"Lost Boys", Cousins & Aunties:

Using Sudanese Refugee Relationships to Complicate Definitions of "Family"

Working Paper

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In June of 2005, I sat in the living room of a Sudanese refugee family that I had recently begun tutoring. The family consisted of a mother and father, both in their late twenties, a five-year-old girl, and a nearly three-year-old boy. Akhlas, the mother of the family, worked diligently on her ESL homework, which dealt that day with the concept of "family." Akhlas paused and stared at the workbook page, momentarily stumped. I looked over her shoulder; she was supposed to fill in the blank in the statement "There are _____ people in my family." Akhlas confirmed that she understood what she was supposed to do. She explained, however, that she could not count up all the people in her family because there were "a *LOT*!" I told Akhlas that in America, this sort of question usually refers to the people who live in one household, and I suggested that she just count the people in her home.

When Akhlas wrote "8" in the blank, it was my turn to be perplexed. I knew that only 4 people lived in this household—Akhlas, her husband, and their two children. Akhlas' English abilities were advanced enough that I also knew she had not misunderstood the instructions or the context of the statement. I quickly realized that Akhlas and I were operating on very different concepts of "family". Akhlas' first reaction to the statement about the size of her family indicated that she included a great number of people in her definition of family, a far greater number than I, a White middle-class American, might include. I also suspected that Akhlas was thinking of her family of origin rather than her family of marriage when she wrote "8" in the blank. As I came to better know Akhlas' family and the other Sudanese families that participated in my research, it became increasingly clear that "family" held a very different connotation among the Sudanese than it did for me. This realization led me to ask many questions: What does

this different conceptualization of "family" suggest about the diverse nature of families living in the U.S.? How might this different notion of family impact refugee children's learning in schools? What would happen if teachers and schools also started using a broader definition of "family"? How might teachers' understandings of the resources children bring to the classroom change if we broaden our definition of "family"? How might schools change their relationships with the families of their students by embracing this broader concept?

Examining the Concept of "Family Literacy"

Over the past two decades, literacy researchers, schools, and policy-makers have increasingly turned their attention to the issue of family literacy (Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers & Smythe, 2005; Auerbach, 1989; Edwards, 1995; Gadsden, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000). The focus on family literacy suggests that a child's family provides the foundation for his or her literacy development, and research has repeatedly demonstrated strong correlations between a child's reading achievement in school and her parents' educational level, the uses of print and the number of books in the home, and the frequency of parent-child storybook reading (Purcell-Gates, 2000). The emergent literacy framework also suggests that children learn a great deal about literacy before they ever set foot in a classroom. At home, children gain concepts of print (Clay, 1998), such as print directionality and how to hold a book, and they also acquire knowledge of written registers, vocabulary, and letter-sound relationships (Purcell-Gates, 2000). Unfortunately, this body of research is often misinterpreted to mean that families that do not provide certain opportunities for their children are somehow "deficient" (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Auerbach, 1989).

Auerbach (1989), however, suggests that how we define "family literacy" has important implications for meeting the needs of learners and their families. Researchers have long noted

that "family literacy" is largely based upon White, middle-class definitions of literacy (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Heath, 1983). As a result, family literacy programs typically reach out to parents and families by using what Auerbach (1989) calls the "transmission of school practices model". This model naturally privileges school-like (and also White, middle-class) literacy practices, and it gives parents materials and instruction on how to carry out these practices in the home. What this model does not recognize, however, is that there are multiple ways that individuals and families use literacy in meaningful ways in their everyday lives—ways that are not necessarily identical to school-like literacy practices. Researchers who use this multiple literacies framework argue that educators need to take into account the myriad ways in which literacy can be meaningful to children (Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers & Smythe, 2005; Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Gonzalez et al, 1995; Purcell-Gates, 2005, in press). Schools also would do well to acknowledge these home-based "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez et al, 1995) that children bring to school and to expand their definition of literacy by incorporating a broader range of literacy practices in the classroom. This focus on multiple literacies leads Auerbach (1989) and others to question exactly how we define the "literacy" in "family literacy". Much recent ethnographic research has illustrated the rich and varied ways that individuals, families, and communities practice and value literacy (for example, see Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers & Smythe, 2005; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2000; Heath, 1983; Lipka, 1991; McCarty, 2005; Purcell-Gates, 1995, in press). This research also shows that this rich variety of literacy practices is not always reflected in school practices and beliefs about literacy.

In addition to questioning how we define "literacy", I believe that it is equally important for us to question what we mean by "family", as the story I shared at the beginning of this chapter illustrates. Teachers know that families come in all shapes and sizes in the U.S.

