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WHO REALLY WANTS
"THE TIRED, THE POOR, AND THE HUDDLED MASSES"
ANYWAY?:
A STUDY OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS THAT
INFLUENCE AND CONSTRAIN THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF
SOMALI BANTU MALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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By

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ABSTRACT

WHO REALLY WANTS
"THE TIRED, THE POOR, AND THE HUDDLED MASSES" ANYWAY?:
A STUDY OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE AND CONSTRAIN THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF SOMALI BANTU MALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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This qualitative research study examines the socio-cultural factors that influence and constrain the success of Somali Bantu male refugee students enrolled at high schools in Central City. Primary emphases for this study have been on the contexts of reception for these students in their local schools and communities, the social networks they use to help them gain information about how to succeed in schools, and the ways in which the cultural capital they possess is valued or under-valued by teachers and other service providers. Specifically this work examines the inherent difficulties Somali Bantu youth face when they try to succeed in public schools in the U.S., but have previously only attended schools sporadically due to discrimination against their ethnic group and civil war within their home country. Through an analysis of their interactions with teachers, their families and their peer group at school and their overall academic performance, gaps in their academic knowledge are highlighted. A rich description of the difficult and complex circumstances under which Somali Bantu young men and their families lived in Somalia, refugee camps in Kenya, and now in Central City provides teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators a contextual framework for understanding the potential difficulties that Somali Bantu students typically face in their transition to formalized schooling in the U.S.

My findings suggest that the Somali Bantu students in the study have an incomplete understanding of the U.S. school system, have not had prior exposure to subject matter crucial to their academic success in school, and exert downward peer pressure upon one another that is hard for them to overcome. Teacher responses to these students include negotiating and bargaining, avoidance, disappointment and frustration, and regret. I argue that continued inattention to the educational and social needs of these students will most likely result in a loss of academic potential and human capital that will affect these students, their families, and the larger communities in which they reside.

This book is dedicated to my beloved mother, Herminia G. Roxas, who supported me throughout her life in every way possible with wise counsel, never-ending support, and, of course, much love.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1

Welcome to the U.S.: The context of reception in schools for Somali Bantu refugee students

Introduction

The relocation of refugees is changing the face of the United States, placing unique challenges on its educational system (Portes, 2002; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). The numbers of refugee students enrolled in public schools is growing apace, the academic backgrounds of these students are becoming increasingly diverse, and the funds with which to support special programs are becoming scarce (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001b; C. Suarez-Orozco, 2000). Meanwhile, the teacher workforce continues to be predominantly white, middle-class, monolingual and female (Zeichner, Melnick, and Gomez, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teacher educators in schools and colleges of education mirror these same characteristics. This increasing diversity in the range and type of refugee students and the lack of diversity in teachers and teacher educators is contributing to an ever-increasing divide between what students need in schools and what schools can currently provide (Goodwin, 2002; Rong & Preislle, 1998; Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2001; C. Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Igoa, 1995; Schoorman, 2001; Wallace, 2000).

As waves of children from different refugee groups throughout the world continue to move to the United States, the educational task facing public school teachers in schools in which these children enroll proves to be a daunting one. Indeed, upon arrival in the U.S., refugee students have difficulty adjusting to public schools because of various

factors including emotional trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (Sinclair, 2001; C. Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Volkan, 1993; Westernmeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996); difficulty with learning the English language (Guerrero, 2004; Cummins, 1995; Olsen, 2000; Valdes, 1998); and the ambivalent context of their reception by their local community, school, teaching, staff, and fellow students (Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland, and Doumbia, 2003; Lee, 2005, 1996; Lucas, 1996).

Even though the official discourse of most school policies and teacher talk in U.S. public schools is to welcome refugees, many schools lack necessary English as a Second Language (ESL) programs or teachers (Gitlin et al., 2003), hold low expectations of their refugee students (M. Suarez-Orozco, 1989; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990), and fail to provide refugee parents translation services so that they may better understand the U.S. public school system at school events or parent-teacher meetings. The problems that refugee students and their families face in U.S. public schools often result in experiences of isolation and rejection, lower achievement scores on standardized tests, higher drop-out rates, and antisocial behavior and rejection by peers (Rong & Preissle, 1998; French & Conrad, 2001; Kirova, 2001).

Purpose of the study

Few educational research studies describe how recently arrived refugee students and their families make their transition to public schools in the U.S. and how they negotiate success in a formal schooling environment (Ngo, Bigelow, & Wahlstrom, 2007; Hones & Cha, 1999; Igoa, 1995). In order to better understand these processes, this study examines the educational adaptation of Somali Bantu male high school students and their families to U.S. public schools during the 2007-2008 (June 2007 to May 2008) school

year. Specifically, my research question for the study is "***What are the socio-cultural factors that influence and constrain the academic success of Somali Bantu male high school students?***" Primary emphases for this research have been on the contexts of reception for Somali Bantu male students at high schools in the Central City School District[1] and in the local communities into which they have settled, the social networks they use to help them gain information and succeed in school and after school, and how the cultural capital they possess is valued or under-valued by teachers and other service providers in Central City.

An examination of the contexts of reception for the young men in this study includes how family, politics, history, and economics influence the teaching and learning process within a social context. Portes (2000) argues that the contexts of reception matter a great deal to immigrant minorities in America. He writes:

> Immigrants from Asia are beneficiaries of a relatively benign reception in the United States, marked by the absence of persecution by government authorities, declining discrimination by natives, and the halo effect of successful settlement and adaptation by prior Asian cohorts (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996). Mexicans, on the other hand, are regularly persecuted as potentially illegal aliens and are subject to much external discrimination as ''takers'' of American jobs and bearers of an inferior culture (Cornelius, 1998). This negative reception inevitably affects the outlook of immigrants, reducing their expectations of what is possible to achieve in their new country, and consequently, their aspirations for the children."

My study adds to the research on how the contexts of reception matter to refugee students in particular by examining the context of reception for a group of young refugee students who are currently enrolled in public schools in the U.S. but who previously have had little access to educational opportunities in their homeland and within refugee camps. By closely examining the different ways in which they have been received into their local school and neighborhood communities, it is my hope that the research in this study will

[1] All place and school names are pseudonyms.

bring greater attention to the needs of recently arrived refugee students for teachers, administrators, and for educational policy-makers with teen-age refugee students in their schools.

Rationale

Numerous reasons compel me to study this particular ethnic group including, but not limited to, the following: the historical repercussions of lower-caste status in Somalia for the Somali Bantu; their lack of experience with formal schooling in their home country; the discrimination they faced from other refugees in refugee camps in Kenya; and their seeming lack of capital (financial, social, and cultural) in navigating the public school system in the U.S (International Organization for Migration, 2002; Van Lehman & Eno, 2003). These obstacles suggest that Somali Bantu families and their children, and other refugee students in similar circumstances, will have difficulty adjusting to public schools in the United States and may, as a consequence, not succeed academically. The choice to study Somali Bantu young men in school is also important to me because of the unique stresses placed on these young men to be both successful students in school and wage-earners for their families (C. Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Olsen, 1998b); the gendered roles they must undertake as males both in the Somali Bantu community and also in U.S. public high schools; (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005; Valenzuela Jr., A. 1999); and the stereotypes they face as black males, refugees, and part of the underclass in U.S. society (Steele, 1997; Rong & Brown, 2002; Davidson, 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1987, 1991).

History of the Bantu in Somalia

The Somali Bantu are descended from six African tribes originally living in regions in what are now known as Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Arab slave traders armed with muskets and whips plundered these regions, and they captured untold numbers of Bantu men, women, and children to be sold in Zanzibar's great slave market for eventual enslavement in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. As they escaped or were freed during these centuries, many Bantu attempted to return to Tanzania. However, the harsh environment of southern Somalia prevented them from returning to their ancestral land. Many settled in the Juba River Valley of Somalia where they were able to live as subsistence farmers. During the era of Italian colonization (1890-1941), slavery was technically abolished, but the plight of the former slaves did not greatly improve, and they were forced to work on plantations owned by the Italian colonial administration (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003).

Under the British occupation of Somalia from 1941-1951, conditions improved slightly for the Bantu. However, when Somalia gained independence in 1960, life became more difficult. The Somali Bantu continued to be the victims of overt discrimination in housing, education and employment. Many were forcibly conscripted into the military and sent to fight Somalia's war with Ethiopia. Civil War in Somalia in the early 1990s created a situation in which Bantus, previously despised by Somalia's primarily nomadic clans, were robbed, raped, bullied and chased into exile in neighboring Kenya. The impact of slavery on the Somali Bantu has been devastating. Even after slavery was abolished, the Somali Bantu continued to be treated as second-class citizens in Somalia. Cultural, linguistic, and physical differences set the Bantu apart from ethnic

Somalis. There was no co-mingling or intermarriage between the two groups. The Bantu were discouraged from sending their children to school, denied land rights, and denied political representation. They were restricted to the most menial jobs and were often taunted and ridiculed by ethnic Somalis (Besteman, 1999; Cassanelli & Besteman, 1996).

The system of discrimination was even perpetuated in the refugee camps they resettled to in Dabaab, Kenya, where the Bantu were ostracized and forced to live on the peripheries of refugee camps, the least protected areas of these camps, where robbery, rape, and murder were part of their daily existence. Many of these Somali Bantu have spent most of the last decade in these refugee camps awaiting resettlement (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002; Princeton Refugee Initiative, 2005). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the years of subjugation and fear in Somalia have adversely affected the sense of equality and self-esteem for many Somali Bantu. Many witnessed friends and relatives being killed in Somalia. The prevalence of violence and the constant threat of attack in the refugee camps have further eroded the Bantu's sense of security and well-being. The IOM reports trauma-related problems, including hopelessness and depression, among the Bantu being interviewed for resettlement (International Organization for Migration, 2002).

Although access to formal schooling was limited in Somalia, primary and secondary education was made available to all refugees in the Kenyan camps. Schools in these camps, however, were generally under-funded and access to educational materials and resources inadequate. Bantu children were taught according to the Kenyan national educational system, where English is used as the medium of instruction in the primary

school. Many school-age Somali Bantu children have attained some English reading, writing, and speaking skills, especially the boys. However, education for girls is not as high a priority. The IOM estimates that approximately 5% of the adult Bantu refugees (mostly male) are proficient in English. Although many Bantu children have learned to speak some English, the Somali Bantu as a general population have remained largely illiterate (International Organization for Migration, 2002; Van Lehman & Eno, 2003).

In the spring of 2003, the United States began to admit the first of 13,000 Somali Bantu refugees. Beginning in the spring of 2005, non-profit social service organizations in the Central City area, including Catholic Refugee Services and Lutheran Social Services, have organized the resettlement of approximately three hundred and fifty Bantu refugees into the local community. According to local social service providers and Somali Bantu community leaders, approximately one hundred and thirty Somali Bantu students are enrolled in the Central City Public School District. There are approximately fifteen Somali Bantu students enrolled in high school, twenty in middle school, and about one hundred in various elementary schools throughout Central City. The fifteen Somali Bantu high school students have faced numerous difficulties in adjusting to Central City High School, including a lack of experience and proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking English; unfamiliarity with the expectations of their teachers; and a lack of resources both at home and in the local community. The potential for low academic achievement and motivational levels of Somali Bantu male high school students is an ongoing and pressing concern for local social service providers, school teachers and administrators, and Somali Bantu community leaders.

Situating the study

Castleton state and public schools in Castleton – Demographic trends related to immigration

The United States has seen unprecedented growth in its immigrant and refugee populations in the last thirty years. In the 1990s, the foreign-born population grew 57.4%. (Singer, 2004). Closely resembling national trends, the state of Castleton in the Midwestern U.S. has also seen significant increases in the size of its foreign-born population. Of the total foreign-born population in Castleton, 31.9 percent entered during the 1990s, and an additional 26.6 percent entered in 2000 or later (Migration Policy Institute, 2005). The state currently ranks 15th in immigrant population in the nation and 11th for its total number of refugees (Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, 2006). From 1983 and 2004, Castleton resettled approximately forty three thousand refugees. Immigrant and refugee student enrollment in public schools in Castleton mirror national trends. In the year 2000, approximately eighty thousand immigrant children were enrolled in Castleton schools in grades pre-Kindergarten through grade 12. Between 1990 to 2000, Castleton public schools saw an increase of 105% in the enrollment of students classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Herwantoro, 2005).

Description of Central City and Its Local Economy

This study was conducted in Central City, Castleton, located in the Midwestern United States. Central City is the state's capital and is the state's fifth largest city with a population of approximately one hundred and twenty thousand residents (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). Central City is a post-industrial city with a distressed downtown area and depressed local business economy. Most shops in the city rely upon

the business of state capitol employees and the employees of other businesses affiliated with the local and state government, post-secondary educational institutions (including a large national university, several smaller local colleges and a regional law school), automotive manufacturers, and healthcare institutions. However, local business and neighborhoods have been significantly affected by the closures of several major automobile plants and automotive suppliers within the last two decades. Once known as one of the major car manufacturers in the nation, Central City has closed many of its aging plants over the last few decades. Many of its plants have been closed for good, relocated, or moved overseas. Some light industrial firms and processing plants remain in the area, but future growth for factory-level jobs remains uncertain.

The decline of manufacturing in Central City has had numerous ill effects on the local community including a high unemployment rate, a rash of for sale and bank foreclosure signs in front of homes throughout the city, and an increase in red tag signs on homes that point to poor housing stock. Closed and abandoned plants can be found throughout the city center. These market conditions have contributed to an increase in poverty statistics. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, 24.4% of the city lives in poverty, a rate nearly double the national and state averages (Range, 2006). High unemployment and cuts in social services have caused the flight of families from the Central City area to other parts of Castleton and out of state in order to find employment. State officials are also concerned about the loss of young college graduates from public and private universities in the state who migrate to major cities in neighboring Midwestern states because they cannot find jobs in the local area. This flight from the

area has affected the Central City School District as it continues to lose students and families.

From 2005 to 2007, the school district had to close six elementary schools and instituted substantial lay-offs of teachers and other school staff. In addition to school closures, the school district also has had problems with its students doing poorly on standardized tests. All three high schools in the Central School District have been criticized for failing to make Adequate Yearly Process (AYP) for the past five years. Under provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the high schools in the district could be taken over by the state if they failed to make AYP (Wallbank, 2007). In March 2008, the newly appointed superintendent of schools announced a massive reorganization of the teachers in the high schools. Under this reorganization plan, all teachers would have to reapply for their jobs and school administrators would have the final say about which teachers would be hired back to their schools. The plan has come under wide attack by teachers in each of the three area high schools and caused great distrust between teachers and school administrators. The plan was eventually postponed by the central administration due to a large public backlash by teachers within the district (Wallbank, 2008a).

Description of Central City School District

Due to its access to entry-level industrial and service jobs, low cost of housing, and historical experience with and services for refugee populations, Central City yearly receives large numbers of refugees into its community. Over the last twenty-five years, Central City has received more than thirteen thousand refugees from all over the world. In 2007, nearly ten thousand refugees lived in the Central City area. These refugees

arrived from Sudan, Cuba, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and many other countries. Within the last three years, recently arrived refugee groups in the Central City School District include the Somali Bantu, Somali, Afghani, Liberian, and Iraqi. As refugee families seek to find lower cost housing and more space for their families, many are moving away from the city center to other parts of the town including the south and north sides of Central City (Refugee Development Center, 2007). The Central City Public School District had an enrollment of eighteen thousand students in the 2007-2008 school year. Sixty-two different countries and forty-six different languages are represented in the schools. The school district estimates that ten to fifteen percent of the entire student population can be classified as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) learners (Central City School District, 2008).

The Central City School District was chosen for the study because its high rates of refugee and immigrant student enrollment mirror similar enrollment trends in other cities throughout the U.S. with similar demographic indicators. Demographic trends indicate that settlement patterns of the foreign-born are rapidly shifting in the U.S. Specifically, significant numbers of immigrants and refugees are shifting from more traditional areas of resettlement to new "immigrant gateways" (Singer, 2004). As new cities and smaller towns become emerging gateways for immigration, school officials will now need to better understand and meet the needs of new immigrants and refugees with diverse educational backgrounds.

Despite the large number of refugee families and school-aged children in the area, teachers from the Central City School District have reported to me in my previous research (Roxas, 2008) that they do not know how to best meet the needs of refugee

children. Teachers explain how difficult it is to teach students with varying degrees of English proficiency who sometimes are placed in their classrooms with little or no advance warning and when they are given very little information about the child's previous educational experience and background. In addition, teachers struggle to teach refugee children who often have had limited or interrupted experiences with formal schooling while at the same time teaching native English speakers in the same classroom. Finally, these teachers report that they have received little in-service training or support from their school and school district in meeting the special needs of these children.

Somali Bantu families have been initially placed in lower-cost housing near the downtown area of Central City. Because of their low English proficiency skills in reading, writing, and speaking, many of the children have been placed in English Language Learner programs in their neighborhood elementary schools, in their neighborhood middle schools and at one of the three area high schools. Because of the existence of the Newcomer Welcome Center, Maine High School currently attracts and busses in some refugee high school students who would otherwise attend schools closer to their neighborhood in Central City. These students who are selected to participate in this program are bussed to Maine High School in the morning for ESL classes and then bussed back to their neighborhood high school for afternoon classes.

Description of Maine High School, Evans High School, and Smith High School

During the 2007-2008 school year, all of the Somali Bantu students in this study attended Evans High School or Maine High School. Smith High School is the third high school in the district, but no Somali Bantu students were enrolled there during the 2007-2008 school year. Abdullah, one of the focal students in the study, actually attended all

three of the high schools in the district during his first three years of high school, but currently attends Evans High School. Although three of the Somali Bantu young men in the focal group were initially enrolled at Maine High School, Abdullah convinced the entire group to transfer with him to Evans so they could be together during the school year. One of the other focal group students in the study, Ibrahim, chose not to transfer and still attends Maine and is one of two Somali Bantu students still enrolled in the school.

Just six blocks from downtown and the capitol, Maine High School is located in the Eastside, the most ethnically diverse section of Central City. Situated a block from two of the major avenues in town, the high school is centrally located to ethnic enclaves of different refugee groups and convenient to small corner delis and ethnic restaurants owned by immigrant and refugee families. Because of its relatively affordable rental housing and proximity to schools, public transportation, and to refugee resettlement services, the Eastside is known as one of the first places that immigrant and refugee families are resettled to when they initially arrive in Central City.

Maine High School serves 1452 students in grades 9-12. In the 2006-2007 school year, Maine High School did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress and its school standardized test scores on average fell below state averages. Approximately half of the students at Maine are classified as economically disadvantaged and a little less than half receive free lunch. Both figures are higher than state averages.

Table 1: Maine High School Standardized Test Scores and Demographic Information

Maine High School	School Average	State Average
Reading	69.2	70.0
Math	45.6	52.3
Economically Disadvantaged	53.0	35.2
Receiving Free Lunch	46.7	28.7

(Standard and Poor's, 2007)

Of the three high schools in Central City, Maine High School enrolls the highest number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. Approximately three hundred and sixty students at the school have been classified as LEP or in need of English as a Second Language support. In the last two years, the Central City School District has begun to see the needs of these LEP learners at Maine and has instituted changes in the school program including an increase in the number of full-time staff working with ESL students and the development of a Newcomer Center. The Newcomer Center is a program in which other LEP students from the other two high schools in Central City are bussed in to Maine for a morning of ESL classes and then return in the afternoon to their respective high schools for mainstream classes.

Evans High School is the largest high school in the district with an enrollment of 1680 students. Located on the south side of Central City, Evans is surrounded by tract housing mostly built in the 1950s and 1960s. Although its local neighborhood is not as densely populated as the neighborhood surrounding Maine, Evans also has a sizable immigrant and refugee population enrolled in the school. Resettlement agencies often

place groups of recent immigrants and refugees in public and private housing within a few miles of Evans High School because the monthly rents are cheaper than the downtown area of the city, and apartments and homes are slightly larger in size. Some of the problems associated with the resettlement of refugees in the south side of Central City are that some refugees feel geographically isolated from other ethnic enclaves and from shopping because of infrequent bus services and long distances from the south side of town to the downtown area.

In the 2006-2007 school year, Evans High School also did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress, and its school standardized test scores on average fell below state averages. The school's standardized test scores in reading and mathematics also fall below the averages of the other two high schools in the Central City School District. Approximately half of the students at Evans are classified as economically disadvantaged and a little more than half receive free lunch. Both figures are higher than state averages.

Table 2: Evans High School Standardized Test Scores and Demographic Information

Evans High School	School Average	State Average
Reading	52.9	70.0
Math	31.9	52.3
Economically Disadvantaged	54.0	35.2
Receiving Free Lunch	51.0	28.7

(Standard and Poor's, 2007)

Approximately three hundred and forty students at the school (20% of the student body) have been classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) or in need of English as a Second Language Support. In the last two years, the Central City School District has

begun to see the needs of these LEP learners at Evans and has instituted several changes in the school program. They have hired one full time staff member to be the ESL teacher for the school and also hired two part time bilingual assistants to support ESL students during pull-out sessions from their mainstream classes. One of the bilingual assistants is a native Spanish speaker and the other is a native Vietnamese speaker. Prior to these teaching appointments, no teaching staff was officially dedicated to the teaching of ESL students. Some newly arrived ESL students are scheduled to take ESL classes at the Newcomer Center at Maine High School in the morning and then return in the afternoon to Evans for mainstream classes in the afternoon. None of the students selected to take these special ESL morning classes at Maine are from the Somali Bantu peer group. No full-time teachers or support staff in the Central City School District come from the Somali Bantu ethnic group.

Smaller in size than Maine and Evans, Smith High School serves 1133 students in grades 9-12 and is located about a mile west of the downtown and capitol area. In the 2006-2007 school year, Smith High School also did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress. Its school standardized test scores on average fall well below state averages (see chart below). Approximately half of the students at Smith are classified as economically disadvantaged and a little less than half receive free lunch. Both figures are higher than state averages. Less than one hundred students at Smith have been classified as LEP learners and staffing for ESL learners at the school consists of two full-time teachers. Students at Smith with ESL needs are bussed to Maine High School for morning sessions with other LEP learners from throughout the district.

Table 3: Smith High School Standardized Test Scores and Demographic Information

Smith High School	School Average	State Average
Reading	59.6	70.0
Math	34.8	52.3
Economically Disadvantaged	49.0	35.2
Receiving Free Lunch	42.6	28.7

(Standard and Poor's, 2007)

Significance of the research

My study of Somali Bantu young men makes several contributions to the field of education. First, there is very little educational research that offers us an understanding of what it is like to be a Somali Bantu student in a U.S. public high school. Of the few studies that are available, there is indication that Somali Bantu students are struggling in school and that their needs are not being addressed (International Organization for Migration, 2002; Van Lehman & Eno, 2003). My research examines how Somali Bantu students negotiate their identities as refugee students in an urban setting and documents their struggles as they navigate the unfamiliar terrain of public school in the United States. Second, the recent and continuing increase of refugee students and families to the United States to "new immigrant gateways" makes it critical for educators and educational researchers to better understand the refugee experience. Without a better understanding of the experiences of these children and their families, it will become increasingly difficult for teachers to help these students achieve academic success and become productive members of their local communities. My exploration of the socio-

cultural factors that influence and constrain the academic success of Somali Bantu refugee students and their families contributes to the much-needed literature on the education and transition of refugee students to mainstream U.S. society and U.S. public schools. Finally, my research provides insight into the varied approaches teachers take to teaching refugee students in their classrooms and the accompanying rationales they use that guide their decision-making both in and out of the classroom.

My study adds to the existing research about the educational adaptation of refugee students in the field of education by documenting and analyzing the educational experiences of students who come to U. S. public schools with limited or interrupted access to schools. My findings suggest that Somali Bantu students have had a unique set of educational experiences both in school and out of school which affects their transition into and success in U.S. public school classrooms. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of ethnographic studies that chronicle the educational experiences of refugee students in the U.S. In chapter 3, I present the methodology of this qualitative research. I explain how I gained access to the group of Somali Bantu young men that I worked with, the data collection and analysis for the study, and the limitations of the work. In Chapter 4, I analyze the research data by discussing the contexts of education of low-income, urban refugee students' education. Specifically, I examine the educational experiences of three focal students who present unique challenges for their teachers, counselors, and school administrators. In Chapter 5, I illustrate the ways in which teachers and staff attempted to teach and address issues related to Somali Bantu students and the particular challenges they faced in their work. In Chapter 6, I present major themes that affected families throughout the course of the 2007-2008 school year as they discovered what it means for

their children to be successful students in U.S. public schools and as they sought to gain access to resources that would help their children in school. I conclude my dissertation in Chapter 7 by contending that Somali Bantu students in this study face numerous obstacles in adjusting to schools in the U.S. which pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, support staff, and school administrators should attend to. Continued inattention to the needs of these students will most likely result in a loss of academic potential and human capital that will affect these students, their families, and the larger communities in which they reside.

Chapter 2

Review of the literature

Introduction

My research study builds on other educational research that has been conducted about refugee and immigrant children. Similar to research conducted by Laurie Olsen (*Made In America*), Loukia Sarroub (*All American girls: Being Muslim in a public school*) and Stacey Lee (*Unraveling the "Model Minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian-American youth* and *Up against whiteness: Race, school and immigrant youth*), my study is designed to capture the experience of refugee students and their families through ethnographic methods, including extended informal and formal interviews, observations, and field notes. My study adds to the literature about the education of refugee and immigrant children by highlighting the experiences of Somali Bantu students and their families, an understudied segment of refugee students that have recently arrived for the first time in the U.S.

Research about refugee children in U.S. public schools is generally understudied in the field of education. Typically refugee children are included in the research on immigrant children more generally. Although the two groups of students may be similar in some respects, it is important to underscore that generally refugee children face much more difficult adjustment issues in schools because of interrupted or minimal experiences with formal schooling (Rong & Preissle, 1998; French & Conrad, 2001; Kirova, 2001), a lack of financial resources and support at home and in the schools they attend (Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland, and Doumbia, 2003; Lee, 2005, 1996; Lucas, 1996), and various

types of psychosocial trauma (Sinclair, 2001; C. Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Volkan, 1993; Westernmeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996). This review provides an overview of selected ethnographies of refugee and immigrant children in U.S. public schools that provide a richer, closer look at the lives of these students and show how the aforementioned issues overlap and interact with one another at school sites, rather than existing in isolation from one another. I end the review with an argument for the urgent need for more robust, broader-based ethnographic studies of recently arrived refugee populations, of which there are currently very few, in the field of education.

Ethnographies of refugee and immigrant children in U.S. public schools

Refugee and immigrant children then face a number of issues when attempting to adjust to and thrive in public schools in the United States including dealing with psychosocial trauma, learning to navigate unfamiliar school settings, working with school personnel and peers that are sometimes ambivalent about their presence, and learning both the colloquial and academic conventions of a difficult, new language (Guerrero, 2004; Cummins, 1995; Olsen, 2000; Valdes, 1998). What makes matters more difficult for these children is that these adjustment problems often intersect and occur simultaneously, forcing refugee students to learn coping skills and strategies and be resilient in times of adversity. The previous studies in this review predominantly look at one aspect of schooling, such as learning English or psychosocial trauma, rather than looking more broadly at the schooling experience of immigrant and refugee students. One way to gain a more comprehensive insight into how immigrant and refugee children adjust to schools in the United States is through an overview of different ethnographies devoted to documenting the refugee and immigrant student experience. This section of

the paper provides an introduction to four seminal ethnographic research studies about immigrant and refugee students: Made in America: Immigrant students in our public schools (Olsen, 1998b), Unraveling the model minority stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth (Lee, 1996), All American Yemeni girls: Being Muslim in a public school (Sarroub, 2005), and Educating new Americans: Immigrant lives and learning (Hones & Cha, 1999). Specific attention is given to the ways in which the authors conducted their research and the written form and organization of their ethnographic accounts. The results of each study, especially as they relate to students and their schooling experiences, are highlighted in order to provide an overview of some of the most current educational research about immigrant and refugee students in U.S. public schools.

