Uncovering the Experiences of Teen-aged Bhutanese Refugees in the United States:

A Case Project Towards Relevant Refugee Youth Guidance

Shauna Metschke

Northwest University

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Abstract

This case ethnography uncovered insights from the resettlement experiences of Bhutanese 7th to 10th grade refugees who had arrived in Seattle, WA, from six months two years prior to the research. The researcher collected and interpreted ethnography from three sources: an assets-building workshop based on the 40 Developmental Assets youth development model that was facilitated through Action Research principles; semi-structured interviews with Bhutanese community leaders and the students' teachers; and research from the Nepal-based refugee camps as well as prior refugee youth resettlement research. English-language learning; social integration; and family and community dynamics emerged as the central themes in the Bhutanese youth case. Findings from the case study and from the very process of uncovering the resettlement experiences of young Bhutanese refugees implied that youth leaders, especially those working in non-profit organizations, ought to enhance English-language support, intentionally involve parents in programming, partner with refugee community leaders, adapt youth development models, and get to know students on an individual basis.

Keywords: Bhutanese, Nepali, refugee, English-language learning, acculturation

At estimates ranging between 80,000 and 90,000, more refugees fled Bhutan in the early 1990s than had fled nearly any other country (Evans, 2010; Giri, 2004; Muggah, 2005, Quigley, 2004). But with media attention overtaken by the Iraq war during their exile to refugee camps in Nepal, the plight of ethnic-Nepali Bhutanese refugees remained one of the world's most neglected humanitarian crises (Mills, Singh, Roach, and Chong, 2008). The refugees remained in camps with no real solution towards repatriation to Bhutan nor path to legal citizenship into the host country of Nepal. In October of 2006, the United States agreed to resettle 60,000 Bhutanese refugees to American cities (Evans, 2010). By the beginning of 2011, more than 34,000 had already made new homes in the U.S., with close to 2,000 living where I live, in Seattle, WA (UNHCR, 2010).

At the afterschool youth program for refugee students where I volunteer tutored, a group of ethnic-Nepali Bhutanese teenagers struck me as distinctive from other refugees, and their delicate balance of promise and vulnerability drew my attention. As a graduate student hoping to dedicate a career to working with young refugees, and tasked with carrying out a thesis project, I sought and was granted permission to lead an assets-building workshop with the Bhutanese students.

For quick clarification, because the students were born in refugee camps in eastern Nepal and never set foot in Bhutan, the youth largely identified themselves as Nepali. Some students, though, claimed both Bhutan and Nepal as their home countries, and others insisted on being called Bhutanese (L. Chin, personal communication, March 17, 2011). Their parents, ethnic-Nepalis with lineages of settlement in Bhutan dating centuries back, typically referred to themselves as Bhutanese. Throughout this paper, I use the terms "Bhutanese" and "Nepali"

interchangeably, but in accordance with context to describe the students, their parents, and their communities.

The assets-building workshop with the Nepali teenagers allowed me to begin to build a picture of their life worlds without encroaching too far onto grounds of annoyance, or even exploitation, felt among some resettled refugees from being over-consulted and under-served. With hopes for immediately practicable outcomes, I facilitated the workshop using Action Research principles and activities based on the 40 Developmental Assets youth development model (Benson, 2006). In response to early-emerging insufficiencies of the workshop as a conduit for a well-rounded understanding of these young people's situations, I extended my exploration. I also included literature on the Nepal-based refugee camps, prior refugee youth resettlement research, interviews with Bhutanese community leaders, and interviews with the students' teachers. Ethnographic methods guided my collection and interpretation of accounts from those sources, corroborating my presumed thesis: Insights from the resettlement experiences of teen-aged Bhutanese refugees in the United States, and the process of understanding those experiences, can guide youth leaders towards supporting Bhutanese youth, and all newly arriving refugee youth, in more relevant ways. Certainly, the very endeavor of unearthing the distinctive challenges and assets of the Bhutanese students substantially clarified recommendations for guiding refugee youth well.

Directions of Youth Development Efforts

Prior to moving ahead, I want to define ultimate directions of youth development efforts and the import of supporting young refugees as they adjust to their lives in the United States. Starting at a macro level, concepts of "development" used in international development or community development circles imbue directions for youth development. Sen's (2000) view of

development, for example, redirected attention from culturally-constructed priorities like growth of gross national product, technological advance, or social modernization, to the true ends that make societal development important—the real *freedoms* that people enjoy. Ensuring young refugees have access to opportunities versus merely ensuring a constitutive means, like academic achievement, would be a youth development goal aligned with Sen's *development as freedom* philosophy.

Long, (2000) in his exploration of community-based health in Africa, described another development philosophy through the biblical construct of *shalom*, where relationships to God, the environment, and one another are at peace. He submitted that when individuals embrace the complete range of relationships that define fullness of life, their communities embody shalom. A shalom-like trajectory for guiding refugee youth would move them ultimately towards community restoration. Perkins (2007), an influential community developer in the American South, conceived of reconciled and restored communities as he instilled a *receiving-to-giving shift* in young people. Emphasizing the Christian tenet that people are blessed not solely for their own ascent, but to be a blessing for others, Perkins built up strong indigenous leaders willing to learn and then serve their communities. Young people bolstered through these goals of youth development—access to opportunity, holistic reconciliation of relationships, and a receiving-to-giving shift—can ultimately change communities and societies (Long, 2000; Perkins, 2007; Sen, 2000).

Proponents of established youth development paradigms often pitch their stratagem on end goals of improved societies as well, and incumbent in those end goals are more individualistic aims of learning and maturation. Benson (2006), who founded a rising-to-prominence youth development model called the 40 Developmental Assets, referred to *thriving*

and its measurable outcomes to conceptualize the kind of healthy youth development that would progress society. Indicators of thriving youth include academic success, care for others and the community, affirmation of cultural diversity, commitment to healthy lifestyles, positive emotionality, openness to challenge, hopeful purpose, moral and pro-social orientation, and spirituality (Benson, 2006; Benson and Scales, 2009).

From the adult-posed theoretical stances presented so far, engendering positive youth development is about ensuring opportunities for kids to grow towards wholeness as individuals, in part, so that they can help bring forth societal restoration. But how do teenaged Bhutanese envisage the concept? Framed as "success" for cross-language communication purposes, participants in the assets-building workshop prioritized "working hard and passing," most prominently, but also "kindness, honesty, respectfulness, activeness, and creativity" as indicators of success, and thus the qualities to nurture through youth development efforts (Agni Raja, Muna, Madan, personal communication, January 31, 2011). Academic achievement might be viewed merely as one outward indicator, depicting only a slice of holistic development, no more than an inter alia means to freedom, and only crucial inasmuch its attainment leads to service. But doing well in school, and its perceived antecedent, learning English, weighed heavily on the Nepali students. Not necessarily exalting these two criteria in my own conception of positive youth development, but attentive to their preeminence for Nepali youth and their prevalence in the literature, academic success and English-language learning are addressed in due weight throughout this paper.

The Need for a Focus on Refugee Youth Support

Immigrant youth, including young refugees, constitute a growing part of American society with an increasingly vital role to play in the future of this country. In 2006, one-fifth of

all children living in the country was born to at least one immigrant parent, or was immigrants or refugees themselves. It has been estimated that by the year 2015, almost one-third of the children in U.S. schools will be immigrants or children of immigrants (Moreland, 2007). Those people that believe supporting young immigrants does not apply in their small city well away from immigrant gateways might be surprised to know that recent growth in immigrant populations occurred not in California or New York, but in Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Nevada. Midwestern states like Iowa, Minnesota, and Kansas endeavor to integrate immigrant influxes at levels unseen in decades (American School Boards Association, 2008). If not for refugee and immigrant children's own well-being, then for the health of the nation, their development must be effectively cultivated throughout American communities and cities.

A question worth answering is: Should guiding refugee youth differ from guiding any child in their development? Camino (1992) asserted, "Most of the established knowledge base concerning youth development in this country—what we have largely taken to be universal— represents in fact the experiences of White youth" (p. 1). Researchers for the 40 Developmental Assets, for example, took surveys from over 150,000 students across a swathe of middle schools and high schools in the United States to identify the 40 building blocks essential to helping kids thrive (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, and Sesma, 2006). Although the researchers tried to focus on supports that were hypothesized to have utility across ethnicity, the model's founder, Peter Benson (2006), admitted that as the paradigm came in to use across diverse communities, he expected insights on unique dynamics to emerge. The core assets would potentially need to be augmented with other culturally valued ones. As of early 2011, an application of the 40

Developmental Assets had not yet been formally researched among immigrant or refugee populations in the United States (S. Longfellow, personal communication, January 17, 2011).

Youth development efforts applied equitably will not necessarily benefit all kids equally. As will be relayed in further detail, unique challenges and often unrecognized or under-appreciated assets in young refugees warrant focused attention on them. There is particular urgency among high-school-aged newcomers who through inauspicious resettlement timing have much to make up in their schooling and English-language learning—sometimes in balance with supporting their families—to achieve their stated hope of attending college.

The Bhutanese Youth Case Project

At the time of this research, I was volunteering at ReWA (Refugee Women's Alliance), tutoring 3rd through 12th grade refugees at its afterschool youth program in Seattle, WA. Students' families had resettled in the Seattle area from countries across Asia, Africa, and South America, but the newest youth to the program had come from Nepal. I gained permission to facilitate an assets-building workshop with 7th to 10th grade ethnic-Nepali Bhutanese students who had arrived in the United States six months to two years earlier.

I recognized early on that ethnography (i.e., the endeavor of gaining an insider's view into aspects of these young people's lives and social worlds) from the workshop would provide a good basis for understanding Nepali youth experiences, but an incomplete picture of their histories, school life, family life, or community life. As such, I broadened my ethnography to incorporate interviews with the students' teachers and Bhutanese community leaders. Additionally, in greater measure than I had originally intended, I brought in literature from refugee camp life in Nepal and previous refugee resettlement research.

Assets-Building Workshop

I conceived of the assets-building workshop with The 40 Developmental Assets paradigm in mind. The 40 Developmental Assets (See Appendix for Adapted 40 Developmental Assets Assessment with complete list) constitute both internal characteristics like self-esteem or integrity and external supports like positive adult role models or involvement in youth programs. The premise of the philosophy is that these qualities or conditions can be developed for youth by community members, parents, teachers, and young people themselves (http://www.search-institute.org). Typically, the framework is introduced to a host of community partners that play a role in the positive development of children. I simply borrowed its strength-based philosophical orientation, as well as tools 40 Developmental Assets implementation experts shared with me.[1]

In essence, the purpose of the assets-building workshop was to help the Nepali participants become aware of their own assets profiles, to plan ways to develop their assets, and to become asset builders for others and for their communities. An unanticipated direction of the workshop led to the students gaining exposure to new assets and resources in the communities they were still learning to navigate. Workshop activities included hands-on exercises, surveys for individual assets identification, guided group discussions, participation at a city-wide youth summit, a community-mapping exercise, and action-planning activities.

