjustment of refugee children, and establishing positive parent teacher relationships (Szente, Hoot, and Taylor, 2006, p.16). Teachers need to be prepared to address the emotional needs and respond to the diverse life experiences that refugee children have experienced. Szente et al. report that the majority of teachers they interviewed did not feel adequately prepared to address the emotional stresses and needs that refugee children experience and to further complicate the situation, parents often chose not to share their traumatic experiences (p.17).

In order to support the needs of refugee children and their families, teachers can provide social skill activities to help establish a community within the classroom, encourage communication with parents by enlisting the help of a translator or interpreter, design art and creative activities that allow children to communicate their feelings, experiences, and their knowledge in different ways, and provide peer group and pair learning experiences even when students have limited English Language skills (Szente, et al., 2006, p.18). As the number of refugee children entering primary classrooms continues to increase, Szente, et al. suggest that refugee resettlement agencies, colleges/universities, and schools work together to provide the most efficient and effective support for refugee children and their families. Additionally, the researchers found in their interviews that basic English as a Second Language strategies, information on the cultural backgrounds of students, mental health service access,

and available modifications in academic learning were essential when working with refugees. With the appropriate support and services, refugee children can flourish academically and socially/emotionally as well as develop cross-cultural skills and understanding (Szente, et al., 2006, p.19).

In addition to sensitivity to traumatic experiences, teachers also need to be mindful of the socioeconomic status of refugee families and the impact lack of education, limited English skills, and restricted career opportunities have on the families. Hoot and Strekalova (2008, p.23) explain while teachers can do little to improve the socioeconomic status of children, they can take such factors into consideration in trying to better understand the needs of refugee children. Teachers and school administrators can also make certain that refugee children and families are taking advantage of the educational and community services available to them.

Jones and Rutter (1998) state that refugee students are often perceived as problems rather than being looked at for the positive role that they can play in the classroom. Jones and Rutter identified several issues in refugee education in the UK: inadequate language support, difficulties in providing students with information, misunderstanding their experiences, and lack of ability to meet the psycho-social and emotional needs of refugee students (Jones and Rutter, 1998). English language support is especially important for refugee students with limited or discontinued education to access the mainstream curriculum. Jones and Rutter explain that some Local Education Authorities (LEAs) continue to work to improve refugee education and have added positions such as 'refugee support teachers' to school districts (Jones and Rutter, 1998, p.3).

In her more recent work, Rutter (2006) criticized the current focus on the traumatic experiences refugee children face rather than maintaining focus on the educational needs of refugees. She reported that approximately 76% of the materials she reviewed included "psychological research monographs about trauma" and viewed the refugee child as "traumatized" (Rutter, 2006, p.4). In her view, the portrayal of the refugee child as "traumatized" impacted her ability to conduct a real analysis of refugee backgrounds and experiences, and seriously distracts and hides the significance of post-migration experiences such as poverty, isolation, racism and uncertain migration status (Rutter, 2006, p.5, as cited in Taylor and Sidhu, 2011, p.43-44).

The teaching profession in the United States today is comprised of a relatively homogeneous group of White, monolingual professionals from middle-class backgrounds. It is unlikely that most teachers have had direct experience with the types of traumatic events that many refugee students have faced in their lifetimes. This background as well as the current curriculum in teacher education does not adequately prepare teachers to respond to the unique needs of refugee children (Hoot and Strekalova, 2008, p.21).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

When Ladson-Billings first observed the teachers in her three year study of successful teachers of African American students, she was concerned that she did not initially see any patterns or similarities in their approaches to teaching. After observations and interviews, however, she determined that in order to understand the teachers practices and approaches, she needed to examine more than just their teaching strategies and critically explore the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of their practice, i.e., how they thought about themselves as teachers and how they thought about others (their students, the students parents and other community members), how they structured social relations

within and outside of the classroom, and how they conceived of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.162-3).

Through this careful examination and exploration, Ladson-Billings determined that culturally relevant pedagogy or culturally responsive teaching is comprised of three criteria: (a) students experience academic success; (b) students develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students develop a critical consciousness that they use to challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160).

In classrooms that embody culturally relevant teaching, teachers utilize students culture as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.161). Teachers can support cultural competence in a variety of ways. One of the teachers in Ladson-Billings study implemented an artist or craftsperson-in-residence program during which parents and family members came into the classroom for one or two hours for two to four days to demonstrate skills and interact with students. Through this program, students came to see parents and their family members as knowledgeable and capable resources who shared important cultural knowledge and skills. They also learned that what they had and where they came from was of value (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.161).

