The Refugee Experience

This handbook provides awareness and strategies for effective integration of refugee children into the United States and the American school system. The handbook was developed by the Spring Institute located in Denver, Colorado in 2003.

This document provides the following information to assist school districts in helping their refugee students:

- Definition and general information about refugees;
- Mental health challenges of refugee students;
- Academic challenges that refugee students may confront;
- Ways to support refugee parents and families;
- Recommendations for teachers of refugee students;
- Stories of authentic refugee student experiences; and
- Strategies for meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of refugee students.
Resources for Refugees

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New Jersey

**Essex**

**American Friends Service Committee**
89 Market Street, 6th Floor
Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: (973) 643-1924
http://afsc.org/office/newark-nj

The Immigrant Rights Program in Newark NJ works to ensure that all immigrants to the US are treated with respect and are able to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms. They work to address the vast need among immigrants for access to legal counsel and fair and non-discriminatory treatment by government agencies.

**Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark**
590 North 7th Street
Newark, NJ 07107
Phone: (973) 266-7989
http://www.ccannj.com/

“Catholic Charities' programs serve the very young, the very old, and all in between. We seek to provide the necessities of life to the homeless, the blessings of liberty to immigrants, and the restoration of right relationships within families and within society. We seek to provide a life with meaning to the disabled, isolated, and lonely; a safety net to those in crisis; the hope of economic participation to the marginalized and unemployed; and opportunities for the growth and development of children and youth.”

**Hudson**

**International Institute of New Jersey, Refugee Resettlement Program**
1 Journal Square plaza, 4th floor
Jersey City, NJ 07306
Phone: (201) 653-3888
http://iijnj.org/our-services/our-social-services/

“IINJ works to ensure that arriving refugees attain economic self-sufficiency through the provision of an array of services” such as administering “a cash resettlement grant upon arrival to cover such costs as housing and furnishings. Bilingual case workers help refugees access needed services ranging from medical care, English language training, housing, employment, vocational counseling and referral, to medical assistance, mental health counseling and social adjustment services.”
New Jersey Resources for Trafficked Persons
880 Bergen Avenue
Jersey City, NJ 07306
Phone: (201) 653-3888

A directory compiled by the International Institute of New Jersey indicating resources for housing, case management and referral, health and legal services, counseling, law enforcement, ESL and other educational services, services particularly for men or women, community organizations, and sexual assault recovery services.

Mercer

The Catholic Diocese of Trenton, Migration and Refugee Services
149 North Warren Street
Trenton, NJ 08608-1307
Phone: (609) 394-8299

“Offers legal counseling in immigration matters and assistance with applications for the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, advocates on behalf of immigrants and refugees, and works to raise consciousness of the plight of immigrants and refugees among the people of Burlington, Mercer, Monmouth and Ocean counties.”

Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey
189 South Broad Street
Trenton, NJ 08601
Phone: (609) 393-4900
http://www.lsmnj.org/programs-services/community-outreach-services/immigration-refugee-program/

“The Immigration Program of Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey provides a full range of high-quality immigration legal assistance and counseling to low-income immigrants, including: immigration legal services, refugee resettlement, English as a Second Language (ESL) program for refugees, civics and citizenship classes for immigrants, and employment support for asylees and refugees.”

New Jersey Department of Human Services
Capital Place One
222 South Warren Street
P.O. Box 700
Trenton, NJ 08625-0700
Phone: (609) 588-2989
http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/programs/refugee/
“Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP) is a federally funded program that provides cash and medical assistance to refugees. An individual is considered a refugee for purposes of RRP if he or she fled from and cannot return to his or her place of national origin because of fear of persecution on account of race, religion or political opinion.”

Middlesex

**Jewish Family and Vocational Service**
52 Concordia Shopping Center
Monroe Township, NJ 08831
(609) 395-7979
http://www.jfvs.org/ImmigrantRefugee.htm

“JFVS assists immigrants with processing requirements and acculturation (such as ESL training), and educates the community through intergenerational programs designed to explain the journey and experiences of the refugees.”

New Jersey Resources for Trafficked Persons and Community Volunteers
http://www.jlnjspac.org/nj_resource_guide.pdf

A resource guide organized alphabetically by New Jersey county detailing programs and services available for victims of human trafficking and other forms of domestic violence as well as volunteers.

Passaic

**Catholic Family and Community Services**
24 De Grasse Street
Paterson, NJ 07505-2001
Phone: (973) 279-7100
http://www.catholicharities.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=54

The Catholic Family and Community Services organization “provide[s] social services that address the needs of individuals, families and groups in our community, especially the poor, to advocate for justice and to convene other persons to do the same.”

Union

**Human Rights Advocates International, Inc.**
1341 North Avenue, Suite C-7
Elizabeth, NJ 07208-2622
Phone: (908) 352-6032

HRA addresses the panoply of human rights issues, including minority and bodies on the human rights aspects of such issues as: minority and peoples’ rights; the rights of the child; juvenile criminal sentencing; trafficking in women and children; migrant worker rights; the right to
housing; the right to food; affirmative action; corporate accountability; and human rights and the
environment.

National

California

California Refugee Program
Phone: (916) 654-4356
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/refugeeprogram/

California's Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP) is comprised of many program partners at the
federal, state, county, and community level. The RRP in California is 100 percent federally
funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement and is state administered by the California
Department of Social Services, Refugee Programs Bureau (RPB). The RPB supervises county
operations and delivery of RRP benefits and services. The RRP assists the populations we serve
to adjust socially and attain the skills needed for finding employment and becoming self-
sufficient as quickly as possible.

Refugee Assistance Program
Hung Nguyen, Refugee Assistance Coordinator
Refugee Assistance Program
56 S. Lincoln St. (In the WorkNet Building)
Stockton, CA 95203
(209) 468-2061
http://www.sjaging.org/Refugee_Assistance/refugee_assistance.htm

The Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) is a federally funded program which helps persons
admitted to the U.S. as refugees to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible upon their
arrival. Temporary RAP cash assistance and medical aid are available to needy refugees who are
not eligible for other cash or medical assistance programs. In addition, employment services,
health screenings and foster care services to unaccompanied minors are also available to
refugees.

Refugee Cash Assistance Program
Hall of Administration
333 W. Santa Ana Blvd.
Santa Ana, CA 92701
Phone: (714) 834.5400
fugee%20Assistance

Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) is cash assistance provided to individuals with refugee, asylee,
or trafficking victim status who have been determined to be ineligible for CalWORKs or
SSI/SSP and who have resided in the United States for no longer than 8 months from the Date of
Entry.
Florida

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Miami, Inc.
700 S. Royal Poinciana Boulevard, Suite 800
Miami Springs, FL 33166
Phone: (305) 883-4555
http://www.ccadm.org/ourministries/refugeeservices

The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Miami, Inc. offers cultural orientation seminars, access to English Language classes (ESOL), information about job training and educational opportunities, job readiness and placement services, assistance with housing and child care placements, referrals for immigration services, mentoring services, and healthcare referrals in the area of Miami, Florida.