Made in America: Immigrant students in our public schools

In *Made in America: Immigrant students in our public schools* (Olsen, 1998b), Laurie Olsen provides an in-depth look at the educational experiences of immigrant students in a comprehensive public high school in California. Olsen, the director of California Tomorrow, a nonprofit advocacy group for school reform, spends two-and-a-half years at Madison High School observing classes, working with teachers at the school, and conducting interviews with immigrant students, their parents, and their teachers in order to more fully understand the ways in which immigrant students conceptualize their place and identity in public high schools in the U.S. and, similarly, to articulate the ways in which teachers conceptualize the place and identity of immigrant students in these same schools. Olsen chose Madison High School because she felt that "its basic structure, textbooks, classroom organization, and social activities are similar to

what one might find walking into the vast majority of comprehensive high schools in this country (p. 14)." Thus, she contends that the lessons learned about immigrant students and their educational experience in the U.S. at Madison High School can be generalized to other similar public schools throughout the country.

Olsen conducts and analyzes her research of Madison High School through the lens of social reproduction. What she hopes to find in her analysis of the school are the ways in which teachers both produce conditions in which social reproduction occurs for immigrant students at Madison as well as understand how teachers can resist forces of social reproduction both within their role as individual teachers and also within the institutional structure of the school itself. During the course of her research, Olsen largely uses ethnographic methods including spending time in various classrooms and public spaces at Madison High, interviewing fifteen faculty members and forty-seven students, and co-creating lesson plans with teachers at the school that had students create social, cultural, racial, and linguistic maps of the school. Because much of the previous research on social reproduction in schools has been conducted with male, working-class students, Olsen elects to focus predominantly on female students and female teachers to illuminate relationships between gender and cultural reproduction. She admits that this decision was based upon "a matter of convenience, depth of access, and her own theoretical interest (p. 19)."

The stories that Olsen uses throughout the study are primarily taken from the female immigrant students and female teachers that she spends the most time with in her two and a half years at the school. Olsen is able to provide her readers with an intensive look at the lives of these female immigrant students and their female teachers because she

spent so much time developing rapport with each of them. Out of the total forty-seven students and fifteen teachers and administrators she initially interviews at Madison, she eventually focuses more intensive research and observation on ten students and four teachers over a period of two years. Olsen observes the students both in class and out of class at the school, shadowing them throughout the day, and spending time with them outside of school. She collects her data about the smaller group of four teachers by meeting them "at school, in homes, and in cafes and restaurants in their own communities." She explains that, "one teacher even spoke into a tape for me as she commuted on her two-hour drive in the morning and evening to and from school (p. 21)." Olsen interviews these teachers, holds formal whole-day focus group sessions with them, and spends time with them in informal discussions as well. She even helps to plan several lesson plans with some of the teachers so that she could engage in research about the perceptions of immigrant students from immigrant and non-immigrant students.

Various attempts at ethnographic research have been conducted to understand and analyze the experiences of immigrant students in public schools in the United States (Lee, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999; Waters, 2001; Gibson, 1988). *Made In America* is similar to these other studies in that it looks specifically at the experiences and problems that immigrant students face in their schools such as low teacher expectations, inadequate instructional support, and limited possibilities for cross-cultural understanding and communication between immigrants and non-immigrants. However, Olsen's study adds to the literature about the experience of immigrant students in U.S. public schools through her multi-layered description and analysis of the four young teachers who work against the institutional obstacles that are in place at Madison High School for immigrant

students. By sharing with her readers the stories of both immigrant students and the four teachers who strive to help them, Olsen provides her readers an accessible account of the rich possibilities available to those who are willing to work for a more just and inclusive educational system in the U.S. for immigrant students.

Unraveling the model minority stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth

While Olsen concentrates her research on predominantly female students and teachers at Madison High School, Lee in *Unraveling the model minority stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth* (1996) focuses on the experiences of Asian students and examines how the "model minority" stereotype is used to define Asian immigrants in U.S. public schools. Society, including the news media and politicians, have constructed the image that Asian immigrant students form a monolithic group, a group of students who work hard in school to achieve academic success, especially in the disciplines of mathematics and science. However, Lee contends that this monolithic image disregards that fact that Asian immigrants possess important ethnic, cultural and social-class differences. Lee argues that the formation of the Asian "model minority" stereotype has effectively been used to hide the diverse and complex experience of Asian immigrants. Furthermore, the stereotype serves to deny the poverty and illiteracy that exists in some Asian immigrant communities. "As a hegemonic device, the "model minority" stereotype maintains the dominance of whites in the racial hierarchy by diverting attending away from racial inequality and by setting standards for how minorities should behave (p. 6)." Because of this stereotype, the needs of Asian immigrant students at the peripheries of this model are being unmet. Students who do not do well in school either academically or socially are marginalized because they do not "fit" into the socially

constructed stereotype of an academically successful Asian student. Moreover, teachers and U.S. students do not how to deal with those students who choose to retain their ethnic and immigrant identity instead of assimilating into the mainstream U.S. student body.

Through a year-long ethnographic study, Lee explains the different ways that Asian immigrant students define themselves and how this conception of self-identity affects their interactions with each other, fellow students, and their teachers at school. In her field research at "Academic High School", a public high school located in a large city on the East Coast of the U.S., Lee finds that the Asian students she interviews place themselves into four general categories: Korean-identified students, Asian-identified students, new wavers, and Asian-American-identified students. Each of these groups describes their experiences with fellow students, teachers, and the school in distinctly different ways. In their interviews with Lee, Korean-identified students often describe distancing behaviors they used to separate themselves from other Asian students. While new waver students buy their clothes in stores in Chinatown, Korean-identified students prefer to wear preppy clothing that they generally purchase in suburban stores or department stores where white, middle-class students shop. Korean-identified students also seek to participate in the same types of sports, eat at the same type of restaurants, and listen to the same music as white students at their school. These students report that much of the impetus to "act white" stems from their parents' wish for them to socialize exclusively with other Koreans or real "Americans". "Americans" for these parents means white Americans. Although Korean parents encourage their children to learn "American" ways, they want their children to preserve certain aspects of the Korean culture, such as the Korean language and Korean music, as well.

Asian-identified students in Lee's study were diverse in terms of their ethnicity, social class, and proficiency in the English language. Living in racially integrated neighborhoods, many of the students in this category are immigrant children from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan or refugee children from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. These students rarely associate with non-Asian students, preferring to socialize mostly with other Asian-identified students both in school and outside of school. Although, according to Lee, these students most closely resemble the "model minority" stereotype in that they are quiet, hard working, and respectful of authority, their proficiency in English and their academic results in school vary greatly. In contrast to the Asian-identified students, new wavers do not see education as the key to success in their lives in the U.S. and engage in behaviors that are resistant to school authority. Many of these students cut class in order to congregate on the southeast lawn of the school so they can smoke, talk, and listen to music with other new waver friends. Mostly refugee children from China, Vietnam, and Cambodia and the children of working class and poor families, these new waver students act in opposition to a school system that they find discriminatory and oppressive.

Finally, Asian American-identified students claim both their Asian identities and their American identities in their interviews with Lee and in their behaviors at school. Most of these students came to the U.S. when they were young, a few had come in the last few years, and a few were American-born. As compared to the other three groups of students Lee interviewed, this extensive experience in the U.S. seemingly gives Asian American students the confidence to confront directly the racism they encounter in schools and society. In contrast to the groups of Asian-identified students and new wavers who lack confidence in their own abilities to speak out, Asian American-

identified students feel that all Asian students should "work together to fight racism, and they [see] white people as the primary holders of institutional power and the beneficiaries of racism (p. 43)."

In her analysis of the academic achievement of all four groups of students, Lee finds that both Korean-identified and Asian-identified students attempt the most to live up to the "model-minority" stereotype. Motivated by a sense of guilt and responsibility to their families, these two groups of students hold positive attitudes towards schooling based upon the belief that education will help them achieve social and economic advancement in the U.S. New wavers, however, do not believe in the connection between schools and future success. Resisting behavior that encourages academic achievement, new wavers challenge the achievement ideology that is usually associated with students from the "model minority" group. Finally, Asian American-identified students are high achievers who work hard in school. Although they see that education will not guarantee equal opportunity, these students hope that education will allow them to fight more effectively against social inequalities. Education then for Asian American-identified students is not to assimilate but to fight against a system that oppresses them and students like them.

Despite the different perspectives on school that the students in these four groups bring to their school, Lee explains that many teachers at "Academic High School" tend to lump all Asian students into the "model minority" group. The idealization of the "model minority" stereotype by teachers seems to disadvantage those students who did poorly in school. Ironically those students who do not do well in school are sometimes still promoted or given passing grades due to their behavior as opposed to their academic

performance. Students who have problems with the English language are ignored because teachers linked their silent confusion in class with understanding and obedience. Teachers describe those students who had problems in school as "less Asian" and, in associating poor academic results with a lack of effort instead of a lack of understanding, do not make efforts to reach out to students with serious academic problems in their classes.

All American Yemeni girls: Being Muslim in a public school

While Lee's study focuses on several different groups of Asian immigrants and refugees and how they interact with their teachers and peers at "Academic High School", Loukia Sarroub's study, *All American Yemeni Girls* (2005), provides an account of the balancing acts and the underlying tensions that Yemeni female immigrant students face. Based on two years of fieldwork in a Yemeni community in southeastern Michigan, Sarroub examines how six Yemeni American young women construct their identities as Yemenis, Muslims, Americans, daughters of immigrants, teenagers and high school students. By providing her readers with an overview of the girls' home life, their Yemeni culture and history, their interactions with their teachers and fellow students at school, and their literate lives at home, in school, in their local communities, and in their religious lives, Sarroub shows how ethnicity, culture, gender, and socioeconomic status complicate the lives of these girls and how schools can be a great source of liberation and optimism for these girls. Drawing upon literacy studies and sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology, and sociology, Sarroub examines the religious and cultural traditions that are, in fact, reproduced and reconstructed within the Yemeni family and larger community and how this impacts their social and academic performance.

One of the phenomena that Sarroub describes in her study is how the Yemeni young women invest heavily in school as both a source of danger and a source of hope. School is a source of danger for her informants because education for women in their Yemeni culture is not as valued as it is for men. Education for females is often deemed secondary to preparing to be a good future mother or wife. Consequently, if any of the Yemeni young women behave inappropriately at school or engage in any acts that would bring shame upon their homes, their male Yemeni peers may report that information back to their families and local communities and their families may withdraw them from school. This close scrutiny of Yemeni girls by Yemeni young men and by community members continued into other public spaces beyond school including Arabic school and the local Yemeni community center. Although their lives were so closely monitored inside and outside of school, Sarroub makes the interesting discovery that, once the doors of a classroom were closed, classrooms served as "oases" for the girls in which "real-world cultural norms were suspended". Although the lunchroom and hallways were spaces in which the Yemeni young women had to be careful about what they said or who they talked to, classrooms were places where these young women could interact more freely with each other, their U.S. peers, and even their Yemeni male peers. Because they were "forced" by their teachers to interact with everyone in the classroom in group work or other class activities, the usual cultural norms that restrained them from interacting with other students, especially male students, in school were suspended. In addition to looking forward to these times of freedom in their classroom "oases", the Yemeni young women also found school in general to be a source of hope and optimism in that it provided them with the opportunity to further their education. Although there was

always the fear of being withdrawn from school by their families for an arranged marriage or for real or supposed indiscretions, the informants believed that doing well in school bought them additional time to graduate from high school and possibly, for some, to even attend and complete college. This additional opportunity for more education brought a sense of personal accomplishment to the girls and additional prestige for themselves and for their families. Therefore, for many of the young Yemeni women school was a great source of hope and motivation to keep studying despite other problems they faced at home, at school, and in the local Yemeni community.

Sarroub adds another layer to her ethnography of these Yemeni young women by describing the various tensions that teachers face in their work with immigrant students. In addition to documenting the various ways in which the school administration and teaching staff tried to accommodate the growing number of Yemeni students in their school and their different educational needs, Sarroub also uncovers a range of responses of teachers, "from heartbreaking experiences to confusion to open hostility when they thought the administration had gone too far to ignorance of cultural and ethnic differences (p. 108)". By illustrating the multiple challenges that teacher had to face in teaching their immigrant students, Sarroub pushes her readers to think of teaching as more than just a job in which teachers interact with students only within the walls of classroom, but also how teachers interact with their students within the larger domains of the school and the community within which the school exists. Moreover, through her descriptions of the teachers at the school and their various perspective and viewpoints, she encourages us to understand that teachers, just as much as their students, bring with

them their own cultural understandings and ways of thinking that complicate the process of education even further.

Educating new Americans: Immigrant lives and learning

While the work of Olsen, Lee, Sarroub, and other educational researchers (Valenzuela, 1999; Waters, 2001; Gibson, 1988) provide rich and compelling descriptions of the lives of immigrant students in U.S public schools, there are very few ethnographic accounts of refugee students in the field of education and even fewer studies that focus on refugee students from one particular ethnic group. *Educating new Americans: Immigrant lives and learning* (1999) is one of the few accounts in the field of educational research that allow us to see the challenges and obstacles that a refugee from one specific refugee group might face. *Educating new Americans*, helps us to see close-up the personal journey of identity transformation for Cher Shou Cha, an adult Hmong refugee who is a teacher's aide and a parent. Co-authored with Donald Hones, this study investigates the problems and hardships that a newly arrived refugee must face in the U.S. and how various historical, social, and educational contexts, both from one's country of origin and from one's host country, help shape the identity of a refugee. By focusing their research and ethnographic account upon the life of just one person, the authors provide a thicker and more complex explanation as to how a refugee deals with problems in his host society and how his response needs to be multi-faceted and highly context specific. Although the study focuses on the experiences of an adult refugee, it is still helpful to those who wish to understand the life of a refugee child because the transitions and challenges that Cher Shou Cha has to face in public schools are similar to what a child refugee might face. Moreover, by showing the difficulty with which Cher

Shou Cha deals with some of the obstacles and problems he faces in schools and society as a refugee even in his position as an adult, one can see just how difficult it might be to be a child in those same circumstances.

Hones and Cha (1999) provide insight into the multiple and competing demands that a refugee must attend to in their lives in the U.S. On the one hand, Cha struggles to retain for himself and his family the culture and societal norms of the Hmong tradition. Although he has long since left the village of his birth in Laos, Cha still believes strongly in the role of patriarchy and the importance of having obligations to fathers, elder brothers and leaders, where the collective good tends to override the rights of the individual members (p. 119). He tries to foster these beliefs in his children and, to some degree, they respect these traditional Hmong beliefs. However, Cha's children also face a school and community culture that challenges these beliefs and fosters the importance of individualism over the collective good. Cha's children also seem to internalize beliefs counter to traditional Hmong beliefs that they learn from television, school, and friends. More specifically, his children are placed into a dominant culture that rejects the cultural worth of their ethnic identity. Thus, the children face a decision to choose between home culture and host culture.

Against these cultural pressures, Cha tries to guide his children into a respect for both traditional Hmong culture and their adopted host culture. Because of his employment as a teacher's aide at an elementary school with a large Hmong refugee population, Cha must also try to help the immigrant and refugee students at his school negotiate this particularly problematic terrain between home culture and the demands of the dominant host society. Horace Kallen School, the school where Cher Shou Cha

works, focuses on the development of a multicultural and multilingual learning community. To foster this development, the school employs the extensive use of bilingual aides, English as a Second Language instructors, and ongoing dialogue between school and linguistic minority communities. School also plays a role in the local ethnic community through its participation in citywide educational conferences and cultural festivals.

As a bilingual aide to a kindergarten class in the school, Cha helps his immigrant students and non-immigrant students understand the different cultures that are a part of the school. Furthermore, in his role as a community liaison, Cha helps to foster connections between members of the local immigrant community and the school and society. Part of his role as school-community liaison is similar to the role he must play in his own home. In summary, his job requires him to:

> make peace between immigrant children and their parents, who are often operating with different cultural scripts; between different ethnic and immigrant communities, some of whom have long-standing animosities they bring from their previous homelands; between the worldview of the larger society, represented in the school, and the various worldviews of different communities. Community liaisons such as Cha...are golden...for they are the ideal peacemakers in this complex web of multicultural relationships (p. 158).

By uncovering the multiple demands that Cha must deal with both inside and outside of his life as a classroom aide at school, Hones and Cha make it clear that life for a refugee is not so simple. Indeed, life always seems to be a series of balancing acts: between home and school, between one's home culture and the culture of the U.S, and between a public role as a teacher's aide and one's private role as a member of an ethnic community. These balancing acts are even more difficult for children to try and negotiate.

What do these qualitative studies of immigrants and refugees allow teachers to see better?

Through an overview of these four qualitative studies, educators can begin to see the complex process immigrant and refugee students must undertake in the U.S. In addition to mastering a new school system and a new system of education, immigrant and refugee students must negotiate their identities against a backdrop of pressures from society and from schools. These pressures from the U.S. host country often conflict with the beliefs and values that students have from their home countries.

One particular problem that immigrant and refugee students must face is the monolithic group identity that U.S. society has already constructed for certain ethnic groups. While Asians are often seen as the "model minority" and Yemeni girls are seen as "hard-working and dedicated", students from either of these two groups who fall outside of these categorizations are seen as aberrations or problem children. Because society has so strictly limited students from these two groups into tightly controlled typologies, some students blame themselves if they do not do well in school or fail to fit into socially accepted categories. Thus, by internalizing the failure to act within society's expectations, these children further reify socially constructed stereotypes about their own immigrant or refugee groups. When faced with these socially constructed categories, some students sometimes choose to align their actions in accordance with the host society. Prodded by their parents to act "American" and to socialize with only "Americans", Korean-identified students in Lee's study make strong efforts to mirror the behaviors and dress of their white classmates at their school. Similarly Cha's children try to conform to the expectations of society by working hard in school and actively participating in activities at their church.

However, the research studies referenced above also show that immigrant and refugee students sometimes choose to act in opposition to the host society's conceptualization of them as members of a monolithic group. Asian American-identified students in Lee's study realize that the "model minority" stereotype reinforces misconceptions about Asian students and choose to work against the identity that the school and society has created for them. Although these students still work diligently to excel in school, their overall purposes is not to fit into the system as it is already constructed. Their purposes are to learn enough about the system to work against it and to expose the systematic ways in which stereotyping behavior disenfranchises poor and illiterate Asian immigrant communities. Cher Shou Cha, in similar ways, uses his life's work to dispel myths and misconceptions about Hmong refugees through his work as a teacher's aide, community liaison and local minister. Cha spends his life educating people about Hmong culture and community so that members of the U.S. host culture and even members of his own Hmong community can realize the positive contributions that the Hmong people can make to the host society.

Immigrants and refugees then shape their identity based on the experiences, beliefs, and encounters they have upon their emigration to the U.S. The construction of self-identity is undeniably linked to the contexts of receptions of the host culture. How open is the host culture to new immigrants and refugees? What stereotypes surround these new immigrants and refugees and to what extent do expectations of immigrants and refugees help or hurt their transition to their new country of residence? What resources and knowledge do immigrants and refugees have before arrival in the U.S.? What resources and knowledge are provided to immigrants and refugees upon their arrival in

the U.S.? All of the research studies discussed in this paper provide some information about the contexts of reception for the studied immigrant and refugee groups. However, some of the authors fall short of adequately situating the immigrant and refugee experience into the context of the larger economic and political structures of schooling in the U.S.

Lee (1996), for example, does not fully investigate the link between the unwillingness of new waver students to study in schools and the way in which the oppressive socio-economic conditions of their lives discourage any attempt at self-improvement. Hones and Cha (1999) also fail to discuss how the problems that Cha and his children face in schools are a direct result of the poor economic conditions of the schools in which they have been enrolled. Without a critical interrogation of the economic and political structures that exist both in school and around the school community, readers may believe that the interaction between immigrant and refugee children and their schools exist in a vacuum. By failing to consider the external facts that affect immigrants outside of schools, Lee and Hones & Cha absolve society and schools from realizing their own culpability in fostering racial inequality for immigrants and refugees through under-funding, failing to provide adequate resources for learning opportunities, and providing economic opportunities for immigrants to aspire to as students. Olsen (1998b) and Sarroub (2005) provide a more complex picture of the schools and neighborhoods in which their refugee students reside. Olsen, for example, provides an overview of the neighborhood surrounding the school that she studies and explains the long-term and recent economic history that has affected the school's growth and how that history has altered the socio-economic and ethnic background of its

students. Sarroub writes at length about the economy and history of Yemen and the immigration of Yemeni families and children to the neighborhood surrounding Cobb High School. She also describes how the local economy of Dearborn affected both the Yemeni families in the area as well as funding for Cobb High School itself. This information helps readers to understand how the context of the neighborhood and local community plays a significant role in how refugee and immigrant children are received into their schools and what kinds of school and community resources are made available to them.

These ethnographic accounts hopefully then show teachers how important it is for them to understand the complex lives that immigrant and refugee students must lead when they move to the U.S. Students are asked by their parents to embrace their new host culture, but, at the same time, are warned never to forget their immigrant and refugee roots. Teachers sometimes expect their students to fit into "model minority" stereotypes or other ethnic stereotypes and then fail to adequately address their academic and social needs if they do not. These tensions are played out for refugee students in schools and communities that are, at times, ambivalent towards the reception of refugee students in their classrooms. Moreover, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel are not always prepared with the resources, training, and staffing to adequately meet the linguistic, social, and emotional needs of recently arrived refugee students. Teachers therefore need to see that their teaching of immigrant and refugee children is embedded in multiple and sometimes conflicting demands that are placed on students by the host society, parents, and the students themselves.

Understanding how these multiple and sometimes competing demands work for immigrant and refugee children is a first step towards a better understanding of how best to meet the needs of immigrant and refugee children in public schools in the U.S. today. Therefore, robust ethnographies that document the experiences of refugee and immigrant children in schools play an important role in helping teachers, teacher educators, and other stakeholders in the field of education better appreciate the tensions and obstacles that immigrant and refugee students must face daily in their experiences in U.S. public schools. Unfortunately few such ethnographic studies exist, especially studies that concentrate on the experiences of recently arrived refugee students. As refugee children and their families from around the world continue to move to the U.S. in ever increasing numbers due to political and economic upheavals in their own countries, the need for more finely grained ethnographic studies about refugee children in public schools is becoming increasingly evident, urgent, and timely.

Contributing to ethnographic educational research with refugees: The experiences of Somali Bantu refugee students and their families

The focused, in-depth study of the socio-cultural factors that influence and constrain the educational experience of Somali Bantu male high school students and their families contained in this study bring greater attention to the needs of recently arrived refugee students for teachers, administrators, and for educational policy-makers with refugee teen-age students in their schools. The rich description of the difficult and complex circumstances under which Somali Bantu young men and their families lived in Somalia, refugee camps in Kenya, and now in Central City provides teachers, teacher educators, and school officials a contextual framework for understanding the potential difficulties that Somali Bantu students typically face in their transition to formalized

schooling in the U.S. Specifically this work examines the inherent difficulties Somali Bantu youth face when they try to succeed in public schools in the U.S., but have only attended schools sporadically due to discrimination against their ethnic group and civil war within their home country. Through an analysis of their interactions with teachers and other students at school and their overall academic performance, gaps in their academic knowledge due to a lack of access and opportunities to school in their home country of Somalia are highlighted.

This type of research also provides educators with possible strategies for successfully working with Somali Bantu male students and their families so that they can better understand U.S. public schools and better negotiate academic success. This framework is further enhanced by examining the educational experiences of these young men through the perspectives of their families, their teachers and other community support workers, and the young men themselves. By approaching an understanding of these young men through multiple perspectives, the complexity of the lives of these young men is highlighted and the importance of educating these young men, and other refugees like them, from a more nuanced and carefully considered perspective is argued.

Chapter 3

On gaining access, setting, and methods

Introduction

This study has its origins in work I did as an instructor in the College of Education at Castleton State University and my own volunteer work at the Refugee Development Center, a drop-in homework help center for refugee youth sponsored by a local Lutheran church. One of the courses I taught while a doctoral student at Castleton State University required that teacher education students commit themselves to working with students from schools in the surrounding community. In the fall semester of the 2005-2006 school year, I required all of my students to tutor refugee students at the Refugee Development Center and revised my course syllabus to have course readings and course descriptions oriented to talking about the education of refugee children.

Because of my own interest in the education of refugee children, I also began to volunteer at the Refugee Development Center. Through my volunteer work, I began to meet regularly with the director of the center to talk about issues related to the education of refugee children, especially as it related to their experience in schools in Central City. Knowing about my interest in the education of refugee children, the director introduced me to Abdullah's father, Haji. In my very first meeting with Haji at a McDonald's near his house, he was excited about my interest in the Somali Bantu and invited me to meet his son, Abdullah, and Abdullah's friends. He was very open about the challenges he felt the Somali Bantu youth were facing as they tried to succeed in schools in Central City and spoke personally about the challenges he faced as the father of children trying to

succeed in schools. As I drove home from that very first meeting, I realized that the education of Somali Bantu children was an important topic I wished to research further.

During the 2006-2007 school year, I conducted a literature review on the education of refugee children in U.S. public schools and the Somali Bantu ethnic group specifically and conducted a pilot study with young men from this group. Throughout that year, I continued to build rapport with Haji, his son Abdullah, and the rest of the young men who eventually became the focal group for this dissertation study. I met the group of young men regularly at local coffee shops to help them with their homework, to talk with them about how they were doing in school, and to help them understand how community colleges and universities worked. For example, in response to many of their questions about Central City Community College, I arranged for a special tour of the campus and meetings with admissions counselors in early June, 2007. I purposefully attempted to draw Abullah and the other focal group students together for these meetings in order to gather information about "the configuration of time and space, of people, and of activity in their physical sites" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

Study participants

This qualitative research study (Berg, 1995; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Schumacher & McMillan, 1993) examines the socio-cultural factors that influence and constrain the success of Somali Bantu male high school students. Multiple, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Somali Bantu students and their respective families who have relocated to the United States from Kenya within the last five years (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995: Seidman, 1998). All participants were identified through the use of snowball sampling in which representatives from Central City social

service agencies that provide services to refugee families and teachers in the Central City school district nominated Somali Bantu families for me to contact (Berg, 1995). Families were chosen for this study if they had high school aged male students who attended high school in Central City High. Although I began the study with six families, I eventually refocused my study and my research with more intensive interviews and observations of three students (Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan) enrolled in high school and their respective families. *[See Appendix A for Letter of Consent Forms.]* These three students met the criteria of being currently enrolled as high school students and were the most active members of the weekly study group meetings throughout the entire school year. Through my work and rapport with their families and the students themselves, I had more frequent and sustained access to these three students than the other three students in the group.

Data collection and analysis

For a period of twelve months, beginning June 2007 and ending May 2008, I collected data with a group of Somali Bantu male high school students. As a participant observer, I met with the young men as a group once a week for an average of two to three hours at the local library over the course of the academic year. I organized these meetings as study group sessions for these young men. At these sessions the Somali Bantu students could get help with their homework, study for upcoming tests, and write term papers. Inevitably students would also talk about their lives outside school, problems with their family and friends, and experiences as a refugee student in a U.S. public school. Throughout my research, I wrote field notes about these weekly homework help sessions that documented their experiences as refugee youth in the

Central City community, their beliefs about school and being a refugee student, and their experiences being forced out of Somalia and their experience in refugee camps in Kenya. In addition to meeting with the young men as a group, I also met individually with each of the three focal students once a week for one to two hours in their homes, in local cafes, or in fast food restaurants near their homes.

My goals for these meetings were to provide individual assistance to each of the students in their homework and class-work, to begin to understand each student as an individual, and to uncover the similarities and dissimilarities of each student and family within the larger Somali Bantu peer group. Writing field notes after each of these visits, I paid attention to larger themes that seemed to emanate from both the larger group study sessions and appeared to repeat themselves once again in the individual study sessions. These group library sessions and individual meetings with students were crucial to the richness of the data collected for this study. These close-up, informal meetings with these young men afforded me a view into their lives not guided by a pre-written interview protocol or tightly scripted by questions I had written months before our meeting. Rather, these young men, because of the informal nature of the group meetings at the library, talked about their lives, their experiences at school and the problems they were having in a very candid and natural way, as if they were talking to each other on the bus on the way home from school or as if they were socializing with each other at each other's homes. By listening carefully to what they said to each other in these meetings and what they did not say, I was able to learn a great deal about their lives and the ways in which they viewed their experiences from school. What I learned from these informal

group sessions also helped me as I wrote up interview protocols for my individual meetings with each of the young men.

