Family Cultural Orientation: Refugee Learners Shaping Design

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Abstract

Families new to our city, especially transnational families, become skilled in the art of cultural orienteering. They use their knowledge, values, relationships, and communication skills to create a new home for themselves in Nashville. To date, scholars have not adequately addressed refugees' perspectives on orientation to mainstream school culture in the United States. In this project, my position is that the collective strength of family units can be used to create a positive cultural orientation (CO) learning experience. Based on my conversations with refugee families, a refugee resettlement center, and a government agency, knowing what to expect - prior to the start of school - decreases stress in children and supports positive experiences in adapting to new learning environments. My capstone project offers just one more navigational tool that families can use to prepare for enrollment in MNPS. I created a website, featuring differentiated cultural orientation modules, to facilitate conversation between interpreters, parents, and their children, about what they will encounter in elementary, middle, and high school.

Context of Capstone Project: The Environment of Refugee Resettlement

These days, everyone who works in Refugee Resettlement needs a pirate name. According to coworkers and the *Treasure Island* ESL kit, which takes your initials and designates you a pirate name, mine is "Bowman Creeper O'Malley." The casual observer might worry about our sanity, but, in the wake of executive orders, vigils, and protests fueled by dedication to provide refuge to families of all nationalities, one feels the need to be rebellious like a pirate.

I created my project for a nearby refugee resettlement center. This center is a powerfully social place. Usually on Mondays, one of the caseworkers will bring in samosas and Somali tea. The delicious aroma wafts through the lower floor of the center as caseworkers, resettlement people, office people, interpreters, transportation people, and adult education people start drifting out from their desks and paperwork to grab a steaming plate before it is all gone. One day there was even a scrumptious goat stir fry and Russian cow blood chocolates. It is quite an adventurous fare and it reflects what life is like at the

center. As people wander back to their desks to plan with coworkers, listening to snippets of Mongolian "throat music," it is observable that there is no such thing as the "mainstream" in this place.

The individualist mainstream does not exist at the refugee resettlement center because there is a collectivist culture there. As a newcomer, I might have initially felt uncomfortable finding my way around to get information about resettlement and cultural orientations (COs), but, people got used to me poking around. The trick is to be sociable, clearly communicate what I am trying to do, and help others when they need it. They don't just share delicious food, they share companionship, information, and worries about refugee families. All departments of the center work together to help asylum seeking families get to the United States, find a place to live, pay for their place to live with the cash assistance program, find jobs, enroll their children in schools, orient these families to a new way of living, and build their English language acquisition. Health services and transportation are also provided to families.

I was tasked by the resettlement center and affiliated refugee government agency to create a "youth" cultural orientation for future families. My supervisors and I planned to visit family homes and invite them into the CO design process. For the most part, the families I was hoping to engage in participation came from Somalia, Syria, Iraq, the DRC, Afghanistan, Burma, Bhutan, and Sudan. Collectivism was a trait that these families often shared. In the past, home visitors were welcomed as a guest within family homes. However, in the wake of government adversity, MOAB, and the increase of hate crimes, families were hesitant to allow me, a stranger, into their households. This project was a tremendous learning experience that required me to communicate and design in a way that provided psychosocial support to my stakeholders.

Task & Final Product

Families who qualify as "refugees" are not simply "asylum seekers." They tried to find a home elsewhere, but the countries they sought asylum from refused them. Refugee families, who make it to the United States, have used their collective strength to survive loss and traumatic experiences. Existing

literature has shown minimal research efforts to determine refugees' perspectives about orientation experiences to mainstream schools in the United States, but my research into cultural orientations has shown that the collective strength of these families can be used to create a positive CO learning experience. So, instead of simply making a "youth" cultural orientation, as the resettlement center and government agency asked me, I ended up creating interactive family orientations that explore elementary, middle, and high school cultures of Metro Nashville Public Schools.

Part 1: Literary Trends in the Refugee Experience

I started out on the path of orientation design by looking at what has been written about the experience of refugees and how different places implement cultural orientations. Analyzing literature, associated with the refugee experience, helped contextualize what different environments (in several different countries) are doing to interact with this specific population. Studies and literary reviews of educational researchers, sociologists, and anthropologists documented barriers to success in the lived experiences of people seeking asylum. The nature of these finding yielded fascinating trends that revolved around four different barriers for refugees: psychosocial needs, coping with trauma, the debate between acculturation and transnational families, and stress associated with English language acquisition.

