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**Teachers Responding to the Challenges of Educating Refugees in
Sweden and the U.S.**

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Teachers Responding to the Challenges of Educating Refugees in Sweden and the U.S.

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Abstract

This study was conducted at two rural schools in Northern Sweden, and one urban school in the Midwestern region of the U.S. Data from surveys and interviews of teachers, administrators, and students were compared to relevant literature as well as available government policies pertaining to the education of refugees. Results suggest a need for more specific funding so that refugees' educational needs are met by way of more opportunities for increasing "Relational Closeness" as well as continued professional development for educators to obtain "Cultural Competence."

Keywords:

The U.S. and Europe experienced a tremendous influx of refugees during the past two decades due, in large part, to civil wars in the Middle East and Africa (World Bank, n.d.). This inflow greatly affects those schools that are tasked with not only meeting the learning needs of P-12-age students, but also their physical and emotional needs (Banki, 2012). Often, refugees believe education of themselves and their children as being essential to successfully sustaining themselves both economically and culturally in their new home (Dryden-Peterson, 2004). This study examines challenges and possible solutions to educating high school-age refugee students at one site in the U.S. Midwest and two sites in Sweden; all three school sites served a high percentage of refugee students.

The aim of the study was to examine how educators respond to the challenges of educating refugee students who usually had different culture backgrounds from their teachers, and whose first languages were typically not understood by school staff. The findings reported here suggest ways in which to better educate refugees, mirroring the literature on the subject; namely, the importance of educators who possess high levels of Cultural Competences and who use the concept of Relational Closeness. All three sites had a welcoming environment for refugees with a focus on integrating their students into the community. The findings also disclosed challenges educators face in meeting the needs of recent refugees, challenges exacerbated by funding concerns.

Review of the Literature

This section is divided into two subsections: 1) Integration and assimilation, and 2) the current state of refugees in the U.S. and Sweden. This format allows for an examination of the philosophical divide surrounding all immigration; essentially, should immigrants, including refugees, melt into the dominant culture, losing many or all aspects of their own cultures? Or should they be allowed to keep their cultural values and beliefs while peacefully coexisting and engaging in the context of the dominant culture? The section's framing further provides for a short, if not cursory, comparison of the present immigrant and refugee situation in the U.S. and Sweden, providing a background for the challenges presented to the schools, teachers, and students in the study.

It is important to provide a delineation between the term "immigrant" and "refugee." A refugee is a type of immigrant who is persecuted by her nation of origin. According to the U.S. State Department:

The United States considers for admission as refugees persons of special humanitarian concern who can establish persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (n.d.).

Further, The United Nations' High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) classifies displaced persons in five ways:

1. Internally displaced person: An individual forced to flee from his/her home or place of habitual residence, who has not crossed an internationally recognized state border.
2. Asylum seeker: A person seeking international protection whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined.
3. Refugee: A person who, owing to well-founded fear of persecution for one of a number of specific reasons contained in the 1951 Refugee Convention, is outside the country of his/her nationality, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country.
4. Refugee in protracted situations: A refugee in a long-term state of displacement; for UNHCR, a protracted refugee situation is one in which a large number of refugees of the same nationality have been in exile for several years in a given asylum country.
5. Stateless persons: A person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law (1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons). Not all stateless persons are displaced. While some people are born stateless, others become stateless over the course of their lives (UNESCO, May 2016).

In this study, the students in the U.S. are indeed refugees as per the UNESCO definition. Those in Sweden, however, were asylum seekers, having not yet been granted refugee status.

Integration and Assimilation

In general, the main goal of host countries in the past half-century has been to *integrate* rather than *assimilate* all immigrants, including refugees (Ewing, 2012; Salomone, 2010). That is, to welcome them into their society and allowing them to keep most, if not all, of the culture that they bring with them. For many years, the Swedes have attempted to integrate immigrants into what they hoped to be an organic culture rather than assimilate them into one that is and would remain static (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, 2009). The U.S. also has stated policy to this effect (Office of Refugee Resettlement, n.d.). These policies, however, are not without opposition as demonstrated by the recent increase in Nativism in both countries (Crouch, 13 December 2014; Dooley, 2012).