Georgia

Georgia Department of Health, Refugee Health
Two Peachtree Street, NW
Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3186
Phone: (404) 657-2700
http://health.state.ga.us/programs/refugeehealth/index.asp

The program ensures that refugees receive adequate healthcare, which is not provided in their native country. Screening refugees within 90 days of their arrival aids in the reduction of contracting contagious diseases and/or spreading any diseases to the indigenous community in which the refugee resides. In correlation, outreach services provide health education to the refugee community, further ensuring prevention of infirmity.

Georgia Department of Human Services, Refugee Resettlement Program
State Refugee Coordinator
Phone: (404) 657-5118
http://team.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHS-DFCS/menuitem.5d32235bb09bde9a50c8798dd03036a0/?vgnextoid=1dca2b48d9a4ff00VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCRD

The Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP) to provide cash assistance, medical assistance, and social services to refugees. The Fascell-Stone Amendment to the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980 extended to Cuban and Haitian entrants the same benefits and services available to refugees. The Refugee Assistance Amendments of 1982 amended the law. In the Continuing Resolution of 1983, the Cuban/Haitian Entrant Program was combined with the RRP so that the same program served both refugees and entrants. The Refugee Assistance Extension Act of 1986 further amended the law. In 1988, the Amerasians Homecoming Act admitted Amerasians and their families as immigrants but made them eligible for refugee benefits. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 admitted victims of severe forms of human trafficking and made them eligible for refugee benefits. Asylees are also eligible for refugee benefits as added by the Refugee Act of 1980.
The goal of the RFS is “to support the efforts of refugee women and children to achieve self-sufficiency in the United States by providing education and economic opportunity” in the Atlanta, Georgia area.

**Maryland**

**Kurdish Human Rights Watch**
8151 15th Avenue
Hyattsville, MD 20783
Phone: (240) 491-5791

The new KHRW affiliate office in Maryland provides Reception and Placement services to special immigrant visa holders (SIV) and new refugee individuals and families. Refugee core services are provided in culturally and linguistically appropriate fashion.

**Massachusetts**

**Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma**
Department of Psychiatry
Massachusetts General Hospital
22 Putnam Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139 USA
Phone: (617) 876-7879
http://hprt-cambridge.org/

The Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma (HPRT), originally founded at the Harvard School of Public Health, is a multi-disciplinary program that has been pioneering the health and mental health care of traumatized refugees and civilians in areas of conflict/post-conflict and natural disasters for over two decades.

**Michigan**

**Refugee Assistance Program**
Department of Human Services
235 S. Grand Ave.
P.O. Box 30037
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517)373-2035
http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,1607,7-124-5452_7124_7207---,00.html
The Refugee Assistance Program is a federal program which helps persons admitted into the U.S. as refugees to become self-sufficient after their arrival. Temporary RAP cash assistance and medical aid is available to refugees who are not eligible for FIP (TANF) or Medicaid for up to 8 months after their entry into the U.S. employment services, health screenings and foster care services for unaccompanied minors are other DHS services available to refugees.

**Minnesota**

**Minnesota Department of Health, Refugee Health**  
P.O. Box 64975  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975  
Phone: (888) 345-0823  

Minnesota's Refugee Health Program partners with local health departments, private health care providers, and community organizations to offer each new refugee arrival a comprehensive screening examination, appropriate follow-up or referral and community-based health education.

**Montana**

**Immigrant & Refugee Women’s Program**  
3672B Arsenal Street  
St. Louis, MO 63116  
Phone: (314) 771-1104  
[http://www.irwp.net/](http://www.irwp.net/)

It is IRWP’s mission “to increase the independence and reduce the isolation of immigrant and refugee women by teaching them basic English and practical living skills in the security of their own homes” and their vision “to create a community where immigrant and refugee women have sufficient English language skills to provide a home that prepares them and their children to meet the everyday challenges of living in a diverse culture and to make a personal, lasting, and valued social, moral, and economic contribution to the community.”

**Nebraska**

**Refugee Resettlement Program**  
PO Box 95026  
Lincoln, NE 68509-5044  
Phone: (402) 471-9264  
[http://www.hhs.state.ne.us/refugees/](http://www.hhs.state.ne.us/refugees/)

The mission of the Office of Refugee Resettlement is to help refugees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, asylees, and other beneficiaries of our program to establish a new life that is founded on the dignity of economic self-support and encompasses full participation in opportunities which Americans enjoy.
New Hampshire

New Hampshire Refugee Program
NH Office of Minority Health and Refugee Affairs
97 Pleasant Street
DHHS, Thayer Building
Concord, NH 03301
barbara.seebart@dhhs.state.nh.us
Phone: (603) 271-6361
http://www.nh.gov/oep/programs/refugee/index.htm

The New Hampshire Refugee Program at the Office of Energy and Planning (OEP) provides federally funded services to refugees resettled in the State of New Hampshire in accordance with federal statutes. The major goal of this program is to assist refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency and social adjustment upon arrival to the United States.

New York

CAMBA
1720 Church Avenue 2nd Fl
Brooklyn, NY 11226
Phone: (718) 287-2600

CAMBA’s Refugee Assistance Program has provided refugees and political asylees in New York City who face cultural and language barriers to employment with opportunities to obtain jobs and training and improve their English language skills.

International Rescue Committee
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168 USA
Phone: (212) 551-3000
http://www.rescue.org/

“The International Rescue Committee responds to the world’s worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein, the IRC offers lifesaving care and life-changing assistance to refugees forced to flee from war or disaster.”

University of the State of New York, State Education Department
55 Hanson Place, 4th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11210
Phone: (718) 722-2425

“A Resource Guide for Educating Refugee Children and Youth in New York State”
Oregon

Department of Human Services Refugee Program
500 Summer St. NE
Salem, OR 97301
Phone: (503) 945-5600
http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/assistance/refugee/

Working with the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, the State of Oregon may provide up to eight months of cash and medical assistance to newly arriving refugees. Refugees may be able to receive any other assistance that is offered to U.S. citizens – this includes food assistance in the form of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. The state may also provide other services beyond the initial eight months, such as assistance with job search, employment acculturation, English language classes, citizenship and naturalization help.

Pennsylvania

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Allentown
Lehigh/Northampton Service Office
530 Union Boulevard
Allentown, PA 18109
Phone: (610) 435-1541
http://www.allentowndiocese.org/csa/refugee.htm

Catholic Charities staff and volunteers meet the arriving refugees at the airport and place them in safe, affordable apartments that have been furnished with donations from local families. Staff and volunteers arrange for medical appointments, school enrollment, and orientation to basic community services in the area of Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program
Norm-Anne Rothermel, State Refugee Coordinator
Phone: (717) 787-8608
e-mail: nrothermel@state.pa.us
http://www.refugeesinpa.org/RefugeeResettlementProgram/

The Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP) provides federally-funded services to refugees in accordance with federal statutes and regulations and the Commonwealth's State Plan.

Virginia

Office of Justice and Peace
Catholic Diocese of Richmond
811 Cathedral Place
Richmond, VA 23220-4801
Phone: (804) 359-5661
http://www.richmonddiocese.org/cst/ref-imm.htm
Provides useful links and lesson plans for religious educators.

