





***Family & Community:
Tools Sudanese Refugees Use
to Navigate Diverse Literacy
Landscapes***

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African Refugees: A Diverse Group

- African refugees arrive in the U.S. from many different backgrounds
 - Ethnic & linguistic backgrounds
 - Exposure to formal schooling
 - Various refugee experiences
- Sudanese refugees draw upon funds of knowledge and have access to resources



Frameworks & Perspectives


- Literacy as Social Practice
- Community & Diaspora
- Family & Intergenerational Literacy
 - Children learn about literacy from homes & communities
- Brokering
 - Individuals rely on brokers to help them learn about new contexts



Literacy Practices Among Sudanese Refugees: Two Studies




- Orphaned refugee youth (“Lost Boys”)
- Families with young children



Methodology

● DATA COLLECTION:	● ANALYSIS:
● Participant observation	● Unit: literacy events
● Semi-structured interviews	● Theme analysis
■ 1 st study: 3 focal youth	● Creation of data matrices for further analysis
■ 2 nd study: 3 focal families & 4 children	● Triangulation across data sources
● Artifact collection	



Refugees’ Literacy Practices

- Participants were multi-lingual and bi-literate
- Religion, community issues & education shaped literacy
- Refugees had many resources available to them



Chol: A (not so) Lost Boy

- Separated from family at age 4
- Refugee camps in Ethiopia & Kenya
- New family units:
 - Elders & foster parents in Kakuma camp
 - Brothers' Union in Michigan



Chol: Educational Support in Michigan

- Social service agencies
 - Case workers
 - Educational funding: tutoring, computers, tuition
- American mentors
 - Academic tutoring, computer help, driver's education



Remaz: Young Child



- Parents with limited education
- 2 years in U.S.
- High-achieving kindergartner



Remaz: Educational Support in Michigan

- Church community
 - Family sponsors
- Extended family—many “aunties”
 - Older cousins in school
- Support for parents
 - Translation for parents
 - “Best teacher” for mother



Viola: Sudanese Parent

- Elite Southern family
- Earned law degree
- Community leader
- Mother of 4 boys



Viola: Literacy Support in Michigan

- Church community
 - Religious book group
 - Computers at church
- Other American literacy brokers
 - Sweepstakes junk mail
- Support from children
 - Texts that came home from school



Insights & Implications

- Refugees have a wide variety of supportive resources available
 - Often more than are available to “regular” immigrants
- Refugees are incredibly resourceful
- Focusing on community shows that refugees may not be so “deficient”



Strategies for Educators

- Think beyond traditional family literacy models
 - Parents learn from children
 - Siblings learn from each other
- Tap into families, broadly defined
 - Older siblings, cousins, ethnic communities
- Access community resources
 - Social workers
 - Church groups/sponsors
 - Tutors