

Thesis Project-ICCD Cohort 2 specific

Somali Families in America: A Journey of Integration and Transformation in the Globalized Era

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Abstract

Somali Refugees make up a growing population in urban parts of America. Researchers have examined the integration and assimilation processes of refugees, yet this study acts to highlight the intricacies of culture, situation, interaction, and context as they relate to these processes. This study serves to reflect on the complex cultural interactions between the white European- American educator and the Somali refugee. It was important for this author, being a white-European educator, to use personal reflection in this study in order to acknowledge and deconstruct cultural biases informed by the context of privilege. These biases impact how the white European –American educator views and interacts with children and families and also influences the methodological route of a research project. Concepts of power balancing, community space use, and integration in the context of education were discussed. It was found that in order to best study, develop, and interact in this integration process it is necessary for each party to step into the cultural unknown and undergo a process of integration and transformation. This requires openness to deconstructing one's own cultural bias which can only occur in context of mutual and balanced relationships.

Part I: Introduction

Introduction

Somali immigrants and refugees make up an ever-increasing population in the United States. Since 1980 over 65,000 Somali refugees have been admitted for resettlement in the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2009). Life in America has not been easy for these newcomers. Congruently, Somali children experience challenges as they first confront the majority of the American culture- through the public school systems (Sekhom, 2008). Whether the population in question is youth or young child, American formal schooling is foreign to the vast majority of Somalis (Bigelow, 2010). With regards to child development: expectations, communication, parenting styles, and teacher roles in Somalia vastly contrast to those in the U.S. In fact, these two cultures are commonly referred to as polar (Bigelow, 2010). Furthermore, many refugees suffer from various forms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), thus compounding the challenges of overcoming stark cultural contrast (Smith, Rasmussen, & Keller, 2007).

Entering into the American classroom with limited formal education, as defined by American standards, Somali youth face severe adversity in adapting to systems of schooling which rely heavily on English literacy proficiency (Bigelow, 2010). Oral language tradition has so defined this culture that the transformation from orality into literacy often means loss of identity. Schools lack the resources to properly support the language, social-emotional, and cognitive needs of the child (Scuglik & Alarcon, 2005). Teachers and school systems, partly due to lack of resources, are slow to effectively address the challenges posed by the Somali student and family to the classroom, curriculum, and American educational pedagogy (Lansford, Deater

-Deckard, & Bornstein, 2007). Instead, immigrants and refugees are held almost entirely responsible for rapid assimilation. According to Lansford, Deater-Deckard, & Bornstein (2007) individualistic societies tend to stress early intervention and education as a key component to the successful integration and acculturation of the child and family into the host culture.

Unfortunately it is typical that the process of accommodating the newcomer in meeting their unique need on an individual level falls behind the process of assimilation. The institution all too often fails to change its function based on the identity and value systems of the populations that are being served. Assimilation without adequate accommodation or validation of home language and culture can have adverse effects on the process of constructing positive bi-cultural identity (Lansford, Deater -Deckard, & Bornstein, 2007).

Young Somali-American children face similar adversity in different contexts. Research has indicated that Somali preschool children are participating in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) programs at a higher rate than non-Somali children in Minnesota and in Sweden (Minnesota Department of Health, 2009; Fernell, Barnivik-Olsson, & Bagenholm, 2010) .

Various unfounded theories have surfaced attempting to identify causes of this phenomenon, yet this evidence indicates that some Somali children face integration challenges from as early as their preschool years.

Background

Somalia, a desert land torn by civil war and unrest since 1991, is home to more than 7 million people (Gelletly, 2002). To Somalis, family is identity. Who you are from is more important than where you are from. Consequently, Somalis are tightly bound and dedicated to clan groups or family clusters whose members can trace their ancestry back to the clan's founder.

These clan networks have formed social frameworks which have allowed Somalis, in spite of resource scarcity, to make a living. However, strong clan allegiances have also contributed to violence between rival groups battling over resources. Because of this unrest, Somalia has been frequently referred to as a failed state as no central government has been successfully established since 1991. Somalis are the third largest registered refugee population in the world (Gelletly, 2002). These numbers will continue to rise as war and unrest still rapidly divides the country. In 2010 over 68,000 refugees had fled the fighting conflict in Somalia (Refugees International, 2010).

Nearly 100% of Somalis are Sunni Muslim. The Islam religion was founded by Mohammed in the 7th century. The main difference between Sunni and Shiite Islam is that Sunnis believe all four successors of Mohammed rightfully took his place, while Shiites believe that there was only one rightful successor. The word Islam means submission. Mohammed's followers are known as those who submit.

Lack of government investment has left Somalia without formal public education systems. Literacy rates in 1974 were less than 5 percent. Somalia did not develop a written language until 1973. Today, due to initiatives taken on by the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), the rate has risen to 37 percent (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). Though, the Somali language is still oral in nature. Traditional stories have been passed down from generation to generation, yet never written. Orality is embedded in Somali identity and it guides interaction with others and the world (Bigelow, 2010). Accordingly, poetry is a highly valued form of expression in this culture and is used to carry on traditional stories. Somalis are known as verbalizers with passionate communicative styles. They are sometimes misunderstood as being

overly assertive or brash in relation to other cultural styles of communication (Skuglik & Alarcon, 2005).

Oetje Madany has worked with Somalis since 1981. She traveled, following the refugees from Somalia in 1989, to Kenya and Ethiopia. Since moving to Seattle in 2004 she has been working to recruit, train, and mentor church volunteers to assist recently resettled refugees. Oetje described Somalis as, “pragmatic, often taking situations for what they are and making the most out of them for their own benefit. They are nomadic and this quality is embedded in their nature as a survivalist” (personal communication, March 16, 2011). She went on to explain that Somalis do not want to be associated or identified as African. They believe that they, because of their strength and certain facial features, stand out from the average African. They are also mistakenly identified as part of East Africa, when in actuality Somalis do not identify as East African. Due to ongoing territorial disputes, Somalis prefer that Somalia be identified separately as part of the Horn of Africa.

Somali children are raised with discipline and love (Gelletly, 2002). They are taught to work from the age of five or six and have little time to play. Parents view play with children as irresponsible or indulgent. This is because, according to Oetje, in order for the clan unit to survive children must contribute to the daily household or farming chores (personal communication, March 16, 2011). Children are taught to observe their world carefully and listen, respect, and value their elders. In spite of their hardships Somali children are known for their laughter and sense of joy. Because of this, Somali children and youth are understood as perseverant, resilient, and able to overcome adversity.

This brief demographic explanation will provide framework for understanding the various components of the Somali child and family and their interaction with the American school systems.