Officially, however, we tend to define "family" as all of the related individuals who live in a single household; typically, we mean nuclear families—parents and their children—when we say the word "family". This meaning is certainly reflected in both official documents, such as census or food stamps forms, and in the research literature. My response to Akhlas' dilemma illustrates this cultural understanding; I automatically assumed that Akhlas' ESL homework referred to a nuclear family, all living in one household (and, because the workbook assignment was designed by other Americans, it is likely that this is what the assignment intended). In reality, however, families in the U.S., just like families around the world, come in all sorts of interesting shapes and sizes. The nuclear model of the family leaves out all sorts of family configurations—single-parent households, children who are being raised by grandparents, step-families, and families where several generations live together in the same home, to name a few. However, this model also fails to recognize that even traditional nuclear families may have extended family networks in the same area—cousins who live down the street, grandparents who live across town, etc. The family literacy model has, to a large extent, operated under this same nuclear family model. Research conducted in the area of family literacy tends to focus on the home environment, looking at such factors as socio-economic status, language spoken in the home, and available print in the home (Auerbach, 1989; Gadsden, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000). Family literacy research also focuses almost entirely on a child's parents; in fact, the majority of this research has focused exclusively on mothers, although there have been calls to look more closely at paternal literacy skills (Gadsden, 2000). In addition, research into parent-child interactions in the home tend to focus on storybook reading (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Auerbach, 1989; Edwards, 1995; Gadsden, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000). Finally, family literacy models also typically operate under the assumption that family literacy is unidirectional—that is, that

children are influenced by parents. For these reasons, family literacy programs tend to focus on developing parents' literacy skills (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Auerbach, 1989; Edwards, 1995; Gadsden, 1998, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000).

Although the majority of family literacy research has focused on nuclear families, Gadsden (1998, 2000) prefers to use an intergenerational literacy model rather than a family model. This intergenerational literacy model, according to Gadsden, acknowledges that literacy is impacted by more than just the family members living in a particular household. It also challenges the one-way transmission model of family literacy by arguing that intergenerational literacy development is multi-directional; that is, children also influence their parents' literacy practices (and other generations' practices, as well). Much of the ethnographic research that investigates literacy in home and community settings supports this intergenerational model. For example, Gregory (2005; Gregory & Williams, 2000) noted that siblings often play an important role as literacy teachers, what she calls "guiding lights", in Bengali populations in East London. In my own work with Sudanese refugee families, I have often seen the young children specifically teaching their parents about English or about computer technology.

With this chapter, I hope to show that an expanded model of "family" has much to offer educators. An expanded definition of family, such as the Sudanese definition that I will present in this chapter, may help us understand that children have many resources at their disposal. In my work with young Sudanese children, whose parents may have limited English literacy skills and/or limited experience with education, I have seen these children draw upon broad support networks of extended family and community mentors. In my work with orphaned Sudanese youth, who have no parents at all, I have seen the youth create a new definition of "family". In both cases, these "families" have provided important resources and support for students' literacy

achievement. I believe that by recognizing and valuing these extended networks and by learning how to tap into them, teachers will be better able to support literacy achievement for all students, but especially for ethnic and cultural minority students such as refugees.

<div align="center">Research with Southern Sudanese Refugees</div>

My work with Southern Sudanese refugees began shortly after I returned from two years as a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer in Lesotho, Southern Africa. I learned about a local community of the so-called "Lost Boys" who were seeking academic tutors, and I began working closely with three orphaned youth, one just entering college and the other two still in high school. After a year and a half of this work, one of my students asked me to serve on the board of the Southern Sudan Rescue and Relief Association, a local organization comprised of both Sudanese refugees and Americans. My close relationship with these young men also led to a study of how they practiced literacy in their everyday lives, particularly comparing their literacy lives in Africa with their literacy practices in the U.S and how these practices compared to those of formal schooling. This work, and my deepening relationship with the local Sudanese community, led to my current research project, which involves examining the role of culture in the development of literacy practices of young children in intact Sudanese refugee families.

