Creating a Partnership Model for ELL Organizations Serving Refugees in the Seattle Area

Thesis

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Introduction

Acapella groups, the Avengers, and the Seattle Seahawks. Each a group made up of talented individuals that when they come together accomplish more than they can alone. In the Seattle area, churches, schools, and nonprofit organizations are all working to integrate refugees into their new communities, including the essential component of learning English. Without English, refugees have a difficult time finding work or even meeting their neighbors. Because of previous education, personal goals, and lifestyles, certain programs are a better fit for some students than others. Valerie Giesbrecht, who runs a church-based program, recounts:

> In the community college system...if you have failed level one three times, you're out and you need to make room for somebody else who can actually pass level one. So there's this group of people in Seattle of maybe really low [level] illiterate or elders in our community that have been dropped out of the community college system. And that was their community and I've heard from some they are really sad when they are told that they can't come anymore….I've just sent an email yesterday to the community college saying, "How can I advertise that our doors are open to these people, to these immigrants...who just can't seem to move ahead in the community system? We'll take them!"

Community college teachers and administrators like Emily Campbell at Green River Community College and Marissa DuBois at Edmonds Community College bemoan the "three-strikes-and-you're-out" rule for their English language learners (ELL). While this rule may help to propel students forward who continually retake Algebra or History and cannot seem to pass, it means that a lot of struggling students either end up floating in a level they will never get out of or get frustrated and drop out. In either scenario, what happens to these students? With a plethora of resources in the Seattle area for English language learners, there is likely a program that is a better fit for their needs at a church (like the one Giesbrecht runs), organization, or another school. The issue is how to get them connected to these resources, and the sooner they do the better. A formal partnership would bring these organizations and resources together in order to benefit from the strengths of each other. The goal of creating partnerships between English programs for refugees is to form a self-sustaining model accessible to all parties to streamline the educational process and ensure students end up in the right program for their needs, helping them transition between programs when necessary. Taking a qualitative approach, I spoke with people representing multiple programs around the Pacific Northwest which ultimately led to an evident need for partnership. In light of the existing lack of access and collaboration, effective partnerships among nonprofit, church, and school ELL programs will ultimately serve the best interests of both the agencies and the refugee population in the Seattle area. Establishing intentional relationships among key stakeholders, identifying a limited number of high-priority needs, and committing to collaborate and share resources to fulfill those needs provides a basis for partnership that meets individual needs while strengthening each agency's programs.

The History and Current State of Refugees in the Pacific Northwest

A refugee is defined as "someone who has fled from his or her home country and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group" ("Refugee Admissions"). To differentiate, an asylum seeker meets the same criteria but already lives in the U.S. or is trying to get in at a port of entry, like the U.S.-Mexico border. While focused on refugees, the research and resources within this paper may apply to asylees and immigrants as well. Once leaving their home country, refugees are registered with the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who then determines if they can return home safely, stay in the country of refuge, or should be resettled elsewhere. Fewer than 1% of all refugees are resettled in a new country (Seattle Times). On average, it takes ten years for a refugee to get from their home country to a place of resettlement (Shaw and Poulin 1104). At least three million refugees have resettled in the United States since 1975 (Igielnik and Krogstad). It is estimated that "by 2040 one in four Americans will be an immigrant" (Lynn 132). With these kinds of statistics, American cities, communities, and schools need to be prepared to host incoming refugees and English language learning is an important response to this need.

Although they cannot be categorized by a single ethnicity or culture, refugees have many shared experiences. Many are subject to "role loss" where professionals in their home country end up in minimum wage jobs in their country of resettlement (Fadiman 206). This in turn can negatively impact one's identity and self-esteem. Refugee families are also especially vulnerable to poverty, crime, violence, and illness with the demands of a new culture, financial stress, and lack of resources (Lynn 133). Unfortunately, "Immigrants are frequently the targets of verbal abuse and physical violence, because there is a perception they are receiving more than they deserve at the expense of others in the community" (139). They are vulnerable to cultural and linguistic misunderstandings that can result in isolation or, even worse, hate crimes.

It is difficult enough to try and make a home in a foreign country, yet immigrants also often end up living closer to landfills and dumps which can affect their health and well-being. As it is in America with racial inequality, "The darker the community, the greater the likelihood of finding an incinerator located there" (Pellow 103). Immigrant and refugee populations in the United States are more likely to be adversely affected by environmental conditions. Resettlement is by no means an easy journey. With the Seattle area in a housing crisis as it is, the demand for low-income housing far outweighs the current supply making homelessness a real possibility for refugees (Beason). Compared to 14% of native born Seattleites, 27% of refugees living in Seattle are below the federal poverty rate ("Seattle's Immigrants and Refugees"). In sum, these families have escaped war, spent at least ten years traveling or in refugee camps, and then must build a new life with relatively few resources while learning a new culture and language. Simplifying the language learning process is just one way to lighten their load.

In 2016, about half of the refugees resettled in the U.S. were from Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, and Burma (Igielnik and Krogstad). Many refugees in the Seattle area are from the Middle East and East Africa and therefore belong to much more group-oriented cultures in contrast to the individualist United States (Hofstede 95-97). They also tend to have a higher power distance, meaning there is greater expectation and acceptance of unequal power distribution (61). These cultural characteristics can create more difficulties integrating into a very culturally different community. Because of the significant cultural differences, "Relocated individuals seek out already established ethnic communities, placing additional stress on already strained or unprepared communities" (Lynn 136). The job market is strained as well and even those who are native to the area struggle to find sufficient employment. Many of Seattle's homeless work full-time or near full-time but still cannot afford basic necessities (Moe-Lobeda 24). Refugees are at-risk for homelessness because of the many barriers to accessing resources. Communities with higher concentrations of refugees are usually more vulnerable to poverty and thus not equipped for growing populations. Tukwila, a city south of Seattle, is about 40% foreign-born and has one of the highest crime rates in the state (Weise). Existing systems are overloaded and unable to handle the increase of refugees and their specific needs.

Historically, Washington state has been in the top ten among states in accepting refugees (Seattle Time). From 2010 to 2016, 16,504 refugees came to Washington state from 46 countries (McDermott). Since 2003, Seattle has been considered a “sanctuary city”, where law enforcement officials cannot ask about a resident’s immigration status, offering relative safety (Lloyd). Overall, it’s been found that sanctuary counties have lower crime rates and stronger economies (Wong). Seattle’s refugee population is reflective of global events meaning it shifts over time when conflicts arise. To demonstrate what that can look like, ELL teacher Emily Campbell at Green River relates, “Any one quarter I'll have twelve countries represented in my class. So right now I have Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Armenia, Thailand, Ukraine, Russia, and Mexico. [At] the lower levels you get more of the east Africans”. In 2015, the largest refugee populations in the Puget Sound area were from Somalia, Iraq, Ukraine, Moldova, and Bhutan (Balk).

With representation from so many countries, how can ELL classrooms handle this diversity of need? A survey of Iraqi refugee students found they preferred separation by gender in the classroom (“Iraqi” 7). In some cases, “Women were discouraged from attending mixed-gender classes by their husbands or other family members who considered them inappropriate” (Riggs 400). Sudanese refugees favored peer support and group settings over an individualized approach to education (Bates et al. 646). Taking this into consideration, a typical individualized, mixed-gender American classroom may not be appropriate for the majority of students. With a variety of preferences and needs, it can be complicated to accommodate each student and make education accessible to all.

When Maryam Pedraza came to the U.S. from Iran in 1995, there was no ESL program at her high school and it took her a long time to learn English. While services have increased to meet the demand, she laments that cultural understanding is still shockingly lacking. She expressed that her identity is under constant attack and her family, despite being naturalized citizens, still lives in fear. Regardless of the number of ELL programs in the Puget Sound, there is still a need for increased public awareness. Building partnerships between ELL organizations is a step toward unity as shared understanding is spread throughout communities.

In addition to shared knowledge of available resources, a hope of this partnership is to increase public empathy toward refugees. Instead of seeing refugees as passive recipients, the dream is to see a mutual exchange of language and culture. At the same time, this sharing of cultures and stories should be seen as a privilege. Pedraza asserts that it is not an immigrant's burden to change people's minds. A shared value among ELL programs should be not only to educate but to allow space to listen and build trust among students and staff. This is not a task any one organization can handle alone. As explored below, the Seattle area already boasts a fairly abundant supply of ELL resources in various sectors.

The Process

As discussed above, refugees have lived in the Pacific Northwest for decades. Over the years, local governments and other helping agencies have learned numerous lessons on ways to best serve this growing population and their changing needs. Even so, more can be done. While data and research can show where programs are succeeding and failing at educating students, only in talking to representatives from these programs and hearing from recipients, refugees themselves, can a holistic story unfold. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, I have seen neighborhoods change and diversify with the shifting population. Spending time overseas, I realize the unique situation in a city like Seattle and in a country like the United States to receive people from all over the world. As an ELL teacher for a time myself, I am fascinated by the notable differences in a refugee's learning process and journey. Speaking to teachers and administrative staff at agencies in Seattle like World Relief and at various schools revealed a need for more collaboration and thus, the dream for a partnership model was born.