Psychosocial Needs & Coping with Trauma

About designing student-centered cultural programs, Naidoo (2009), in the article, "Developing social inclusion through after-school homework tutoring: a study of African refugee students in Greater Western Sydney," uses the conceptual framework of Bourdieu's theory of social capital and cultural reproduction to make the additional point that, within these programs, a person should be able to build cultural capital without losing their identity. Naidoo reported refugee students to have high expectations of education and they often see it as a pathway to future employment. This is significant, because it shows that the American Dream still lives and it is important to for these students to be safely integrated to the

mainstream classrooms. However, this is a catch-22, because, for a classroom to be safely integrated, it must be democratic, which is not mainstream. In mainstream classrooms, a certain amount of stress is caused by the label "refugee" and teachers don't always understand this. My orientation design uses social capital which increases interest in the learning experience because it recognizes the identity of a learner and the strengths of the families they belong to.

A person's identity development is impacted by trauma from the surrounding environment. In individualistic societies, those who suffer from trauma are misunderstood. Often, people assume that something is wrong with an individual when they have been affected by war or persecution. According to one of my supervisors, at the refugee resettlement center, when it comes to refugee children and their families, the appropriate question is not, "what is wrong with you?" The best question to ask is "what happened to you?" My supervisor's approach is more appropriate because it takes an asset-based view on learners and is more successful in engaging interest and connection with curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Pitre, 2014). The importance of being able to work with individuals who suffered trauma is also suggested by MacNevin (2012). Youth from refugee backgrounds, sometimes suffer from social isolation and schools fail to recognize their funds of knowledge (p. 51). The key to helping these individuals feel included is to create a safe, calm atmosphere, which is something that teachers do not always feel prepared to do (p. 52). The design of my CO eliminates feelings of social isolation by creating a safe, organized space, where children, accompanied by their families can express their experience and curiosity about life in American schools.

McBrien (2005) highlighted the barriers of how refugee children have traumatic experiences that can hinder their learning, and how they have specific psychosocial developmental needs to be fulfilled. McBrien based his views on the theory of segmented assimilation, which accounts for acculturation in various contexts. An intervention, to promote refugee learners' emotional engagement was created by McBrien (2005). McBrien's large scale longitudinal study, used quantitative methods and qualitative participatory action research to explore possible educational directions for students from refugee

backgrounds in PEI intermediate and high schools. Results yielded that, participatory action research was an effective method to engage the concerns of multiple stakeholders. Within this study, the psychosocial well-being of refugee children is a dominant theme and it included "a sense of safety, a sense of self, and an adjustment to the cultural expectations of a new place while maintaining a connection to their heritage" (2005, p. 339). Additionally, MacNevin suggested that future policy should ensure that schools provide advocacy for refugee youth who need not only language acquisition assistance, but emotional counsel as well (2012, p. 59-60). This was an important factor in studying how COs could be designed, because the learning experiences needed to be implemented in conjunction with relationship building between facilitator and students. If emotional counsel is ignored, the curriculum will not be as powerful. This was another reason for the use of interpreters in COs. They are already members of the participants' culture and can help facilitators and refugee participants get to know each other.

Acculturation vs. Transnational Family Approaches to Planning

An interesting intervention to reduce stress on trauma survivors was suggested by Weine et al. (2004). This qualitative study decided that "the extraordinary intensity that is carried by the parent-child relationship in refugee families is often not matched by existing intervention in the refugee trauma" (p. 158). The existing interventions mentioned previously focus on children and their parents separately, but what is needed is an intervention that incorporates the parent-child relationship's therapeutic facilities. Specifically, Weine et al. suggests that this intervention should address "areas of concern regarding school, transition, parental monitoring, and high-risk behaviors" (p. 158). This study denounces views of individual acculturation. Weine et al. suggests that professionals should stop using individual analysis and look more at family dynamics and structure. It is stated that, "family focused interventions could be directed at better helping families to address the problems of being 'transnational families' in support of their overall goal of promoting family togetherness among conditions of geographic disbursement" (p. 158). This idea suggests that "youth" cultural orientation programs should not be designed for youth

alone. Their family members should also be included to promote emotional safety and engagement, which correlates with Bourdieu's theory of social capital.

Bacigalupe and Cámara (2012) also discuss trends in refugee trauma and acculturation, but the study, "Transnational Families & Social Technologies: Reassessing Immigration Psychology," does not support the idea of acculturation at all. According to Bacigalupe and Cámara (2012), acculturation is anchored in an assumption that refugees and immigrants have a "need for recreating identity in the receiving country" (p. 1428). Another assumption associated with acculturation, highlighted by the study, is that a refugee family has "lost" their culture and home. The authors supported this claim with two reasons. Firstly, people create culture and can take it with them. Secondly, technology helps you stay connected with members of your culture. Bacigalupe and Cámara pointed out that a refugee still uses technology to maintain contact with their cultural roots. In a setting that approaches cultural orientation with an acculturation outlook, families, family dynamics, and communications associated with a "home" culture are ignored and refugees are considered "blank slates." This is not appropriate, or helpful for creating a participatory learning environment; therefore, I approached design from a transnational family approach, because an individual does not exist without social capital.