My research with the Sudanese refugees, both the orphaned youth and the intact families, has been shaped by a sociocultural perspective on literacy. Within this framework, literacy is a social practice shaped by social, cultural, economic, political, and ideological forces (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2000; Street, 2001b). Researchers who study real-world, everyday literacy practices shed light into the multiple ways in which people use literacy, and they offer implications for the ways in which literacy instruction may be made more relevant to learners' real-world lives. In my study with the orphaned youth (Perry, 2007; Perry, 2005a;

Perry, 2005b), I wanted to understand the refugees' beliefs about literacy, the different ways they used literacy in their lives, the ways in which different languages (e.g., English, Arabic, KiSwahili, and Dinka) related to literacy for the youth, and how well school literacy practices aligned with the everyday literacy practices of these refugees. In my ongoing study of refugee families with young children (see Perry, 2005c), I am investigating similar questions. In addition to the issues explored with the orphaned youth, I am exploring the ways that the refugee experience has shaped the literacy practices of the parents, as well as the ways in which the young children are making sense of their literacy worlds across the contexts of home, community, and formal schooling.

For both studies, I used a typical ethnographic case study methodology. Both studies relied heavily on participant-observation, various types of interviews, and the collection of different types of literacy artifacts. Participant-observation in both studies involved spending a great deal of time in participants' homes. I offered academic tutoring and community mentoring or cultural broker services to the participants, which not only helped me to gain access and build trust with the families, but it also was a way in which I could give back to them by offering to help them as they had helped me. The research also involved a great deal of "hanging out" at community events such as church services and cultural celebrations. In the study of refugee families, I also observed the focal children in their kindergarten or first grade classrooms. I interviewed the orphaned youth and the family members about the types of texts and literacy practices that participants engaged with, both in their previous lives in Africa and in the U.S. I also collected life histories and other important cultural information. I gathered a variety of literacy artifacts, including texts that were read and written by both focal participants and other

community members, audio recordings of events such as church services, and photographs of literacy events and the literacy environments.

Historical and Cultural Context

Issues facing Sudan are increasingly prominent in both international news media and global politics. Although much of the world is now aware of the plight of Darfur, many people are not aware that Southern Sudan has faced similar conflicts for over two decades. The Southern Sudanese are members of various tribes located in southern Sudan; these southerners, typically black African Christians (unlike the people of Darfur, who are Muslim), have been engaged in a civil war against the northern-dominated Arab Muslim government for over twenty years. The war that displaced the Southern Sudanese was the result of centuries of deep ethnic and religious divisions (Bok, 2003; Deng, 1995). This war completely devastated Southern Sudan. At least two and a half million people have been killed since the beginning of the conflict, and five million people have been displaced as refugees—far more than have been affected in Darfur. The conflict in Southern Sudan caused a mass exodus of southerners, many of whom ended up as refugees in Egypt or the Kakuma Refugee Camp near Lake Turkana in Kenya, where they typically spend many years before being granted asylum in countries such as the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. The so-called "Lost Boys"[1] are a special case among the Southern Sudanese refugees. These orphaned youth began an arduous and dangerous journey of over 1,000 miles—entirely on foot. Only 7,000 of the original group survived to reach the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya in 1992 (Yang, 2002). The U.S. government has made a particular effort to resettle these youth (U.S. Department of State, 2001).

Language and Literacy Practices of Sudanese Refugees: An Overview

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[1] These orphans were first called "Lost Boys" by a Western journalist who compared them to characters in *Peter Pan*. I refer to these refugees as "orphaned youth", although some of the youth in Michigan refer to themselves as "Lost Boys" and others as "New Sudan Youth".

The results of my research show that Southern Sudanese refugees use literacy in a variety of meaningful ways, and in many languages. The orphaned youth, for example, attended school in English in the Kakuma Refugee Camp. They also learned KiSwahili, the national language of Kenya, in these schools, and some became literate in Dinka or other local languages. In addition, most also speak Arabic to some degree. The refugee families are similarly multilingual and multi-literate. All of the parents are literate in both Arabic and English, although their comfort levels with English vary. The families speak both English and Arabic at home, and the parents also speak a variety of other local Sudanese languages. For example, one mother speaks seven different languages. The children in these families, therefore, draw upon a rich variety of linguistic resources.

Many of the meaningful literacy practices in this community of refugees focused around key areas of their lives. Religion, for example, played an important role in shaping literacy practices for most of these refugees. Church life and reading the Bible, in both English and Arabic, provided important motivations for these refugees to read and write. In addition, staying in touch with friends and family who had either been left behind in Africa or resettled in other parts of the world guided many of the literacy practices of the orphaned youth and the families. The Sudanese refugees also actively sought information about the political situation and the peace process in Sudan. Although most had had little, if any, access to computer technology in Africa, many refugees had become very skilled in the U.S. at navigating the Internet to access information about their homeland. Significantly, education and formal schooling played a very large role in the literacy lives of these refugees. The Sudanese community highly valued education—they saw it as not only a way to better their own individual lives, but more importantly as a way to improve the situation in Sudan. Many of the refugees felt that it was their

duty to obtain a good education so that they could go back to Africa and help to build a New Sudan. The orphaned youth, in particular, strongly believed in the power of education. Ezra, one of the young men who participated in my first study, explained his hunger for education this way:

> I saw it necessary for me to be able to read and write, because—maybe partly because I was there by myself, alone, and I have seen many professionals, and I admired what they do and their positions, and the kind of life that they were living. I was so desperate, living by myself without any parents, without any relatives, without any older person to give me advice and guidance—so, I felt that as long as I live and as long as God keeps me alive and lets me breathe, I would do anything I could to become one day a professional like some of the people that I saw there.

