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UNDERSTANDING ACCULTURATION PATTERNS
OF BURMESE REFUGEE CHILDREN IN
UTAH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

Stacie Jai Fraire

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Educational Specialist

Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education

Brigham Young University

August 2009

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING ACCULTURATION PATTERNS OF BURMESE REFUGEE CHILDREN IN UTAH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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This qualitative study explored the experience of 21 Burmese refugee adolescents as they acculturated into public schools in Salt Lake City, Utah. Unstructured, open-ended interviews were conducted to elicit information on the students' perception of the U.S. educational system, as well as their feelings about acculturation. The interviews were conducted with the aid of a Burmese/Karen translator and were transcribed and analyzed utilizing a grounded theory approach. The findings detail the acculturation process of the Burmese refugee students, the positive effect motivation has on the pace of acculturation, the impact of unfamiliar technology and language-based misunderstandings on the students' educational performance, the need to develop an

individualized career plan for the student upon arrival, and the value of expanding the Burmese refugees' social networks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was an amazing experience, and I would feel be remiss if I did not thank everyone involved in this process. Thank you to my amazing family and friends whose support system of encouragement motivated me to complete this thesis.

A special thank you to my amazing chair and thesis committee members for helping me become a better writer and researcher than I would have thought possible.

I am very grateful for the Granite School District and staff who allowed me to work with their students—especially Charlene Lui, head of the Educational Equity department, and Dr. Darryl Thomas, head of research and development for all studies conducted in the Granite School District. I greatly appreciate their time and patience with me throughout this study.

Thank you to all of the translators who translated the documents into various languages, and a very special thank you to my amazing Burmese/Karen interpreter.

Lastly a huge ‘thank you’ to all the individuals who participated in this study! This study would not exist without your participation.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States has the fifth largest number of asylum-seeking refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2006). Between 1975 and 2006 a total of 2.4 million refugees immigrated to the United States (U.S.). In 2008, former President George W. Bush signed an allotment for an additional 80,000 refugees to enter U.S. borders (Presidential Determination No. 2008-29 of September 30, 2008). Current U.S. President Barack Obama has not rescinded this allotment. The number of refugees entering the United States is projected to increase substantially in future years.

Refugees from Burma are among those expected to significantly increase their immigration to the United States. Since 1984 more than 654,000 Burmese citizens have fled from Burma and sought refuge in neighboring states. Approximately 3,526 Burmese refugees have resettled in the United States. It is unlikely that these individuals will return to Burma until the current governing party is overthrown; thus, these individuals will likely resettle in the United States permanently (International Rescue Committee, 2007).

Current resource allocation for refugees is woefully inadequate given the huge scale of immigration. Educational and social programs to facilitate adjustment to the United States are conspicuously absent, resulting in the failure of programs designed to help refugees acculturate successfully to their new environment. Hence, refugees entering the United States may experience substantial difficulties when attempting to negotiate societal structures, specifically the public educational system (McBrien, 2005).

The majority of refugee households admitted into the United States include school-age children. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

estimates that more than half of any refugee population are children (2006). Refugee children are at great psychological and developmental risk due to their dependence upon adult caregivers who are generally refugees themselves and do not understand the U.S. systems and institutions (UNHCR, 1993). Therefore, there is a particular need to focus on the educational and developmental adjustment among refugee children. This thesis will address this issue by exploring the experiences of Burmese refugee children integrating into the U.S. public education system.

There are further salient reasons for addressing the experiences of Burmese refugee children adapting to the U.S. public educational system. The sustained number of refugees who enter the United States every year dictates that it is vital for school psychologists and school personnel to understand the needs of these individuals and assist them with their educational development. However, to date there is extremely limited research concerning how to assist refugee populations as they acculturate within the U.S. public school system.

Furthermore, these individuals may deserve special psychological conditions based on their initial purpose of flight. Many refugee children have seen their home country torn apart by war. Most of these individuals are the first in their traceable lineage to leave their native land. Developmentally, these children may not fully comprehend the issues surrounding their flight and the need to acculturate into a new society (McBrien, 2005). They are likely to have been traumatized by the surrounding events of their flight, and they may struggle to find a place of safety to mourn their loss. Many who have lost family members will be full of “unthinkable and inexpressible fears and anxieties”

(Blackwell & Melzak, 2000, p. 8). Their psychological needs will differ markedly from those of their school peers.

Another salient issue is the lack of resources the United States is able to provide for refugees. Historically, the United States has been seen as a haven for refugees and immigrants. Many of these individuals enter the United States with a belief that the United States will provide a better future for them, the so-called “American dream.” Yet, the goal to attain financial security is often outweighed by the imminent need of survival. Many refugee families have difficulty securing stable employment and may lack financial resources for rent and food. The majority of Burmese refugees will enter their new country with no post-secondary education and little work experience outside of agriculture. As Geo-JaJa and Mangum point out, “even lifelong Americans . . . rarely achieve family-sustaining earnings without at least a year of post-secondary education and skill training” (2007, p. 30)

Refugee children are often expected to assist their family in various tasks, such as working a part-time job, making transactions with various agencies because of their rapid English acquisition, and supervising their siblings. Such roles may cause the children to take time off from school, which can lead to their falling behind in schoolwork (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000).

Public education is the primary means to increase the likelihood of a refugee’s economic survival and social acculturation into the United States. Participation in the U.S. public school system increases an individual’s insight into his or her new society’s pragmatics, lifestyle, and language (Rick & Forward, 1992). During this time refugee children can be vital sources of knowledge to their families through helping their family

members discover rituals and customs about their new environment. Refugee children represent a hypothetical bridge that spans between their families' past cultural beliefs and the belief that this new society will lead to an enhanced socio-economic future for them and their descendants (Gong & Chang, 2007).

Refugee children who enter the public schools at an early age have a longer period of time to adjust and acquire English language competency, compared to their peers who enter at a high school level. Older students typically lack fluent English language abilities and familiarity with the surrounding culture's social pragmatics. These deficits result in greater challenges associated with their acculturation (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007; McBrien, 2005; Rick & Forward, 1992; Rudmin, 2003). Currently little research is dedicated to the experiences of older refugee children compared to their younger counterparts. Therefore, researchers whose studies involve secondary school students uniformly cite the need for greater insight—which may lead to greater resources to assist older refugee children as they acculturate into the U.S. educational system.

Overall, adjusting to the U.S. educational system is one of the most difficult experiences for refugee children. They are often marginalized due to their lack of English fluency, and they combat feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness, with an acute awareness of their cultural differences (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007). These children often experience conflict between their need for an education and their responsibilities within their role in their family structure.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, countries are responsible for “protecting the human rights of all persons within their territory, including refugee children, and for providing the adults accountable for these children

with the support necessary to fulfill their own responsibilities” (UNHCR, 1993, IV A.18). Current U.S. politicians concur that the United States government has a responsibility to provide assistance to these individuals who arrive to the United States. On February 8, 2008, Utah Governor Jon Huntsman created a Refugee Services Office within the Utah Department of Workforce Services to assist with the integration of Utah's foreign-born refugee newcomers (Utah Executive Order No. 2008-0002, 2008).

It is estimated that the state of Utah presently accommodates between 30,000 to 50,000 refugee individuals; most of these refugees are under the age of 18 (Kinkead & Romboy, 2005). According to a local media outlet, Burmese refugees are the largest group of refugees entering into Utah. In 2008 Utah resettled approximately 500 refugees from Burma (“Burmese Refugees,” 2008). For the benefit of these children and their families it is important to allocate more time and research towards helping these individuals acculturate successfully to their new environment.

Statement of Problem

The sustained quantity of school-age refugees that enter the United States each year dictates that it is vital for school personnel to understand the needs of these individuals and assist them in their educational development. To date there is sparse research available regarding the particular needs of refugee children within the U.S. public educational system. Teachers and school personnel express their desire to help refugee students but are often unclear regarding what resources would be beneficial (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000).

Under *No Child Left Behind* and IDEIA 2006, in conjunction with the UNHCR, the U.S. educational system has a mandate to help refugee children receive the best

educational experience that can be provided. The education these children receive may have a generational effect, where others in the child's family are directly affected by the educational experience that the child received. This is why there is great importance placed upon improving the child's educational experience and helping him or her acculturate successfully into the U.S. public educational system.

If refugee children do not learn how to function within the US public educational system, they may take on the role of an outcast and may engage in disruptive behavior. Consequently, they may be likely to drop out of school and attain a low income job, thus perpetuating the poverty cycle. Such individuals may become further secluded from peers within the new society, which may lead to an increased sense of isolation and possible diminished wellbeing and educational/occupational attainment.

Statement of Purpose

This thesis will describe the experiences of Burmese refugee adolescents acculturating to the U.S. public educational system in the state of Utah. Both common themes associated with their current level of acculturation and participants' recommendations about ways to facilitate the educational transition will be described.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of literature will provide an overview of the history of the Burmese refugees, and a depiction of the educational system in Burma and Thailand refugee camps. The Burmese refugees will then be discussed in relation to the state of Utah, including a depiction of the economic struggles these individuals encounter. Cultural adjustment issues will be addressed, as well as an explanation between the differences of acculturation, integration, and assimilation, and the effects acculturation has on refugees. Educational parenting styles, the importance of attaining an education for a refugee student's success, and factors that inhibit a refugee child's education will then be reviewed.

Overview of Burmese Refugees

A refugee is defined as “a person who is outside his/her country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a well-founded fear that he/she will be persecuted because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group” (UNHCR, 2007, p.16). An individual may become a refugee for various reasons ranging from political strife to economic difficulties or religious persecution. Overall there is significant validation that an individual believes their current situation endangered enough to prompt them to leave their country of origin and flee to a new, unfamiliar society.

The United Nations Refugee Convention in Geneva of 1951 established a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to identify and lead international efforts to preserve the rights and well-being of refugees (UNHCR, 2007). The United States abides by the UNHCR protocols and thus attains the majority of its refugees from

the Geneva 1951 Convention protocol. Therefore the United States is required to annually acquire refugees from areas the UNHCR is concerned with.

Refugees often move in large groups and at the same time. Refugee migrations can result in permanent relocation. The nations who house these individuals work either towards helping them gain autonomy through national citizenship, or confine the individuals to camps where they depend on assistance from the international community. The U.S. is one of the nations that work toward assisting the individual in gaining autonomy as well as citizenship.

Since 1984, about 500,000 Burmese residents have fled to Thailand to avoid violence and human rights violations stemming from the governing military regime. The majority of these refugees are sequestered into Thailand refugee camps. There are currently nine Thailand refugee camps along the Thailand–Burma border housing approximately 154,000 Burmese refugees (International Rescue Committee, 2007; Relief Web, 2009).

Burma, officially the Union of Myanmar, is divided into 14 states and divisions. Burmese is the official language of Burma. Each state within Burma teaches Burmese as well as its own dialect. This includes the language of Karen, which is spoken by individuals from the Karen state. There appears to be no sign of improvement in human rights conditions, economic opportunities, or political rights under the present governing party of Burma. It is expected that there will continue to be an increase in refugees fleeing from Burma and seeking aid in neighboring countries (International Rescue Committee, 2007).

The educational system of Burma is controlled by the Burmese military junta. In Burma, citizens are not permitted to oversee their schools, teach their native language, or to challenge official versions of Burmese history. Although the education in Burma is free for its citizens, teachers and faculty will often charge their pupils tuition to attend a supplementary educational institution outside of school. In these institutions principles taught in school are more clearly defined and individualized instruction is utilized to help the student learn. Since many Burmese families cannot afford the cost of tuition, their children will likely receive a substandard education (Lorch, 2007).

The majority of individuals who flee from Burma escape to Thailand. During the 2007–2008 academic year, approximately 38,000 children and youths were receiving education in a Thailand refugee camp school. The teachers for those schools are also refugee camp residents (Oh & Van DerStouwe, 2008; TBBC, 2007).

Each camp has an educational committee and each school has a school committee consisting of teachers, parents, and leaders. In seven of the nine refugee camps the educational system is governed by the Karen Education Department, the ministry of education of the exiled government, the Karen National Union. In the other two camps the Karenni Education Department oversees the education of their pupils. These two administrations differ in content and language of instruction (Bowles, 1998; Oh & Van DerStouwe, 2008).

Within the Thai refugee camps the individuals are excluded from other educational opportunities, such as attending college. As Oh and Van DerStouwe explain, “officially refugees do not have services provided outside the camp, nor are they permitted to leave the camps to earn an income” (2008, p. 590). Additionally, individuals

residing within a Thai refugee camp do not have many opportunities to explore the environment outside of the camps, thus reducing the relevance of an education (Bowles, 1998).