Ladson-Billings described another teacher from the study who encouraged students to use their home language while they learned the secondary discourse of standard English. Students expressed themselves in the language that they were most comfortable with using in speaking and writing, but then were required to translate to standard English (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.161).

Teachers who established culturally responsive classrooms, according to Ladson-Billings, were not dependent on state/local curriculum or textbooks to determine what to teach and how to teach it. They demonstrated passion about the topics they were teaching showing enthusiasm and vitality about what was being taught and learned (p.163). Students who had weaknesses or lacked skills were given support and opportunities for learning and developing the skills so that they could become proficient and continue to participate in the challenging work that was occurring in the classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.163).

Through synthesis of ethnographies conducted in classrooms in the United States and Australia, Osborne (1996) identified five components of culturally responsive or culturally relevant classroom practices. Osborne reviewed more than 70 ethnographies to determine what practices are most effective and efficient when working with diverse cultures and for successful implementation of a culturally responsive classroom. These five components all have confirming evidence from the studies Osborne reviewed and provide teachers with guidelines for their classrooms: (1) using group work; (2) controlling indirectly rather than confrontationally; (3) avoiding spotlighting; (4) using an unhurried pace; and (5) using the home participation structures of the children (Osborne, 1996, p.299). These components are starting points for teachers and will help lead toward the development of a community of learners in their classrooms that embrace cultural differences and support the unique experiences and knowledge of all children, especially refugee students.

Currently, there is limited research available that focuses on refugees in Early Childhood Education within the context of CRT as well as a lack of literature that differentiates between the educational needs of refugees compared to those of immigrant students. While there are cultural differences and language barriers in both cases, it is critical for educators to understand the background

experiences and potential traumatic events refugee children may have experienced in fleeing their native countries. Most immigrant families have planned for relocating, while refugee families are often forced to leave quickly and without any knowledge of where or when they will resettle. Further, due to the migration and resettlement process, many refugee children have interrupted schooling or no opportunities for education until their final resettlement (McBrien, 2005). This study, then, is designed to advance our knowledge of the needs of refugee children within the context of culturally responsive teaching in the early childhood classroom.

METHODS

Situated in an urban school district in the northeastern United States, East Franklin Academy (EFA) serves over 500 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 8 (School Website). The Mission Statement of the school is proudly displayed in the front entrance:

> The East Franklin Academy community promotes a safe and respectful learning environment that focuses on literacy, math, and social skill to inspire all students to reach their highest academic potential.

EFA was initially opened in 1968 in response to the growing population in the Northern School District and was renovated and expanded in 2006. Today the school has thirty classrooms, some equipped with computers and television monitors, a library, cafeteria, two gymnasiums, an indoor pool, and an auditorium that seats approximately 1000 (School Website). Demographics of the school from the 2010-11 school year are identified in Table 1 along with the demographics of the students who were in the classroom used in conducting this research.

Table 1: *School and Classroom Demographics*

	School		**Classroom Sample**	
	Number	*Percent*	*Number*	*Percent*
Eligible for Free Lunch	452	89%	10	100%
Limited English Proficient	83	16%	10	100%
Racial/Ethnic Origin				
American Indian/Alaska Native	5	1%	0	0%
Black or African American	226	45%	0	0%
Hispanic or Latino	110	22%	1	10%
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	46	9%	4	40%
White	99	20%	5	50%
Multiracial	20	4%	0	0%

Note. School and Classroom Demographics adapted from: https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2010-11/AOR-2011-140600010118.pdf

The majority of students at the Academy come from low socioeconomic status families who are currently receiving government assistance. The average class size during the 2010-11 school year was 21 students (School Report Card). East Franklin Academy requires that all students follow the school

dress code; all students must wear a blue collared shirt with the school logo and non-denim navy blue pants or skirts. The site was selected by soliciting teacher participation from several teachers known to have refugee students in their classrooms based on a previous study. Three teachers volunteered to participate; however, only one teacher was able to secure administrator approval.