In fact, there is even a proverb among the youth: "Education is my mother and my father" (Lost Boys of Sudan, n.d.).

A Sudanese Definition of Family

The Sudanese refugees that I work with think of family in a very broad sense; as Akhlas noted, there can be too many members to count. In fact, I often found myself perplexed by the relationships described by the families with whom I was working. The same individual might be referred to as an "aunt" on one occasion and as a "cousin" on another. The children often referred to their cousins as sisters and brothers. When some relatives were coming from Omaha, Nebraska, to visit Viola's family, for example, Viola told her son, Boni, that the family would be bringing their baby daughter. She told him, "Your sister is coming," and she let him know that he would be responsible for helping to watch over her. Extended family is so valued in this community that they even play an important role in wedding ceremonies. I attended a Sudanese

wedding early in my study of the families in which five members each of the bride's and the groom's extended families sat in places of honor and were served wedding cake by the bride and groom. The best man explained that in this culture, the bride and groom were not just marrying each other, they were also marrying each other's families.

Even those refugees, such as the orphaned youth, who have been separated from their families by war, manage to create new family-like networks. Yang (2002), a photographer, documented the lives of the orphaned youth while they were still in Africa and the close bonds that the youth developed. He noted, "In the weeks and months of their journeys, traveling mostly at night to avoid being bombed from the air or captured by ground troops, lions were a constant threat. The boys began to form close-knit groups, a new sense of family following the loss of their own" (2002). The youth brought this new sense of family with them to the U.S., where several youth often lived together in an apartment or house. In fact, one tactic that the youth used in order to stay together when they were applying to come to the U.S. was to claim kinship with other orphaned youth, because the refugee resettlement agencies tried to keep relatives together.

The Sudanese community in Lansing is relatively large, consisting of several hundred people, some of whom are related and some of whom are not. However, even unrelated refugees sometimes refer to each other as family. Viola, for example, introduced me to Falabia, whose family also began to participate in my study. Of Falabia, Viola told me, "We are like one family." She also told me that Falabia's elderly mother lived in Lansing, and that she was "like a mother" to the whole community. In many ways, there does not seem to be a clear boundary between the Sudanese definitions of "family" and "community" as they are enacted in the U.S.; they are fluid and interconnecting concepts. Some of the refugees that I work with even refer to Americans in familial terms. Akhlas' daughter, Remaz, not only refers to a White friend from

church as her "auntie", but Remaz and her mother also refer to me as "Auntie Kristen" as well! Clearly, close friends and other caregivers can be "family" as well as relatives by blood and by marriage.[2]

Individual Snapshots

The Sudanese refugees drew upon these extended family resources in many ways as they adjusted to life in America and as they pursued education. In this section, I will provide snapshots of two refugees—one orphaned young man, and a little girl from an intact family—to show how these family networks supported these students' educational and literacy achievement.

Chol[3]

Chol was the first Sudanese refugee that I began tutoring, shortly after I returned from living in Africa myself. When I met him, Chol was about 18 years old, although he was not exactly sure of his age. Although most refugees are assigned January 1st as a birthday if they do not know exactly when they were born, Chol chose the date of his arrival in the U.S. as his birthday. When I first met Chol, he was still a senior in high school. He had recently moved out of a foster home and into an apartment with other Sudanese refugee youth. Lutheran Social Services, a local organization that was responsible for resettling the orphaned youth and helping them adjust to life in this country, hired me to tutor Chol and two other youth still living in foster homes. Chol graduated from high school a few months after I began working with him, and I continued to provide academic support to him as he began a degree program at a local private university. Although I still work with him now, he only needs my help on occasion.

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[2] Of course, this occurs in the U.S., too; Dyson (2003), for example, describes a group of unrelated first graders who refer to themselves as "the brothers and the sisters".

[3] A pseudonym. The Institutional Review Board approval for this project required me to use pseudonyms. The families in my second study, however, all chose to use their real names as they participated in my research.