Stress Associated with English Language Acquisition

Another barrier refugee families must face is English language acquisition. Language acquisition can add significantly to psychosocial stressors (McBrein 2005). Generally, students who acquire English language skills "are better adjusted to their U.S. school environment" (p. 342). Others are often made fun of and, sometimes, become silent out of fear of public humiliation. Gifted children, who are learning English, are often not recognized by educators and are tracked into lower level classes. In some cases, they are even placed in special education classes, or separated from the mainstream. Since they do not have learning disabilities, smaller, more structured special education classes can slow language acquisition and injure self-efficacy of refugee students.

When formal, mainstream institutions dismiss the discourses and practices of marginalized groups this creates a "symbolic violence" toward the group's culture (Naidoo, 2009). Naidoo mentioned that this can also be found in some countries literacy practices. Arguably, public schools within the United States create symbolic violence toward any practices that aren't mainstream. Warriner (2007) also brings up how, in the personal experiences of families resettling in the United States, there is a very complicated relationship between English language proficiency, Americanization, national identity formation, and patriotism. Despite enthusiasm to become a contributing citizen, immigrant families educational and job-related workload limits their full integration into participating in the American society. There is limited social and economic mobility for families facing this struggle. Warriner suggests that there is "a need for a more empirical work that theorizes the long educational, social, and economic costs associated with exclusionary practices in educational settings" (p. 356).

Additional concerns, associating language acquisition with psychosocial stressors, include a critique on the "functional, competency-based approach" that dominates ESL curriculum development (Tollefson, 1986). A functional approach is most commonly defined, by Grognet and Crandall (1982) as, "a performance-outline of language tasks that lead to a demonstrated mastery of the language associated with specific skills that are necessary for individuals to function proficiently in the society in which they live" (Tollefson, 1986, p. 650). Tollefson's 1986 article examines the theoretical and practical deficiencies in how curricular objectives are selected for a functional approach. In functional, competency-based approaches, including youth programs, there are very prescriptive lesson plans that can be implemented by novice ESL teachers. One size fits all prescriptive programs are problematic because survival depends on various environmental contexts. Managers, supervisors, and teachers (who may or may not have had contact with ESL populations) decide on curriculum. This means that these programs are not participatory for the populations they are created to help and may ask refugees to adopt values that they don't believe in. The goal is to help a person transition into living somewhere new, while still retaining the personal beliefs and values that they identify with.

Discussions with my resettlement supervisor revealed that, COs operate as a precursor to ESL classes and should be conducted in the language families are trying to learn. After all, language is culture and it is important to practice in a place designed to ease psychosocial stressors. Considering the power of language, it is also important to monitor the risk of allowing symbolic violence to slip into curriculum design of COs. To decrease the likelihood of symbolic violence, is wise to allow refugees to participate in the design process (McBrien, 2005; MacNevin, 2012). Additionally, the importance of language as a psychosocial stressor influenced my CO design to incorporates learner autonomy over content (they can change the content) and the use of an interpreter, who can act as a possible mentor in initial English language acquisition.

Resonating tools for implementation: Literary Suggestions
Can use family support system (social capital)
Can build relationships with OC facilitators
Can use technology to increase flexibility
Can use simulations and problem solving activities (Tollefson, 1986)

Significance of Literature to the Project

Thoughts and projects associated with theories of acculturation, transnational family adjustment (Bacigalupe and Cámara, 2012), Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (Naidoo, 2009), the theory of segmented assimilation (MacNevin, 2005), and the theory of symbolic violence (Naidoo, 2009) highlight trends of the refugee experience in learning environments. Additionally, researchers have suggested what orientation content could be included for building foundations of school success. Tollefson (1985) promoted curriculums that aid with topics of stress management, family dynamics in school communication, finances, and health. Naidoo (2009) also discussed managing psychosocial stressors by highlighting the purpose of the curriculum in identity development. Highlighting identity in the content of CO curriculums is challenging because it requires a design, or structure that can resonate with a diverse group of learners.

Literary review suggests that structuring the design of COs to support identity, and previously existing cultural capital, is a challenging process, but common views suggested that differentiated structures are accessible when cultural capital is acknowledged (Naidoo, 2009; Tollefson, 1986). Differentiated structures could include simulations and problem solving activities that allow for a lot of choice in the learning process (Tollefson, 1986). The cultural orientation (CO) I designed was initially intended to be designed for school-aged children, but the literature influenced it to become a "family CO," where children and parents could support each other in the learning process. Weine (2004) promotes orientations that leverage the therapeutic properties of parent-child relationships. Most orientations counsel and test parents and children separately, but this takes away the emotional security and collective knowledge of the family unit. Refugee families have survived much hardship and trauma, so they often are wary of situations that separate them from loved ones. Bacigalupe and Cámara (2012) also support that the social capital of families, family dynamics, and use of technology should not be ignored in orientation design. Technology could even be used to neutralize the need for an orientation facilitator. If the design requires a facilitator, there must be a relationship between this person and participants (MacNevin 2012).