Despite a recent curtailing in acceptance, Sweden is still one of the primary European destinations for refugees due to its relative welcoming philosophy. Although the nation has seen a rise in opposition to refugees (Crouch, 13 December 2014; Dooley, 2012), Sweden has a centuries-long history of embracing immigration, including refugees. Beginning in the 1950's and '60s, Sweden made a determined effort to allow immigrants to keep their cultures. It was not until this time did Sweden have actual policies in place for integration; the vast majority of immigrants had come from other Nordic nations so it was assumed they would have little trouble settling into the culture (Government Offices of Sweden, n.d.; Swedish Institute, n.d.; Westin, 2006). In the 1990s, the Swedish

government reconsidered the concept of diversity as it realized integration of immigrants was a responsibility of not only the government, but also the native Swedes and the immigrants themselves (Government Offices of Sweden, n.d; Westin, 2006). The U.S., in contrast, has no official policy for integration of refugees (as opposed to assimilation) (Dooley, 2012).

Literature on educating refugees in the U.S. is meager. Scholarship on teaching immigrants, specifically, those whose first language differs from the dominant language of their adopted nation is more robust, but is still lacking (Dooley, 2012). The literature on what is effective for meeting the learning needs of English Language Learners (ELL) is led by U.S. researchers due most likely to the sheer number of immigrants the U.S. receives (however, the nation does not receive the most immigrants per capita nor is it the most diverse (World Bank, n.d.)).

The prevailing literature on educating immigrants advocates the intertwined concepts of *Cultural Competence* (see Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009) and *Relational Closeness* (Banki, 2012; Dooley, 2012; Kirova, 2012). It is assumed that the host nation's goal is *integration* of immigrants, in contrast to *assimilation* into the dominant culture. In the latter, immigrants are to be absorbed by the dominant culture by casting aside their own cultures which often included values and customs (Nieto, 2004). Integration can be viewed more as a "salad bowl" in contrast to assimilation's "melting pot" metaphor, whereas a salad bowl is a fine medley of healthy ingredients that keep their individual flavors and textures (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009).

Scholars (e.g., Abdul-Hamid, et al., 2014; Banks, 2002) advocate "cultural competent" teachers who can facilitate the integration process into society. Cultural competence is generally defined as the ability of one to accept the behaviors and beliefs of someone from another culture as well as one's ability to adapt to an alien culture (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Literature suggests increased cultural competence among teachers can increase educational success for immigrants and improved chances of integration by increasing Relational Closeness (Banki, 2012; Dooley, 2012; Kirova, 2012).

Effective teachers create strong relationships with their students to improve trust as well as communication (Goldstein, 1999); relationship building and communication are key attributes to cultural competence (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). The ability to integrate is greatly beneficial to an organization where the population possesses high levels of cultural competence and where differences are accepted (and, perhaps, even celebrated for the diversity they bring to the culture) (Abdul-Hamid, et al., 2014; Diller & Moule, 2004). Educators with high cultural competence can help students integrate into the school culture, enriching the educational experiences of *all* students (Banks, 2002). Close relationships between teachers and students not only improves the effectiveness of the learning environment (McGrath, 1998) but also empowers students to become life-long learners, striving to advance themselves; thus, providing stronger contributions to the economy and society (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Dryden-Petersen, 2004). Although refugees ostensibly are temporary immigrants, returning to their home nation when it is safe to do so, only about 15% do return

(United Nations Refugee Agency, 2016). Given that as many as 85% of the world's 16 million refugees will remain in their host nation, it seems incumbent upon host nations to ensure that these populations can be successfully integrated.

The Current State of Immigration in Sweden as Compared to the U.S.

Immigrants and refugees in the U.S. amounts to about 13% of the nation's population (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.) while Sweden's immigrant and refugee population is about 15% (<https://sweden.se/migration/#2013>). The rate of immigration for the Scandinavian nation, however, far exceeds that of the U.S. which has accepted roughly one million legal immigrants on an annual basis in the 21st century (Office of Immigration Statistics, n.d.). One million amounts to about 0.3% of the U.S. population each year. Sweden, by contrast, accepted 115,000 in 2013 (<https://sweden.se/migration/#2013>) which is approximately 1.2% of its population or four times the rate of the U.S. Regarding refugees, the U.S. received nearly 70,000 in 2014 (Office of Refugee Resettlement, n.d.) whereas the figures for Sweden were more than 142,000 in 2014 (World Bank, n.d.) and more than 160,000 in 2015 (Lane, 2015). *Sweden not only received twice as many refugees but received them at a rate that was 75 times that of the U.S.*

As media reports indicate, the massive influx of refugees into Europe has caused much resistance throughout the continent, some of it violent. This influx, as one might deduce, can cause strains on host societies, both economically and politically (Knight, Jacobson, Gonzales, Roosa, & Saenz, 2009). The civil war in Syria has been the catalyst for the most recent increases in refugees but Sweden has been a magnet for refugees for decades, as mentioned previously, accepting Eastern-Bloc citizens fleeing Soviet domination following WW II, Bosnians in the 1990s, and Iraqis during the start of the U.S.-led invasion of that country in 2003 (Swedish Institute, n.d.).