Opportunities for Refugees in Utah

The state of Utah presently accommodates approximately 30,000 to 50,000 refugee individuals (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007). Refugees are placed in Utah by the U.S. federal government and through the assistance of non-governmental organizations working with international refugee agencies, such as the Catholic Community Service and the International Rescue Committee.

Refugees choose to relocate to the state of Utah due to the availability of various financial and educational resources. These programs include Deseret Industries and the Humanitarian Center, both of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which assist employees in attaining a higher level of education and/or gaining knowledge in a particular work skill. Classes are offered in the evening so they do not conflict with work hours. These two programs also pay for their employees' tuition at various institutions such as the Utah College of Applied Technology or the Skills Center of the Salt Lake Community College (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007).

Furthermore, several school districts along Utah's Wasatch Front have programs prepared to address the needs of refugee students and their families. For example, the Granite School District has a specific program to help refugee parents acquire basic English skills. This program serves approximately 250 adult refugees per year. Many of these adults are the parents of K-12 students who attend one of the Granite School District schools (Granite School District, 2009).

Economic Difficulties of Refugees in Utah

When a refugee enters Utah, local service agencies focus on integrating the incoming refugee into the labor market. However, with agency resources being scarce, and with the refugees' needs being great, the job placement for refugees may not be adequate to support more than meager levels of subsistence. Adequate financial stability is rarely attained if the refugee does not already possess substantial education or marketable job skills (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003).

Furthermore, the majority of refugees entering the United States are single-parent, female-headed households with children. These women enter the United States labor market as the sole wage earner in the family. Due to their minimal English language skills, these women typically acquire jobs that pay the minimum wage, with little likelihood of salary increase or promotion. These women not only have to provide financially for their family but must also provide suitable care for their children, while being required to gain an understanding of the U.S. social system, learn English, and acculturate into the prevailing society. These women are "both limited in their employability and overburdened by childcare (and societal) needs" (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007, p. 16).

One of the greatest ways to attain acculturation is to attend a U.S. school. The pursuit of education, although it would help adult refugees in the long run, does not help them pay rent now. "The most successful refugees tend to find employment quickly and then, although it is a difficult challenge, seek to improve their educational status while working" (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007, p. 24).

For an individual relocating to the United States, attending school can be a burdensome situation based on the following reasons (from Geo-JaJa and Mangum):

- (1) Few of those who have arrived in recent years had significant amounts of education and those who had received an education rarely had done so in English.
- (2) The refugee resettlement program emphasizes employment as the key to self sufficiency and does not permit a great amount of time for refugees to seek further education.
- (3) They are becoming immersed into a totally new society and culture which even lifelong Americans learn to understand as much by formal education as by osmosis and of which refugees will understand little until they have been immersed in its schools.
- (4) Even lifelong Americans . . . rarely achieve family-sustaining earnings without at least a year of post-secondary education and skill training. Multiple earners or multiple jobs per earner are the only alternatives to that. (2007, p. 29)

Cultural Adjustment Issues Facing Refugees

Aside from the challenges of finding employment, incoming refugees are confronted with a new culture and societal pragmatics that may be very different from their previous way of life. Researchers Kathryn Rick and John Forward identify that members of a refugee family will adapt and acculturate to their new environment at significantly different rates depending upon their previous exposure to that society's mainstream culture (1992). For example, many African refugees are unfamiliar with Western culture. The majority have never had access to running water, electricity, and various skills of a modern economy (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007). This unfamiliarity with luxuries utilized in industrialized countries can create additional hardships for refugees as they navigate the technology and life skills of their new society. The more compatible an individual's native culture is to the new host culture, the greater the odds that he or she will acculturate to the new surroundings at an accelerated rate.

According to the 2000 Census, Utah is 89% Caucasian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The predominant religious faith and social customs of Utah differ greatly from those of the incoming Burmese refugees. These refugees may feel grateful for the safety that this land has provided, but they may also feel conflicted, with the desire to practice their faith or beliefs in their own way. The process of adjusting into a new society and culture often produces an intense cultural shock for incoming refugees.

Nguyen explains acculturation as “degrees of socio-cultural distinctions” that ethnic groups maintain while deciding which aspects of mainstream society they choose to adapt (1999, p. 25). Individuals may choose to maintain their beliefs but their observance of those beliefs into the dictates of the prevailing culture. Acculturation is the process whereby an individual decides which aspects of their previous (native) culture they wish to maintain and which aspects of their new culture they wish to acquire in such a way that they maintain an integrated sense of identity in their new environment. Phinney clarifies that “a strong relationship with the ethnic culture does not necessarily imply a weak relationship or low involvement with the dominant culture” (1990, p. 502).

Integration is the most successful type of acculturation. Integration implies that an individual successfully acculturated to their new environment and they developed a gestalt identity of themselves and their beliefs based upon the effective collaboration between their new cultures. These individuals are successful and feel that they are a member of their new community and are comfortable with their surroundings (Rudmin, 2003).

Assimilation occurs when individuals “give up their old culture completely, exchanging it for the culture of their new society” (McBrein, 2005, p. 331). Assimilation

connotes a complete abandonment of the individual's previous culture (i.e., belief systems, practices) and an absolute adoption of the new society's culture. This is common among the younger generations of refugees and their descendants.

Research suggests that assimilation may not be psychologically beneficial for the individuals, due to the loss of self and a lack of knowledge regarding their new culture. Rather, the ability for individuals to selectively access what they wish to maintain and change gives individuals an increased sense of empowerment and ownership regarding their beliefs. Thus, "acculturation has emerged as one of the main research topics in psychology due to its association with psychological well-being among ethnic minorities" (Kang, 2006, p. 669).

Participants of this thesis are in the process of acculturating to the school system and have not yet reached the point of integration. For the purpose of this thesis, acculturation to public education is defined as individuals' understanding and successfully navigating within their new education system, in contrast to their previous education system and experiences. Specific variables to consider regarding the U.S. educational system include how an individual's performance is graded, what a track system is and what it entails, standardized testing, instructional styles, norms for student behavior, and so on (McBrien, 2005; Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007). A refugee family may choose to retain various educational cultural habits such as how to interact with the child's teacher and other school personnel. Optimally, these decisions can be made after the family becomes aware of the new cultural norms within their child's school.

The process of acculturating into a new society is particularly challenging for refugee children, since they are often faced with a "crisis of identity as they try to meet

the cultural demands of their parents and of their new peers” (McBrien, 2005, p. 333).

“Unlike immigrating adults, whose identity has been consolidated, children are continuing to form a sense of self in the context of both acculturation to the host culture and enculturation within their own ethnic culture” (Briman & Trickett, 2001, p. 458). The children will usually seek out their parents for guidance and assistance in selectively acculturating during this transition time, yet the parents, who are adjusting to a new culture as well, “may be unable to provide [assistance]” (Rick & Forward, 1992, p. 86).

Leading anthropologists state that when individuals are removed from their cultural context and placed into a new society, a generalized process of adaptation typically takes place. This process has been broken down into four phases—adaptation, destabilization, re-stabilization, and stabilization—that collectively span approximately seven to ten years. During the first phase, adaptation, individuals focus on getting settled and acquiring skills to survive in the new society. They reinforce these skills through constant employment and exposure to the new host culture (Morante, 2004).

Once an individual is settled into their new environment, the destabilization stage occurs. During this stage an individual begins to experience feelings of isolation as well as depression. The individual begins to search for a sense of cultural identity upon realizing the differences that exist between the individual’s new culture and his or her previous culture. Refugees may cling to their native culture or relinquish their own cultural upbringing and embrace the new prevailing culture. At this time refugees are at increased risk for problematic mental health issues, domestic violence, and a decreased sense of personal worth (Gonsalves, 1992; Morante, 2004).

Following the destabilization stage is a re-stabilization stage, in which a refugee successfully adopts a stable new cultural identity. This process usually occurs within two to seven years after arrival. The refugee has decided what to keep from his or her own culture, how tightly to hold onto that culture, and how much he or she should assimilate into the new culture (Nguyen, Messe, & Stollak, 1999; Lee, Sobal, & Frongillo, 2003; Morante 2004). In other words, refugees “have learned that, in order to belong to a culture, they must first belong to themselves” (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007, p. 40).

This entire acculturation process can be a painful experience, particularly if the refugee was forced to leave the native country. The cross-cultural adjustment “requires not only a cognitive understanding of a new culture but also a person’s motivation to engage the new culture” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 125). Refugees forced to leave their home country can be very apprehensive about acculturating into a new society. This experience is exasperated if the refugees believe that they will be able to return to their country once the political unrest abates. However, these individuals must still learn how to survive in their host country for a time.

As individuals acculturate into their new society, they selectively choose what aspects of their own culture they wish to preserve and what aspects of their culture they wish to adapt to the presiding society. The idea of what aspects an individual should adopt from a new society is the foundation of many disagreements within households regarding child rearing, liberties, and social customs. Older generations may view the younger generation as abandoning their native culture for that of their new host country; while the younger generations possibly view their predecessors as being staunchly rigid

in adapting to their new environment. This acculturation gap between children and parents has a tendency to increase over time (Birman & Trickett, 2001).

This difference of views has a direct effect upon the child's education and the importance the family places upon school involvement in their own lives. As the children enter the academic community they are rapidly exposed to the mainstream culture and values and often "adopt language and behaviors from the host country more quickly than their parents" (Rick & Forward, 1992, p. 85). This change in adaptability alters the parent-child relationship. The parents now become dependent upon their children in communicating with their new culture.

The disruptions created by shifting family roles cause parents to feel "they are losing their proper authority and respect and . . . [worry] that their children are losing their traditional culture by acculturating" (Rick & Forward, 1992, p. 92). Rick and Forward conclude that students who are forced to live within two cultures very often feel exorbitant pressure to decide what part of their native culture to retain or to disassociate from. In many cases the child will live between two cultures: one at school, where most of their social interaction will occur, and one at home. This can lead to great conflict within the individual as well as within the family structure.

As has been stated elsewhere, "children can survive on the nurture of their parents; however, no refugee family can survive in the United States if there are not English speakers and readers in the family capable of interpreting on behalf of the others" (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007, p. 30). However, all too often, families discover that becoming English fluent is often accompanied by a loss of home language fluency and use (McBrien, 2005, p. 343). This acquisition is therefore met with hostility yet reluctant

acceptance, since the ability to speak, read, and write English is a vital tool to attain employment and succeed in the schools.

Educational Factors Impacting Refugees

Parental views on education can vary greatly within cultures. Within the Burmese culture some individuals may promote formal education as a necessary means for financial advancement. Others within this same culture may view formal education as one of several methods for gaining necessary skills that qualify an individual for work (Keller, Lamm, Abels, Yovsi, & Borke, 2006; Lamm & Keller, 2007).

Accordingly, parental views and parenting styles differ within cultures regarding the amount of involvement a parent should have with their child's school personnel and school performance. Kaplan and colleagues (2001) note that parents with low levels of educational attainment and low academic self-efficacy may encourage their children to pursue other methods outside of formal academics for personal advancement. Hence, some parents may communicate lower academic expectations to their children than other parents.

In fact, there are multiple ways in which parents may need to adapt themselves to a new set of standards that vary drastically from their previous societies' schooling experiences and etiquette. These differences include understanding the importance of standardized testing, the importance of tracks in a track system, and learning what is appropriate parent-teacher interaction within school regulations. These concepts are rarely ever fully explained to an incoming refugee family; rather, the school will overlook these explanations assuming that the family will acquire this knowledge through various community resources (McBrien, 2005; Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007).

Because parents of refugee children are often not well informed about the U.S. educational system, refugee children may need particular attention from school personnel. For example, Rick and Forward found that Hmong teenagers expressed interest in supplemental school counseling regarding career choice because their “parents are unfamiliar with the educational and employment opportunities in the United States” (1992, p. 86). Findings such as these demonstrate the importance of being sensitive to the needs of refugee children and making assistance available to help them to adjust to the local school system.

The view the family takes on further education acquisition is crucial to the adjustment of the child in an academic setting. Kaplan, Liu, and Kaplan affirm that the most important family process variable to a child’s academic performance is the parents’ educational expectations for their children. Those expectations have “consistently been a strong predictor of student achievement at all age levels . . . and for students from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds” (2001, p. 360).

Rick and Forward note that higher acculturation levels may greatly depend upon the number of years an individual has spent in U.S. schools (1992). The longer time individuals have had to socialize in their new culture and learn that culture’s customs, the further developed they are towards selecting what aspects of the new culture’s customs they wish to inherit.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) further note that children’s language retention and acquisition relates to academic achievement as well as to their acculturation. Increased fluency in the new culture’s language makes their academic and social advancement possible. If children can successfully learn a new language while retaining their former

language, they may develop a sense of continuity with their parents and others from their native country. This continuity assists the children in maintaining their heritage.