Rationale

I have been privileged to work with multi-ethnic children and families for four years as a teacher for Denise Louie Education Center (DLEC), a Head Start organization operating in three areas of Seattle. Throughout this time I have been invited to enter into the lives and stories of immigrant and refugee families in the most intimate manner; by educating, loving, and caring for their young children. In turn, I have learned about the family's struggles, accomplishments, culture, needs, and lifestyle. As an early educator I have become familiar with varying family dynamics and have worked in partnership with parents to raise successful, thriving children who grow to have positive self-identity and a strong connection to their home culture and community. Through these experiences I have realized that education, integration, and acculturation processes are profoundly complex for both the immigrant parents and bi-cultural children. So complex that according to Trickett & Burman (2005), in a study on the acculturation process of refugee adolescents in the former Soviet Union, acculturation as a phenomenon should be further studied in order to better understand the psychological processes that immigrants and members of the nation state face.

Munira Mohamed has worked as a refugee resettlement case manager in Seattle and now works for DLEC as an early intervention home visit manager. She visits Somali families and partners with parents to provide family support and early intervention and educational services to children under the age of 3. She was born and raised in Somalia in the 1990's during the war.

She came to America at the age of 12 and recalls, “When I came here I was very scared, worried, and lonely. I wondered how I would ever learn English, communicate with teachers, or complete work that I couldn’t get help from my parents to complete” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). Munira recalls that it took her nearly three years to feel comfortable in school. She remembered regarding one of her ESL teachers as a second mother. Even though her experiences with her teachers were positive, she still reports feeling inadequate and having a lack of support. She also recalled that her family was upset when she joined gym class and had to wear shorts because exposing legs was inappropriate in their culture. At first the school wouldn’t let her participate in class if she didn’t wear the shorts, but the family spoke up enough that the school finally allowed her to wear black pants (personal communication, Munira Mohamed, February 25, 2011). Munira’s story embodies the plight of many Somali children and families who encounter the American school system. Children and families often feel confused, isolated, and misunderstood.

In the past two years DLEC has served a growing number of Somali immigrants and refugees. My classroom, due to location, has housed the majority of these children and families. As I observed these children interact in their very first group learning experiences I began to notice an interesting pattern emerge. The Somali children would score significantly lower than the other children on standard Head Start assessments, they were more dependent on teacher attention and supervision, most were less verbal in comparison to other children, and they were unsure about how to interact with the classroom material. Remarkably, this is a classroom containing five to seven different ethnicities and 90 percent are children from immigrant families. It was my primary reaction to question what might be happening in the culture or home to cause these occurrences. As I began to research about this formative pattern, it became

apparent to me that these potential indicators of need are no more the product of the Somali circumstance than of the American circumstance. Through this process I've realized that my own privilege, pride, bias as a White European educator plays a large role in influencing the circumstance of the Somali child and family. My bias as a result of my developing in the context of privilege and power should remain in a constant state of deconstruction.

Consequently, this study will serve to build a foundational framework the way in which the White European educator and the Somali refugee might create a third space of understanding which will allow a collaborative effort to take place between parent and educator. This study will also touch on the relationship between community, space use, family support, and cultural integration as it relates to the positive influence on child development trajectories.

For the purposes of distinguishing between immigrant and refugee, language will be focused around the refugee child and family, maintaining the understanding that a majority of Somali immigrants have been impacted by war and violence. Issues of racism, bias, sexism, and oppression are present among every culture in the context of education and are inseparable from the human condition. However, if we are to reconcile between cultures I believe it is important to speak as specifically in regards to ethnicity and identity as possible. Because I am a White European educator who has struggled with bias and exercising privilege and racism over the Somali refugee family I have chosen to focus discussion only around Somali refugee families and White European educators.

Parker Palmer is known as a master educator who has worked for the renewal of meaning in education and physical role. According to Palmer (1993) the process of learning should be one which incorporates authenticity and a transparent, subjective, and spiritual involvement. Palmer

(1993) stated of current trends regarding knowledge attainment, “In our quest to free knowledge from the tangles of subjectivity, we have broken the knower loose from the web of life itself” (p. 26). In attempts to remain within the realm of subjectivity and alignment with this learning process, the study will incorporate reflective practices as they relate to my personal transformation and understanding on this matter.

Important questions that were considered are: How can Somali refugee parents and White European-American educators create a dialog of reconciliation and partnership, and deconstruct cultural barriers to communication? How can the power dynamics between privileged and oppressed cultures in this instance be transposed? How can the strengths of the Somali culture be recognized and drawn on in order to improve the Somali experience in America? What does the family need in order to assist their child to thrive in the host culture? And finally, what is already being done to improve the lives of the Somali refugee child and family?

Methodology

It was important for this author, being a white-European educator, to use personal reflection in this study in order to acknowledge and deconstruct cultural biases informed by the context of privilege. These biases impact how the white European –American educator views and interacts with children and families and also influences the methodological route of a research project. This study is informed by an integration of story; personal communication, observation, and experience; and literature review. White (2006) noted that “Experience has the power to uncloak what is hidden” (p. 67). During my two years working in the Lake Washington Apartments, I’ve been in close relationship with many Somali parents and have certainly been enlightened about cultural matters that were once hidden to me. This is why my personal

experience working with Somali refugee children and families in this community will be highlighted.

Freebody and Freiberg (2006) discussed issues of quantitative research in culturally diverse educational environments:

We work in a period in which policy in education, and in the human services generally, celebrates the significance and value of the diversity of clients, settings, processes and outcomes, while drawing its accountability and governmentality systems more and more deeply from more and more reductionist aggregations of standardized outputs. (p. 720)

Freebody and Freiberg (2006) called for an overhaul of standardized assessment and quantification in educational outcomes. It is nearly impossible to portray cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values of a culture not your own without use of story and direct information from individuals within that culture or those who have spent a profound number of years in contact with the culture. Thus, qualitative research is necessary when speaking about cross cultural issues. This way information can be understood at a human level because the topic of culture requires humanization. Accordingly, a series of interviews were conducted in Seattle among Somali and American professionals who work with children and families in different contexts. These interviews were informal and recorded. Guiding questions were set, but not strictly followed. Information from these interviews was coded for themes as well as significance and power of story.

The model of third space was derived from studies conducted in various fields (Fitts, 2009; Hollinshead, 1998). The philosophy was expounded on and adapted to fit this area of study. Few Somali parents being served by DLEC consented for me to use parent conferences as

reference and resource. Principals of the third space were experimented with during these conferences and interactions between the parent and I were reflected upon.