**Virginia Council of Churches, Refugee Resettlement Program**
VCC Refugee Resettlement Office  
1214 W. Graham Rd., Suite 3  
Richmond VA 23220  
Phone: (804) 321-3305  
[http://vacouncilofchurches.org/cms/?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=33](http://vacouncilofchurches.org/cms/?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=33)

The VCC offers assistance in facilitating a sponsorship program between participating congregations and refugees entering the state of Virginia, offering job and housing assistance and providing a local community to integrate into.

**Washington, D. C.**

**Cultural Orientation Research Center**  
Center for Applied Linguistics  
4646 40th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20016-1859  
Phone: (202) 362-0700  
[http://www.cal.org/co/](http://www.cal.org/co/)

The Cultural Orientation Resource Center provides technical assistance regarding new refugee groups and the orientation they receive either before their resettlement in the United States or after their arrival.

**Jesuit Refugee Service/USA**  
1016 16th St NW Ste 500  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Phone: (202) 629-5943  
[http://jrsusa.org/](http://jrsusa.org/)

“The mission of Jesuit Refugee Service/USA is to serve, accompany, and defend the rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, witnessing to God’s presence in vulnerable and often forgotten people driven from their homes by conflict, natural disaster, economic injustice, or violation of their human rights.”

**Refugee Council USA**  
1628 16th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
Phone: (202) 319-2102  

“RCUSA provides advocacy on issues affecting the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, victims of trafficking, and victims of torture in the United States and across the world.”
Federal

US Citizenship and Immigration Services
Phone: 1(800) 375-5283
http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis

“U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States.”

US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
2231 Crystal Drive, Suite 350
Arlington, VA 22202-3711
Phone: (703) 310-1130
http://www.refugees.org/

USCRI’s mission is “to protect the rights and address the needs of persons in forced or voluntary migration worldwide by advancing fair and humane public policy, facilitating and providing direct professional services, and promoting the full participation of migrants in community life.”

US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families
Aerospace Building
901 D Street, SW
Washington, DC 20447
Phone: (202) 401-9246

“Founded on the belief that newly arriving populations have inherent capabilities when given opportunities, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides people in need with critical resources to assist them in becoming integrated members of American society.”

US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520
Phone: (202) 647-4000
http://www.state.gov/g/ prm/

“The mission of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is to provide protection, ease suffering, and resolve the plight of persecuted and uprooted people around the world on behalf of the American people by providing life-sustaining assistance, working through multilateral systems to build global partnerships, promoting best practices in humanitarian response, and ensuring that humanitarian principles are thoroughly integrated into U.S. foreign and national security policy.”
International

American Refugee Committee
ARC World Headquarters
430 Oak Grove Street
Suite 204
Minneapolis, MN 55403 USA
Phone: (612) 872-7060; or (800) 875-7060
http://www.arcrelief.org/site/PageServer

The American Refugee Committee is an international nonprofit, nonsectarian organization that has provided humanitarian assistance and training to millions of beneficiaries over the last 30 years. ARC provides shelter, clean water and sanitation, health care, skills training, microcredit education, protection and any possible additional support.

Danish Refugee Council
Borgergade 10, 3rd floor
DK-1300
Copenhagen K.
Phone: +45 3373 5000
http://www.drc.dk/

The DRC provides “refugees, internally displaced persons and other affected groups in situations of war and conflict with assistance according to their rights. This assistance can consist of relief and other humanitarian aid, rehabilitation and support to return home, as well as contributions to the promotion of durable solutions” and contributes “to capacity building and co-operation between local and national authorities, as well as other relevant organizations. This work aims at strengthening advocacy and promoting solutions to problems related to situations of conflict, particularly with a view to improving the protection and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons.”

International Committee of the Red Cross
ICRC regional delegation
1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 500
Washington D.C. 20036
Phone: 1 (202) 587-46 00

Assists refugees in being reunited with their families.

International Relief and Development
1621 North Kent Street
Fourth Floor
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (703) 248-0161
http://www.ird.org/
IRD programs help vulnerable households, displaced persons and refugees become self-sufficient by providing the necessary immediate and transitional assistance needed to start anew following war, natural disaster or political conflict. Beyond distributing food and critical supplies, IRD works with local and international humanitarian organizations to equip victims with the shelter and tools they need to gain independence.

**Refugee Council of Australia**  
Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010  
Phone: (02) 9211 9333 or  
81-85 Barry Street  
Carlton VIC 3053  
Phone: (03) 9348 2245  

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the national umbrella body for refugees and the organizations and individuals who support them. It has more than 130 organizational members and 250 individual members. The aim of the Refugee Council of Australia is to promote the adoption of flexible, humane and constructive policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons by the Australian and other Governments and their communities.

**Refugee Law Project**  
Plot 9 Perryman Gardens, Old Kampala  
(Opposite Old Kampala Primary School)  
P.O. Box 33903  
Kampala, Uganda  
Phone: +256 (0)414 343 556

The overall aim of the department is to ensure that the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, deportees and other forced migrants in Uganda, as specified under national and international law, are respected and implemented. We also offer psychosocial assistance in the areas of counseling, as well as clinical and mental health. We campaign to ensure that forced migrants are treated in a just, fair and humane manner befitting of all human beings. The department is divided into the legal aid clinic and the psychosocial unit and operates through a variety of thematic programs.

**Resources for Torture Victims, Asylum-Seekers, Detainees, and Refugees**  
http://kspope.com/torvic/torture.php

There are over 130 links below to resources such as: major centers, online courses, legal services, information about asylum and refuge, networks of torture survivors, human rights organizations providing information and services, guides to assessment, and other diverse resources.
The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) provides protection, shelter, emergency food, water, medical care and other life-saving assistance to 36 million people worldwide, who have been forced to flee their homes due to war and persecution. When possible, UNHCR helps refugees and other displaced people return to their homes voluntarily, safely, and with dignity. When return is not possible, the agency assists with local integration, or resettlement to a third country.

Women's Refugee Commission
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168
Phone: (212) 551-3115

The Women's Refugee Commission advocates for laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and young people, including those seeking asylum—bringing about lasting, measurable change.

World Relief
7 East Baltimore Street
Baltimore MD, 21202
Phone: (443) 451-1900
http://worldrelief.org/

In US offices, World Relief offers legal support, job training and English classes to immigrants. In Baltimore, a Legal Services clinic reaches out to thousands of clients each year—helping them fill out paperwork, joining them at hearings and ensuring they understand their rights and responsibilities.
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Questions to Ponder and Answer:

1. Who are your refugee students?

2. Where are they from?

3. What do you know about their stories?

4. Which ones are you most concerned about?

5. What are your specific concerns?

6. What are you possible solutions to their needs socially, emotionally and academically?
What is a Refugee?

Refugees are people who are outside their country of nationality and who are unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group or political opinion. These persons have been forced to flee their homeland. Immigrants, by contrast, choose to leave their country, often for economic reasons. At any given time there are 20 million refugees worldwide. 75,000 refugees are admitted yearly in the United States.

General Information about Refugees

Schools are different in the U.S. than in refugees’ countries. For example, when speaking, students are expected to stand. Personal opinions are not to be expressed, and students are not formed into small groups for collaborative learning.