ELL Resources and Leadership for Each Agency

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has a 116-page guide for immigrants that implores the reader, "If you do not speak English, try to learn it as soon as possible. You can find free or low-cost English language classes in your community, often through the local public schools or community college." Assuming this document is even translated into their native language, is it realistic to expect someone coming into a new country to know how to pursue these resources? There is a plethora of ELL resources in the Seattle area. Some may use slightly different language (i.e. English as a Second Language [ESL] or English Language Learners [ELL]) but for these purposes the terms are used interchangeably to describe an English language acquisition program. Community colleges, churches, nonprofits, and other organization's programs exist to serve those seeking to learn English. Different programs are better suited to certain students more than others, but how do the right students find their way to the best program for their needs? Through partnership, the goal is that every program will become aware of every other resource available and know when it is necessary to direct a student to another program that better suits their needs. This reconciliatory approach would value students for more than a dollar amount and urge them into more appropriate programs for their individual learning styles and goals. While it may be against their natural interest to turn a student away, it is necessary if the goal is to truly serve the student. The following is an exploration of each type of program, suggestions for what students are a good fit, and organizations that are good candidates for establishing a partnership [See Appendix A for a full database of local resources].

Community College Programs

At the Seattle Colleges (Seattle Central, North Seattle, South Seattle, and SVI) the goal of their Adult Basic Education (ABE) program is “to help non-native speakers communicate in English and increase their understanding of American culture” (“Adult Basic Studies/ESL”). In contrast, many English programs for international students serve those who have an equivalent background in education but without English (Stoufer). ABE programs are designed for students who may have little or no previous education. Green River ELL instructor Emily Campbell says that “if you really wanna make gains and you want to learn English fast and this is your first priority, go to a community college.” Cultural knowledge and language acquisition are the primary goal in a community college setting, but this also means a serious commitment. Most community college programs require attending class at least four days a week for a few hours at a time. To advance to the next level, standardized testing is frequently utilized, adding a new level of difficulty for ELL students. Additional time outside of class is necessary to complete homework. Therefore, going to a formal school means foregoing a full-time job for most students. These programs also require a modest tuition of $25 per quarter. There is little variation between programs meaning the choice is simple: pick the closest school.

Not only do community college-level ELL programs require high commitment, there are relatively high expectations. With the three-quarter policy, students are only allowed to take a class three times in order to advance to the next level before they are removed from the program. While three attempts may sound like a lot, many students, especially those who have never had previous formal education, are not able to pass the tests required to level up (DuBois). Vince Barnes, a professor at Shoreline Community College’s ESL program, acknowledges the barrier of unrealistic expectations regarding how long it takes to become proficient in English, realistically requiring 4-5 years of hard work. It is rare that either students or institutions are willing to invest that much time or resources. There are also students who use these classes as a way to write off requirements for the Department of Health and Human Services (DSHS) where proof of class attendance is needed to keep benefits (Richard). The reality of the formal, structured setting of a community college can be an asset to learning for many but a hindrance to others. Understanding a student's past and present situation as well as their future hopes and dreams can help determine whether or not a community college program will best serve their language learning needs. Due to their proven commitment to collaboration, Green River ELL instructors Emily Campbell or Angel Richard and Marisa DuBois at Edmonds Community College would be quality candidates to pursue for partnership.

Church Programs

Formal education, like a community college setting, can present significant barriers to access for refugee students, especially those with little or no previous education. Only a small percentage is able to "take full advantage of language classes because of long work hours and familial obligations" (Brown 219). In addition to these complications, there is the "potentially paralyzing impact embarrassment, lack of self-confidence, and nervousness have on motivation" (223). Because of these obstacles, a church-based ELL program is an appropriate alternative. There are usually fewer barriers to entry, they are free or very low-cost, they do not have strict testing or reporting requirements, and they are community-oriented. Because they are usually volunteer-run, there is a good chance for contact with native speakers, essential in gaining fluency. Since churches are missional nonprofits, students can gain easy access, but sacrifice the academic rigor found in other programs. A student's progress may also be slower than in a more intensive program.

At church programs like University Presbyterian Church (UPC), within walking distance of the University of Washington, the emphasis is on community. First of all, they can act as a safety net for those that fail community college programs. Director Valerie Giesbrecht, also a potential partner, sees their unique position as beyond ministry but not quite a formal school. They have leveled classes and appropriate curriculum. Because there are no testing requirements, Giesbrecht has creative control over class content and can cater topics to the needs and interests of the students. For example, she has created a class called "English for baking" and has found it empowering to mothers with low English proficiency who are comfortable in the kitchen. Without a set curriculum, the content may be unpredictable and certainly will not be transferable in terms of credits or offer a certificate. However, these programs could work well for students with very little previous education that would not do as well in a more structured classroom environment while learning needed life skills.

Unlike UPC, other church programs may not have paid staff members or plentiful resources. But while other programs have government- or funder-mandated requirements, Giesbrecht sees their strength as not only a safe place to learn English but to find community. She recounts a snow day in January of 2017 when sixty students showed up when even the teachers couldn't make it in due to road conditions simply because they wanted to be there. Programs that focus on community building are helpful for students who do not want to be isolated at home but may not be looking for educational advancement or work, like older refugees and mothers raising children. It is especially accessible when these programs are easily reached by public transportation and offer childcare. Churches can also act as a resource for other needs with vast networking opportunities and outreach ministries that can help refugees financially or socially. While academic rigor may not be its' strength, there are many other benefits to church-based ELL programs.

Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofits have a unique role in the local community. They exist to help "set up conditions within which individuals and groups can empower themselves" (Willis 113). Many programs focus on a specific population and have focused resources. For example, Helping Link provides services for Vietnamese speakers while Neighborhood House is job-centered. Many are conversation-based, offering "talk times" where English learners get a chance to practice English in a controlled and safe environment with native speakers. They are usually free and staffed by employees or volunteers at the organization. Nonprofits are notoriously underfunded and while accountable to stakeholders, not necessarily academically rigorous. However, like church programs, they are often well-integrated into communities and mission-driven.

Nonprofit ELL programs, similar to church programs, are more accessible than other programs. In the case of World Relief, the program is free and is part of the resettlement process, making barriers to entry very low. On average, students are in the program for three months until they find employment. English class runs Monday through Thursday with a specialized "Job Class" on Fridays that teaches job readiness skills. Consistency can be an issue since it is used more as a transition than a long-term learning process and the participants can change weekly or even daily. To deal with that level of turnover, World Relief created eleven two-week units that are cycled through. These units offer practical life skills integrated with English language skills. For example, there are units on dealing with money that includes going to the bank, using an ATM, and shopping. There are also units on housing, transportation, and health; all topics are useful to everyday life in their new environment. Once the six-month curriculum cycle renews, it is mostly new students. If they are still in the program, they are usually in a higher level and content is presented differently. Students go through standardized testing every six weeks to determine levels and collect data for the agency. Once refugees find a job through World Relief, they are no longer part of the program since classes are held during the day. However, because World Relief provides so many services and is well-connected to the community, they can often refer refugees to longer-term English programs that will fit their needs (Kennedy).

World Relief may be unique in its approach to ELL. Having been around since 1979, almost since the beginning of Seattle's refugee influx, there are many years of experience behind these methods ("How We Help"). This model is not necessarily representative of the work happening in other Seattle area nonprofits but does give an example of the potential impact a nonprofit can have in even a short amount of time. Other nonprofits may not have the experience or reach of World Relief but can have a significant impact on their area of influence if they keep listening and adapting to needs of the local community. Constituents from World Relief would be a powerful addition to the partnership. In general, nonprofits have the potential to provide relevant curriculum and individualized attention in addition to a strong sense of community.

Other Programs

Besides the programs already discussed, there is a variety of other ELL programs that do not fit neatly into categories. There are a few for-profit companies that could serve refugees in addition to library, government, and other programs that do not necessarily fit under the nonprofit umbrella but are similar in mission. Many public libraries in the Puget Sound region offer ELL resources at no cost. These include Talk Time, formal classes, and even Rosetta Stone for self-paced learning. These programs are appealing due to their proximity and community base. "Ready to Work" programs run by the Seattle government also offer free classes to help with literacy and finding jobs. Karen and Loren Marston of Kent run a program for the whole family: adults get English help, school-aged children get homework help, and younger children receive daycare. Representatives from any and all of these programs would add a valuable perspective to the partnership. There are even some K-12 school programs that serve parents so they can learn enough English to help their kids with homework and participate in the school community. Because for-profit companies cater to more privileged students who can afford steeper tuition fees, they are not always suitable for refugees. Private tutors are another option, although probably not feasible due to higher cost. The resources are numerous and, with the exception of for-profits, free and easily accessible.