Part 2: Inquiry into Stakeholder Views

Knowledge gained from similar contexts provided a theoretical basis for the design of orientations at the resettlement center. For the most part, theories regarding transnational families and psychosocial stressors, seemed to center around the importance of allowing social capital to fuel the learning process. The focus of this project's initial inquiry was to analyze the views of different stakeholders. I talked to refugee families (the learners), a refugee resettlement center's employees/volunteers, and the government agency in charge of our grant to determine what content could be included in family orientations for Nashville's public schools. Specifically, this inquiry began with two research questions: In the curriculum of a family CO, what content could be included to satisfy the needs

of both families and schools, and how could the orientation experience be structured to allow families to have more autonomy over the learning and design process.

Research Questions:

- What content could be included to satisfy the needs of both families and schools?
- How could the orientation experience be structured to allow families to have more autonomy over the learning and design process?

Methods: Data Collection from Stakeholders

It takes a certain amount of bravery to participate, so the process of my inquiry was delicate and messy. To understand what content could be included in COs and how the learning experience could be structured, I had to understand the refugee experience. This involved getting to know the organizations that refugees interact with, what knowledge these orientations value for school orientation, and how they believe the content should be learned by refugee participants. Literature review provided a macro-level glimpse of what global society thinks about orientation experience. The government agency I worked with presented political (exosystem) views. The refugee resettlement center illuminated local mesosystem values and practices of orienting refugee families.

I wanted to see how these perspectives collided and divided to create the overall orientation experience for the microsystem of the refugee individual. When I got to know the climate of cultural orientation at the local refugee resettlement center, I got to interact with adult refugee participants. We talked about what they most wanted to know about American schools. My findings gave me a taste of a microsystem perspective that was at odds with mesosystem and exosystem values. I then tried to knock on the door to the refugee's personal world. I wanted to know what funds of knowledge they brought with them across the seas, jungles, and deserts, so I started reading their biographic files (bios) in preparation for contact. This was an important step because it provided me with a foundation for approaching

families. It determined how I should contact them, who I should have interpreters contact, and whether they had literacy abilities strong enough to correspond electronically.

I initially planned to meet with families in person, so the bios provided foundations for polite cultural etiquette. However, when I began attempting to set up home visits, it became apparent that families were hesitant to establish contact. This took me by surprise, because managers at the refugee resettlement center assured me that most families came from collective cultures that welcomed community members whole-heartedly. But, as I sat in reflection about the situation I was in, I realized I was not yet a part of their communities. MacNevin (2012) was right, I had to establish a relationship with them first. I decided on the gentler approach of emailing and calling. Email was more effective, and I think it was because they could tell I was truly affiliated with their resettlement organization. Considering the anti-immigrant political environment of the United States, I can now understand why some immigrants (particularly from "banned" countries) would avoid being asked about how to improve cultural orientations about schools. It would take time, but, before I could learn what refugees want to learn about could improve their experiences in American schools, I had to prove my trustworthiness. Out of all 105 participants, I was only able to gather RQ1 data from two families. I worried that I wouldn't have data for RQ2 from the refugee individual's perspective, but, thankfully, when I was coding my field notes for research question answers, I realized that I had written about a family-interaction experience prior to Donald Trump's first executive order on immigration. In this family-interaction experience, I had gone with a Syrian mother and her sons to MNPS' ELL enrollment office. We didn't have an interpreter, but she got out her cell phone and we talked on google translate for almost an hour.

Overall, I spent around 200 hours over the course of spring and summer semesters on this capstone project. I worked with different stakeholders including a government agency, a refugee resettlement center, and families who have experienced refugee resettlement. The variety of participants enriched data collected. Although I would have preferred to obtain data from all the refugee families who have been resettled since October, I realized that it was not appropriate or useful to bother families into

participation. I wanted to call again, or email again, but I respected their decision to remain silent. The key to improving participation might lie in working more with a trusted community members (interpreters are often these individuals).

Data Triangulation Chart

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA COLLECTED	ANALYSIS
In the curriculum of a Youth Cultural Orientation, what content could be included to satisfy the needs of both families and schools?	1. Field notes on cultural orientations at the refugee resettlement center 2. Government agency post-assessment artifacts for adults and children 3. Field notes on conference with government agency representative 4. Field notes of refugee perspectives and interactions	1.Coded by research question 2.Descriptive Coding 3. Coded by research question 4. Coded by research question
How could the orientation experience be structured to allow families to have more autonomy over the learning and design process?	1. Field notes on cultural orientations at the refugee resettlement center 2. Government agency post-assessment artifacts for adults and children 3. Field notes on conference with government agency representative 4. Biographic files of recently resettled refugees 5. Field notes of refugee perspectives and interactions	1.Coded by research question 2. Descriptive coding 3. Coded by research question 4. Attribute & magnitude coding 5. Coded by research question

Data Analysis

Although my data collection methods were complex and interconnected, I analyzed the sources of data in more simplistic, low-tech ways. To protect the confidentiality of my participants, I did not video or record them, so coding transcripts was not possible. After my observations and conferences, I recorded field notes about what transpired and my reflections upon it. I have a very colloquial field note style, so I

had to choose codes that could separate my opinions from data source opinions within the writing. As a result, I coded by research questions (RQ1 & RQ2).