The perception about American schools is that they are permissive, there are few rules to follow and teachers are always kind and gentle.

The American school culture, the rules, regulations and norms, which are taken for granted and are obvious for native English speakers, are not for refugees. For refugees who have not had previous schooling, even basic skills can be a challenge, such as hold a pencil or turning the page of a book.

Teachers cannot take one single thing for granted about refugee students, because their backgrounds are so diverse.

Questions to consider:

What would you like to know about your refugee students, to help you better facilitate their education?
Symptoms of Mental Health Problems of Refugee Students

As a result of the trauma experienced before arriving in our schools, refugee students may develop some of the following psychological symptoms:

- **Depression**
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Poor self-esteem
  - Memory problems
  - Irritability
  - Anxiety
  - Nervousness

- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** can occur after refugee students experience a horrifying or frightening event

- A study of 52 Cambodian students showed that only 15% had poor academic performance and over half had notable depression and anxiety disorders. In another study, 75% of Chilean refugee students whose parents were tortured or persecuted had sleep disturbances, 69% suffered anxiety, 58% were defiant, 42% experienced depression and 39% acted aggressively. Many Central American students are depressed and act out. When parents are killed, children are especially at risk.

Children may manifest the above mentioned symptoms in the following ways:

- Express aspects of trauma through repetitive play
- Avoid activities, places or people
- Detach from others and feel estrangement
- Unable to pay attention in school and have difficulties concentrating
- Block out that which is too painful – “disassociation”
- Suppress all feelings to stop painful memories
- Internalize painful experiences be seeming fearful, sad or shy
- Externalize the symptom by getting into fights or being disruptive
- Experience emotional fragility
Being Different

The experience of immigration is difficult and stressful, with various adjustment changes. The pressure on families can include economic strain or impoverishment, homelessness, criminal victimization, family dysfunction, alienation and lack of language skills.

Refugee students feel different because of:

- Being teased and taunted about their clothing, lack of English ability (example: Somalian girls wearing scarves and mismatched clothes)
- The questions asked by other students are often inappropriate and insulting
- Being lost in school the first few days
  - Recommendation: provide orientation for refugee students and a buddy to accompany and assist
- Tensions between certain refugees and white students, especially at the middle and high school levels

Questions to consider:

In what ways do you refugee students stand out as being different?

How do you think their classmates perceive these differences?
Acculturation

Acculturation is the process of learning a new culture and how to successfully function within it.

Acculturation involves:
   a) Learning about the new culture (i.e., its norms and customs)
   b) Learning the language

Research shows that maintaining the home language and culture is advantageous for many reasons. Students who have continuity of home language and culture in the United States will have an easier time with the acculturation process. An ethnic identity is important for adjustment in the new culture. It is related to positive self-esteem.

Three general ways refugee students deal with acculturation:
   1) They are in a hurry to become acculturated into the American culture. Refugee students may even reject their language, native culture and families. They may be embarrassed about their parent’s inability to speak English and dress fashionably.
   2) They resist becoming acculturated and retreat in their family’s culture. For some refugee students, acculturation may be synonymous with departing from traditional cultural and family values.
   3) They feel torn and divided between their new and former culture and language. These refugee students don’t think they can become acculturated while also maintaining their home culture, and so become alienated.

For many refugee students the experience of acculturation is a mixture of these three examples or an experience of shifting from one example to another.

Questions to consider:

Do you know how your refugee students are handling/coping with acculturation?

What are their challenges/difficulties in adjusting to the American and school culture?
Academic Adjustment

Despite and sometimes because of many hardships, refugee students are driven to learn and excel because they know education is their only option.

The rational thinking is that if children have been traumatized and have exhibited mental health symptoms, it is less likely that they will succeed academically. Surprisingly, in adolescence, research has not shown a significant association between failure at school and mental health symptoms, whether reported by parents or by the students themselves. There is no certain correlation between refugees’ scholastic achievement and psychological symptoms.

Questions to consider:

What reasons might there be for not having a correlation between achievement and mental health symptoms?

What other factors might be attributed to effective academic adjustment and success?
Factors That May Contribute to Challenges of Academic Adjustment

If refugee students are abruptly flung into a new environment, where a language other than the home language is spoken, the normal feelings of alienation are intensified. The process of academic adjustment will not be easy if basic needs are not adequately met (safety, food, shelter). Before students can begin any meaningful interaction with text, their social, emotional and psychological needs must be met to some degree.

Some factors that may contribute to difficulties to academic adjustment:

- Witnessing the lack of respect for teachers in American students
- Lack of adequate discipline by American teachers
- The influence of bad role models in the classroom
- Keeping up with the pace of American students and trying to keep up
- Not connecting with their families before coming to the U.S.
- School, education and teachers play more important roles and accorded greater respect in their home countries
- Feeling alienated, lonely and depressed
- Unable to make friends
- Not comprehending or understanding very little of the lessons
- Too afraid or shy to ask questions
- Failing assignments and tests because of language
Factors that Contribute to Refugee Parents’ Difficulties

Most refugee parents face considerable challenges in addition to personal and family trauma.

Refugee parents:

- Don’t understand the American school system and can’t be helpful to their children regarding various aspects of school
- Feel alienated and believe that no one understands their experiences
- Feel undermined as the authority in their children’s lives because at times, they feel their children are pulling away from them and not minding them
- Endure grueling hours of work and are often overqualified for the job
- Miss their homeland, family and friends left behind
- Have not found anywhere to turn for help
- Feel humiliated, frustrated, lonely and lose
- Want to know how to gain access to cultural, recreational, employment, medical, counseling, transportation, shopping, and educational resources and opportunities
- Alarmed at the new habits exhibited by their children: too much freedom, lax discipline, too much television, lack of respect for adults
  - Example: One Iraqi father was horrified to learn that his adolescent daughter was expected to walk to school alone.
- Live in fear that their children will be corrupted by the materialistic, individualistic culture, fall prey to drugs and promiscuity
- Being protective of their children in the new culture
  - Example: A Bosnian mother would not let her 8 year old son use the restroom at school. She feared he would catch germs and spread them to their family. Another mother kept her children at home for Halloween because she wanted to protect them from satanic influences.
- Can’t speak or speak very little English, so their children help translate, make appointments by phone, etc. This role reversal can cause children to act like adults and feel superior
- Work in menial jobs because they don’t have the resources to return to school to earn another degree

Recommendations for assisting refugee parents:

- Connect by telephone, mail and notes home
- Find out what their needs are through an interpreter with the assistance of the school psychologist or social worker
- Hold a meeting with refugee parents to explain rules and regulations about the school culture
- Ask the ESL teacher where adult English classes are being offered
- Invite parents to observe and help out in your classroom
- Request administrators to hold a meeting for refugee parents, and with the assistance or interpreters, address their questions and concerns
• Introduce the concept of “Family English Time,” where the parents interact with their children using English
  - Example: Listening to books on tapes, reading library books, sharing students’ writing
• Model how they can be of assistance to their children even without being able to speak, understand, read or write in English, simply being available, enthusiastic and willing to engage
• Let parents know that research has shown that reading with their children during Family English Time is the single most influential factor in students’ reading success compared to any reading program or intervention, and therefore, encourage parents to model love of literacy to their children
• Encourage the maintenance of the native language

The native language:
• Is the primary vehicle for the transmission of cultural values, family history and ethnic identity
• May be the child’s only means of communicating with parents or grandparents
• Break the fatigue of learning a new language
• Strengthens bilingualism and seems to lead to cognitive flexibility and greater development of lateral thinking
• Is a vehicle for cognitive development, especially in young children
• Allows the possibility for parents to help the student preview upcoming units, extend teachings or explain content
• Allows the students to express concepts related to content area materials

Questions to consider:

What else would you like to recommend to refugee parents?
Teachers Are Concerned About...