A factor that is effective in helping children successfully acculturate into their school environment is their ability to create challenging goals. If school-age children tend to set higher educational goals than their peer counterparts, it may “enhance their academic and social adjustment” (Gong & Chang, 2007, p. 24). The child’s school and academic performance is likely to improve the more challenging and realistically attainable the goals are. These goals directly affect the direction, intensity, and persistence of an individual’s efforts (Latham & Locke, 1990).

Even though education is identified as a key ingredient in helping an individual to successfully acculturate, there are many factors that inhibit that process. “From the school’s standpoint, it is a challenge to know which classroom to assign refugee children” (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007, p. 34). The variance across countries’ educational goals, the child’s fluency in English, and the need to spend additional time assisting the child with school work, leave educators with the option of placing the child in special education or a life skills class, both of which may be inadequate to meet the child’s needs.

These life skills or special education classroom settings are already overrepresented by students of various minorities. Once refugee students are placed in these classroom standings, they find it difficult to distance themselves from the label of a ‘special needs’ child. “Adjusting to school is one of the most difficult experiences for young refugees. They are often marginalized through lack of security, self-consciousness, and feeling different” (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007, p.47).

Oftentimes well-meaning teachers further alienate refugee students by drawing attention to their differences, putting them at a distance from their classroom peers. It is necessary for administrators to be sensitive to the needs of refugee students regarding their social context, and to place them in an environment that will assist them in successfully developing social skills. This includes designing social skills groups led by a counselor or school psychologist, establishing resources for the family through a social worker, as well as initiating individual time with the child to assess their needs. Overall, “the most important ingredients for success appear to be intervening as early as possible and maintaining the quality of what is offered as more children are served” (Sawhill, 2006, p. 4).

The unique requirements of assisting a refugee student expand beyond placement in a fitting classroom and should reach towards helping the family understand the social structure of the educational system, allowing the child set attainable goals, and supporting the child as he or she adjusts to the new host environment. Sinclair (2001) concluded that early educational responses support emotional and social healing of the refugee student, and they help the refugee student restore a sense of normalcy and hope.

Research Questions

As demonstrated in this review of literature, inadequate attention has been given to understanding and supporting refugee children’s acculturation in to the U.S. educational system. Specifically, the following questions require attention:

- (1) How do Burmese refugee children acculturate to the U.S. public educational system?

(2) What resources are effective in assisting Burmese refugee students acculturate into the U.S. public educational system, and what school practices or policies can be improved upon?

Responses to these questions can identify factors that may help or hinder individuals as they work towards acculturating into a new culture.

Such information should benefit educational and academic communities across the nation. In addition, many other research theses will develop utilizing the results of this thesis. At a practical level, teachers and other school personnel who understand the complex issues that refugee children face within the U.S. educational system can respond with appropriate interventions and solutions. In particular, school psychologists can develop or adapt parent refugee or student refugee support groups within the school system to address the issues and needs facing this special population, as well as to enlighten them of procedures within the U.S. school system.

METHOD

A qualitative research methodology was used in this study. Qualitative research attempts to “describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting” (Ponterotto, 2005, p.128). In this study the researcher attempted to understand the experiences and interpret the realities of Burmese refugee students acculturating into the U.S. educational system from their point of view.

Participants

Participants for this study were 21 refugee adolescents from Burma who were attending school in the Granite School District in Salt Lake City, Utah. At the time the study was conducted, there were 981 refugee students from 25 different countries attending school within the Granite School District. Permission to interview refugee students was received from the Educational Equity advisor for the Granite School District, Ms. Charlene Lui.

Participants were selected among all refugee high school students who were currently enrolled or who had previously been enrolled in the Newcomer Academy, a transitional school specifically designed for recent immigrants that focuses on English language immersion and other preparatory activities prior to students’ being enrolled in a traditional high school. Student participants were between the ages of 13 and 20. Those interviewed were Burmese refugee students who entered the United States within the past year.

Volunteer participants were solicited through personal visits by the researcher to their school. The researcher and interpreter met with possible interview candidates and discussed the purpose of this research and its procedures, including informed consent. The students were given an assent and consent form in their native language and in the

native language of their parents, if different. Students assenting to participate were paid \$1.00 for returning their consent and assent forms and \$10.00 at the time of the research interview. In all, 55 refugee students were initially contacted through the Granite School District. Twenty-five of the 55 gave their assent and also obtained written parental consent to participate in this study. Four out of the 25 were individuals from countries other than Burma; data from those four interviews are not included in this study. The 21 Burmese refugee student participants consisted of 12 males and 9 females. The participants were all high school students (freshmen to seniors), with most being either freshmen or juniors.

Seventeen of the participants had lived in refugee camps in Thailand for 5 to 17 years, with the mode being 10 years and the average being 10.6 years. The remaining four refugee students had lived in Malaysia for 6 to 18 months. These four students had not lived in refugee camps but had lived with friends until the United Nations sent them to the United States. Prior to living in Malaysia, these individuals had lived in Burma for 13 to 15 years, with the average being 14.25 years.

The 21 participants had resided in Utah from two months to one year. The modal number of months residing in Utah was 10, with the average being 8.3 months. Utah was the first settlement area in the United States for 20 of the 21 participants.

Data Collection

Each research participant completed an informal, open-ended interview. All of the interviews were conducted by the principal investigator with the aid of a Burmese and Karen interpreter. The Burmese/Karen interpreter had been a teacher in the Thai refugee camps, where he taught both Karen and Burmese to his pupils. The same interpreter was

used for each interview. Interviews were conducted at the students' school, with all interviews being completed in two consecutive months. The interviews ranged from 29 to 47 minutes in length. Questions were designed to elicit information on the students' perception of the U.S. educational system, as well as their feelings about acculturation. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed by the principal investigator.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the transcribed interviews was based on the philosophical assumptions of a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. According to this paradigm: (a) the perceptions of the individual being interviewed are valid and the meaning of participants' statements can only be recognized through deep reflection by the investigator; (b) the assessment focuses on understanding the individual as a unique entity; (c) there are behaviors which are unique to the individual; and (d) the goal of this paradigm is to understand the experiences from the perspective of the individual who lives it (Ponterotto, 2005).

The specific approach the principal investigator used to understand the experience of the participants was grounded theory. Grounded theory is based on two key concepts. The first is constant comparison, where data is collected and analyzed simultaneously within the interview, with questions responding immediately to the content and context revealed. The second is theoretical sampling, where decisions about what data should be collected next is determined by what form the theory is taking (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Burck, 2005; Suddaby, 2006). It is important to note that when analyzing the data, much depends on the researcher:

If the researcher simply follows the grounded theory procedures/canons without imagination or insight into what the data are reflecting—because he or she fails to

see what they really indicate except in terms of trivial or well-known phenomena—then the published findings fail on this criterion. Because there is an interplay between researcher and data, no method, certainly not grounded theory, can ensure that the interplay will be creative. Creativity depends on the researcher's analytic ability, theoretical sensitivity, and sensitivity to the subtleties of the action/interaction (plus the ability to convey the findings in writing). A creative interplay also depends on the other pole of the researcher-data equation, the quality of the data collected or analyzed. An unimaginative analysis may in a technical sense be adequately grounded in data, yet be insufficiently grounded for the researcher's theoretical purpose. This occurs if the researcher does not draw on the complete resources of data or fails to push data collection far enough. (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 19)

With this in mind, qualitative data interpretation is a flexible process. Although initial steps rely on prescribed methods, those methods facilitate but must not constrain interpretation. Sequencing analytic steps data is simply one method to help organize and generate data interpretations consistent with participants' lived experience. The primary key in articulating congruent interpretations involves the immersion of the researcher in the data. The researcher drew upon her knowledge, experience, and interpretive skills to identify themes and generate interpretations grounded in the experiences of the participants.

After the completion of all interviews, the principal investigator reviewed the resulting transcripts through successive readings to better understand the context of each individual's communications. These repeated readings also assisted the principal investigator in gaining familiarity with the text. Next, the principal investigator began to identify plausible themes corresponding with the original research questions. During this step the principal investigator utilized her interpretive skills and prior experience in working with the Burmese refugee students.

To facilitate data interpretation, pairs of research assistants also read the 21 interview transcripts. These team members were undergraduate students in psychology

who had been trained by the principal investigator. Following training, these assistants worked independently at first to limit the possible effects of interpretive bias from the principal investigator. This form of checking helped the principal investigator maintain awareness of her biases and how those biases may have affected her interpretations of the material. After all team members had read the transcripts and generated tentative themes, the researcher discussed the interpretations generated and refined the themes extracted from the interviews.

Subsequently, the principal investigator re-read the transcripts to verify that the tentative themes identified by the researchers encompassed the breadth of experiences the participants conveyed during their interviews. A specific search was made to identify any prominent concepts expressed by the participants that had not yet been accounted for within the themes. The resulting final themes were then discussed with the faculty research advisor, who requested additional clarity in the wording and descriptions of the themes.

The principal investigator reviewed the results of the study with the participants through informal meetings. The participants verbally acknowledged their agreement with the results. This process of “member checking” requested the original participants to either verify or correct the results according to their own perceptions and experiences. The participants were also asked to identify which of the themes within each category they felt were most important for the principal investigator to understand. Seventeen of the participants agreed with the overall results and order of the themes for this study. Three of the participants were unable to be contacted for follow up, and one of the participants had left Utah to attend Job Corps.

Interview Guidelines and Sample Questions

Each participant of this study provided a written statement of parental consent and personal assent prior to their being interviewed. Issues of confidentiality and the participant's rights were also discussed with each participant at the initiation of each interview. The interviews were conducted using an open-ended, conversational format. Reflective listening was utilized to encourage participant responses and to verify statements made by the participant or the interpreter. The following questions provide a sample outline for the interview. These questions were modified to fit the context of the discussion with each individual.

1. If you had a friend come from Burma what advice would you want to give them about U.S. schools?
2. Tell me about your adjustment to the schools here.
3. What helped your adjustment?
4. What was most difficult about your adjustment?
5. Tell me what has helped you feel welcome at the U.S. schools.
6. Tell me of a time when a teacher helped you feel good at school.
7. Tell me of a time when your family helped you adjust to schools here.
8. If you were a principal or teacher at a school, and you were working with new students, what would you do to help that student most?
9. What are your worries about going to a new school?
10. What other advice would you like to share with us to improve the way we welcome refugee students into the school?

Assumptions of the Researcher

Prior to conducting these interviews, the researcher, conducted her practicum experience at the participants' school for one college semester. Her responsibilities included conducting classroom observations, making home/family visits, designing functional behavioral analysis and behavioral plans, and conducting individual counseling sessions with some students. None of the students with whom the researcher had worked previously were included in this study. Nevertheless, this prior experience allowed her to become familiar with the participants prior to the interviews and for them to become familiar with the researcher and her role in the school.

Prior to attending graduate school the researcher spent approximately 15 months in Thailand, a nation that neighbors Burma. Although she never personally traveled in Burma, she did interact with many Thai individuals who told her about their relationships to individuals from Burma. Typically, these discussions gave the impression that Thai people regard Burmese individuals as unskilled and poorly educated. Therefore, as the researcher began this study she had the following assumptions regarding Burmese individuals: (a) they possessed few job skills to be competitive in an industrialized country; (b) they were grateful to be able to live in a Thailand refugee camp; (c) they greatly respected educational instructors and would work hard to impress their teachers and family members.

During the data collection process these previous assumptions were challenged. When the researcher found that the majority of her assumptions were inaccurate, she chose to acknowledge the fallacy and listen to the experiences of the individuals being

interviewed. From that experience she altered her perceptions and realized that a minimal amount of her assumptions accurately depicted this group of individuals.

Initially, the researcher believed that these individuals would possess few skills to compete in the U.S. job market. As she conversed with the individuals she realized that even though they may lack knowledge of current technology and be unable to effectively follow instructions in English, these Burmese refugees do have a strong desire to work hard and to learn. She also learned that not all Burmese refugees felt appreciative of the Thai government for allowing them to live in Thailand. Some of the individuals interviewed expressed bitterness over the conditions they had to live in, the lack of education or jobs available to them in the camps, their inability to leave the camps, and the corruption of the police who would target them if they left the camps and request bribes in exchange for their freedom.