The teacher in this study, Christine Jeffs (pseudonym), has been teaching for twelve years. Mrs. Jeffs taught for one year in Puerto Rico and has been in the Northern School District for the past eleven years. She taught one year at a different school in the district; this is her tenth year teaching at East Franklin Academy and she has taught all the grades at the school–she worked with the fifth through eighth graders for three years, and has spent the majority of her career teaching kindergarten through grade four. The class used in this study is the beginner ESL class which is comprised of ten students in both kindergarten and first grade ranging in age from six to eight years old. There are nine males and one female student; four students are in kindergarten and six are in first grade. Table 2 identifies information about the students' gender, grade level, language, and country of birth.

Table 2: *Student Demographics*

Student Name (pseudonym)	**Gender**	**Grade**	**Primary Language**	**Country of Birth**
Aung	Male	1	Burmese	Burma/Myanmar
Ali	Male	1	Arabic	Iraq
Tai	Male	1	Karen	Thailand
Prem	Male	1	Nepali	Nepal
Khin	Male	1	Chin	Unknown**
Hansa	Female	K	Unknown*	Thailand
Fateen	Male	K	Arabic	Iran
Luis	Male	1	Spanish	Puerto Rico
Than	Male	K	Burmese	Burma/Myanmar
Malik	Male	K	Arabic	Iraq

*This student did not return the mandatory language inventory paperwork typically completed by parents, however, through conversation the teacher and refugee counselor have determined her primary language to be Karen.

**This student returned the mandatory language inventory paperwork, but no information had been received from the parents regarding his country of birth.

Mrs. Jeffs' classroom is bright and several examples of student work are displayed both inside the classroom and outside the classroom in the hallway. Outside the classroom door there is a laminated sign that says Mrs. Jeffs and "Welcome to our Class!" On the left hand side of the door is a cover of a picture book about a trip to the apple farm and student writings with drawings about their trip to an apple farm. The writing assignment focuses on main idea and there is a small poster in the center of the student work hanging that says: Our Trip to the Apple Farm and Writing Main Ideas.

The classroom is large and has a few different areas with space for students to move around. There is a large area rug on the floor near book shelves and plastic bins full of books mostly picture books and some chapter books for younger readers, like Juney B. Jones books. There is a large brown

rocking/recliner chair on the rug near the bookshelves that looks worn and comfortable for reading to the children.

Beyond the reading area, there is a long table with four chairs on each side and one on each end. This is along the glass windows that look into the classroom next door except the windows are covered with posters and student work so that you can only see small parts of the other classroom. There are several long tables along the window from the back of the classroom to the front. There is one desktop computer set-up towards the back of the classroom on the table against the glass window. There are piles of papers, teacher manuals for reading textbooks, big flip charts with pictures and parts of stories, and clickers for interactive technology integration.

The teacher's desk is in the front of the room. Across the front of the desk are cups of pencils, several small plastic pencil sharpeners, worn pencil erasers, hand sanitizer, and a jug of water. There are papers piled up and disheveled across the desk and another teacher guide for a reading textbook. There are desks for children in the front section of the room. There are four columns and four rows of desks. There are white paper strips with red border to the left corner with the children's names on them for the one class and white paper strips with yellow border to the right corner with the other classes' student names written on each desk. Some of the name tags are peeling off slightly and others are securely attached to the desks. Some look as though the children have scribbled a little on the tape with pencils and they look scratched up and worn.

Prior to conducting any interviews, I spent time observing and interacting with students and teachers to gain a better understanding of the culture and norms of the school and classroom environment and to establish a relationship of trust and mutual respect. To effectively conduct qualitative research, Shenton (2004) suggests the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations before the first data collection dialogues take place (p.65). Even before I first entered the school building, I spent time reviewing relevant documents to inform me about the mission, vision, academic performance, priorities, and available services through examination of the school report card, NYS Refugee Guide, and school and school district website.

The approach used in this study for observations and fieldwork was similar to the process described in *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles*:

Many experts, among them Agar (1980), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Spradley (1980), propose the sensible idea that qualitative researchers proceed through a series of stages in observing-participating. These stages move from an introductory, general overview with broad focus, to one in which the researcher narrows the focus to very specific aspects of the situation that have called attention to themselves in the ongoing cycle of logging and analyzing the data (Steinmetz, 1991, p.48).

In conducting observations, I initially focused on the entire classroom, teacher behaviors and instructions, and then focused more specifically on student interactions and teacher and student interactions. In interviewing, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with the teacher and many informal interviews and discussions. I initially focused on having conversations with her to learn more about her life, her teaching career, and her teaching philosophy. I then had more in-depth conversations with her about her current teaching situation and current students. By using an approach similar to the three-interview series described by Seidman, I was able to contextual her experiences.