The other major sources of data for this dissertation were transcripts of interviews I conducted with each of the participants in the study. Throughout the twelve month period, I conducted multiple formal and informal one-on-one interviews with Abdullah, Ibrahim, Hassan and the other participants. Although I had developed an interview protocol for these interviews, I also intentionally allowed the interviews to be open-ended so that the refugee youth in the study felt comfortable bringing up topics that were of importance to them on the days of the interviews. Topics of emphases during interviews generally focused on the context of reception for the students at their respective schools; their academic achievement at schools; and struggles they were facing at school, home, or in the local community. *[See Appendix B for Interview Questions for Somali Bantu male students.]* I also conducted multiple interviews of the parents and teachers of each of the focal group students in my study. Many interviews also occurred on a more informal basis as I tutored students at home, met parents at community events, and walked with teachers to their cars after school.

For a period of three months (October through December 2007), I attended classes with three focal group students and interviewed each of their teachers. I spent at least two full school days with each of these students. In classrooms, I took field notes on the physical environment of the classroom, the events that occurred before, during, and after each class period, and the various interactions among the focal group students, their peers, and their subject teachers. Specifically I took notes on the ways in which focal group students were able to accomplish the tasks set out for them by their teachers

and the obstacles they faced in trying to do the tasks assigned to them. When I was unable to write everything down before I left a classroom, I wrote up the rest of my field notes in my car before heading home for the evening (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I also returned to the schools of these students on separate visits to conduct interviews with the teachers of my focal students. For example, most of Abdullah's teachers were interviewed for their perspective on working with Abdullah and other Somali Bantu students in general. The topics also covered the teachers' experience in working at Evans and Maine High Schools and their teaching philosophies in general and with regards to working with refugee children. *[See Appendix C for Interview Questions for teachers of Somali Bantu male students.]*

The parents and teachers of the young men in the study were an important source of data for me. Through my interviews and interactions with parents and teachers, I was able to triangulate my data and discuss my findings with another group of people besides the young men themselves. Through a series of semi-structured interviews with Somali Bantu parents, I was able to examine the role and importance of both formal and informal education to Somali Bantu families and communities, the successes and problems that Somali Bantu male students and their families have had in schools in Somalia, in Kenya, and in the United States, and other aspects of education in U.S. public schools that Somali Bantu students and their families still do not understand well and need more information about. Through these interviews, I examined why and how these families left Somalia and attempted to chronicle their years in refugee camps, their transition to the U.S., and their current lives in Central City. *[See Appendix D for Interview Questions for parents of Somali Bantu male students.]*

During my visits to the classrooms of my focal group students, I collected copies of the assignments the students were given, their classwork (e.g., written assignments, essays, and journals), and teachers' assessment of their work. In addition to course syllabi and classroom expectations, teachers also often shared with me the work of my focal group students including posters that students had created and group work presentations that they had worked on with others in the classroom. During my time in the field, I also collected digital photos (of classrooms, hallways, hallway posters, library, student activities and the students themselves), addresses of websites that the focal students often browsed, and email communications between each of the students and myself. I was interested in knowing more about each of local high schools and the Central City School District so, during the 2007-2008 school year, I collected newspaper clippings, census information, and documents about each of the schools (e.g., the student handbook, counseling handouts, school newspapers, student yearbooks, and school website). I also gathered data from the Somali Bantu community itself, including pictures at community events, notices for meetings, and information in the local newspaper about the group.

All interviews with students and their families were audio-taped, transcribed, and followed up with additional interviews or observations in the field. Ethnographic field notes were also taken during each interview and observation and were used in the final data analysis. As the data from the interviews and observations were analyzed, themes were identified through an open coding process in which interviews and observations were analyzed for common themes and patterns in a line-by-line analysis. Coding frames were then constructed to organize the data and to identify findings (Glaser & Strauss,

1967; Charmaz, 2006). These findings were recorded frequently in the form of analytic and integrative memos, and used subsequently to write the findings sections of this study (Emerson et al., 1995).

Theoretical framework: Connecting social capital and cultural capital to the education of refugee children

Through an exploration of the socio-cultural factors that influence and constrain the success of the Somali Bantu families and students in this study I provide additional insight into how teachers and other school personnel can better meet their academic needs. Specifically this study is situated within the theoretical frameworks of social and cultural capital and attempts to link these theories to research on refugee children. During the process of data analysis, specific attention has been given to the ways in which Somali Bantu male student participants built social connections with each other and local actors to support them in their lives in both local public schools and in the local community (Coleman, 1988). By analyzing the social relationships that Somali Bantu families construct within their own communities, with members of the local community and at school, I identified the ways in which these families were able to improve their children's access to educational opportunities and school resources, but were also limited to some extent by their inexperience with how schools work in the U.S. I also explore in the study the forms of cultural capital Somali Bantu families and the male students in these families possess and the problems they face in trying to understand and gain access

to the cultural capital that is valued in U.S. public schools (Bourdieu, 1973; Giroux, 1983). For this study, I use Lamont & Lareau's definition of cultural capital as "*institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion* [italics in the original] (Lamont & Lareau, 1988)."

In "Cultural reproduction and social reproduction", Bourdieu (1973) writes that

> An educational system which puts into practice an implicit pedagogic action, requiring initial familiarity with the dominant culture, and which proceeds by imperceptible familiarization, offers information and training which can be received and acquired only by subjects endowed with the system of predispositions that is the condition for the success of the transmission and of the inculcation of the culture. By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture (p. 71).

Bourdieu suggests here that students have a greater chance at success in school if they have an "initial familiarity with the dominant culture" and possess a "linguistic and cultural competence" that can only "be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture." When thinking about the educational experiences of refugee students such as the Somali Bantu, the familiarity with the dominant culture Bourdieu writes about is limited. Many refugee children have very limited experience with the "dominant culture" in the U.S. and their parents too lack the "relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture." It is my contention in this study then that, while there are sometimes connections between the cultural capital possessed by the Somali Bantu people and the cultural capital valued by the teachers and other educational professionals they face, there

are also major gaps between the cultural capital possessed by the families and children at home and the expectations of the teachers in school.

A lack of knowledge about the Somali Bantu people and their history can lead teachers to confuse the lack of experience the Somali Bantu have had with the English language, formal schooling, and U.S. public education in particular with a lack of intelligence or ability to learn. This lack of fit between their previous experiences in education and the requirements of their new schools in the U.S. can lead teachers to undervalue the courage, tenacity, and resourcefulness the Somali Bantu have had to show in their lives. If few people in schools are able to bridge that gap and understand what the Somali Bantu can bring to school communities and if schools continue to make, as Bourdieu puts it, "demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give", there will be depressed hopes and aspirations in the promise of public education for Somali Bantu families and their children. By examining the social capital and cultural capital of the Somali Bantu, I identify the various socio-cultural factors that influence and constrain the success of Somali Bantu male high school students. My analysis is "grounded" in the data I collected from the field including the interviews, observations in the field, and the "actions, interactions and social processes" of the participants in the study (Creswell, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). While other theories, such as social reproduction, may have been used in analyzing the educational experiences of Somali Bantu refugee youth in this study, I chose social and cultural capital because they provide rich avenues for understanding better both the importance and value of relationships to members of this ethnic group and the ways in which Somali youth may be excluded socially and culturally from their peers in school and the effects this has on their educational adaptation.

Limitations of the study

This study relies upon interviews with Somali Bantu male students, their family members, and their teachers. Asking people to recall past events can be a problematic exercise. Over time people forget the details of events; they misremember their actions and the context of their actions; and the way in which they interpret an event changes during a lifetime of growth, new experiences, and introductions to alternative perspectives. Interviewing Somali Bantu students and their parents about their experiences and lives in Somalia, Kenya, and the United States are complicated even further by the historical oppression and disadvantage that the Somali Bantu have faced, the psychological trauma they have experienced through violence, their forced withdrawal from their country of residence, and disorientation in a new country, and, finally, by my reliance upon translators at times with Somali Bantu who do not speak English as a first language.

Another potential limitation of this study is my own position as the college-educated son of lower-middle class, Filipino immigrant parents. Although I try to better understand the lived experiences of the Somali Bantu students and families through my interviews, observations, and background research, I cannot fully comprehend their subjugation in Somalia, their forced exodus from Somalia to Kenya, and what it means to live in a refugee camp for more than ten years. Another limitation of my study that I must highlight is that my sample has been nonrandom, small, and limited to research with Somali Bantu male adolescents. The findings of the study cannot be extrapolated to other refugee groups of younger Somali Bantu students of either gender or to Somali Bantu female adolescents. By acknowledging these limitations, I suggest that my research

should not be taken as "the truth", but rather a tentative exploration of the educational experiences of adolescent refugee males from an historically disadvantaged population as they try to adapt to a foreign land and unfamiliar school system.

Personal preparation and experience

My overall course of studies at Castleton State University (CSU) has helped me to understand how immigrants and refugee students interact with schools in the U.S. and how their needs are currently being underserved. A course in the contexts and micro-politics of teacher education has introduced me to the ways in which the teacher education system is currently constructed and how policy development is a crucial component in the development of a skilled and caring teacher workforce that can meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Courses on the topics of social analysis of educational policy and urban education have deepened my understanding of how the education of disadvantaged populations, including many immigrant and refugee children, must be viewed from socio-cultural and historical viewpoints. A course in the Department of Sociology on migration and social change and a course in Family and Child Ecology on immigration in the U.S. have widened my frame of understanding of issues related to immigration beyond the field of education and has provided me with a greater awareness of current sociological theories on immigration and its effects on children. Finally, courses in qualitative methods both in the College of Education and in the Department of Sociology have exposed me to the powerful ways in which ethnography and narrative can be used to explain how teachers think about their teaching with respect to meeting the needs of immigrant and refugee children. Other experiences in the college, beyond my own classes, have also enriched the way in which I view and

approach the education of immigrant and refugee children. As a teacher of TE 250, as a research assistant on a project that examines how teachers teach immigrant children, and as a field instructor in the College of Education, I have seen firsthand how both teachers new to field of education and experienced teachers struggle with understanding the context of immigration for refugee children and the instructional practices to use with this specific student population.

In addition to my coursework and research experiences at CSU, my research perspective on the education of immigrant and refugee students has been uniquely shaped through my own experience in U.S. schools as a child of immigrant parents. Unlike the parents in my study of Central City, my parents were able to keenly understand what it took for children to succeed in the U.S. system of schooling and adjust accordingly their school strategies for their children. Their knowledge of the local school system developed through the sharing of information with other Filipino families in the area and their ability to pay tuition fees, though limited, was enough for me to stay enrolled in parochial schools. It is clear to me that I have been the fortunate beneficiary of how society in the U.S., especially the school system, works. In addition to looking within my own experience, these lenses have allowed me to look outside of myself to the larger student population in the U.S. and question what is happening to the children of refugee families who do not have access to schools that serve them well or whose families lack the financial and linguistic resources to support them in their education.

Chapter 4

"I don't know how to play the rules of these school games": The educational experiences of selected Somali Bantu refugee students in Central City High School

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the educational adaptation of three Somali Bantu refugee students: Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan. I first provide an overview of each student's context of reception into the United States and, more specifically, their transition into the Central City School system. I then provide background information about each student's family, their previous experience with schools in Somalia and Kenya, and their current academic achievement in the high schools of Central City. In the second half of the chapter, I outline several themes that cut across the experiences of the lives of these young men and provide further insight into how they experience school in the Central City School District and how they have responded to difficulties they have faced in their studies. I then return to and focus more intensively on the educational experiences of Abdullah to present a close-up view of one Somali Bantu refugee student's life. By presenting this information about the context of their lives outside of school and their responses to school, I seek to provide a more complete picture of the complexities of the lives of each of these Somali Bantu young men and the inherent challenges each student must face as they try to become successful students in an unfamiliar school system.

Abdullah

In 1992, Haji Hussein, Abdullah's father, fled his native village with his three wives, their children, and his father because they feared for their lives and safety. At the time, Abdullah was a one year old baby, and Haji's father was quite ill. Originally

intending to flee Somalia altogether, the family walked for ten days towards the Kenyan border. As Haji puts it, the walk was quite difficult because they had "nothing with us to eat or drink". However, they stopped in Kishmael in Somalia because Haji's "father couldn't walk anymore because he was old enough and sick." The family then stayed in Kishmael until 2000. Although he had previously been a math teacher for seven years in a high school in Somalia, Abdullah's father supported the family in Kenya by "doing everything possible and taking odd, odd jobs." In Kishmael, Abdullah's father had to share his earnings with neighborhood thugs for his family's protection from ethnic clan members who had prejudice against Somali Bantu. According to Haji, "It was like bribing them for my safety and the safety of my family." Abdullah's grandfather died in 2000. The family then made plans to leave Somalia for Kenya (Interview, March 13, 2007).

In 2000, Haji, Abdullah, and members of Haji's family moved to Mombasa, Kenya. They lived in Mombasa for four years and then moved to the refugee camps in Kenya for one year. In Mombasa, again Haji had to take on odd jobs, helping with translation services in English for non-governmental agencies working with refugees and tutoring students in mathematics. Haji had learned some English while he was in college in Somalia, but much of what he learned was through the self-study of books and through deliberately trying to improve his English through conversing with the staff of non-governmental agencies. In Mombasa, his children were only able to attend school sporadically, because the family was not always able to pay school fees. When they were unable to attend school, the children studied at home with books Haji had brought with the family from Somalia. In 2004, Haji moved his family to a refugee camp in Kakuma

so that his children could begin to attend school for free. He also began to translate for Somali and Somali Bantu applicants seeking refugee resettlement through the UNHCR. Abdullah's family was processed for refugee resettlement in the U.S. within a year of arrival in the camps because of the imminent danger they were in because of Haji's work as a translator. Haji explains how his family's case was expedited:

> If I can go back a little bit as to how I was granted this process, this was the case. I was translating for the Somali Bantu, at the same time I was translating for the Somali Somali, when I mean the Somali Somali I mean the Somali natives. So sometimes, when a Somali Somali could get a negative answer from his case, he could be denied to travel to the United States after all his interviews, they came up with accusations against me that I was not translating correctly on purpose and there were some rumors that they could harm me in any way and have revenge on my family. The Department of Homeland Security, the officers from that department, heard those rumors so that makes me a priority for resettlement as soon as possible (Interview, March 13, 2007).

Because of the constant movement during his childhood, Abdullah attended formal schools only sporadically in Somalia and Kenya. Because Haji, his father, did not always have enough money to send his children to school in Somalia and in Kenya, he eventually brought his family to the refugee camps in order to enroll his children in formal schools.

When part of his family was resettled to Central City, Abdullah initially lived with his father, his father's 3rd wife, five of his siblings, one step-sister, and one adopted nephew. Abdullah's family also includes eight other children and two ex-wives of his father who did not originally accompany the family to the U.S. in 2004. The remaining part of the family lived in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya while they waited for the processing of their refugee resettlement papers. The two ex-wives and six of the eight children arrived in the U.S. in August 2007 and have been reunited with the rest of the family.

Though he does have a few acquaintances from the soccer team at school or from his classes, most of Abdullah's friends are other male teens within the Somali Bantu community. These teens vary in age from age fourteen to nineteen and live in two main neighborhoods in Central City: the Eastside and the South Side. All of the teens and their families were relocated to Central City within the last five years. Although none of the young men knew each other from Somalia, a few of them knew each other while they were in the refugee camps in Kenya waiting for resettlement in the U.S. Their flight from Somalia, their shared experiences as refugees, and their memories of Kenya were common experiences that bound these young men closer together. The topics of their conversations together therefore often touched upon their lives in the refugee camps in Kenya or people they knew in common that now lived in other refugee resettlement cities in the U.S.

All of Abdullah's friends currently attend Evans High School or Maine High School and exhibit generally poor academic performance in school. According to Abdullah, two of the students (Ibrahim Gure and Musa Ali), from his Somali Bantu peer group are doing very poorly at Maine High School. They do not pay attention in class, barely study, and are getting mostly Ds in school. Musa, according to Abdullah, has not been successful in his attempts to learn English and is, as a consequence, enrolled in only special education and English as a Second Language courses in school. Omar Abde and Yusuf Sheik, two older students in the group, attended Maine High School for their freshman year of high school and midway through their sophomore year were transferred to Mountain Vocational High School. They were then "promoted" to senior level status and graduated from Mountain that same year. This fall they had planned to go to Central

City Community College. However, because of the low scores they received on a placement test, they both were informed that they will need to take one to two years of English as a Second Language courses before they can enter the core curriculum courses. Finally, Abdullah and his friend Hassan Mkoma are doing slightly better than their peers, but are still struggling with their courses. Through my interactions with Abdullah's friends in weekly tutoring sessions I organized for them, informal conversations and formal interviews, and observations in the field, it appears that almost all of Abdullah's friends struggle in their studies in school. Two main problems that they these students face is a lack of exposure to academic content because of a lack of time in formal schools and limited English proficiency.

Both Abdullah and his father, Haji, believe that Abdullah is one of the stronger Somali Bantu students in high school in Central City. Abdullah is able to achieve some success in school because Haji is able to help him with his homework and has been tutoring him at home his entire life even when they were in Somalia, in the camps in Kenya, and in the U.S. Abdullah also has a seeming advantage over his Somali Bantu peers because his father speaks English, is the only college graduate in the entire community, and has some knowledge about how schools in the U.S. work. Haji is very focused on the importance of education and how it can help his family and the other Somali Bantu families that have been relocated to Central City. Haji is able to access networks outside of the Somali Bantu group through his work at a social service organization that helps resettle refugee families and uses his English language skills and his awareness of how to make support systems (e.g., immigration and social service systems) to his advantage and to the advantage of his family. Haji says that Abdullah's

willingness to ask questions and to be assertive makes him "Americanized" (Interview, March 13, 2007).

At the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, Abdullah used what he learned from his father about how to access support systems when he arranged for his own transfer from one high school to another in the Central City School System. Without his father's knowledge, Abdullah went to the downtown offices of the Central Administration of the Central City School System, had his teachers sign off on the required forms for his transfer, and submitted the forms at his school. Haji learned of the transfer only after Abdullah had completed the majority of the paperwork and the transfer was already in process.

Ibrahim

One of Abdullah's best friends out of his Somali Bantu peer group in Central City is Ibrahim Gure. Ibrahim is sixteen years old and the 4th oldest child out of seven children in his family. His father attended school only until the 3rd grade while his mother was only able to attend school until the 1st grade. Both parents speak little English and are currently unemployed. Ibrahim's three older brothers all work clearing and cleaning tables in different restaurants throughout the Central City area to support the family while Ibrahim attends high school and the three youngest children attend elementary school.

Ibrahim, or IB as he likes to call himself to his friends and teachers at school, has had very limited experience with school. Because of the ethnic strife that occurred in Somalia in the early 1990s, Ibrahim and his family fled Somalia into Kenya in 1993 and lived in refugee camps for ten years before being selected for refugee resettlement in the

United States. Ibrahim and his parents report that IB attended school only occasionally in Somalia because the Somali Bantu families in their local village were dissuaded from attending the local schools. Moreover, the Gure family had little money to pay school fees and to buy books and other school materials. While in the refugee camps in Kenya, Ibrahim again attended school only intermittently because his family had little money to pay for school supplies and relied upon him and his older brothers to do odd jobs to earn money to supplement the food rations the family was provided by refugee camp authorities.

While Abdullah was able to earn mostly As and Bs in his first year of high school, Ibrahim has struggled with his academic work ever since he began middle school in Central City and reports that he is often "lost" in class. He has difficulty reading aloud the course readings he is given for homework and often does not understand the material he has just read. Although he makes an effort to do the homework he is assigned, IB reports that most of the textbooks given to him are above his current reading level and consequently he is unable to complete all of the homework assignments given to him in his various classes.

Ibrahim is not able to ask his parents or his older brothers for help with his school work because they themselves did not attend much school either in Somalia or in Kenya and their grasp of English is very limited. Ibrahim's parents do, however, recognize that education is important in the U.S. and encourage him to do well in school. Ibrahim often comments that his parents expect a lot of him, but he worries about keeping pace with the other students in his classes and the possibility of failing his sophomore year of high school.

IB is smaller in stature compared to his Somali Bantu peer group and is known as the most light-hearted of the group. In one-on-one meetings and interviews with him, he takes an interest in those around him and in how they are doing. However, according to many of his teachers, IB takes on a different demeanor and attitude at school. One of his teachers, Ms. Reynolds comments that IB had:

> ...this desire to look tough. Like when he smiles, he's a really pleasant young man, but also like in the pictures, in all the pictorial representations of him that he's turned in for class, he always looks really tough and then he was also kind of like under the wing of that kind of tougher student that was older in the class too. So I felt like he was striving to be categorized by peers in a different kind of, what do I want to call it, peer group kind of and maybe his being successful in school or trying in school wouldn't be valued by them (Interview, January 11, 2008).

As reported by Ms. Reynolds, his desire to look tough manifested itself throughout the year in IB raising his voice at his classmates, often coming in to class with the hood of his sweatshirt obscuring his face, and on one occasion talking back to a teacher.

Hassan

Hassan Mkoma is a seventeen year old student currently enrolled as an 11th grader at Evans High School. Having arrived in the United States in 2003, Hassan has spent four years in the public schools in Central City. He was enrolled at Maine High School for his first two years of high school, but he transferred to Evans because he wanted to be closer to Abdullah and his other Somali Bantu friends who were also transferring to Evans. Hassan also transferred schools because Evans was closer to the housing complex where he and his family lived in Central City.

Hassan is the fourth oldest child of five children in his family. His father, Chirango Mkoma, speaks conversational English and is able to express ideas fairly well in informal conversation. However, Hassan's mother, Hawa Magiro, speaks little

English and has had very little experience with education at all. Hassan's older sister, Asha, is twenty-four years old and is married with her own child in Kenya, while his younger brother, Jeylani, is fifteen years old and is an 8th grader at Gateway Middle School. The two youngest siblings of the family, Osaman, age twelve, and Ramadhani, age eight, attend Watertown Elementary School. Hassan and his family reside in Summer Place Apartments, an apartment complex on the far south side of Central City. The complex is located in an area geographically isolated from the city center and grocery stores, and with limited access to public transportation. The storefronts of the closest strip malls are populated by cash checking and money loan centers, liquor stores, one gas station, and a few take-out restaurants. Refugee organizations initially resettle or relocate many recently arrived Somali Bantu refugee families to this complex because of its low monthly rent.

In 1990, Hassan's family fled Somalia for refugee camps in Kenya. The family spent thirteen years in two camps in Kenya before they were granted refugee status and moved to Central City. For eleven years they lived in a refugee camp in Dabaab, Kenya, where, as members of the Somali Bantu ethnic group, they were discriminated against and were in perpetual fear for their safety. They, along with many other Somali Bantu families, were then moved to a refugee camp in Kakuma, Kenya and waited two additional years for their refugee resettlement paperwork to be processed.

During interviews with the family, Chirango, Hassan's father, continually focused on the violence and poverty he and his family left behind in Somalia and Kenya. It seems as if the Mkoma family has been deeply affected by the trauma of their flight from Somalia and Kenya and the discrimination and violence they faced because of their

ethnic group membership. During one interview with the Mkoma family, Hassan and his father focus in on what it was be a Somali Bantu in the refugee camps in Kenya:

> Chirango: Yuh, because you see Somalian people they kill each other and they try to kill us [Somali Bantu]. Sometimes you see your neighbor, you listen to the gun, POP, so you cannot sleep here. There, there no peace anymore, because you think about are you dead today, are you dead tomorrow? You see, sometimes we are sleep here, we live in a tent, there's no house like this, and your children are here and your neighbor there. And they take the things and they take your clothes, so you think after that, they will go back there.
>
> And sometimes, when things were bad, we would have to take everything and go to the police station to be safe at night. In the morning the police sometimes they take their car, they go into the camp, they check here. When they look, they check, and then they say go back.
>
> Hassan: In Somalia this time they don't have a peace. Because always this time if they saw you walking, like anywhere, they gonna shoot (Interview, March 30, 2007).

Hassan is a young man confident in his academic abilities and achievement in school. Whenever he is asked about his grades in school, he replies that he is doing well in all of his classes and never seems to ask for help with his work. However, observations and interviews of Hassan in weekly study group meetings, at home, at school, and in informal discussions with him point to a more complicated story. Hassan's teachers report that they find it hard to understand what he is saying in English. Often they have to ask Hassan to repeat what he says or to rephrase what he says. Hassan also has trouble understanding what other people are saying in English and often asks them to repeat what they have said. This lack of English proficiency, both in speaking and listening, point to potential problems in his understanding of what goes in his classes and his academic achievement overall. Hassan's report cards for 9^{th}, 10^{th}, and 11^{th} grades also show that he

has had mixed academic progress with most of his grades in the Cs, Ds, and Fs throughout most of high school career.

Cross-cutting themes: Shared experiences as Somali Bantu students

Although Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan each had unique experiences as part of refugee families relocated to a new country and as students in Central City, several themes cut across the lives of these young men and repeatedly emerged during individual interviews, during weekly study group sessions, and during observations of them in and out of school. These cross-cutting themes provide different vantage points for understanding the inherent challenges these three students face as they try to become successful students in an unfamiliar school system.

Optimistic about their academic work

When asked about their schoolwork, all three young men were often very optimistic about how they were doing. Abdullah, for example, did very well in his first year of high school at Maine High School and earned mostly As and Bs. Because his family moved from the central part of the city to the northern part of the city, Abdullah then transferred high schools from Maine High School to Smith. In that second year, Abdullah began to do poorly in his classes and was suspended twice during the school year for his involvement in fights. In the summer of 2007, Abdullah's birth mother was accepted for resettlement to the United States and moved from a refugee camp in Kenya to the south side of Central City. Abdullah moved from the north side of town to be with her and decided to transfer schools a second time to Evans High School.

At the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, I asked Abdullah about his outlook for the year, and he replied that he was really looking forward to the upcoming

school year. He promised me that he would focus on his schoolwork and get "All As, for real this time. I'm just excited because I want to get a good grades right now. I really want to focus this year, not like last year (Interview, September 2, 2007)." Throughout the school year, I continued to ask Abdullah in our meetings together about how he felt he was doing in school and the response was invariably optimistic. However, Abdullah's optimistic perspective on his academic life was not always consistent with the perspectives of his teachers. His teachers had been informing me that Abdullah was often missing work, missing class, and was earning low Cs, Ds, and Fs in their classes. Their comments about Abdullah's poor academic performance were further verified by my own observations of Abdullah in school. During a three month period of observations, I saw him present in school but not in classes, fall asleep during his classes, and not turn in assigned homework.

When asked about his outlook for the 2007-2008 school year, Ibrahim too looked forward to "doing much better than last year. You'll see, Kevin. I'll do much better." (Interview, October 10, 2007). Ibrahim had received mostly Cs and Ds in his first year of high school at Maine and felt that he would do much better in his second year of high school. Whenever I would meet him at our weekly study group meetings or at his home, Ibrahim would without fail indicate that he was "doing fine" in his classes. Similar to my experience with Abdullah, Ibrahim's self-reporting of his academic achievement was in contrast to the grades in his teachers' grade books. When asked about Ibrahim's academic performance in their classes, his teachers reported that he was "not on track to earn credit for the semester", "not paying attention", and "did not regularly complete his homework."