One of the researcher's original assumptions that appeared somewhat accurate was the respect these individuals had for their educational instructors. The individuals she interacted with expressed their gratitude towards some teachers and their frustration with others. This represents only a limited sample of Burmese refugee students. These students attended school every day and worked for their education. The researcher believes that if she had encountered other Burmese refugee students not attending school, and questioned them regarding the respect they had for their instructors, she may have received a different, possibly more negative, response.

RESULTS

The results were obtained through analyses described in the previous section. The findings of this study are broken down into the following five categories: (1) the difficulties the refugee students encountered in attempting to acculturate into the U.S. educational system; (2) the process of acculturation that these individuals experienced; (3) the factors motivating the individual to acculturate; (4) the community resources and services that have assisted the individual to acculturate; and lastly, (5) the improvements to school and community services desired by these individuals. Direct quotes were edited to conform to correct grammatical English wording.

Difficulties with Acculturating

Refugees encounter a variety of difficulties when they enter the U.S. public educational system. These difficulties were based on unfamiliarity with the English language, unfamiliarity with the requirements/expectations of their new community, and financial challenges. Students need to successfully navigate all of these barriers in order to increase their likelihood of acculturating into the public schools. The following themes summarize the primary difficulties experienced by the Burmese refugee students interviewed in this study.

Theme 1: Difficulties with communication. A strong theme across participant statements concerned the importance of being able to communicate effectively. Prior to attending the U.S. schools these individuals had minimal exposure to the English language, and the staff and faculty at the U.S. school were unfamiliar with the students' native languages. Students' inability to verbally communicate with the staff regarding their needs, and the staff's inability to effectively teach higher level concepts to the individuals due to the language barrier, created frustrating experiences. This

communication barrier provided so much of a conflict that the Granite School District hired a part-time Karen and Burmese translator to assist these children in their classroom studies. Prior to the addition of this translator many of the students relied upon their Burmese peers in the classroom for aid; however, these individuals were also novices with the English language.

Given this educational context of English immersion without prior English exposure and instruction, many students reported that the single most challenging thing in attempting to acculturate into their new community was learning the English language and expressing themselves in that language with the people around them. The following participant statements exemplify responses to the principal investigator's inquiry about their greatest difficulty encountered in the U.S. schools:

H1: I can not speak English well and because I can't speak English well I communicate using body language, that way the teachers can understand me. The language problem is the most difficult thing for me. You know, because we are new and we can't speak English well some people will scorn us. They don't care about us.

N2: Adjusting is hard for me because of the language problem. Even though it is hard, I continue to come to school and study; I live and I learn. I was nervous and scared at first because of the difficulty understanding the language.

M2: The most difficult thing to adjust to is the language. You know, I can't read very well, and I don't understand the English words.

Concerns such as these were common to all participants. Frustration with communication in English was foremost in the minds of these refugee students.

Theme 2: Unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system policies and procedures.

Another theme involved misunderstandings of and a lack of information about the U.S. school system. Students' inability to comprehend the school rules and protocols was compounded by their families' inability to assist them because they also had no prior

experience with the U.S. school system. This lack of familiarity, coupled with the individuals' struggles to effectively communicate in English, created multiple problems for the students. Most of them relied on their past experiences in schools in the refugee camps, but those practices and procedures proved very different in many cases.

Participants' statements clearly reflected difficulties in attempting to understand school rules such as attendance, classroom behavior, and procedures. The following individual statements reflect the challenge of adapting to the U.S. school attendance and tardiness policies:

H2: I would advise other Burmese refugee students that if you come to school in Utah you have to listen to the teacher, the instructions, the school rules, and you have to be in school on time every day.

Interviewer: Did you know about that before you came here, or was it a new experience learning the rules?

H2: No, it was a new experience for me. It was very hard for me to do.

Interviewer: How has it been learning about the rules here and the school here in the US?

T1: I come to school on time now.

Interviewer: Was that something hard at first to get use to?

T1: Oh yes, you know, the school starts very early here. In Thailand the school starts at nine.

W1: I would like to advise new refugee students that you should obey the school rules, come to school on time. Because the school in Thailand starts at 9 A.M. we haven't got enough sleep, which is why we sleep in here.

As described previously, the majority of the participants in this study had lived in Thai refugee camps. These camps were unequipped with electricity and instructional tools such as computers and calculators, and they often lacked even basic school materials such as books and pens. The instructors in the refugee camps encouraged their students to learn through rote memorization and mental calculations due to this absence of technology aids and insufficient educational supplies.

In contrast, the majority of schools in the United States are equipped with computers, calculators, projectors, and other technological items to help the student understand mathematical concepts, write papers, and participate in classroom lectures. The following students' statements reflect how this new technological environment and manner of instruction was at first a difficult change for the incoming refugees:

H1: You know when I was in the camps my teacher would teach me a formula to memorize, but here it's different. Some things are similar, and some things are different. When I came here I didn't know how to use a calculator because when I lived in the camp, I never used a calculator. I used my mind to think through my problems, not a calculator.

T2: You know, the education in the Thai refugee camps is not as advanced as in America. We don't have computers and we haven't got a cafeteria like here in America. I know now about computers because of the schools here.

Other students cited difficulties with school admissions policies, particularly the requirement to document immunizations, and with a school culture that requires constant parental permission and involvement. Students expressed ambiguity regarding the need for parental involvement to allow them to go on field trips or other excursions. The following individuals' accounts reflect the struggle they had understanding these school protocols:

H1: Sometimes I have an opportunity to go places for performances, such as going somewhere to perform a song. The school needs my parents to sign a permission slip, but my parents sometimes do not sign because they don't understand what the form is saying. So they don't sign it.

H121: You need to have your immunizations so you can attend school. If you do not have them you cannot attend.

Interviewer: Did you not have your immunizations before you came here?

H121: I did not have my immunizations before I came to school, so it was a big problem. I now have all of my immunizations, and I can come to school.

Interviewer: How long did you have to wait until you received your immunizations?

H121: Three months.

Theme 3: Financial difficulties. The students interviewed expressed concern regarding their families' financial status and their own inability to assist their families in becoming financially secure. Oftentimes if a family has financial concerns, the children may desire to seek part-time employment rather than gaining their education first, to later assist their family in attaining financial stability. This pressure to help meet immediate financial needs can impede the student's ability to concentrate adequately at school.

The Burmese students' families consistently had modest prior work experience aside from agriculture. The combination of limited non-agricultural work experience and the family's inability to communicate effectively in the English language greatly restricted the individuals' employment options. Responses from participants highlight a few of the difficulties these students face as their families attempted to find employment. For example, during interviews the interviewees typically appeared very relaxed and communicated in dulcet tones; however, as soon as the refugee students expressed concerns regarding the financial difficulties at home, their voices became forceful and their bodies became strained. It was very obvious to the principal investigator that these students felt very stressed and concerned about financial difficulties, as exemplified by the following statements:

F1: It is very hard to find a job. Our case worker and the Department of Workforce Services ask us to find job by ourselves, but we can't find a job. Our case worker and the Department of Workforce Service no longer provides us with Medicaid and money to pay our bills. I don't know what I have to do to get assistance.

H192: My family and I do not have money to purchase a bus pass because it is too expensive. Sometimes I have to walk to school because I have no bus pass.

T2: My family and I have been in the United States for four months, and my parents have no job, none. They have no job yet. When we came here we had nothing: no food, and no house. Our Karen neighbors brought us pots, food, rice,

vegetable, and meats. We lived on our neighbor's sofa for two days because our caseworker didn't come. For two days we had nothing.

Process of Acculturating into the U.S. Educational System

Refugees entering a new educational environment must choose which aspects of their previous educational culture they will maintain and which aspects they should relinquish. This decision is made through discovering their new educational environment—by conversing with their peers and school staff and by participating in community excursions that introduce them to the operations of their new society—followed by comparing their previous and current educational experiences to decide which educational experience will benefit them financially, and then electing to embrace that education experience while maintaining a sense of their previous culture through identity affirmation. These themes highlight how the participants worked through their difficulties to attain a level of acculturation. The following themes summarize the process of acculturating the Burmese refugee students experienced as they acculturated into the U.S. public educational system.

Theme 1: Learning about the U.S. educational system through conversing with peers and school staff. The participants of this study indicated that upon arrival to the United States they were unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system and its protocols. This unfamiliarity reflects the individual's uncertainty regarding their new educational environment as well as their need for help to gain information about their new educational situation.

The Granite School District established an introductory school to aid new students in comprehending the procedures, core subjects, and culture of the U.S. educational system. This school allows the incoming refugee students to learn and practice U.S.

educational protocols and expected school behavior while gaining an education. Many of the interviewed students mentioned that their previous exposure to a traditional U.S. public school was frightening and confusing. These individuals aver that because of the information and experiences this school provided to them they felt cognizant of school and classroom procedures and were learning the fundamentals to prepare them to be successful when they returned to a traditional U.S. school.

The following statements reflect the individuals' initial unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system and how conversing with the school staff and peers helped the students understand the school's protocols:

H124: My parents did not know how to help me because they did not understand the educational system here, so the people here at school help me. The school counselor and the refugee service social worker help me. The teachers are also very good here and very friendly. When I didn't come to school, the school counselor came to my house, took me to school, and registered me.

N1: At my first school I couldn't speak English and I had no friend. I didn't know anybody, and I was scared. My teacher at the time told me about this school for refugees. She told me that at this school there were other students who were refugees and that I would make friends there.

U1: You know, whatever the teacher teaches me I learn carefully. The teacher teaches me about the society, the culture, and the friendship of Americans.

W1: The teacher tells the students they have to be on time and they can't eat in the class. The teacher teaches us what we need to know about the school's rules.

Theme 2: Exposure to U.S. culture. In addition to understanding the rules and protocols of the U.S. educational system, the refugee students interviewed in this study identified the value they gained through learning about their new environment and the educational opportunities that are available to them in their new society. Various field trips and cultural excursions taken by the school allowed the refugee students to become

familiar with their surroundings and their new society. This information provided them with a sense of knowledge as well as a sense of interaction with their new community.

In the Thai refugee camps they were unable to leave the demarcated enclosures of the camp, and they were not provided with education beyond the equivalent of a high school degree. These situations in the camp produced a sense of lack of acceptance by the Thai government and conveyed a climate of temporary residential status. In contrast, here these individuals interact with their new environment by participating in school field trips and other experiences designed to familiarize them with their new environment. Without the school providing these experiences it is likely that these students may not have received this insight. The individuals expressed their thoughts as follows:

H1: When I was a new student I didn't know about a lot of things in the US. Sometimes my teachers would take me to go visit the university and the museum. This provided me with experiences; I saw a lot of new things. Those experiences provided by my teachers made me feel good.

T2: My teacher and my school counselor took me to the community college because I had never been there. Everything is new for me. I had a blast; I had a great time at community college.

U1: I would like to continue to have the teacher take us and other students to restaurants, to the museum, and to the community college. I would also like to have more field trips because I want to have experiences. I want to know more about this city. These experiences are a very good thing for me.

Theme 3: Choosing an educational system that will benefit them. The Burmese refugee students were presented with two unique educational styles: their Burmese and Thai educational culture vs. the U.S. educational culture. Once these students recognized the difference between their former and current educational system they had to decide which part of the U.S. educational culture they desired to adopt. These students carefully

considered which educational system would help them attain their goals in their new society.

The following statements detail the experiences these individuals had comparing the education of their previous society to the education in the United States and deciding which educational experience they chose to embrace:

N2: The education in Burma was not as advanced or good as it is in America. The curriculum in Burma comes from the Burmese government. In the capital city of Burma the education is good, but in my state the education is very bad.

N3: A lot of the Burmese teachers did not teach their students very well, so the students did not understand the lessons. Here the teachers teach very carefully so the students understand, and what the teacher teaches me is helpful for me in my future.

U3: The school in America is better than the schools in the Thai refugee camps. The education in America is superior. If I had friends who were going to attend school in America I would tell them to come to school on time and to not miss a class. I would tell them that the education here is better than in the Thailand refugee camps.

Theme 4: Identity affirmation. Many of the interviewed students commented that a beneficial step in their process towards acculturating into the U.S. public educational system was experiencing positive interactions with the school staff and their schoolmates regarding their display of their native culture through verbal declarations or the wearing of their traditional apparel. This entailed displaying their beliefs or culture through clothing or verbal declarations and having those beliefs or their culture respected in their new environment.

These individuals maintained their previous culture through the clothing they wore at school, and the performances they gave at school assemblies in their native dialect. Many of these refugees reported that these opportunities to express their culture helped them feel welcomed and respected within their new educational environment. The

surrounding environment supported these individuals as they expressed their culture. If the support had been lacking it is likely that the individual would have felt isolated from other members of their new environment and may have acculturated at a slower pace. This support allowed the individuals to acculturate quickly by providing them opportunities to make mistakes, readjust their needs, while still furthering their educational attainment without harsh critiques.