The issue of getting refugees connected to ELL programs is not availability but how students can find the best program that suits their needs. There may actually be an overwhelming amount of options with little variance between them. However, a partnership model would increase awareness of coexisting programs as well as bolster the performance of each as they share resources and best practices. Students could make a more informed decision and receive referrals for a program almost tailor-made for their needs. Easily documented, objective factors to consider when selecting an appropriate program include location and accessibility via public transportation, class schedule, cost, and class size. The trickier subjective qualities, however, may better help to determine an appropriate program. These include student motivations and goals, teacher personality, classroom culture, community atmosphere, academic rigor, cultural sensitivity, and individualization. These are harder to illustrate in a written list but could be accessed through an established referral system within a database of participants willing to share their personal experience.

The Need: Highest Priority Issues in Common Among ELL Organizations

Why do so many ELL resources exist in the United States? Why do refugees even need to learn English? Once refugees are resettled in the United States through agencies like World Relief, they are immediately enrolled in an English class unless they can test out at the highest level (quite rare). As previously mentioned, World Relief's ELL classes are connected to their employment program and once a refugee gets a job, they are no longer in the class. At that point, they can choose to pursue English if they want and are usually referred to community colleges, libraries, or church-based programs to continue the learning process. The average amount of time a student spends in language class at the resettlement agency is about three months with exceptions for those with high barriers to employment like very low literacy or significant health problems who may be in the program for years (Kennedy). Programs that provide ELL are then receiving students from many backgrounds who are coming in with many different motivations for learning English. Refugees largely continue to pursue English for one of the following reasons: to more fully integrate into their communities, to pursue a better job or a previous occupation, or to have better access to community resources for a more holistic well-being.

Community Integration

Integration into a new community is a strong motivator for many refugees to continue English language learning. After spending years or even decades in a refugee camp, many people experience loss of identity or belonging once they finally settle in a completely foreign country that they did not get to choose. Additionally, they can feel an immense pressure to assimilate to the new culture which Miroslav Volf describes in this way: "You can survive, even thrive, among us, if you become like us; you can keep your life, if you give up your identity" (75). This loss of identity can affect every aspect of life. Especially with the fear surrounding terrorism in the United States, it may be tempting for refugees from certain cultures to give up cultural and religious customs or dress in order to look, act, and speak more like the people they come into contact with in their neighborhoods. A Hmong woman living in California named Foua described what it was like leaving behind everything she had in Laos, saying, "'I miss having something that really belongs to me'" (Fadiman 105). That sense of ownership can be deeply tied to identity, and since refugees have given up physical property as well as family and friends, it can be difficult to find again.

Finding Work

Namet Al Shamyani was an engineer in Baghdad, Iraq. Resettled in Michigan, he became frustrated with starting from the beginning and having to learn English before working again when he held a high-level position back at home. "'I am happy now,'" Shamyani says, "'But if I can find a job - because without job, I cannot find myself'" (Wells). One's sense of identity is strongly connected to their strengths, skills, and how they spend their time. Being forced to start from scratch can mean many years of school or training before assuming previous occupations, no matter how revered they were in their home country. Some refugees may be able to work without a strong grasp on the English language. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommends asking employers if English language skills are a requirement and "if [the] employer cannot show that speaking English is required for [the] job, then he or she may be breaking a federal law". If English is required, it could be a long time before resuming a previous occupation.

The amount of frustration or hopelessness due to these circumstances could paralyze even the most resilient of students and is certainly something educators should be aware of. At the same time, “They certainly did not need pity; what they [need are] the same opportunities to learn and the same expectations of achievement as their native-born American peers” (“Iraqi Refugee Students” 2). While refugees may have unique educational and personal needs compared to American-born peers or even immigrant students, there remains a desire for normalcy and to be treated and respected as adults, whose complexities reach beyond their histories and circumstances. As far as outcomes go, “Immigrants who speak English proficiently earn an estimated 17 to 24 percent more than those who do not” as those who do not are typically stuck in minimum wage jobs (Vu). Therefore, despite the difficulties or frustrations of learning a new language, English language acquisition is often seen as necessary for any hope of moving forward.

Community Access

Despite the obvious emphasis of the English language in ELL programs, many such programs exist to help refugees pursue holistic well-being for themselves and for their families. It is important to learn English quickly and soon after resettlement for maximum benefit because the Refugee Council explains, “Early English language support is vital to creating job and training opportunities” (4). In the United States, well-being for refugees is related to English ability (Shaw 1099). Without English, it could be difficult or even impossible to access the breadth of resources available to refugees as citizens in their new communities. Feng Hou and Morton Beiser write, “Lack of language compromises economic opportunity, access to social resources, and the opportunity to participate in the power structure of resettlement countries” (135). Lack of English skills adds to the inevitable loss of power and privilege refugees experience when starting over in a new country.

In addition to community access, “linguistic competence helps ensure well-being by avoiding intra-familial disruptions that can be brought about by children learning a new language more quickly than parents, and by preventing the isolation of elderly immigrants and refugees” (138). Dynamics of families from collectivist cultures are thrown off balance when entering into an individualist country like the United States. Largely, refugees’ home cultures are more group-oriented meaning there is a high value for respect for elders, with a higher power distance, and loyalty to the in-group is a high value (Hofstede 67-68, 91). Therefore, when children translate for their parents among other adults, the family power dynamic can shift drastically. Not only are there changes for individual families, but the well-being of the receiving community is also at stake. With a need for more robust services, such as interpretation or translation, the cost of services increases (Hou and Beiser 136). Thus, it can be argued that early English intervention for refugees is beneficial not only for the well-being of adult refugees and their families, but for the well-being of the entire receiving community.

The Problem of PTSD

One distinct characteristic of the refugee community that impacts language acquisition is the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to conditions they faced fleeing their home countries and living in refugee camps. Stress and especially PTSD can interrupt academic achievement (among other things) but specifically language acquisition which creates unique challenges in ELL classrooms for both teachers and students (Finn 587). ELL teachers are often “one of the first links to their new country and a main source of cultural information” making them the front lines for those dealing with PTSD (Gordon 2). Thus, teachers should be trained on how to recognize symptoms of PTSD that include low motivation, high anxiety, and reluctance to participate verbally as well as strategies to help lessen unnecessary triggers in the classroom (4).

PTSD can also cause memory loss, causing difficulty in the learning process that teachers may wrongly assume is lack of preparation (Finn 593). While it cannot be assumed that every student suffers from this condition, awareness of PTSD and its possible effects should be a consideration for any ELL program. In many cultures, mental health is highly stigmatized and not openly discussed (Bates 646). Safety in community is essential for healing. Haitch and Miller write, “For people who have been traumatized by violence such community is usually an essential precondition for being able to speak their stories. The community’s ability to listen precedes the person’s ability to speak” (400). Therefore, students should never be forced to recount their histories and teachers should be careful when assigning what might be benign writing or speaking exercises for other students.

Diversity of Need

Most ELL programs, with the exception of resettlement agencies, are often a mix of immigrant, refugee, and foreign-exchange students. As in any classroom setting, refugee students have unique needs that other students may not have. Thus, ELL programs are not all singularly focused on refugee needs and therefore the priorities of these organizations are not specific to them. Community colleges, overall, are for-profit organizations with a goal of enrolling enough students to maintain programs and getting these students through to graduation or on to a four-year college. Nonprofit organizations, such as World Relief, have a personal mission to achieve while keeping funders and other stakeholders satisfied. Church and library programs are usually community-based and typically have lower barriers to entry and fewer people, in terms of stakeholders, to whom they are accountable. These programs have unique needs of their own, but the same students may walk in the doors of any one of them. Creating a partnership would benefit both the refugee students and the organizations even when they have such different needs. Before bringing these stakeholders together, it is important to focus on what they have in common and how those common needs can be met through a collaborative model.

Language Success for Refugees in ELL

It is well-documented that English language acquisition is necessary for refugees upon resettling in the U.S, but what are the keys to successfully learn English? Some influential factors in student success, especially with refugees, are previous education and literacy in the first language, having intrinsic motivation to learn English, a classroom culture that reflects the student's home culture, and having strong support systems in place. As a case study, the Vietnamese community is the second largest immigrant community in Seattle and "learning English and earning a family-supporting wage are still as challenging today as they were 40 years ago" with 65% of Vietnamese residents claiming that they do not speak English well (Vu). Since refugee populations have been resettled in the Seattle area for decades, there are many lessons to apply to current programs from what they have learned over the years. The following is an in-depth look at some of these keys to success.

Variance in Previous Education/L1 Literacy

Previous education and level of literacy in the first language (L1) is a strong determinant of English success. Standard practice is to make sure students do not use the L1 in an ELL classroom, but, especially for those with limited L1 literacy, an English-only classroom is not the best method for learning (Auerbach 9-10). English and literacy skills are not differentiated when testing into English programs, so it is often the case that "students with little L1 literacy background are grouped with those who are literate in their L1 but have beginning oral ESL proficiency" (17). Classrooms that make use of the L1 reduce barriers for previously underserved students as they recognize the value of their native culture and language (18, 23).

Findings have shown that "success in securing consistent employment and higher wages has been attributed to higher pre-arrival education and English skills" (Shaw 1100). While it is unfeasible to amend previous education once refugees arrive, it is possible to provide a proper learning environment for new English skills to take shape. Additionally, "it can take an average 85 to 150 hours of ESL instruction for a student to advance just one level of English proficiency — this is equivalent to attending three to four months of a two-hour class, five times a week" (Vu). While previous education and literacy are important factors in a student's progress, all language acquisition requires an investment of time and effort, regardless of the student's starting point.