The cultural characteristics of Somali refugees and white European-Americans were discussed using theories from anthropologists and ethnographers such as Clifford Geertz and Geert Hofstede. Then these characteristics were expanded on using personal story and information from interviewees.

The topic of space use and community integration was informed by personal observation of the Lake Washington Apartment complex in Rainier Beach, Seattle. Frequent walks around the neighborhood and interactions within and around this community define these observations. Somaliland Community Center was used in a case study about space use and community connectedness among youth. Information about this community was drawn from interview sources and website information.

Part II: The Third Space

The Third Space

It is important that this question begin to be considered: How can the presence of Somali immigrants influence American educational pedagogy? Here, focus is shifted from what Somali children need to learn in order to be successful in the dominant culture to how they can use their cultural strengths to influence change. Whenever multiple cultures encounter space in close vicinity, there is potential for moving toward a third space of understanding. Clifford Geertz, a renowned anthropologist and ethnographer, is known for influencing the definition of culture as it relates to systems of meaning. According to Geertz (1973) culture is not static, but ever changing. Geertz (1973) focused heavily on culture as a behavioral map:

Once human behavior is seen as symbolic action--action which, like

phonation in speech, pigment in painting, line in writing, or sonance in music, signifies--the question as to whether culture is patterned conduct or a frame of mind, or even the two somehow mixed together, loses sense. The thing to ask about a burlesqued wink or a mock sheep raid is not what their ontological status is. It is the same as that of rocks on the one hand and dreams on the other--they are things of this world. The thing to ask is what their importance is: what it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said. (p. 10)

In regards to child development, both the White European-American and Somali cultures carry distinct identities and frameworks of meaning for the way the process of education plays out. Their behavior is greatly influenced by context. This section will serve to build a theoretical framework for understanding the way in which this third space can be realized, by understanding culture through the lens of symbolic action. In order to speak to this matter, characteristics of the two cultures must be identified. For the purposes of explaining these characteristics, general terms will be used. While generalities never depict reality on the individual level, they do serve a purpose in capturing the essence of interaction patterns between the two cultures.

Pedagogy for Western early education practice is heavily influenced by renowned philosophers like Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget and is focused on the way in which the individual interacts and discovers the world. Piagetian theory is used extensively in the United States where development is referred to as romantic maturationism which emphasizes the following of "one's unique biological clock" (Lee & Johnson, 2007, p.85). Bruner (1986),

described development as an individualistic process that “occurs through children’s direct encounters with the world rather than mediated through vicarious encounters with it and interacting and negotiating with others” (p. 85).

According to Lee & Johnson (2007), age is a strong marker of development and children are seen as deserving of opportunities for play. Scientific, linear, and knowledge based rationale are used to study ways in which children grow, learn, and develop. A position statement from the National Association for the Educating of Young Children introduced universal developmental best practices for early education that are scientifically based (A Position Statement of the National Association for the Educating of Young Children, 2007). These practices stem from Western philosophy. Lee and Johnson (2007) argued that due to these evolving universalities on child development, Western educators may not be attentive to the significance of the intersection between culture and child development.

The interactions with parent and child in mainstream White European America are allowed to happen in the manner that they do because of privilege and wealth. Privilege also allows a society time and resources for study, reflection, and theoretical thinking. Thus, scientific evidence for best practice on child rearing is derived from the context of privilege. Assuredness of safety in the space of privilege allows freedom from worry or fear about danger. The relationship between parent and child is less emergently correctional and more guiding and patient as a result. In a study based in suburban upper class America it was found that adolescents in privileged, wealthy, and mostly white families exhibit frequent signs of depression, anxiety, self- absorption, and entitlement (Levine, 2006).

A Somali's pedagogy for child development is influenced heavily by context as well. Ayan Musse is a Somali child and family social service worker in Seattle, and serves on the board of many Somali service organizations in Seattle including Village of Hope, an organization which focuses on cooperating with African-American youth, elders, organizations, families, and children in order to promote a healthy community. She has a bachelor's degree in child psychology and a master's degree in Social Work. She explained that, "You can't speak about a Somali child's experience in school without recognizing where they have come from. War has influenced their identities to the core and most American educators can't possibly understand this" (A. Musse, personal communication, January 18, 2011).

Abyan Muse is a Somali pediatric intake worker at Boyer Children's Clinic in Seattle. She diagnoses Somali children with various disabilities and dialogs with parents experiencing stress. She spoke about the impacts of PTSD on parents of U.S born Somali children; "Whether they are born here or not, the children of parents affected by war and violence are indirectly affected by the parent's actions" (Ab. Muse, personal communication, February 1, 2011). She also explained that the concentration camps which refugees flee too in parts of Kenya and Ethiopia are swathed with violence, drugs, sickness, and unsanitary living conditions. Abyan spoke about the way in which her culture manages emotions, in particular stress and depression. She stated, "People in the culture don't acknowledge or express their emotion. I have to warm up to the parents constantly in order to get them to open up about an issue" (Ab. Muse, personal communication, February 1, 2011). According to Smith et al. (2007), in a study on PTSD among refugees from Africa, avoidance is one common symptom often displayed by individuals who have experienced political violence. However, Oetje claimed that Somalis don't see their trauma in terms of mental illness and they are also less emotional than most Africans. She explained,

“Their symptoms are not so much to do with avoidance as they are with averting feelings of weakness because to be seen as weak is shameful. For to Somalis, their culture is so much about strength which is necessary to survive” (personal communication, March 16, 2011).

Abyan and Ayan both explained that the exposure to repeated violence greatly influences how a Somali parent interacts with their child. Interaction with children is based on the need for safety, survival, and practicality. Ayan contended that Somalis view the engagement in play with their child as indulgent or senseless:

We don't call it play; we call it learning. It's an insult to a Somali when you tell them to play with their child. They will think, no I'm not playing with them, I'm teaching them. You and I both know we aren't playing, we are teaching. So let's not pretend here. (personal communication, January 18, 2011)

Play is not deserved, it is a right. Oetje provided a founding explanation for this symbolic meaning of play behavior: “I've talked with many Somali women and they feel that it is their role to prepare the child to live in a harsh environment” (personal communication, March 16, 2011). Contrastingly, Levine (2006) described that it is the role of the white American parent to protect their child from the harsh realities of the world. Oetje went on to say that the complaint of many Somalis about American schools is that there is too much play.