In summary, the data sources for this study included six classroom observations, three teacher interviews (two of which had audio recorded), two interviews with five students for a total of ten student interviews, and one interview with the school district's refugee counselor. Data analysis was conducted using a hybrid approach using both grounded theory and open coding. Observation notes were taken during classroom activities and transcribed as immediately as possible. I recorded audio notes of points to remember and important events or statements immediately after the classroom observation. Five students were interviewed twice and notes were taken during these interviews and students drew pictures that were collected as well. The teacher was interviewed three times with two of the three interviews being recorded. After transcribing and writing up these interview notes, I reviewed my analysis with her to confirm accuracy. The school district refugee counselor was interviewed and notes were taken during the interview. I recorded important information and quotations during the interview, made audio recordings of my thoughts and important details, typed up the notes and then had the refugee counselor confirm the information and my understandings. Once all of the data was transcribed, a line by line analysis was completed to code unique terms, emotions, ideas, and theories. I recorded questions and asked the teacher and students follow-up questions and used these initial codes to focus subsequent observations. I reviewed my data and initial analysis with colleagues, classmates, and the instructor. Initial themes were developed and data analyzed to determine appropriateness and relationships. These themes were again discussed with colleagues, classmates, and the instructor.

Through continued engagement with the teacher and classroom, I continued to complete observations and participate in school activities. Due to limited time for the project and time required to gain access, I was able to participate at the school from the end of February through May. I was able to observe mornings on varying days of the week so as not to only see students on Mondays, or one specific day. I arrived early and stayed late to observe student transitions into school and between classes. As a former teacher, I was careful to be cognizant of my own teaching philosophies and approaches for teaching. I frequently recorded notes to remind myself to be objective and be aware of the potential biases I could bring to the field given my own teaching background. By recording reflective notes and discussing my observations and analysis with a colleague, I was able to constantly reflect on my biases and monitor self-awareness.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

There were three main themes identified through data analysis and the data collected during classroom observations and interviews. These include: (1) the difference between a caring teacher and a culturally responsive teacher, (2) the difference in teacher behaviors during instructional and non-instructional time and its impact on student behavior and learning, and (3) the importance of recognizing and responding to student needs and the unique needs of refugees.

Theme 1: Caring teacher vs. Culturally Responsive Teacher

In classroom observations and interviews, it quickly became apparent that Mrs. Jeffs is a caring individual. Her generous nature and consideration for other's needs was evident in many interactions with students. For example, during one classroom observation, it was noted that one of the student's pants no longer fit him:

Teacher : Tai, can you please close the door?
Tai gets up and his pants are tight and short on him.

Teacher	:	Oh, we need to get you a new pair of pants, Tai.
Prem	:	Baby pants.
Teacher	:	Don't say that, Prem, that's not nice.
Prem	:	(Repeats himself, a little more loudly) "He wear baby pants."
Than	:	(laughing) "baby pants"
Teacher	:	We'll get him other pants. No, Than, don't say that. Prem. That's not very nice.
Teacher	:	Alright, first we are going to say the word slowly and then the word fast. Eyes on me. Ali and Fateen. Hansa. Okay, get ready. They go through reading words aloud as a class. Words include: ear, read At one point teacher stops and says, "I don't think I hear everybody. Let's make sure we are all saying it together. Let's try this one again: read." Class says "read."
Fateen	:	Read. We are going to read. Read in libwawy.
Teacher	:	Yes, Fateen, you are correct. We are going to read today. But we aren't going to go to the library. We are going to read the story we started yesterday in our books. Teacher goes into cupboard and pulls out two pairs of pants. She calls Tai over and has him take the two pairs of pants to the bathroom to try on. He comes back with a new pair of pants on. He gives the other two pairs to the teacher. The teacher gives him the pair he had on back.
Teacher	:	"Do you have a little brother or sister? Why don't you take them home for them?" Tai takes the pants and sits at his desk.
Teacher	:	If you are ready to get started, you will have your yellow book.

Mrs. Jeffs provided the child with pants that fit him which would make him more comfortable and less likely to be teased by his classmates. Further, Mrs. Jeffs demonstrated her caring nature by having Tai keep the original, ill-fitting pants so that someone else in his family might use them.