Hassan shared in the optimism Abdullah and Ibrahim had about their academic achievement. He rarely asked for help with his schoolwork and often reported that he was "doing real well" in school. However, his teachers reported to me their concerns about his English ability level and his academic content knowledge especially in subjects such as World Literature, U.S. History, and Mathematics. As the 1st semester reached its midpoint, Hassan began to consult with me more about his schoolwork and admitted that his courses were becoming much more difficult. Although he earned mostly Bs and C+s in Mathematics at Maine, Hassan found that the mathematics class at Evans was much more difficult, that the teacher presented material that Hassan had never seen before, and that the homework expectations were much greater. In his first semester of classes at Evans, Hassan failed three of his six courses (World Literature, U.S. History, and Mathematics), earned Cs in two of his classes (Physical Education and Choir), and a D in another class (Economics).

Incomplete knowledge about the U.S. school system – Lofty goals, but lack of a roadmap

The optimism of Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan about their academic schoolwork also carries over to their aspirations about the types of careers they wish to pursue in the future. All three frequently talked about their hopes of entering the professions and becoming doctors, lawyers or engineers. However, whenever pressed to talk further about what kinds of education they would need to pursue these careers, all three knew very little about the school system in the U.S. They did not know how many credits they needed to graduate from high school, the types of courses they needed in high school to prepare them for college, and the types of colleges and universities they would need to matriculate to in order to follow their goals of becoming professionals.

When asked about his future career, Abdullah, for example, stated that he hopes to become a doctor because he says that his dad told him that this was a good job. However, when asked about the academic path he needs to take to become a doctor, he appears to have little idea about how to achieve his goal. He does not know how many years it will take, nor does he know the types of medical training necessary for this kind of career. These lofty goals point to an optimism about the future and an ability to see positive outcomes. However, Abdullah's plan for a future career in medicine is vague and not grounded in how the school system works in the U.S. He has an end goal of becoming a doctor but has very little idea of how to attain this goal, either in the short term for what he needs to currently do as a high school student or in the long term of how to apply to college or medical school.

One example of how Abdullah lacks a road map for academic success is evident in the transfers he made between high schools in his three years of high school in the U.S. For reasons of convenience, Abdullah attended three different high schools in three successive years within the Central City School District. Between his first and second year, Abdullah's father moved the family from the central part of town to the northern part of town and so Abdullah transferred from Maine High School to Smith High School. Between his second year of high school and his third year of high school, Abdullah's birth mother's refugee paperwork was processed and she moved to the U.S. from Kenya and relocated to the south side of Central City. Abdullah moved from his father's home to live with his birth mother on the south side of the city and transferred from Smith High School to Evans High School. Each of these transfers to different schools was based upon convenience.

In each case, Abdullah moved and transferred to a high school closer to where he was living at the time. Although logistically these transfers made sense, neither Abdullah or his father acknowledged the problems that these frequent transfers caused to Abdullah as he sought to understand the cultural norms present at each school, to establish relationships with fellow students and teachers at each of the schools, and to navigate the different types of course offerings, grading and academic credit policies, and academic support services available to him. The moves of convenience saved Abdullah hours on the bus each week, but they also cost him even more hours of work each week as he attempted to figure out how each school worked and his place in each school.

Throughout the school year, Hassan spoke frequently about how good he was at mathematics and his hopes of becoming an engineer. He believes that this field will make use of his skills at mathematics and that he can help to design things with a background in engineering. Hassan admits that part of his desire to become an engineer stems from the plans his father has made for all of the children in the Mkoma family. When asked about his children's future careers, Chirango, Hassan's father, remarks:

> Yeah, right. In terms of education first of all, I want them to learn English. Um, the planning of my children, Mohammed [Hassan's younger brother], first of all, I need him to be like a doctor. I am planning in my vision I hope that Mohammed to work hard at the school and to be a doctor. Like Hassan, Hassan also I am advising him all the time to work hard in the school to be engineering, to know mathematics because always I sit with them and advise them about the school (Interview, March 30, 2007).

Hassan then both has a personal desire to enter the professions and support from his father to further his education.

However, like Abdullah, Hassan does not know what he needs to do in high school to prepare himself for this type of career nor is he familiar with the types of college and university academic programs that he would need to enroll in. He says that

he will continue to take mathematics classes in high school and hopefully go to some college in the future, but he has little idea as to the exact Mathematics and Science courses he would need to put himself in a position to apply for entrance to university. The experiences of Hassan and Abdullah point to a lack of understanding by the students and their parents about the types of courses necessary to attend college or university, but they also point to an absence of counseling and outreach by school teachers and counselors to provide them with this important information.

In addition to a lack of knowledge about his future career, this year Hassan has begun to receive Ds and Fs in Mathematics, a class he used to excel in at his former high school. An analysis of Hassan's past report cards, current course schedule, and school curriculum guides points to possible reasons why Hassan has begun to do poorly in this class. In his 9^{th} and 10^{th} grade classes at Maine, Hassan was enrolled in general level mathematics classes. These mathematics classes were the lowest level mathematics classes that he possibly could take in these grades. When he transferred to Evans, Hassan was placed in an advanced level Trigonometry class for students who were going to take Calculus the following year. Although Hassan was unaware of it, this past school year he had been promoted to a course in which he needed a higher level mastery in mathematics necessary to excel in this Trigonometry class than he had been asked to have previously.

Finally, whenever I asked Ibrahim about his future, he often talked about his desire to become a lawyer. When I asked him about the work of a lawyer and the types of academic preparation needed to become one, Ibrahim was unclear of exactly what was needed, but reported that he had heard that you did not need to be as good at mathematics and sciences (subjects he was struggling with this past school year) to become a lawyer.

When pressed further about his desire to become a lawyer, he admitted that he knew very little about they did but, "has seen them on t.v. and they seem to make a lot of money and are rich. Yeah, that is the kind of career I want. Kevin, can you help me become one?" (Interview, October 12, 2008).

Unclear understanding of the study skills needed for success in school

Although Abdullah, IB, and Hassan are optimistic about their academic achievement and have high aspirations for their future careers, observations of their study habits and daily work habits suggest that, after approximately four years of enrollment in Central City schools, the young men do not yet understand how much time they need to study in school and after school to succeed academically.

Abdullah, for example, on average spends less than one hour a night on his homework. On most school nights, Abdullah usually does not get home till ten p.m. because he is out socializing with his friends. He does his homework while resting on his bed, and does as much work as he can before he falls asleep. He states, "In my room, like at the sleeping time, I'm laying in my bed, I'm doing my homework, as long as I, I do as many as I can, whenever I get to sleep, I just thrown them in and just sleep." (Interview, September 2, 2007). These behaviors toward school work do not help foster high academic achievement at school; rather they provide potential reasons as to why he did so poorly in his second year of high school at Smith. Abdullah's relatively good grades during his 1st year of high school may be attributed to the low level of difficulty of those first year classes and the fact that freshman classes are typically transitional years from middle school. Abdullah did well because he had seen some of the content matter the year before in 8th grade. As the level of academic difficulty increased in his

sophomore year, Abdullah's efforts and home study, as evidenced by his self-reporting and interviews with his father and with his teachers, decreased. Thus, Abdullah earned little credit for his sophomore year of classes at Smith.

Although Ibrahim currently receives mostly Cs, Ds, and Fs in his classes, he does not see the value of putting more time into his studies at home or in school. When asked about the relationship between the time spent on his homework and his grades in his classes, Ibrahim does not ever make the connection between the two by himself. Only after prompting and further explanation does Ibrahim begin to talk about how time and effort spent on homework and grades would affect each other.

This missed connection between effort and assessment is perhaps partially rooted in the ways in which Somali Bantu students have been assessed so far during their years of enrollment in U.S. public schools. Ibrahim and his friends have at times received credit in courses and been promoted from grade to grade for just attending and participating in school. A comparison of the grades they have received on their report cards and their academic performance this school year as evidenced by individual tutoring work with them and interviews with their teachers indicates that some of the grades they have received have been inflated and based upon effort rather than academic achievement. As Ms. Endicott puts it, "Some of these students really are trying, so we have to give them some type of grade. Usually I give them a "G" for trying." (Interview, November 21, 2007). In the Central City School District, a "G" grade is a grade teachers can give to students that does not give them a grade that counts towards their G.P.A. such as an "A" or a "B", but does count towards graduation credits. Somali Bantu students are aware of this parallel grading system and know that they can earn credit for school

without having to do all of the work. Hassan, for example, tells me that in some of his classes he receives a passing grade "just for showing up and not talking too much" (Interview, October 17, 2007).

Another way in which effort and assessment appears to be disconnected for these Somali Bantu youth is shown in the way in which some older Somali Bantu students have had the experience of being "socially promoted" for a whole year of school not because of academic achievement, but because of their age. Because they were two years older than the peers in their grade and would have graduated at the age of twenty-one, Omar Abde and Yusuf Sheik, two Somali Bantu students, were transferred in the middle of their sophomore year to a vocational high school, given credit for their junior year of classes without attending any classes for this grade, and were graduated from high school. This "promotion" from middle of the year sophomore to middle of the year senior in high school all occurred within a 1 year time frame. Jeylani, Hassan's 8th grade brother, has already been told that because of his age, he will skip 9th grade and start high school at the 10th grade level next academic year. This promotion is problematic because Jeylani will miss an important transitional year between middle school and high school and will certainly miss fundamental content knowledge that will be used in his 10th, 11th, and 12th grade years of high school.

Hence, the students in this study have in the past sometimes received passing grades without having to earn them. They have not always had to academically perform, so they see little reason to start now. This phenomenon is potentially problematic because it may set these students up for failure once they begin any type of community college or college or once their academic skills in writing, reading, or speaking are

compared to their peers in a job search. It also may provide these Somali Bantu students false hope in their academic achievement as they begin to believe that they have done well in school, when they really have not and are just being promoted for organizational rather than academic reasons.

Keeping each other down – the context of Somali Bantu peer interactions

One other theme that emerged from observations of the Somali Bantu students in study group meetings, in informal meetings, and from interviews with the students themselves is the depressed aspirations the students seem to have of each other. Although one might claim that high school students from other ethnic groups and native-born groups also have the habit of making fun of each other and putting each other down, in my year of observations of these students, the comments made by them to each other about their academic performance seemed almost uniformly negative. Although they were optimistic about their own individual performance in school, Somali Bantu students would often comment to each other about how poorly the others did in school and how difficult *the other* students found school to be. These predominantly negative comments about the academic performance of other students in their peer group heard over the course of a year point to a combination of problematic influences in these students' lives.

These influences include a lack of previous experience with formal school that results in a poor foundation for these Somali Bantu students to start school. All of the students in this study started public school in the U.S. in a grade that corresponded to their age. However, in each of their cases, school administrators unfortunately did not always take into account that these students, unlike their age peers in school, missed large chunks of school and when they did attend school had uneven instruction due to

inexperienced teachers, wartime uncertainty, and ethnic bias against their group. Most of these students also have had limited exposure to the English language. A lack of academic content knowledge and proficiency in English often resulted in low academic performance for many students within this group which resulted in a belief held by members of the group about their academic ability. These depressed aspirations in what each group member can achieve are not challenged because of the low incidence of positive academic role models these students can look up to. For example, in the entire Somali Bantu adult community in Central City only one person, Abdullah's father, has graduated from college. There are, therefore, very few role models for Abdullah, IB, and Hassan to look up to within their community for how to succeed in schools and how to successfully navigate the obstacles they face in schools.

An analysis of their peer group interactions suggests that the students in the Somali Bantu peer group unconsciously keep each other down through their comments to each other, group norms of the avoidance of school, and asserted disinterest in school. Although in individual interviews they remain seemingly optimistic about their own educational achievement in schools, an analysis of their report cards reveals that these students have actually started out poorly in the Central City public schools and continue to do quite poorly.

A return to the case of Abdullah

In addition to looking at themes that cut across the experiences of these three young men, another way to gain perspective into the lives of these young men is to focus more intensely on the educational experiences of just one student. In this section of the chapter, I have chosen to focus on and write more about Abdullah and his experiences in

school because, compared to his peers, he seemed to in many ways have the most potential to succeed as a student in the high schools of Central City. His father, Haji, was the only adult in the entire Somali Bantu community in Central City to have a college degree and was very willing to help his son with his homework. Abdullah did well in his first year of high school and, armed with help from his father and his own intellect, seemed in an ideal strategic position to continue to do well. Abdullah's peers singled him out for success as did other adult members of the community.

In fact, when I first met Abdullah he was doing so well in school as a freshman, I originally thought that this study might be one of comparing Abdullah's success in school to the relative challenges his peers faced and trying to account for the differences in their academic achievement. However, as the school year unfolded, I began to realize more and more how similar the experiences of Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan were in the high schools in Central City rather than see how different the three were from one another. Moreover, I began to see up close how Abdullah's initial academic success in high school began to unravel.

In many ways, Abdullah has been quite insightful and resourceful in the ways that he understood the structure of schools in the U.S. and how to access resources that would be of benefit to him. For example, during the tour of Central City Community College (CCCC) I arranged for the Somali Bantu young men in the summer of 2007, Adam often asked the guide about the resources of CCCC and how he could use them. He asked her about how he could access their library and computer room and how he could access their medical care services provided free of charge by students enrolled in their health sciences and dental hygiene program. In a series of interviews with Abdullah and Haji, I

uncovered how at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year Abdullah successfully arranged for his own transfer from Evans High School to Smith High School so that he could attend a school closer to where his biological mother had been resettled. Without his father's knowledge, Abdullah figured out that he had to go to the downtown offices of the Central Administration of the Central City School System, had to get signatures from the teachers and guidance counselor from Evans High School, and submit the forms downtown. As a student, he was able to successfully talk to central administration office staff, school administrators, and teachers and convince them to arrange the paperwork for his own transfer.

Abdullah also cleverly learned how to prioritize which work to try to complete given the weight of the assignment for each course. Throughout the course of the year, Abdullah would do the assignments that counted the most for his grade in the course that would meet during any given day. For example, if Abdullah had four assignments to do for homework, he would start with the assignment that would provide him the highest number of points. He would complete this assignment and then start to do the assignment that would give him the second highest number of points. By proceeding in this way, Abdullah tried to gain the greatest number of points for doing homework in the limited amount of time he had available in any given night (Field Notes, December 5, 2007). Although this strategy did not ultimately help him to pass all of his courses, it did exemplify how Abdullah tried to strategically deal with obstacles and problems he faced during the school year and how he tried to devise creative strategies in facing these problems.

However, Abdullah's ability to strategically deal with obstacles and problems he faced in school was eventually undermined by school policies and school decisions that unintentionally placed him on a downward spiral of academic underachievement. For example, during the 2007-2008 school year, Evans High School instituted a new policy which prohibited students from going off-campus to eat during their lunch. This change in policy led to changes in the timetable at the school and the numbers of students who had to be serviced by the school cafeteria during multiple lunch periods. In the end, the school administration decided to use a schedule in which lunch periods overlapped each other. Some students at Evans decided to use this new lunch schedule to miss their own classes before or after their actual lunch period in order to socialize with their friends. Seeing how other students cut classes during lunch period, Abdullah began to follow their lead and ultimately was caught doing it during a "hallway sweep" of truant students. He was suspended from school for a two day period right before final exams and missed class review sessions that probably would have helped him prepare for his final exams. During the school year, the administration also enacted a new policy in which special education students were to be placed in mainstream classes without additional support for the teachers who taught these classes. This decision created a situation in which teachers faced additional problems with classroom management including increased inattention and increased problems with discipline. In some of his classes, Abdullah's needs as an English as a Second Language learner unfamiliar with the academic content knowledge of the course seemed to get lost amongst the other classroom issues his teachers were forced to contend with.

Abdullah also did poorly in classes in which his teachers were not able to meet his needs for additional support in doing his homework and class projects. As I point out in Chapter 5, Ms. Endicott, his World Literature teacher, seemed to avoid his sleeping in her class while Ms. Case, his Grammar teacher, seemed so disappointed in his behavior that she waited until the end of the marking period to tell him that he was going to fail her course for the semester. In other courses, such as Economics with Mrs. Benjamin, Abdullah seemed to get lost in the class because of other pressing disciplinary and classroom management issues faced by his teachers. Consequently, although I originally thought that this study was going to chart Abdullah's success for the year and account for why he was able to do much better than his peers, the study actually became a study of how he faced obstacles and problems in school just as much as members of his Somali Bantu peer group did. Despite the educational experience Abdullah's father has and the tutoring he was able to provide Abdullah, this study began to chronicle how high schools in Central City appeared to withhold educational opportunities and support from those students who seemingly need it most.

Discussion: Challenges to academic success for Abdullah, IB, and Hassan

> By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1973, pg. 81).

This chapter provides a closer look at the lives of Abdullah, IB, and Hassan and presents background information about each student's family, their previous experience with schools in Somalia and Kenya, and their current academic achievement in the high schools of Central City. Although all three students provide optimistic views about their

academics at the start of the school year, a closer analysis of these students' lives during the 2007-2008 school year shows that each of these students is experiencing difficulty in U.S. public schools because the school is demanding of them things which "it does not give". Bourdieu's criticism of an educational system that "demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give" provides a revealing way of analyzing the experiences of these three young men in public schools in the U.S.

One of the major challenges Abdullah, IB, and Hassan face in trying to do well in school has to do with the expectations and demands their teachers have about academic content matter. Although teachers expect and demand that these young men will have a familiarity with the academic content matter and subject-specific vocabulary in each of their classes, in many cases, these young men are learning content specific material for the first time in their lives and consequently struggle to pass these classes. For example, while some of his native-born peers in his classes have had previous exposure to U.S. history and government in their elementary and middle school years, Abdullah is reading about these ideas and concepts for the first time in his grade 11 social studies class. Abdullah also struggles as the academic English demanded of him increases as he moves up the higher grades of high school, surpassing his level of informal English ability. That is, Abdullah knows English well enough to converse with his peers and even with his teachers on an informal basis, but when asked to debate U.S. politics or read British Literature, Abdullah has tremendous difficulty.

IB faces even more challenges because he struggles with both informal and academic English. While Abdullah can converse with native speakers of English in everyday conversations, IB has difficulty communicating even the most basic of

sentences in clear, coherent English. When asked to read the textbook for his classes in Biology or U.S. History, IB does not recognize and cannot pronounce many words particular to the field being studied. For example, IB has never in his previous science classes in Somalia or Kenya been introduced to the idea of photosynthesis in Biology or the Emancipation Proclamation in U.S. History. While his native-born peers have potentially read about these topics in previous grades, IB has very little previous academic knowledge to draw upon to make sense of what he is being asked to read.

Hassan too struggles with subjects he has not had much exposure to before. During the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, he took and had great difficulty in U.S. History, World Literature, and Economics, three classes in which the subject matter was new to him. Throughout the term, he struggled with understanding the specialized terms used in each of these subjects, completing the course assignments especially when written work was required, and participating in classroom discussions. Frustrated by his inability to succeed in these courses, Hassan failed U.S. History and World Literature and earned a D in Economics. Teachers continue to demand and expect that these young men know things that at times have not been given to them in their previous educational experiences in Somalia, Kenya, and even in public schools in the U.S.

All three young men also struggle when the school expects that they possess and draw upon what Bourdieu calls a "familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture." Put another way, the young men struggle when the school and teachers in the school expect a familiarity with the culture and expectations of U.S. public schools, but do not take into account the fact that many of the families in the Somali Bantu community are unfamiliar with schools, either

in the U.S. or in Somalia, and, thus, are unable to "transmit the dominant culture" to their children and help them understand how to succeed in schools. For example, because their families moved many times within Somalia and Kenya to escape violence and discrimination and often lived a nomadic existence, all three young men attended school only sporadically during their formative elementary and middle school years of school. These missing years of school have led to tremendous gaps in academic content knowledge for all three young men. These gaps are exacerbated by all three students' unfamiliarity with the instructional practices and expectations of the teachers in their classes. For example, while many of their peers are used to taking tests via Scantron bubble sheets, IB filled in his first bubble sheet at the age of fourteen. While many students have been encouraged to use powerpoint presentations to complete group work assignments and are used to completing these types of assignments, Hassan first used a computer just four years ago. Although Abdullah is able to rely upon the academic support of his college-educated father at home to help him and to coach him on how to complete homework and group work assignments and to fill in the gaps in his academic content knowledge, IB is not able to seek help with his homework from either his parents or his older brothers because they themselves did not attend school past their elementary years. Hassan, too, struggles with finding additional support at home for the subjects in which he has difficulty. All three young men then lack a "familiarity with culture" which is exacerbated by their family's inexperience with the "dominant culture" of public schools in the U.S. and life in the U.S. more generally.

As the young men in the Somali Bantu teen peer group struggle with the expectations of their teachers, Abdullah, IB, and Hassan are further challenged in their

attempts at academic success by the poor academic performance and lack of motivation exhibited by the other young men in their peer group. Each of the three young men see little point in spending time studying in school and getting high grades. Rather they enjoy school as a place to socialize with each other and to make plans for after the school day ends. Part of the reason why their peers may be doing poorly in schools is that only some of these students were even able to attend school in Somali and Kenya. Abdullah explains:

> Most of them didn't go to school in Kenya or in the camp. They just helping at home. Finding food for their family. In all of my friends, I don't think any of them went to school that often. Some went to school, but not every day. They just going any time they want. Sometimes their parents think they went to school, but they just walk around and they go back home (Interview, September 23, 2007).

With little encouragement from their peers and few positive academic role models to look up to, Abdullah, IB, and Hassan find getting motivated for school very difficult and have a very hard time adjusting to the academic demands placed upon them by their teachers and school administrators. Socialized by both the members of their peer group and their age-group peers at school, these young men begin to act in ways counter to what the school expects. However, what is important to note is that what the teachers and school expects from newly arrived refugee students in terms of appropriate study skills and self-motivation has not always been explicitly taught by their teachers or modeled by their fellow students.

These academic problems related to academic content and English comprehension and the negative influence of their own peer group are further compounded by unfamiliarity with the culture of high schools and a lack of knowledge about how best to study for and succeed in a public school classroom in the U.S. In addition to not

knowing some of the academic content expected of students at their grade level and having troubles with reading comprehension in English, these three young men are trying to understand very quickly the unwritten rules and hierarchy of student life in a public high school. They are trying to understand what is "cool" in the eyes of their U.S.-born peers and what types of groups and behavior are accepted or not accepted. As they struggle to find their place in schools, they are also finding it very difficult to understand what is really expected of them in terms of their homework and class work and how best to prepare for school at home.

For example, literally within the span of two weeks, Ibrahim was relocated from a refugee camp in Kenya where he attended school only when his family had enough money to pay for school and school supplies to an Algebra classroom in Central City where he was expected to do thirty mathematics problems every night for homework. The rapid shifts from refugee camp to public school classroom and from a lack of access to formal education to everyday life in a public high school in the U.S. has created an uneasy feeling of disequilibrium in these three young men from which they are still trying to recover. Knowing more about these students' backgrounds makes me posit the question, "How could this group of Somali Bantu students possibly not fail in U.S. public schools?"

Chapter 5

The front-line:
Teachers' responses to Somali Bantu refugee students

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ways in which teachers responded to the specialized educational needs of the focal group refugee students in this study in light of the obstacles they faced as teachers in the Central City School District. The chapter begins with a brief review of literature that explains how schools act as institutions and how teachers individualize their responses to the conditions of the institutions they work in. The review is followed by a description of the obstacles teachers in the Central City high schools faced during the 2007-2008 school year. The chapter then focuses on the identification of different types of responses employed by native-born teachers as they sought to work with high school refugee students with limited and interrupted access to education prior to enrollment in high schools in the Central City School District. Teacher responses included accommodation, avoidance, disappointment and frustration, and regret. By examining the ways in which teachers sought to meet the needs of these refugee students, I highlight the complexities of the work charged to these teachers and the inherent challenges each teacher must face as they try to help Somali Bantu students become successful learners in an unfamiliar school system.

Schools as institutions and teachers' responses as individuals

Schools are not neutral institutions. Rather teachers, administrators, and students engage in a contestation of power, knowledge, and social interaction that has the potential to disadvantage students who are not from the culture of power (Delpit, 1996). Schools

use "hidden" and "official" curricula to promote the hegemony of those who are already in dominance (Apple, 2004) and engage in instructional practices that do not always value the voices and backgrounds of urban students of color (McLaren, 2003; Noguera, 2003). These practices include socializing and sorting students in academic tracks which serve to reinforce social inequality (Oakes, 2005); valuing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills of the dominant group (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977); and providing different types of access to education depending on the race and class of the student population (Anyon, 1997).

External constraints also limit the school as an educational entity. Poverty and social isolation are conditions that invariably affect schools and children in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987). Inadequate school funding and ambivalent support from federal, state, and local governments make it difficult for teachers and administrators to provide instructional resources and materials to children, recruit motivated teacher candidates, and maintain school facilities (Kozol, 1991). The reproduction of social inequality leads to the alienation and disempowerment of students from marginalized groups in U.S. public schools (Fine, 1991; MacLeod, 1995, Kohl, 1991).

Teachers who are a part of these institutional contexts often find themselves struggling to find ways to meet the needs of refugee students. They may lack knowledge of their students' diverse backgrounds. They may also be disempowered by school policies that demand they raise all students' standardized scores but fail to provide them with the classroom materials, in-service training, and technical support needed to do so. Faced with this lack of institutional support, teachers then, at times, turn inward towards themselves, their own experiences, and ideas for answers on how best to meet the needs

of children. Although teachers do work collaboratively with colleagues during faculty meetings or curriculum planning meetings, when it comes time to teach the students in their classrooms, teachers often close the door to the classroom and rely upon their own individualized conceptions of what good teaching is to drive how they create lesson plans, approach students, and conduct classes. The way that they think about teaching and their approach to students is significantly based upon years of experience with schools as a student and as a teacher through an "apprentice of observation" (Lortie, 1975). Many teachers also believe that their skills as a teacher can only improve through more years of additional practice in the field, rather than through university courses, ongoing professional development, or advanced study (Britzman, 2003). This reliance by teachers upon one's individual experience for guidance can become problematic when working with students from groups with which one has little experience or knowledge, such as recently arrived refugee students.

The 2007-2008 school year – A year of challenges for Central City high school teachers

Despite the large number of refugee families and school-aged children in the area, teachers from the Central City School District have reported to me in my previous research that they do not know how to best meet the needs of refugee children (Roxas, 2008). Teachers explain how difficult it is to teach students with varying degrees of English proficiency who sometimes are placed in their classrooms with little or no advance warning and very little information given about the child's previous educational experience and background. In addition to varying degrees of proficiency in the English language, teachers struggle to find the best ways to teach refugee children who often have had limited or interrupted experiences with formal schooling while at the same time teach

native English speakers in the same classroom. Finally, these teachers report that they have received little in-service training or support from their school and school district in meeting the special needs of these children including children with English language learning (ELL) needs or children with emotional trauma.

During the 2007-2008 school year, teachers' work with Somali Bantu refugee students in Central City was further complicated by the presence of other pressing issues to contend with in an urban district including but not limited to: discipline and absenteeism problems, a lack of resources and funding, budget cuts, school closings, the recent mainstreaming of all special education students, low teacher morale, and a history of teacher mistrust of the current district administration. Over the last five years, the Central City School District has seen its student enrollment drop by over 300 students. Many of these students have left the district due to a poor local economy and because families have decided to move to other states to find better employment. Other students have left the district due to a "schools of choice" policy that allows students to leave Central City schools for the suburbs surrounding Central City (Wallbank, 2008b). The decrease in student enrollments has led to a lack of resources and funding for teachers, school closings, and significant cuts to the teacher workforce in the district (Wallbank, 2008c). In the fall of 2007, a new central administration took over the Central City School District and instituted several changes district-wide including the appointments of new administration at two of the three high schools and the mainstreaming of many special education students to general education classes (Geary, 2007).

In March 2008, the local media discovered and reported that the central administration was planning a massive reorganization of the teaching staff at each of the

three high schools in the district. All teachers would have to reapply for their jobs and principals at each school would have the final say on which teachers they would accept for employment (Wallbank, 2008a). This news report resulted in teacher outrage and further depressed teacher morale. Teacher mistrust of the current district administration was increased even further by the reorganization plan and teachers began to mobilize amongst themselves to find ways to counter the administration's plans. Faced with having to reapply for their jobs, union organizers within the district began to mobilize teacher resistance and formulated a plan in which all teachers would apply for all new positions in the district. This plan would effectively stall the district's reorganization plan indefinitely as the human resources department sought to process all of the teacher applications. Because of the overwhelming negative responses by the teachers in the schools and the general public, the school district administration eventually postponed their plans for teacher reorganization within the schools until the 2010-2011 school year and shifted their focus on providing all Central City High School students take-home textbooks for every course within the next three years. Students currently do not receive their own textbooks to take home, but receive books at the start of each class and must give them back before they leave (Wallbank, 2008d).