The process of coding was time consuming. I read all the field notes first - to make sure I wasn't missing any significant patterns. After, I read through each field note again for just RQ1. I repeated the procedure for RQ2. This strategy helped me notice content or structural ideas that I hadn't before. Time has a way of only allowing us to remember ideas that fit in most with our personal belief systems, but coding field notes by research question maintained objectivity.

In addition to coding field notes, I also coded the government agency artifacts (post-test assessments) and participant bios in different ways. Government artifacts were coded by topic, which was easier because there were only two test assessments given to me. All topics were centered around RQ1. On the other hand, attribute coding the 105 refugee participant bios was significantly more difficult because there was a vast array of attributes provided. I coded by attribute and then used magnitude coding see if there were patterns of attributes that could visually represent cultural, language/literacy, location, technology trends across the families. Attribute and magnitude coding of bios was important for answering RQ2, because it illuminated structural needs for a diverse group of speakers, readers, and writers. Some people speak, read, and write in English, the language of most orientations, while others only speak their native languages. Findings from this coding will be reported in the next section.

Code Book

DATA SOURCE	TYPE OF CODING	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Field notes	**Research Question**	Isolating anything that concerned what could be learned within orientation and how it can be taught (RQ1 & RQ2)	We sat together for almost an hour and had a lovely conversation with the aid of google translate! It was awesome. Just small talk about Crest White Strips and various things, but the mother and I really got along. Note: RQ2
Artifacts	**Descriptive**	Descriptive coding summarizes data in a word or a shorter phrase	Student post-test assessment "#9.) How does your teacher let you know how you are doing in school?"

			Note: <mark>grading policy</mark>
Biographic Files	**Attribute** +	Attribute coding explores descriptive info, which is useful in comparing and contrasting participants.	**Attribute Example:** Family #1 nationality, ethnicity, religion, where their apartment complex is, contact information, email access, number of people in family, ages of adults and children, what languages are spoken/read/written.
	Magnitude	Magnitude coding helps to observe the frequency/intensity of certain attributes of participants	**Magnitude Example:** Creation of bar graph. How many people speak different languages. How many people read or write the languages. What languages are used the most. I also created a concept map to show what neighborhoods had technology access.

Inquiry Findings

Though the journey to establish contact was winding and interconnected, collaboration with data sources revealed many answers for this inquiry's research questions. My data sources and coding analysis revealed that the refugee resettlement center and the government agency want refugee youth and parents to learn about school policies and safety. On the other hand, refugee parents want future families to learn about interpersonal relationships involved with making friends and maintaining a good relationship with teachers (RQ1). Additionally, the learning environment (RQ2) of CO's could be structured in the form of didactic PowerPoint presentations (the resettlement center), interactive learning stations with short answer questions (the government agency), or via online module (refugee bios).

RESEARCH QUESTION	**DATA**	**FINDINGS**
RQ1: In the curriculum of a Youth Cultural Orientation, what content could be included to satisfy the needs of both families and schools?	1. Literary review 2. field notes 3. Government agency artifacts 4. Refugee survey (open ended question)	1. Ed. Researchers promote stress management, healthy family dynamics, finance, managing psychosocial stressors, health/identity development 2. Content could include how public school is free, compulsory, and available for everyone. Educational hierarchy, ESL support services, free/reduced price lunch, required school supplies, school expectations for parent

		involvement, higher ed. opportunities, GED information. 3. Grade level, transportation, dress code, homework, bullying, attendance, discipline, grading, ed. hierarchy, parent teacher conferences (interpreters provided) 4.Obedience, following class rules, how to make friends, how to converse with classmates/teachers. How to get financial aid for educational opportunities. How students change classes and general behavior expectations during class.
RQ2: How could the orientation experience be structured to allow families to have more autonomy over the learning and design process?	1. Literary review 2. field notes 3. Biographical files (bios)	1.Differentiate with interactive problem solving & simulation. Use technology. Parents and children must work together (family orientation) 2. Center Didactic PowerPoint w/ true/false assessment (no pre-test). Government agency OC orientations usually didactic w/ open ended questions (no pre-test). Representative open to more interactive methods. Refugee family utilized Google translate on January 20th. 3. 55% of 105 refugees have access to technology (online module possible). Majority of population speaks/reads/writes Kiswahili & English. Developing literacies in various languages suggest utilizing strong imagery and drawing activities.