Geert Hofstede, developer of the five indices of culture, has identified aspects of various cultures which contribute to common difference in behavior. According to Hofstede (2008), countries in East Africa and the Horn show a high differential in power between authority and subordinate. This means that the relationship between authority and subordinate, unlike in a democratic system, carries distinct roles and boundaries. Authority figures are respected and

since the characteristic of submission is highly valued in Islam, so is the submission of the child to the parent. Thus, there exists a clear distinction between the roles of adults and children in this society. According to Oetje, though, boys are able to challenge and question authority much more than girls are. The relationship between the Somali child and parent is correctional in nature (personal communication, Ab. Muse, February 1, 2011). Parents teach their children how to behave and provide for their primary needs. According to Abyan, “Children at home learn from their siblings because the Mom doesn’t have time to pay individual attention to the children” (personal communication, February 1, 2011).

The third space is created when transparent dialog about the meaning behind each framework and impact on the child can occur. The philosophy of third space is used in other contexts (Fitts, 2009; Hollinshead, 1998). The basic principles, though, are founded on the existence of equality of power between two sources. Inside the space integration, exchange of knowledge, mutual respect, and validation of core values occur. Members involved in this dialog do not map their understanding of another culture based on outward action, but instead reach for comprehension of the innermost significance that each action represents. The actual physical space does not need to be labeled or set aside because space for cultural dialog can be created anywhere. The word space is used to give a perceptible representation for the merging of disconnected cultural paradigms. There are no absolutes involved in defining the types of dialog which should transpire in this space. However, in order to exemplify a distinct point of difference between the two cultures I will briefly discuss the characteristics of individualism versus collectivism and how they relate to child development.

Individualism and Collectivism

According to Hofstede (2004), America shows more evidence of individualistic tendencies than any other culture in the world. This evidence contrasts with East African nations which show more collective tendencies. However, since Somalis do not identify as East African, this evidence is questionable. Oetje explained of Somalis that they are collective, but show less collective tendency than many other Africans (personal communication, March 16, 2011).

According to Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2007) in a study on parenting and the co-existence of individualism and collectivism, the contending concepts of individualism and collectivism have been studied and described using many different terms including; autonomy versus relatedness, competition versus co-operation, and dependent versus independent cognitive styles.

Nonetheless, the Western parent and educator often prioritize the installment of autonomic values over values of relatedness, and vice versa in collective societies (Tamis-Lemonda et al., 2007).

However, Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2007) argued that placing these two dichotomies in separate spheres does not serve to identify the depth of the interaction between the two that occurs in every individual. In other words, simply labeling difference doesn't always give way to progress toward the third space understanding. The line between individualism and collectivism is blurred. Each individual, in fact, will usually value characteristics of the other. For example, according to Smetana (2002), "Although European-American children expect and assert earlier autonomy than Mexican, Asian-American and African-American children, children in all cultures value autonomy" (as cited in Tamis-Lemonda et al., 2007, p. 6). Values related to individualism and collectivism can and do co-exist. Each individual and culture, though, prioritizes the values differently.

Thus, the third space dialog will acknowledge and draw on these commonalities, understanding that the arranging of value priority is inevitably different. The way an individual within a culture prioritizes these values plays a key role in influencing not only the development of a child but the interaction between individuals with differing priorities.

Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2007) labeled components of the two dichotomies that have been commonly identified as development goals, including: personal choice, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and self-maximization as values associated with autonomy. Values of family connectedness, group harmony, respect, and obedience are tied to relatedness. Again, the way in which the individual prioritizes these components is influential, but there is opportunity for the relator and the individualist to create dialog that may act to harmonize and level priorities which may be extreme or out of balance. The unbalanced priority may act as an inhibitor to the child's development. The unbalanced priority usually becomes culturally accepted and in turn, could contribute to societal disorder. According to Goudzwaard et al. (2007), an unbalanced priority could lead to dangerous ideology. There are two ways in which ideology interacts with reality: Either the ideology conquers human rational, ultimately corrupting the mind and spirit, or the ideologies are unveiled through human confrontation (Goudzwaard et al., 2007).

A pragmatic example of a possible unbalanced priority is, for instance, if the adult overly committed to guiding the child's ambition towards autonomy to the point where the child became selfishly motivated, losing sight of the way their actions impact those around them. One could argue that the value of autonomy amongst Western nations has already reached this disruptive point. According to the World watch Institute (2011), "The 12 percent of the world's population that lives in North America and Western Europe accounts for 60 percent of private consumption spending, while the on-third living in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa accounts

for only 3.2 percent” (Global inequities section, para. 2). South Asia and sub-Saharan African countries are collective, while most Western societies show high individualistic tendencies (Hofstede, 2008). One may argue that collective tendencies occur due to outside influences like resource scarcity. Nonetheless, the evidence remains, collective societies use fewer resources. Sadly, considering that resources are finite, population is on the rise, and so are living standards, a paradigm shift will have to occur in regards to consumption. I personally believe that this change will begin when the individualists start to adopt communal, collaborative, and collective existences which, regardless of contextual pressures, prove to be more resourceful lifestyles.

This example above indicates that value priorities in regards to autonomy versus relatedness are correlated with external factors like population growth and resource finiteness. Accordingly one must measure extreme priorities not only based on how children are directly affected, but on how the actions related to this value interrelate with peripheral factors. These outside factors will directly affect the success of the child in the changing globalized world.

Both Ayan and Abyan alluded to this aspect of relatedness in a positive light. They recognized that America’s individualism has its downfalls. Ayan stated, “America systems are cutting budgets and now the superintendent’s job is to cut budget, not empower children. How can they focus on supporting the bi-cultural children” (personal communication, January 18, 2011)? She went on to label partnership between family, community, and agency as key to improving this condition. She remarked:

You think you sit here, interviewing me for this thesis because you did it alone?

No. If weren’t for your friends, the people that referred you to me, or you family you wouldn’t be here. There is no such thing as I did it by myself and

Somali's don't understand that phrase. (personal communication, January 18, 2011)

Ayan noted that Somalis use and acknowledge social resource capital very well.. Collective cultures care and rely on one another in a network, understanding that humans need support and cannot rely solely on individual efforts. Ayan told a story of a time when she went to Dubai and stayed with distant relatives that she had never met: "I was out shopping and this woman came up to me and said, I'm your auntie, I've heard all about you and I can't believe you didn't come to stay with me" (personal communication, February 1, 2011). Ayan recalls her reaction of surprise that a perfect stranger felt such responsibility, desire, and conviction to care for her. She fondly draws on this characteristic when she explained that:

People in my culture are willing to support you when you need it. My Grandma wanted to start a business so she asked all of her family members for 50 dollars. They all gave money and Grandma said she would pay it back. She paid me back the money and some, now her business is very successful. This is the way we are. (Ab. Muse, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

As I sat, hearing her stories about dedicated family members that were willing to give time and resources to her for nothing in return I realized that the essence of relatedness seems to inherently teach social responsibility. Collective lifestyles are more sustainable, more conscious of promoting the function of the whole, and are valuable to the future of our changing, globalized society. I believe the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this section about how the presence of Somali culture in America can influence the educational pedagogy involves a realignment of the value of autonomy. The third space is where the dialog and actions occur that

will allow the autonomous white European- American to develop a higher value for relatedness. This may, in turn, develop skills that will contribute to the effective use of human and social capital which are needed if schools are to remain a supportive institution for the Somali child in a time of deepening recession. One could argue that the individual who overly prioritizes interdependence may need to become more independent in order to better manage societal pressures, especially when the collectivist moves to the individualist's realm. The third space will allow for this bidirectional learning and human development to occur.