Chol's story is typical of most of the orphaned Sudanese youth. Chol, a member of the Dinka tribe, became separated from his family when he was about four years old; he has since regained contact with a brother and some other relatives who live in Khartoum. In an autobiography assignment for school, Chol wrote,

> The war separated me from [my] parents in 1986, and I have learned and experienced problems and many other consequences from it. I have seen many people dying, drowning and starving. I am a survivor of that war. In 1986 I escaped to Ethiopia, where I learned the life of being a child refugee in that country. I was lonely without my parents.

Along with the other orphaned youth, Chol was forced out of Ethiopia and went to Kenya. Chol explained that, growing up in Kakuma Refugee Camp, he formed new family units with other refugees; many of the orphaned children, including Chol, lived with foster mothers there. Chol and the other youth that I interviewed for my first study explained that few community elders lived in the camp, but those that were available were very important to the youth. These elders used storytelling to pass on Dinka culture, history, beliefs and values to the youth, and they also offered important guidance. For example, Chol told me that when the youth were first offered the opportunity to come and live in America, they consulted with the community elders. Chol explained that these elders at first advised them not to go, worried that the youth might be sold into slavery. He told me, "The community said, 'No, maybe you are going to be given to the Arab people.'" In fact, the American representative made several visits over two years before she convinced the community that bringing Chol and other youth to the U.S. was a good idea. Deng (1995) notes that Southern Sudanese cultures tend to view orphanhood as an exceptionally deprived condition, so it is not surprising that the community came together to provide family-like structures and guidance to the orphaned youth.

These new family structures carried over into the youths' lives in the U.S. Many chose to live together. Those who had access to academic tutors or helpful American foster families frequently called upon these people to help mentor those who had less access to those resources. Chol, for example, often asked if I could come over and fix his roommate's computer, despite the fact that I am quite technologically inept. The youth with better jobs and steadier sources of income often supported those who did not. In fact, Chol organized several of his friends into the Brothers' Union Investment Club (see Figure 1). The members of the Brothers' Union each deposited a small sum of money in the club's account each month, and this money was then used to support members in need. For example, a member who needed to pay for car repairs could use the pooled money. This is a common support system in many African communities; indeed, the women in my village in Lesotho had a similar "investment club". What I think is particularly interesting here is the name of the group: the Brothers' Union. This name clearly reflects the ways in which these unrelated young men created a new sense of family—not only in name, but also as a source of real, practical support.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The wider American community also embraced these orphaned youth and provided them with many family-like resources. The social services agencies not only provided caseworkers for the refugees, but they also had received grant money to support the youths' education and cultural adjustment. Chol arrived in Lansing with a large contingent of other orphaned Sudanese youth in December, 2000. For two years or so after this group's arrival, the social service agencies offered a weekly afternoon/evening program for the youth that provided academic

tutoring, sessions in cultural adjustment, drivers' education, and recreation time. Each refugee youth who came over as a minor also had funding available to him (and to the handful of "Lost Girls" who also came to this area) specifically for educational uses. This money could be used for tutoring, to buy textbooks once the youth reached college-level education, or for other educational resources. Chol, for example, used some of the money to buy himself a computer to use for schoolwork.

Like many of the other orphaned Sudanese youth, Chol developed relationships with Americans who could help him in different ways. Because Chol knew me as a tutor and as a teacher, he often called upon me to help him (and his friends) with academic tasks. Once, for example, Chol's friend wanted to send a letter to a church to ask if they could provide some support for his family back in Africa; Chol asked me to come over and help edit the letter for spelling and grammar. Chol also developed a relationship with a middle-aged couple who helped him get his apartment set up, taught him how to drive, and helped him with car-related problems. As he delved more deeply into his business studies, he found a retired businessman who mentored him in this area. In fact, these other Americans and I developed a family-like relationship with Chol; in times where Chol needed help—after an auto accident, for example— we often called or emailed each other to check on Chol and see how we could support him, much like anxious parents.

Chol was also a community leader among the other orphaned youth in the area, and Lutheran Social Services tapped into his leadership abilities. He often helped them organize Sudanese community events, and he regularly contributed a column to the refugee newsletter. Chol also was a founding member of a local organization, the Southern Sudan Rescue and Relief Association (of which I am also a board member), which is a community organization comprised

of both Sudanese refugees and Americans that works on improving the lives of the Sudanese, both in Michigan and in Africa. All of the Americans on the board of this organization have worked closely with Sudanese orphaned youth, often acting as foster parents and community mentors for them. I believe that Chol's participation in this group shows how intertwined issues of family and community are for this group of refugees.