The institutional obstacles faced by teachers during the 2007-2008 school year forced them to focus some of their time and energy on thinking about out-of-class struggles with the school administration and influenced the ways in which they viewed their work as teachers in the Central City School District. The next section of this chapter will identify different types of responses employed by teachers as they worked with the Somali Bantu refugee students in this study and examine how institutional

obstacles within Central City High Schools affected the teachers' responses. Teacher responses included negotiating and bargaining, avoidance, disappointment and frustration, and regret. Vignettes from my observations and interviews in the field with four teachers will be presented to provide examples of each response and will then be followed by additional background information about each teacher and their interaction with the focal group students.[2]

Negotiating and bargaining

One theme that emerged from observations of and interviews with teachers of the Somali Bantu young men was one of negotiating and bargaining. During the 2007-2008 school year, teachers were given class rosters with many more special education students than they might receive during a typical year as the school district sought to implement a new policy of mainstreaming additional special education students. This policy was implemented without additional teacher support of these special education students either during class meeting time in the form of in-class tutors or professional development. ESL students, including Somali Bantu refugee students, also were placed in mainstream classes. Although the numbers of teachers employed to work with ESL students increased slightly in Central City High Schools, professional development of mainstream teachers and in-class support of ESL students was not increased. This caused some teachers to face additional issues with classroom management of students as they tried to balance the various learning needs of students in their classrooms. Some teachers then

[2] In this section of the chapter, the first three vignettes are taken from observations and interviews from Abdullah's teachers. The fourth vignette is from one of Ibrahim's teachers. Although I was able to observe and interview Hassan's teachers during the school year, I had the greatest access to Abdullah's teachers and one of Ibrahim's teachers. Although I am aware that there appears to be overrepresentation of Abdullah's teachers in this section, I feel that the vignettes represent common types of responses exhibited by teachers of all three students.

engaged in a response of negotiating and bargaining with their students in an attempt to address the classroom management issues and learning needs of students they faced. Ms. Benjamin, Abdullah's Economics teacher, provides one example of this type of response.

Ms. Benjamin's Economics Class
Field Notes from December 5, 2007

9:20 a.m.

> As I take my seat to observe Ms. Benjamin's Economics class, I notice printed signs up on bulletin boards at the front of the classroom near the teacher's desk. They state,
>
> These 50 points are yours to keep to help your grade point average.
>
> Lose 20 points for:
>
> > Not staying seated until the bell rings
> > Talking during a test
>
> Lose 10 pts for second warning talking in class during work or lecture time

9:23 a.m.

> The bell rings and four students take their seats after the bell has rung. Ms. Benjamin starts the class and, shortly thereafter, asks students "Can I have everybody's attention please?" I keep notes at the top of my field notes how often she says something like this. My count was thirty-three times for the entire period. Two students come in late to class a few minutes after the bell rings.

9:33 a.m.

> There is an announcement over the P.A. "Excuse the interruption. Some students were just picked up in the hall sweep. A list of students will be forthcoming by the end of the period. Upward Bound students are asked to please report now to the library." Two students in Ms. Benjamin's class leave. This prompts other students to say, "Tyesha's not in Upward Bound, Ms. Benjamin." Ms. Benjamin tells students about last night's faculty meeting in which it was decided there would be a crackdown on students listening to I-Pods or cell phones in class. She warns students to put all devices away and to take their ear phones out. After her announcement, I note that three students still have ear pieces in their ears.

9:35 a.m.

Throughout the rest of the lesson, Ms. B. tries to call students back to attention. She says:

"Kamran, will you stop?
"You shouldn't have your feet up on the desk. Take them off."
"I asked you to put away your I-Pod, now I have to write you up."
"Guys, don't start randomly talking about anything. Stay on topic now."
"Guys I cannot tolerate the noise. I'm going to start sending out people."
"Please don't encourage their fooling around, that's just not helpful."
"You'll still be here next semester if you don't start paying attention."
"I can't hear you because he was talking."
"I could not hear you because everybody else is so loud."
"Guys, please stop talking so you'll hear the answers. It's not free time."

9:40 a.m.

Ms. B notices that one student still has an I-Pod and writes him up for a detention. "Solomon, that is an I-Pod." Solomon responds, "I wasn't even listening to anything." Ms. B. writes up Solomon. Another student says to Kamran, a talkative student on my side of the room, "Shut the fuck up Kamran, you be trying to act so hard. Boy, you get on my nerves."

9:50 a.m.

Throughout the first thirty minutes of class, Abdullah sits impassive. He does not talk to his peers; he does not talk to Ms. B. He does write some things on his worksheet, but not the entire time. At 10:00 a.m., Abdullah starts to nod down toward the textbook and falls asleep. He tries to catch himself from sleeping, but falls asleep anyhow. A few minutes later, Abdullah wakes up, but eventually puts his head down on his desk and sleeps.

While Abdullah nods off to sleep, other students in the class talk about the following Economics topics: mutual funds, pensions, baby boomers, NYSE, portfolios, diversification, the Dow Jones, the S & P, bull and bear markets. A student asks a question about health stocks and Ms. B. responds, "I'm not too familiar with the medical field. I teach health sometimes, but I'm not too deep into it."

10:09

I look around and notice that students are doing the following things in class

Sleeping (three students)
Fixing hair in a compact mirror
Looking at a clothing catalog
Writing up notes for another class
Three different side conversations are going on
Two other students doing homework for another class with their textbooks out
Reading a magazine
In the span of about ten minutes, five students get up to blow their noses. Most students leave the room to blow their noses and then come back in.

10:15

A student returns after seven minutes of being out in the hallway, blowing his nose. A few minutes later, Abdullah wakes up, but still looks sleepy. Ms. B, annoyed by Kamran's calling out answers, yells, "Kamran, will you please go outside and switch places with her?"

Abdullah falls back asleep again. Another student yells out, "I think Kamran and the other girl have been swept." The other girl does not come back in.

10:20

Abdullah wakes up again, but falls back asleep again. Has his arms pulled up into his short sleeves (kind of like a turtle).

10:22

Ms. B. "Please put your textbooks back on the shelf. Now we'll talk about your projects for a little bit." Two students out in the hallway still have not returned.

10:25

Ms. B. counts the textbooks and gets upset that two textbooks are missing. "Where did you guys put the textbooks? I'm missing two." Students look at each other and kid about who's taken it. One student raises his hand and says, "Ms. B., I know what happened to the textbook. I got hungry and I ate it."

10:27

One of the two students in the hallway returns to the room. Ms. B. goes over assignment and talks about the fact that students should use the Census website to figure out where to locate their restaurant. Students should look up average household income to figure out prices to charge and where to locate their restaurant.

10:30

One girl still out in the hallway peeks back into the room, but seeing that Ms. B does not see her or ask her to come in, goes back out in the hallway. It looks like she is with another girl who has been kicked out from another class. The other girl is using her phone to text others and eventually asks the girl from Ms. B's class to take her picture with the cell phone.

10:35

Abdullah falls back asleep and stays asleep. Girl in the hallway returns in to the classroom. Ms. B continues to give an overview of the assignments. Students express confusion over the assignments.

10:42

One other girl in the middle of the classroom is still asleep. She has been asleep for over forty continuous minutes. Some students start singing in the class and harmonizing together. Ms. B. announces that "We are still missing textbooks. We are not leaving until we find these two textbooks." A girl gets up to count the textbooks. "Ms. B. how many should there be in the shelf?" Ms. B. replies, "Forty". The girl responds, "Well, there's forty there."
Ms. B. replies, "I'm so sorry. You must have squeezed some extra books in the top shelf more than I though there would be. I'm so sorry, I must have miscounted."

10:45

Abdullah is still asleep. The bell rings shortly thereafter and Abdullah gets up looking a little groggy and follows his fellow students out the door and off to their next class (Field Notes, December 5, 2007).

Background

Ms. B, Abdullah's Economics teacher and the teacher in the above vignette, has taught at Evans High School for eight years. Certified to teach Social Studies, Ms. B currently teaches five sections of Economics, a semester-long elective course in the social studies curriculum. She has previously taught some Health courses at Smith High School but not in the last few school years. During interviews and informal conversations with Ms. B throughout the school year, she indicated that she faced obstacles in teaching

Economics as an elective course. Because it was not required for graduation, some students did not study as diligently for this course as compared to courses in the core curriculum required for graduation. After looking at her grade book, she confirmed that approximately seven out of thirty students in this particular section were taking the course for a second time because they had failed the course in previous semesters.

Ms. B also mentioned that this course was especially difficult to teach this year because guidance counselors were placing many special education students and ESL students in her classes, because, according to Ms. B, "they had no other place to put them. They know I will deal with them (Interview, November 16, 2007)." Ms. B points out ten students in her Economics class that she would not have had last year. This mainstreaming of special education students has changed the dynamics in her classroom and crowded out any time and extra assistance Ms. B could give to ESL and refugee students. When asked how she tries to reach out to both her special education and refugee students, she says that she tries to accommodate the different needs of all of her students by making special accommodations, but she also admits that "because our students come to the classroom with so many different learning disabilities, I am not always able to do what I want to do with them (Interview, November 16, 2007)."

Throughout my five observations of Economics class during the semester, I noted the following behaviors in the class: students talking out of turn, sleeping, singing, not working on Economics assignments, working on assignments for other classes, reading the newspaper, looking at clothing catalogs, getting up in the middle of the lesson for no reason, coming in late with no notes, leaving the classroom and not returning for long stretches of time, and talking back to the teacher. During the opening vignette of this

section, Ms. B approached her job like a fire fighter putting out little fires occurring throughout her classroom during the entire period of Economics. She moved from one group of students in one part of the classroom to another trying to quiet them down or convince them to pay attention. When she tried to get one set of students to work on the assignment, another set of students on the other side of the room tried to physically leave the room.

A closer look

Throughout the semester, Ms. B. tried to juggle the many needs of the students in her class. Whether they needed repeated instruction because they were late for class or needed additional time for assignments because they had special education needs, Ms. B. tried to attend to the different things happening in her class and made an effort to help those students who ask for it. However, Ms. B also appeared to be in the continuous process of bargaining and negotiating with her students as a way to entice them to behave and pay attention. For example, during one class period she tried to get students on task by threatening to not bring them to the computer room at the beginning of the following week. Fifteen times during the lesson, she held out the option of not going to the computer room the following Monday because of the failure to work on the assignment, talking, or getting up out of seats. Students kept talking and Ms. B just continued to give warnings about the consequences of the continued talking. At the end of class, Ms. B eventually just said that they would not be able to go at all and some students replied bluntly that they did not care (Field Notes, November 29, 2007). This specific sequence of events is important because it underscores how Ms. B's efforts at bargaining and negotiating did not seem to have much effect on the motivation or learning of her

students. Despite her attempts at using a visit to the computer room as a bonus during the lesson, it appeared that many of the students really did not care about going to the computer room the following week, so the threats about not going seemingly held no weight with them.

The process of negotiating and bargaining continued throughout the remainder of that week. During class meetings later in the week, the students in Ms. B's class assured her that they would pay closer attention if she would take them to the computer room on Monday. Eventually, she did take them to class on Monday. Their main task for the period was to fill out an Economics worksheet that involved finding the price quotes of different types of stocks. Although Ms. B tried to go over this explanation several times during the first thirty minutes of class, some students appeared to not know what to do. Some raised their hands and asked questions. Some other students were filling out the form and paying attention. However, approximately half the students in the class were logging on the computers and looking at random websites not related to the task at hand (Field Notes, December 3, 2007).

Examples of websites that students in the classroom looked at during the period in the computer room included:

- Baby Phat clothes
- Video clips of football games
- Sports Illustrated
- University of Michigan Hockey
- Various MYSPACE pages
- A Evil Kneivel motorcycle simulation
- Tetris
- Solitaire
- Edline webpage [to check their grades]
- Various drawing software including MS Works drawing pad
- Yahoomail, googlemail, etc.

Examples of what Abdullah looked at during the period in the computer room included:

- His MYSPACE page
- Cnnmoney.com [the actual assignment]
- A shopping website for clothes
- Pictures of friends
- Pictures of Will Smith
- Microsoft Works drawing pad
- Pictures of interiors of cars

Ms. Benjamin tried repeatedly to get the students back to attention and working on the tasks she assigned. She would say things like, "Can I have your attention please?" or "Eyes to the front please." As evidenced by the types of websites students were looking at during the lesson, these calls for attention were largely ignored. Ms. B's attempt at using the prospect of going to the computer room as a bargaining and negotiating tool for students to pay closer attention in class appeared to fail for many of the students in the class including Abdullah who spent most of the class time looking at websites unrelated to the assigned Economics assignment.

Avoidance

Another theme that emerged from observations of and interviews with teachers was a general lack of knowledge about and seeming avoidance of refugee students in their midst. In most of the classrooms in which Somali Bantu students were enrolled, there were two to three other refugee students present. When asked about Somali Bantu students specifically or refugee students more generally, teachers in the study did not know very much about the family or academic background of the refugee students they taught. Moreover, some teachers appeared to avoid directly addressing some of the academic problems Somali Bantu refugee students were having in their classroom. The

following vignette about Ms. Endicott, Abdullah's World Literature teacher, provides an example of how avoidance of Somali Bantu refugee students occurred.

Ms. Endicott's World Literature Class
Field Notes from Tuesday, December 11, 2007

I arrived at Evans High School a little before 7:50 a.m. It is still very dark at this time of the morning and the roads are quite icy because of a dip in temperatures. I enter a side door that appears to be normally locked, but a student is standing there propping it open, perhaps waiting for a friend. I make my way up to Ms. Endicott's room up a side stairwell noting how dark it is in the stairwell and the rust all over the stairs.

As I enter the 2nd floor hallway, the bell rings and students scurry in all directions. I notice that Abdullah was talking to Hassan in the hallway. I pass the two of them without saying hi because I do not want to call attention to myself or disrupt them, but I hear them yelling at each other, "Don't be late for class, man." Abdullah appears to be following behind me, but I can't quite tell because I'm already near the door of the classroom. Ms. Endicott is greeting students at the door and quickly mentions that they have a three hour block this morning because of some special schedule and that I should not feel obliged to stay the whole time and should feel free to leave at any time that suits me.

I take a seat in the very back row of the classroom exactly opposite from the front door. There is basically a five row and four column configuration of two person desks. Most of the desks have xeroxed copies of Beowulf on them and one to two textbooks. Students are scattered around the room and when class starts there are only twenty students seated in the room. Abdullah enters the room and sits one row in front of me and one column to the left. I can see him clearly from a side angle. For some reason, he is wearing a utility glove on his right hand.

7:50

> Class officially starts. After giving a few brief announcements, Ms. Endicott starts class by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, where did we leave off last time in Beowulf?" "Ok, lines 2349-2390, let's start with these lines." Along with other sets of lines from Beowulf, Ms. Endicott then proceeds to read through the following sections of lines. She reads the text herself, asks students what they think it means, adds her own commentary, and students write down a brief summary in their notes. I note that Abdullah has no backpack and no notebook. For some reason, he is wearing some sort of utility glove on his right hand. Although Abdullah does appear to be turning the pages to the text of Beowulf as the rest of the class reads it, he does not take any notes throughout today's lesson.

8:00

Two more students enter the room. One of the students asks Ms. Endicott for a pen. Abdullah gives her his pen. I wonder if he knows he will not be using it throughout the lesson. She appears to be in the classroom from another class and is working on another assignment quite diligently on her own. There are approximately four to five other students in the class doing the same work.

8:02

There is another knock at the door. The person does not come in. Ms. Endicott talks to the person at the door for about two minutes before closing the door and continuing with the lesson. Abdullah has fallen asleep already.

8:05

One student asks "Can I go to the bathroom?" Two more students knock at the door. Both enter the room. One of the students is wearing a Dora the Explorer backpack. Ms. Endicott continues with her explanation of Beowulf line-by-line to these students. .

8:10

Abdullah raises his head from his sleep, but promptly falls back asleep. He puts his head down on his desk. The student returns from the bathroom. Abdullah repeatedly lifts his head and then falls back asleep. Ms. Endicott continues to read lines of Beowulf. She asks the class, "What's going through Beowulf's mind right now? Death and the coming of death." Abdullah is still asleep even though the text itself is compelling. Beowulf is about to slay a foe, but finds himself mortally wounded.

I make notes to myself how might it be possible for Ms. Endicott and others to show Abdullah and the other students in the classroom how Beowulf could possibly be connected to their own lives. Certainly Abdullah could speak of death and seeing it around him. What kinds of parallels could he make between the wars and violence he has seen and the wars and violence in Beowulf? As far as I could see from today's lesson, Abdullah has taken away very little from this piece of literature, nor has Ms. Endicott made any effort to make it come alive for him specifically. Rather it appears that she lets him sleep, as long as he does not cause any trouble or cause any disruptions for the rest of the class.

8:25

Abdullah is still asleep. David, a student seated in front of me, seems almost obsessive about cleaning out his backpack. He pulls out literally all of the contents of his backpack, lays them out on his desk, and then begins organizing

each of the contents into plastic clear bags. Into one of the glad bags, he puts rice chex, into another he puts all of his empty candy wrappers, and into the last he puts the remaining snacks he has for the day. He packs and repacks these bags for about 10 minutes and then finally zips up his backpack and leans back in his chair. Interestingly enough, this student actually know the story of Beowulf without listening to Ms. Endicott read the text. When he answers her questions, he refers to the text and websites he looked at that referred to Beowulf.

8:30

Abdullah is still asleep. Ms. Endicott tries to bring the story alive with her explanation. In her explanations, she refers to the following things:

To current history
Her family's recent family trip to Sweden
Egyptian tombs
Sports that students at Evans play
Her daughter's softball game and motivation
"Beowulf is getting his butt kicked."

8:35

Abdullah is still asleep. Ms. Endicott says that the students will read Shakespeare next. Kamran says, "I can't understand half of Shakespeare." Ms Endicott says, "Yes, you can."

8:40

Abdullah is still asleep. The student in front of me is totally packed up. As I glance around the room, most of the students are engaged and reading along in the text. There were a few not on task (i.e. Abdullah and a boy seated in the back row of the classroom), but most were on task.

8:45

Ms. Endicott, for the first time in the lesson, walks through the middle of the room and the back of the room. For most of the class, she has been at the blackboard in the front of the room. Her presence and voice wakes up Abdullah and the other boy in the back of the classroom who was sleeping. She asks the students, "What happened in this part of the text? Everyone bailed, that's what happened." As she continues to ask questions, like a turtle, Abdullah retracts his arms and hands into his long shirt sleeves and falls asleep once again. At this point, Ms. E. is literally standing five feet behind Abdullah reading Beowulf and he's still asleep.

Kamran looks back and asks two students behind him to move over so that he can see Abdullah sleeping. He yells out, "Ms. Endicott, he's (Abdullah) sleeping every day!" Ms. E. responds, "I know we talked about this the other day. Think about yourself and take care of yourself, not others." She moves on with her explanation of Beowulf.

8:52

Abdullah sits up, but falls back asleep quickly.

9:00

Abdullah is still asleep.

9:10

Abdullah is still asleep.

Ms. E. makes the comment, "For some of you silent people, we need to hear from you as well." David, the boy who kept packing up his backpack, has been answering a number of questions out loud without raising his hand and Ms. E tries to get the other students involved in the discussion. Looking back on the discussion, probably only about five to seven students (out of twenty-four) give verbal responses to the questions Ms. E. raises. The rest pay attention, but largely remain silent throughout class.

9:15

Abdullah wakes up.

9:17

Abdullah falls back asleep.

9:20

Because the class will be three hours long today, Ms. E. gives the students a break. Although some students get up to use the bathroom and begin talking to one another, Abdullah does not wake up. As I leave the classroom, she points to Adam and shrugs her shoulders. I try to think of something to say to Ms. E. I take her leave by saying with a smile, "At least I enjoyed the discussion today."

(Field Notes, December 11, 2007)

Background

Ms. Endicott, Abdullah's World Literature teacher, has been teaching at Evans High School for ten years and has seen a number of different refugee groups cycle through the Central City school system including students from the following groups: Hmong, Cubans, Somalians, Bosnians, Afghanis and Iraqis. During the 2007-2008 school year, she taught three sections of World Literature and two sections of British Literature. Ms. Endicott had painted the ceiling in her classroom a sky-blue color. On a bulletin board behind the teacher's desk at the very front of the classroom are displayed fifty to seventy pictures of previous students. All down the left hand side of the classroom suspended from the ceiling are glass streamers. Ms. Endicott took some steps to brighten up the room and make it more welcoming. This is in stark contrast to the state of the hallways and stairwells. As I walked up the back stair well, the first thing I always noticed during my visits to her classroom were the rusted out stairs, the peeling paint on the walls, and the water stained drop ceiling tiles all throughout the hallways.

The first time I met Ms. Endicott she offered me a seat and asked me about Abdullah. She thought that he would attend our meeting together, and I replied that it would just the two of us. I asked her what she wanted to know about Abdullah and she asked me to "fill in all the details". She let me know that she did not know anything about his background, which ethnic group he was from, or his previous education. She had not yet been in touch with his family nor called home to talk to his parents. Ms. Endicott seemed surprised and shocked to hear the details of Abdullah's story and how he came to the U.S. as a refugee. When I talked about the difficulties Somali Bantu faced in Somalia and in refugee camps in Kenya, she commented that she had never heard this

much information about Abdullah or any of the other refugees she had taught before. She stated:

> We never get this kind of information when these students are put in our class. The students are just dropped in our laps and we're never given any idea of what they already know and how they know it (Interview, November 16, 2007).

She asks me why Abdullah has transferred to Evans High School from Smith, and I told her that Abdullah's birth mother just recently arrived in the U.S. and that he elected to live with her on the south side of Lansing.

During our initial meeting together, Ms. Endicott shared several concerns about Abdullah's performance in her class. Abdullah appeared to be very withdrawn and does not socialize with other students in her class. His transition to Evans worried her in that he seemed to be trying so hard to fit in with his peers. Ms. Endicott repeated the idea that she thinks Abdullah is trying very hard to fit into the culture of the school and this is "not helping him at all (Interview, November 16, 2007)." She reported that he falls asleep easily in class and that she is not sure that he understands all that is going on in class and the work that he is expected to do.

Ms. Endicott then described to me the literature that the students have been reading and will read throughout the rest of the semester. They were in the midst of reading Beowulf and then will read the Canterbury Tales and the Divine Comedy. They were also scheduled to read Hamlet and MacBeth. She read Beowulf to them aloud and also asked students to write summary statements of the passages of the play. For example, she has written on the board lines 0-18, 19-25, 26-30, 31-52, 53-90, etc. Students are supposed to paraphrase what the meaning of each of those sections mean. Students then read out their summaries, and Ms. Endicott gives them feedback on what

they've done. Ms. Endicott said that this activity will help them on one of the standardized tests they have to take which asks them to do a similar activity.

Ms. Endicott then gave me a packet of informational sheets that she walked me through. These sheets include:

1. Tentative Overview of Readings by Week – Readings include Creation Myths, Flood Motifs, Archetypes, Ancient Middle East, Greek Literature, Indian Literature, Roman Literature, Chinese and Japanese Poetry, Germanic Literature, Persian Literature, and Literature from Europe
2. Her course syllabus
3. A list of readings for the entire year for World Literature class
4. An explanation of the current events assignments: Weekly current events assignments lead to a major paper due April 18. Students do current assignments that ask them to identify the five Ws of the article (When, why, where, what, and who).
5. The language arts curriculum from the Central City School District for World Literature class
6. A list of common transitional words students should know
7. A sheet on archetypes and what they mean
8. A sheet on how to write effective journal entries
9. A sheet of vocabulary words students are supposed to know by the end of the year
10. A copy of Beowulf she has copied for her students

The sheets were overwhelming for me to process at once. Several thoughts raced through my mind as I looked at them. How is it possible for Abdullah to keep up with all of these assignments throughout the semester when his English reading and writing skills do not match up with the English skills needed to do this work? For example, in addition to his World Literature course assignments, Abdullah is also taking a Grammar class that asks him to identify nouns, verbs, and objects, and he has trouble doing this type of activity. One assignment in the Grammar class asks students to write a paragraph in which there are three verbs, three subjects, one interjection, etc. The tasks and reading level required in each of these classes is very different, but Abdullah is enrolled in both simultaneously. How can a student enrolled in a Grammar course also be expected to also read and

understand Beowulf? What does this say about the coherence of Abdullah's schedule and the likelihood of him passing all of his courses this semester?

Ms. Endicott confirmed what I already suspected. She stated that Abdullah was not doing well in this course at all and was probably going to get an "F" for the first semester. She said that she would normally give a "G" to a student in Abdullah's situation if they tried and handed in some of the work. However, Abdullah was not handing in any of the work. He could probably pass for the second semester if he began to do some of the work and hand it in, but as it is, Ms. Endicott was not optimistic about his chances. I asked her if Abdullah is exhibiting atypical behavior for the students in her classes. She replied that about three or four students out of about thirty-six students in each of her classes were doing similar work. She said that some students, for example, do not come at all, do not try, or are ready to transfer to Mountain Vocational School.

A closer look

Based upon my conversations with Ms. Endicott about Abdullah and my observations in her classroom, I found it very unlikely that Abdullah will pass this course for the semester. He could not comprehend the texts that were part of the class. He did not hand in many of the homework assignments and he appeared to sleep through at least some of the classes. Ms. Endicott also did not appear to take Abdullah to task for falling asleep, but rather appeared to avoid him. For example, during the above vignette, while Ms. Endicott read Beowulf aloud to the rest of the classroom, Abdullah nodded off and retreated into sleep on multiple occasions throughout the class period. He literally pulled his arms up into the long sleeves of his shirt and pulled part of his collar up over the lower part of his face. Like a turtle trying to defend itself, Abdullah appeared to pull

himself into his shirt to shield himself from the lesson being presented. Although she did her walk by his table a few times, she made no effort to wake him up or hold him accountable for doing the work assigned.

It seemed as if Ms. Endicott had struck some type of an informal agreement with Abdullah. You can fall asleep and I will not call on you as long as you do not cause problems in the classroom. In this way, she did not have to make waves nor did she really have to get to the root problem of why he probably was sleeping. As Abdullah explained to me later that weekend, he did not understand what they were talking about so he totally tuned out of the classroom conversation (Interview, December 15, 2007). Even other students like Kamran realize that Abdullah is often sleeping in class and mention this to her in class, but Ms. Endicott continued on with her lesson without addressing Abdullah directly at all.

Avoidance of Abdullah and students like him appeared to be a strategic way for Ms. Endicott to move past potential problems some students were having in her class and to move the rest of the class who were able to follow along with the text ahead. Abdullah was enrolled in the class, but when we sat down to talk, Ms. Endicott knew very little about him, other than that he was not doing well in her class. She pushed along with the readings and topics she was required to cover by the Central City School District pacing guide for English, seemingly avoiding Abdullah's sleeping in the class. She must have known that Abdullah was disengaging from her class, but she chose not to investigate the causes of his problems further. Perhaps she knew that by working with Abdullah directly she would be opening up a Pandora's box of problems that would take a lot of time to

address and resolve? Perhaps she knew that addressing the needs of Abdullah would require extra time that new district standards and state-wide testing did not allow for?