Recognizing Human Inherent Worth

Until the benefits of each lifestyle and framework are identified and valued by both parties, the third space will cease to exist. If impact driven white American educators continue unidirectional focus on educating the Somali population, they cannot participate in a partnered learning experience. When I asked Ayan how she thought I could better serve the Somali families that I encounter, she said:

Just be direct with the parent on what you are observing; be honest on your confusion. Ask them to inform you about their child and culture. Then a parent is empowered to teach you. You're able to get more information from the parent when you go in not as the expert but the learner (Ay. Musse, personal communication, February 1, 2011).

In this type of interaction, the Somali individual is valued as a mentor instead of just a disciple. Rightfully so, according to Ayan, "The parent knows their children and their culture and you do not, you are the learner here." Every human being needs to be valued as both because we all contain inherent ability to be both. According to Wolterstorff (2008), justice is grounded in the

fact that we all carry inherent worth as human beings. Nicholas Wolterstorff is an established philosopher who, in his defense of justice as human inherent worth claimed that, “One should never treat persons or human beings as if they had less worth than they do have; one should never treat them with under-respect, never demean them” (Wolterstorff, 2008,p. 370). Ayan contended that her culture has been under-respected by their white American hosts and stated, “Educators are often intimidated to address Somali parents because of difference, language barriers, or whatever” (personal communication, January 18, 2011). She went on to tell a story of a time when her son’s teacher sent home a note saying that he might qualify for English as Second Language (ESL) services. She sent a note back asking, “What language does my child speak?” The teacher didn’t respond and when Ayan confronted the teacher in person she was apologetic about not taking the time to get to know the child before making this assumption. Ayan said, “I just wanted the teacher to take time to respect my child and not make assumptions. Americans make a lot of assumptions without really knowing a child. Somalis don’t take labeling well” (personal communication, January 18, 2011).

Ironically, Oetje explained that Somalis are just as guilty of labeling and assuming (personal communication, March 16, 2011). Nevertheless, empowerment of the Somali child and family depends on the recognition and validation of this worth. Furthermore, if the walls of cultural isolation which are built on discrimination and assumption are to be broken, both Somalis and the white European-American will need to consciously chose to participate in the principles of third space. Though, since power dynamics between privilege and oppression are imbalanced, so may the process of cultural understanding hold an unbalanced responsibility for those involved. According to Wolterstorff (2008) in speaking about biblical patterns:

The widows, the orphans, the resident aliens, and the impoverished were the bottom ones, the low ones, the lowly. That is how Israel's writers spoke of them. Given their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy, they were especially vulnerable to being treated with injustice. (p. 76)

Since Somalis fall in the position of greater vulnerability in the American context they may actually have less responsibility than those in the position of power and privilege to initiate interaction of open cultural dialog. As I have come to learn, in the attempting to participate in open cultural dialog with some Somalis, my responsibility in the realm of the third space often has to do with choosing to become aware of my own privilege, power, and bias. This means that I should continually relinquish of pride and control.

The third space is indefinite and should be ever changing. But the principals that make up this space are grounded in the inherent value and worth of every human and every culture. If every human in every culture has value and worth, then they all have knowledge and system of prioritizing values that is worth learning from. The third space is a meeting ground for the strengths to flourish from both cultures. It is also a space to address weaknesses transparently. It is a space for bridging culture by letting go of pride, control, and false systems of belief. In this space Somali children are able to wrestle openly and honestly with their bi-cultural identity and draw out the strengths of both. In this space educators and parents are brought together in equal partnership in order to provide the best opportunity for their child to learn. Here priorities are re-aligned to match the external demands of our ever changing, globalized world.

Experimenting with Third Space Principles

Attempting to follow my own advice I experimented with third space principals at a parent open house night. I was given the task of educating parents about discipline during this meeting. I began by sending out an e-mail to all members of the Somali community that I had interviewed for this project, seeking translation. I found SamSam Yusuf, a reconciliation worker for East African Community Services that I will reference later in this paper. I then did a bit of research on discipline, looking for resources in other languages, which I did not find. I found a site which I printed out to reference during the meeting. I attempted to meet with the parents in groups based on language.

I began with Hamdi Mohamed, a Somali mother of a 5 year-old boy in my classroom. The meeting started with a discussion about the word discipline. Hamdi didn't understand why we were meeting because we had just met a week prior for a home visit. SamSam asked me to explain discipline because the word didn't translate in Somali well. I explained what I had found in my research. The word "discipline" comes from the word "disciple" which means to teach. SamSam confirmed that the word "teach" translated well and that Hamdi understood why we were meeting. I then said, "Hamdi, I want to learn more about your culture and I want you to understand more about my culture so that we can form a better partnership which will benefit your child." As SamSam translated this, I saw Hamdi move her body forward. I gave her an example of a perceived difference that I had. I had noticed that she was very upset anytime her son came home with his shirt wet from outside or from washing his hands. I asked her if this was a sign of disrespect to her. She said, "Sort of, yes, but I am concerned about him getting sick." Before I could respond, SamSam addressed this concern in Somali by explaining that if the child is healthy, the immune system will overcome the body being cold or wet. I knew that this was a common concern among the Somali parents that she had encountered through her position at

East African Community Services from our interview discussion a month prior. I added the idea that if the immune system is given chances to be exposed to challenging elements, it may become stronger because it is given chances to overcome. Hamdi seemed to absorb this information as truth. She repeated in English, “Ah, ok, ok, ok.”

I went on, explaining that I am not trying to disrespect or improperly care for her son when I allow him to get wet. I said, “My culture tells me that being wet is ok, and that the benefits of allowing the child to explore and get messy outweigh the negatives. But I understand that your culture does not say the same thing and I will better supervise the way that your son plays in the future.” After I said this, Hamdi seemed more engaged in this conversation than in any we had had in the past six months. Her facial expressions were more animated than I had ever seen and she was repeating, “Thank you teacher; thank you teacher.” I got the feeling that this type of open dialog about culture hadn’t ever occurred between her and another American (H. Mohamed, personal communication, March 8, 2011).