- Resources for a smoother transition into mainstream classes
- Students’ educational background in their home countries
- Placing age appropriate students in school
- Distinguishing students needing special education
- Susceptibility of developing friendships with troublemakers (i.e., cursing, bullying, etc.)
- Residual trauma experienced before immigration
- Not being able to handle the trauma manifested in the classroom
- Not having follow up to referrals
- A reading assignment or discussion triggering an uncomfortable situation
- Not having enough time during the day to tend to all students’ needs

Questions to consider:

What are your concerns regarding refugees?

Give possible solutions to your concerns.
**Recommendations for Teachers of Refugee Students**

After each bullet, please jot down examples from your classroom to illustrate each recommendation. Mark the top 5 examples that apply to your situation.

- Provide extensive orientations for classroom rules, routines, roles, etc.
- Explain expectations about classroom behavior and work
- Provide opportunities for children to draw or “tell” their story in writing to help them express their feelings
- Set limits and help the students monitor his or her behavior
- Model appropriate skills to cope with everyday life
- Find out about students’ cultures
- Invite students to share about their lives if they’re comfortable
- Reward appropriate behavior and experiment with the “right” reward
- Reinforce students’ behavior for not paying attention to disruptions
- Provide a supportive atmosphere, a friendly, trusting environment
- Provide verbal as well as non-verbal cues to help students understand what is expected of them
- Practice “active listening,” by restating what the student said, “Let me make sure I understand...” (this helps clarify students own thoughts and helps them with their English skills)
- Provide the “place” where the students feel they’re understood
- Provide opportunities to orient students about American culture, including information on team sports, birthdays, playground behavior, etc.
- Provide peer tutoring by older refugee students or ones who have been in the U.S. longer
- Provide opportunities for presentations about their countries, cultures, and friends
- Praise, complement and encourage your students on a daily basis. Give genuine, specific praise (i.e., learning the English language, sharing an emotional story, etc.)
• Set realistic short-term goals

• Point out signs of progress

• Provide experiences in music, singing, movement, drawing and painting which can promote concentration and language recall

• Create structures that bring native English speakers and refugee children together, in order to break down barriers

• Provide clubs in high school for American and International students to get to know each others’ cultures

The Role of the ESL Teacher

• Is important for support, to help with the process of acculturation and learning basic communication skill: speaking, listening, reading, and writing

• Meets many of the students’ needs

• Provides individual students with more attention

• Forms a mentoring relationship

• Communicates and collaborates with regular classroom teachers

• Structures classroom activities that encourage students to interact with each other
Mental Health & Cultural Recommendations

- Listen to newcomers and help them tell their stories
- Provide opportunities for refugee students to tell their personal stories while are educational and beneficial for other students to hear
- Initiate storytelling as a school wide project
- Honor the child’s concept of family and tradition
- Help students deal with homesickness by encouraging them to keep in touch with extended family members or to preserve their memories of those who died
- Incorporate lessons about various cultures that will help the newcomer feel valued
- Promote diversity appreciation and the celebration of all cultures
- Form a committee to organize a school wide multicultural celebration
- Invite refugee families to share food from their countries
- Help put on a multicultural program including storytelling, music, puppet shows theater
- Develop a network of community agencies to serve refugee families
- Recruit community volunteers to assist in the acculturation process and link them to schools, cultural programs and other community resources
- Think of ways to break down barriers between newly arrived refugees and the school population
- Provide a supportive environment while refugee and host students work toward common goals such as story writing, which can lead to the dissolution of social isolation and the establishment of trust
- Provide guest speakers who can enrich cross-cultural communications
- Encourage quiet students (especially Asian girls) to speak out, while showing appropriate respect for home cultural values
- Recognize that refugees from certain cultures feel an obligation to overcompensate, to make a success of their lives in spite of the many challenges, because of all those who never had the opportunity (this overcompensation and extraordinary determination to succeed has been found among children of Holocaust survivors, Cambodian refugees and others)
- Provide a room where fasting Muslim students, celebrating Ramadan, can congregate in mutual support
  - Be aware that Muslim girls are often not allowed to work with boys in small groups
  - Arabs cannot eat certain foods in the cafeteria
Explicit Recommendations for Adjustment in the Classroom

Teachers need to teach and model explicitly:
- How does one get a turn?
- Who gets to initiate topics for discussion?
- What responsibilities do teachers and students each have?
- What’s required for a lively exchange?
- What kinds of grouping configuration are supportive of refugee students’ participation (i.e., small group and pairing, which is less threatening)

Additional suggestions:
- Ask second language learners to think and formulate ideas before asking them to speak
- Pose open-ended questions which allow for multiple points of entry
- Make connections to students’ personal experiences
- Allow students to rehearse their initial response in writing which may help
- Formulate ideas and find the words they need when speaking
- Provide writing logs in reading, social studies, science, and other subjects which become “texts for talk,” as a way to write the ideas first
- Accept nonstandard forms of speaking and writing
- Have students interview one another and family members, and present oral or written report to the class
- Provide time for thinking
Recommendations for Teaching Content to Students
With Limited English Proficiency

1. Create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere
   Rationale:
   - Frees students to ask questions
   - Encourages students to risk answering questions
   - Recognizes that no one will mock or make fun of them
   - Shares trust and respect

2. Provide firsthand experiences with course materials
   Rationale:
   - Understand that the text is only one of many routes to content learning
   - Understand that learning modalities vary
   - Engage students through visual, aural and many other teaching aides to internalize concepts
   - Contextualize, demonstrate, illustrate and provide examples for difficult concepts
   - Encourage students to demonstrate their understanding in a variety of informal assessments

3. Use visual materials to supplement printed text whenever possible
   Rationale:
   - Use charts, graphs and other visual organizers for reading and writing activities
   - Use a visual organizer in conjunction with a textbook to assist students in categorizing unfamiliar vocabulary and in demonstrating comprehension
   - Provide students opportunities to use new vocabulary specific to the content by explaining the data in a chart or graph
   - Expect students to create a graphic to demonstrate reading comprehension and to assess what the student understands

4. Model and demonstrate frequently
   Rationale:
   - Provide both cognitive and linguistic scaffolds or frames
   - Provide the language model of vocabulary and strategies in which the concept is embedded
   - Engage students in interaction with a familiar idea before moving on to a new one
   - Provide concrete examples before abstract ones
   - Explore what students know before introducing the new material