The net effect of her avoidance of Abdullah is that he ended up failing for the semester with very little remediation or help. During the semester, it was either sink or swim for students in Ms. Endicott's class, and Abdullah eventually sank. What is ironic about Abdullah's failure is the strong possible connections that could have been made between Beowulf and Abdullah's own life as a refugee who has seen war and violence up close. Some important opportunities were missed during the semester to make Beowulf come alive for Abdullah and perhaps other students in the classroom. During the opening vignette for this section, Beowulf fights an epic battle in which he goes against a major foe, is mortally wounded, and is abandoned by his peers. Although Ms. Endicott did explain this main plot to her students, she made no effort or gave no time for students to relate these themes to their own lives. She provided examples of how the themes relate to her own life, but she did not appear to give students time to relate the themes to their life. English teaching best practices suggest that this is a crucial step in getting students really motivated and engaged in the text (Morrell, 2004). Therefore, the Beowulf moment appeared to be a missed opportunity to make this seemingly inaccessible text accessible to many of the students in the classroom (including Abdullah) who have faced issues like these in their daily lives in their homes and in their local communities.

Abdullah's previous interrupted experiences with school, limited academic English skills, and lack of support and resources from his peers and the school have not provided with him the experience, academic content knowledge, or skills to do well in school, especially in a course that requires advanced skills in English reading and writing.

Ms. Endicott's avoidance of Adam's disengagement from class did not seem to motivate him to do well in the class nor connect him closely to what the students in the class were reading. He was not held accountable for engaging with the text being read or with other students during classroom discussion. So, in the face of such adversity, it appears to me that Abdullah's move to sleep and to, in some ways, give up on the possibility of doing the work required in World Literature actually, to some degree, did make sense.

Disappointment and frustration

Somali Bantu refugee students had numerous academic difficulties during the school year. These difficulties included, but were not limited, to the following: problems with English comprehension and reading of class texts, submitting late or not submitting assignments at all, being late to class or skipping class altogether. When interviewed about the academic performance of Somali Bantu students, one common teacher response was one of disappointment and frustration. Ms. Case, Abdullah's Grammar teacher, is an example of this type of teacher response and how this response, in turn, affected her interactions with Abdullah throughout the semester.

Background

Ms. Case is Abdullah's teacher for Grammar class at Evans High School. Because he failed English during his sophomore year, Abdullah's guidance counselor scheduled him to take two English classes his junior year: World Literature with Ms. Endicott and Grammar with Ms. Case. Grammar class is taken mostly by students having difficulty with the core English courses. English as a Second Language students and students with English reading and writing difficulties make up the majority of the student population in the class. By taking two English classes at one time, Abdullah's guidance

counselor hoped that Abdullah would make up the one year-long English course credit that he was missing. In late October, I met with Ms. Case to check in with her Abdullah's progress. She noted that he was missing class too often but could make up the work that he missed by seeing her after school.

I also learned from this meeting that that Abdullah was not submitting work due at the end of each class. Ms. Case runs Grammar class in what she calls "a workshop format" (Interview, December 12, 2007). Ms. Case gives a few directions at the beginning of each class, but spends most of class time walking around the classroom to help students with difficulties they are facing with the worksheets. Students are expected to complete three worksheets per class period and submit them by the end of class. After this meeting with Ms. Case, I spoke with both Abdullah and Haji to share with them the news about Abdullah's difficulties in the course and reminded them of the problems that Abdullah would face if he failed either of the two English classes he was taking this year. Abdullah would have great difficulty in being on time to graduate from high school if he faced another set of failures in either of his English courses. Abdullah said he would work harder in this course and complete all the work required of him. I continued to work with Abdullah on his course work for this course throughout October and November to try and help him complete the work that he was being asked.

In mid-December (right before the holiday vacation), I emailed Ms. Case to check in with her about Abdullah's progress in her class. The exchange of emails between Ms. Case and me is copied below.

[Email Request for an Appointment – Monday, December 17, 2008]

Dear Ms. Case,

Thank you for meeting me last week and helping me understand Abdullah's current situation and behavior in your Grammar class. I spoke with Abdullah and his father this Sunday morning about our meeting and Abdullah's current academic and attendance record in your class. They are both very concerned about his performance. If possible and if you would allow it, they would like for Abdullah to begin to make up the work and time that he has missed.

At our meeting last week you mentioned that you are usually available after school on Wednesdays and Thursdays for students to come see you. Would you be available this Wednesday or Thursday after school for a meeting with Abdullah, Abdullah's father, and myself? If possible, we would like to collaboratively chart a path for Abdullah to begin to make up work that he has missed.

Thank you so much again for your insight into Abdullah's work and behavior in your class.

Sincerely,

Kevin Roxas

[Email Reply – Wednesday, December 19, 2008]

Dear Mr. Roxas,

This week is not a good time for meeting. Is it possible to meet Wednesday or Thursday Jan.9 or 10? That will be after break.

Abdullah didn't come back after lunch on Monday and did not show up at all on Tuesday. This is not a concerned student.

Ms. Case

Because of the long holiday vacation, I was not able to schedule a meeting with Ms. Case until January 10, 2008. Ms. Case, Abdullah, Haji, and I attended this meeting. Ms. Case started this meeting by saying that Abdullah is often late to her class. Because her class usually meets over the lunch period of other students, Ms. Case thinks that Abdullah often comes late to class because he is visiting with his friends. She tells

Abdullah that he needs to be on time, but she says she gets little response from him. I ask her about Abdullah's organizational skills for the class. She says that he is supposed to have a binder for the class, but he doesn't seem to have one. Ms. Case says she is "very discouraged, because I know he can do the work." She continues and says Abdullah's attitude appears to be "passive aggressive." He walks into an hour and a half class with only ten minutes to go.

Ms. Case goes on to say that Abdullah's "attitude is indifferent and that he doesn't seem to care. He's just not applying himself in his work. He comes in with his headphones on and this is just not appropriate. However, Abdullah has the ability to do the work. He is just not applying himself." She says that the Grammar course is only a one semester course and it will be finished in a couple of weeks. "Abdullah won't receive credit for the course and will need to make up the credit somehow. He needs to apply himself in his work and I hope that he retakes the course and finishes what he starts. He can do the work required in this class. He just has chosen not to do it." Apparently Abdullah has handed in half-complete assignments or assignments where he has done just the first few lines of the assignment. The meeting ends with Ms. Case asking Abdullah a few questions. She asks him, "Will you take this class another semester." Looking down Abdullah replies, "Yeah, I guess." "Will you be in class as needed?" "Yeah."

Ms. Case asks Haji what he thinks and he says, "I don't have anything to say. What you have said is the law. I will want him to take another semester of this class." Ms. Case continues, "Abdullah, you need to commit yourself to two things: Be in class everyday and complete the assignments. Do you think you can do that? [Abdullah nods

his head.] I know you can do it. It is not difficult. You have shown me you can do it. He does well on the tests. He just doesn't do the daily homework assignments. There's a glimpse of hope. He knows how to do the work and knows most of the subject matter."

Haji asks Abdullah, "Why you don't come back to class after lunch?" Abdullah does not answer. Haji continues, "It irritates me that you don't care about your work for class and school." Ms. Case asks Abdullah how his friends are doing in school. Abdullah says they are doing okay. Ms. Case says that she asks about this because sometimes friends negatively influence one another and she hopes that this is not happening with Abdullah and his friends here at Evans (Interview, January 10, 2008).

A closer look

In both meetings detailed above, Ms. Case is visibly disappointed and frustrated with Abdullah's behavior and academic commitment to her class. In mid-October, she expressed concern about Abdullah's failure to hand in his three worksheets a day on time. In an email exchange with her, she wrote to both Abdullah and Haji that Abdullah is "not a concerned student". In a meeting near the end of the semester in January, Ms. Case talked at length about Abdullah's continued failure to not do the assigned work and to not show up on time for class (if at all). In this meeting, she informed Haji and Abdullah that Abdullah would not receive credit for the course and would need to reenroll in the course to get the credit he needs to graduate.

Throughout the semester, Ms. Case described herself to me as being "discouraged" by Abdullah's behavior in her class. She told me what frustrates her most is that she knows "Abdullah can do the work" (Interview, January 10, 2008). She stated that Abdullah can usually do the work assigned if he is given some direction and

encouragement, but often chose not to complete the work that is assigned to him for her class. I highlight this point about Ms. Case's discouragement and frustration, because it seems like a natural reaction for a teacher to become discouraged with a student who appears to be disengaged in class and often comes late to class but has the ability to do the work. However, while understanding the natural tendency of a teacher to become disappointed and frustrated, I wonder what lies at the root of Abdullah's seeming unwillingness to "do the work" and to "play by the rules". I wonder why Ms. Case decides not to learn more about Abdullah outside of her classroom and the specific reasons why he is not doing the assigned classwork. By understanding why Abdullah is not doing the work and is seemingly disengaged from school, it becomes possible to know why a student is disengaging in his academic work and to be proactive about how to help a student, rather than reactive with disappointment and frustration to a student's seeming indifference.

I asked Ms. Case in various ways throughout the fall term if she knew anything about Abdullah's previous experience with schooling and general background. She said she knew nothing about Abdullah other than his absences/latenesses to class and his lack of homework completion rate. I asked her if she had ever called his parents at home or spoken to him after school about the work that he is missing. Throughout the semester, I also asked Ms. Case about the different ways she tried to motivate Abdullah to do the work. She usually replied to both sets of questions that she did not have the time to attend to a student who did not put in the time his or her self. Because of her other teaching commitments at school and role as the English Department chair, Ms. Case said that she had very little time to "cheerlead a student who did not want to be in the game."

To some degree, Ms. Case's decision to not find out more about Abdullah's academic background and experience with formal schools may have led her to believe that Abdullah was "not a concerned student" and did not care at all about how he did. However, upon closer analysis, one could see that Abdullah was trying to do the work that was being asked of him, but he was unable to academically succeed due to the many different assignments being asked of him to complete in his Grammar classes and the other five classes he was taking at Evans. For example, Abdullah was being asked to do three worksheets a day in a Grammar class. These worksheets were all in English, his second language. Moreover, the homework questions were all derived from worksheets and focused on discrete grammatical parts of the English language that were taken out of the normal context of language. For example, one worksheet asked students to conjugate twenty verbs that had no connection to each other. In this case, Abdullah was asked to work with some verbs he had never seen before nor knew their meaning. Abdullah also had problems doing the work in Grammar class, because the teachers in his other five courses at Evans were asking him to do just as much work in these other classes.

Rather than spitefully not doing the work asked of him in Grammar class, Abdullah was actually prioritizing which work he would do on any given day given the weight of the assignment for each course. Throughout the course of the year, Abdullah would do the assignments that counted the most for his grade in the course that would meet during any given day. For example, if Abdullah had four assignments to do for homework, he would start with the assignment that would provide him the highest amount of points. He would complete this assignment and then start to do the assignment that would give him the second highest number of points. By proceeding in this way,

Abdullah tried to gain the greatest number of points for doing homework in the limited amount of time he had available in any given night (Field Notes, December 5, 2007). Ms. Case's reactions of disappointment and frustration in Abdullah may have led her to believe that Abdullah had given up and to treat him as a student who was not worthy of additional time and support. However, Abdullah had not just given up but was doing the best he could with all of the homework assignments that he was given.

Another way to see how this reactive approach worked is to look back on the two after-school meetings I arranged with Ms. Case. In the first after-school meeting, I ended up talking to Ms. Case in early October about Abdullah's academic performance. In the second meeting, I emailed Ms. Case to try and meet before the holidays so that Abdullah could catch up on any work that he missed. She emailed me and Haji back saying that Abdullah was "not a concerned student". We did not meet as a group until January 10 at which point Ms. Case informed Abdullah, Haji and me that there was no way Abdullah could make up the work he missed and that she would fail him for the semester. Both meetings occurred because I initiated them and contacted Ms. Case on Haji and Abdullah's behalf. The initial after-school meeting occurred well after the semester was underway and the second after-school meeting occurred about two weeks before the final exams for the first semester. Both meetings were held at points in the semester when it was too late for Abdullah to do anything or for Haji or me to work more closely with Abdullah to make up the work that he missed. It seems as if Abdullah's failure was a *fait accompli* for Ms. Case and that there really was nothing she could do for him. At the same time, she also says that he was capable of the work. Ms. Case expresses concern about Abdullah, it is too late in the term for him to do anything about it.

In the January meeting, Ms Case expressed her concern that Abdullah missed 18 classes so far in the semester. As she let us know this, I wondered to myself why then was I the one who had to initiate a meeting with her and Haji? Why did she not call home earlier? Perhaps she was working with the other students who also miss class and are not doing well? Perhaps she was overwhelmed by the challenge of addressing the multiple needs of all of the students she teaches and hence some of her students get overlooked? By letting her frustration and disappointment with Abdullah keep her from actively helping him to improve in her class, Ms. Case allowed Abdullah to continue to miss class and ultimately fail her class with little hope of ever passing.

During the course of the research, other teachers working with Somali Bantu students expressed feelings of disappointment and frustration similar to what Ms. Case reported. Teachers reported that "students don't do the work, even though I try and encourage them" or that "these [refugee] students must not care at all" (Interview with Mr. Steele and Ms. Berkner, December 19, 2007). However, my research indicates that a lack of caring is not entirely the reason for Somali Bantu students' seeming disengagement with school. I would argue that these students do care, but just are so overwhelmed by what is being asked of them that they begin to see withdrawal as the only "safe way" out in order to protect their dignity. If they try and fail, then they will be seen as being dumb or stupid. If they choose to not even play the game as it has been set up, they have made that choice and no one will ever know the exact extent to which they are totally lost and need additional support. Teachers, therefore, sometimes only see the disappointing and frustrating side of these Somali Bantu students, rather than the side of

the students struggling to succeed, but with little direction and academic content knowledge to guide them.

Regret

Another response that some teachers in the study seemed to share was one of regret over not being able to do more for the Somali Bantu refugee students in their classrooms. Faced with the wide-ranging needs of other students in their classrooms (e.g., special needs, disciplinary issues, general reading comprehension issues), teachers in this study felt like they were not able to provide Somali Bantu students with any additional support. Although they guessed that the students had missed some schooling by virtue of their status as refugees and that their English skills were not as strong as some of their peers (even in ESL classrooms), teachers felt like they did not have enough time to concentrate fully on how their Somali Bantu students were doing academically and socially and consequently felt regret over the students' low academic achievement.

Background

Ms. Reynolds was Ibrahim's Intermediate English as a Second Language teacher for the first semester of the 2007-2008 school. Although Ms. Reynolds was technically an intern from Castleton State University's teacher preparation program, in practice Ms. Reynolds was the main teacher in the classroom from the first week of September till the end of the term. Ms. Reynolds' mentor teacher had in effect given her full control of the class by the end of the first week of school. Because of her position as an intern teacher working with refugee and non-refugee students for the first time, Ms. Reynold's insights into working with Ibrahim provides yet another unique perspective teachers' work with Somali Bantu refugee students in this study.

Ms. Reynolds' classroom was an old school type set-up. The student seating area was tiered in a mini-theater style with five rows of seating and six desk combos in each row. The classroom had wood floors throughout and retro style desks and chairs. Almost all of the students in Ms. Reynolds' Intermediate ESL class had arrived within the last two to three years. Throughout the semester, Ms. Reynolds worked on different parts of speech with the students including: present tense verbs, regular past tense verbs, irregular past tense verbs, common nouns, and proper nouns. Ms. Reynolds gave presentations on these topics, asked students to do worksheets on the mini-presentations, and sometimes asked students to work together on presentations of their own in which they would utilize some of the grammar lessons or sentence structures they learned.

Ms. Reynolds reported that during the first semester Ibrahim (or IB) only handed in about half (or even less than half) of the work that he was required to do. IB eventually received a "G" as an effort grade in the class. From Ms. Reynolds's perspective, IB seemed resistant to do the work. Ms. Reynolds explained IB's usual pattern of doing homework in her class:

> I would say he turned in not even half of his homework. When he finished, he had a "G" in this class. And we had kind of a cumulative project coming, called the Cultural Collage. I don't know if you saw any of it. And he didn't really, it consisted of maybe a collection, they had to include three poems, a paragraph description of themselves, and a pictorial representation of themselves. And he turned his in late. And every time I would collect drafts or things from the class, his stuff would be missing or incomplete. And I would talk to him, he would say, "Yeah, I got it in my locker. Yeah I got it at home." And then when it, I don't know [sighs], I wasn't quite sure what to do about it. And then when it came time to turn in the whole project, he didn't have it for a while. And then finally he turned it in.
>
> And I kept checking with him and trying to encourage him to bring it in, but in the end when he turned it in, it was just not, it was like a third of the project (Interview, January 11, 2008).

Throughout the semester, IB was known as the "joker" of Ms. Reynolds' class. He would get into arguments, make jokes, and as Ms. Reynolds described it, often "make comical comments" during class time (Interview, January 11, 2008). He also had certain key phrases, such as "What do you mean?", which he would use during random and inappropriate times in the class to ostensibly ask for clarification, but in reality it seemed that these comments were meant to disrupt the flow of the classroom discussion and planned lesson. It appeared that in this class other students egged him on in his role as a joker and he seemed to egg other students to misbehave in class as well.

In my interviews with Ms. Reynolds, she also commented that IB sometimes presented himself as a "tough" person during class and in his written assignments. IB would speak loudly at times in class and sometimes, in jest, pull back and clench his fists as if he were ready to fight. She also shared with me some assignments he handed in. In these assignments, IB once again chose to represent himself as a "playa", a "gangster", and "tough". He wore clothes that are often seen on rappers on MTV, flashed gang signs in his pictures, and did not smile in any of the pictures.

IB seemed to respond to an older male mentor in the class, who had "a commanding presence in the class." IB would ask the mentor for help on homework. Ms. Reynolds expressed the concern that, once the older student left the class, IB was not getting "the kind of peer support he was needing."

> He had friendships with the males, but there weren't that many males in the class. At the beginning of the class, there was an older student that he seemed to really respond well to, an older student who was pretty strict and quiet, but he also had a very kind of commanding presence in the classroom and nobody else really talked to him except IB and so they, whenever I assigned something, usually if I went over to check. You know, if I gave them something to work on during class, if I went over, usually IB hadn't started yet. But if I was just walking around and I would notice that usually IB would wander over to this older student's desk and

> the older student would kind of explain it to him and then he would go back to his desk. But then that older student left and then I was concerned that IB wasn't getting the kind of peer support he was needing (Interview, January 11, 2008).

A closer look

During the semester, Ms. Reynolds talked at length about how IB was the "joker" of the class. He would get into arguments, make jokes, and "make comical comments". He also had certain key phrases, such as "What do you mean?" that would often disrupt the classroom discussion or activity. Other students egged him on and he seemed to egg other students on as well. In many ways, IB seemed to be acting out in order to deflect attention from an underlying problem of not knowing what was going on in class. His success in becoming the class clown contributed to his failure academically. Through my work with IB outside of school and observations of his demeanor in class, my guess is that he used this humor to take attention away from the fact that he did not know how to do the work that was being assigned. Other students and even the teachers could be distracted by this behavior and not even pay attention to the fact that his skills were so low that he could barely write a comprehensible, complete sentence in English, nor even understand the directions of most assignments he was given. Being a class clown then allowed him to receive attention, but ultimately the wrong type of attention. Ms. Reynolds described some of these coping behaviors when she talked about IB's role in her class:

> Well, he had an interesting role in the class. Kind of as like the joker and I wasn't sure exactly...sometimes he got into arguments with other students, but I couldn't tell... I had a hard time deciphering whether students were laughing at him or with him.
>
> And so he did things in class that made me think he was trying to maybe hide some of his deficiencies in English. So instead of working on worksheets, he would sort of lay back or put his head down. Or just sit and make comical

> comments. He had some key phrases that he said like, "What do you mean?" And the other students would, sometimes they would say, "What do you mean?" or get them to copy him. And those are some things that interrupted the flow of the class a little bit. Um, the "What do you means?" and sometimes he would yawn loudly [makes a brief laugh], but also on all of his work, whenever he turned in work, even if there wasn't very much completed, at the top he would always say "I try my best". Sometimes he wrote all around the border of his paper. And, at first, ohh, he's really trying and he knows he can't do very well. Or he knows he's struggling. But then, after it happened a lot, then I started thinking, "I feel like he can do better and he's not actually trying." But maybe for fear of failure, and also I think some students did pick on him in class (Interview, January 11, 2008).

Although Ms. Reynolds offered up a number of possible reasons as to why IB had such difficulty in her ESL class, his adoption of the "tough guy" persona is an interesting one to consider further. Ms. Reynolds reports that IB tried so hard to try and fit in to what the popular culture of the United States was and what some other students in the school were doing. However, it appears that this adaptation of the tough guy persona eventually brought more negative attention upon IB than positive attention and detracted from his real English and academic needs in the classroom. Some teachers may have written him off because of the attitude and dress he took on and perhaps were not as willing to work with him to help him. Ms. Reynolds ended this section of the interview saying, "And so I always felt like he could produce more than he did, but he wouldn't even do what he was capable of doing." Ms. Reynolds underscored here his unwillingness to do the work, rather than his inability to even begin the work and lack of familiarity with the expectations of her classroom.

> Kevin: But what do you think is the reason why he was so resistant or didn't even try it seems?
>
> Ms. Reynolds: [Pauses]. Yeah, um, I don't know...I've talked with other teachers about it and I've thought about it and I think, I feel like part of is that, I don't know what order I'll say these in, but I think part of it he was kind of small

> physically and I wondered if he felt, well small physically and maybe not confident in his abilities, but maybe he felt inadequate on several sides.
>
> And then I feel like he had this desire to look tough. Like when he smiles, he's a really pleasant young man, but also like in the pictures, in all the pictorial representations of him that he's turned in for class, he always looks really tough and then he was also kind of like under the wing of that kind of tougher student that was older in the class too. So I felt like he was striving to be categorized by peers in a different kind of, what do I want to call it, peer group kind of and maybe his being successful in school or trying in school wouldn't be valued by them.
>
> And even his handwriting, looked kind of like a child's hand-writing. Really, um, inconsistent and, you know, the lower case letters didn't hang below the line and mixed upper case and lower case letters and so I wondered if just the physical task of writing down assignments was difficult for him, difficult for him to take notes. I don't know.
>
> Also, he has a physical, with his eyes, like they're not, like he has one eye that's a little different than the other eye and I wonder if maybe he had trouble seeing the board or reading what was up on the board or even just trouble reading without relation to like a physical problem like his eyes. But it was hard to get evidence for those things, because he just didn't produce very much stuff so I couldn't tell what was going on.
>
> And so I always felt like he could produce more than he did, but he wouldn't even do what he was capable of doing (Interview, January 11, 2008).

When asked about IB's family background and previous experience with schools, Ms. Reynolds reported that she actually knew very little about him. My questions about his background prompted her to state that she was "shocked that I didn't know that kind of information about him". Although she had made some efforts to learn more about the background of the children she teaches (e.g., the cultural collage), she felt that sometimes the children in her classroom want to keep "an air of mystery" around them and do not want to share too much about their family history. Ms. Reynolds seemed surprised when I shared with her the history of the Somali Bantu and IB's previous experience with schools.

Ms. Reynolds: What I do know about his background, I learned from my mentor who told me, my mentor worked with him last year, and so he showed me this newspaper article or something that was online that had been written about his family and there were photos. And so I looked online kind of at this little article...

Kevin: About his family specifically?

Ms. Reynolds: Yeah, yeah, and I didn't read, I don't think I read the whole article, maybe it was just a photo collage about his family, so I saw pictures of him family that way, but I don't know that much. I think he has a lot of brothers and sisters. I think he's one of the older ones. But I don't know that much about his family.

Kevin: What about his educational background prior to Maine?

Ms. Reynolds: Yeah, I also don't know that much about it.

Kevin: Thinking about like, what teachers could do to help him or students like him better, what would you recommend? It's kind of an unusual case.

Ms. Reynolds: Um, I mean even from just those questions you asked, kind of when I thought about it, I was shocked that I didn't know that kind of information about him. Oh, it was unclear, whether, I think we were unclear whether he was born in a refugee camp or whether he had moved to a refugee camp at an early age and sometimes those students, a lot of them I don't know a lot about their backgrounds, because I feel kind of uncomfortable. I don't want to ask them intrusive questions, but at the beginning of the year I did a lot of things to try, the cultural collage was to try to pull out things, like where they're from and things that they know. A lot of students are vague about it. They don't really say where they come from or they say something...they deny being able to speak different languages so it's hard for me...yeah and I don't know if they're just trying to hide it or build an air of mystery or maybe they don't really know. But I feel at home they have a language that they speak and they should know what that language is, but... (Interview, January 11, 2008).

Ms. Reynolds reported that she "felt bad" because she was not able to give IB all the attention she thinks he probably needed. Because she was attending to the needs of other students, she reported that she ended up giving IB "negative attention" and that a "lot of my interaction with him was more disciplinary or negative so that could have an effect on the kind of work that he is producing." She continued, "There must be some sort of root

to him that I wasn't getting at and that would have helped him, like, function better in the classroom and get along with the classmates better." What is interesting to note here is the teacher regret she seems to have at not getting to the "root of his problem". What I wonder about is how this situation could have played out differently. That is, what if Ms. Reynolds had been given more professional development and direction from her mentor teacher about working with refugee students? What if she had spent more time getting to know him and his situation? What if she had given him more "positive attention" rather than "negative attention"? Would she have the same regrets then? Is it really her "fault" that she has the regrets or is she just part of a system that does not account for the special needs of these children and does not help teachers learn how to reach out to them better? In the following transcript, Ms. Reynolds thinks aloud about her interactions with Ibrahim during the semester and the things she might have done differently.

> Ms. Reynolds: Well, I really wanted to encourage him in the class because he wasn't producing a lot, but I didn't because I thought maybe because he was self-conscious or had low abilities. But also there were just other people I was attending to at the same time. So by the time I could give him attention, it was usually negative attention and I would notice it afterwards and then I would feel bad about it. But it was because he was causing some kind of bigger disruption. So then I noticed a lot of my interaction with him was more disciplinary or negative so that could have an effect on the kind of work that he is producing.
>
> Kevin: How do you feel yourself as a teacher in terms of meeting the needs of this student. In terms of, you know, he seems to have had some challenges in your first full year? I guess even in your first full year it might have been challenging.
>
> Ms. Reynolds: Yeah. [pauses]. It's hard to say. As an intern, I'm thinking about a lot of different things and he definitely has caught my eye a lot of times and I've thought about him a lot in terms of feeling like I've done a disservice to him. I felt like there were some times in class where it seemed like it was almost like the whole class against him in terms of like a showdown. Where he was like...where people would...for example, if he did an oral presentation, like sometime the students would laugh at him, and I mean I feel so out of touch, but I just couldn't tell like it seems like they were making fun of him. But he would also come back

> and kind of laugh about it too and I don't know if it was kind of a defense mechanism or it didn't bother him a lot. But I feel like it must have been kind of embarrassing for him.
>
> I don't know, um, but I felt like there must be something. There must be some sort of root to him that I wasn't getting at and that would have helped him like function better in the classroom and get along with the classmates better (Interview, January 11, 2008).

Discussion

In each of the preceding sections, teachers displayed different types of behaviors in their classrooms as they tried to work with Somali Bantu refugee students in their classrooms. Ms. Benjamin, the Economics teacher, tried to negotiate and bargain with students in order to achieve a sense of order and student compliance in her classroom. Ms. Endicott, the World Literature teacher, seemed to avoid the problems Abdullah was having in her class and allowed him to sleep his way to failure in her classroom throughout the semester. Ms. Case, the Grammar teacher, became disappointed and frustrated by Abdullah's behavior and lack of interest in the work assigned to him and ultimately gave up on his ability to do the work assigned for her. Finally, Ms. Reynolds reported a deep sense of regret over not being able to meet IB's needs and wondered how she could have helped him understand the course material better in order to succeed in her class.

Each of the teacher responses appeared to be affected in some way by institutional obstacles faced by the teachers during the 2007-2008 school year. All of the teachers saw an unusual increase in the enrollment of special education and ESL students in their mainstream classes without additional support of classroom assistants or language aides. Teachers also felt pressure during the year to try to improve their students' test scores on

standardized tests because of central administration's push to increase test scores and the possibility of teacher reorganization in each of the three public high schools. These obstacles seemed to limit the range of options available to these teachers in working with students who had limited English proficiency and a lack of exposure to the academic content knowledge expected of students in high school. More specifically, these obstacles seemed to influence these teachers in ways that forced them to react to the academic problems that the Somali Bantu refugee students were facing in school with disappointment, frustration, and regret, as opposed to acting proactively with instructional strategies to better meet the needs of these young men. In retrospect, it is important to consider how these approaches can be modified in order to provide greater educational access and opportunity for these Somali Bantu youth.