Facilitating the assets-building workshop through principles of Stringer's (2007) Action Research methodology allowed me to place primacy on relevant and immediate outcomes for the Nepali youth in conjunction with carrying out ethnography. Action Research calls for subjects participating directly in a collaborative approach to inquiry that provides them with the means to take systematic action towards specific solutions. The assets-building workshop did assist the young Nepalis in extending their understanding of their situation to resolve the problems they

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[1] Contributors included: P. Stephenson and B. Forbes, who both had extensive experience implementing the 40 Developmental Assets in developing countries through their work with World Vision; S. Busby, a 40 Developmental Assets specialist in Omaha, NE; and E. Barbee, ReWA Youth Program's lead teacher.

faced, but time precluded me from bringing them into a coding process for findings from assessments, written materials, group discussions, observations, and informal interviews.

Participants. Nine ethnic-Nepali Bhutanese refugee students attending ReWA Youth Program participated in the assets-building workshop. Madan, Muna, Durga, Agni Raj, Yashoda, Puja, Sagar, Basu, and Kabita were 7th to 10th grade males and females who had arrived to Seattle from Nepal refugee camps six months to two years prior to the start of the workshop. Attendance fluctuated, with some of the students participating in only one or two of the sessions. The following are short bios of the more consistent participants:

Madan. A bright 10th grader who had been in the United States for six months, Madan was a leader in the assets-building workshop who did well in school. Madan identified mechanics, drama, traditional dance, and sports as his best talents.

Muna. Muna, Madan's sister, had also had arrived six months prior. The 8th grader went about her work happily and actively, but in near silence in English environments. She depended heavily on the other kids' Nepali translations to understand what was going on. Muna's favorite activities included sports, cooking, traditional dance, and reading.

Agni Raja. Raj was a 9th grader who had been in the United States for 11 months. He did not yet speak English fluently, but could get his point across and often helped translate for others. Raj appreciated living in a community that allowed him opportunities for traditional dance.

Yashoda. Yashoda was an outspoken and mature 7th grader who had been in the United States for over a year. She spoke English well, and actively participated in discussions. Yashoda liked dancing, cooking, and online social networking.

Durga. Durga, a 9th grader who had been in the United States for 16 months, seemed to be the cool girl, but with a quick laugh. She spoke moderate English, but deferred to her friends when in groups. Durga listed reading, traditional dance, and cooking as her favorite things to do.

Interviews with Teachers and Bhutanese Community Leaders

To gain a balanced view of the young Nepalis' situations, I conducted semi-structured interviews with adults who worked with the youth on a regular basis. I engaged in many informal discussions with Emily Barbee, the ReWA Youth Program Lead Teacher. I interviewed Lila Chin, the high school students' English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, Ganga Pokhrel, a Bhutanese community leader who also worked as a Nepali bilingual teacher at Seattle's immigrant newcomer school, and Hemlal Achayra, another Bhutanese community leader who led the Youth Program at ReWA's Seatac location. Interview questions concentrated on refugee camp life and the central contexts in which youth were adjusting to their lives in the United States—the schools, their homes, and the tight-knit Bhutanese community here in Seattle.

Literature

Having found just one study on Bhutanese refugee youth in the United States, a doctoral dissertation that included school experiences of Bhutanese students in a California high school, I consulted literature on life back in the Nepal refugee camps and resettlement literature on refugee youth from other countries to cohere an estimation of Nepali resettlement experiences prior to extensively working with them. Particularly the resettlement literature highlighting the experiences of other ethnic refugee groups adjusting to their new lives in the U.S. (and other third country host nations) should be held as informative, but not completely representative of the Bhutanese situation. As such, I arranged this paper with the literature and the Bhutanese youth case as complements. Each literature section is followed by juxtaposing case commentary.

The prominent themes in the literature that related most directly to those that emerged as prevalent in the Nepali case constitute the crux of this discussion. From the Bhutanese refugee camp research, these themes included education in the camps, participatory groups, and deteriorating camp conditions. I did not delve into the substantial literature on politics between India, Bhutan, and Nepal towards long-term solutions, nor concerns dealing with Maoist influence in the camps. From the dominant themes in the general refugee resettlement literature, English-language learning, social integration, and family and community dynamics emerged as the main themes from the Nepali case. Mental health issues featured prominently in the resettled refugee literature and in good measure for Bhutanese adults living in the refugee camps. However, the topic did not arise during the workshop or in interviews with the teachers. Acculturation patterns, another dominant theme in the literature entered discussions, but warranted dedicated focus beyond the scope of this study. Other possible themes that the search terms "refugee youth," "refugee resettlement," and "refugees (and) United States," failed to find, also have been left aside.

Limitations

I reiterate that the process itself of attempting to understand young Nepalis' unique experiences, and limitations arising through that process, proved instrumental towards more general recommendations for supporting all refugee youth. In the tradition of ethnography, this study takes researcher reflexivity as central to the analysis of the students' meanings (Taylor, 2002). With that analysis and prioritization of the Nepali experiences running through my own filter, I should share that I am a white American woman aware of the shortcomings of the educational institution, but with long-standing interests in helping others access educational

opportunities never-the-less. As such, my biases extended beyond cultural realms. I do not, however, believe I amplified the role academic achievement played in the young Nepalis' lives.

In addition, I entered into the research with moderate cross-cultural experience and teaching experience, but little practical experience in youth program leadership. My knowledge base was largely theoretical. At times, attempts to exercise theoretical conceptions without a good balance of tacit knowledge, failed to yield desired outcomes in the nuanced situation at hand. For example, the participatory methods required of Action Research proceeded with difficulty at times among Nepalis unaccustomed to a collaborative approach in the classroom. Moreover, the students' English language abilities—or their low confidence in displaying them—inhibited some kids from active participation. A few students, especially those who had been in the country the longest, dominated sessions. This dynamic undermined participatory priorities. Finally, community-mapping exercises and brainstorming sessions may have progressed smoother with students that were not still trying to navigate their communities or understand all of the options newly available to them.

Mindful of my experience level, I do not pose recommendations from this research as an antidote to what youth programs or schools currently offer—I did not do a comprehensive review of services available. And, I refrain from making specific recommendations to educators in the public schools, because I lack a sound understanding of the complex forces at play in the public education system. Even so, insights brought out from the Nepali refugee case certainly have implications for public educators as well as youth leaders working in non-profit organizations.

With respect to the ethnographic findings, a few limitations should be brought to the fore. Fluctuation in attendance, and only three participants attending all sessions made for a small and inconsistent sample. Also, I intentionally facilitated the assets-building workshop with primacy

on activities that would have immediate benefits for the youth over activities that would lend significantly to my ethnography. As such, I only guided one group discussion activity with the Nepali students. I refrained from directly interviewing the youth, even though interviews may have yielded deeper insights into their lives in less time. I did not use interpreters in the assets-building workshop or in interviews with the Bhutanese adults, and surely translation issues arose. In transcribing audio files, I omitted some of the students' and the adults' responses; I could either not be sure of the meaning of their statements, or doubted their understanding of my questions. I suggest gathering parents' perspectives as a direction for further study.

The first limitation regarding the literature was my emersion in it prior to ever working with the Nepali youth. I inadvertently made predictions about young Nepali refugees' experiences and in retrospect, I admit those biases guided some of my questions. I have mentioned the scarcity of Nepali refugee youth resettlement research to date. An additional literature limitation included discrepancies between the youth in focus throughout the most recent research literature and the Nepali youth. Much of the current resettlement literature highlighted the experiences of refugee groups from East Africa, these being the most recent to resettle in America. In smaller measure, I included older research on Southeast Asian youth as Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) cultural indices showed facets of South Asian (Nepalese/Bhutanese) cultures to be more similar to Southeast Asian cultures than East African cultures. Research on Indian youth in America obviously did not materialize from a "refugee youth" search and was not included in this review, although findings from Indian (or other South Asian) immigrant youth research might have aligned with the Nepali experience in various aspects more than refugee research from divergent cultures.

From my vantage point as a new practitioner mindful of Action Research, ethnographic, and literature review limitations, I position this project in uncovering the experiences of young Nepalis as a case meant to be taken amidst the more comprehensive research, with its recommendations to be taken in balance with readers' practical experience.

Background of Bhutan

Most Bhutanese teenagers now living in the United States never set foot in Bhutan. They were born in refugee camps in Eastern Nepal. I share the circumstances leading to their refugee status because many people in America, including those that support them in non-profits, schools and youth programs, are unaware of the ethnic-Nepali exodus from Bhutan.

Touted to be the last independent Buddhist kingdom, Bhutan is a small country situated in the Himalayas between India and Tibet (Amnesty International, 1992; Giri, 2004; Hutt, 1996; Rizal, 2004). Bhutan is, in fact, a multi-ethnic multi-religious state with three predominant people groups making up its estimated population of between 800,000 and 2 million people (a contested figure; Giri, 2004; Rizal, 2004). The Ngalong people migrated from Tibet somewhere between the 7th and 9th centuries, introducing Tibetan culture and Buddhism to Bhutan. At the time of the Ngalongs arrival, the region was predominantly populated by Bhutan's earliest inhabitants, the Sarchops (Hutt, 2003; Rizal, 2004). The Ngalongs moved in and forced rule over the Sarchops and a familial succession of Ngalong kings led the nation since (Hutt, 2003).

Ruling from the northern capitol in Thimpu—one of Bhutan's largest settlements at 25,000 people—the minority Ngalongs held most of the government posts. The Ngalongs promoted their Dzonghka language as the national language, and along with the Sarchops and smaller Bhutanese people groups in the region, practiced the state-sponsored Tibetan style of

Buddhism (Hutt, 2003). Collectively these groups occupying the northern region were referred to as Drukpas and intermarriage was common between them (Hutt, 1996).

The ethnic-Nepalis who lived in the southern border areas were mostly Hindus who spoke the Nepali language. Nepali people had been migrating from the kingdom of Nepal and settling in parts of India for centuries. Groups of them crossed into Bhutan and settled in the uncultivated malarial south in the late 19th century. Considered an undesirable hinterland, the kingdom's rulers welcomed the hardworking Nepalis to cultivate the southern border lands (Hutt, 1996).

The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGB) allowed the Lhotshampas, as they came to be known, to run their own affairs with minimal northern contact for decades. Then, in 1958, the RGB granted citizenship to the ethnic-Nepalis and began to pursue a policy of integration, training Nepali Bhutanese for government service and even offering cash incentives for intermarriage. These initial policies of integration were met with relative welcome by the Lhotshampas. But decades later, acts from the Bhutanese government began to set off unease, dissent, and according to some accounts, violence (Hutt, 1996).

In 1985, an amended citizenship act required both a child's mother and father to be Bhutanese citizens, altering the former act that required the father's citizenship alone. In addition, the 1985 citizenship act re-affirmed a 1977 act that declared 1958 as the official cut-off year for citizenship, but now required evidence of pre-1958 domicile. The 1985 act also installed requirements like fluency in Dzongkha for citizenship by naturalization (Amnesty International, 1992; Hutt, 1996).