RQ1 Findings. In pursuit of RQ1, I gathered content ideas, associated with the exosystem surrounding refugee families, from the government agency. Based on test sample artifact coding, the government agency believes that it is valuable for refugee adults and children to be oriented to their new life with the content of student grade level identification, transportation, school dress code, homework policies, bullying support services, attendance policy, discipline policy, conduct of parent teacher meetings, expectations of parent involvement in school.

The mesosystem's neighborhood services can be represented by cultural orientations at the resettlement center. This orientation covered the following aspects of the public-school system. How it is free, compulsory available for everyone. This orientation went over the educational hierarchy, such as; how there are elementary schools, middle schools, high schools technical/vocational schools, undergraduate programs, graduate programs, and post–doctoral programs. The refugee resettlement center curriculum went over different grade levels, ELL support services for MNPS, School supplies, free school meals. This orientation also addressed school expectations for parent involvement (how parents must fill out form forms, get their children immunized, attend parent teacher conferences). Higher education opportunities were also listed; such as, how a GED is the equivalent of a high school diplomas. The center's orientation also talked about how long higher education opportunities take to complete, different vocational opportunities (auto repair, plumbing, cosmetology, dental hygiene, computer graphic, metalworking).

The values and techniques of all these systems converge to create the climate of individual refugee's daily experience (microsystem). But everyone, due to personality, family beliefs, and his/her experience across time, views what content could be taught in his/her own way. As I speculated in the data collection section, fear of backlash from the exosystem (political climate) discouraged a lot of families from participating in answering RQ1. However, I did get to interact with a small sample of refugee individuals in the resettlement center's CO, one family's email correspondence, and in a serendipitous cab ride. Before I observed the resettlement cultural orientation for adults, I talked to some of the participants about what they wanted to know about public schools. A Kiswahili speaking family wanted to learn more about technology in schools, which is something that the adult orientation wouldn't teach them in the next hour. A Burmese family didn't answer with what they wanted to learn, but their interpreter, a past refugee with school aged children, had a lot to say. He wanted an orientation that helped to improve English skills in school, informed about activities within schools, and information on government aspects of education. Such government aspects related to financial options for enabling

families to go to college or vocational schools. The resettlement center's CO only talks about where refugees could go to school, but not how to sustain it financially.

A different perspective was given to me by another Burmese parent (he contacted me via email), who stressed the importance of preparing future families for what was expected from school children in terms of "obedience" and interpersonal skills for establishing relationship skills with peers and teachers (example: what words not to say to your teacher or in his/her classroom). The young man, from Haiti, who volunteered his perspective in an early morning cab ride to the airport, also spoke of his emotional turmoil when he began high school in the United States. He said that no one ever gave him a cultural orientation and it would have been helpful for him, because he unprepared for class changes and he even got in trouble for standing up to welcome the teacher into the classroom. In Haiti, high school students stay in one classroom throughout the day and their teachers change classes. Whenever a teacher enters, the students stand up to greet them as a sign of respect. The perspectives of refugee stakeholders illuminate a point of contention with cultural orientations – perhaps we need to create CO's for school personnel? This could be a future project after family COs.

RQ2 Findings. The exosystem and mesosystem stakeholders had different opinions about OC structure. I shared my macrosystem findings with a government agency representative (exosystem), and she had never thought about combining parent and student school COs. They have traditionally remained separate and didactic within this government organization. Short answer questions are used to assess whether parents and students have learned the required content (there is no pre-assessment required). The representative was open to more interactive methods of instruction, but adamant that the short answer assessments be used to show mastery. In the mesosystem, the refugee resettlement center uses didactic PowerPoint and true/false questions to encourage cultural orientation. Only adults are oriented and there is no pre-assessment of prior knowledge.

All ecological levels converge to create the individual refugee's experience. I coded my field notes to find a family-interaction experience prior to Donald Trump's first executive order on immigration. On January 20th, I had gone with a Syrian mother and her sons to MNPS' ESL enrollment office. We didn't have an interpreter, but she got out her cell phone and we talked on google translate for almost an hour. We met as strangers, but left as friends. According to MacNevin (2012), building relationships between facilitator and CO students is important for ensuring psychosocial support in cultural orientation. Google translate, or other applications of technology, could be used in orientation experiences to boost development of relationships between the orienteer in the oriented. Based on the study of Jimenez et. al. (2015), social acts of translation can boost initial language acquisition. Translation's role in language acquisition was also supported by my Haitian participant. Language acquisition can ease psychosocial stressors and accelerate cultural adjustment and success of the individual.