Remaz

Remaz is a much younger refugee child, just beginning her education in an American kindergarten. She is the daughter of Akhlas, the mother I described at the beginning of this chapter. Akhlas and her husband Amin come from the Nuba Mountains region of Sudan; the Nuba live farther to the north than most Southern Sudanese, but they have been equally marginalized and are allied with the Southerners. When I first met Remaz, she was a precocious five-year-old who was equally comfortable conversing in English and her family's dialect of Arabic. Unlike Chol, Remaz lives with both of her parents and her younger brother, Remon. Remaz's parents both attended school in Sudan; her mother completed primary school, and her father attended a year or two of high school. In Michigan, Remaz's mother works as a seamstress at a factory that produces uniforms, and her father washed dishes in a local hotel, until he became very ill and had to have surgery as a result of complications from a gunshot wound he had received in the conflict in Sudan.

Lansing has a large Sudanese refugee community, and Remaz's family is therefore part of a network of many refugee families with children. Akhlas is close friends with Falabia, another mother whose family is participating in my research, and Remaz often plays with Falabia's children. Remaz is close with Juana, the focal child from Falabia's family, and she adores Juana's live-in teenage cousin Golda, who often braids Remaz's hair into intricate

hairstyles. Sudanese refugees spend a great deal of time visiting each other, and it was common for various community members to visit Remaz's home while I was there. In fact, other Sudanese families also lived in the same apartment complex, and they often stopped by for tea, to have their hair done, or to watch DVDs of African television programs or African music videos. Remaz referred to many of these community members as relatives. One day, for example, she waved to someone who was pulling out of the parking lot and told me, "That's my auntie!"

Remaz had several extended family members who lived in the area, as well. Akhlas' cousin (who she sometimes referred to as "sister") lived nearby, and Akhlas and the children often stayed there if Amin was out of town. Amin was in the hospital for several weeks following his surgery, and Akhlas' cousin also cared for Remaz and her brother for much of the time that Amin was in the hospital. Recently, Akhlas showed me a picture of a large group of Sudanese women that was taken when the family was still living in Egypt. Akhlas lovingly named the women, carefully explaining their relationship to her (e.g., her uncle's wife) and telling me where these women now lived—they are scattered across Africa, Europe, North America, and Australia. Although Remaz's nuclear family was intact, her extended family was spread across the globe, and they keenly felt the separation. A much larger community of people from the Nuba Mountains lived in Ohio, and Akhlas and her family often traveled there to visit extended family members. In fact, they seriously contemplated a move to that region to be closer to their family and their ethnic group.

Like Chol, Remaz had access to an extended American support group as well. Remaz's family had been sponsored by a local church, which they continued to attend, despite the fact that most Sudanese refugees in the area attended two other churches with large African

congregations. The members of this church actively supported Remaz's family. For example, when Amin was out of work due to his surgery, the church provided gift cards to local discount stores to help with living expenses. When it became apparent that the family's apartment was not a healthy living environment, someone at the church offered to one of her rental properties to the family at a discounted rate. Carrie[4], a middle-class White woman and another member of the church, frequently acted as a cultural broker and community mentor for the family. She took the children on outings, invited them over to swim in her pool during the summer, and handed down used children's books and educational videos to them. In addition, Carrie dropped Remaz off at school every morning and picked her up every afternoon, and she kept in touch with Remaz's teacher. On many occasions, I heard Akhlas and Remaz refer to Carrie as "auntie". "Auntie" Carrie clearly played an important role in Remaz's family; Remaz even insisted, "She's my auntie for real."

Like Carrie, I also became Remaz's "auntie". After I had been working with Akhlas' family for several months, she and the children began referring to me as "Auntie Kristen". When I once discussed with Remaz the issue of Carrie being her auntie, Remaz told me, "You're my auntie, too." In fact, becoming an "auntie" in this family was what first caused me to think about family literacy in a broader way. I am clearly not part of Remaz's actual family, nor am I a true member of the Sudanese community, but I do play an important role in the family's literacy practices. I help Remaz with her homework each week, and I also tutor her mother as she continues to develop her English language proficiency. Because my research also takes me into Remaz's classroom, I sometimes act as a liaison between the family and Remaz's teacher. In addition, I also act as a literacy broker for the family—on many occasions, Akhlas has called me to help her understand a letter from the school or fill in a necessary form, such as food stamps

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[4] A pseudonym, because she is not an official participant in my study.

paperwork. Carrie and I are both good examples of how refugee families draw upon family-like resources outside of their cultural communities as they adjust to life in this country and as they support their children's educational and literacy experiences.