In 1988, a census conducted only in the southern districts began to seek out illegal immigrants, classifying Lhotshampas in seven categories ranging from genuine "Bhutanese

citizen" to "non-National." The census led to agitation because it demanded unreasonable documentation requirements for a "Bhutanese citizen" classification. An inability to produce the documentation, even for those people with generations of lineage in Bhutan meant classification of "non-National" even when citizen cards or land tax receipts could be produced. In effect, the census mechanism detected over 100,000 "illegal immigrants" living in the south (Hutt, 1996).

In 1989, the Bhutanese national assembly determined that under a policy of "one nation, one people," *Driglam Namzhag,* a code of Buddhist traditional dress and etiquette should be further emphasized (Amnesty International, 1992). The tradition required men to wear the *gho*, a knee-length robe, and women to wear the *kira*, an ankle-length dress (Giri, 2004). The government later admitted that the code was regulated overzealously among ethnic-Nepalis who were unaccustomed to this dress. People could face an on-the-spot fine equating to $440 USD or imprisonment if they left their houses in their everyday attire (Amnesty International, 1992; Hutt, 1996). By the beginning of the school year in March, 1990, again under the banner of "one nation, one people," the Bhutanese government removed Nepali-language curricular material from all of the schools (Hutt, 1996; Hutt, 2003).

Understanding what happened next depended on who one asked. Some reports by groups and individuals with human rights interests omitted accounts of ensuing violence by Lhotshampas against the government altogether, claiming peaceful protests and attributing any violence to external political developments (Giri, 2004; Rizal, 2004). Bhutan's weekly newspaper, *Kuensel*, however, regularly reported acts of violence by ethnic-Nepali anti-nationals under the newly established Bhutan People's Party (BPP), including the killing of civilians and attacks on public facilities in southern Bhutan (Amnesty International, 1992). Refugees themselves described a situation where they were caught between the Bhutanese government and

the BPP. In Evan's (2010) ethnography, refugees in camps described a campaign of violence conducted by the BPP to ensure support for their movement amongst the southern Bhutanese people. It included forced donations, the demand of at least one family member joining the party, kidnappings, and attacks on those perceived to be non-supporters.

Mass demonstrations by Lhotshampas in September, 1990, catalyzed an amplified response by the Bhutanese government, the extent to which, again, surfaced angled by who one asked (Hutt, 2003). Human rights organizations claimed that mass arrests, flogging, torture, arson, looting, rape, and plunder by the RGB compelled the innocent Lhotshampa villagers to flee Bhutan (Evans, 2010). In contrast, the RGB admitted only to arresting the small number of criminals, and expressed surprise at an exodus of Lhotshampas, claiming that no force was used against them whatsoever (RGB, 1993, cited by Evans, 2010). In any case, from late 1990 onwards, forcibly or otherwise, over 80,000 Lhotshampas fled Bhutan (Rizal, 2004).

The refugees from Bhutan first crossed the southern border into India. After months struggling to survive there, the Indian government denied the refugees asylum or permission to set up camps, compelling them to cross into in eastern Nepal. There, they constructed the first refugee settlements of bamboo huts along the Mai River in Jhapa district (Hutt, 2003). The influx of refugees steadily increased throughout 1991, peaking in mid-1992 with around 600 people arriving daily. An estimated 88,880 total refugees had made their way into the camps by 1995 (Hutt, 2003). A 2007 census tallied the total population of the seven camps spanning Jhapa and Morang districts in Nepal at 107,923, which included considerable growth due to new births (Brown, 2001; WFP and UNHCR, 2008). An additional 15,000 unregistered Bhutanese refugees settled in Nepal outside the camps, and more than 20,000 were thought to be living in India (Brown, 2001; Rizal, 2004).

The Bhutanese Refugee Camps

American school teachers have raised the issue that refugee students entering their classrooms often arrive without previous educational or even general background information (Roxas, 2008). The subsequent pages describe the context in which young Nepali refugees grew up, attained their education, and developed their aspirations. Bhutanese refugee camps were distinctive in ways from other refugee camps, and those distinctions challenge the tendency to clump "refugees" into one category. In case commentary following this depiction of the Bhutanese refugee camps, I discuss the implications of camp circumstances on refugee resettlement, with particular focus on the quality of education in the camps and the prevalence of participatory approaches in camp community development.

Since 1992, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assumed responsibility for the coordination of all protection and assistance activities for Bhutanese refugees, acting as the funding agency for health care, education, water supply, sanitation, shelter, and non-food items. Registered refugees received rations of rice, pulses, oil, sugar, salt, and blended food from the World Food Program, and vegetable rations, kerosene, and basic household items from the Nepal Red Cross Society. The agriculturalist refugees could not keep animals and had no land to work, apart from a small plot around their bamboo huts. Every two huts shared one latrine. Camp security was generally good, although fires and floods posed potential threats to safety due to makeshift infrastructure (Brown, 2001; Hutt, 1996; Muggah, 2005).

Since the beginning of 2000, four non-government organizations (NGOs), Nepal Red Cross Society, CARITAS-Nepal, Association for Medical Doctors for Asia, and the Lutheran World Federation, shared responsibility with UNHCR for the activities in the camps (Muggah,

2005). The daily administration of each camp was coordinated by Camp Management

Committees (CMCs) that were composed of elected volunteer refugees. Implementing agencies

leveraged the Bhutanese refugees' hierarchical culture and intricate complex of social

organization during the early period of emergency and helped reshape community management

to reflect democratic standards. CMC guidelines, for example, required that approximately half

of elected representatives be women (Muggah, 2005). Muggah, a researcher with a broad base

of experience in refugee camps the world over, appraised the cleanliness and order of the camps

to be "unmatched" (p. 158). The refugee population exhibited low levels of mortality and

morbidity and high levels of primary, secondary, and tertiary education in comparison to the

general Nepalese population (Muggah, 2005).

Education in the Camps

Generally, education in refugee camps in both quality and achievement ranks

considerably lower than education outside camps. For example, for the 1998 Burundian

National Examination, out of 1233 students (from Tanzanian camps) only 46 pupils (3.7%)

passed with marks above 50%. Students in the Bhutanese camps, however, have outperformed

students not just in other world refugee camps but also in Nepal's general public. In a 1999

CARITAS-Nepal monitoring report, over 90% of the refugee students who took the district and

national examinations were successful, with a Grade 8 pass rate of 96.6% and Grade 10 pass rate

of 91.5%. UNHCR Education Officer, Susanne Kindler-Adam, acclaimed the Bhutanese

Refugee Education Program to be the best refugee camp education program world-wide (Brown,

2001).

The Student Union of Bhutan (constituted of Bhutanese refugees) originally initiated the

Bhutanese Refugee Education Program in November 1991. In 1992, UNHCR and CARITAS-

Nepal came with funding to support the program. The few trained teachers in the camps formed the Bhutanese Refugee Education Coordinating Centre which was guided by an advisory committee of headmasters and refugee education specialists from each camp. Volunteers from Ireland, who served as the first education experts, cultivated selected refugee teachers at each school into teacher trainers. Refugees gradually took over the responsibility of all curriculum development and in-service training (Brown, 2001).

Nine main refugee schools divided into sub-campuses for primary and middle grades supported 964 teachers and 40,204 students (in 2000), with class sizes upwards of 60 students. At that time, essentially all refugees of school-going age attended school, indicating the refugees' strong desire for education. Schoolrooms of bamboo and grass enclosed a large space for assemblies at each campus. Lower classes did not have desks, but most classrooms did have a table and chair for the teacher. Small libraries in each main school contained a few hundred books. Students were supplied with textbooks, stationary, and supplementary reading materials, and in Grades 4 and above students even received individual copies of textbooks for each subject (Brown, 2001). The provision of individual textbooks in Bhutanese camp schools trumped provision even in the Seattle Public Schools, where textbooks were prohibited from leaving classrooms. There was no computer access in the schools or in the camps (Massoumi, 2009).

English was the official language of instruction inside the Bhutanese refugee schools. In Grades 4 to 8, students studied the four core subjects of Nepalese curriculum (English, Nepalese, Mathematics, and Science), and optional courses in English II, Social Studies, Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan), and Bhutanese Value Education. For the top grades (9 and 10) the refugees adhered completely to the Nepalese curriculum and took the national School Leaving Certificate examination in Grade 10. Students in upper grades learned leadership, and girls

received self-awareness training aimed to mitigate early marriages. Various competitions, sports, and cultural activities were organized in the schools, including inter-school football and volleyball playoffs, debates, speech contests, essay competitions, and singing and dancing performances (Brown, 2001). Exposure to these activities, but little else, became evident in the assets-building workshop with the ReWA Nepali students.

Although on-going teacher training was relatively good, many new teachers were recent higher secondary (Grade 12) graduates and some were merely Grade 10 graduates. Teacher orientations and in-service encouraged child-centered methods, but in the Bhutanese culture where teachers were venerated as gurus, a lecture style of instruction dominated classrooms. Brown (2001) observed classrooms where students listened to their teachers unquestioningly, with active participation further deterred by large class sizes and a shortage of teaching materials. The collaborative assets-building workshop environment stood in contrast to these classrooms. It took additional prodding for participatory approaches to function well amongst the young Nepalis.

Participatory Community Groups in the Camps

Collaborative classrooms may have been the exception in the Bhutanese Refugee Education Program, but participatory youth groups did exist. In 1997, Save the Children UK initiated Child Forum to raise children's awareness about their fundamental rights and to lift up children as active community participants. Child Forum leveraged children's social capabilities to facilitate contributions to the family and the community. Democratically-elected young refugees received training in planning, implementing, and evaluating awareness-raising activities. They developed skills in discussing issues through debates and even drew attention for their debate skills at international events (Evans, 2007). Being unfamiliar with debate

programs myself, I was surprised when the assets-building workshop participants named debate as a favored activity.

In addition, the UK based non-profit, PhotoVoice, continued a doctoral research project that explored the use of photography as a tool for expression and international engagement. PhotoVoice deviated from Child Forum in that it aimed to provide a space for children's personal and cultural expression, mindful that Bhutanese refugee children had unique perspectives to communicate and could be effective advocates for themselves and their communities (Evans, 2007). The Bhutanese youth at ReWA demonstrated their aptitude for advocacy through examples I share in the commentary section to come.

The high degree of self-reliance and participation by refugee *adults* generated acclaim from the international aid community. The Bhutanese refugee camps were extolled as model camps. UNHCR facilitated a Community Development Approach (CDA) in the camps, reflecting the mid-90s shift in international development practice from top-down to more participatory initiatives. CDA moved beyond service delivery to treat refugees as agents rather than subjects of development (UNHCR, 2001). In addition to the contributions of Community Management Committees, Bhutanese Refugee Education Program, and Bhutanese Refugee Education Coordinating Centre, an output of CDA was the emergence of refugee groups like Refugee Women's Forum. These groups led an increasingly sophisticated network of activities in the camps with the support of UNHCR and its implementing partners (Muggah, 2005). Of note, Bhutanese leaders of the participatory groups in the refugee camps have brought management experience along with them to their refugee communities in American cities.