While the above incident clearly shows that Mrs. Jeffs is a caring individual, it does not always translate into teaching practice and the effective implementation of culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. Using a culturally responsive teaching framework as well as *funds of knowledge* approach means that teachers make use of the experiences, culture, and language that students bring with them into the classroom. Mrs. Jeffs was often not sure what language her students spoke or what countries they were originally from before resettlement. By not making an effort to gather this information or learn basic greetings in her students' native languages, she is missing out on important ways to connect with her students and to provide students in her classroom with the opportunity to learn about their culture and other students' cultures.

Outside of the classroom Mrs. Jeffs also demonstrates her caring and generous nature. When I asked her about the benefits and difficulties in working with refugee students, she explained:

Just recently one of the kids' dad died and his mom was just a wreck. She was grieving and so upset that she wasn't even functioning and she wasn't taking care of the kids. So I stopped over the one day and brought some food and things to check in on them and she was so thankful. And by that time her sister, the kids' aunt had come to help take care of the family because there were seven kids and she was so appreciative. (tone is very reflective and emotional)

We have with other teachers as a school given a lot and made a lot of donations and given things to the families over the years. Things like clothes and even household items like a refrigerator and when you go see the family and give them these things, it's *really* special. (becoming emotional; eyes tear up and she is on verge of tears) Through that, the meeting families, and the kid whose dad died, I have learned so much. Ways different cultures deal with issues. You hear about the ways of other cultures or you see it on tv or in movies, but to experience some of those feelings and interact with the families, it is more overwhelming and it …(again tearing up and pauses for a second)…. it is different than the way we deal with things but it has taught me a lot.

The difference between a caring teacher and a culturally responsive teacher is demonstrated through a variety of interactions with students and families both inside and outside the classroom. In this study, the teacher was able to successfully show students that she cares by providing clothing and support; this helped build respect and a positive relationship between the student and teacher and the teacher and the students' families. However, Mrs. Jeffs' lack of knowledge about her students' backgrounds, families, cultural identities, and values prohibit her from establishing a truly culturally responsive environment. This lack of understanding interferes with the development of an understanding of cultures and many other benefits of a culturally responsive classroom. In this regard, caring is not enough; students from diverse backgrounds benefit from their teachers knowing about their languages, their cultures, and their experiences.

Theme 2: Impact of teacher behaviors upon student behavior and learning

The second theme identified during the data analysis was the differences in teacher behaviors during instructional and non-instructional time and its impact upon student behavior and learning. Throughout my observations, and even in non-direct ways during interviews, it was evident that a dichotomy existed between the teacher behaviors and interactions during instructional time and non-instructional time. This dichotomy forced students to try to navigate the classroom procedures and expectations without consistent feedback and provided them with few opportunities for higher order thinking and appropriate levels of instruction.

The class periods that I observed all started with low-level, direct instruction at the back table, and then students would read and sometimes write in their notebooks about the story they read. While Mrs. Jeffs was frequently observant of students' clothing and appearance, such as when a student's pants were too small, or a student had a new haircut, she was not observant when it came to the students' academic levels and learning needs. Her lack of attention to learning and varying language needs was in opposition to the attentive caring behavior she exhibited toward the students when they were not participating in instructional activities. An example of the lack of attention during instruction can be seen in the excerpt below from a classroom observation:

Teacher	:	Ali, Aung, Than, take a seat. What is the name of the story we are reading?
Fateen	:	Shoe. Shoe house. Pointing to the picture of the shoe that has windows and a door.
Teacher	:	You are close. It is Shoe Town. Shoe Town.
Fateen	:	Correcting himself repeats the teacher "SHOE town"
Teacher	:	What's the name of it?
Several students	:	Shoe town. Shoe town. **Put one shoe on one foot.**(teacher and students together reading word by word. Some students faster than others.) **Everyone will have some if we share.**(this is the next sentence in the book)
Teacher	:	Let's put our finger on this top picture here. Let's use our fingers, not our pencils.
Class	:	The girls are giving the dog a bath. … … (continues to other picture)
Teacher	:	Okay, let's go to the next picture. Ready? A town has houses and shops. Let's try that one again. That one was tricky. A town has houses and shops.
Fateen	:	I have a house.
Teacher	:	Fateen, let's go. We don't have a lot of time. Let's put our finger on the word. Continue reading the story sentence by sentence together as a class. Some children are way ahead. Others are behind. Tai has a paper cut from turning the page. He is very concerned about this. I give him a tissue for it. It is not even bleeding.
Teacher	:	Tortoise is a what?
Prem	:	A cat.
Teacher	:	No, Prem, you know this. What animal is a tortoise? Look at the picture.
Aung	:	Rabbit. A RABBIT! (louder)
Malik	:	A turtle.
Teacher	:	Yes, Malik. Good! A tortoise is a turtle. Just like another way to say a rabbit is to say a "hare."
Aung	:	Rabbit. Yes! The rabbit.
Teacher/ class	:	Read along together – sort of- as students are all on different words and turning pages. We just went for a run. Can we stay here with you in your shoe? Oh what fun.
Teacher	:	Come on, Fateen, let's go. Turn the page. Fateen has not finished reading the previous sentence. But he turns the page anyway.