After interviewing many ELL program directors in the Seattle area, I found that many use formal intake assessments with reading, writing, listening, and speaking components to determine which level to place students in when they first begin classes (Campbell, Giesbrecht, Kennedy, Moccia, Thomas). In addition to academic placement, however, it is essential to assess the specific needs of each individual student in order for them to get the most out of these programs (Seufert). While relevant curriculum and a safe classroom culture are certainly indispensable, as will be discussed later on, there are some factors over which ELL teachers have no control. The reality is that refugees come from a wide variance in educational background. Some are highly educated with prestigious jobs while others received little or no education in their home country. Many also had their education continually interrupted as they moved from one place to the next while seeking out safety for themselves or their family. Because these factors cannot be changed, it is important for teachers to understand the contexts their students are coming from. This understanding will help create a classroom environment where students are best served.

Personal Motivations and Goals

With any student, refugee or not, their reasons for being in the classroom will help to determine their success (Richard). Those intrinsically motivated and invested in their learning will move quickly and successfully through each level. These motivations can vary, but are typically instrumental or integrative; there is a desire to get a job or move into a better one or a desire to communicate with family and friends and be part of community (Webb 492). It is also important to remember that "motivation is not static; it may change from day to day, from task to task, and from learning community to learning community" (Schwarzer 27). Hunger pangs, loneliness, or family concerns may all interfere with that day's learning, for example. It is also common for embarrassment, nervousness, and lack of self-confidence to have a negative impact on motivation among adult learners (Brown 223). Educators should be aware of these things that can affect motivation and discern when to shift the atmosphere of a classroom as necessary.

Teachers should work to connect learning with student's real lives to increase English use outside of class, creating opportunities for students to use their world as a "language-learning laboratory" (Schwarzer 27). Students that engage English media, TV, radio, or attend plays or church services in English optimize their learning and perform the best (Hou and Beiser 140, Richard). Ultimately, "adult learners should depend as little as possible on their instructors for learning" (Schwarzer 31). An often overlooked task for instructors, then, is finding out what motivates their students and playing to their interests as much as is appropriate. Moms that want to help their kids with homework or to pay their bills, young adults who want to enter the dating scene, or older learners looking to obtain a sense of self-achievement are all looking for relevant programs (Campbell, Independent Living Coordinators, Kim 126).

While a lot of refugees see learning English as a means to better integrate into the community and their new life, Emily Campbell of Green River Community College explains that enrollment fluctuates with the economy. If the economy is bad and people lose their jobs, they often come back until they can find a different or better job. Campbell also worked at a nonprofit serving Somali refugees in Seattle and found that some people were just there to get out of the house. Angel Richard, another ELL instructor at Green River, explained that some students attend only to meet their quota for government subsidies; they need to prove they are taking classes and putting in hours to get money for DSHS and WIC and other programs. These programs actually look at attendance records and even count the hours they are in class. For example, one man needed to miss class but asked Richard to record that he was in class. He was clearly coming just to get these hours but always left early to work because he needed to make money, interrupting his education. Extrinsic motivators, even government subsidies, are not as beneficial in acquiring English as are personal goals.

Classroom Culture

An intentional classroom culture and a well-thought out physical space create a positive learning environment. In terms of curriculum needs, cultural competence, explicit language instruction, and differentiated instruction are three components of effective ELL instruction ("Complex English Language Learners" 2). As Hofstede explains, student motivation can shift depending on their culture of origin. Additionally, a student's comfort level in the classroom can depend on what they are used to; students from a collectivist culture may have a harder time speaking up in class (118-119). It is also helpful to provide breaks (where students are allowed to use their first language), use dual language books, model mistakes, and allow preparation before interaction in the new language (“Complex English Language Learners” 4-11). As discussed earlier, previous education and L1 literacy can boost or hinder English language acquisition and L1 use should be encouraged rather than discouraged in the classroom. All of these considerations can make or break a student’s learning experience.

Many studies have shown the importance of an “authentic learning” experience in the classroom (Schwarzer 28-29). “When planning lessons,” Seufert writes, “teachers can ask themselves how a particular activity might help learners not only develop language skills to survive, but also the confidence to thrive in the United States.” Beyond just obtaining English vocabulary and understanding grammar rules, refugees are more engaged when they learn English that is immediately applicable in their home or work life. Therefore “authenticity is critical for inventing a classroom learning community” (Whitmore and Crowell 275). Students are more engaged when the classroom environment reflects their real-life needs, so materials like the news, popular novels, or even song lyrics all have a place in the ELL classroom (Finn 591-592). In a K-12 setting, ELL classes teach parents how to help their children with homework using role-plays and the same texts their students are using (Waterman 231). Ultimately, the classroom should look as much like a student’s daily life as possible.

Studies show that students “perform better academically if the culture of their classrooms...reflects the culture of their homes” (“Iraqi Refugee Students” 2). This can be challenging in a city like Seattle where refugees come from so many different backgrounds and cultures. However, classroom community building is key with adult English learners in order for them to invest and take ownership of their learning. This kind of community happens only when students feel comfortable and safe with each other (Larrotta 75). If it is possible to integrate aspects of every culture into a classroom, then, it allows every student to feel represented and valued by the educator as well as their peers. One way to establish such a classroom is to allow students to have a say in everything from how the classroom is set up to how the schedule is run.

There can also be stark cultural differences that affect the classroom community such as gender relations. Megan Kennedy, an instructor with World Relief, relates how it has been difficult to build rapport with some of the men who are not used to having women in places of authority as they have limited access to education in their home countries. Others would prefer classes completely separated by gender, but almost all are mixed-gender. Even if separate classes are not possible, teachers should still be aware of these tensions and consciously respond to them, like not placing men and women in mixed pairs for an activity.

Part of creating a safe classroom space is consistency. Many nonprofit or church-based programs rely heavily on volunteer teachers. A problem with volunteer-run programs is that there is likely a “revolving door” of teachers in and out and “as soon as a teacher leaves, there is a significant drop in student attendance” (Finn 590). It was pointed out earlier that it is common for nonprofit programs to have a whole new set of students each day due to lower investment on the part of students, but there is an even higher risk of student turnover when teachers change often. While this is a generalization and some programs in fact have consistent volunteers, including World Relief where some volunteers have been around for twenty years or more, most volunteer programs rely on college students or other people with changing schedules. The resulting high turnover rate negatively impacts quality of presence, key in any community-building organization and especially those hoping to educate and propel others into more hopeful situations. People come through the doors of World Relief from several countries and cover a whole range of skills, from a complete newcomer in a classroom to an expert in their field. A lack of presence would count every student the same without recognizing the differences they carry into the classroom, while assurance of presence optimizes every student's learning opportunity.

Support Systems

John Friedmann defines the cause of poverty as "limited access to social power" so "building, empowering, and nurturing social networks and social organizations is the key" (qtd. in Myers, Ch. 5 "John Friedmann-Development as expanding access to social power"). Success in learning English can provide the access to social power refugees need to overcome poverty in a new community. Especially vulnerable are those least likely to learn English, typically women, the elderly, and those with limited previous education (Riggs 398). Support systems can provide needed social capital in order to keep students accountable and motivated.

Even in places where ELL resources are plentiful and accessible, like the Seattle area, "only a small percentage of adult [ELL] learners, both documented and undocumented, are able to take full advantage of language classes because of long work hours and familial obligations" (Brown 219). Therefore, many potential students, and especially women, prioritize their family's needs above their own. A study shows that women are less likely to participate in literacy programs for themselves when they do not perceive it as beneficial for improving the whole family (Albertini 26). Even when they find their way to a program, stress outside the classroom (like family matters) can have a negative impact on classroom learning. Being in a program without the support of a family or the presence of too much pressure at home, such as husbands who do not understand why their wives need classes, can also cause problems in the classroom (Richard). Valerie Giesbrecht of University Presbyterian Church noticed that many wives get pushback from their more traditional husbands who do not want them to give up their duties at home - taking care of the children, cooking, cleaning - in order to study. In reality, what goes on outside of the classroom can have as great an effect on learning as what happens inside of it. Therefore, family support often drives student success while lack of support can impede it significantly.

In most cases, children learn English much more quickly than their parents, but do not always want to contribute to their success as learners. Angel Richard, at Green River Community College, gave an assignment to speak English during at least one meal at home, but many relayed afterwards that their kids tried to correct them with little patience for mistakes. Parents thus found very little safety practicing at home. The result is that "limited English proficiency leaves mothers at risk of isolation and marginalisation. As their children rapidly become proficient in English, communication issues and family dysfunction can arise" (Riggs 400). Some mothers "reported how their children's mastery of English was helpful, whereas others felt threatened by it" (Brown 221). Moreover, women may feel less motivated to pursue learning English if it causes tension in their family.