The Protracted Situation and Deteriorating Camp Conditions

Repatriation had long been the most desirable solution to the Bhutanese refugee situation. However, with Bhutan successfully stalling through several bi-lateral talks with Nepal despite pressure from the international community, Nepal holding its position of denying integration, and India, the regional superpower, reluctant to get involved insisting the matter to be purely bi-lateral, the refugees remained in limbo for nearly two decades. Attempts at peace marches back to Bhutan ended in arrests (Hutt, 2003). In 2001, a Joint Verification Committee initiated the identification of genuine refugees for repatriation, but the promising step towards a solution turned out to be somewhat of a farce. Only 2.5% of the refugees were verified as bona fide Bhutanese citizens in the only camp it was administered, and the process was halted due to an attack on the Bhutanese verification team by aggravated refugees (Evans, 2010; Hutt, 1996; Rizal, 2004).

The frustrations and difficulties common to protracted refugee situations arose in the Bhutanese camps as well. Approximately 1700 refugees were employed by UNHCR and the implementing NGOs for small incentive pay, and another 3,000 worked as volunteers (Brown, 2001). Officially, refugees were not legally permitted to own land, leave the camps, or engage in political activities (Muggah, 2005). Although, entry and exit from the camps required official permission from government representatives, it was reportedly quite easy for the Nepali-speaking refugees to mingle with the surrounding Nepalese population. Some refugees did go outside the camps to work on farms or building sites. For those without jobs inside or outside the camps, forced to depend on international aid, there was very little to do (Brown, 2001; Muggah, 2005).

As UNHCR's programs in Nepal suffered falling budgets for the last several years, discontent with provisions by UNHCR and its implementing partners grew. The absence of a

durable solution, a lack of employment and further educational possibilities, and the refugees'

growing levels hopelessness led to a rise in prostitution, a spiraling incidence of mental illness,

and heightened vulnerability to forced recruitment of youth by Maoist insurgents. Muggah

(2005) interviewed an experienced doctor who had previously worked in Afghanistan where

psychological trauma was acute. The doctor noted, "The levels of mental illness among the

Bhutanese are the highest I have ever seen" (p. 160). Evans (2007) added to the list of corrosion:

a rise in domestic abuse of children, exacerbated by alcoholism and/or polygamy in some

families; gender-related problems including girl trafficking, rape, and early marriage (especially

of teenage girls to older men); and discrimination in treatment between boys and girls. School

attendance declined and School Leaving Certificate pass rates plummeted to 70% by 2004 and

then to 41% by 2005.

In keeping these concerns in context, it should be noted that the general welfare of

refugees was still high in comparison with other refugee populations, and similar problems were

also present in the host country of Nepal. Even so, the prevalence of these issues caused many

resourceful refugees, including university-educated leaders to leave the camps. This downturn,

and the ensuing leadership drain that exacerbated the deterioration, threatened the collective

livelihood of the Bhutanese refugee community (Muggah, 2005). Even in my short

conversations with the Nepali youth about the Bhutanese camps, dire conditions, still apparently

prescient in their minds, comprised the depiction they relayed.

Moving Forward

With repatriation turning out to be a less-than-likely solution, in October 2006, the

American government (among others) offered resettlement places for 60,000 Bhutanese refugees

(Evans, 2010). Some refugees opposed the proposal of any other durable solution except for

repatriation. In August 2007, the Maoist-motivated Communist Bhutanese Party along with its fear-based following committed collective violence against the pro-settlement refugees. Although the Communist Bhutanese Party demanded that the Nepal government stop the resettlement process, threatening more attacks, the large-scale resettlement of Bhutanese refugees went forward. By December of 2010, over 40,000 ethnic-Nepali Bhutanese refugees had started new lives in third countries, mostly in the United States (UNHCR, 2010).

Case Commentary on the Bhutanese Refugee Camps

  Education in the camps. H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011), a teacher at ReWA's Seatac Youth Program, recounted being a member of the Bhutanese Student Union and initiating Bhutanese Refugee Education Program in the refugee camps:

> In the beginning I taught for a couple of years as a volunteer service, and we established all the schools and developed the basic curriculum. And then, we tried to get it through the government of Nepal, and we negotiated that curriculum to get approved so that when you take the standard test you can validate. So, those things we did initially. Then, the kids who were able to pass their high school through grade 10, pass their public exam, CARITAS-Nepal provided extra support with some funds in order to pay the tuitions for the school for the next two years…outside of the camps.

When I mentioned that the education in the camps was acclaimed to be the best refugee education system in the world, H. Achayra replied, "Yes, I know we felt like that because when I came here and then when we started working with different groups of the refugees…" He trailed off and then continued, "You know, we worked hard, and at least [a good education] is something the [Bhutanese] kids got."

The quality of Bhutanese Refugee Education Program likely accounted for Bhutanese refugees' ostensibly easier transition into the American education system than other refugee groups. L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011), an ESL Department Head at Rainier Beach High School who had worked in the Seattle Public schools for over twenty five years, relayed that the Nepali kids arrived to their American schools with higher academic levels and higher levels of English proficiency than other immigrant groups.

H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011) also corroborated that the medium of instruction in the Bhutanese camp schools was English, albeit, he clarified, British English spoken with the strong accent of Nepali-speaking teachers. In addition, although English was the official language of instruction, Nepali dominated as the practical language of instruction. Even so, in one display of higher English literacy at arrival, a new ReWA 9th grader who had been in Seattle just four months, asked me to edit her English essay on the exile of the ethnic-Nepali people from Bhutan. The essay was already nearly grammar-perfect.

When I learned of the permeability of the camp borders, I conjectured that an availability of opportunities outside the camps in Nepal possibly influenced what I originally perceived to be a college-going culture in the Bhutanese community. H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011) relayed:

> There wasn't a situation where everyone [had to stay] within the boundary. It's
>
> something flexible….People are back and forth….If you had to go to school maybe five
>
> miles away you would take a bicycle….I hear in other refugee camps, you weren't
>
> allowed to leave, but that was not the situation in Nepal.

In fact both Bhutanese community leaders that I interviewed, H. Achayra and G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011), completed their Bachelor's degrees outside the

camps in India through scholarships. But the men also conveyed that those scholarships were quite rare and even less obtainable as time went on. Very few students, in reality, went to university at all.

Participatory community groups in the camps. H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011) and G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011), presumably drawing from their camp leadership experience in Bhutanese Refugee Education Program, were waiting on their 501(c)3 non-profit status for an organization they had formed called Bhutanese Community in Washington.

I was interested to learn of the participatory youth programs in the camps especially in conceiving the assets-building workshop. I thought some past experience with these groups might offset the nature of their classrooms in the camps. The ReWA students had not heard of PhotoVoice, and did not mention participating in Child Forum. As I relayed earlier, my participatory methods in the asset-building workshop proved difficult to carry out at times. The students responded more readily when told what to do rather than asked what they would like to do. In contrast, they did demonstrate agency by often asking adults for help. Another demonstration of initiative took place at a youth summit resource fair. A group of Bhutanese students that were asked to man the ReWA table wandered off to visit the other tables. When they didn't return after some time, I went to look for them. I found them answering people's questions about Bhutan at a table they had spontaneously created to represent "Bhutanese in America."

Muggah (2005) and Evans (2007), researchers who spent time in Bhutanese refugee camps discussed the implications of empowering youth and inculcating people in democratic approaches in a protracted refugee context. Evans submitted that the empowering kids to sound

their voices towards change in their community primed them for revolutionary action:

Empowered kids made attractive potential recruits to Maoist-inspired groups. Muggah

highlighted that as the UNHCR taught people of their human rights, their cultural patriarchal

norms shifted. Democratically-minded ethnic-Nepali refugees would become less desirable to

the Bhutanese monarchs, and repatriation would become even less of a possibility.

Although in the protracted context of the refugee camps, unintended outcomes of

participatory groups could be dire, democratically-minded kids, who have been taught to create

their own futures rather than passively accept them, may adapt well in an American culture that

exalts individual initiative. However, empowering refugee youth ought to be entered into

sensitively, with consideration of the effects on already disempowered refugee parents (discussed

in later sections) so as to account for the health of whole communities. With regards to the

democratization of adults in the camps, I tender that Bhutanese leaders cultivated through

management opportunities in the camps are a community asset to be recognized and leveraged

by anyone coming alongside the Bhutanese in their adjustment.

The protracted situation and deteriorating camp conditions. H. Achayra (personal

communication, March 22, 2011) reported that the camps began to deteriorate as far back as

1998. The Nepali students, who would have entered the so-deemed deteriorating schools from

1999 on, shared negative opinions of camps schools. Yashoda (personal communication,

February 14, 2011) in response to my inquiry about the camp schools, replied, "No! Definitely

not good." Madan (personal communication, February 14, 2011) added, "Not government

school. It's really bad….Teachers never teach us." Then, perhaps in hyperbole, Yashoda began

to talk of violence in the schools: "One time a teacher killed a student….They used to slap the

students." Hyperbole or not, the students' judgment of the poor quality of the camp schools came through clearly.

Moving forward. G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011) shed light on what happened when the offer to resettle to the United States came:

When there was negotiation for the settlement, there was three options, back to home country, local assimilation, and then third country resettlement. There was two options that were really not worthy. There was no situation [to go back to Bhutan]…For local assimilation you had to have marriage certificate with Nepalese lady, so there was not possible, so that is why we made our effort.

When I informally asked him about tension arising from the decision to resettle, G. Pokhrel simply said, "We don't really like to go back and discuss about the matter." He, for one, was more interested in moving forward.

Refugee Youth Resettlement

English-Language Learning in the Schools

Students who enter high school as English-language learners have just a few short years to catch up with their English-speaking classmates to meet academic requirements for graduation. Wilkenson (2002) cited Watt and Roessingh's (1994) finding that 74 percent of ESL students (i.e., immigrants and refugees) did not complete high school in Calgary, Alberta. Wilkenson (2002) herself found that up to one-half of the 91 refugee youth in her study were failing in the Canadian school system. The other half were, "for the most part in classes leading to post-secondary education" (p. 176).

English-language learning programming. Of course, a number of factors play into a refugee student's ability to learn the language of their new country and consequent academic

achievement levels—age of arrival, number of brothers and sisters, proximity to other target language households, and previous first language education. But the nature of ESL support in the schools dominated the discussion, and often debate, on English-language learning in the literature (Loewen, 2004). In the context of a large ethnographic study on the experiences of immigrants at school, Olsen (2000) reported that most American high schools provided some kind of ESL program or sheltered instruction in the mainstream. The national shortage of teachers trained in second language acquistion, however, meant that a majority of classrooms failed to provide strong English-language development. Oikonomidov's (2007) research on Somali girls in American highschools revealed that in many classroom environments, class time was spent on activities and independent study. These classrooms, where little communication in English took place and the students struggled to understand the instructions of the teachers, were not conducive to acquiring English-language skills. Roxas's (2008) study on the educational experiences of resettled Somali Bantu high school boys paralleled Olsen's and Oikonomidov's findings. The boys did not find a supportive environment at school to help them acquire academic English language skills. Typically, the boys were provided with one to two classes of ESL support in their first year and even less support in their second year of school. One Somali boy with limited English was placed in mainstream classes in his first year struggled without any ESL support.