After this, I felt the space to speak about discipline as I understood it. I openly explained to her how I felt when being at her home the week prior. She has four children under the age of five; three boys and one girl. She looked tired and I told her that. I told her that I cared for her and her family and I didn’t want her to feel tired. I noticed that during the home visit she had told one of the boys that she was going to put him in time out, but did not follow through on this threat. I told her, “Hamdi, if you keep telling the boys you will give them a time out, but don’t do it, they will learn that your words are empty and they won’t listen to you.” She again, nodded with a look of conviction. She then explained that her boys have so much energy, she doesn’t know what to do sometimes. She doesn’t feel comfortable taking them to the park in the complex because they don’t listen to her and she fears losing them. I said that I would like to help her

with this but that she would have to be willing to take some risks. We agreed that during the next conference she would consider allowing me to help her to take the boys to the park and practice following through on her discipline practices (H. Mohamed, personal communication, March 8, 2011).

I was careful not to come in as an expert during this meeting, but I felt that was exactly what I did. Still, Mohamed was very grateful and agreeable about the information I was sharing. However, I felt that the conversation was still very unidirectional. Surprisingly, after one of Hamdi's concerns was validated during the conversation she became captivated, the power shifted, and she was more willing to take information that came from my mouth as truth. Trust was built in that moment that I was able to recognize and openly acknowledge the difference in value priorities that we shared about something as simple as her son being wet. Oetje explained of this power dynamic between the privileged and oppressed that the person in the power role has the large responsibility of using it positively and not manipulatively (personal communication, March 16, 2011).

I'm excited to build on this opportunity for a more open relationship with Hamdi. Certainly my expertise and experience as a preschool teacher is worth sharing with parents and I do have tacit knowledge about discipline in the classroom context. I do not, however, have tacit knowledge about being a Somali parent in America. I want to learn more about Hamdi's experiences before I prescribe fixes to problems I perceive as parenting issues.

Part III: Physical Space, Community, and Cultural Integration

Physical Boundaries in Urban Space

Many of the Somali immigrants and refugees living in America have moved from rural, communal villages into urban spaces where physical boundaries have the potential to create isolation. Conn and Ortiz (2001) wrote about the city as a context for ministry. They addressed theories from well renowned sociologists such as Louis Wirth and stated of Wirth's theory on the city:

Wirth's focus was fixed on definite physical boundaries, on population size and density. And, asked Wirth and his supporters, what was the effect of this on our

way of life in the city, on what he called urbanism? Community is replaced by non-community. In the city the integrated life moves toward anomie (p. 159).

While this phenomenon may not occur for all Somali refugees, according to SamSam, physical boundaries do have an impact on the way in which Somalis experience community here in the United States (personal communication, February 1, 2011). SamSam was born and raised in Somalia for the first 10 years of her life. She admitted that she was privileged compared to others from her country. When she came to America, she was encouraged by her parents to continue on with her schooling. SamSam has a degree in transformation and reconciliation work. She noted that clan ties in America are just as strong as they were back at home and that members in the same clan will find each other here. However they do not always live close enough to visit or support one another (S. Yusuf, personal communication, February 1, 2011).

Certainly, every city has a unique cultural and spatial dynamic. So, in order to discuss space use in practical terms, it is necessary to draw attention to a specific city and place. Columbia City, Washington is located in South Seattle. According to Komo 4 News, reporting on the findings of the 2010 census, 98118 or Columbia City is the most diverse District in the Nation, housing over 154 languages (Census Bureau: 98118 the most diverse zip code in US, 2010). Denise Louie oversees one preschool site in Columbia City, located within the Lake Washington apartments. I am privileged to educate and be educated by so many young children and families from diverse ethnic backgrounds in these apartments.

During my frequent afternoon walks around the complex I have observed some of the ways in which this community uses its space. The playground inside of the complex is often vacant, even on sunny days. The community garden is fenced and locked. I often see young

children peek out at me from the closed blinds. According to SamSam, many families close their blinds out of cultural tradition (personal communication, February 1, 2011). Somalis used to have thick blinds back in their homeland in order to block the scorching sun. They would still be exposed to sunlight, however, during their trips to the well to get water or when they had to do chores outside of the house. The community has one meeting room where they hold ESL classes, tap classes for the children, special events, and staff meetings for the complex managers. The Somali families that I work with do not attend the ESL classes due to time constraints and the amount of young children in their household that need care. There is no option for child care during these classes.

The teens from Rainier Beach High school, the high school right across the street from the apartments, are seen spending time together in groups outside of the local Sars Market and Rite Aid parking lot. Lake Washington is also located across the street from the apartments, but during winter, spring, and fall very few community members stand on the lakeside to feed the ducks or enjoy the water's edge view. Even Beer Sheva Park and playground, situated on the water's edge, is nearly vacant. When I do encounter a passerby in this neighborhood, I usually advance a smile. But I often receive glances of disdain, fear, or avoidance in return.

Cultures stick together in this space. In my classroom, the Mexican parents share responsibility for dropping off and picking up their children. The two Ethiopian boys spend time at each other's apartments after school. The Somali parents assist each other in caring for and supervising one another's children when there is a need. When I visit the homes in the Lake Washington apartments for parent/teacher conferences, I often witness friends and neighbors from similar cultures casually visiting and sharing the living space as if it were their own. The

one commonality among these three cultures is that they are, according to Hofstede (2004), collective in nature.

In many collective societies the education and care of the child is the responsibility of multiple individuals. Abyan playfully recalled a story of one Somali woman who entered into her clinic with her child and fell asleep in the waiting chair. The child wandered through the clinic and finally one of the nurses awoke the mother to inform her that her child had been peeking in the patient rooms. Abyan was embarrassed for the woman, but said:

I understood; she really expected that since there were other women in the clinic that they would care for her child. She, for a moment, forgot that she was not back at home where women naturally care for other women's children no matter what environment they are in. (personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Abyan explained that in Somalia educating a child is not only the responsibility of the parent or the teacher, but of extended family and community members. Somali refugee families living in America are often made up of single parent units (Gelletely, 2002). A common situation is that the father has passed in the war and the woman and child are granted refugee status. Another common situation is that the father works many hours in order to provide for the family and is rarely present (Gelletely, 2002). Somali men are allowed more than one wife if they are able to care for them financially. Abyan mentioned that the absence of the father as an emotional mentor and primary care provider is common. Three of the four Somali families in my classroom are cared for a majority of the time by the mother. In two, the father is not present. Each of the four families has more than three children under the age of five, a result of common childbearing practices for Somalis. Oetje noted the reasoning behind this practice:

It is all about survival. In Somalia they needed to have more children to help on the farm; the more children they had, the more productive they were as a family or clan unit. Here in America they know they get more welfare for every child they have. They are taught in their religion that the only time one is able to lie is if their survival depends upon it. Here Somalis claim single parenthood and have more children so they can get money and who wouldn't do the same? (personal communication, March 16, 2011)

Regardless of reasoning, the results of these practices in America are that mothers carry a heavier burden of responsibility for childrearing than they did back home and this can cause feelings of isolation.