If families are uncomfortable supporting adult learners, what are the options for these students? "Educators say that adult learners are more likely to remain in programs that help them set realistic goals, use varied instructional approaches, and are linked to support services such as child care, transportation, and health centers," so sometimes they need to look outside their family for support (Seufert). Support may also come from within the classroom as community is created and bonds of trust are formed between peers, teachers, and volunteers. The amount of time spent with students in class can make a difference, but so can the attention given to students' lives outside of class (Campbell, Giesbrecht). Interaction beyond the classroom is certain in an organization like World Relief that provides holistic services to its students

(Kennedy). When possible, students can also reach out to community resources for extra one-on-one tutoring if needed.

Alternatively, some innovative programs for the whole family have been successful. A Tuesday night program in Kent, south of Seattle, considers the needs of the whole family, inviting kids to come for childcare, teenagers to receive homework help, and the adults to get English instruction (Campbell). Another program catering to women found they needed to offer separate classes from men while children are being taught simultaneously. Then women could fulfill their responsibility to their family and instructors could create lessons for the specific needs of these students (McLaughlin et al. 44). Finally, a "mutual learning" model brought together Hmong refugees and American undergraduate students to learn from each other, forming relationships which then progressed to where the undergraduate students could act as community advocates for the refugees (Goodkind 391-393). All three of these intentionally created models show the diversity of need as well as the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to success among ELL programs.

There are common factors among success for English language learners, a major key being overall student support:

> Refugees and immigrants can be more effectively served when business, labor, education, and social services agree that the following are mutually beneficial: providing instruction that enables learners to master the language for self-sufficiency (finding, keeping, and advancing in jobs) as well as the language for family and community life; offering on-site and off-site classes with flexible schedules; providing access to auxiliary support services (child care, health care, transportation); involving families in learning together; promoting lifelong

> learning; and budgeting sufficient resources for training programs, including technology use. (Seufert)

Support can come through family, community, as well as inside the classroom. While not every program can cater to every distinct need, student success in the ELL classroom may look different than that of a typical classroom found in Seattle. While there may not be one singular model for success, the lessons learned from many years of work with refugees can be applied to benefit any and all newcomers to this area.

Why Partnerships?

As discussed, refugees learning English in a new cultural atmosphere need substantial support. Access to transportation, childcare, personal goals, and PTSD all contribute to the success or failure of becoming versed in this new language. There are many organizations in the Seattle area working to provide ELL classes for this population, but many have limited knowledge of each other. If organizations could gain a working knowledge of other resources in the community as well as the strengths of these resources and work together toward common goals, refugees could be better served. Thus, pursuing a partnership model is a necessary next step.

Best Practices for Partnerships

Phill Butler, an internationally acknowledged expert in partnerships and strategic alliances, defines a partnership as “any group of individuals or organizations, sharing a common interest, who regularly communicate, plan, and work together to achieve a common vision beyond the capacity of any one of the individual partners” (34-35). Due to the complex needs of refugees learning a language in a new country, a partnership model between organizations can more effectively serve this population and create large-scale social change than working in isolation (Kania & Kramer 37). As it is, “duplication of effort, division, and lack of coordination” are hindrances to advancement, so awareness of available resources leads to greater efficiency in programming and students can be better served (Butler 5). It takes work and commitment from each member of the partnership. Ultimately, partnerships serve as a means to reconciliation in the greater community as groups work to better understand each other and move towards peace.

The existing grantmaking system almost forces nonprofits to work against each other since grantmakers want to see how their funding makes an impact (Kania & Kramer 38). Nonprofits compete for limited funding and it is often mediocre organizations with strong brands that get the most support (Bornstein and Davis 49). One advantage to the partnership model is the opportunity to bring together financial resources, but even better, these organizations no longer need to compete against each other. The hope is that lessening this competition can encourage systemic change among grantmakers to reward good, effective work instead of the best marketing team. Concentrating the task of fundraising to the single administrative group central to the partnership means that collective resources are funnelled into one focused ask instead of competing but still serving the target population.

Because of the diversity of the refugee population in Seattle and the goals and structures of organizations serving them, pursuing a partnership model is more difficult than simply serving an individual organization’s needs. In an interview, Butler remarked that potential loss of power; fear of loss of income, prestige, and influence; and ego are all reasons that organizations are hesitant to collaborate. Instead of focusing on only the needs of the organization, a partnership necessitates looking at the common good which can take compromise. However, working in partnership is a step toward reconciliation. The ultimate goal of reconciliation is *shalom*, or right relationships with all, that results in peace (Sider 3). While it will take work, if the motivation for coming together is truly for the good of everyone involved, partnerships can result in healthy, lasting relationships (Stewart 48-49). Coming together means facing likely conflict and mess. However, Brenda Salter McNeil, a pastor with a long history of work in reconciliation, affirms that "chaos is a necessary stage in the community-building process" (52). At the same time, contact theory gives hope that "relationships between conflicting groups will improve if they have meaningful contact with one another over an extended period of time" (33). Partnerships give people time to work together as people, not just organizations. It is relationship that creates reconciliation and reconciliation that brings global society closer to peace. Butler writes, "People and ministries simply cannot work together effectively over any length of time without dealing with the relational brokenness" (51). Therefore, partnerships should be seen as more than a way to get business done. Partnerships should be viewed as peacemaking institutions that deal with this brokenness. The following will take a look at how to create effective and sustainable partnerships.

Create Inventory of Available Resources

Initially, a partnership facilitator or facilitation team should be identified. This person or group needs patience, tenacity, and commitment to the vision (Butler 122). From there, this person or group works to build a knowledge base of existing resources and the current situation of refugee students in the Seattle area (126-127). This knowledge does not need to be exhaustive, but good effort should be given to cover every base. All activity should be framed with purpose and process in mind (203). From this database, this person or team will then decide who to speak to first in order to explore partnership possibilities (129).

Drawing from the inventory of local ELL resources discussed above, the partnership will include key leaders from every category: nonprofit, for-profit, church, and school programs. In order for this partnership to serve the needs of every student, each of these categories need to be well-represented. In this way, diversity of both the organizations and the participants is celebrated and integrates the whole range of resources (Butler 55). As the partnership moves forward, it will be vital to keep this inventory updated as programs expand, change, fold, or as new ones emerge. This dynamic, living document, then, can be used to show how the partnership changes over time as resources shift to meet the changing needs of the population.

Identify Key Players and their Roles

As in a business, "Better people are your best hope" (Lynch and Walls 82). In speaking with some of the teachers and leaders in the Seattle ELL community, it is clear that some prioritize collaboration over others. These people would be approached first as the partnership forms to help with early buy-in, but this does not preclude those who have no evidence of past partnership. Some might desire partnership but have been unsure where to start or who to approach and early conversations can distinguish who is in this category. Because of the abundance of ELL workers in the Seattle area, it is important to identify the most influential parties in hopes of involving at least 30-50% of them in the partnership (Butler 138). As seen in Appendix A, parties identified as influential are marked with an asterisk. These can include everyone from CEOs of larger organizations to teachers, administrative staff, and volunteers who deal directly with students.

It is important to mention that initial one-on-one meetings are essential, but at this stage it is much too early to bring everyone together. The first get-to-know-you meetings are a chance for the facilitator to listen and understand the needs and goals of each potential partner, but more importantly, to get to know each other and start to build relationships. In a partnership, the first focus should be on the individual as a person (Butler 123). In addition, the facilitator should keep their ears open for repeated names during these conversations as these are the influencers in the field. These people should also be pursued as potential partners. Successful collaboration necessitates shared understanding of existing relationships and the current roles of all involved as it "implies interdependency and joint ownership of decisions" (Amey et al. 7, 10). Prioritizing relationship enables this ownership to take place.

At this stage, it is also helpful to identify power dynamics and consider how identified parties may interact with one another. Considering the long-term nature of the partnership, it is important to consider roles of power and privilege before bringing everyone together. Peters and Armstrong identify how "the unequal distribution of power and authority in a group can profoundly influence the direction of decision making and knowledge construction" (78). If one or two people dominate every meeting and every decision, a partnership becomes a dictatorship, serving only the needs of that organization. Acknowledging the balance of power is important for a facilitator to consider before approaching potential key leaders. Especially in working to serve a vulnerable and often systematically disempowered group of people, organizations coming alongside refugees need to be aware of how their leadership and structures will be perceived. The partnership should reflect the diversity of the Seattle area and encompass a range of age, gender, race, social status, and citizenship instead of allowing one group to dominate.

Identify Commonly Felt, High-priority Needs Among Agencies

Listening well with a genuine curiosity to get to know people and their vision will help the facilitator identify high-priority needs in these first meetings (Butler 213-214). There are four stakeholders to keep in mind when considering needs: the primary audience (refugee students), the partnership (organizations that serve ELL students), senior staff (those performing administrative functions for the partnership), and people who give towards the cause (funders) (222-223). Due to the dynamic nature of this group of stakeholders, needs and priorities are subject to change. Therefore, this is not a set-it-and-forget-it step. There needs to be continuous communication with all four audiences, especially with those the partnership is hoping to serve (226).