Two types of second language proficiency have been identified: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP; Loewan, 2004). BICS can develop as a result of exposure to language through communication, but CALP (i.e., academic writing and reading comprehesion) is much more difficult to develop. Collier

(1987) found that it may take between four and eight years for children with low English proficiency to reach the average grade-level CALP of their English-speaking peers.

Teachers' training and support. Most refugees tend to resettle where rents are low in poorer city neighborhoods (Dumbrill, 2009). Teachers, especially in under-resourced schools with high enrollments of immigrant and refugee students, explained how challenging it could be to teach English-language learners arriving in their classrooms with little advance warning, unaccompanied by background or previous academic information (Roxas, 2008).

Strekalova and Hoot (2008) pointed out that teachers in the United States are a relatively homogenous group. The majority are White and monolingual coming from secure middle-class backgrounds. Roxas (2008) relayed that despite the large number of school-aged refugee children living in their area, teachers in his study reported that they did not know how to support refugee students. Even in well-resourced schools, teachers have reported the difficulty of teaching students with varying degrees of English proficiency and continuity in formal schooling. Furthermore, teachers in Roxas's study reported having received little in-service training or support from their school district in meeting the special needs of refugee children. Nominal knowledge about the Somali Bantu people and their history at times led teachers to confuse the Somali Bantus' limited English experience, limited formal schooling, and lack of knowledge of U.S. public education, with low intelligence or an inability to learn. The lack of appropriate language support in the schools, training, and ecouragement by teachers, and the ensuing discouragement in academic failure, leads many second language learners to drop out and never attain full English literacy (Olsen, 2000).

Case Commentary on English-Language Learning in the Schools

Through a guided group discussion and various assessments, the Nepali youth at ReWA who defined success largely, although not solely, as "passing," identified learning English as their biggest challenge, the aspect of adjustment that might keep them from succeeding, the facet of support they felt was lacking, and the central subject of their youth program (and school) improvement recommendations.

For example, in a guided group discussion activity, I gave the three students present ten candy hearts each (on Valentine's Day).   I then asked the students several questions. For each question I instructed them to allocate their candy hearts to pre-determined answers that I had written on paper hearts placed on the table in front of them. Students could split up their hearts and allocate them to different answers if they so chose. In response to the question, "What is your biggest challenge—the thing that might keep you from succeeding?" the students placed about twenty of thirty total hearts on "learning English." The answers "school work," "family," "my attitude," and "my friends" also received heart votes. In response to the question, "If you could tell adults in this [ReWA] youth program one thing about how they could help you better, what would you tell them?" Yashoda and Durga (personal communication, February 14, 2011) both answered, "More English support." Madan (personal communication, February 14, 2011) also replied, "More English," but added, "More service hour, learn about America, learn about the rules of America, Washington" When I asked, "What would you improve about your school?" Madan, replied "English," and Yashoda agreed, "Of course, English." To learn English also came out as a central reason the youth attended ReWA.

Although further reiteration may be unnecessary to convey the weighty position learning English held in young Nepali's lives, I include one final example. To raise awareness towards their own assets situations, the students took a 40 Developmental Assets survey. "English

proficiency," evidently an assumed asset, was not included in the list of 40. I adapted the survey to include spaces for students to share important assets missing from the list. Two of four Nepali students taking the assessment wrote in, "speaking English" as an unidentified asset.

English-language learning programming. In Seattle Public Schools, some arriving refugees with very low English proficiency had the opportunity to attend an immigrant newcomer school called Secondary Bilingual Orientation Center (SBOC). Students attended SBOC for one semester or one year before entering the regular Seattle Public Schools. Other students entered the regular public schools immediately. Depending on results from a reading and writing assessment, they participated in varying degrees of a mixed curriculum of mainstream and sheltered-English classes (i.e., subject classes taught by an ESL teacher). L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011) disclosed that inclusion (or mainstreaming) was the official policy of the Seattle Public Schools but that ESL teachers often ended up teaching subjects like Language Arts or History to English-language-learners. E. Barbee (personal communication, January 14, 2011), ReWA Youth Program's Lead Teacher, shared with me that the kids who went to SBOC seemed to adjust better than kids that did not have that opportunity.

L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011), redirected my inquiry about English-language-learner graduation rates at her school, Rainier Beach High School—intentionally or not, I did not know. She instead told success stories of high-achieving ESL students. L. Chin thought it was too early to tell how far the Nepali youth would go scholastically. H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011) thought that most of the students would graduate, adding that some were already attending community colleges. He also reiterated that it was too early to conclude what Nepali youth in America would achieve academically. The students themselves expressed an assured desire to go to college but less confidence in whether they

actually would get to attend (Durga, Madan, and Yashoda, personal communication, February 14, 2011). All three guided discussion participants placed all of their candy heart votes on "I want to go to college," but when asked if they thought they would go to college, Durga and Madan placed their hearts on "I don't know."

Teacher's training and support. Due to an open-attendance policy that allowed parents to send their children to any school in the Seattle Public School District regardless of residence, the attendance at Rainier Beach High School which is located in a part of the city perceived to be run-down and dangerous had declined to 400 students. Although even SBOC counselors were reluctant to refer its new immigrant students there, L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011) stressed that because the school was small with a diverse population, including 25% English-language learners, Rainier Beach was actually a good school for ESL students to attend. Teachers there were accustomed to dealing with the intricacies of varying levels of English in their classrooms, she thought.

The Nepali students relayed a mixed report with regards to general support from teachers. Yashoda (personal communication, February 14, 2011) shared, "Some [teachers] help, some do not." Madan (personal communication, February 14, 2011) added, "Half and half. Some of the teachers don't help. My school teachers never understanding me what I am saying."

Yashoda (personal communication, February 21, 2011) showed me her online report card as we were trying to pull up a homework assignment from her school's website. Yashoda was earning all As, but one E (a 46%) in her U.S. History class. Yashoda complained that her teacher didn't think she did her homework well, and didn't give her an option for a second submission like her other teachers. Was her History teacher holding her to a high standard, thus reflecting high expectations, or was he inept or unwilling to support Yashoda in her unique situation?

Adding to the frustration of difficult homework for the students was a Seattle Public

Schools' policy that disallowed textbooks from leaving the classroom, thus forcing students to

rely on their sometimes incomprehensible notes. The students, who were able to bring home

their textbooks even in the Bhutanese refugee camps, struggled with this policy. And, as a tutor

at ReWA, I too was often aggravated while trying to help students with difficult Math,

Chemistry, or History questions without being able to refer to a textbook.

Frustrations aside, the Nepali students did recognize several teachers as assets in their

schools. In a community asset-mapping exercise where students wrote assets on small post-it

notes and stuck them within the appropriate sphere on a map of concentric circles—

"neighborhood," "community," "school," or "city"—most of the assets posted in the "school"

sphere named teachers. In another exercise, students created a web of assets by naming one,

pinching yarn, and passing the ball of yarn to someone sitting across from them in a circle, who

would then follow the same steps. Agni Raja (personal communication, January 31, 2011) cited

a teacher that encouraged him to speak up as an asset.

Again, it is not my intent to challenge the current ESL, teacher-preparation, or general

English language-learner support in the schools as much as it is to reiterate that students report

needing more support academically, and even more prominently, with learning English. Youth

programs outside the schools might be well-positioned to accentuate their role in these domains.

Social Integration

Tiexiera and Wei (2009) explained that for refugee groups who settle in enclaves in

immigrant reception areas close to city centers, the sufficiency of settlement neighborhoods to

provide access to safe and affordable housing, good education, and employment, but also social

integration, factors significantly into their successful adjustment. Reception by the host

community has been identified throughout the literature on resettled refugee youth development as central to successful adaptation, as well. Schools, along with resettlement support services, health and social services, and the community at large playing a crucial role in assisting children to adjust and integrate into society (Fantino and Colak, 2001).

      Discrimination, acculturation, and identity construction. For all kids, a sense of belonging is critical to accomplishing a central task of adolescence—developing a positive sense of identity. Refugee adults can buffer discrimination by an already established sense-of-self developed in their countries of origin. But refugee children can lack meaningful connections to their home countries, so they are prone to evaluate themselves by the standards of people in their new country (Zhou, 1997). For refugees pierced by multiple spears of discrimination, feeling like they are meeting the standards of their American-born peers can be difficult. The girls in Guerrero and Tinkler's (2010) photo-based study with Somali teenagers in the U.S. were vulnerable to quadruple marginalization—as female, ethnic, religious (outwardly visible by veiling), and linguistic minorities. Matsuoka (1990) found that Vietnamese refugee youth who did not conform to styles of dress, social conduct, and idiomatic language were also often rejected by their White American age-mates. The Vietnamese refugees responded to discrimination and rejection by either isolating themselves or by attempting to quickly acculturate. Due to a policy of dispersal of Vietnamese refugees at the time of Matsuoka's study, he was referring to individual isolation. Acculturative separation also occurs more collectively as ethnic enclaves isolate from the social fabric of their cities.

      Acculturation has been described as culture change resulting from continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups. Originally posed as a group-level dynamic with both groups experiencing change, albeit usually with much more influence transposed from the

dominant group onto the non-dominant group, acculturation is now also recognized as a phenomenon in individuals whose cultural group is collectively experiencing acculturation. Individuals and groups have four acculturation options: assimilation (relinquishing one's cultural identity), integration (some maintenance of original culture and some adjustment to the larger societal framework), separation (segregation when imposed), and marginalization (loss of cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society; Berry, 1988).

Integration, also called biculturalism, was posed by psychologists as the most desirable acculturation pattern for healthy identity construction in young immigrants (Zhou, 1997). But for the refugee child who encounters discrimination while developing their identity and simultaneously trying to bridge generational and cultural gaps, perhaps more stressful than attempting to belong to two cultures, is the threat of marginalization—the threat of belonging to none (Fantino and Colak, 2001). Steppick and Steppick (2002) found that as opposed to refugee adults for whom language acquisition determined acculturation, for youth, discrimination was the largest determinant on acculturation. It may come as no surprise, then, that discrimination also has been shown to have significant effects on mental health. Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln, and Cabral (2008) uncovered that for English-speaking Somali adolescent refugees between the ages of 11 and 20 who had resettled in the U.S., perceived discrimination was the strongest predictor of depressive symptoms.

Social aspects of English-language learning. I return breifly to English-language learning and the social climate in which that learning occurs—predominantly, the schools. In a statewide study in California, 70% of the high school students reported severe tensions between immigrants and American-born teens—much of it focusing on language. The social dynamics

of the schools involved rejection, putdowns, and efforts to freeze immigrant newcomers out of the social world of English speakers (Olsen and Chen, 1988, as cited by Olsen, 2000). Unwelcoming behavior, or worse, hostility towards immigrants and refugees, affected whether and how well they learned English (Olsen, 2000).

Conversely, because the socio-cultural process of language learning often seeps into the process of identity construction for newcomers, refugee students have added motivation to learn English. In *Made in America*, an in-depth ethnography on immigrants in U.S. public schools, Olsen (1997) offered that when English-language learners invest in a second language, they often do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources. Language learning becomes a significant cornerstone in how immigrant and refugee students come to understand and constitute their lives in American schools.