In addition to my experiences recorded in field notes, I used attribute coding to analyze ethnographic details within family bios and found most refugee families to have access to technology. This made online module orientations possible, and neutralized the need for facilitator/participant relationship building. Attribute coding also revealed that majority of the 105 people speak/read/write Kiswahili and/or English. In the future, modules could be created with built in translation. An audio component might need to be included, because, even though some participants could speak many languages, they couldn't read or write in any of them. These developing literacies also indicated a need for visual prompts and drawing activities.

Data Considerations: Conclusion of Part 2

Overall, stakeholders support that orientations could cover how public education in the United States is free, compulsory, available for everyone. It is important to communicate that education in the U.S. has a hierarchy of levels (elementary school, middle school, high school, undergraduate programs,

graduate programs, and vocational programs). Families need to know how ESL support services are offered for MNPS teacher conferences. Families are entitled to school supplies and free school meals. Students need to be informed about: what level they are in school, how they get to school, what they should wear to school, homework policies, what to do when they're being bullied, what they do when they're in trouble, and attendance policies. There is also a need for an easily differentiated CO learning experiences. For students coming from the DRC, it can be a little startling to be required to sit still for six hours and raise their hands whenever they must go to the bathroom. Where they are coming from, you could just get up and go. Children from Syria have experience interrupted education, but they generally know rules of etiquette in the mainstream classroom.

Based on my observations of the refugee center orientations and my conversations with the government agency representative, many CO curriculums are structured to be taught in a didactic way. My interactions with families, on the other hand, suggested that building language acquisition and relationships with instructors and teachers and schools needed to be more interactive. One Syrian mother, I met on January 20, used Google translate to converse with me. This experience helped me decide to use technology in the CO design. It is flexible, consistently available (interpreters are sometimes hard to reserve), and user friendly.

Literature regarding orientations discusses how parent-child bonds are important for engagement with content and facilitators. Attribute and magnitude coding for nationality, ethnicity, and literacy/Language capabilities was very informative for how to interact with the families in orientations. Most families were Burundian, Afghanistan, Iraqi, Somalian, Burmese. Syrian. Each nationality ethnicity and religion has cultural norms of interaction that go along with it. If an orientation must be conducted without the use of online modules, and facilitators and interpreters are required, facilitators can establish relationships more effectively when they know how their participants are comfortable communicating. For example, if I were to speak with a devout Muslim family from Syria it's not appropriate for me to try to shake hands with members of the opposite sex.

Following Wolcott's strategies for ensuring reliability (Mills, 2006), I tried to establish relationships with participants. I began writing field notes as soon as I began working at the resettlement center. I reported the successes and shortcomings of data collection and efforts to secure participation. I relied on critical peers to ensure that the research collected data consistently, and that this data answered the research questions. Gathering data to answer the research questions was challenging, and, while I answered RQ1 and RQ2, findings might not be generalizable to other organizations and refugee ethnic groups. Collecting data from various contexts has proved to be an interesting experience. It is important to notice that refugee perspectives aligned more closely with macro-level researchers (literature review), while exosystem and mesosystem views aligned with each other. Regardless of similarities and differences, if the structure of the design is flexible, all content and structural ideas can possibly be combined to create a family CO that satisfies all needs and supports a positive school experience (McGuire et al., 2006).

Part 3: Prototyping an Orientation Curriculum

Prototype Description and Implementation

In the initial inquiry of this project, I collected data on the perspectives of various stakeholders and explored possible curriculum topics and design structures. This inquiry was conducted in the context of my EDUC 7810 class on action research. My capstone project extended this inquiry by creating a two prototypes of a parent-child cultural orientations. The first prototype was implemented in the refugee resettlement center and its progress and revisions determined the design of the second. Both prototypes were centered upon Bourdieu's theory of social capital (Naidoo, 2009). As mentioned earlier, theories of social capital are correlated with the idea that cultural orientation curriculums should be designed to include the whole transnational family. Design that allows transnational families to use their social capital promotes emotional safety and engagement in curriculum (Weine et al.,2004).

The prototype was designed for parents and children, and took the form of interactive stations that utilized imagery, conversation, and drawing activities (Tollefson, 1986). The stations explored topics that stakeholders believed to be important for incoming families, such as; what kids should bring/wear to school, transportation, attendance, teacher expectations, technology in schools, bullying, social opportunities, and higher educational opportunities. The experience, supported by the government agency, was implemented in the refugee resettlement center with an interpreter, who went through stations with parents and students. If the families felt that they already knew the content of a station, or did not want to explore it, they could skip it and spend more time on a more interesting one. The "School Benefits" station allowed families to report what else they wanted to learn that wasn't addressed by the CO.