During one parent conference, I asked Ilhan Mohamed, the mother of a 4 year- old Somali boy in my classroom, "Do you have all of the support you need in your life to provide the best education for your son?" She asked Fatima, our official site translator, in Somali, what I meant by support. I continually have to remind myself that Somalis understand specific, direct, and practical language. I rephrased my question by asking, "Do you have time to spend with your son at home, in his classroom, and to form a good relationship with me?" She told Fatima that she had to work long hours; she relies on friends to care for her children while she works. On the weekends she is busy with cooking, cleaning, and laundry and cannot spend much time with her son. She has three children under the age of five with another on the way. I still have not met the father. I asked her, "What would give you more time?" She said that this was just the reality of the situation and that there was nothing she could do to change it. Even though her friends in the complex were willing to take in her three children, she still felt stressed enough to say that she didn't have time for her son. I saw exhaustion in her eyes. She informed us at the

meeting that she had just spent the past few days sick in the hospital. Still she made the effort to attend this meeting. I knew she held time spent with her son's teacher in high regards (I. Mohamed, personal communication, March 4, 2011).

I wonder how Illhan could feel that she had time; time for herself and time for others? The woman who spent a moment reverting back to her home life must have felt the availability of time as she fell asleep in the waiting chair. What triggered the sense of availability in that space? Abyan continued her story about the woman in the waiting room by explaining that:

Back home there are doors and windows to the house, but they don't separate the community. People came out of their homes all the time to work, gather water, or just spend sitting in community. People who live near to each other get to know one another and take responsibility for the children of the community. (personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Is this to say that in the Lake Washington apartments the windows and doors separate more than they did in Somalia? Why?

Illhan explained that she needed to work long hours to provide for her family and also had to cook and clean on the weekends. Work demands in America are a lot different than in Somalia. It is likely that many Somali refugees and immigrants can relate to Illhan's stress due to work demands in America. I wonder if Illhan might have more time if she lived in a community that shared responsibility like they did back home.

Somaliland Community Center and Community Connectedness

Somaliland Community Center in Seattle is a place where this type of shared responsibility and security might exist. Somaliland is open to all ages within the Somali community (Somali Community Organizations in Seattle, 2011). Here, seniors have the opportunity to socialize with their peers, learn English, pass on religious knowledge, and care for youth and children. Youth and children have a place to practice their homework with peers and socialize under adult supervision. For several years, all resources at the community were material donations and volunteer time given by the community members. Here education of youth and adults is the main priority. Over 60 youth stay in the house after school and close to 40 adults. Eventually the Somaliland wishes to start sewing, ESL, and tutoring classes (Somali Community Organizations in Seattle, 2011).

According to Whitlock (2007), in a study on the role that adults and space play on impacting youth connectedness, seven factors were identified that influence youth feelings of connectedness to their community. The factors are as follows: (a) quality of youth-adult exchange, (b) availability of outlets for creative engagement, (c) well- advertised opportunities for meaningful input, (d) safety, (e) perceived welcome in public spaces, (f) knowledge of community events, and (g) awareness of youth impact on community. It is hard to determine, without visiting, the way in which Somaliland measures up to these factors. Yet, it seems that this type of space use would give more opportunities for exercising these factors than would Illhans home where she and a few friends are the only adults responsible for caring for their children. According to Erikson (1968), in an analysis on youth, identity, and crisis, “The adolescent drive to negotiate safe, comfortable and constructive roles within the larger social environment provides a powerful opportunity for communities to positively influence developmental trajectories” (as cited in Whitlock, 2007). Further studies may be conducted on

the impacts of this type of space use on young children. One portion of the statement above to draw on and clarify is the meaning of larger social environment as it relates to community centers like Somaliland. Does Somaliland incorporate factors of integration in the larger community? Another question to address is: What kinds of space foster these feelings of community connectedness that lead to positive influences on the youth's development trajectory?

Integration and Community Space: Moving Beyond Boundaries

Jama Musse is the executive director of East African Community Development Council. He has worked in Seattle for nine years helping to resettle Somali refugees. He explained of his work, "There is so much to be done in terms of developing this community" (J. Musse, personal communication, March 9, 2011). He spoke about Somaliland Community Center, acknowledging that more spaces like this need to exist in Seattle, but unfortunately budgets are being cut. He confirmed that this space provides a great source of support for the families and children. Families do share responsibility for supervision of the child in this space and children and youth collaborate together to complete homework tasks. Although, he noted that communities like this need more integration into society because while they are a comfortable place for Somalis to congregate, they don't often promote cooperation with the larger whole of society. Jama claimed, "We don't want Somali's to continue to isolate themselves, this will not serve to develop their interaction in society. Interaction in the greater society is much needed because Somalis don't see the whole of how an American views education." Jama went on to explain that while peer-to-peer counseling is beneficial, it still does not allow the child to seek homework advice from an adult who is able to help.

Still, lack of support remains an issue in this community. I asked Oetje how she thought community and communal living among this population might serve to build better support networks. I questioned, “What if we opened the spaces within the apartment complex in order to allow more Somalis to live together?” It wouldn’t be like back home, but at least they would have more of an opportunity to be together. Oetje answered by explaining that the concept is noteworthy, yet is difficult to realize within an urban context. Here we worry about things like traffic, child abduction, and child protection services. Somalis cannot let their children out of their sight here in the busy urban centers of America. It’s true; the urban setting of Seattle could never mirror the rural space in Somalia. Other complications arise, according to Oetje, with communal living: “Back in Somalia the houses would be formed around in a circle and the women would sit outside together. But in that space the clan was still very close, like family. Here you don’t have that as much” (personal communication, March 16, 2011). She went on to describe the plight of some families that she works with who live communally; “They are tired of the fighting, the gossiping, and the invasion of privacy. These families like and need a little more privacy” (personal communication, O. Madany, March 16, 2011).