The following students' statements reflect how the encouraging response they received from the school staff and their peers helped them feel comfortable in maintaining a sense of their original cultural identity, which they maintained as they acculturated into their new educational system:

H2: Sometime our teachers let us sing a song in our native language to show our classmates that we are Karen people. I like to show our culture.

T2: The school counselor and my teacher took my class to a restaurant and the teacher announced to the customers in the restaurant 'Hey, everybody I have some students that came from Burma'. This was a very great time for me.

Interviewer: How have you thought that your culture's been respected in the schools here?

U2: When I wear my Karen shirt some of my friends asked where I bought it. They ask me where I bought it, and they tell me it is amazing. Even the teacher said 'oh your shirt is so nice.'

U3: When I wore my Karen bag my friends asked me where I got it from. I told them I brought it from Thailand. That made me feel nice.

Motivational Factors

These Burmese refugee students experienced many motivational factors that assisted them in acculturating into the U.S. public educational system. These motivational factors included parental encouragement, their own internal motivation to attain an education, and their sense of support from the school staff, faculty, and the U.S.

government. The following themes summarize the impact these motivational factors had upon the refugees' acculturation into the U.S. public education.

Theme 1: Parental encouragement. Individuals interviewed identified the positive effect familial support and encouragement had upon their ability to acculturate into the U.S. educational system. Parental verbal acknowledgment conveyed the importance education has toward providing financial assistance to their family as well as providing knowledge and increased opportunities to the student.

The majority of the participants were aware that their family did not have a stable source of income. The participants' parents encouraged the participants to attend school rather than seek to become another source of income for the family. This encouragement motivated the students to attain an education so they could gain steady employment that would financially benefit their family in the future. Participants of this study expressed their appreciation for the financial support their family members provided for them as they attained an education.

The following statements reflect the impact the parental encouragement had upon the students' acculturation into the U.S. public educational system:

F1: My family pays the bills and rent for me while I come to school. My father encourages me to come to school. My father tells me, 'I am old and I cannot learn because my memory is getting worse. You are young, you can learn.' So my father encourages me to come to school and study hard.

M2: My parents encourage me to go to school and study hard. My parents do not have a job now, and my brother works. They give me a little pocket money. They think that education is very, very important. My family and I can have a better job if we have an education.

T3: My parents think that education is important. You know our ancestors had no knowledge; they only knew how to work hard. Because they didn't have a lot of knowledge they farmed day by day. Like our ancestors, my parents only know how to farm. My parents do not want me to be like my ancestors. That is why my

parents think that education is very important. That is why they let me come to school. Like our ancestors, my parents do not have an education and they have to work very, very hard. If I have an education, I will not have to work like my ancestors.

U2: My dad and mom encourage me to come to school. I know that if I live here I will have wisdom. My parents encourage me to study hard. They tell me ‘Study hard. Everything, whatever you want you can achieve if you try and study hard.’

An interesting sub-theme relevant to parental encouragement involved explicit parental pressure the students received to acquire and become fluent in the English language. Since the individual who was attending school had more exposure to English than the rest of the family, the students naturally assumed the role as translator and communicator for the family. This role appears to have been undertaken with reluctant acceptance by the students, who are no longer viewed just as children but also as the families’ main source of communication with individuals in their new society. The students expressed that the familial need for their English acquisition motivated them to increase their study of the English language and improve their understanding of the pragmatics within their new society.

H2: My parents want me to be able to speak and learn English quickly.

H191: My parents think that education is very important. Sometimes my parents are upset because they don’t speak English very well. Even though they are upset they encourage me and my sister and brother to continue to go to school and study hard so we can learn and speak English.

Theme 2: Internal motivation. Many individuals identified gaining an education as their way to attain stable employment upon graduation. These students chose to attend school regardless of the language and financial difficulties they incurred, because they believed the benefits of attaining an education were financially and individually valuable to them. The participants’ perceived value of education included acquiring knowledge

and learning skills that would help them achieve a stable financial future and employment in their selected field, as well as earn them respect in the sight of their peers.

The students had developed their own reasons for why they chose to attend school, independent of their family's involvement. The students' internal motivation provided them with goals that they developed as they focused on attaining employment through gaining an education. These goals fueled their internal motivation to attend school and study hard and compelled them to continue attending school despite the difficulties they experienced as they acculturated into the U.S. educational system.

The following students' statements reflect their internal motivation to attend school and gain an education to improve their abilities and their future:

H1: I want to advise my friends who come to the US that if you come here you will receive a higher education; and if you graduate high school you will get a certificate and that will help you get a job. You will have the work. Try hard in school. Try your best; in everything try your best.

H2: I am sad about some of my friends. They skip school and no longer come. Some of my friends still skip school; they miss class.

Interviewer: Why do you keep coming when your friends don't?

H2: I want to study. I want to study the language, and I want to have an education. I want to gain knowledge. You know, if I were a teacher, I would encourage my students to study hard. If they study hard they are going to have good credit and when they graduate they can go to college and have a good job. Their future is good.

N3: If you have an education you can have a better job and other people will show you respect. If you don't have an education people will not respect you and they will scorn you.

T3: I think that education is the ability to do something. You know, if we have an education we have the ability to work, to find a job, etc. You know, in the camp we did not have a lot of jobs like here in America. Our only jobs were becoming a teacher or a nurse; that's it. And our family would try to leave the camps and work entry-level jobs day by day.

Despite these individuals' struggles with learning the English language they believed that as they continued to come to school and study, they would eventually communicate effectively in English as well as acquire a valuable education. The following individual responses express the struggle they had learning the English language, as well as their internal motivation to continue to attend school believing that as they attend school their English and knowledge will improve:

H121: Language is difficult for me, but I continue come to school. I live, I learn, and I have experiences. That is why everything is going to be okay.

H122: Even though I don't know anything I continue to come to school. If I don't understand what the teacher says it doesn't bother me; I continue to come to school.

T2: Even though I don't understand English I continue to come to school and study. You know if you come to school and study one day you will know a lot of things. You will have knowledge and you will get an education. I know some refugee students and we do not know a lot of English, but I tell them to never give up. I tell them to continue to study, study, study. We live and we learn, and one day we will all speak English well.

Theme 3: Encouragement from the school's faculty and staff. Many of these students expressed their appreciation to the school's staff and faculty for teaching them and encouraging them to go to school. These participants also mentioned that they were motivated to perform well in school because they perceived that the U.S. government provided them with an opportunity to gain knowledge and improve their future.

Prior to their arrival to the United States these students attained their education in their Burmese state and then inside the Thai refugee camps. According to the students, the education they received in Burma was insufficient and was intentionally poorly taught so the student would be compelled to pay tuition to attend supplemental personal

instruction by their educator. The majority of these individuals could not afford the cost of the extra instruction and so their education remained inadequate.

An individual in the Thai refugee camps could not continue education beyond a high school degree because there was no college located in the Thai refugee camps. In the Thai refugee camps these individuals were taught by other refugees who had also attained an incomplete education. Their previous exposure to education was limited and confined. The message conveyed was that without money or nationality they would not attain a significant education. In contrast, any child in the United States age 6 to 18 can gain a free public education.

It appears that these individuals were motivated to attain a higher education because they felt welcomed and accepted by the faculty and staff at the U.S. schools and that the opportunity for them to advance was provided. The following participants' statements reflect this idea:

H122: I feel welcomed attending the US school because the teachers are friendly to me and they smile a lot. The school counselor encourages me to study hard, try hard; and the school counselor also gives me a lot of advice.

H2: My teachers help me in this school, and they give me a lot of the things I need here, like books and paper. That is why I feel I have adjusted to the school here. You know, the government and the teachers let me come to school and study. That's why I feel welcome in the US, because the government and the teachers let me come to school.

N3: You know, the teacher is friendly, and every day when I look at the teacher the teacher is happy. When the teacher is happy, I feel happy.

U1: The teachers here have a smiley face, and they are friendly. I know I can ask for help from a teacher and the teacher will help me. In Burma the teachers did not teach me all of the instructions so I would have to attend an institution and study there. To attend an institution I would have to pay money and I did not have enough so I would not attend.

Beneficial Educational and Community Resources

Refugees require a lot of financial and emotional assistance upon arrival to a new culture. Various organizations and school staff assisted these individuals in attaining materials for their basic needs and in expanding their support network. Teachers provided individualized attention to help the student understand the classroom subjects; and the school counselors assisted the student in designing a personal career plan. This next section identifies how these resources helped this group of Burmese refugee students acculturate into the U.S. public educational system.

Theme 1: Supplies provided by local community members. The participants of this study expressed gratitude to members of their new community who continually provided them with basic supplies, such as food, clothing, and shelter. This provision allowed the individuals to focus more on their schoolwork than on their family's financial difficulties and lack of supplies.

Many participants experienced aid from members of their new community and various organizations. When these individuals initially arrived to the United States they had little money, no food, no employment, and unknown housing prospects. Government workers and members of the community aided the refugees in attaining food, lodging, and clothing, and introduced them to available resources that could help them meet their basic needs and improve their financial future.

The individuals whose families attained a stable place to live, obtained the necessary basic materials to survive, and attained beneficial employment, appeared less concerned with their financial needs and were able to focus more on attaining an education. Individuals whose families had not met those needs consistently brought up

their physiological and financial concerns throughout the interview. This suggests that these concerns consumed a lot of their focus, and would consequently suggest that their focus on gaining an education was debilitated.

Despite the financial uncertainty these individuals still face they continually expressed gratitude towards the aid they received from their neighbors, service missionaries, and the U.S. government:

H123: When we need something for our house we ask the service missionaries to help us; and if we have something to do and we need help we call the missionaries. You know, I come to school and my parents and family members pay the bills and rent so I have a place to live while I learn. When I ask for help from my parents they help me.

H2: My mother helps me. She pays the rent, the bills, and a lot of things. The government also helps by providing money for our rent and bills. Also, the school provides us with a free cafeteria.

M2: If my family needs something with our house the service missionaries will purchase those things for us. They bring food, clothes, shoes, and a lot of things for us.

T2: Our Karen neighbors bring like pots, food, rice, vegetables, and meat for us.

T3: When we first came here we needed a lot of things like bicycles, clothing, and food. The service missionaries came and helped us. They gave us shoes, clothing, kitchen appliances, like a lot of things.

U4: Whatever I need I will ask for from the family I live with, and they will buy it for me; they help me. Like, if I need something for school like books or materials I will ask them for help and the family that I live with will help me. Because I live with an American family everything is okay. They take care of them.

Theme 2: Expanding the refugees' social network. Participants in this study noted that the presence of a strong social network provided them with a sense of support that aided them as they acculturated. Their social network helped them attain an understanding of educational materials, learn about their new environment, and provide them with comfort and encouragement as they acculturated into their new society.

Upon arrival to the United States these individuals had no social connections to members of their new environment. Typical places where an individual would establish relationships with members of the community include community activities, neighborhoods, church activities, or at work. However, these new inhabitants of the community were unfamiliar with the environment's social customs and norms and were unable to communicate with their neighbors. In order for the refugees to develop these social connections, members of the community had to approach the refugees and help them understand the cultural pragmatics.

The refugees' social network was a conglomeration of individuals from their neighborhood, religious organizations, government organizations, and individuals from their school. The individuals in this study reported their social network provided them with a feeling of being welcomed to their new environment, and helped them acculturate to the U.S. educational system through providing them with information about various school programs available to assist their needs, and by providing them with emotional support during financial and emotional trials. The following comments elaborate on how these Burmese refugee students' social network assisted them:

H1: When we came here the service missionaries helped us and took care of us. And we have a refugee service worker that helps us. These people help us learn English and go to school. This has helped me feel welcome in the US.

M1: A lot of people help me, like teachers. The teacher and my friends talk to me in the English language. Sometimes my friends from Burma and I read together to help each other understand and learn English. We help each other.

N3: My friends and I help each other. If I can do something my friends can't then I will help them. The lady I live with encourages me by telling me that even though school is hard you should study, study, and do your best. She tells me to not feel upset but to try my best.

Theme 3: Personalized attention from the school staff. The interviewees mentioned that the personal individualized attention they received from the school faculty and staff helped them to feel welcome and assisted them in learning the lessons at their school. The students' previous experiences with education in Burma involved little practice with new concepts and included minimal interactions with their teacher. This change in presenting materials so the student could understand the educational concept was a novel experience for these individuals.