A study by McLaughlin, et al. describes how a university and community collaboration to benefit migrant English learners has "been committed to prolonged engagement and mutual benefit when writing grant proposals and sharing funding" (42). Funding is one obvious need that can affect all four audiences so this "share the wealth" model is extremely promising. Discussion around funding is essential when determining need. Are organizations willing to share in the work of raising funds? Or are well-funded organizations willing to put in more resources than sparsely-funded ones? Additionally, partnerships in higher education have found success in shared leadership and shared purpose (Butcher et al. 37). True collaboration means rejecting the tendency -- or even necessity -- to compete for resources and instead share for the benefit of all. The facilitator can help moderate this by encouraging organizations to contribute their strengths to the partnership and mutually benefit each other. Transparency helps move the partnership from transactional to transformational engagement (Bowers 42). A centralized administrative entity is recommended to advance the partnership and manage need.

Identify Readiness To Explore a More Collaborative Approach

Initial one-on-one meetings are important to build a foundation for future partnership. The facilitator can start by asking each individual to assess the current rate of ELL success in the Seattle area, what is keeping them from being more effective, and if they would be interested in a one-time meeting with other stakeholders. From there, if others express interest as well, they are invited to be part of the first group discussion (Butler 130). These simple questions can help determine each individual's readiness to pursue a partnership. Some partners will be ready to begin right away while others may need time to determine if it is the right fit or priority. Whether or not they decide to pursue the partnership, "Hope of accomplishing something that seems impossible can motivate, supply excitement and anticipation, and provide great fulfillment when the vision is realized" (Butler 96). This kind of city-wide collaboration will ultimately affect most if not all ELL programs in Seattle, thus providing this hope and motivation for all in the field. While some may feel they do not have the time or resources to contribute, lines of communication should stay open if possible in case an opportunity arises in the future.

Many programs are collaborating already or would like to. Emily Campbell relates that "the dream is that the organizations send to us….World Relief sends us people [and] other than that it's kind of word of mouth. We have some library classes in the community and those are a good on-ramp." Through this word-of-mouth approach, many programs are aware of other community resources and refer students when appropriate. This loose collaboration will make transition into a more formal partnership system easier as there is already a relational foundation and some, even if limited, knowledge of how they operate and what type of student has been successful there.

Hanleybrown et al. recommend that a collective impact model first has adequate financial resources for at least two to three years, an influential champion (facilitator) that can get people of influence on board, and a sense of urgency for change (3). At this stage, potential partners do need to be realistic about whether or not a collaborative approach is sustainable or not. If identified as a priority, it is more likely that these preconditions can be met. The facilitator should also be prepared to point out how a collaborative approach will add value to each partner as well as serve the common good since “there’s a lot of pressure on these agencies to perform” (Butler, Personal Interview). Once readiness is determined, it is time to bring interested parties together for the first group meeting.

Bring Potential Partner Agencies to the Table

When the moment finally comes, organizations will be energized by meeting each other face-to-face through an invitation by the facilitator. In this first meeting, it is vital to lay a relational foundation. While the facilitator has begun this process individually, this is where the partnership succeeds or fails. Each person will be given a chance to share their personal story as well as that of their organization with at least five to ten minutes allotted each (Butler 149-150). A shared vision should be determined and if that is not possible, a potential caution should be raised as to if this partnership will be viable. The facilitator may need to act as a cultural broker to maintain understanding among the different organizations. From here, there needs to be discussion on the central issue, namely how to establish language learning success among the refugee population in Seattle. In small groups, stakeholders are given time to identify the three main issues or barriers faced by their organizations. Coming together, these issues will be compiled and discussed in a larger group, eventually voted down to determine the top two issues. In small groups again, they will discuss the action steps needed to overcome these issues. Over the course of this meeting, understanding of the current and historical context of refugees in Seattle and identification of the primary roadblocks to best serving them should be taken into consideration (Butler 151, 153). This group will need to establish how to determine success in light of these priority issues and action steps. Action research -- adapting on processes through actually doing them -- will be used in this process in order to better understand the issue and keep everyone involved in problem-solving (Merriam and Tisdell 49). Finally, with all of these things in mind, stakeholders will decide if a partnership model will be the best way to enact these goals.

Once the central vision is determined, a smaller task force should be created from interested individuals that can act on the next steps (Butler 163). They will need to decide when they will meet next and choose a method in which to keep the rest of the group informed of their progress. Future meetings will then build on these initial action steps. Preferably these meetings take place away from familiar settings, like partners' offices, with plenty of time to work on predetermined objectives (170). Retreat-style meetings would give ample time and space while ensuring focus is kept on partnership work. As mentioned earlier, an imbalance in power dynamics can wreak havoc on progress. If this emerges as an issue, it may be necessary to "create a time and space in a neutral location that will be facilitated by a neutral moderator for all involved to voice their positions, values, risks, concerns, fears, wishes, and demands" (Davis et al. 33). This ensures that everyone is heard and no one organization has an unfair advantage in getting their own needs met. The facilitator should be aware of how these dynamics play out and adjust accordingly in future meetings if necessary. The hope is that more time together will also help ease existing tensions since contact theory states that contact in which people cooperate and act towards common goals can reduce prejudice and intergroup conflict (Everett). After this initial meeting, there should be an idea of common goals among partners.

Identify Limited, Achievable, High Priority Common Goals

Vision is what keeps a partnership focused as it "inspires people to believe the impossible dream, to commit extraordinary resources, to take great risks, to think 'outside the box,' and the personally invest their time and energy far beyond the normal" (Butler 95). It is important to have early successes, even just establishing this shared vision, in order to keep up morale. Setting limited, achievable objectives helps to get there (178). It also helps to set up the team for success. This means it is not necessary to tackle every problem, or even the biggest problem, right away. Instead, tackle the issue where this collaborative effort can have the most impact in the shortest amount of time.

As in business, the mission of a partnership is important, but those on the receiving end should also be receiving a high-quality end product (Lynch and Walls 35). Following along with the goal of simplicity in structure, the lean principle states that anything that does not add value is waste and should be eliminated (115). As a partnership seeking to provide language learning success to refugees, one of the goals should describe what that success looks like. As explored above, not every student has the same goals or motivation for learning English. Some are looking for better work or higher pay while others are longing for social connection. To that end, success for the partnership cannot focus on just one of these goals, but instead should seek to fulfill the student’s goals, whatever they may be. This is just one example of a common goal that can emerge.

Define the Relationship - Partnership Structure

Effective and lasting partnerships start with vision, not structure (Butler 41). However, once a solid vision has been established, partners need to define the relationship and come to a consensus on what the partnership will look like. They will need to agree on the duration, structure, and context of the partnership. Because of the focus on education, it would make sense to establish a long-term partnership (of two or more years) to see participants through their desired goals. Realistically, after two years the partnership will just be getting its footing and people will have just begun learning how to work together. The initial structuring phase followed by organizing for impact can itself take up to two years while sustaining action can easily turn into a ten-year process. Partners need to understand that they are in it for the long haul and be willing to commit the time needed to make it work as "there is no shortcut in the long-term process of social change" (Hanleybrown et al. 4).

In terms of structure, it should be "as simple as possible and still meet your objectives" (Butler 40). While everything comes at a cost--from facilitation, administrative needs, meetings, conferences, and joint projects--if the partnership is a priority, it will work out financially (242-246). Organizations need to demonstrate willingness to invest their time and money into the partnership. Consistency should be maintained in vision, memory, leadership, process, and structure whenever possible (247). The structure of the partnership will depend on levels of commitment and expectations. Ranging from a simple awareness of coexisting programs to a formal constitutional approach, structure can help or hinder progress towards completing goals. As Butler puts it, "The less structure you need to accomplish the vision, the less maintenance you need and the more resources can be focused on your primary outcomes" (251). In order from least to greatest amount of structure:

- *awareness* of each other is simple enough as taking an inventory of what is out there,
- a *covenant* acknowledges each other and commits to best interests,
- a *network* shares information and resources,
- a *consensus* commits to working together informally,
- a *strategic alliance* formulates a written document and focuses on complementary strengths,

- and finally a *constitutional* structure defines the vision and who is a part of it and specifies how actions will be carried out (248-257).

While awareness is the simplest, it is likely too simplistic for a partnership of this nature while a constitution may be too rigid. As the partnership comes together and a vision emerges, a structural form somewhere in the middle will be decided on and carried out.

Similar to a strategic alliance, Kania and Kramer also advocate for a collective impact model that includes “a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants” (37). In order to keep the collaboration healthy and thriving, a partnership requires “frequency of interaction, diversity of interaction, and strength of influence on the other party’s behavior, decisions, plans, and goals” (Stewart and Alrutz 50). Participation is required from all parties for it to work. Less formal interactions should occur between partners intermittently to maintain and continue to build relationships. Difficult conversations may need to happen in order for this to work (52).