Teacher	:	So what is the main idea of the story? Aung? Go ahead.
Aung	:	The mouse bad. He made the house.
Teacher	:	He is bad?
Aung	:	He lives in the house. In the shoe.
Teacher	:	Right, he lives in the shoe.
Ali	:	Little.
Teacher	:	No, the shoe is not very little.
Ali	:	Oh. The shoe is little house.
Teacher	:	Well, that's not the main idea. Do you remember what we mean by main idea? **Children start saying random things:** Shoe is the house. The mouse is little. The turtle.
Teacher	:	Do you know what main idea is? Okay, well we are out of time so let's talk about main idea on our way back to class.

Many of the instructional practices that Mrs. Jeffs utilized in her classroom detracted from the development of a culturally responsive classroom. According to Osborne (1996): Culturally relevant teachers tend to avoid excessively spotlighting of individuals, that is, calling on them to make public performances, particularly in elementary settings (p.301). During the direct instruction period of each class, the students sat at the big table in the back of the room as a group and were called on as individuals to demonstrate their mastery of reading and site word recognition/pronunciation in front of the rest of the class. While the class size was never more than ten students, for children who have not yet mastered English or an understanding of the educational systems, this type of spotlighting can be destructive emotionally and academically. An example of this instructional approach follows:

Teacher	:	Now how about Than? Than, can you tell me at least one thing?
Than	:	Looks down at the table. Doesn't respond.
Teacher	:	What did you do over the weekend? On Friday, or Saturday or Sunday? Can you think of something you did.
Than	:	Shrugs his shoulders. Looks back down at the table. After a few seconds of silence, he says: "On Friday"
Teacher	:	Good. On Friday. What did you do on Friday?
Than	:	Shrugs his shoulders looks at teacher, then stares at table.
Teacher	:	Think. How about we come back to you? Ali? How about you? I bet Ali can use the first, next, and last.
Ali	:	A girl my sister my sister friend she come to visit us. She come to my dad house.
Teacher	:	She came to your dad's house. She was there so it was in the past, it already happened so we need to use the word came.
Ali	:	She came to my dad's house. And we played a game.

Teacher	:	Good. So can you use your first, next, and last?
Ali	:	(without hesitation) First she came to my dad's house. Next. Next my brother come to play with me.
Teacher	:	Good. Repeats and corrects him–"Next my brother came to play with me."
Ali	:	Last… and last…we played a new game.
Teacher	:	Very good. Fateen, can you share with us? Can you think of one thing you did?
Fateen	:	Sits quietly for a few seconds. Looks uncomfortable and unsure of what to say.
Teacher	:	While you think about that I am going to check the homework. Does everyone have their homework out?

While this type of instruction was frequent in the classroom, during non-instructional time, the teacher would recognize and deal with struggling students in a private setting. For example, she learned from another teacher that one girl's mother was very sick and she was having a hard time following directions. Mrs. Jeffs approached the girl before school and pulled her aside for a private conversation and to see if the girl needed anything. Rather than putting her on the spot in front of her classmates, Mrs. Jeffs provided the girl was a safe place to share and voice her needs. Mrs. Jeffs did not provide the same type of learning environment that is critical for all students and especially refugees.

Theme 3: Recognizing and responding to student needs–especially the unique needs of refugee children

The third theme discovered through the data analysis is the importance of recognizing and responding to student needs and the unique needs of refugees. The data related to this theme helps to answer the research questions: What do teachers and students do that interferes with the development of a culturally responsive classroom? What do schools and teachers do to support the unique needs of refugee students in an early childhood setting?