Additionally, the personalized attention these individuals received created a sense of importance and belonging to the individual. Many individuals commented that they felt encouraged and invited to learn when the teacher took the extra time to help the student understand the educational concepts presented to them. These students wanted to encourage the faculty and staff to continue reaching out to refugee students by providing personalized attention to them.

The following statements reflect the students' gratefulness for the personalized attention they received:

M1: You know sometimes there is a problem in my family. The teacher will call my family and ask them questions. The teacher encourages them and helps them solve their problem. You know, some teachers know psychology, and they know how to help and encourage students. If I was a teacher and I was working with a new student, I would encourage them to come to school every day, to come to school on time, and try hard. And if they have problems, I am going to help them as much as I can.

T1: If I were like a teacher or a principal, I would help the student with what they need. If the student needed help with their work, either schoolwork or homework, I would help them.

T3: Sometimes I cannot do my schoolwork. If I can do it, I will do it. If not I ask help from the teacher, and the teacher helps me.

The participants mentioned their appreciation for the direct instructional practices in the U.S. educational system. Direct instruction involves teaching a new concept to a class by first modeling the desired behavior or task, then practicing it with the students, followed by encouraging the students to perform the task on their own while the instructor continuously provides feedback and assistance to individual students. Many of the students compared the way educational material was presented in Burma to the educational practices of the United States and concluded that the direct instructional practices of the United States help them learn the material effectively. The following responses reflect the students' thoughts regarding direct instruction:

F1: When I cannot do my school or homework I will ask for help from my teacher, and the teacher will help me. If I can't do something the teacher will give me an example from the schoolwork or homework and tell me to do it like this.

M2: I try to listen to the teacher carefully. If I can't do my homework I ask my teacher to do a little bit of it with me, not all of it. It is hard because I have to do my homework by myself. The teacher helps me do my schoolwork.

N2: It is very different in Burma compared to here. In Burma they teach in the class, even though the student doesn't understand the teacher continues to teach; they go onto another chapter. So almost all of the students have to attend an institution, and at the institution the teacher teaches so they understand. But some people can not afford the tuition to go to the institution. Some people cannot go because we have to pay for learning and the government gives little money to the teachers. So the teachers have to find their own business to earn extra money. That is why there are institutions. When I first came here the teacher helped me. I could not do my homework and schoolwork so the teacher helped me learn how to do it.

U1: At this school the teacher teaches us something, and then we study. We practice and practice, as if we were taking the test. In Burma, we have to memorize the facts and then take a test; we do not practice. It is different. In Burma you have to read and calculate a lot. You read and memorize. Here we read, we learn one chapter, and then we practice. In Burma you only read and study; no practice.

Theme 4: Individualized career plans. Establishing individualized career plans for the refugee student helped the individual understand the requirements needed to gain employment in their new society. Prior to the development of their career plans they were unfamiliar with how to become a professional in various fields by U.S. educational standards. Many of these individuals have aspirations to become professionals; however, they lack the knowledge on how to achieve this goal.

The school counselor's knowledge is vital toward assisting the student to achieve their future professional aspirations. Individualized career plans prepare the student to successfully navigate the U.S. public educational system and eventually attain their desired occupation. These individuals respected the idea that they can continue with their education either through vocational training or through other opportunities for higher education.

The following responses reflect the experiences of two students as they discuss their own personalized career plans:

H121: The school counselor and my teacher are going to help me go to college. The first time I came to this school I told the school counselor that I was going to join Job Corps. I told the counselor that I wanted to go, but the school counselor told me she didn't want me to join Job Corps. She said she would like me to attend college, community college. At first I did not know about community college, but now I know. And now I told my school counselor that I cannot go into Job Corps because I want to go to community college.

U3: Because I want to study mechanics, electronics, and technology, I choose to attend Job Corps. A lady came here and she lets the student know about Job Corps. And you know, some of students were interested, including me. I was interested. I asked my teacher for help to fill out the forms. And then the lady came and interviewed me, and I passed the interview for Job Corps. I passed the test, and now I can attend Job Corps.

Recommended Areas for Improvement

Participants of this study suggested improvements to the school and community services. These improvements included spending more time in class learning, providing further financial assistance, and helping school staff understand that the majority of students' learning difficulties come from not understanding the language rather than intellectual deficiency. The following themes summarize the improvements to the school and community services that these individuals desired.

Theme 1: Increase instruction time in class. Participants of this study mentioned that they would like to utilize more time in class learning subject materials through the teacher supplying more homework and providing them with an additional year of study in their school. At the time of the study, students remained at this introductory school for one academic year; after that year they were transferred to a traditional high school. The following individuals' responses express their desire to stay at this school an additional year and to utilize their instruction time more effectively:

H121: I would like to study, but now I am going to be 18, and there is not enough time. I am going to have to change schools.

H191: The students can only attend this school for one year. Some of my friends and I would like to be in this school for two years. Some of the students here don't learn much because they don't try, but some of the students here learn a lot and we want to be at this school for two years so we can continue to learn more.

U1: I would like my teachers to focus on teaching English grammar and reading. We have a lot of free time, like break time. I want to study more, I don't want the breaks. I want to study and learn.

Many of these students further commented that they would like their teacher to focus on teaching the fundamentals of the English language. Various students expressed apprehension about not being prepared to go to their new school due to their continued

unfamiliarity with the English language. The following comments reflect their desire for additional time spent teaching English language fundamentals:

H191: I would like to advise the teachers to teach the student more English grammar and more speaking skills.

M1: I would like to advise my teachers and my principal to teach English a lot. Like how to speak. They need to teach English and how to speak to the new students here.

N2: I would like the teacher to teach grammar, speaking, writing, yes I would like the teacher to teach English grammar. Grammar is very important. I would like my teacher to teach me a lot more about grammar. If I was a teacher and I had a new student, who came from a refugee camp, I would teach him speaking skills, grammar, writing, and reading skills.

T2: I would advise my teachers to talk to me slowly and in basic terms. Some refugees come and they cannot read. If I were a principal or a teacher I would help these students learn how to read with pronunciation. Teach them how to pronounce words.

Theme 2: Increase financial assistance. Participants acknowledged the need for continued financial assistance with clothing, money for transportation, and money for rent. These individuals are aware that the aid currently available to them may no longer be accessible.

At the time of these interviews the United States was in an economic recession and many refugee families were unable to find employment due to the economic crisis, compounded by their personal inability to communicate effectively in English and their lack of previous work experience. Members of the refugees' families were also dealing with the stress of a potential layoff from work. The hardship incurred through layoffs was exacerbated by the fact that an individual has to be working for approximately two years at a single job before they can attain unemployment benefits.

Without stable employment the family's ability to eat, obtain clothing, reside in a suitable home, and attain transportation are significantly impaired. This lack of resources has a direct impact on the students, who depends upon their family to provide them with necessities. When the ability for them to travel to school or the grocery store is impacted, the student's capacity to focus on schoolwork is jeopardized. The following students' statements express a plea for financial assistance to meet very basic needs such as clothing and transportation:

H124: I live far away from here. My home is far away from the school here so I live at my cousin's house. I don't have a bus pass, so I can not take the bus to get to school, and I don't know how to go home when I walk to school from my house. One time, I walked to school from my house, and I was very late. Like half an hour. I walked to school in the snow. But my cousin lives here and it is only three minutes away from the school, so I live with my cousin now. When I first came here I didn't receive any books. I received nothing. I had to buy the books and school materials by myself. I had to buy everything.

T3: Some of the students need clothes. If they need clothes I am going to give them clothes. If they need materials to use in the school, if they need it I am going to give it to them.

F1: In my family only my father and sister are working. He is the only one and he pays the bills, the rent. Everything is not going okay. That's why I would like to advise the government to help us some, you know, to help us with the bills. If we have to pay \$800 the government could pay \$300 and we could pay \$500. Because we cannot find work and we cannot find a job easily. And you know some of the refugee people receive Medicaid for only 8 months. After 8 months they do not supply Medicaid. And when some of us are sick and are not feeling good we need to go to hospital, but we are afraid to go to the hospital. If we go to the hospital we have to pay a lot of money and we haven't got money like that. That is the problem.

U1: Some of my friends have to come to school taking a walk. I would like the school principal or the teachers to find a way to help the students. Maybe give them a bus pass.

Theme 3: Decrease miscommunications due to language and technology. Some of the students interviewed pointed out their discontent with being identified as incapable of

producing or understanding schoolwork when their seeming inability is due to a language difficulty. The majority of these misunderstandings arose from the individuals' inability to effectively read or communicate in the English language, as well as their unfamiliarity with modern technology.

All of the students who participated in this study had never worked with a computer or calculator prior to their arrival in the United States. They report that this technology was challenging for them to learn without the aid of an instructor. After these individuals received guided direct instruction on how to operate a computer and calculator, the majority were able to comprehend the functions of these technological instruments.

Many of the students requested that faculty and staff understand that the student is unfamiliar with the English language and modern technology and they require additional assistance to understand instructions and complete assignments. Some students believed they were graded unfairly due to their inability to understand the instructions required for particular assignments. They believe that they would be able to comply with the instructor's instructions if they understood enough of the English language. This would allow them to develop their knowledge in various school subject areas, and receive grades that reflect their knowledge on that subject matter rather than their ability to comprehend instructions in a foreign language.

The following responses reflect their frustration being identified as incapable of producing effective work due to their inability to understand English:

T1: I would like to inform my teacher that sometimes we can't do our work because it is difficult for us. And I would like the teacher to understand this. Especially some students who don't know English real well. They need help.

U3: I passed my other classes. My teacher gave me an A, B, C, and D. But when my new teacher grades my papers he gives me Fs. I got an F because I don't understand the instructions. I told the teacher I don't understand, and the teacher will give me homework. I don't know how to do the homework, so I put my homework away. In my other class I can do the work, but in this class I cannot because of the language problem. Because my grade is an F, I don't care about my science class anymore. Even though I tell my teacher I can do these problems, I can do the experiment, I don't get a good grade because I don't understand the language.

DISCUSSION

The themes that emerged from the five categories detailed by the Burmese refugee high school students who recently arrived in Utah provide insight into their experiences acculturating to the U.S. educational system. When interviewed the participants of this study were still in the process of acculturating to the school system. They had not yet reached the point of integration. The information gathered provides us with insight into how these individuals were acculturating at the time of the interview. In general, the respondents' descriptions provide support for the conclusions reached by previous researchers regarding refugee populations' acculturation experiences. However, the responses also provide specific information regarding the motivational factors and processes involved in these Burmese refugee students' engagement in educational acculturation. Furthermore, the interviews identified resources that the participants found beneficial and those that they felt could be improved upon.

Summary of the Results

The first category of the results identified the difficulties this particular group of Burmese refugee students faced as they attempted to acculturate into the U.S. educational system. Acknowledging the individuals' concerns allows the reader to understand what the refugee finds challenging and how those concerns are being resolved. The subsequent categories detailed how the individual is adapting to the school system, how they are overcoming the challenges they experience, and what they feel could be improved upon to further assist them in their quest to succeed in U.S. schools.

Respondents acknowledged that the hardest thing they faced as they acculturated into the U.S. educational system was learning how to communicate effectively in the

English language. Participants further expressed their frustration in not understanding the U.S. educational system rules and protocols, such as attendance, admission requirements, and technology. Lastly, the participants of this study stated that the financial difficulties they were experiencing at home caused them extreme distress at school. These three themes encapsulate the predominant challenges that these students face in their efforts to successfully maneuver within in the U.S. educational system.

The refugees also outlined their process of acculturating into the U.S. schools, which process included learning about their new school environment by conversing with teachers, other faculty members, and peers. Participants verbalized the importance of learning about the local community and U.S. culture through field trips and similar class excursions. These conversations and interactions with their new environment provided the students with enough information to decide which aspects of their new educational environment they would adopt and what aspects of their old educational environment they would maintain.

All of the students in this study adopted the U.S. educational system practices because of the perceived future economic and employment benefits that adopting those practices would provide for them. These individuals choose to maintain aspects of their previous culture through the clothing they wore and through open verbal acknowledgment of their cultural heritage. According to these particular students, their displays of their native culture were warmly received by school faculty and the students' peers; the school climate that they experienced seemed supportive of cultural expression, which atmosphere was appreciated by the students.

The participants also identified positive motivational factors that assisted them in acculturating to the U.S. public educational system. These motivational factors included parental encouragement, internal motivation, encouragement from the school staff, and perceived encouragement from the U.S. government. Parental encouragement was a vital source of motivation to attend school despite the financial or communication difficulties the child experienced. The teens were further motivated to learn how to communicate in English so they could assist the family with necessary transactions that required the aid of an English interpreter. Individuals in this study also displayed an internal motivation to obtain an education and become a contributing member of their new society. They recognized that they needed an education to attain a stable financial future for themselves. Furthermore, these individuals stated that they felt encouraged to acculturate into the U.S. educational system because they were presented with opportunities to gain an education and attain a career—opportunities that were unavailable to them in Burma or Thailand.