Lynch and Walls state, “It’s important to have good plans. It’s equally important to not get too hung up on them” (59). Change should be expected and flexibility is key, especially when working with such a diverse group of participants for such a diverse group of recipients (Butler 183)! A structure kept simple and consistent sets the partnership up for success. Butcher et al. advocates for “an openness to change not only in the nature of the partnership but in the organizations themselves” (31). If organizations are not adapting as needs change over time, it may be time to redefine the relationship. If the partnership is not serving the vision or accomplishing its predetermined goals, it may be time to reevaluate. Restructuring and reevaluating does not equate to failure, but refusing to do so would be.

Methods for Sustainability

Working in partnership has a way of revealing personal and organizational biases or weaknesses (Butler 51). Conflict is inevitable when people are involved given different desires and needs. In fact, “Assuming that consensus forms in a linear fashion and will include no incidents of disagreement is problematic” (Davis et al. 41). Conflict should be anticipated and “productive channels of disagreement” created preemptively in order to work through issues (41). The most important way to maintain a sustainable partnership is to focus on relationship. Not just working relationships, but “informal discussions need to continue independently of the formal structures, keeping the lines of communication open” (Butcher et al. 37). First and foremost, the focus needs to remain on building “trusting, open, and restored relationships” (Butler 52). As goals are realized, initiatives should be strengthened and everyone should remain involved in communication (187). Butler asserts, “A lasting, effective partnership depends as much on confidence in *the process* as it does on confidence in the *people* who are leading it” (165). When people are prioritized, processes are strengthened.

When goals are reached, they should be celebrated! It is important to not move past successes without acknowledging the work it took to get there. Moving on too quickly to the next thing can cause burnout or demotivation. It could help to have predetermined rewards in place as each milestone is reached, like the gamification model, and to give something to look forward to. Alternatively, Stewart and Alrutz recommend, “Public recognition and celebration of the benefits and outcomes of the partnerships (e.g., through a press release, website feature, award, or community event) reaffirms a commitment to partners and to the value of the shared work” (52). No matter how it is structured, recognition should be more than an afterthought. In between victories, constant encouragement can help keep the vision alive in the midst of significant investment of time and resources (Butler 229). The facilitator should be aware of and try to manage expectations of each of the four constituents as well (237).

Evaluation is essential for sustainability of a partnership to keep accountable to the desired vision. A "triple bottom line" can help determine success as it looks at social, environmental, and financial factors (Bornstein and Davis 63). Example questions to pose to the partnership could include the following: Are students reaching their goals? Is this partnership helping to reduce barriers to access? Are financial resources being used wisely and in compliance with any government- or grant-mandated requirements? And finally, is there a need to reevaluate goals in light of the dynamic nature of the refugee population in Seattle?

As Bornstein and Davis point out, measuring social change is "artful" and requires subjective and objective dimensions (66). It helps if a solid vision is established at the beginning of the partnership so there is something concrete to evaluate. However, "the worst possible scenario is to assume that everything is going okay" (Butler 190). Therefore, ongoing evaluation is crucial. A small team of two to three partners should help to establish and carry out consistent evaluation. This is usually aided by the administrative group put in place to keep the partnership running. Unfortunately, "backbone organizations are sometimes seen as the kind of overhead that funders so assiduously avoid" so it can be difficult to keep them going (Hanleybrown et al. 7). Without them, essential tasks of the partnership, such as periodic evaluation, are more likely to fall behind and endanger sustainability. This is why the "triple bottom line" approach tells a better story than any one factor by itself.

The most dynamic groups are the ones that focus on "how to effect change beyond their immediate reach" (Bornstein and Davis 69). Another question to consider in a thriving partnership is if multiplication is possible. If this model is successful in the Seattle area, can it be replicated in other cities as needed? Sharing resources can expand beyond one locale and reach into the lives of families on the opposite side of the country. While there may be unique needs and challenges elsewhere, the foundation of this partnership may translate well to other situations. “A product as good as the mission is your strongest competitive advantage” and if a quality product and mission can be replicated, it is worth spreading (Lynch and Walls 99).

Implementation Plan (see Appendix B)

So far, this partnership is in the beginning stages. While there is a database of ELL resources in Appendix A, it is likely not exhaustive. There could be other ELL programs, but it shows a good representation of what exists in the Seattle area. As the partnership expands, the knowledge base of local resources will continue to grow. A critical first step is to identify a facilitator or facilitation team that can advance into the next phase of partnership formation. Because of the variety of sectors in which ELL education occurs, a facilitation team may be the best option to represent the diverse needs. It would be advantageous to include a refugee who has been through ELL on this team. This team will continue to build upon the existing knowledge base in the Seattle area and identify key influencers in these organizations. The next step is to meet one-on-one with these potential partners and start to build a relationship. Relationship-building is key in this stage because in order to be most effective, the partnership needs to achieve 30-50% buy-in among key players. Thus, the facilitation team needs to prioritize these meetings in these first six months in order to work toward future success.

Also during this initial six-month period, the facilitation team will start to identity high-priority needs, likely through these one-on-one meetings with leaders from other organizations. They will listen for patterns and common goals repeated by these individuals. They will also seek to understand the mission and vision of the organization and determine whether or not that organization or individual would be prepared to enter into a formal partnership. This can be asked outright by the facilitation team or discerned based on these initial interactions.

After this crucial work of relationship building in the first six months to one year, potential partners will be brought together for the first time. The priority of this first meeting will be to build relationships among partners, many of whom will be meeting for the first time. Each partner will be given 5-10 minutes to share their personal story as well as the story of their organization or school. From there, the group will establish a shared vision of how to best serve the refugee population in learning English in the Seattle area (the central issue). There will be a discussion of the history of refugees in the Seattle area and potential roadblocks to the work ahead. After creating specific action steps, tasks will be assigned to willing candidates, forming a smaller task force for immediate work to be done.

A future meeting session will also be scheduled and required for all partners. This retreat-style weekend will be held off-site from normal office space in order to set aside dedicated time to the partnership and next steps. The priority of this meeting will be setting specific goals and forming outcome statements with measurable results and evaluation methods. Possible outcome statements include:

1. All refugees entering ELL programs in the Seattle area will accomplish their self-appointed goals (which can include getting a job, entering higher education, being able to communicate in the community).
2. All refugees enrolled in ELL programs in the Seattle area will increase their English literacy by at least one level.
3. All programs providing ELL in the Seattle area will be able to refer students to a better-fitting program if necessary.

Only after establishing these goals will a structure be set in place for what the partnership will look like in the coming years. It may take up to two years to settle into a structure that will be sustainable over time. Because of the nature of this partnership, with people coming from very different organizational structures and funding sources, it may need to be a more formal structure to keep on track. This includes having a written document with partnership guidelines, as in a strategic alliance.

Finally, after starting activities and setting a structure in place, sustainability is key. Acknowledge and celebrate wins. Evaluations, as set up during the structuring process, should be adhered to in order to further partner goals or improve upon existing methods. There also needs to be a shared understanding that this work will take time. “As people work toward a collective vision that clarifies the nature of the problems that have brought them together,” Stringer writes, “they gain a greater understanding of the complexities of the situation in which they are enmeshed” (192). Over time, the understanding of local refugee’s situations will increase and with it, greater understanding of how to better support them and each other as organizations.

Conclusion

As we become more globalized and our lives more integrated, “Partnership with others is not an option--it’s essential” (Butler 305). Even though it will take a significant amount of time, when it comes to providing resources for a new life for refugees, partnerships are necessary for success. For immigrants coming into a new country, and especially for refugees who were forced out of their homes due to political violence or religious persecution, change will be slow as people take time to heal. In a fast-paced, time-oriented culture, this can be difficult to embrace, but ultimately, a slow and steady pace will bear lasting fruit. If possible, the onus should be on the community as “power should be encouraged to evolve downward, not upward. Decisions should constantly move closer to the people most affected by them" (International Forum 594). Real change comes from stopping to listen before starting to act. Thus, listening and building relationships, with both refugees in the community and ELL organizations, will be the foundation of this partnership.

Unfortunately, while globalization gives us greater access to each other, we often end up more divided. Because we can find people that think like us or act like us, we tend to self-segregate into trusted groups of like-minded individuals. While this may create strong communities, if these community members keep to themselves, they are likely to forget the perspective of the "other" and step into dangerous territory. This is where we need to get outside of our safe boxes and choose to associate with those that may be unlike us. Only through these connections can we pool the wealth of resources and knowledge contained within. By forming partnerships among organizations serving refugees, we can tap into this knowledge base as well as find empathy for each other. Representation is also important in honoring the place of refugees in the city of Seattle. Seeing immigrants and refugees in places of power in government, in education, and in communities is a powerful way to show that they belong and are valuable.

Ultimately, in order for this partnership to be successful, it needs to add value to all parties. Each partner should be able to better fulfill their mission and each refugee should be better served and more likely to achieve their goals. Funders should recognize the value in their investment and the administrative group should see their time as well worth it. Shared goals and a shared vision are necessary for this partnership model to move forward. Seattle's rich history of accepting immigrants and refugees as a sanctuary city make it ripe for a collaborative model of service. Instead of getting lost in a system that does not work for them, refugees will find community and have a better chance at learning English to fulfill their goals and dreams for this new life. Through partnership, refugees will be better served which will ultimately bolster community well-being through initiatives like refugee-owned businesses and strong, healthy families. Organizations that work together can have a greater long-term impact than working in isolation. For the future of the city and its families, establishing a partnership will increase overall impact and decrease the amount of time needed to get there.