In order to belong with their American peers, refugees have to learn not just the English language, but the dominant linguistic code. In Oikonomidov's (2007) research revealing how Somali high school girls dealt with language learning and discrimination, the Somali students battled with eliminating factors that could contribute to their alienation from their classmates. For example, the participants were aware of how their pronunciation affected the perceptions of their peers. Working hard on their accents to avoid being targeted for the way they spoke English was creating another means for them to belong in school. The Somali youth invested in language learning, knowing that it was a necessary milestone in the potential of acceptance by their peers and in their progression in the academic life at school.

In sum, English-language learning and discrimination have multi-directional correlations. Differences in language exasberate negative inter-group attitudes, and expereriences with those

attitudes and forthcoming discrimination affect language acquistion for refugees (Loewen, 2004).

        Differential treatment by adults. With the school day structuring most of the peer relations, leisure activities, and extracurricular learning that shape a refugee child's identity, teachers and program leaders have a role to play in providing a safe environment for positive identity construction (Steppick and Steppick, 2002). But through the differential quality of education they provide, teachers have been shown to be perpetrators of discrimination themselves. In Roxas's (2008) study on Somali Bantu boys, teachers undervalued the boys' courage, tenacity, and resourcefulness, and discredited the boys' abilities in their first language. A Somali girl from Guerrero and Tinkler's (2010) study described her teachers as follows:

        Maybe the education has been missed, mistreat, just because we are refugees and everything we don't get that much good education, and [they] not believe in that we can learn. People just assume that we are not good enough. People just assume that we are not gonna be anything, only that we are gonna be a street cleaner or a window washer, so they don't believe in us. That's how they give us education. (p. 55)

Misinterpretations of culturally-constituted behaviors can also lead to deficit-oriented attitudes of teachers towards refugees (Tadesse, Hoot, and Watson-Thomas, 2009).

        Hamilton (2004) recounted research that found teachers who held rigid stereotypes and social class biases and who tended to differentiate between high- and low-achieiving students were more likely to produce negative expectation effects. Wilkinson's (2002) research on refugee ethnicity and academic achievement revealed that youth from the former Yugoslavia were more likely be on track to graduate compared with their counterparts from Asian, African, and South American countries. Although the finding could have been a result of Yugoslavs'

greater familiarity with a western school system, it likely suggested institutional racism, systematic discrimination, or at least more subtle forms of racism like polite racism and subliminal racism.

Youth outlook. It should be highlighted that even refugee youth who experienced high levels of discrimination did not see themselves as passive victims in their futures. The Somali girls in Oikonomidov's (2007) study responded to religious discrimination creatively, either by actively confronting their peers, ignoring them, creatively transforming uncomfortable situations into jokes, or by wearing the hijab (Muslim veil) in creative ways. Afghani, Iraqi, Somali, and Columbian refugees in Guerrero and Tinkler's (2010) study maintained an American discourse of freedom and opportunity to interpret their present and future possibilities, despite undeniable experiences of discrimination and injustice.

Case Commentary on Social Integration

Discrimination, acculturation, and identity-construction. Asha (personal communication, March 21, 2011), a Somali student who also attended the assets-building workshop on occasion, commented to me after one session, "I don't even think they know how to vote," in a way that exhibited she viewed the Nepali teenagers as *other*. If differential thinking was happening by more-acculturated refugees in a multi-cultural environment, I figured it was probably happening at the schools. L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011) shared that although she didn't know what kids experienced out of her department, she did not perceive much discrimination happening at her diverse school. When I asked the students outright if discrimination had been a problem for them, they all answered, "Yes" (Durga, Madan, and Yashoda, personal communication, February 14, 2011). Yashoda clarified, "Some of the students, but not teachers. Teachers are okay, it's just the kids. They are so proud."

Only one other Nepali student attended Yashoda's and Durga's junior high school (personal communication, February 14). In Madan's and Basu's school, Rainier Beach, there were seventeen others (L. Chin, personal communication, March 17). Madan, Durga, and Yashoda (personal communication, February 14, 2011) answered a weak "yeah" when I asked if they made friends with other kids at their schools. When given the chance they preferred to stick with other Nepalis, because as Yashoda relayed, "Then they don't make fun of me…and I can speak Nepali."

The relationships the Nepali students had in their tight-knit community of friends did seem to buffer them from discrimination and they valued each other as supports. In fact, a central reason they valued ReWA was the opportunity it gave them to make friends and spend time with other Nepalis. In the activity where students created a web of assets with yarn, part of the exercise included letting balloons (representing each student) fall down onto the web at various stages of its construction to see if the web would support the balloons. Madan tied two balloons together to keep them from falling through the net of supports. Recognizing the poignant metaphor, the other students followed suit, seeing the strategy as the best way to keep the balloons (themselves) from falling through the net of assets.

As important as their tight-knit community was to them, Madan (personal communication, February 14, 2011) said his friends could be a problem. He relayed, "Some of the friends are so selfish. 'Can you help me?'…We help them, but they don't help us….Bad people teach us bad things." Their protective enclave allowed Madan's sister, Muna, who had been in the United States for six months, as well as Durga who had been in the country for sixteen months, to remain quite reliant on the other Nepali students for English comprehension and communication.

Social aspects of English-language learning. Perhaps the emphasis the Nepali students placed on learning English resulted from their implicit recognition of the social capital they would gain by being able to speak English. After a couple of weeks participating in the assets-building workshop, the Nepali teenagers were readily offering contributions and displaying high comforts levels of speaking English in our workshop. I was somewhat surprised, then, to observe shyness to the point of near silence at a youth summit where the students sat at a round-table discussion for immigrant and refugee issues. The eight of them constituted almost half of the round table participants. Even so, none would speak up even when called upon several times. Another surprise came to me when L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011), Madan's high school ESL teacher, characterized him as a "shy guy." Madan had stood out to me as a confident leader in the assets-building workshop.

Differential treatment by adults. As mentioned, the students reported a lack of support by their teachers, but not necessarily differential attitudes. Shortcomings of college preparation for the older students as testified by the Bhutanese community leaders (H. Achayra, personal communication March 22, 2011; G. Pokhrel, personal communication, March 22, 2011) conjured skepticism in me as to whether the school teachers recognized and developed the promise of these youth.

Youth outlook. Any discrimination students did perceive did not inhibit them from feeling positive about their futures. In fact, "discrimination" was an English word some of the Nepali students did not know. All students in the guided group discussion reported feeling like they had control over their futures, and agreed when Yashoda (personal communication, February 14, 2011) answered, "External [assets] is important, but internal is more important."

Family and Community Dynamics

As the most intensive, prolonged, and programmatically continuous social institution for adolescents, the context in which refugee students learn to integrate into society, most refugee and immigrant research has been situated in the contexts of the schools. But research also indicates that refugee youth frequently have intense family commitments, with family consuming most of one's time outside of work and school (Stepick and Stepick, 2002). The interplay of family and school forces on refugee children can be complex, and ought to be accounted for in ecological approaches to youth development.

General challenges of refugee parents. As teenagers adapt to their new societies through the sometimes luke-warm welcome of the schools, their parents must negotiate even less forgiving institutions simultaneously, and with little guidance from others (Wilkinson, 2002). Refugee parents cope with lingering pre-migration stressors like like greif, loss, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) resulting from circumstances around their exile and refugee status. Resettlement stressors, including feelings of uprootedness, un- or underemployment, discrimination, family and social role changes, loss of control, and sadness or guilt over friends and family left in their home countries, exaserbates any pre-existing ill-being. With only a few months of refugee-specific social support, parents hurriedly have to navigate foreign social and political structures in order to become self-sufficient.

Beyond a mere vehicle of communication, English in particular, is an instrument for adult refugees to participate in the labour force and access necessary resources. Language proficiency often determines the level of work refugee parents can attain and many refugees take positions that they are overqualified for, but lingually relegated to. Shimoni, Este, and Clark (2003) found that language deficits and subsequent under-employment affected refugee fathers' self-image and in turn parenting abilities.

Mastery of the English language also allows social affiliation and belonging (Olsen, 2000). Refugees who had an above average interest in the socio-political life of their home country find themselves in a pre-verbal position that underscores their vulnerability and dependency. To be excluded from the language of the host country is to be largely excluded from participation in its social, cultural, and political life, and feelings of isolation can be particularly difficult for refugees accustomed to higher levels of involvement in social life. (Loewen, 2004; Atwell, Gifford, and McDonald-Wilmsen, 2009). Older refugees in particular are vulnerable to social isolation and loss of self-esteem (Shimoni et al., 2003).

Parental involvement in students' education. Parental involvement in children's education has long been commended as a key determinent of acadamic acheivement, with evidence showing positive influence on both student performance and behavior in schools (Hamilton, 2004). Beyond hindered parental support due to the self-image issues ensuing from under-employment and social isolation in resettlement, refugee parents who don't speak English have trouble supporting their children's education in more direct ways. Helping their children with homework is a challenge and they struggle to navigate the school system. Resettled refugee parents in Atwell et al.'s (2009) study were candid in their sense of helplessness when it came to guiding their children. One Burmese mother shared that all she could do was ask her kids to do their homework, because in reality, it was her kids who often helped her with schoolwork.

Regarding the parent-school ralationship, Norasing, Mack, and Collins (1999) noted that typical communication mechanisms between the schools and parents depended both on spoken and written language, and thus, reciprocity was contingent on a literate parent who could read formal documents and provide written responses. Unable to understand written reports or notices, some of the Laotian refugee parents in the study withdrew from direct contact with the

school, assuming teachers and administrators were positively guiding their children. Diverse cultural beliefs towards teachers can also bear on involvement. In many Asian and African cultures, parents respect teachers' opinions above their own with regards to their children's education and would consider it disrepectful to dispute a teacher's decisions. These orientations can result in a hands-off deferential parental approach towards education (McBrien, 2011).

Parental expectations. Sometimes a lack of involvement in the schools by refugee parents due to language barriers is mistaken for a low emphasis on education. In reality, refugee parents have been found to place quite a high emphasis on education. In Dumbrill's (2009) photography-based study, one mother explained a photo she took:

> This photo is a road, and it shows how far we've come for a better future for our kids. My kids will go to school in Canada and become somebody who has a future—you know our expectations of coming here are great. (p. 152)

Difficulties for families can arise however, when parents have high goals, but do not have the language skills or social capital to support their children in achieving those goals. Conversely, refugee parents who have difficulty supporting their children in traditional ways have shown resourcefulness in supporting their children's education in other ways. Roxas (2008) imparted that especially in the Somali Bantu families where parents had attained higher levels of education in their home countries, parents made considerable effort to attend the local community college, in part, for a better understanding of their children's academic content. These Somali Bantu families made efforts to piece together a social support network that would allow their children access to community resources, tutoring support, and valuable information about how U.S. public schools function.

However, like South East Asian mothers in Dumbrill's (2008) study who claimed they did not know about community services for their children, the Somali Bantu families with little previous formal education appeared to have little contact with teachers at school or members of the social service community (Roxas, 2008). High educational expectations can also sometimes take a backseat to immediate financial needs of the family. High-school-aged siblings in Roxas's study were called upon as family providers as their higher levels of English allowed them to attain employment more easily than their parents.