Participants further acknowledged community resources and services that helped them acculturate into the U.S. schools. These community resources and services included receiving food, clothing, and other basic needs from members of the community; developing a social network of members from their new community to familiarize them with resources and aid available and assist them in acculturating to their new environment; receiving personalized attention from the school faculty and staff, including teachers instructing them through direct instruction; and receiving help from the school counselor in establishing an individualized career plan.

These refugee students further identified what community resources and services they felt should be improved upon to assist other refugee students as they acculturate into the U.S. public school system. The services requested included spending more time in class learning subject materials, with particular attention to learning English grammar and pronunciation; obtaining further financial support from government and other agencies; and having teachers understand that the refugee students' inability to effectively produce schoolwork is due to their inability to understand the directions in English and their unfamiliarity with technology.

The refugees' responses provided insight into the difficulties facing Burmese refugee students as they acculturate into the U.S. educational system, the process of how they are acculturating into the U.S. educational system, the effect that motivational support has on their acculturation process, community resources and services that are beneficial to them, and areas that could be improved in the future. The following analysis of participants' statements offers understanding of how to help these students acculturate into the U.S. public educational system and identifies possible areas of improvement in the school system and in various outside organizations.

Findings and Recommendations

The findings of this study detail the acculturation process of the Burmese refugee students, the positive effect motivation has on the pace of acculturation, the impact of unfamiliar technology and language-based misunderstandings on the students' educational performance, the need to develop an individualized career plan for the student upon arrival, and the value of expanding the Burmese refugees' social network. The following sections summarize these findings.

Finding 1: Acculturation process. The Burmese refugee students in this study described a process of acculturation that aligns with the anthropological viewpoint of Morante (2004) described earlier in this paper. According to Morante, when individuals arrive into a new society, they attempt to focus on getting settled and acquiring the skills necessary to survive in their new environment. When the interviewees arrived into their new society, and new school, their initial focus was on getting settled and acquiring the skills necessary to survive in their new environment.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs supports this concept of needing to first sustain oneself in the new environment by establishing a procedure to obtain food and shelter. Maslow's humanistic theory states that individuals must first satisfy their physiological needs, such as food and clothing, before they can satisfy their personal and safety needs (Berk, 2002). Until those needs are met an individual will spend the majority of their energy attempting to compensate for those needs. Only when those needs are met will an individual be able to adequately focus on improving themselves by attaining an education or developing relationships. Participants who indicated their family's difficulty in obtaining food and shelter seemed to support Maslow's theory: Throughout the interview and, presumably, throughout their school day, these participants reflected anxiety related to their basic needs—anxiety that threatened to undermine their ability to focus and learn.

Once an individual settles into their new environment, or school, they proceed to the destabilization stage. During the destabilization stage the individuals recognize the differences that exist between their previous environment and their new one, and they may feel ostracized from their new surroundings. Their feelings of isolation and depression stem from their recognition of the differences that exist between their new

culture and their previous culture or, in the educational setting, between their old school system and that of the new school. These differences compel the individuals to develop their own cultural identity.

Following the destabilization phase is the re-stabilization phase. During this phase the students successfully identify which aspects of their new environment they wish to adopt and what aspects of their previous environment they desire to maintain, and they successfully adopt a new cultural identity. The refugees interviewed were in the process of choosing what to keep from their own culture and how much they should assimilate into their new culture. To successfully navigate through the destabilization phase the student needs to be exposed to the differences, taught what is expected of him or her, and then allowed to choose to either accept the new culture's educational system or identify how much of the former educational background to maintain. Their decision involves concluding which aspects of their new and previous educational cultures will allow them to attain their future employment goals, and which educational system will help them interact successfully with members of their new environment.

Once the individuals decide which aspects of their old educational environment they will incorporate into their new educational culture, they will have successfully acculturated into their new environment. Many participants seemed to have acculturated enough to enter this stabilization phase, at least in terms of life in their transitional school. As indicated by students' reluctance to move on to traditional high schools when their year at the refugee school is complete, it is likely that to some extent the acculturation process will need to occur again when the student enters a traditional U.S. education setting.

For most of the students, succeeding within the new educational system required more assimilation than acculturation: They worked hard to rapidly adopt the new school's practices, with little room to pick and choose what to incorporate. This is indicated by the many mentions of being on time and following school rules. Alternatively, students showed acculturation, rather than assimilation, through native clothing worn to school or by participating in cultural performances. One suggestion for counselors might be to encourage students to see the strengths of their old educational system—their ability to memorize, their respect for teachers, and their desire to work hard in their new opportunities—and to explain that they can draw on those strengths to help them succeed in the U.S. system. This strengths-based perspective could reinforce students' perception that they are acculturating with some sense of self intact, rather than only assimilating the new ways.

These first two themes in the acculturation process support the idea that as these students attempted to acculturate into the U.S. educational system they relied upon aid from school staff and peers to assist them in understanding the school rules and protocols. The last two themes identify how these individuals choose to retain and acquire various cultural factors as they acculturated into the U.S. public educational system. It appears that the pattern of acculturation these participants described is similar to the pattern described by Morante. This information supports Morante's findings to concluding a similar process of acculturation for Burmese refugee students into the U.S. public educational system.

Finding 2: Motivational factors impact the pace of acculturation. Morante states that an individual will take approximately 2–7 years to go through all of the acculturating

phases (2004). However, according to this research the Burmese refugee students interviewed are acculturating to the U.S. educational system faster than Morante detailed in her research. It is important to recognize that Morante did not specifically detail a pattern of acculturation for teens, or for acculturating into the U.S. educational system; however, since the individual responses of these refugees reflect the stages Morante expressed in her research it is wise to compare both timeframes regarding how long it takes an individual to pass through this acculturation process.

The majority of the participants of this study have resided in the United States between 2 months to 1 year, the modal amount of time being 10 months. Within that time frame, the participants of this study acknowledged the differences of their previous educational experience to their new society's educational system, they reflected upon what parts of their educational upbringing they desired to relinquish or maintain, and they confidently accept the choices they made so they can be successful in their new environment while maintaining their culture.

The speed at which they acculturate into the U.S. educational system may be further explained by the motivational factors that they identified as assisting them to acculturate. This finding supports current research on the effect motivation has towards assisting individuals acculturate into the United States. Earley and Ang identified motivation as a strong factor in cross-cultural adjustment (2003). They state that it is valuable to be aware of the new culture's pragmatics and rituals, but it is the motivation that an individual has which will allow them to successfully acculturate into their new environment.

The individuals of this study affirmed that familial support and encouragement motivated them to attend school and acquire an education. Kaplan, Liu, and Kaplan (2001) conclude that regardless of the families' racial or ethnic background, the family process variable most important to a child's academic performance is the parents' educational expectations for their children. The participants acknowledged that their parents encouraged them to obtain an education so they can attain a financially secure job, as well as verbally encouraged them to learn the English language effectively so they could help the family communicate with members of their new society. These individuals continued to come to school due to their familial needs. Both of these responses identify the positive impact parental encouragement had upon the students' ambition to attend a U.S. school.

Based on this finding, one recommendation would be to increase the emphasis on home visits with parents, in which the school counselor or other professional, accompanied by a translator, discusses the expected role of parents in the U.S. educational system. During the visit, the counselor might show the parents samples of various documents that will be sent home with the student, such as report cards and permission slips. The translator could then talk the parents through the meaning of the documents—in a general sense—with the hope of minimizing parental anxiety or confusion when students bring home the actual documents later.

Finding 3: Suggestions for school policy. The introductory school these students attended provided a non-hostile environment for the students to learn about procedures in the Utah schools without being penalized for noncompliance to school procedures and rules during their first few weeks of attendance. This school integrated English language

acquisition across all subject areas, such as math and social studies. Through this process the student learns to communicate in English and builds school based language vocabulary, which is essential for them to understand if they desire to attain a high school certificate or diploma. Participants of this study recommended that school faculty and staff provide more opportunities to teach basic grammar, reading, writing and English communication skills. These students may be offered additional English classes as a high school elective.

A social worker was provided at this school to assist the students in gaining access to government programs and funds, as well as to helping the students learn about cultural norms and laws in the United States. This was an invaluable service to these individuals who required additional help in understanding and maneuvering the school environment and their society's rules. It is recommended that the school district continue to provide necessary finances to employ a consistent school social worker for the refugee population who will continue to provide these services to them.

Students in this school are enrolled for one academic year before transitioning to a traditional high school placement. While enrolled in the transitional school the student is placed in a traditional high school class for part of the day. Data is gathered through observational reports, interviews with the students and teachers, and through grade reports to understand how the student is transitioning. This data informs the staff how the student will perform when they transition into a traditional high school setting at the end of the year. A recommendation to improve this policy is to allow the student to spend additional time in the introductory school's setting if the data shows that the student is unable to follow the assignments, becomes behaviorally overwhelmed to their new

environment and cannot adapt, or is unable to comprehend the material due to language difficulties. After the student is placed in a traditional high school setting modified work assignments should be developed with the aid of the school's English as a secondary language teacher so that they student will have optimal success at comprehending the subject matter and performing well.

Another recommendation to improve this school's policy is to continue supplying opportunities for the student to display their culture through clothing, dance, or presentations can convey the message that their new society understands that their heritage is important for them to maintain and that it is acceptable to maintain their culture. The display can also foster meaningful discussions about their new society with school peers. This communication with new members of their school environment may assist in combating feelings of isolation.

Further recommendations include utilizing school peer tutors. It would be useful for a fluent English speaker to become a volunteer peer tutor for the refugee as the refugee students transition into a traditional high school setting. This tutor could provide academic support and model appropriate pronunciation and usage of the English language. This extra support could assist the refugee student attain a wider social network and practice their English skills with the help of a native English speaker.

A recommendation for school districts that do not provide introductory schools to new refugees is to offer introductory meetings that discuss school policies and rules. These meetings can focus on informing the student and their family members what time school begins and ends, how to use the transit system and school bus system, defining tardiness and other school offenses, explaining what the consequences are for those

offenses and detailing what detention or expulsion means, discussing the need to receive parental permission for the student to participate in excursions as well as explaining that parents are expected to attend school meetings with their teachers throughout the year, introducing the student to how the cafeteria will supply them with food, detailing how the student can participate in extracurricular activities, and discussing the positive benefits that an education will have upon the student's future employment status.

Finding 4: Addressing technology instruction in school. Another interesting finding is the role technology had upon the Burmese refugee students' educational performance. These students required an additional class to familiarize them with the function and uses of computers, calculators, projectors, and other forms of technology that are utilized in the U.S. public schools. Prior to this class these students could not effectively operate a calculator or a computer, and they were unable to rely upon their family's aid due to their family's unfamiliarity with the technology in the U.S. schools.

Refugee students who learn to effectively utilize these materials require ample opportunities to practice the skills. In particular, in order to type, the refugee must be able to recognize the English alphabet and learn the letters' seemingly haphazard placement on the keyboard. Teachers' guided direct instruction is vital in teaching the student how to operate a computer or calculator and providing them with sufficient practice so their abilities to utilize computers, calculators, and other forms of technology can improve. Until they learn how to utilize computers, school faculty and staff should allow the student ample time to complete assignments by hand.

Finding 5: Individualized career plans. This study identified the importance of developing a career plan for the student within their first year of high school. These

students require additional guidance to understand how to attain their occupational goals due to their unfamiliarity with the process of career advancement in the United States. Although career options in the students' previous locations were severely limited, becoming a professional in the refugee camps required only a high school degree; in fact, opportunities beyond high school education were generally not available. This differs remarkably from the U.S. educational standards for becoming specialized in any given field.

School counselors provide valuable assistance by informing these individuals of the U.S. requirements for their chosen profession, and by helping the student ascertain whether this profession would be an adequate fit or possibility. Once the students are aware of the requirements for various professions, they can then make informed decisions about what career they want to attain. The career plan then outlines what courses they need to take at school and what preparations they need in order to gain additional training after high school, so they may be successful in their chosen career.

Building upon this idea, one recommendation would be to inform parents in the home visit about career service plans and to encourage them to be involved in the process in appropriate ways. Parents' encouragement as the students explore possible careers is one more opportunity to provide the family motivation that, as this study shows, speeds students' acculturation.