The resettlement center that I interned at is currently implementing my prototype with new families, and, according to my previous supervisor, it has been helpful for all families (they have performed well on the government agency's mandatory post-assessment). Families have enjoyed having more autonomy over their learning and learn a lot through conversation with an interpreter (this time was previously restricted in didactic COs). However, despite success, some changes needed to be made to meet the needs of elementary school children. The resettlement center added arts and crafts to the stations to boost engagement of elementary students. Reports of changes made to the prototype has led to further inquiry into how to create a family cultural orientation that can be differentiated by both content and structure to meet the needs of the learner, wherever they are coming from, and wherever they are planning to go (elementary, middle, or high school). To accommodate learners' diverse interests, I decided to use technology to differentiate the orientation.

Inquiry into Improving the Prototype

The differences in family interests presents a problem for designing just one CO. In one orientation, if I design for all grade levels, interpreters will not have time to go into depth about specifics

regarding elementary education, middle school education, and high school education. Some families only have children in elementary school, while others are interested in high school settings. Even though the resettlement center liked the content and structure of my design, the prototype changes helped me to see that I really needed to create three different orientations for families entering MNPS. This new iteration of family MNPS COs address elementary school, middle school, and high school cultures independently.

When I used attribute coding to analyze ethnographic details within family bios, I found most refugee families to have access to technology. This made online module orientations possible, and neutralized the need for facilitator-participant relationship building (MacNevin 2012). Attribute coding also revealed that majority of 105 people speak, read, and write Kiswahili and/or English. Modules with built-in translation would serve both these major language groups. Some participants could speak many languages, but couldn't read or write in any of them, so I included interactive drawing activities, imagery, and videos. In the future, it would be nice to have audio recordings of the content on the slides (in different languages), but I need more assistance from interpreters for that. According to the theory of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), access to technology can increase the flexibility of learning experience; therefore, increasing differentiation for language and literacy abilities (Mcguire et al., 2006)

UDL is centered around equitable use in a community, flexibility in use, simplicity, clarity, low physical effort, and physical accessibility (Mcguire et al., 2006, p. 170). According to this framework, it is impossible to have a true "core" content, but it is possible to create a learning experience flexible enough to increase the learner's autonomy (Hitchcock et al., 2002). If the learner has more control, they can use their power to shape the curriculum to better meet their needs. Parents and children could also work on the module in a familiar place without the presence of strangers. This could be very beneficial for children who have experienced trauma. The flexibility offered by technology compelled me to expand my prototype into three online modules that can be continually revised to incorporate the knowledge and views of all stakeholders.

Part 4: Final Curriculum and Implications

Curriculum Content & Structure

As I stated previously, I turned the initial prototype into a second iteration that features three digital CO modules. These modules cover different developmental levels in public education; elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. For the most part, the content is the same as the prototype (topics suggested by stakeholders). I still include what learners should bring/wear to school, transportation, attendance, teacher expectations, technology in schools, bullying, social opportunities, and higher educational opportunities (topics provided by the stakeholders), but the second iteration now features differentiated videos to support the learning of these topics across ages of students. In addition, the digital modules explore Tennessee Department of Education's expectations for grade-level learning. In the high school orientation, I also provided resources for financial aid and technical programs offered by MNPS.

The structure of the nearpod.com online module is very different from the prototype. There are still interactive stations (utilizing problem solving and drawing activities), families can skip stations they already know, and learners can suggest content changes. But there is no interpreter anymore. I need more money, man-power, and technological resources to include translations and additional language support on the modules. In the future, I would like to code the modules and increase security surrounding participants. It would also be nice to incorporate further interpreter involvement, perhaps in the form of an online tutor for the family. I would like to add this because I worry that losing an active interpreter will decrease psychosocial support and English language acquisition associated with the learning experience.

Final Project. *http://orienteeringschool.weebly.com*

Discussion and Conclusion

Designing curriculum to meet the needs of refugees has been an arduous process. My adherence to a family-centered approach (rather than student-centered approach) leveraged the collective strength of

the families. Not only did I have to break down barriers to participation, but I also had to create a design flexible enough to account for differences between families. Differentiating involved allowing learners to choose which stations they wanted to learn about and providing multi-modal interactive response activities to partner stations. Allowing for learner autonomy personalized the experience of COs and provided psychosocial support for refugee families. Facilitators and interpreters have also served as sources of psychosocial support for families (MacNevin, 2012). I haven't yet studied the influence of interpreters on the learning process, but there is something to be said about the importance of conversation in learning (Jimenez et al., 2015). Interpreters could be extending and customizing the curriculum with their own funds of knowledge in real time. Interpreters contribute to the idea of social capital by reinforcing the collective strength of a family with community support.

In conclusion, the design of my digital family cultural orientations is flexible with both autonomy and supportive with social capital. This project has demonstrated the importance of social capital and autonomy in the learning process. Learners need to see how their existing social structures, knowledge, and values can be used in a new setting. Transnational families who have suffered from loss and trauma rely on social capital in many areas of their lives, such as emotional support and survival. This social capital is a valuable resource for learning about the culture of schooling in public schools in Nashville.

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