Students in the classroom exhibited many needs: learning and academic needs, cultural needs, and basic needs for themselves and their families. Learning and academic needs were frequently unrecognized, as demonstrated in several of the above examples. Moreover, recognition of cultural and language needs as well as the need for parent involvement and support were often neglected in the classroom by the teacher. For example, in the excerpt below from a classroom observation, information about an upcoming event for parents was being distributed to the students and the handouts were provided translated into several languages.

Teacher	:	"Who else? Khin? Did you get one? What language do you speak at home? Karen? Burmese?
Khin	:	Chin
Teacher	:	Chin? You speak Chin at home?
Khin	:	Khin nods and says quietly "Yes, Chin."
Teacher	:	Are you sure? You speak Chin at home? We don't have Chin. Here take this one. Take this one to your mom and dad. See if they understand this one. I think they should." (hands him the Karen translation).

Teacher : "Okay, so don't forget to give this to your mom and dads.
Now it is time to go so let's line up."

For most of the students, this translated version for their parents would be helpful (as long as their parents are literate in their native language) and a great way to overcome language barriers. Unfortunately, Mrs. Jeffs is not familiar with all of the language needs of her students. This prevents the translated fliers for parents from being as successful and useful as they could be and also could potentially create distrust of the family.

I had the opportunity to speak with Lynn Smith, the refugee counselor for the Northern School District. She provided me with more information about her role and the ways many of the schools and teachers in the district support the unique needs of refugee students and their families. The flier discussed above was a notice about one of the events that the school district provides specifically for refugee families on a monthly basis. Each month a different topic is presented during a two hour session that refugee parents and families can attend for free. The topics range from information about the education system, how to support their children's education, learning about food stamps and transportation, to basic ESL classes for parents. The sessions are free, interpreters are present, and snacks are provided. The sessions take place in a cafeteria at one of the schools that is large enough that if families do not have access to child care, they can bring their children with them and the children sit together in one section and partake in crafts and coloring activities while their parents learn. According to Ms. Smith, the sessions are well attended and provide a place for the refugee families to come together and learn and also meet others in similar situations. They also provide the opportunity for more adjusted and settled families to help new families thus providing a positive connection and benefits for all families involved.

Creating a sense of belonging and shared interests is a way to involve students and can develop cultural competence. Mrs. Jeffs would often try to find out more about her students and their homes or families by asking them about their favorite foods.

Teacher : What do you like to eat? What is your favorite food?
Fateen : Pizza!
Teacher : What about foods from where you are from? That maybe your mom makes for you?
Ali : Hamburger
Teacher : Is there anything you like to eat that your mom makes for you? That is from where you lived? Like maybe Burmese noodles?
Hansa : Hansa looks at teacher puzzled.
Says: "No, I don't like noodles."
Teacher : I had Burmese noodles the other day. They were very spicy. The waitress told me that they were mild, but whooaa…those noodles were very hot.
I like hamburger. With cheese.

While Mrs. Jeffs went out of her way to try foods that would allow her to connect with her students, the lack of context proves to be a barrier for developing that connection. If students had read a book about food, or had an event where they were eating different foods from their cultures, it may have

made more sense to them. The question was asked when the class was reading a story about a lion and what the mother lion feeds her baby cubs. For young children from so many distinct backgrounds, the question did not make sense, but not due to lack of effort on the teacher's part.

Both Mrs. Jeffs and Ms. Smith identified parent involvement and difficulty in communication with parents as a struggle in supporting refugee student needs. Ms. Smith explained that she participates in frequent home visits, especially after the first time meeting a new refugee student. She has found that many refugee families are afraid of the school because of the language issues and because they are not sure what the expectations are or what their role should be. This is consistent with the findings reported by Szente, et al. (2006), Hurley, et al. (2011), and Osborne (1996). By participating in home visits, Ms. Smith explained that she is able to bridge the gap and assure the parents that it is appropriate for them to be involved in their child's education. The visits are also an opportunity for her to explain what school is about, help arrange for transportation and interpreters as needed, and provide the parents with a positive message about their child. Teacher participation in the home visits could support this message and provide the teacher with information about the home life and family vital to the child's success.