Finding 6: Social networks. Participants recognized the benefits of having various individuals in their social network. These benefits include guiding the individual to resources for financial assistance, providing encouragement and emotional support for the individual, and informing the individual about the new environment. In general, the

broader the network, the more successfully individuals may utilize available community resources and seek out support.

School faculty should ascertain the strength of a refugee student's social network by identifying how many resources the student is aware of, the number of friends he or she spends time with, and how supported the student feels by peers and other members of the community. If the faculty feel the student has an inadequate amount of support, they can intervene by increasing the support that student has at school. Methods for conveying support include offering school counseling services, introducing the student to various organizations that provide services to refugees, and encouraging school staff and faculty to help the student feel welcome through verbal encouragement and smiling.

As previously mentioned, a formal or informal peer mentoring program may also provide important social and academic help. The peer mentoring may occur in short amounts of time during the school day, perhaps within each class period or in a designated elective class period rather than before or after school.

Overlap across Themes

Significant overlapping of themes occurred throughout various categories. These themes include the impact communication has on the students' educational performance and daily living necessities, the impact finances have upon the students' educational performance, and the importance of the child's social network.

The ability to communicate in English increases the students' understanding of instructions and assignments, while the inability to communicate in English impacts their future employment prospects as well as their ability to comprehend future educational instruction in a university or trade school setting. Unfortunately, the refugees' current

economic difficulties interfere with their language acquisition and schoolwork in general. If the students are concerned about where they will sleep that night or whether their families will have food to eat, they cannot optimally focus on finishing their homework or school assignments. This lack of focus will impede the students' grades, which in turn may impede their chances at attaining a strong financial job.

Neighbors and various organizations can greatly assist the individual's family in obtaining basic food, clothing, and shelter, which will allow the student to focus on attaining education. Without this social network of available resources it is likely that the individual's family would be in extreme poverty conditions, reducing the student's chances of attending and succeeding in school. This vital social network is developed as family members interact with affiliates of their new community. Paradoxically, it is the student who has the most exposure to the community due to interaction with peers at school, the various organizations that present information at school, school field trips.

Given the previous information, possible ramifications of the student's not attending school would include a decrease in the family's social network, and thus in the existing resources that the refugee family would have available to them. This decrease of social support can impact the family's financial status and, coming full circle, can further hamper the child's language acquisition and, absent the child's ability to translate, the language acquisition and economic standing of the whole family. Thus, helping families avoid extreme poverty now has implications not just for children's education but for families' self-sufficiency in the future.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when discussing the findings of this study. First, this study was restricted to Burmese refugee students who were still attending school after several months of U.S. residency. The findings cannot be generalized to individuals who dropped out of school, who may have had very different experiences within the U.S. educational system. Therefore the data from the current study represent Burmese refugee students who had successfully acculturated into the educational system; individuals who did not acculturate well are likely to not be represented in this sample.

Second, each interview was conducted as an interpreter translated the conversation from English to Burmese or Karen and vice-versa. The process of translating information between two dialects decreases the authenticity of what the individual is attempting to convey. The constant banter allows for possible miscommunications and inaccuracy in reporting. In an attempt to counter this effect, clarifying follow-up questions were asked during the interview. Despite these measures, it is possible that miscommunications still existed in the interview dialogue.

A benefit of using the same interpreter for all interviews was that the principle investigator became familiar with his translation style and, similarly, the interpreter became familiar with the principal investigator's questioning style. However, a limitation of using the same interpreter was that if the interpreter translated a concept erroneously, that mistake would have been consistent throughout all of the interviews, rather than simply being a single incident. It was apparent that through working with a translator the subtle nuances of the language could not be translated verbatim;

paraphrasing occurred. This difficulty in conveying precise the meaning of the message may have decreased the validity of the data analyses based on the participant's translated responses.

Third, the participants have not been in the United States for more than a year. Their lack of exposure to the U.S. educational system, as well as lack of unawareness of the factors that contribute to this organization, limit the refugees' perception of what may be impacting their acculturation. This restricted knowledge may have influenced their responses regarding which factors are contributing to their acculturation and how those factors are affecting them.

Fourth, the research was confined to participants at a single, transitional school. It is probable that the experiences of refugee students who begin their education at mainstream schools differ greatly in terms of resources offered, social networking opportunities, and the pace of acculturation. Still, the researcher believes that the issues participants identified as challenging—and the resources they identified as helpful—will be applicable to educators and helping professionals working with refugee students in a variety of settings.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research in this area may focus on identifying Burmese refugee students who dropped out of school and the factors that led to their withdrawal from school. The experiences of those individuals with the U.S. educational system may differ from the experiences of the individuals in this study. It would be interesting to then compare the factors which led an individual to leave school to the factors that are assisting the individuals who are successfully acculturating into the U.S. public educational system.

The results of the comparison may solidify which factors are beneficial in helping a Burmese refugee student acculturate into the U.S. school system and which factors signify the child is at risk for dropping out.

Future research in this area may also include a follow-up study on the participants of this study as they continue their education in a traditional high school setting. Their experiences in new surroundings can provide additional insight into which factors are still helping them acculturate into the U.S. public educational system, and what advice they would give to incoming Burmese refugee students who are initially placed into a traditional high school setting. Additionally, these individuals may also have developed greater insight regarding other factors that affect their education, and they would be able to discuss how those factors assisted or impeded their acculturation into the U.S. public educational system.

Another area of study might be the efficacy of the transitional high school model for incoming refugees. At present, the researcher believes that the transitional high school provides exceptional resources to refugee students that would be more difficult to provide in a traditional setting. However, given the re-acculturation process that is likely to occur as students move to the traditional high school, it may be worthwhile to consider alternative transition models, such as a daily, one-period class at the traditional school for new students coming from the alternate school; a system of half days at the traditional school during the students' second year at the alternate school; or, perhaps, a traveling education specialist who provides counseling and home visits to refugee students who attend schools throughout the district (a model that could be especially valuable in areas without a transitional school option).

Finally, although difficult to conduct, follow-up interviews with these participants as they conclude their post-secondary training and enter the job market, would offer additional perspectives about the impact of their acculturation during high school. A subsequent follow-up interview after the immigrants have obtained several years of work experience would also be of interest.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study provide educational agencies, refugee organizations, and local governments with insights regarding how Burmese refugee teenagers acculturate into the U.S. public educational system. The findings also, identify factors that are encouraging or hindering this process. These implications may be utilized to realign programs to better assist the refugees.

The first implication focuses on these agencies by identifying what motivational support the students' acculturation experiences. From this study we learn that an individual is likely to successfully acculturate to the U.S. public educational system if they are receiving motivation from their family, from the school, or through their own realization of the power education has for their employment future. If an individual is lacking in one of these areas additional time may be spent encouraging the student through the other areas. For example, if a student has no familial relations and is receiving no motivation from the individuals he or she is living with, it would be important to encourage that student to understand why an education is valuable, as well as encouraging the school's staff and faculty to further promote the individual's successes and possible future accomplishments.

Another implication involves spending additional time in school teaching the new refugees about the technology the school uses and how to utilize that technology.

Participants of this study additionally requested that their teachers focus on teaching the fundamentals of the English language. It is probable that the instructors already focus on English training a good deal, but that the students still find language acquisition overwhelming, particularly in the immersion environment. The English language foundation provides them with assistance to communicate with individuals in their new environment and progress with their education to gain stable employment.

The students mentioned that they would like the school system to continue assisting them to develop their individualized career plans that align with their career goals. The individualized career plan helps the students know what they need to do to gain their desired profession, and the plans communicate a sense of personalized identity that is vital to the acculturation process. Without this career plan it is likely that many students would become lost in the world of education.

Implications also exist for local and national governments to provide additional financial resources for refugee families; particularly with attaining unemployment benefits. Financial resources need to be provided to new refugees for a period longer than six months. Because these individuals have little prior work experience and the majority cannot effectively communicate in English, their families will live in poverty until they can attain stable employment. The best solution for these individuals to attain financial stability is to attain at least a high school education; however, the majority of the parents cannot sacrifice the time to gain an education. Thus, a solution to assist these families subside while they send their children to school includes extending the time financial

services are available to refugees and providing free English classes taught in their neighborhood by knowledgeable teachers.

There are also implications for various community organizations. The verbal praise these individuals gave various community organizations details the positive impact these resources have as families attempt to acculturate into their new society. Aside from providing the families with their basic necessities, the organizations also provide them with opportunities to interact with members of their new community and help increase the number of members of in their social network—a social network that will decrease possible feelings of isolation and increase the family’s resources when challenges occur.

Overall, there are many facets involved in assisting a Burmese refugee child in acculturating into the U.S. educational system, and each of these facets provides a needed resource for the child to feel accepted into the U.S. public educational system and decide to acculturate. It is likely that more refugee students will successfully acculturate into the U.S. public educational system as local communities work together to assist these individuals.

Conclusion

This study provided insight into the difficulties facing Burmese refugee students as they acculturate into the U.S. educational system, the process of how they acculturate into the U.S. public educational system, the effect that motivational support has on their acculturation process, community resources and services that are beneficial to them, as well as identifying areas that can be improved. Parental, community, and internal motivation to acculturate to the U.S. educational system encouraged the student to attend

school despite the financial difficulties, communication complexities, and unfamiliarity with school procedure they encountered.

Volunteers aid these refugees through explaining their new cultural procedures, the uses of technology, and other novel experiences to the students so they can effectively operate in their new environment. Furthermore, communication is identified as the most essential form of adaptation once the individual's basic subsistence needs are met. This language acquisition is essential to access and benefit from education. These individuals previously adapted from their society in Burma to the Thailand refugee camp society, and are now in an entirely new environment and are adapting well.

It appears that even with meager resources, individuals can elect to adapt to a new environment. For the refugee students in this study, the availability of language acquisition programs, organizations and friends willing to provide financial aid or explanations of cultural norms, and above all, the individuals' own choice to adapt to their new educational environment, are resulting in successful educational acculturation.

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Utah Exec. Order No. 2008-0002, 4 U.S.B 2 (2008).

Appendix A

Interview Guidelines

Sample questions for the interview with students:

1. If you had a friend come from [student's native land], what advice would you want to give them about U.S. schools
2. Tell me about your adjustment to the schools here.
3. What helped your adjustment?
4. What was most difficult about your adjustment?
5. Tell me what has helped you feel welcome at the U.S. schools.
6. Tell me of a time when a teacher helped you feel good at school.
7. Tell me of a time when your family helped you adjust to schools here.
8. If you were a principal or teacher at a school, and you were working with new students, what would you do to help that student most?
9. What are your worries about going to a new school?
10. What other advice would you like to share with us to improve the way we welcome refugee students into the school?

Common statements that assisted in generating more information:

1. Can you tell me more about that?
2. What do you mean when you say...?
3. What does [emotion] look like?
4. Please describe that.
5. So what you mean is...
6. Can you tell me about a time when that happened?

Appendix B

Member Check Letter

Thank you so much for your participation in this study! I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to meet and talk with you about your experiences acculturating into the U.S. educational system.

I would like to share with you the results of this study. As you read these results please consider if they are an accurate representation of your experience.

Results:

The challenges:

- 1) Difficulty communicating with an unfamiliar language
- 2) Unfamiliarity with school procedures; such as attendance and receiving immunizations
- 3) Financial difficulties

How you acculturate into the U.S. public school system:

- 1) Learn about your new school setting by talking with teachers, school staff, and peers to learn the rules and school procedures.
- 2) Learn about your community through field trips
- 3) Choose which educational system [the educational system of Burma or the refugee camps vs. the U.S. educational system] is beneficial to your future.
- 4) Adopt the educational system you prefer and feel respected through identity affirmation.

Motivational factors that are assisting you acculturate:

- 1) Parental encouragement to attend school and to learn the English language so you can effectively communicate in your new society.
- 2) Internal motivation—you have your own desire to gain an education
- 3) School staff and teachers encourage you to gain an education

All of these factors are helping you acculturate into the U.S. educational system.

What is assisting you:

- 1) Organizations and community resources providing food, clothing, and shelter to you
- 2) Having many individuals you can talk to and go to for support and financial assistance
- 3) Receiving personal attention from school staff
- 4) The teacher teaches you a concept, then you both practice it together, then you do it on your own but the teacher still helps you.
- 5) Having an individualized career plan to help you graduate high school and gain employment or a college degree.

What we can do better:

- 1) Spend more time learning. This includes teaching basic English grammar and pronunciation.
- 2) Providing more resources to assist with your financial needs.
- 3) Helping teachers understand that sometimes you cannot do the work because you do not know the language. This does not mean you are incapable of doing the work, but you don't understand the language well enough to do it.

Once again, thank you so much for your participation in this study!