Role reversal. Atwell et al. (2008) highlighted that the variations in language ability between a child and their parents can create a power differential within the family structure as the child takes on the burdens of acting as interpreters for their parents and negotiating the systems and structures in the new society. Such role reversal usually leads to greater dependence of parents on children, a loss of parental authority, and an undermining of the parent's ability to guide children (Zhou, 1997). Role reversal can mean added stress for youth too, especially older children in the family (Fantino and Colak, 2001). Roxas (2008) found that many of the older Somali Bantu children were 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. Additionally, family stress can arise when refugee youth acting as translators for their parents are exposed to sensitive issues other youth are insulated from, like financial problems or health issues.

Intergenerational relations. According to Olsen (2000), the generational wedges that grow between children and their parents and grandparents are a major contributing factor to the higher stress that develops in immigrant families in the early years of their settlement in the U.S. When sons and daughters master English, it allows them to also adopt new values, customs and

lifestyles related to the host country faster than their parents, and this causes friction (Wilkinson, 2002). Besides a breakdown in the health of the nuclear family that might occur, when refugee youth lose fluency in their first language, and are no longer able to converse with grandparents or family back in their country of origin, a rich and important connection to heritage is lost (Olsen, 2000).

Immigrant children and their parents tend to percieve their host society and relations within it from different angles. The younger generation tends to focus on current adjustment, paying attention to the external traits of what they have come to define as being "American." Their frame of reference for fitting in is from their American-born peers and to some extent from the media. Parents, though, are primarily concerned with making the best of the new environment and with retaining traditional family life. These parental concerns tend to lead them to focus on the future and to emphasize discipline and academic achievement. Family difficulties arise as young refugees struggle to balance the demands of American culture with those of their tradition-minded parents. Parents seem especially concerned about lack of respect for elders and loose discipline in the schools (McBrien, 2011). Intergenerational conflicts lead to dwindling parental authority and insuffiencient family communications, and have significantly negative effects on children's self-esteem, psychosocial well-being, and academic aspirations (Zhou, 1997).

Intergenerational divides and ensuing feelings by refugee youth of being under-appreciated by their elders can be quite hurtful. Tigerson, Spigner, Farwell, and Stubblefield (2006) noted a very strong consensus of frustation among young Southeast Asian and East African youth when being labeled as deviant by adults. The youth felt their elders were unfairly stereotyping them as engaging in the same alleged bad behavior as non-refugee youth.

Case Commentary on Family and Community Dynamics

Somewhat unexpectedly, familial and community issues arose as a focal point in interviews with L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011), H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011), and G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011), painting a bleaker picture of Bhutanese adjustment than what the Bhutanese youth revealed.

General challenges of refugee parents. G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011) estimated that 90% of Bhutanese adults in Seattle were unemployed. He stressed, "The agencies must be able to endorse at least one person from each family [for employment]." He also reported a discontinuity in services between the four month cut-off of government resettlement support and support from community non-profit refugee services. The Bhutanese were not necessarily referred to other organizations that could help them, and felt left in limbo.

Along with a lack of employment in the Bhutanese community, English communication emerged as a pressing problem for Bhutanese adults. H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011) reported that some Bhutanese adults came to ReWA for language support, but that transportation fares kept others from coming. G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011) spoke of a lack of relevance of adult ESL class content:

> Some of the agencies teaching ESL class, but now we are admitting it's very slow. They discuss about a matter that is complete out of day-to-day activity which is really useless, you know. That is why they don't learn anything….They have to make all the terms relatable to the parents.

With these challenges brought to the fore, I asked H. Achayra if Bhutanese adults on balance were happy that they came here. He hesitated, sighed, and replied, "yeah, but I say them be

encouraged, the things will come…. the time, and then adjustments, and gradually you are in the

same place."

Parental involvement in students' education. G. Pohkrel (personal communication,

March 22, 2011) and H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011), in particular,

recommended intentionality on the part of teachers and non-profit program leaders to include

parents in program planning. The men, along with L. Chin (personal communication, March 17,

2011) reminded me that parents who are in survival mode may have different priorities for their

children than the priorities youth development practitioners push for. L. Chin, like many

teachers in the literature, reported a lack of involvement by parents in their childrens' education,

stating that very few of the parents attended parent-teacher conferences. She sensitively

attributed their lack of conference attendance to either not getting the message, not being able to

afford the bus fare, not wanting to ride the bus into the Rainier Beach neighborhood at night, or

needing to work during conference times.

G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011) also recognized the parent-teacher

communication disconnect:

> They do not teach about the student credit or the student curriculum. For the purpose of
>
> the student there need to be three side, the parent, the student, and the teacher. So here
>
> there is only two sides, student and teacher.

Along with other Bhutanese community leaders in Seattle, G. Pokhrel and H. Achayra were

planning to address parental involvement through their new non-profit, Bhutanese Community in

Washington. G. Pokhrel explained their planned effort:

> We have to make a program for the students, but making the approach through the
>
> parents. Still there is gaps. So that they will know the school's activities. They will

know the students' progress. We need to organize a program within the community. I

am a community leader and whenever I get resources of something, so I am taking those

people in a group and we have a discussion, and they learn something, and I interpret

them….Include [parents] in everything. Even if we have a single event, we want to have

the interaction with them.

The Nepali students recognized their parents' support as assets through the asset web-

building activity, the community-asset mapping activity, and through the 40 Developmental

Assets assessment. When asked in the guided group discussion, "Are your parents strong factors

in helping you succeed?" Yashoda (personal communication, February 14, 2011) replied, "Of

course, yep." But, Madan (personal communication, February 14, 2011) answered, "Nope…But,

our parents cannot speak English. They can't help. We help them." And Yashoda agreed, "Oh

yeah. We help them." G. Pohkrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011) put forth:

If the family lacks the education, it's tough for the student to make their own

approach….Still most of the family do not know how to speak a single word. The

student need to explain them. The student need to take them to the different appointment

and the student are the one who need do it for themselves.

Parental expectations. L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011) reported that

Bhutanese parents, like other Southeast Asian parents including her own, did have high

expectations but that "things happen." H. Achayra (personal communication, March 22, 2011)

shed light on some of those "things." He described a tension that parents deal with in regards to

their children's college endeavors:

Parents say, "These are all things when we are okay, we are not okay….We are not able

to support ourselves. So it is very tough on us right now….My son turns 18 and now, I

am denied of cash benefits and who will pay my rent, he needs to work." So that's what

they say…So when they get a job, kid's gonna be more likely to take the steps…So that

is what the main problem is here.

G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011) added to this line of concern:

And even at the moment, when the student is about to complete their high school, they

like to discuss about [the future] for them, the parent are fed up because of no job

situation….'Who's gonna pay?' Still they are willing to take them to the

college…because they want their student to make the most of everything, but their major

problem is since they do not have money, they don't have an income source, so they are

scared.

G. Pokhrel (personal communication, March 22, 2011) took ownership for the future

prospects of the youth and had even paid $300 a month to keep afloat a family that wanted to

pull their son out of high school to begin working. He lamented:

Still there is a lot to do, you know….Only that have like 2% that continue their college.

They have to earn their family. Number two, most of the family are under the skill of

farming, so they don't get opportunity in the camp. So we [community leaders] are the

ones who run the family, and ourselves, we don't have no money, no time, nobody we

can ask anyone.

L. Chin (personal communication, March 17, 2011), H. Achayra (personal communication,

March 22, 2011), and G. Pokhrel, recognized that bridges needed to be built between parents and

teachers, but also between the Bhutanese community and sources of information or support

outside the community.

The ReWA students and the students' teachers all commented on issues of role reversal in Bhutanese families and in the community. According to Evans (2007), in Nepali culture children take on important roles in their families from quite early on. The children acknowledged helping their parents navigate institutional systems and translating for them, but did not seem overly stressed about it. "Do you feel pressure from having to lead your families?" I asked them. Durga and Madan (personal communication, February 14, 2011) both replied a simple, "sometimes." G. Pohkrel, (personal communication, March 22, 2011) relayed that the loss of control on the part of the parents was the most disruptive thing, especially in a culture where parents were to be respected and answered to unquestioningly: "They don't go anywhere without someone, so kids think, 'We are leading our family. We are the boss. We are the head of our family.' So they get more opportunity to be responsible…But, it's not good."

Intergenerational relations. One possible outcome of this lack of control over their youth was negative attitudes by adults in the Bhutanese community towards the kids. Madan (personal communication, February 14, 2011) grieved:

Some of the people think I am bad. Our community people think that I am bad. In the neighborhood they talk about you, 'You are smoking, you never read.'…My neighbor said when I am in America, I am now bad.

Possibly from the sense that adults in his community thought he was losing his culture, Madan shared, "[I want to] learn more about our culture, our country. I don't know anything about my country." Madan was also part of the group that in attempting to share their culture and history, spontaneously set up the "Bhutanese in America" table at the youth summit resource fair. E. Barbee (personal communication, January 31, 2011), ReWA's Youth Program Lead Teacher who works with many different refugee groups, noted a particular cultural pride in the Nepali

students. As a final example, in a *sparks* identification activity where students would shine a small light if their spark—that interest, passion or gift that gives their life meaning and purpose—was read aloud (www.ignitesparks.com). "Traditional ethnic-Nepali dancing" ignited spark lights for five out of the seven youth present.

Recommendations

Some recommendations unveiled through this ethnographic project emerged directly from the students and Bhutanese community leaders towards specific ways youth leaders can support Bhutanese youth in more relevant ways. Others were sourced in the very process of attempting to understand the nuanced circumstances of the Bhutanese youth and their community as they adjust to their new lives in Seattle.

Enhance English-language learning efforts. One of the most direct recommendations from the refugee resettlement literature, the Bhutanese students, and the Bhutanese community leaders, was to improve English-language support. If they don't know already, teachers of after school homework programs like the one at ReWA might be interested to learn that the youth valued the program in substantial measure because it provided a safe and comfortable place for them to learn to English from English speakers. English promotion ought to be intentionally incorporated into the variety of youth initiatives, especially for newly arriving refugees wanting to gain assurance in their English-speaking skills. Additional English-language support in after school programs need not be new programs requiring additional resources, although they could be. Simply slowing the pace of instruction to focus on vocabulary or creatively nurturing the confidence of refugee youth in their English expression are two inexpensive ways to heed the Nepali refugees' loud call for more English-language support.

Intentionally involve parents. Bhutanese refugee parents, and in turn their children, would benefit from accessible adult ESL programs with curriculum relevant to day-to-day activities. *Parental* involvement and support emerged from the Bhutanese teachers' interviews as the widest current gap in provision for *youth* development, and one that must be addressed to account for the health of whole communities. The most pressing issue in the Bhutanese community, and also the constraint predicted to keep high school graduates from their hope of furthering their education, was unemployment. One way program leaders can foster educational endeavors is by referring families to employment specialists and other basic needs services offered to refugees. Attempting to understand and respect parents' educational priorities, cultural priorities, and even survival priorities can strengthen program-parent ties and nurture the health of intergenerational relationships.