In all of the classrooms observed for this study, each teacher assigned homework on a daily basis. In some instances, teachers, such as Ms. Case, assigned more than one piece of homework for students to do in their class. Viewed cumulatively, these assignments could take students up to two to three hours a night to do at home. When these assignments are examined from the perspective of an English as a Second Language student, these assignments could take up to three to four hours a night to do (Field Notes, October 17, 2007 & January 23, 2008). When faced with the seemingly overwhelming task of completing each of the assignments asked by each of their teachers and a limited amount of time each night to do the work, Abdullah and his Somali Bantu peers made choices throughout the semester to selectively do homework that would count the most for their grades and to not do work that would count for very little of their semester grade (Field Notes, December 5, 2007).

In addition to viewing time as a constraint on their ability to do nightly homework, Abdullah, IB, and Hassan also faced difficulty in understanding the directions for some of their assignments and what exactly what was being asked of them. For example, in Economics class, Hassan was asked to do a semester long project in which he had to create a business plan. The project included doing research from census data on the demographics of Central City, creating and designing a concept for a restaurant, and creating a budget of prices, expenses, and taxes for the restaurant. Hassan struggled with doing this assignment because the initial directions were not clear to him and he was unfamiliar with the vocabulary being employed within the directions. Finally, all three focal students seemed to have difficulty with focusing on and completing worksheets copied straight from textbooks. These worksheets provided a challenge to these students because they took terms and concepts out of the context of normal, every-day situations and practiced the use of these terms and concepts discretely and artificially rather than in the everyday use of the English language. The students, therefore, did not see the point of doing these worksheets that seemingly had little to do with their everyday lives.

One potential way of improving the academic performance of Somali Bantu refugee students would be for teachers to link student assignments to student interests (Field Notes, December 11, 2007). During one classroom observation, Abdullah folded his arms and head into his t-shirt as Ms. Endicott read a passage from Beowulf that described the battlefield and Beowulf's preparation for war. As Ms. Endicott talked about the tragic losses that Beowulf has incurred on the battlefield and prepares for his own imminent death, Abdullah slowly withdrew from consciousness in the classroom despite the fact that he has faced parallel experiences of love and loss as a refugee from a

war-torn country. Ironically, Abdullah slept through this discussion about Beowulf and his tragic death because he was never encouraged to connect to the themes Ms. Endicott introduces. How might Ms. Endicott have learned more about Abdullah's background in Somali and Kenya so that the text of Beowulf could be more intimately connected to Abdullah's own life and experiences?

Another way to reconceptualize working with Somali Bantu refugee students would be to individualize classroom instruction so that it builds upon a student's strengths. Currently it appears that the teachers of students in this study have a one-size-fits all approach to assignments and the curriculum. Students must do the work that is assigned in lock-step fashion or not get credit. There is very little accommodation for students who cannot do parts of the worksheets or need additional help. For example, in Mathematics class this year, Hassan actually did quite well in certain aspects of Algebra but began to falter as new material is introduced. He began to shut down near the end of the first semester because he felt like that he did not know how to do other parts of the assignments and felt like he was unable to receive much instructional support from his teacher. Additionally students like him begin to feel overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of assignments given to them and by the seeming lack of relevance of these assignments to their lives. As a result, they literally began to shut down during the school year in order to avoid the reality of their current situations and lack of understanding in school. How can teachers start to build on Hassan's strengths in a class and build motivation from a strengths-based approach? By beginning to focus in on what students can do and scaffolding future work assignments around these strengths, teachers can build to build in

students a confidence in their own abilities and motivation to redouble their work and efforts in each of their classes.

The difficulties of the focal group students in this study underscore the critical need to understand better the context of the lives of these refugee children and to differentiate instruction based upon each child's educational background and possible resources/experiences with school. When Abdullah begins to miss class more frequently and this endangers his chances of passing a course needed for timely graduation, teachers need to take a closer look at the reasons why he is missing classes and to identify the potential causes of why he is not turning in his work. Perhaps he is capable of doing the work, but needs a more thorough explanation of the directions and ongoing encouragement to bolster his self-confidence. When IB begins to act like a clown in class or act tough, perhaps it is a self-defense mechanism he uses to deflect attention away from the academic problems he is facing. A serious conversation with IB about the school work he is being asked to do and an examination of his readiness to do the work that is being assigned would potentially uncover a great deal of information for teachers to explore further and to use as a basis for further instructional expectations from him. Perhaps a teacher would learn from IB that he has missed several formative years of schooling in both his home country and in the refugee camps in Kenya and needs individualized tutoring from either the teacher or a teacher aide to assist him in learning the basics of U.S. History or English Literature. Finally, more in-depth interviews, analysis of previous report cards, and home visits to Hassan's home may result in the discovery that prior to this year Hassan did very well in Mathematics class and that

remedial instruction in some sections of this year's mathematics course may yield a student who can do C and B work in Mathematics this year rather than D and F work.

My work with Somali Bantu refugee students and their teachers reveals an urgent need to revisit and rethink the instructional practices used with refugee children and to seriously consider how best to meet their needs in the mainstream classroom. There is cause to reconsider the types of thinking being used in classrooms with refugee children and to consider the multiple and complex reasons why these refugee students seemingly do not well in school, rather than only focus in on the symptoms. By looking only at the perceived failures and weaknesses of their academic achievement, teachers will only perpetuate the idea that these students are not able to succeed in school rather than open up avenues for these students to connect to the curriculum being presented and the work that is being asked of them to do.

All of this work, however, needs to be situated within the context of the urban school district and the pressing needs that teachers in these schools face. That is, teachers need to be supported even more with resources, time, and support from central administration to do this work with refugee students. Without additional support and allocation of resources, teachers are faced with the prospect of sustaining the instructional practices and beliefs already employed in their work with refugee students rather than rethinking how best to individualize instruction for refugee students with specialized needs.

Chapter 6

Connecting with families: The experiences of Somali Bantu parents with U.S. public schools

In the latter part of February, 2008, I was invited by Haji, Abdullah's father, to speak to a group of Somali Bantu parents. As one of the unofficial leaders of the Somali Bantu community, Haji organized monthly meetings of these parents so they could gather together as a community and to talk about life in the U.S. In previous meetings, they had talked about forming a non-profit group so they could begin to raise money so they could pay teachers to help parents in the community learn English and to help their children with their lessons. They had also talked about how to share their personal resources so that they could provide transportation for one another for jobs, for medical appointments for members of their family, and for shopping trips to the supermarket. However, for this particular meeting, Haji asked me to talk about the educational experiences of his son, Abdullah, and to be frank with parents about how Abdullah was doing. Haji wanted other parents in the group to know about the problems that Abdullah was having in school, because he felt that many of the parents felt that their children were doing fine in school. They spoke English, went to school, and could use computers. In the minds of these parents, their children were succeeding in U.S. public schools even though their children's grades in school would suggest otherwise.

As I arrived that morning at Haji's house, I wasn't sure exactly what to say. I did not want to embarrass Haji, Abdullah, or their family, but I did want to be forthright about the problems he was facing. So, in the end, I told them what I had observed during the past semester in my work with Abdullah. Abdullah was not doing the work that he needed to earn credit for his classes, that he was skipping some classes, and that it was possible that he might not earn enough credits to graduate from high school on time. As Haji finished translating my comments for the gathered parents, a palpable silence filled the room. After a few minutes (which actually seemed like an eternity to me), the parents started speaking to each other all at once. Then, two parents raised their hands. The first parent asked me, given what I had talked about Abdullah's difficulties in school, what they could do to help their children succeed in school. The second parent asked me if I would be willing to help them understand what the grades meant on the report cards that were sent to their homes. I agreed to help the parents and their children in whatever way I could and agreed to meet the parents who were interested at a later date so that I could walk them through the report cards of their children.

When the meeting ended, Haji walked me out to my car. I asked him about the second parent who asked how to read a report card. Because he was unfamiliar with the report card system in Central City, I assumed he must have arrived within the last year. "Oh, no," Haji replied, "His family has been in Central City for over four years. We arrived in the U.S. at the same time." As I drove home that morning, I thought about the research I was doing with the Somali Bantu community and the educational needs of students and parents that I was seeing go sadly unfulfilled (Field Notes, February 2, 2008).

Introduction

The opening vignette to this section provides a glimpse of some of the unique challenges the parents in Somali Bantu families faced as they tried to navigate the unfamiliar territory of public school in the U.S. While the young men in each of the families attempted to support their parents and the younger children in the family serving as translators at their siblings' school meetings and providing important income in part-time jobs, the parents in each of the families tried to support their children by employing creative coping and networking strategies (e.g., asking guest speakers such as myself to come to speak to them about schools) in order to provide resources and external school support that they themselves could not directly provide. Despite these efforts by both students and their parents, families indicated that there is a need for the students to overcome gaps in their academic content and experience with schools. This chapter presents findings from interviews and observations of Somali Bantu students and their family members during the 2007-2008 school year.

Findings

The multiple roles of children in Somali Bantu families

In my interviews with Somali Bantu parents and their children, I found many of the older children serving as tutors and surrogate parents for the other younger children in their families and as advocates for their parents in interactions with social service agencies, schools, and the workplace. Because many adults in the community speak little English and have had limited experience with formal schooling, parents report that they entrust their children to translate at parent-teacher meetings for them and sometimes ask

their older children to make decisions for them about the education of the other children in the family. Parents report too that they often rely upon the income of the children in paying the bills and rent for the family household because older children in these families have often had an easier time finding entry-level factory jobs in the community than their parents.

These roles force the older children in Somali Bantu families to take on major responsibilities within their families at a young age and to become "more adult" than their age might imply. While other young adults of similar ages are contemplating which college to attend and where to possibly go on spring break, some of the Somali Bantu young adults in this study have had to either postpone their attendance at college or balance both college and work in order to continue to contribute to the household income of their family. In some cases, these children are the primary wage earners for families and, hence, a lifeline for economic survival.

Omar Abde, one of the two young men who had recently graduated from one of the high schools in Central City, but was still placed in the English as a Second Language program at Central City Community College, exemplified well the stresses placed on older immigrant children. In addition to trying to improve his English at the local community college, Omar spent much of the 2007-2008 school year trying to find a part-time job that would help to supplement the food stamps and government support that his family was receiving. Omar would often attend the weekly study group sessions I held for the Somali Bantu young men at the Central City Library and would invariably bring a job application he had picked up from one of the local businesses. However, despite having graduated from a Central City high school, Omar still had difficulty filling out the

basic information required on the form without assistance from me. In May 2008, Omar still had not found a job and was feeling pressure from his parents because of his failure to do so and was contemplating dropping out of school to pursue a job full time.

My findings support earlier research that documents how children of immigrant and refugee families assist their parents and their siblings in their transition to life in the United States in multiple ways and the tremendous pressures that exist for these children in their daily lives on a familial, social and economic level (Valenzuela, 1999; Suarez-Orozco, C. & Suarez-Orozco, M., 2001a; Olsen, 1988a). The cumulative effect of these added stresses on these children in their early adulthood affects their schoolwork, their interactions with their peers, and their interactions with their parents (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005; Sluzki, 1979).

The coping and networking strategies employed by Somali Bantu families

Another theme from my data analysis is the creative coping and networking strategies used by some Somali Bantu parents and caregivers to improve their children's access to educational support. Although their inexperience with both the English language and formal schooling might suggest that Somali Bantu adults would be totally disconnected from their children's teachers and the assignments at school, some parents and caregivers talked at length about a number of ways that they try to help their children at school. Sheikh Gudle, an older brother placed in charge of the education of four of his younger siblings, talked about how he called the teachers at his siblings' schools once a month to ask the teachers how his siblings were doing in their classes. He stated:

> Often, you know, I call the teachers to check on Muslima and the other children. I ask the teachers how my brothers and sisters are doing. I ask them like that and they tell me, she's good, or he needs help. I have to tell the teachers to take care of all of my brothers and sisters, because they are not like American students, you know, so if they can help them, that's good for me (Interview, March 18, 2007).

Haji Hussein, Abdullah's father, because his job requirements and his own attendance at a local community college make it difficult for him to always be at home to help his children with their schoolwork, has actively tried to find tutors and tutoring centers for his children in the local community. Other parents in the community talked about checking homework even though they cannot necessarily read English and the importance of trying to go back to school, if at all possible, so that they can help their children with their homework as it becomes progressively more difficult. In their interviews, many of the parents and children reflected on the importance of education in their new host country. Haji comments that "education is very important in the world. If you don't know English or have an education, that's not going to help you in your future. Education in the U.S. can help you learn something and help you become successful here (Interview, March 30, 2007)."

Although they are not always able to participate in the education of their children in more traditional ways of parental participation (e.g., serving as a homeroom parent, volunteering on class field trips) (Lopez, 2001), the creative coping and networking strategies referred to by some of the Somali Bantu parents and caregivers in this study suggest that these refugee parents are indeed contributing to the education of their children in important ways. By building and strengthening networks with teachers at schools and tutors in the local community, Somali Bantu parents are trying to provide their children with educational resources and information that they themselves do not

currently possess. These weak ties to others with more experience with education will hopefully provides these Somali Bantu children with the academic, social, and material resources needed to succeed in schools (Lopez, 2001; Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2003; Granovetter, 1973).

The need to overcome tremendous gaps in academic content and experience with schools

Despite the fact that refugee children assist their parents in making sense of schools and that some parents and other caregivers engage in creative networking to assist their children, there are many difficulties that Somali Bantu parents, caregivers, and their children continue to face in Central City public schools. Similar to other refugee populations, one of the most pressing problems facing these families is the tremendous gaps that many refugee children have in their academic content knowledge (Hones & Cha, 1999; Sinclair, 2001). Many of the Somali Bantu children in this study have had limited experience with formal schooling institutions. In Somalia, because of racial discrimination, Somali Bantu children were not encouraged to go to school and were often unable to go to school because they were financially unable to pay school fees. If children were able to attend school, their formal schooling experience was interrupted by the outbreak of war in Somalia, their family's flight from Somalia to Kenya, and movement between refugee camps within Kenya (Besteman, 1999: International Organization for Migration, 2002). Additionally, although many Somali Bantu children do speak some English, their proficiency in English is mostly conversational rather than academic (Cummins, 1995; Guerrero, 2004).

Therefore, most of the Somali Bantu children in this study have faced tremendous academic challenges in the local public schools because they struggle with their English comprehension skills including reading, writing, and speaking and have sizable gaps in

their academic content knowledge. Haji Hussein, one of the Somali Bantu parents in the study, captures quite well the problems faced by Somali Bantu children in U.S. public schools because of missing gaps in their educational experience:

> Yeah, our children are so far behind because of the language barrier, they cannot understand well what the teachers say to them, what they are taught. They cannot grasp very well the meaning of the subjects. When they read, they don't understand actually or properly what they are reading. That is why they are behind.
>
> They missed so much school in Somalia and Kenya. I mean, they don't have a good basic education. They missed school, that is why. When they were in the camps, they were just going to schools, say not well-prepared, and they started going to school too late in life. They didn't start school early enough in Kenya and were always too old for their grade (Interview, November 17, 2007).

Parents in this study report that these educational gaps sometimes become exacerbated by the context of their reception in the local public schools. For example, parents report that Somali Bantu children have had limited contact with English as a Second Language support in the Central City Public Schools. Typically Somali Bantu children have been provided one to two classes of ESL support in their first year and even less support in their second year of school. One of the focal students in the study, Ibrahim Gure, explained that, although he had limited experience with the English language, he was placed in mainstream classes in his first year at Maine High School and, as a result, struggled throughout the entire year. It was not until his second year that counselors recognized his misplacement and he was placed in the ESL program. Currently in his third year at Maine High School, Ibrahim is doing better because of the additional support he has been provided through the ESL program, but still is academically behind his classmates.

Another way in which the gaps in their academic knowledge become exacerbated is by their placement with age-group peers rather than with ability-group peers. At high

schools in Central City, the policy appears to be one of social promotion for students in the school. When they are first resettled to the Central City area, school counselors ask refugee students how old they are. Refugee students are then placed in an "age-appropriate" grade even though they may not have had prerequisite academic experience in the course subject matter. For example, children who are 15 to 16 are placed in the sophomore track of courses, even though they may not have had any exposure to American Literature or U.S. History, two of the main courses for that grade level. Therefore, the gaps in academic knowledge that Somali Bantu students bring with them to school appear to be unaddressed in any formal instructional planning or course scheduling by the school and the prospects for the remediation of these gaps are not likely to improve (Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003; Suarez-Orozco, C. & Qin, 2004).

The previous experience of Somali Bantu families with formal schooling matters.

As I analyzed my interviews with Somali Bantu parents, caregivers, and their children, two main paths of educational adaptation seemed to unfold for Somali Bantu families and their children. If Somali Bantu parents already have some type of education in Somalia and Kenya (e.g., the family of Abdullah Hussein), then they are more likely to know how to help their child educationally and to advocate for additional support and higher education. In these families, considerable effort has been made for the adult parents and caregivers in the house to try to attend Central City Community College. Attendance at this community college means that the adults in the family can improve their English skills and that these language skills will hopefully translate into increased opportunities for better jobs, more education, and a better understanding of the academic

content that the children in the family are being taught in schools. Haji Hussein, a full time employee and part time student at Central City Community College, clearly sees the value of education when he remarked:

> More education will help the Somali Bantu because the world today is a world of communication and a world of knowledge so when the Somali Bantu become educated they can communicate very well with the other communities in the U.S. They can take and play their roles, as expected by society and the other communities, in employment where education is necessary. So education can help the Somali Bantu in many ways not to mention those few that I think matter (Interview, March 17, 2007).

Conversely, if Somali Bantu parents have less experience with education, then they are less likely to know how to negotiate the U.S. public school environment, less comfortable with going to school and talking to teachers, and less likely to know how to even begin to help their child with their schoolwork. In this case, families struggle to know where to even start to help their children or who to ask for help in the school or in the local community. The second parent in the opening vignette who asked me if I would help the parents understand report cards is a poignant example of a parent concerned about his child's education, but uncertain of the instructional and assessment practices of U.S. public schools. Indeed, his children had been enrolled in public schools for four years, but he was still not sure how to read a report card.

Shangora Mkoma, the father of two high school aged students, expressed great concern for the education of his children when he stated:

> These boys, because the school actually is in English, they don't even understand what the teacher is saying. When they come home, they cannot tell you anything about their day. They are very, very behind the U.S. citizen students. They are struggling with their studies and they don't know how to do their homeworks because hardly they could understand the instructions. They don't know even where to go to find a help so they can do well in their homeworks and their assignments given by their teachers. I don't know who to turn to for help (Interview, March 30, 2007).

When asked about his concerns for his children's education in U.S. public schools, Sheik Gure, Ibrahim's father, just as tellingly remarks:

> I know that education here [in the U.S.] is important and that my children should do well in school. I just do not know exactly what that means here or if I can even help. My wife and I hardly were able to go to school in Somalia because they didn't want us there. That is why it is so hard for us to even help (Interview, May 14, 2007.

These divergent paths suggest that academic success for Somali Bantu students is highly contingent on their parents' and other caregivers' previous experience with formal schools, understanding of what kinds of knowledge are valued in U.S. public schools, and the ability to build networks with others in the community who can help with access to educational resources and academic support (Bourdieu, 1973; Coleman, 1988).

Discussion: The Fit between Refugee Families and Schools

People unfamiliar with Somali Bantu refugees may view families from the community as having limited access to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to succeed in the U.S. Both Somali Bantu parents and children have had a history of being denied access to schools in Somalia and limited access to schools in refugee camps in Kenya. Although many Bantu children have learned to speak some English, the Somali Bantu, as a general population, have remained largely illiterate and very few of the adult Bantu refugees are proficient in English (International Organization for Migration, 2002; Van Lehman & Eno, 2003). This lack of experience with formal education coupled with reported trauma-related problems, including hopelessness and depression, suggest that Somali Bantu children may experience low academic achievement and low motivation for formal schooling in the U.S.

However, in this study, both students and their parents report how they are trying, in their own unique ways, to bridge the gap between home and school and to provide resources for their families that they otherwise would not have access to. Older children in these families are taking on "more adult" roles in order to translate for their parents, care for the younger children in the family, and act as economic and social lifelines between the home and school community. Another way that parents, older children, and other caregivers in these families attempt to gain access to resources in the community is through building strategic relationships with other refugee families and social service providers in the Central City area. Because many of the adult Somali Bantu community know their own limitations in terms of English proficiency and knowledge of the way U.S. public schools work, they are actively reaching out to tutors at local area homework help centers, community volunteers, and to other Somali Bantu families to piece together a social support network that allows their children access to community resources, tutoring support, and valuable information about how U.S. public schools function. Moreover, parents, older children, and other caregivers are trying, as much as they are able, to improve their own English comprehension and general academic skills to keep up with their children. The findings from my interviews and observations suggest hope for some optimism as Somali Bantu students continue their education in the U.S. at secondary and, hopefully, post-secondary levels.

Despite these initial positive findings, there is also cause for concern for Somali Bantu school-aged children. Because of poverty, discrimination, and persistent movement, many Somali Bantu children have had their schooling interrupted for extended periods of time. Some children in the study did not attend formal schools for

over five years or attended school sporadically over the course of their childhood. Upon resettlement to the U.S., these same students have then been placed in grades in public schools based on their age, rather than their academic achievement. These gaps in their academic experience do not appear to be formally addressed by their teachers, administrators, and their counselors or by school policies and programs; instead each individual student is expected to study hard on their own and, as Haji Hussein puts it, "catch up as much as they can". (Interview, March 14, 2008). Somali Bantu students and caregivers report that they are trying hard to understand the academic subjects they are being taught, but they find it difficult to keep pace with their U.S.-born peers because of a lack of experience with both the subject matter in each class and the academic level of English required to understand both class textbooks and class discussions.

These gaps in familiarity with subject matter and proficiency in academic English appear to be exacerbated by a family's experience with school. While some Somali Bantu families have parents, older siblings and other caregivers who have had some experience with formal schooling in Somalia and Kenya, other families have no one in their family who has attended formal school for an extended period of time. Thus, while some families can understand the basic "architecture" of how a public school functions in the U.S. and how to access help from teachers or tutors at a school, other families do not even know that they are welcome in the building at Central City High School. In a classic tale of the "rich get richer", Somali Bantu families who have had experience with formal education appear to be finding more ways to help their children succeed in school and those families with little experience with formal education appear to have little

contact with teachers at school or members of the social service community who could, in theory, help them.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Looking backward and looking forward: Obstacles in the way of Somali Bantu refugee students, possible recommendations for schools, and implications for further research

Introduction

In the previous chapters about Somali Bantu refugee students, their teachers, and families I have provided examples of how the public school system in Central City has expected these students to "have which it does not give" in terms of educational expectations and the cultural capital valued in schools. Because refugee teens in this study have had very limited experience with the "dominant culture" in the U.S. and their parents, too, lack the "relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture", there have been major gaps between the cultural capital possessed by the families and children at home and the expectations of the teachers in school (Bourdieu, 1973). This chapter will revisit some of the common obstacles faced by the three Somali Bantu refugee students in this study, provide some possible recommendations on how to begin to help these students overcome these obstacles, and provide implications of the study for further research.

Looking backward: Common obstacles faced by the Somali Bantu students

Although Abdullah, IB, and Hassan began their lives in the U.S. and in schools in Central City with optimism about their opportunities for education and possible future careers, they faced some common obstacles as they tried to successfully adapt to Central City public high schools. One of the major obstacles they faced is the fact that none of them had consistent access to formal schooling during their formative elementary and

middle school years. Due to war-time turmoil and ethnic strife, the families of these young men were forced to move frequently both within Somalia and also within refugee camps in Kenya. These moves kept the young men from becoming fully literate within their own home language and also placed them in a position to miss foundational academic content knowledge, such as in science and the social sciences, that was expected by their teachers. Without having previously learned or read some of the academic content knowledge in the courses that they were enrolled in, such as U.S. History, these young men faced tremendous difficulties in trying to succeed in and understand the content being presented in their high school courses, especially during their sophomore and juniors years.

The problems caused by the gap in academic content knowledge were exacerbated by the three students' lack of proficiency in reading, writing, and listening in English. Although the young men quickly were able to learn enough English to converse in informal, colloquial English, they had great difficulty in understanding the more formal, academic English used in their textbooks and in many of their assignments. For example, in a Grammar class he took in the fall semester of 2007, Abdullah had trouble conjugating verbs and identifying the different parts of speech such as adjectives, adverbs, and participial phrases. During this same semester, he also was enrolled in a World Literature class that asked him to read and understand literature such as Beowulf and the Canterbury Tales written in Old English. In both English classes, Abdullah did not have previous exposure to English Grammar and literature and struggled academically in both classes as a consequence. IB, as a sophomore, took a course in Biology in which the textbook was written for Advanced Placement and college freshmen

students. The placement of these young men into classes above their reading level without additional teacher or school support made it difficult for them to keep up with their peers and succeed.

In addition to a lack of proficiency in English and a lack of exposure to certain types of academic content knowledge, the educational adaptation of Abdullah, IB, and Hassan was further influenced by their uncontested assimilation into student life in an inner-city high school. In *Accommodation without assimilation*, a seminal work on immigrant student educational adaptation, Margaret Gibson (1988) describes how Sikh immigrant students and their families succeed in a public high school in northern California by making the necessary accommodations to the teachers and administrators at their school in order to become successful at school. Gibson also goes on to describe how the immigrant students and their families remain steadfast in their refusal to fully assimilate into the student body and the local community. By accommodating without assimilating, these Sikh immigrants were able to be accepted into the school and local community and succeed in their surroundings, but without having to abandon their focus on academic achievement and a close-knit family life.

In contrast to the youth in Gibson's study, I would contend that the Somali Bantu young men in this study attempted to *assimilate without accommodation.* That is, in an attempt to fit into the student body around them, these young men copied the behavior of the students enrolled in their classes and began to exhibit public behaviors that showed little concern for academic achievement in school. As they saw that other students in their classes were either late or truant to class and were inattentive to their studies and their teachers, Abdullah, IB, and Hassan began to think that this behavior was acceptable

within the school community and assimilated into the counter-culture of the student body community. With few positive role models within their classrooms to provide a different model to aspire to, these young men began to act in ways that signaled to their teachers that they had given up on school and did not care how they did.

This decision to assimilate and adapt the attitudes of their fellow students led the Somali Bantu students down a path towards academic failure in school and a possibility of repeating grades or not graduating from high school on time. Contrary to the Sikh immigrant youth in Gibson's study, these Somali Bantu young men did not accommodate to the rules and expectations of the teachers at their schools; rather they assimilated in ways that helped them to fit in to the culture of the study body. Abdullah, for example, actually started off during his first year of high school as a model student within the Somali Bantu community. He was the sole student to have a parent who completed college and, as a consequence, had help at home with his studies despite frequent moves throughout his childhood. Abdullah did do well in his first year of high school. However, in his second year of high school, Abdullah joined a fight in a hallway at school and was subsequently suspended. He missed a week of school, was unable to make up the work that he missed, and ended up failing two courses for the year that he needed to graduate on time. During his third year of high school, he did not fare much better and is unlikely to graduate on time from high school if he does end up graduating at all. Throughout his downward spiral, Abdullah did not realize how his truancy and inattention to schoolwork was positioning him in a negative light in the eyes of his teachers. This anti-school behavior was normalized to him through his frequent observations of the actions of the students around him in his classes and in the hallways

of his school. Abdullah chose to fit in with his student peers rather than fit in to what teachers expected of him in his classes. Hence, Abdullah, like IB and Hassan, assimilated into the student body at his high schools, but did not accommodate the expectations of the teaching staff and school administration.