Remaz's family also challenges the traditional one-way transmission model of literacy development that suggests that literacy skills are only passed on from parents to children. Like many bilingual children, Remaz often acts as a language and literacy broker for her parents. In conversations with me, for example, Akhlas often calls upon Remaz to supply her with an English word. What is interesting about this family, however, is that Akhlas does not just view Remaz as a translator—she sees her as a teacher. Akhlas frequently describes Remaz as her teacher, and I often have observed this little girl (who only recently turned six!) not only supplying her mother with English vocabulary, but also actively explaining English grammar and spelling rules! Recently, I shared a dinner meal with the family, and Akhlas told me again how important Remaz's teaching role is in the family: "Yeah, she teach me. My best teacher— Remaz!" Clearly, Remaz plays an important role in shaping her parents' English literacy development, just as they support her by seeking out tutors and providing her with the time, space, and materials to complete her schoolwork.

What Can Teachers Do?

As these cases illustrate, refugee students have a wide variety of supportive resources available to them, although they do not necessarily fit neatly within the traditional family literacy model. Clearly, Chol is without "family" in the traditional American sense. He has no parents, and the "brothers" with whom he is close in the U.S. are biologically unrelated to him. Yet, without the traditional notions of family support, Chol has managed to succeed quite well in the American educational system; not only did he earn a high-school diploma from a Michigan high

school, but he likely will finish his bachelor's degree in the next year. The traditional concept of "family literacy" therefore is largely irrelevant for a student like Chol. A broadened concept of "family literacy"—one that includes both an extended definition of "family" and community resources—would fit him well. This broadened concept shows that Chol's "family"—community mentors, tutors, social workers, and Sudanese "brothers"—supports his learning in a variety of ways. Similarly, according to a traditional family literacy model, most schools likely would consider Remaz's family as "deficient" because they are still developing their English language and literacy skills, and because they have no experience with the American educational system themselves. Yet, Remaz had access to an extensive network of both Sudanese and American community resources; her Sudanese cousins and her American "aunties" provided a great deal of familial and educational support.

Chol and Remaz both illustrate why traditional family literacy models may shortchange refugee students. Family literacy programs that only target parents and students' immediate households ignore the fact that children's literacy lives draw upon extended family resources and connections with the wider community. Family literacy programs that assume that literacy development is a one-way street from parents to children also ignore the realities of many immigrant and refugee families where the children's English literacy skills may be more developed than the parents, and where children may be important partners in developing other family members' literacy skills, as Remaz's case illustrates. Other adults in the Sudanese community also take important roles in educating children and providing them with important developmental experiences. Viola explained to me that one woman in the Sudanese community often gathers together the young children and takes them on outings to such things as the movies and the zoo. Viola explained that these experiences were important for the children: "Some kids,

they don't know what is the—what is a movie. They don't know people go out to watch movies, because parents cannot take them, never take them there."

Investigating Family Networks

The revised family literacy model that I am proposing would take into account these extended family and community networks, much as Gadsden (2000) suggests with her intergenerational literacy model. How can teachers and schools use such a model to their advantage? Most importantly, teachers and other school officials need to find out what sorts of literacy and educational networks support their students. Home visits and parent interviews or surveys are, of course, useful tools for finding out about students' home lives. These tools are less useful, however, if parents' English language skills are limited. Home visits also may simply reinforce traditional family literacy models, because as the name implies, home visits focus on a student's immediate household and may not account for extended family or community resources.

Teachers may want to interview their students individually. Most teachers spend a great deal of time assessing students' literacy development in the classroom through running records, reading and writing conferences, and other regularly-scheduled assessments. One idea is for a teacher to substitute student interviews in place of one round of running records or other similar assessments. The teacher would use this interview to gather information about the student's family and other support networks, about literacy practices in the home, and other relevant information. Teachers clearly should design interview protocols that fit the needs of their particular students, and they also should ask probing questions to go more deeply into any relevant topic. Possible questions or prompts might include:

- Ask about the student's family. How many people live in her home? Also have her describe extended family who might live in the area.

- Are there other significant adults who live outside of the home also involved in the child's life? (e.g., aunts/uncles, cousins, community mentors, tutors, social workers, etc.)

- Who helps the student with homework? Are other family members also in school (siblings, cousins, parents, etc)?

- What languages to people speak, read, and write in the family and the community?

- What kinds of things do people in the family read?

- What kinds of things do people in the family write?