5. Utilize collaborative and cooperative structures
   Rationale:
   - Encourage peer group interactions which provide further scaffolding
   - Allow student interaction so they can benefit from the affective climate of a group
   - Encourage students to ask questions and clarify the meaning of their ideas and opinions from peers
6. **Vary the sizes and purposes of group structures**
   Rationale: 
   - Design tasks for students to work on in pairs, triads, groups of four or five and individually

7. **Modify your speech**
   Rationale: 
   - Slow the pace at which you speak
   - Control the use of slang and idioms and the length of the sentences
   - Embed new words in definitions and examples when introducing vocabulary
   - Find more than one way of using cognates to convey meaning

8. **Question appropriately and make frequent comprehension checks**
   Rationale: 
   - Adjust the wait-time after asking a question
   - Allow students to search for and employ unfamiliar vocabulary and language structures

9. **Demonstrate a variety of questioning types**
   Rationale: 
   - Ask open ended questions, one word answers, yes/no responses
   - Assess students’ understanding, misunderstandings and lack of comprehension

10. **Prepare students by building on and expanding background knowledge**
    Rationale: 
    - Open a lesson with a brainstorming activity, a journal entry or a collaborative activity
    - Help English Language Learners tap their previous experiences before moving into unfamiliar conceptual territory
    - Consider the varied backgrounds, previous schooling experiences, literacy skills in both first and second language and life experiences of students before planning lessons
Teachers’ Realizations

“It took time for us [teachers] to realize that the refugee students were absorbing English, whether we could see it or not.”

“We have to look at each individual that comes in. Even when from the same culture and family, they’re different.”

“It is their inner strength that enables refugees to succeed.”

“We should have high expectations, but measure success even when they take baby steps. These are tiny miracles.”

“Teachers are often the first ones refugee students can ‘hang onto,’ can depend on. Are you willing? Do you care?”

“Over and over children find it helpful to discuss traumatic experiences with caring adults who will listen to them.”

“Because of verbal and written language barriers, art is often one of the most effective ways to convey traumatic experiences.”

“Refugee students have the potential to catch up. They need intrinsic motivation from someone. Because many of them never had time to be kids, they need time to play and explore. Enjoying being children should be the priority over academic learning in the early stages, because survival had been their primary mode up to now.”

“Rather than focusing exclusively on texts, we need to pay attention to students, to determine: 1) what they know and what they can do, and 2) what they need and how we can take advantage of classroom diversity to enrich everyone.”

“Adjustments must go both ways. As native English speakers, we also need to make adjustments, make an effort to understand, respect and appreciate the newcomers.”
Samplings of Stories about Refugee Students

The following cases reflect a variety of stories about refugee students. Some of these students have experienced some form of trauma. Most of them exhibit symptoms, which are sometimes triggered by cultural shock.

The Story of Akbu

Akbu was a fourth grader having arrived from the Congo, where violent civil war took place. Akbu refused to do any work, so his ESL teacher was unable to know the degree of Akbu’s understanding or the level of his skills. He hadn’t attended school since the first grade. The only activity he participated in was drawing pictures in his storybook. The drawings were always similar; little babies were being murdered with bayonets by laughing men in uniforms. The teacher was very concerned and asked the family translator what this was about. She said that guerilla fighters killed babies and women daily. Boys were expected to become guerilla fighters at young ages. Akbu was frightened by the prospect of being forced to kill babies and mothers. He continued to create these drawings daily.

How would you address Akbu’s trauma?

What would you do in the classroom to help Akbu move forward in this education?

The Story of Mohamed

Mohamed, from Somalia, was a fourth grader when he and his family moved to the United States. The teachers wanted to test him for Special Education right away, because he had a difficult time sitting still in the classroom. Mohamed’s previous education setting was outdoors under a tree, where he learned to memorize passages from the Koran with boys of various ages. He had moderate pencil-paper skills. In Somalia, Mohamed wasn’t required to sit still for long periods. The first time he experienced the light switch being activated in the classroom, he exclaimed, “Wow!”

How should the teachers work with Mohamed to orient him into the school culture?
The Story of Tino

Tino was a fifth grader from Cuba. His thin, frail frame stood in contrast to most of his classmates who were taller and bigger. His father had been jailed. After being sequestered with relatives for 20 months, Tino, his mother and sisters finally made their way to Colorado. He had adequate literacy skills in Spanish and appeared to have an interest in learning to speak, read and write in English. However, from time to time, Tino placed his head on the table, both in the ESL as well as in the regular classrooms. The second week of school, he didn’t return to the ESL class following lunch. The teacher discovered that Tino was hoarding cartons of milk in his coat, and he’d been caught. When Tino’s mother was asked, she tearfully explained that in Cuba, they had lived in extreme poverty after her husband was imprisoned. Tino, as well as they rest of the family, was malnourished. He had been stealing milk from the cafeteria since he’d arrived at school.

Was Tino still hungry after weeks of being in the U.S.?

What suggestions would you offer to help Tino resolve his fear of lack?

The Story of Faduma

Faduma was 16 years old when she arrived at high school with a high population of ESL students. She stepped on a landmine and had a bullet ledged in her disabled leg. She had lived through years of civil war, having lost several members of her family in Somalia. Faduma walked with crutches, her headscarf tightly and her dress fitting loosely to hide her disability. She had never been in school. Girls were not encouraged to go and she couldn’t even write her name. As an ESL Coach/Trainer, I sat with Faduma to find out if she had any concept of numbers. She gazed steadily at my face. She was interested in me, and though we couldn’t speak through a common language, we communicated on paper. I would draw a simple pattern and Faduma would copy it. Then we made a game of it, with Faduma initiating a pattern that I duplicated and elaborated on. I recognized her brightness through this creative interaction. Our time together satisfied a social, emotional need for Faduma.

When I talked to her current ESL teacher, I found that Faduma is beginning to speak some English and can read 5-7 sight words. She recently asked this teacher, “Why can’t I learn?”

What would you have answered?

What are some ways you would have addressed Faduma’s social, emotional and academic needs?
Mihib Mohamoud, an 8th grader from Somalia wrote:

“In 8th grade the teachers treated me like I was blank and didn’t know English. Also, they assumed that I don’t speak English and that I’m so different. During my reading assignment, I’d raise my hand, but the teacher wouldn’t call on me. I tried getting her attention by raising my hand higher. When she finally called on me I started reading in a trembling voice. My classmates giggled and the teacher said she couldn’t hear me, so I read louder. I caught myself crying when I felt tears around my eyes.

“I remember my long-gone father’s words: ‘Mihib, keep your head high above the ground and make yourself heard.’” So I read proudly, as the page ended. One person said, “Man, she can read better than some of us.” I smile; I was so happy and proud of myself.

“In my new school, Tucker High School, I wore a blue hijah, a long blue skirt and sandals. I tried to stay positive even though past memories of kids cussing at me and making hurtful jokes filled my head. In fought the hot tears in my eyes as I walked into the hallway. The whole school watched me as I walked. Everyone looked at me, saying mean things and pulling my scarf. I remembered my mom’s words: “In this country everything you do is your fault, for you’re the foreigner.” I cried on the inside and sweated on the outside as students blocked my way to class.