Politically, the refugee dilemma came to the forefront in the 2006 Swedish national elections when a center-right coalition promised to curtail immigration, as mentioned earlier (Scrutton & Ahlander, April 17, 2013). In 2010, the Sweden Democrats, historically a very minor party with Nativist beliefs and roots to neo-Nazis, earned seats in parliament when they garnered 5% of the national vote and even more seats in 2014 when they received 10% of the vote. Their key objective is to reduce immigration and, by doing so, they hope to keep Sweden "Swedish" (Crouch, 2014; Shapiro, 2015).

The U.S. has seen a rebirth of Nativism exemplified by the promise of the building of a wall across the southern border with Mexico and other anti-immigration and inward-focused economic promises made by President Donald Trump (Liasson, 21 Sept., 2015). His election was, in part, due to fears of "the other" by those who may be left behind by globalization and neoliberal policies and mirrors European movements such as those in Sweden and Great Britain ("Brexit") (Habermas, 12 July, 2016). With growing income disparity, U.S. Nativists seek to close the nation's borders to keep out new immigrants who, they fear, will take jobs from natives, and further make the nation even more multicultural than it presently is (Coates, 2 May 2011).

Methods

The overarching question which this study attempted to answer was the following:

How do school personnel meet the educational needs of their refugee students?

In addition, three ancillary questions included:

1. What strategies do school personnel find effective in meeting those needs?
2. What challenges do they face?
3. What possible solutions do they believe can help them better meet those needs?

An Attempt to Answer these Questions based on the Data collected are Found in the Findings and Analysis of the Data Section

Design and Instrumentation

Based on the review of literature pertaining to the research question and sub-questions, the researcher adopted a mixed-methods approach consisting of 1) surveys for teachers and students; 2) interviews of teachers, students (in Sweden), and principals; and a 3) document review (national, state, and local policies pertaining to immigrant and refugee education).

Settings

The research was approached by the communities in Sweden to study the concerns arising from educating refugees. The U.S. site was selected as it served a similar set of refugees based on nations of origin and age.

The settings in Sweden were two small towns of about 2000 in Northern Sweden each with a significant number of immigrants and refugees (numbers of refugees are assigned to each community based on its population). Swedish education is controlled locally by municipalities or “kommunerna.” The towns in which this study took place were situated in two separate kommunerna serving multiple small towns. Both schools served about 400 high school-aged students as well as some adult students who were learning Swedish, only.

In the U.S., the study was conducted at a public high school in the Midwest serving 971 students from grades 9 through 12. The school had one principal, two vice principals, two instructional coaches/tutors, and two school improvement leaders (SIL), to go along with 59 licensed teachers. At the time of the study, the student racial breakdown was as follows:

- Asian 19%
- Black 24%
- Latino 22%

- Native American 1%
- White (non-Latino) 30%.

Thirteen percent of the school's students are recent refugees, and 15% are categorized as "Special Education." Seventy-three percent of the students are economically disadvantaged, eligible for free-and/or-reduced lunch (a free breakfast is available for all students).

Participants

In Sweden, both principals and all teachers were interviewed in person and via email. Students at the first school were interviewed in a small group. A similar data collection methodology was used in the U.S. with the These interview data were analyzed qualitatively seeking themes and patterns in responses as well as novel responses requiring further investigation. Surveys were conducted using SurveyMonkey where all teachers and students (in Sweden, only) were sent a link to the survey via email. Due to school district limitations, no students in the U.S. were interviewed.

In the U.S., three staff were interviewed, one individually (the principal) and two others together (the Intake Specialist and a translator). The 60-minute focus group included seven teachers, five of whom were females.

Finally, a review of the community's/school district's, and school's websites pertaining to policies and procedures regarding refugee students and their parents/guardians was conducted prior to and after the interviews.

Findings and Analyses of the Data

Survey Data

Thirteen of the 17 teachers in Sweden responded to the survey. It was found that 16 languages were spoken in their classrooms other than Swedish and English: Somali, Persian, Somali, Polish, Wolof, Thai, Singalese, Romanian, Arabic, Pachtu/Pashtu, Tigrinya, Arabic, Dari, German, Japanese, Bengali. Teachers reported that they generally believed that they were supported at the school and the community to teach this population, but did not believe that they received proper training from either their university programs or from the school (in contrast to their belief that they were supported).