Address acculturation patterns. The benefits and potential downfalls of the tight-knit Nepali youth community emerged as an area of interest, but one that I did not have time to study in detail. Indeed, my research with the Bhutanese youth and their community provided more of a broad sweep in clarifying their assets and challenges than a deep exposition of particular implications. As such, concentrated study could be carried out with any one of these emerging nuances. Acculturation patterns, in particular, arose as an area obliging more research. For this recommendation, I simply encourage leaders to reflect on how to leverage the benefits of the cohesive Bhutanese group, while simultaneous ensuring cross-cultural integration.

Practice reflectively. A number of theorizing practitioners have endorsed the merits of reflective-practice. Freire (2000) defined the similar concept of *praxis* as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 54). White (2006) asserted, "The power of the cycle of action and reflection is an irreplaceable element in the process of leveraging experience for

maximum effectiveness in the growth of the [practitioner]" (p. 37). And, Schön (1983) clarified

that tacit knowledge ought to substantially inform the knowledge base in fields proposing to

solve social challenges. In effect, the assets-building workshop was my attempt to carry these

reflective practitioners' call. As a relatively new practitioner myself, the workshop gave me an

opportunity to develop tacit knowledge to balance the theory that I had been immersed in

through my graduate studies.

Schön (1983) advocated for artistry when rigorous methodologies fall short, especially in

the social welfare professions where "shifting, ambiguous ends and unstable institutional

contexts of practice" are the only mainstays (p. 23). An emergent exhortation then, in the

context of youth development is to adapt youth development models to fit the context and

nuances of the recipient/participant population. Benson (2006) himself, encouraged continued

dialogue between research and practice with regard to applying his 40 Developmental Assets and

advocated for adjustment to his model across diverse populations. The Bhutanese case study

pressed for explicitly emphasizing assets either missing or assumed in the current list of 40.

Assets Nepali refugees needed included English-language learning, non-discriminatory

environments, and employed parents. Assets young Nepali uniquely had included heightened

responsibility, a wider world perspective, biculturalism, and bilingualism.

Encourage young people to reflect on their situations from an assets-orientation.

The assets-building workshop allowed me to engage the Bhutanese refugee youth in a light

version of Friere's (2000) *conscientization* where individuals take account for the situation they

are in, in order to be change-agents in their futures. Amidst the assets-discourse of the 40

Developmental Assets, the environment in which the students reflected on their situations proved

encouraging versus deflating. I did not formally assess how the workshop changed student

attitudes, but I did perceive increasing levels of confidence in the students as weeks went on.

The assets-discourse running through ReWA and the workshop promoted comfort levels in the

students, and allowed them a safe environment to speak out, practice their English, and express

their personalities.

Engage indigenous leadership. Groody (2007) fostered a vision of society based on

human dignity, mutuality of relationships, and active concern for the most vulnerable members

of a community (p. 185). Although referring to liberation theology which puts primacy not

simply on written texts, but on reading living texts, and declares that insights from the

[community] should have a favored place amongst solutions, Groody's vision applies to the

resettled refugee situation. Those with material resources or social capital (i.e., non-profit

organizations and their program leaders) in host cities ought to foster healthy and just refugee

communities through partnership or even servant-hood, not from positions of power. A

partnership-orientation that exalts local leadership has gained acceptance as an effective

international community development approach in developing countries, and I submit the same

philosophy applies towards resettled refugee communities here in the United States, as well

(Myers, 2000).

Perkins (2007) posited, "An outsider can seldom know the needs of the community well

enough to know how to best respond" (p. 55). Consulting the Bhutanese community leaders

proved to be a pivotal step for me in understanding how to best serve refugee youth. For

example, prior to meeting with Hemlal Achayra and Ganga Pokhrel, I envisioned developing a

college preparatory workshop for the Nepali youth in response to recognizing their academic

promise. I could have forged ahead preparing for such a workshop, spent considerable time and

resources on the project, and implemented all the aspects I conceived to perfection. The

workshop would have failed to produce hopeful results—students attending college—if Bhutanese parents chose to send their high school graduates to get jobs instead. In talking with Mr. Achayra and Mr. Pohkrel, I learned that access to college opportunities for Bhutanese youth required an ecological approach that addressed the whole family situation. I would heed H. Achayra's (personal communication, March 22, 2011) advice:

> What I think is the most important, more encouragement, more support for getting into college, more ideas…going over application forms, what are the different resources they can access…and also encouragement, this is also very important for them right now, and then parent support is also very important for them, because they need to know it's okay for me to go to college.

Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) cultural indices and cultural comparison tools function well as a starting point for categorizations of what to expect when encountering other ethnic groups. I found Ganga Pokhrel and Hemlal Achayra to be windows into the Bhutanese community that allowed me to see nuances laced within and beyond the cultural categories. Through these community leaders I better understood cultural priorities, a distinctive conception of childhood, and in further study I imagine these leaders could provide crucial insights into religious values and motivations as well.

Get to know kids as individuals. Extending the idea of moving beyond the categories, I surmise that there is a need to test the categorical platforms from which refugee youth are served. As the White-centricity of youth development models renders the platform of "youth" an insufficient base from which to serve refugee youth, the platform of "refugee youth" may not necessarily address the needs and assets of particular ethnicities. Supporting the small community of Hindu Bhutanese newly arriving to Seattle with moderate education and English

levels might call for a different approach than for serving Muslim Somali youth who have been in Seattle for several years and live in a larger and more established Muslim ethnic-community. Understanding the distinctions of particular ethnic refugee groups, with immensely different backgrounds, and in different phases of adjustment—and ultimately understanding the particularities of the youth themselves—calls for getting to know them on an individual basis. Refugee-serving non-profits are accustomed to case management systems, and a similar approach could be extended into their youth programs.

Build bridges. Part of reflective practice is an acknowledgement of where one's giftedness and artistry as a teacher reach their limits to efficaciously meet all of the unique challenges at hand. But at those limits, bridges can always be built. The Bhutanese community leaders requested of people like me, not program leadership, but connections to resources. They would then connect those resources to their community through communication channels inaccessible to English-speaking youth leaders.

Helping the Bhutanese develop their social capital, defined by OECD (2001) as "the networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups," is what they asked of me (p. 4). Woolcock (2000) cataloged the central social capital relationships as bonding, bridging and linking: bonding refers to the relationships that we have with people who are like us, family members and people within our ethnic groups; bridging refers to those relationships we have with people who are not like us; and linking refers to the relationships people have with those in power that enable them to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the immediate community radius. Non-profit youth program leaders are well poised to play a significant role in strengthening social capital by building *bridges* between parents, teachers, and students, as well

as between resettlement agencies and other refugee-serving non-profit services. Youth leaders can also *link* the Bhutanese people to resources outside their ethnic community.

Conclusion

To return to the thesis guiding the project of uncovering teen-aged Bhutanese refugees' resettlement experiences, I submit that the emergent insights can indeed guide youth leaders towards supporting Bhutanese youth, and all newly arriving refugee youth, in more relevant ways. By bolstering Bhutanese young people through additional English-language support, parental involvement in programming, and acculturative sensitivity, youth leaders can guide the Bhutanese to succeed in the ways identified as most prescient. And, when youth leaders engage in reflective practice, raise young refugees' awareness of their own assets, partner with refugee community leaders, build bridges, and get to know young people as individuals, they champion moving refugees towards the ultimate aims of youth development. That kind of support can help Bhutanese youth, and all refugee youth, access opportunities, restore feeble intergenerational relationships, and progress from receivers to givers as they grow, learn, and then serve their communities (Long, 2000; Perkins, 2007; Sen, 2000).

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Appendix

Adapted 40 Developmental Assets Assessment

Below is a list of positive things you might have in yourself, your family, friends, school, or community. **For each item that describes you NOW OR WITHIN THE PAST THREE MONTHS, check (x) the box if the item is TRUE.**

☐ **1. Family support.** My family gives me lots of love and support.
☐ **2. Positive family communication.** I talk with my parent(s) positively, and I seek their advice.
☐ **3. Other adult relationships.** I receive support from three or more adults that are not my parents.
☐ **4. Caring neighborhood.** I have caring neighbors.
☐ **5. Caring school climate.** My school cares about kids and encourages them.
☐ **6. Parent involvement in schooling.** My parent(s) help me succeed in school.
☐ **7. Community values youth.** I feel that adults in the community value young people.
☐ **8. Youth as resources.** I am given useful roles in my community.
☐ **9. Service to others.** I serve in the community one hour or more per week.
☐ **10. Safety.** I feel safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
☐ **11. Family boundaries.** My family has clear rules, and knows where I am and what I am doing.
☐ **12. School Boundaries.** My school provides clear rules, and enforces rules fairly.
☐ **13. Neighborhood boundaries.** My neighbors help watch out for me, and guide my behavior.
☐ **14. Adult role models.** My parent(s) and other adults are good role models for me.
☐ **15. Positive peer influence.** My best friends set good examples for me.
☐ **16. High expectations.** My parent(s) and teachers expect me to do well.
☐ **17. Creative activities.** I spend three or more hours per week in music, theater, or other arts lessons.
☐ **18. Youth programs.** I spend three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or other group.
☐ **19. Religious community.** I spend one or more hours per week in a religious activity.
☐ **20. Time at home.** I am not out with friends with nothing special to do more than two nights a week.
☐ **21. Achievement Motivation.** I try hard to do well in school.
☐ **22. School Engagement.** I try to learn new things that might be good for me.
☐ **23. Homework.** I do at least one hour of homework every school day.
☐ **24. Bonding to school.** I care about my school.
☐ **25. Reading for Pleasure.** I read for pleasure (not for school) three or more hours per week.
☐ **26. Caring.** I think it is important to help other people.
☐ **27. Equality and social justice.** I try to solve social problems like inequality and poverty.
☐ **28. Integrity.** I stand up for what I believe in.
☐ **29. Honesty.** I tell the truth even when it is not easy.
☐ **30. Responsibility.** I take responsibility for what I do.
☐ **31. Restraint.** I stay away from sexual activity, alcohol, or other drugs.
☐ **32. Planning and decision making.** I know how to plan ahead and make choices.
☐ **33. Interpersonal Competence.** I build friendships with other people.
☐ **34. Cultural Competence.** I am comfortable with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
☐ **35. Resistance skills.** I resist bad influences, and avoid unhealthy or dangerous situations.
☐ **36. Peaceful conflict resolution.** I resolve conflicts without anyone getting hurt.
☐ **37. Personal power.** I feel that I have control over things that happen to me.
☐ **38. Self-esteem.** I feel good about myself.
☐ **39. Sense of purpose.** I feel my life has a purpose.
☐ **40. Positive view of personal future.** I am hopeful about my personal future.

List three assets that you feel are important that are missing from this list (these DO NOT need to be assets you have):
Examples: (Kids in my school accept me and are friendly, I speak more than one language.)

41._____

42._____

43._____

Which three assets do you feel are most important for success? (Example: #<u>25</u>, #<u>34</u>, #<u>9</u>) #_____ #_____ #_____

What are your three strongest assets? #_____ #_____ #_____

What the three assets that you are most interested in improving? #_____ #_____ #_____

Is there an asset that you would like to have, but feel you can't control? #_____