One other obstacle that all three students face in their studies is their inability to identify the structural obstacles in their way. Throughout the year of the study, I asked the students to identify the obstacles that they faced in their everyday life in Central City high schools. On their own, these students were not able to identify and name the structural obstacles they faced in public schools such as their previously interrupted schooling experiences, the lack of academic support and resources available to them at school, and the lack of student role models they could possibly emulate. Often they pointed toward themselves as the cause of their academic problems and mentioned that perhaps they were not smart enough to do the work. This self-blame and self-doubt is especially problematic because it began to manifest itself throughout the school year in the speech patterns and ways in which the young men interacted with one another. Rather than lift each other up or work to motivate each other in their school, these young men began to make fun of each other in ways that moved beyond playful kidding and moved into harsh criticism of each other's intellectual capacity. As a result, these young men were able during the year to construct and strengthen a collective identity of underachievement in schools that served to undermine each student's wish and plan to academically succeed. Like the Hallway Hangers in *Ain't no makin' It* (MacLeod, 1995), these Somali Bantu refugee youth formed an identity counter to school and counter to society that at once gave them purpose as a group, but also insulated them as individuals

from the realities of school expectations and the likelihood that they might fail a year or two of high school and possibly not graduate at all.

Abdullah, IB, and Hassan then blamed themselves for their lack of academic achievement rather than recognizing that there were other factors at play in their academic development beyond their control. They did not recognize that they had enrolled in high schools in which school funding and resources were very limited, in which teachers had little professional development in working with ESL students, and in which other problems including truancy, discipline, and low student morale demanded attention from both teachers and school administration and away from them.

Looking backwards at the experiences of the three young men in Central City public high schools, I believe that there is a tremendous need for teachers, school administrators, policy makers and community members to seriously consider how these refugee youth are currently experiencing schools in the U.S. and to consider their own complicity in these students' struggles with school. During the course of the study, teachers in the Central City School District did little to directly address the problems these students were having in school. As I described in Chapter 5, the nature of the responses by teachers to these students was more reactive than proactive. Teachers became frustrated and disappointed at the work and behavior of the Somali Bantu students or avoided these students altogether rather than specifically address the underlying needs that the students had, such as the need to learn and master academic English, the missing foundational knowledge they had in specific disciplines, and the unfamiliarity the students had with the assignments the students were given. The lack of responsiveness to the needs of the students in this study should be cause for concern for

those in schools that educate refugee youth, especially with students from similar backgrounds to those of the young men in this study.

I would also argue that stake-holders in schools and local communities need to pay closer attention to the social cost of under-educating Somali Bantu refugee youth and youth from similar academic backgrounds. These social costs include the possibility of graduating underemployed and undereducated refugee youth from the public school system, a costly over-dependence by the refugee families of these youth on social welfare programs, and a chronic inability for refugee young adults to support themselves and their families. If students like the ones in this study continue to be undereducated and underemployed, how will they be affected by their unfulfilled dreams? Moreover, what kinds of commitment will they have to becoming productive citizens for both the good of their local community and U.S. society in general? What are schools preparing these refugee youth to become and what will be the effects of their preparation?

Looking forward to the future: Recommendations and new commitments

Looking backward, the stories of Abdullah, IB, and Hassan point to numerous obstacles the young men faced in schools during the 2007-2008 school year and that they may potentially face in the upcoming years in high school. Looking forward, however, their experiences in school can also provide opportunities for thinking about how to begin to address some of the most pressing needs these young men (and others like them) have in school. As the numbers of youth from war-torn countries continue to grow in the U.S. public schools, how can schools adapt to the various educational needs of these refugee youth? While each school district will need to adapt depending on the student populations it serves and the resources available to it, I have identified a few basic needs

that schools can begin to address and that provide a launching point for further discussions about how to begin to address the needs of refugee youth within individual school communities.

One of the most pressing needs in schools is the need for teachers, school administrators, school counselors, and other school staff to value a greater understanding of refugee students, especially those with interrupted or limited educational opportunities in their lives. These students have often faced hardship in their lives including ethnic violence, the murder of loved ones, and the forced departure of their families from their homeland. Often the educational experiences of these children have been interrupted by frequent movement to avoid capture or cut short due to discrimination against their ethnic group. Once they move to the United States, the transition to the public school system can be overwhelming due to language barriers, the clash of home and school cultures, and the lack of exposure to the formal academic curriculum expected of all students in a particular grade.

Consequently, there is a pressing need for teachers and school staff working with refugee student populations to commit themselves to learning more about the refugee students enrolled in their classrooms. When and how did the refugee student(s) enrolled in my classroom arrive in the United States? What kinds of educational experiences did this student have prior to public school in the United States? What has been their experience in public schools so far in the United States? What kinds of educational opportunities have their parents and other family members had? What kinds of academic and personal strengths do the family members have that can be utilized during this child's year in my classroom? Some of this information can be obtained by teachers if they

make a greater personal and educational outreach to refugee students and their families so that families and schools can work in greater partnership and communication with one another, rather than at odds or apart from one another. Increased communication among refugee students, their families, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders holds such great promise for a deeper understanding and collaboration among all stakeholders in school communities with high refugee student populations. To foster this type of work, there needs to be a realization that this type of outreach to families and students is indeed important and meaningful to the students in the classroom, and also to the teachers of the classroom. Because this type of outreach with refugee students and their families can present its own challenges such as its time intensive nature and working across language and cultural boundaries, teacher commitment to do this type of work can only work if there is greater support and teacher professional development from central administration and the local community.

When refugees first arrive in the United States, refugee resettlement agencies typically place refugee families in cities and neighborhoods in which housing is affordable or inexpensive and in areas that are centrally located in a city or town so that refugee families can have more convenient access to resettlement offices, public transportation, and jobs. This type of resettlement often means that refugee families are placed in urban, high population density neighborhoods in metropolitan areas throughout the country. Because of this placement, refugee students are often initially placed in under-resourced schools in which teachers face institutional obstacles including high teacher turn-over, higher rates of student absenteeism and truancy, and higher rates of student and family poverty. Therefore, district administrators, school principals, and

local community members need to acknowledge that teachers in under-resourced schools who work with refugee youth and try to provide special outreach to refugee youth and their families need additional support including time, resources, and funds to do this type of work. Working with refugee youth cannot be seen as an "add-on" to the already crowded list of things teachers in under-resourced schools must attend to.

The types of support needed for teachers for this type work include commitments of money, professional development, and time. Teachers must have the funds to purchase books and other texts that are appropriate for the level of English comprehension of their refugee students, dictionaries and other reference material in the home language(s) of their students, and other instructional materials that students and parents can borrow for use at home. Teachers must have access and support to attend workshops within their districts, at local colleges and universities, or online that support their development of instructional practices that help ESL students and students with limited English proficiency improve their writing, reading, and speaking skills. Finally, teachers must be provided the release time to do all of this work. The expectation that teachers will do all of this outreach to parents and students, participate in in-service teacher development, and create new materials for their refugee students during their lunch break or during their planning period when other students are trying to meet them or they are attending to attendance paperwork or end of the semester grading is neither feasible or realistic; instead it ensures that increased efforts to improve instruction for refugee students will not occur.

In addition to the need for financial commitments of support from leadership in the school district, there also needs to be a "moral" and "emotional" commitment to this

type of work from district administrators, local community members, and refugee support service staff. This type of work cannot be done alone and cannot be done without high levels of support and commitment to the importance of the work. Teachers will feel disempowered in their outreach activities if they see that the time they spend on calling and visiting the homes of their refugee students is not seen as a valuable use of their time by their building principal. They will feel unmotivated if their requests for more textbooks and resource materials for their students or for a particular in-service to be held on working with limited English proficiency speakers goes unheeded at the office of central administration. They will feel like giving up in their efforts to improve instruction for the refugee students in their classrooms without school leadership pointing out and reinforcing the message that educating all students well in each school , especially those who have been disadvantaged in some way, is central to the mission and promise of public education in the United States.

Recommendations for Central City Schools

These general recommendations for schools can be more specifically applied to teachers and other stakeholders in the Central City School District and in the high schools in which the Somali Bantu young men in this study were enrolled. My research with Somali Bantu students this year indicates that administrative and teacher leadership in the Central City School District needs to seriously examine its commitment to serving refugee students and their families. The district proudly states on its website that over sixty-two different countries and forty-six different languages are represented in the schools and claims this cultural and linguistic diversity as one of the strengths of the district. The school district also estimates that 10-15% of the entire student population

can be classified as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) learners (Central City School District, 2008). Despite these claims, every teacher I interviewed during my research reported that they have not received any professional development in working with English as a Second Language learners within the last fifteen years and have no specialized resources or textbooks in their classrooms to use with this population. Moreover, the amount of time they can spend with refugee students and other students with other ESL needs has become minimized as teachers attempt to meet the needs of special education students and students with discipline problems increasingly being placed in their classrooms. The focus on the improvement of in-class instruction is further complicated by teacher frustration with school administration over new school policies, repeated district-wide failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and the continued decline of student enrollment in the district and the continued increase of school closings and teacher lay-offs.

Despite this current climate, I would argue that the administrators and teachers in the Central City School District must find a way to commit themselves to meeting the needs of refugee students and students with similar learning and instructional needs. School leadership in the district must create a comprehensive, district-wide plan that maps out the instructional strategies, resources and vision for meeting these children's needs. While admittedly there have been a few additions to the English as a Second Language staff at some of the schools in the district within the last two years, there does not appear to be any district-wide plan in place for the reception of these students, their assessment, and their retention in schools. As evidenced by the experiences of Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan, there is no formalized assessment of the English language levels of

incoming students, specialized academic counseling for these students, nor any outreach and educational opportunities for their parents and caregivers. Without a unified vision as to how teachers and other school stake-holders should work with refugee children and their families in the schools, teachers will continue to do the best they can on an individual basis in each of their classrooms with these students and not necessarily work in cooperation with other school personnel (e.g., other specialist teachers in their building, ESL specialists, school counselors, and building principals) who could conceivably provide them additional insight and support for the education of these children.

As part of its district-wide plan for working with refugee students, district leaders and administrators must also commit themselves to creating and providing meaningful opportunities for teachers to learn how to better serve these children. These meaningful opportunities involve professional development opportunities that originate and are nominated from the real-life concerns teachers have about students in their classroom, rather than the provision of one day workshops given by facilitators unfamiliar with the immediate and urgent realities of the Central City School District. These professional development learning opportunities also need to be sustained throughout the year with ongoing teacher support either in face-to-face meetings or in online sessions with other teachers facing similar issues. A commitment of classroom resources, in-class teacher support (e.g., teaching assistants, instructional coaches who provide teaching advice), and release time must also be provided so that teachers can put into place their plans for improving instruction with refugee students.

In addition to planning for new instructional strategies in the classrooms, teachers and other school support staff in the Central City School District must also begin to envision ways of reaching out to the families of their refugee students. Parents of Somali Bantu students report that they are unfamiliar with the public school system in the U.S. and are unsure of their role as parents. As an example, the second parent in the opening vignette in Chapter 6 has enrolled his children in Central City schools for over four years and still is unclear as to how to read the report cards he receives at home every few months. By reaching out to parents and educating them about the educational system their children are now enrolled in, it is hoped that parents and other caregivers can begin to help guide their children to commit themselves to their academic work and studies and that the chances for academic success for these Somali Bantu students hopefully will increase.

Without the creation of a district-wide plan to improve the instruction of refugee students and to initiate educational outreach to refugee parents and their parents, it is very likely that refugee students, such as the Somali Bantu students in this study, will continue to cycle through the Central City School District without receiving the educational opportunities they and the other members of their family came to the U.S. to receive.

Implications for further research

I thought that by doing a dissertation I would answer most of the questions I had about working with refugee students and their families. It would be that easy. However, my work with the Somali Bantu students this past year has actually left me with additional and different types of questions than I entered into the study with at the beginning of the year. Looking back on my research with these young men I feel like my

work has generated additional lines of inquiry I wish to pursue in the future. However, at the crux of any of these lines of inquiry, the focal point remains the same – how can I better understand the problems refugee students face and how can instruction in U.S. public schools be improved to better meet these children's needs?

One line of educational inquiry I would like to pursue further would be to continue to follow the young men of this study over the next few years of high school. What will happen to Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan? Will their educational experiences remain largely the same as they were this year? Will the academic problems they face now in school continue or will they abate? What new problems will surface as they enter the higher grades of high school? What kinds of responses will they receive from their teachers in the more advanced classes of mathematics and social studies? Will they graduate from high school on time, be transferred to the vocational school in the district, or will they drop out altogether? Will some kind of educational intervention either by teachers or by other school stake-holders improve their chances for academic success and greatly increase their chances at graduation? A longitudinal study of these young men would provide additional insight into the unique experiences these refugee students face in U.S. public schools.

Another related study I am thinking of initiating is a study of the younger brothers and sisters of the focal group students in this current study. In pursuing this study, I would be very interested in examining how age and entrance into public schools in Central City may play a part in educational adaptation. According to Abdullah, his younger brothers and sisters currently enrolled in elementary school do quite well in school. Ibrahim and Hassan report similar things about their younger siblings. By

researching the educational experiences of the younger brothers and sisters of Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan, perhaps I can learn what differences exist for younger refugee children in elementary schools and middle schools in Central City. Is it any "easier" to enroll as a second grader and achieve academic success in an elementary school in Central City than it is to enroll as a sophomore in high school? Will the younger siblings of these three young men be in a greater position to be successful in high school because they will have had access to foundational knowledge in all of the core subjects (e.g., mathematics, science, English, and social studies) in their formative elementary and middle school years? Or will these younger students eventually do as poorly as their older siblings because of a lack of positive academic role models within their community and the downward pressure and example exhibited by their older siblings?

I am also interested in the possibility of working with another refugee group besides the Somali Bantu. The Somali Bantu have a long history of oppression both in Somalia and Kenya and have been systematically deprived of educational opportunities. This has undoubtedly had an effect on their educational adaptation to schools in the U.S. What does educational adaptation look like for refugee students who have not had a long history of oppression within their countries, but have still recently been forced out of their country because of recent political upheaval or religious oppression? How are their stories in school similar to or different from those of the Somali Bantu in this study? Are teachers' responses to these students any different than their responses to the Somali Bantu students?

Finally, I am interested in continuing to do research with teachers in classrooms

who work with Somali Bantu students or more generally refugee students but in another school district or state and who have reported success in their endeavors. Although the findings of this study identify and examine teacher responses such as frustration, avoidance, and regret, I will optimistically imagine that other more positive responses exist in other schools in other districts. Moreover, I will imagine that there are other school districts that have in place a comprehensive plan for working with refugee students and addressing their educational needs. What are the teachers in these schools doing differently than the teachers in this study? What does it really take for a school to be successful with refugee students? What kind of school leadership by teachers, principals, or superintendents is needed for a comprehensive plan to be in place and to be implemented? What commitments of time, resources, and professional development are needed? By working with and documenting the experiences of teachers and other stake-holders in these schools, I hope to spend time with and write about teachers and refugee children that provide insightful direction, exciting optimism, and a sense of idealism to all those currently working with refugee students in classrooms throughout the United States.

A final call for action

All of the needs outlined in this final chapter may be idealistic in the sense that one may argue that all of the needs can only be met in an ideal world in an ideal school with administrators with unlimited funding at their disposal. A pessimist may read the needs outlined above and comment, "How might it be possible to fund these initiatives in an already under-resourced school?" Perhaps the pessimist may have a point and the needs outlined above provide an overly optimistic blueprint of what needs to be

accomplished. However, I would also contend that if schools continue to give little to no attention to the needs of refugee students like the three Somali Bantu youth in this study and continue to not meet the needs outlined above, then they should, as a consequence, expect very little back from these young men in terms of academic achievement. Is it reasonable and fair to expect anything more from these refugee students when their educational needs appear to be so great, but few support services and remediation are provided to them? Are we setting refugee students like Abdullah, IB, and Hassan up for failure in schools?

Viewed from another perspective, can we realistically expect anything more from the teachers in U.S. public school systems when they are asked to teach refugees with interrupted or limited access to education but are not provided any additional financial or moral support from their local communities or from their central offices? Is it reasonable and fair to expect anything more from these teachers when the investment and support from the broader community appears to be sorely lacking? Unless we begin to think differently about how we address some of the needs outlined above and throughout this study, it is clear that some of the pressing needs of refugee youth in U.S. public schools will continue to be left unmet and the optimistic hopes and dreams that these youth and their families initially held about public education will go sadly unrealized.

Epilogue

In chapter 3, I write that "my research should not be taken as 'the truth', but rather a tentative exploration of the educational experiences of adolescent refugee males from a historically disadvantaged population as they try to adapt to a foreign land and an unfamiliar school system." In this epilogue, I wish to revisit some of the "tentative exploration" that I have undertaken in the study and point to ways in which the study of Somali Bantu youth was a complicated endeavor. Specifically I will examine the strengths and limitations of using cultural capital theory with refugee youth; the agency of the young men in this study in contributing to their own difficulties with school; and the ways in which class, race, and refugee status impact their lives.

Lamont and Lareau define cultural capital as "*institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion*". In this study, I have attempted to show how Somali Bantu youth have not always understood or even been able to identify the "cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials)" valued by their teachers and how this has led to their "social and cultural exclusion" from academic success. The use of cultural capital in the study has helped me in that it has provided a theory for understanding how structures and institutions in the school have played a role in producing and reproducing inequality in the lives of these young men. Cultural capital theory has helped me to identify the ways in which teachers in Central City Schools have valued a "linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture" which they have not

provided to these youth and how the structures in place in the district have limited both the teachers and refugee students in their midst. The theory has helped me to identify expectations of the dominant culture in U.S. society that are not always clearly explained to refugee youth, such as the Somali Bantu, and their families.

While I found that cultural capital theory has been helpful in this study, it also has some limitations as well. Through my study, I have not been able to identify ways in which teachers are currently bridging the gap between the "cultural signals" expected in schools and the knowledge of these signals by Somali Bantu youth (and other refugee youth). Furthermore, I have not yet been to clearly identify ways in which the young men in this study and their families can begin to better understand and learn the cultural signals valued both in U.S. public schools and society. Indeed, Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan seem to, at many times, contribute to their own lack of success in school by cutting class, creating discipline problems in class or in the hallways, and by not doing required homework assignments and group projects. Although they have optimistic dreams of becoming doctors, lawyers, and engineers in the future, they do not do what will help them in the long run in their adaptation to their new lives as students and members of the local community. In addition to cultural capital theory, other theories such as social reproduction theory (MacLeod, 2004; Willis, 1981) might help me in thinking further about the seemingly downward trends these young men appear to be on in school and the reasons why teachers appear to be unable to successfully reach out to them.

Refugee resettlement agencies often resettle refugee families in areas in which housing is affordable, access to bus lines and employment is convenient, and where there

are other services (such as social services offices or resettlement agencies) readily available. Often refugee resettlement of families occurs in high-density, urban areas with high rates of poverty which meet all of these criteria. Refugee students then face similar issues to their native-born peers in schools in which they enroll such as schools with not enough funding, discipline and attendance problems, and poor academic performance. What therefore makes the stories of these Somali Bantu young men any different from other native-born student youth from disadvantaged backgrounds in under-resourced schools?

The young men in this study and their families are poor. Their parents rely largely upon government assistance to pay their bills at home. In these ways, the Somali Bantu families are similar to the families of their native-born peers. However, there are some differences between families. Because of a lack of marketable job skills and limited English proficiency, the parents find it difficult to find jobs that pay beyond minimum wage, if they can find jobs at all and are sometimes physically and psychologically unable to work due to trauma or violence they have experienced. Refugee families typically also have access to government support. However, many of these benefits run out six months after their arrival. Finally, besides limited governmental assistance and some support from refugee resettlement agencies, refugee families often do not have a large network of outside support (such as extended friends and family) in their local communities they can rely upon for financial and emotional support during difficult financial times. They can sometimes rely upon other refugee families from their ethnic group. However, these other families are often undergoing similar economic problems. Hence, the young men in this study are affected in similar,

but also different, ways by the poverty they see in their homes, in their neighborhoods, and with other members of their ethnic group.

The young men in this study are also black, but not African-American. The color of their skin has racialized these young men and positioned them in such a way that is not always positive within their high schools. As these young men seek to be accepted within their new high school communities, they have adopted the dress and inter-actional patterns of black youth in their schools. With their baggy jeans, large hooded sweatshirts, and Nike sneakers, it would be hard to pick Abdullah, Ibrahim, and Hassan from a group of other students at their schools. Moreover, each of these three young men to differing degrees has adopted a "tough" and "gangsta" persona at their school which they hold out for their peers and teachers to see. The adoption of this persona has in many ways affected their interactions with their teachers who see this assimilative move by Somali Bantu students as a decision to give up in school and to not try anymore.

This move by Somali Bantu students has not resulted in any increase of friendship with African-American students at their schools. Generally the young men in this study are not welcomed into friendship groups with native-born students and keep to themselves during lunchtime and in the hallways of their schools. Therefore, the Somali Bantu students have attempted to assimilate into the general student body of African-American students, but have not accommodated to the expectations of their teachers at their school and have not necessarily been accepted fully by their African-American peers at their schools.

Finally, in contrast to their native-born student peers, the young men in this study have been undeniably influenced by their history of forced displacement from Somalia,

life in refugee camps in Kenya, and their transition to their adopted host country of the U.S. These refugee students have witnessed violence, murder, and acts of discrimination within their home country. They have been bullied and discriminated against even in refugee camps in Kenya in which many lived for over a decade of their lives. Their lives as refugees surely impact the ways in which they view schools and the relevance of schools in their lives. Many of the students realize, as Haji once told me, that they now "have at least some food to eat and clothes on their back and for them that is enough" and can now ease up in life because imminent danger is not visibly present. Moreover, because of their previous limited and interrupted experience with schools in the past, they do not see an urgency to do well in schools. Because of the fact that they have been able to survive and exist without schools in the past, they do not see the relevance of schools to their lives. Hence, the focal group students in this study pull away from schools and continue to under-achieve in their classes and in their academic development.

The lives of these young men are complicated then in so many ways by their interactions with their teachers and peers at school, by their race and class, and by their life experiences as refugees in transition. Trying to understand their lives and the reasons why they act in ways that seem counter-productive to them especially in schools is a difficult task. Returning to Abdullah at the end of this epilogue provides a fitting way in which to think more about the complicated lives these refugee students lead.

In Chapter 5, I describe how Abdullah falls asleep during a World Literature class and the ways in which Ms. Endicott, his teacher, appears to avoid him. I argue that her avoidance of Abdullah and his sleeping in class contributes to his failure and his lack of motivation in her class. I still believe that this is true. However, I cannot end this study

without thinking further about Abdullah's own complicity in his poor academic performance in this class and other potential reasons why he is tired and sleeps. Abdullah sleeps because he is being avoided in class by Ms. Endicott, but I must also point that he sleeps because he does not know what is going on in this class and cannot fully comprehend the language of Beowulf and other works of literature used throughout the semester in the class. Abdullah also sleeps because he stays up late socializing with friends, not realizing the importance of good study and sleep habits for success in school. He sleeps because he has been working a part-time job that requires late hours, but helps him contribute to the little money his family depends on to pay their bills. He sleeps because he helps to care for his little brothers and sisters at home and to help his birth mother with tasks around their home and serves as a cultural guide for her to the new culture and community that she moved into just six months ago. Finally, Abdullah sleeps perhaps because he has realized that the journey to academic success in schools is so complicated and fraught with challenges that sleep is one of the most accessible ways for him to try and not think about the difficult road that lies ahead for him and his family and the work that he must do to keep his optimistic dreams about his future alive.

Abdullah's life and attempts at academic success in school is complicated in so many ways. This study is an attempt to unpack some of the complications and obstacles that Abdullah (and other refugee students like him) face so that teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in school can begin to know that they exist, begin to understand them, and, most importantly, address them.

APPENDICES

[Appendix A: Consent Form.]

Consent Form

This consent form acknowledges your participation in the study entitled *"Teaching Somali Bantu Refugee Students"*, developed by Kevin Roxas, Doctoral Candidate in the Teacher Education Program, and Dr. Susan Melnick, Associate Professor of Teacher Education, in the College of Education at Michigan State University.

Your participation will include a series of interviews and follow-up visits. Each interview will last approximately 1 hour and there may be 2 to 3 follow-up interviews. Kevin Roxas, Secondary Investigator, will conduct the interviews and the follow-up visits. Notes and audio recording will be taken during interviews. You can request to have the tape recorder turned off at any time during the interviews. You also have the right not to answer any particular questions. The researcher/interviewer will be transcribing the conversations.

The interview tapes and notes will be kept in a safe location, in a locked file cabinet. Once the study is completed, all interview tapes and notes will be destroyed. Your identity (if you choose not to be identified) will not be disclosed. A pseudonym will be used for yourself and also for the school, as well as its location, and your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. In public presentations and research articles, all identifying markers for schools and individuals will be masked. However, there is always the risk that someone will make a correct inference about who someone is or which school is being discussed.

Please know that participation in this study is voluntary and that you may choose not to participate at any time. Your withdrawal will not incur in any penalty or loss of benefits to you. Should you have any concerns or questions regarding the rights of subjects and the duties of investigators, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact, anonymously, if you wish, Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Director of Human Research Protections, (517)355-2180, fax (517)432-4503, e-mail irb@msu.edu, mail 202 Olds Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1047. Should you have any questions about the interview or the study, you can also contact the Dr. Susan Melnick, the Primary Investigator and Associate Professor of Teacher Education, at (517) 355-1825, email: susanm@msu.edu or regular mail: 263 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

Participant name (please print):
Contact information: (address):
(phone number and email):

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to be audio-taped for this study.

Participant name (please print):
Contact information: (address):
(phone number and email):

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

[Appendix B: Interview questions for Somali Bantu male students.]

- ✓ Do you see school as important to you in your life? If so, why? If not, why not?
- ✓ Can going to school help you in your life? If so, why? If not, why not?
- ✓ Can going to school help the larger Somali Bantu refugee community in Central City? If so, why? If not, why not?
- ✓ Do you think school can do anything for your family? If not, why not?
- ✓ How have you been successful in U.S. public schools thus far?
- ✓ What problems have you faced in U.S. public schools thus far?
- ✓ Who has helped you understand U.S. public schools?
- ✓ What do you still need to know about U.S. public schools to help you become more successful in school?
- ✓ What kinds of help do you think you need from teachers and principals that you don't currently get now?
- ✓ What are your aspirations for the next few years of your life?
- ✓ Do you plan to complete high school? Do you plan to attend school after high school?
- ✓ What are your aspirations for your future?

[Appendix C: Interview questions for teachers of Somali Bantu male students.]

- ✓ How are Somali Bantu students and their families welcomed to Central City High School?
- ✓ What major successes do you feel Somali Bantu students and their families face at Central City High School?
- ✓ What major problems do you feel Somali Bantu students and their families face at Central City High School?
- ✓ Do you think Somali Bantu students and their families understand how U.S. public schools work?
- ✓ What additional support do you think Somali Bantu students and their families need in understanding and navigating U.S. public schools?
- ✓ Is there something else that could be done to help Somali Bantu students and their families?
- ✓ What is the role of Central City High School teachers in working with Somali Bantu students and their families?
- ✓ How do Central City High School teachers help Somali Bantu students with their experience in schools, despite their limited experience with the English language and formal schooling?
- ✓ What types of educational outreach do Central City High School teachers do with Somali Bantu students and their families?

[Appendix D: Interview questions for the parents of Somali Bantu male students.]

- ✓ What role does education play in your lives? In the lives of the larger Somali Bantu refugee community in Central City?
- ✓ What role do schools play in your lives? In the lives of the larger Somali Bantu refugee community in Central City?
- ✓ What do you think schools can do for your family?
- ✓ What successes have your children had with U.S. public schools thus far?
- ✓ What problems have your children faced in U.S. public schools thus far?
- ✓ Who has helped you understand U.S. public schools?
- ✓ What do you still not understand about U.S. public schools?
- ✓ If you could talk directly to teachers, support staff, and principals in schools, what would you tell them about your child's experience in school?

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