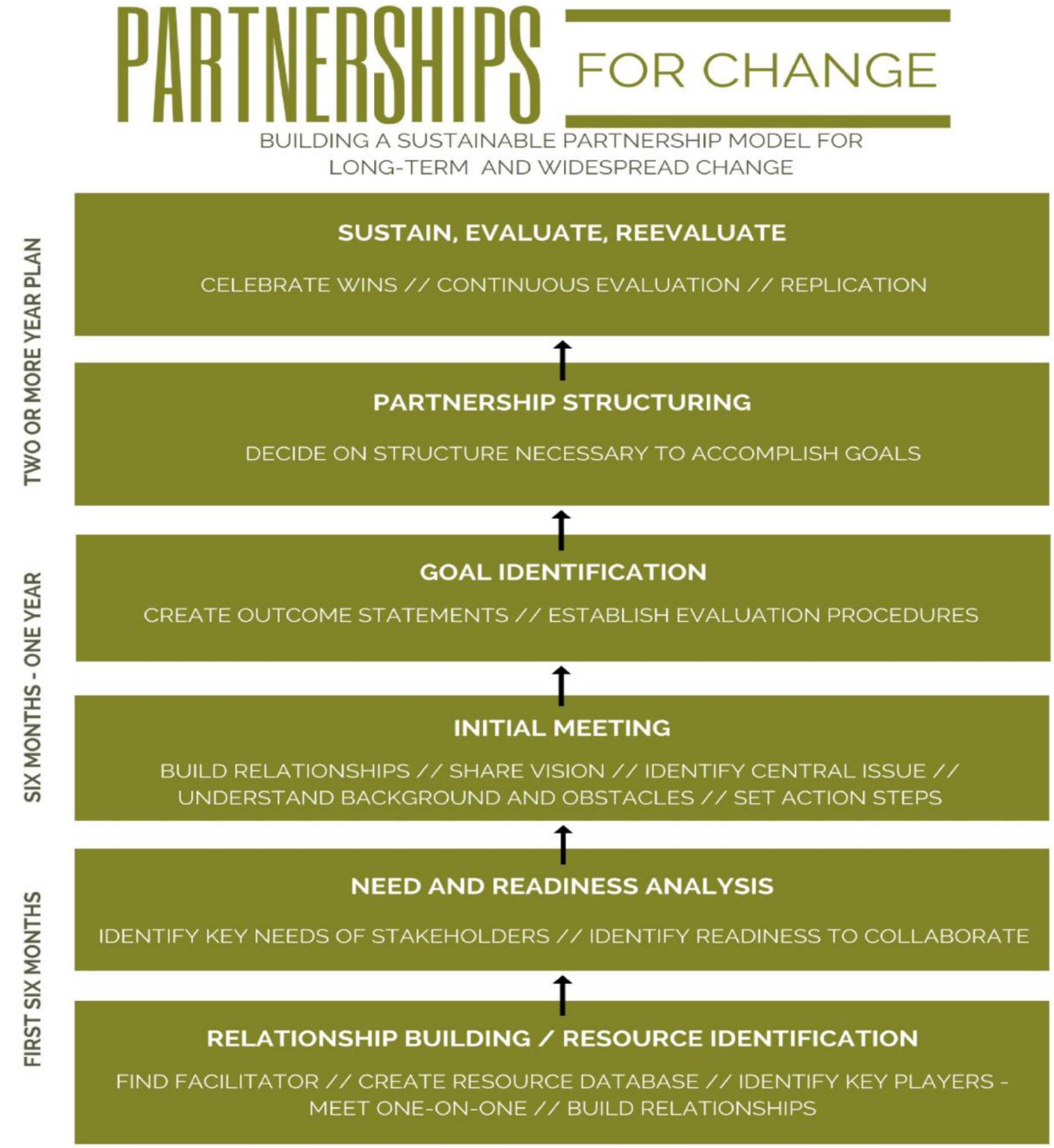
Appendix A - Database of ELL resources in the Puget Sound region

LOCATION(S)	TYPE	NAME	TIMES	COST	CONTACT
Auburn Kent	Community College	Green River*	Various	$30/quarter	Basic Skills Office (253) 838-9111 x2315
Bellevue	Community College	Bellevue College	4-10 hours/week	$25/quarter	Basic & Transitional Studies (425) 564-2171
Bellevue	Nonprofit	Jubilee REACH	M/W pm T/Th am	Free	(425) 746-0506
Bellevue	Nonprofit	English Language Learners Alliance	Various	Free	(425) 312-3552
Des Moines	Community College	Highline College	Various	$25/quarter	ESL (206) 592-3297
Edmonds	Community College	Edmonds*	Various	$25/quarter	Adult Basic Education ESL (425) 640-1478
Everett Monroe	Community College	Everett	Various, M-Th	$25/quarter	Transitional Studies (425) 388-9339
Everett	Community College	Cascadia	Various	$25/quarter	Basic Education for Adults (425) 352-8158
Federal Way Auburn	Nonprofit	Multi-Service Center	2x week	Free	(206) 838-6810
Flexible	Private	ESL and Culture Coach	Flexible	$250 for 10 hour course, free Talk Time	Dr. Chuprina (425) 327-6872
Kent	Church	Kent Covenant Church	T/Th am	$20/course	(253) 631-0222 x300
Kent	Nonprofit	World Relief* (Must be in job search program)	M-Th, F job class	Free	(253) 277-1121
Kent	Nonprofit	Coalition for Refugees from Burma	Family Literacy: M/W/F	Free	(206) 860-5939
Kent	Nonprofit	Refugee Transition Center*	T pm	Free	(253) 373-6934
Kirkland Shoreline Bellevue Redmond	Nonprofit	Hopelink* (English for work)	One quarter courses, 2.5 hours/week, Morning or evening	Free	(425) 250-3007
North & South Seattle	Government	“Ready To Work”*	M-Th 9a-12p	Free	(206) 588-4901

Seattle	Vocational School	Seattle Vocational Institute (SVI)	Various	$25/quarter	Basic & Transitional Studies (206) 934-4950
Seattle	Church	St. James Cathedral			Chris Koehler (206) 382-4510
Seattle	Nonprofit	Helping Link (Vietnamese speakers)	2x week for 10 weeks, evenings	Free	(206) 568-5160
Seattle	Nonprofit	Asian Counseling and Referral Service*		Free	(206) 695-7578
Seattle	Nonprofit/College funded	Literacy Source	M-Th	Free	(206) 782-2050
Seattle	Nonprofit	El Centro de la Raza			(206) 957-4646
Seattle (Capital Hill)	Community College	Seattle Central	Various	$25/quarter	Basic & Transitional Studies (206) 934-4180
Seattle (Northgate)	Community College	North Seattle	Various	$25/quarter	Basic & Transitional Studies (206) 934-4720
Seattle (Rainier Valley) SeaTac	Nonprofit	Refugee Women's Alliance	M-T am	Free	(206) 957-2029
Seattle (University District)	Church	University Presbyterian Church Language Institute*	M T/Th Other activities to practice speaking	$30/ten classes (M); $100/qtr (T/Th); free	(206) 524-7300
Shoreline	Community College	Shoreline	Various	$25/quarter	Transitional Programs Office (206) 546-4602
Variety of locations	Nonprofit	Jewish Family Service	Day Evening	Free	(253) 850-4065
Various	Government	King County Public Library*	Various	Free	Various
Various	Government	Seattle Public Library*	Various	Free	Various
West Seattle New Holly Georgetown	Community College	South Seattle	M-Th 8-11 am or 6-9 pm	$25/quarter	Basic & Transitional Studies (206) 934-5363
White Center Kent	Nonprofit	Neighborhood House		Free	(206) 272-0044

*=likely candidate for partnership

Appendix B - Implementation Plan



PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHANGE

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR
LONG-TERM AND WIDESPREAD CHANGE

TWO OR MORE YEAR PLAN

SUSTAIN, EVALUATE, REEVALUATE

CELEBRATE WINS // CONTINUOUS EVALUATION // REPLICATION

↑

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURING

DECIDE ON STRUCTURE NECESSARY TO ACCOMPLISH GOALS

↑

SIX MONTHS - ONE YEAR

GOAL IDENTIFICATION

CREATE OUTCOME STATEMENTS // ESTABLISH EVALUATION PROCEDURES

↑

INITIAL MEETING

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS // SHARE VISION // IDENTIFY CENTRAL ISSUE //
UNDERSTAND BACKGROUND AND OBSTACLES // SET ACTION STEPS

↑

FIRST SIX MONTHS

NEED AND READINESS ANALYSIS

IDENTIFY KEY NEEDS OF STAKEHOLDERS // IDENTIFY READINESS TO COLLABORATE

↑

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING / RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION

FIND FACILITATOR // CREATE RESOURCE DATABASE // IDENTIFY KEY PLAYERS -
MEET ONE-ON-ONE // BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

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