If students have older siblings or cousins who also attend the same school or who are known to the teacher, these relatives also can be important sources of family information, particularly in immigrant and refugee families where the adults may have limited English abilities or who may work job shifts that make it impossible to connect with the teacher. Teachers also may find it useful to have a concrete object, such as a family photograph, that can help facilitate these interviews. Gadsden (1998) found similar family portraits to be particularly useful ways to find out about family relationships and family cultures and to spark family literacy projects. Asking students to bring in photos of family members and other significant individuals in the child's life could be supplemented by children's own drawings of family portraits or their creation of family trees. Students could create these portraits and family trees in class or as a homework project with their families.

Accessing Community Resources

Most children—immigrants, refugees, and those born in the U.S.—have access to some community resources which can support the children's development. Many children who are

affiliated with churches or other faith communities have access to educational and other support services through their churches, as Remaz's case illustrates. Through faith communities, children may be involved in religious education classes or youth groups that can serve as a support for literacy development. In a literacy interview, teachers may want to ask their students about religious affiliation; although discussing religious issues in school can be uncomfortable for many, teachers may be able to use this information to contact the child's church, mosque, or synagogue to find out what resources might be available to the student. Other children may be involved in programs such as Boy or Girl Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, or the Boys and Girls Club of America. These programs often serve as an important source of mentoring and tutoring for children, and again, teachers may be able to work with their child's tutor or mentor.

As the cases in this chapter illustrate, refugee children often have a variety of community resources available to them that "regular" immigrant children do not. Unlike other immigrants, refugee families typically are assigned a caseworker within the social services agency that resettled them in the area. Asking about and contacting the family's caseworker may prove useful to both the teacher and the student; the teacher may be able to learn important information about the family and the broader ethnic community of refugees, and she may also discover that there are resources available to the family—such as tutoring or funding for educational supplies—that the family is currently unaware of. Some refugee communities have access to specific grant funding for educational support, as did Chol and the other "Lost Boys" in Michigan, and social service agencies often have networks of tutors, both paid and volunteer, who have experience working with refugee families. Many refugee families are "adopted" or sponsored by local churches, even if the families do not attend that church or are not members of that faith community. These churches sometimes have specific funds available to support the

sponsored families, and they also may have access to academic tutors or community mentors. In addition, contacting a family's sponsoring church could alert the church to the fact that the family may be in need of certain resources, such as school supplies or children's books in English. A sponsoring church may also be able to connect a refugee family with a church member who is skilled in academic tutoring or mentoring.

School-Based Family Literacy Programs

Many schools or school districts offer family literacy programs, and some individual teachers offer parent workshops or send home support materials if their schools or districts do not offer such programs. These programs would do well to consider this broader conception of family as they design their programs and their materials. These programs must recognize that, while parents certainly play a role in their children's literacy development and educational achievement, they may not be the only significant caregivers or support resources that the child draws upon. In many African cultures, for example, older children play an important role in the care and education of younger siblings (Rogoff, 2003); this is certainly the case among the Sudanese community with which I work. In Remaz's friend Juana's family, for example, the older children play a significant role in helping younger children with homework or in engaging them in storybook reading; again, a relationship that most traditional family literacy programs neglect. Extended family and community mentors may also spend significant amounts of time with children and work to support their literacy development in different ways.

School-based programs can build upon the knowledge that their teachers gain through student interviews to develop family and community literacy programs that reflect the actual networks that support children's learning. These programs may offer activities not only for parents and children, for example, but they may also include older siblings and cousins,

grandparents, aunts and uncles and other extended family, and tutors or other mentors. Based upon what teachers and school administrators know about their students, these programs could put together packets of materials that direct families to the relevant available community resources. For example, schools with large refugee populations could compile a list of the resources available through the social service and other resettlement agencies.

Conclusion

Why should we expand our notion of what constitutes "family" and "family literacy"? Too often, children from marginalized communities, such as the Sudanese refugees that I work with, are characterized as "deficient" or "at-risk". Schools often believe that students from these communities have few resources available to them, because parents often speak limited or no English, and because schools believe that parents do not understand how the U.S. system works. Using a broader conception of family, one based upon how non-mainstream communities such as the Sudanese refugees define family, shows that children actually have a wide variety of supportive resources available to them. It is true many children may not be getting the support from parents that teachers and schools might like them to get, but it is equally true that this important support likely could be coming from extended family members or the wider community. A broader notion of family also better reflects the realities of many cultural communities, where "family" is not limited to the nuclear family/household model. It also helps to counteract traditional deficit models that suggest that refugee and other immigrant children necessarily are at risk in terms of literacy development or general academic achievement. This expanded model can help teachers to understand the rich resources that refugee children can bring to the classroom, as well as help teachers understand how to tap into family and community support for the child, beyond those who live in the immediate household.

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