The topic of space formation as a bridge to community development has been studied for years. But does community building have to do as much with space as it does with our interaction between one another? Oetje works to involve churches, whose members generally consist of affluent Americans, in the cause of refugee resettlement. She went on to speak about integration among culture as a huge factor of escaping debt. She said, “What I am afraid of is what happened in our history when the Germans came here and had their own cities, the Dutch had their own, the Irish had their own, and the result was more segregation and imbalance” (O. Madany, personal communication, March 16, 2011). However, she maintained, “This has to give

and take from both sides. White European- American's have to be willing to move into those areas where Somalis live and vice versa.”

In a study done for the International Asian Planning Schools Association Congress, Habsah Hashim looked at ways in which harmonious community living could be attained in the urban setting of Central Shah Alam, Malaysia (Hashim, 2005). The doctrine outlined in this study focused on the principal of man's harmonious relationship to fellow man as the foundation of community development. According to Hashim (2005), the way that space is aligned impacts the way a community interacts. In an ideal community space there should, within walking distance, exist a playground for children, schools, grocery stores, community centers, and architecturally designed spaces for the community to congregate.

The Lake Washington Apartments upholds all of these elements. Southeast Effective Development is a non-profit community development organization that developed the Lake Washington Apartment complex (Southeast Effective Development, 2007). From my personal observations it seems they have put a lot of resources toward renovating and maintaining the aesthetics of the environment around the apartments. Unfortunately, aesthetics aren't what seem to draw out community in this population.

Going back to Habsa Hashim's foundational principal of harmonious relationship as a foundation of community, one might ask, if physical space fails to develop this relationship then what will? If space exists but nobody to build community within the space then resources are lost. My classroom is inside of the Lake Washington Apartment. Community is built every day in this space because teachers and parents are united by children. While the preschool exists to serve the need of early childhood education within the community, it also acts to draw people into relationship in order to promote a common goal of developing a successful child. Parents are

often invited for classroom parties, parent meetings, field trips and teachers visit the parents' house twice a year. The mission of Head Starts is to involve parents in the child's education and this indirectly has created community. Integration between cultures happens in this space not due to the mere reality that diverse ethnicities live in close vicinity to one another nor because the aesthetics of the surrounding area are special. Integration occurs because it is invited on a daily basis. The act of inviting encompasses the seeds on which community and relationship are built. Without people like Oetje who have expertise in the refugee community and the church, advocating for integration, the actuation of this relationship would never exist. This invitation not only has to exist, but it needs to carry a sense of repetition and perseverance behind it. Last year, I invited one parent nearly twice a month to stay and eat lunch with the children. Not once, last year, did she respond to my invitation. Her younger son is now in my classroom this year and she stays nearly once a week to eat lunch with the children.

I believe that less emphasis should be placed on space and more on invitation in regards to integration and community development within the Somali population. We did a project once in my classroom where I asked the children to give words that explained who we were as a community. We collected sticks and broke them to create the word that the children agreed on which was: together. The children also said that they enjoyed doing things in classroom with one another and not alone. We exist together partially because someone took the time to create a space, but the establishment of relationship occurs because teachers are hired and paid to advocate for integration and form relationships within this community.

Certainly every individual has their own preference about how they participate in community and some may be willing to give up privacy and space in order to gain more support of their community in a communal living space. But according to Oetje, "It has to do with their

choice. Just because we have the idea, doesn't mean they will choose this way of living" (personal communication, March 16, 2011). This statement stood out to me as one which directly relates to the essence of community development, service, and education. I can go out of my way, using my own will, ideas, beliefs, and efforts in order to guide positive change. However in the end, what matters, is not what I or we have done. Whatever truthful beliefs or theory we've mustered, models, or programs we have created, or change we have sparked in another human is insignificant. What matters is how the power was shared between the educated person of privilege who carries a certain amount of means to involve themselves in outward oriented change and the one who is viewed as oppressed and in need of changing. What matters is how we change and develop together because in reality, we are all in a constant state of changing. The nature of integration is mostly defined by a bringing of people from different religious or ethnic backgrounds to an equal association with one another. According to this definition it would seem that, we are all, regardless of location, on a journey of integration. Equality of association, again, can only occur in relationship. Togetherness fosters integration and integration is community. Spaces where invitation can lead to this ability to simply be together are necessary for the growth and development of the white European-American educator and the Somali community. We all need integration and togetherness and even a very young child harbors this profound knowledge that humans need to be in relationship with one another because they know doing it alone is no fun.

Conclusion

Relationship is the origin which creates potential for education to take place. If cultures remain divided, the type of education which Parker Palmer has fought to rectify will never be realized. We cannot continue to separate the known from the knower because when we do this,

education can no longer transform the human heart. When the human heart remains untouched, the action of the individual in relation to the known is unchanged and spiritual growth cannot occur. According to Palmer (1993), “The message education should convey is not identified by words like ‘fact,’ ‘theory,’ ‘objective,’ and ‘reality’ (though those words have their place). Instead, the message is called ‘truth’” (p.36). The English word truth is derived from the Germanic root troth (Palmer, 1993). With this word one person engages in a bond with another to form a close, mutually accountable and transforming relationship assured by trust and faith in the face of unknown possibilities. This is exactly the type of truth we should seek after as educators, parents, and individuals whose actions directly impact the future of the whole of humanity. In order to reach this relationship as a white European- American educator with a Somali refugee parent, I understand that I must first view culture not as a sequence of actions, a way of looking or presenting oneself, or even a mere source of identity. Instead, I should see culture as a map of intricate meanings and symbols that display the innermost worth and value of that individual under a host of circumstances and influences. More importantly is that I continually reflect on my own biases and on the way in which I exude my power and privilege on another. Because if I remain unchanged, I cannot participate in this journey of integration and I will never learn to step away from my own individualistic tendency or way of generating biased assumptions.

When our hearts reach into the unknown, the different, the unfamiliar we are forced to look back at ourselves and balance the unknown with the known. Managing this sort of balance requires the individual to undergo a transformation of heart. In these instances we become an invigorated and strengthened knower and a more equipped educator. I find that the potential for human connection across the vacant space of the great cultural divide is largely untapped.

Though, entering into that frightening space of the human unknown may be one of the most powerful vices which facilitate the attainment of truth that we are all searching for.

In personal reflection on the way in which this thesis project was written, it is evident, judging by the language, that these arguments come from the very position of educational power that I have addressed as needing to be leveraged. Using theoretical terminology, I will admit, is often a scapegoat of power. There is power in words. But sometimes they can be used in a way that is less than pragmatic. Looking back, it was not my intention to escape from pragmatism, but it is exactly what I did. My regret is that, generally speaking, this project was not formed in a way that could captivate both audiences to which it addresses. The biggest lesson I have taken away from this journey is that the place of privilege carries a profound complexity and responsibility that I am only beginning to understand. My journey of integration has only just begun.

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