CONCLUSIONS

By examining the data collected from interviews and classroom observation, this study explored the ways teacher and students interact and the impact the classroom environment and relationships have on addressing the unique needs of young refugee students. The results of this study indicate that caring is not enough. Being a caring and generous individual does not result in a culturally responsive classroom. There are specific behaviors and intentional activities and actions that teachers must take to develop a classroom environment that is culturally responsive and addresses the unique learning needs of refugee children. As demonstrated in this study and the research of Gahungu, Gahungu and Luseno (2011), Osborne (1996), and Hoot and Strekalova (2008), teachers, the school community, and parents need to work together to support and assist refugee children.

During the course of this study, I witnessed many examples of the teacher impeding the development of a culturally responsive classroom. The literature on CRT provides suggestions for successful creation of this type of environment. The interview I conducted with the district refugee counselor supported many of the recommendations from the literature on culturally responsive teaching, such as the need for better understanding and communication between home and school through translators. This could be enacted through home visits, attendance of teachers and staff at cultural events in the local community, hosting cultural events at the schools, and community events to enable schools and teachers to understand the families' traditions, values, and norms.

The informal non-instruction interactions that were observed in the study exemplified the types of interactions that should be used as the basis for instructional activities. Teachers need to make learning meaningful and relevant to students based on their knowledge, languages, and experiences. According to Gahungu, et al. (2011, p.15). Refugee children come from hopeless situations where tomorrow is uncertain. Schools ought to stress to these students, from the beginning of their academic career, that learning will make a difference between despair and hope, and between death-affirming and life-affirming attitudes of the refugee camp life. To maintain the momentum of the students in their process, teachers must ensure these children are given an opportunity to combine their arts, crafts, and other cultural aspects with the more cognitively and conceptually challenging processes of academic learning.

Osborne (1996, p.292) also explained the importance of teaching content that is culturally relevant to students' previous experiences, that fosters their cultural identity, and that empowers them with knowledge and practices to operate successfully in mainstream society. To support implementation of such changes in teacher practice, it is necessary for pre-service and in-service teachers to receive appropriate training, staff development, and coaching on the best ways to address diverse students, especially refugee students, in their classrooms. Teachers need practice developing the skills needed to successfully develop a true culturally responsive classroom environment. Gahungu, et al. (2011, p.17) also contend teacher preparation programs must develop programs that provide their graduates with additional skills and awareness in teaching in multi-grade, multi-level classrooms where students' proficiencies are inconsistently distributed. They must incorporate into their curricula opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers to receive study abroad experiences so they are exposed to the social and political conditions of refugee and immigrant populations.

There are several limitations to this study that need to be considered when discussing implications and practical relevance. The sample consisted of a single ESL classroom comprised of students of mixed primary languages, varying English Language Proficiency Levels, and different length of time since arrival into the United States. Due to the young age of the children, and many of their limited English skills, I was not able to discern what they liked about their teacher in any meaningful way. The teacher in the classroom studies is a certified ESL teacher with twelve years of experience teaching. However, the current climate of education policy in this state may also have an impact on the teacher behaviors. For example, the implementation of Common Core standards and teacher evaluation tied to student test scores could impact the teacher's instructional approaches. The essential purpose of qualitative research is not to be able to generalize, but to produce evidence based on the investigation of a particular context (Brantlinger et al., 2005, as cited in Hurley, et al. 2011, p.165). In acknowledging these limitations, they can also serve as important directions for future research. In addition to securing sample classrooms and research sites that are not primarily ESL classes, it would be beneficial to examine a classroom with a teacher who strongly and consistently implements CRT approaches and the impact of CRT on refugee students. Future research is needed in exploring classrooms that actively engage and collaborate with families. This will provide better insight and information into how to improve communication, education, approaches for teaching, etc. for refugee students. In reviewing the literature, authors (for example see Szente, et al. 2006) found that many schools use alternate communication approaches for refugee children and families that don't speak English. It would be worthwhile to examine the effectiveness of alternate communication approaches with refugee families. Additionally, including a focus group and/or interviews with older children with basic to advanced English skills to discuss the classroom, school and teacher behaviors would provide additional data that would be useful for future research.

As Gahungu, et al. (2011) explain, refugee children often come from hopeless and uncertain situations. By providing teachers and schools with the tools and pedagogical skills necessary for success, and by using the culture and knowledge students bring to school with them, we can support refugee students and their families to ensure that the education they receive in our schools lead them to a brighter future.

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