“What I learned: I am proud of who I am and what I stand for. We ‘international kids’ might be a little slower in speaking English. It might take us a while to get what others are saying, but we try hard to make it. Please give us the time and take the chance to notice that.”

What would you tell Mihib if you heard her story?
Paw’s story is that of a lonely young woman struggling to enter into a new culture to acquire literacy in a second language, and to find happiness and satisfaction in a new world. Paw never acquired full literacy in her native language. Her learning took place in refugee camps.

Paw wrote the following through in her journal, her third year in the United States and a year after she was mainstreamed from ESL.

“Last year the ESL teacher asked us to write a journal. She said we could write anything we wanted. So, I wrote a lot. Since then, I write when something is bothering me. I will just write. It is like a friend. I really like it.”

When Paw entered the regular English class, she was encouraged to write what she knew and to describe her experiences. She was beginning to find her voice. Paw began buying books. However, the writing assignment changed. She had to read and write on topics she didn’t understand. Because Paw had high expectations of herself, she didn’t want to accept a lower grade (B-) and was transferred to a remedial English class. There she had to memorize decontextualized vocabulary from a spelling list and take several tests. She couldn’t draw on her life experiences and make personal connections in her reading and writing.

Though Paw wanted to learn about American culture and make friends, she didn’t have the opportunity at school. She felt isolated and lonely. Paw wanted to be a nurse, which necessitated going to college. Her parents wouldn’t let her leave the house. At age 28, she was taking care of younger children.

What do you think might have helped Paw realize her dreams?
A Teacher’s Perspective on What Might Have Helped Paw:

- Paw had no time and no confidence for the kind of casual exchanges that might have helped her feel more at home in the U.S.

- It was imperative to have her family’s cultural traditions respected. We must not interfere with refugee students’ cultural and family values.

- There should have been an effort made to gain understanding of Paw’s world, breaking old stereotypes and developing new respect.

If Paw...

- Would have been able to find her voice and if others could have listened

- Would have been able to make sense of the texts she was reading with members of the new culture, pertaining to ideas and experiences

- Would have had time to think and talk about her perspectives and to listen to others’ views

- Could have made cultural connections to build bridges of support

- Could have had the opportunities to clarify with someone that a grade “A” wasn’t the most important thing

- Could have interviewed young American women in high school she may have broadened her understanding

If only... perhaps Paw would have been less lonely.

What else might have Paw done differently if some of the above factors had occurred?
Strategies for Refugee Students’ Social, Emotional and Academic Needs
Writing as a Therapeutic Activity

Writing has been used for therapeutic purposes in many different settings. For refugees, writing allows individual perspectives to be explored and highlighted, and this process can contribute to emotional healing. If refugees are given opportunities to tell and write of their experiences, to interested and responsive audiences, they are often motivated to understand their new cultures.

When invited and enthused, students write to actively construct personally meaningful stories. Teachers must be prepared to provide interesting and valuable opportunities that welcome students to demonstrate their existing literacy skills in meaningful contexts.

Writing in any form can be part of a healing process. Refugee students of all ages have much to say and a special need to find an expressive outlet for their disturbing experiences. Daily writing on topics of their choosing provides the opportunity for releasing repressed feelings of anger, physical pain, sadness, loss, loneliness and fear. Sometimes sharing their written thoughts can further lessen the burden refugees carry within. A double entry journal has been found to be especially helpful to sensitive students who crave communicating with their teachers.

ESL Writing Principles

ESL learners are able to begin writing (defined as the creation of original texts and meanings), while they are still learning English. This principle for second language writing is true for children as well as adolescents. They do not need to wait until they have mastered spoken English. While still acquiring English, students can be encouraged to write, expressing their feelings and experiences.

For ESL learners, writing in English involves being willing both to make risks with the new language and to make mistakes. Allowing students a choice of genres for writing (example: poetry, personal narrative, fiction, fantasy, etc.) is another way to provide for learner control. Writing is a process. Writing can also be a central part of students’ content and language learning. In science and social studies, for example, students can express in writing, what they understood and learned in the lesson.

Native language writing ability contributes to second language writing ability in many ways. ESL students who have learned to write in their native languages understand the purpose of writing and how it may be used. Learners are able to apply the knowledge they have from first language writing to ESL contexts.

The following poem was created by a refugee student who attended an American school for three years. What she expresses in the poem happened to her best friend’s mother:
What I feel is true

I feel sorry for my friend
Her parents died
Her mom got shot twice
Day by night she cries
Her dad got killed in jail
See how he failed
Now follow the law
See how he ended
I don't think you want
to end like that
My friend now lives with
her grandparents
But they don’t give her
the love like her mom did
So now you know
why I feel for my
friend this way

From ESL Magazine, May/June 1999

Writing is a worthy means of self-expression, of delving within and beginning to find emotional resolution for experiences which can’t always be expressed verbally. Like a good cry or a therapy session, free flowing writing from the heart can be a catalyst for healing.
Self-Selecting and Directed Literacy Involvement

It is advisable for students to occasionally be provided with opportunities for selecting and directing their personal literacy involvement. Students’ various experiences, needs and daily desires result in distinctive and unique ways of expression. What students like to experience isn’t always available at the optimum time for their individual needs. Even within a language arts block, the students are required to partake of either reading or writing at a certain time, which is decided by the teacher.

It is highly recommended that an enriching and growth promoting experience be provided where students actually select their mode of expression in the order they desire, whether through reading, writing or storytelling. The organizing of such a designed “choice” involvement doesn’t have to be complicated. The mini-lesson/modeling can be a brief dialogue between the teacher and the students, covering reflective and metalevel cognitive topics and questions:

- When do we like to read, write or tell stories?
- What are they best conditions for each of these literacy involvements?
- Is there a time limit that we like to indulge in these three forms of literacy expression, or does it vary?
- What are the conditions for maximum return (to get the most from one experience)?
- What is the value of working and sharing with others in small groups vs. working by oneself?

The teacher will model how she/he moves from one form of literacy expression to another, directed by his/her preferences, needs and desires at that time. After a brief discussion of what the students noticed and the teacher experienced, students are invited to analyze their preferences and the possible reasons for their choices.

Experimenting with different time allotments is desirable so that students move from a brief encounter on one occasion, to a more extensive, intensive involvement at another time. Ideally students will begin with short sessions, gradually progressing to more extensive periods so they can more easily become accustomed to such choices.

While students engage in their self-selected literacy modes, the teacher circulates as a facilitator, encouraging, helping students refocus and providing students with alternative ways of experiencing their involvement. At the end of the allotted time, a large group discussion will reveal students’ reflections and discoveries. Through such metalevel cognition students will further validate their experience, being able to confidently self-direct their choices. Questions for discussion in the group sharing might be:

- How many times did students change from one literacy mode to another, or how did they persist with one mode versus moving on?
- How many chose storytelling, and was the audience responsive and large enough?
- What can we do next time in an integrated self-selected literacy involvement to enrich, broaden and improve the experience?

Opportunities for self-selected and directed literacy expression, given at regular intervals, will enable students to become more comfortable choosing and more thoroughly aware of why and when to decide to move from one literacy mode to strong, effective language arts or English program. A teacher who is willing to explore new directions will provide students with the opportunity to experience themselves in a new way.
Storytelling

Storytelling can be utilized for a variety of purposes:

1) Pre-reading activity
2) Assessing reading comprehension
3) Assessing language proficiency
4) Instructing/entertaining
5) Therapeutic value

When students are provided with opportunities to tell real stories from their lives, emotional healing can be fostered. Stories can take place in various formats.

One of the ways that has proven successful is for the teacher to model the process first. The teacher explains that she is holding a special rock, which has the power to assist in telling a story. She then closes her eyes and asks the students to chant, “A story, a story, let it come, let it go,” When the storyteller (teacher) has become inspired by the rock, she tells a meaningful story. Afterwards, the rock is passed to a volunteer student who closes his eyes, while the class chants the same line. He will then become the storyteller. When he is ready to begin, he motions to the students to stop chanting. A few other students follow, to keep this mode of storytelling fresh and exciting.

Another storytelling venue is to have students bring a box with items that are meaningful in their lives. This is a sophisticated version of “Show and Tell,” but very effective, especially with refugee students of all ages. Photographs of family members, postcards, miniature flags, objects from their countries and other memorabilia can awake cultural pride for refugees. English speakers and newcomers gain an understanding and appreciation of each other’s cultures, lives and interests in a safe, comfortable setting. Older students find a common theme among the objects, which elevates this form of storytelling to a sophisticated level.

A favorite structure for storytelling is the theme, “My Life through Storytelling,” with 17 topics. Students can begin with any of the 17 topics and have a choice of beginning with oral or written storytelling, complemented by drawings, photographs and artistic renditions of the theme and other creative endeavors. At the completion of this book, our ESL class invited parents to attend a school assembly where students read and displayed their book. The parents at the conclusion of the presentation served foods from the families’ countries.

Storytelling is a powerful means of expressing oneself in a safe environment. Certain rules of respect need to be clarified at the outset. Every year I have witnessed touching moments of crying, laughter and periods of respectful silence, where everyone was moved. It is difficult to ascertain how much healing might be effected in a format such as storytelling. One this is certain: we tell storytellers as well as listeners that we are in this life-experience together, involved in self-expression. In this process students have the opportunity of empowering themselves.
1) When I was ________ years old

2) My earliest memory/memories

3) My school when I was ________ years old
   Class; classmates; teacher

4) My family member(s)

5) My friend(s) when I was ________ years old

6) A family story I heard

7) A tradition in my family; a tradition I would like to have

8) I remember

9) Favorite family song(s) or poem; my favorite song(s) or poem

10) Earlier memories of places, feelings, glimpses of life

11) A special date, holiday; remembrance

12) My current school; teachers, classmates

13) I am happy, sad, scared

14) My dream, wish, goal

15) When I use my imagination

16) An important event in my life

17) My contribution to the world
ESL Family Literacy Time

It is important for everyone to include the parents in their children’s education. One of the most viable means of involving the parents is through ESL Family Literacy Time. At one of the schools in Cherry Creek Schools, Colorado, three ESL teachers held a meeting for all the parents of the ESL students and provided meaningful and enjoyable ways for parents and children to read and write together. Parents received the following information:

**ESL Family Literacy Time is designed to:**
1) Provide a time for you and your child to talk and write about authentic, meaningful topics
2) Provide your child with a specific opportunity to learn about you and your family’s history and culture
3) Create a story together to be shared with your child’s classmates
4) Guide you in helping your child at home with reading and writing about familiar and important topics to both you and your child
5) Comment home and school learning
6) Help children learn about similarities and differences

**Choices for Writing:**
- You can tell the story and the child can write it OR
- You and your child can take turns writing the story or write it together OR
- You can write the story
- You and your child can type the story instead of using the lined page

**Choice for Illustrating** (drawing a picture):
- Your child can illustrate the story
- You and your child can illustrate the story together

**Topics for writing in the ESL Family Literacy Time**

**Write a story**
- About memories of a childhood friendship
- About how your child got his/her name
- About the day your child was born
- About a family memory
- About your child’s grandmother or grandfather
- About a school memory from your childhood
- Using materials send home in a bag (use your imagination!)
- About a special time in your life
- About struggles and change and what that has meant for you

The parents were also given explanations and given pointers to help them better understand the purpose of this project. Translators with the two most common languages were provided. The following suggestions were given:
- One of the purposes of ESL Family Literacy Time is to bond with your child and produce a meaningful story together
- Your child will have the opportunity to read your story in class
- We will be putting all the pages together each week to make class books
- There is no right or wrong. Just focus on storytelling and story writing with your child
- Talk about and write about where the topic takes you
- The story can be true or not true. They can also be part true and part untrue.
Experiencing Therapeutic Effects of Being in the Moment

When the learning process is met with present-ness, optimum learning can transpire. This ‘in the moment’ clarity enables us to experience freshly, with unencumbered awareness. In young children this clarity is naturally operant. They see each situation by embracing it openly and fully with all senses focused. Have you ever noticed the faces of young children as they experience various exhibits at the zoo? Remember the first colors of spring or beautiful sunsets that attracted your attention, and how your awareness was suspended from all extraneous thoughts at such times?

These are examples of wholly absorbed awareness. If we could meet each learning opportunity with this kind of alertness, our understanding would be more enriching and complete. Each experience is potentially new, if we are free of preconceptions. When we are able to practice ‘bare awareness,’ we experience new learning, we discover formerly visited perceptions anew.

In order to encourage the state of mental clarity, which has healing and therapeutic value, the following exercises can be useful:

**Even Breathing** – Sit in a relaxed position with head and spine vertically aligned. Breathe in slowly, evenly and completely. Pause. Then breathe out slowly, evenly and completely. Continue to breathe in this manner for 10-20 rounds, moving the breath at a uniform speed. This process will induce relaxation and quiet the mind, enhancing perception.

**Rocking Motion** – This simple exercise contributes to mental clarity. Stand with feet at shoulder width, arms resting at your side. Slowly bring your weight forward to the balls of your feet, simultaneously swinging your arms forward and up to shoulder height, palms up. Then, turn your palms over and lower your arms while shifting your weight back to your heels. Continue forward and back in an even, flowing manner. Practice for 3-5 minutes, keeping as relaxed as possible. Complete Rocking Motion by standing still for a minute or by sitting before resuming activity.

**Gong Focus** – This exercise creates an easy focus that contributes to mental quiet and physical relaxation. By focusing attention, the though process settles, allowing clarity of perception. After striking the gong, center your attention wholly on the sound (note) and continue to follow it as the volume decreases. This may be repeated several times in succession listening to the sound intently until inaudible.

**Powers of Observation** – This exercise can increase your perception. By giving complete attention to an object (rock, key, ring, leaf, candle flame, etc.), many properties and characteristics can be perceived. We may observe texture, color variants, volume, weight, density, reflectivity, scent and other sensory observations. Careful observation anchors our awareness in the present. Novel insights and deeper meaning may arise, as we quietly focus awareness.

These four exercises assist rediscovery of our innate peace and clarity. They can help awaken our capacity for perceiving and enjoying life, as it is. These can also bring about a lessening of deep-rooted pain from traumatic experiences.