A total of 32 of the 52 students in Sweden completed the survey where 80% reported they were not born in Sweden, and 60% arrived in Sweden within 17 months of this survey's administration. Students believed they spoke both good Swedish and English and, surprisingly, did not believe speaking these two languages well was important. They were in general agreement that they enjoy learning about the nations from which their fellow students come, and would like to know more about Sweden and the Swedish culture.

In the U.S., surveys were distributed to teachers, only, due to the complications with receiving parental consent. Twenty-three of the 59 teachers responded, although some items were left unanswered. It was found that 30 languages were spoken in the teachers' classrooms, other than English. Table 1 is a list as reported by the teachers.

Table 1. *Languages Spoken in the Classrooms (Other Than English)*

Arabic	Georgian	Russian
Arakanese	Hakka	Shan
Bosnian	Karen	Somali
Burmese	Karenni	Spanish
Chin	Korean	Swahili
Croatian	Kunama	Tagalog
Dari	Mabaan	Thai
Dinka	Mizo	Tigrinya
Falam	Nepali	Vietnamese
French	Rundi	Zotung

The majority of the respondents (two-thirds) did not believe they received enough support from their school or their district to support their work of teaching refugees. Nearly 90% believed they did not receive sufficient education from their universities to work with this population.

Interview Data

In Sweden, teacher, administrator, and student interviews were conducted using both face-to-face and email formats. Data are reported according to the questions posed. One principal responded in Swedish, the other in English; all reported responses are in English. The participants in the U.S. were interviewed face-to-face with follow-up email clarifications and confirmations.

Principal Interviews

Interview questions asked of principals are bulleted.

- **How do school personnel meet the educational needs of their refugee students?**

Sweden

The principals stated that funding is provided based on enrollment which is in agreement with the policies found in the document search. About \$870 is provided by the federal government to the kommun for each refugee student and another \$12,000 per year for those who have become Swedish citizens. But this is not enough as the "Principal A" from this first Kommun stated:

This funding is not enough to meet the needs of the refugees especially the ones with special needs, but the faculty and staff work together to provide a good educational experience for them.

Additional funds must come from the kommun's own budget. Principal B notes that they must be "clever" in finding solutions combining technology, collaboration, and cooperation. Principal B elaborates:

We try to grade groups as much as possible, try to have such small groups as possible. When we work with e-learning materials can groups be larger with fewer teachers. In this way released pedagogues who then have students in small groups at the same time.

In short, the principals reported that they were in need of more funding from the federal government for the necessary resources to educate the arriving refugees.

- How have your interaction with the parents or guardians of immigrant children been?

The kommuns have refugee coordinators who meet with the principals when a new refugee arrives in the community. One principal reported meeting with the regional coordinator working for the regional (county) government, attending meetings with him regarding new immigration policies. He often acts as a liaison to the regional government regarding refugee education issues. Another principal spoke of meeting with a community ombudsman to discuss possible changes in accommodations based, in part, on a twice-per-year "performance appraisal." She also meets once per year with the community employment service to discuss possible job placement for her students who are legally allowed to work or about future employment.

- What do you believe would improve the educational attainment of immigrant students?

Both principals agreed more funding and increased opportunities for refugee students to interact with the native Swedes would benefit their schools' goal of meeting the needs of their students. In addition, the principals noted the need for mental health support for their students who often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder which can negatively impact school performance as well as simply attending school.

Teacher Interviews

Teachers in Sweden were interviewed both face-to-face and by email. A total of 11 teachers were individually interviewed. In the U.S., teachers were interviewed in a focus group of seven. The questions posed are bulleted.

- What are the main concerns with teaching immigrant students?

Sweden

All interviewees mentioned both language and culture as concerns and/or obstacles. Learning the Swedish language is the primary focus of refugee education in secondary schools while gaining an understanding of the Swedish culture was a close second. Teachers discussed the difficulties students had who were coming from very different cultures from Sweden, especially in regards to being subordinate to female teachers. Those mentioning this subordination concern were quick to say that they experienced no problems with their students who are from cultures that are patriarchal such as Afghanistan.

Another concern of the teachers was the constant rotating in of students. They enter throughout the year so teaching en masse is difficult, if not impossible. As one teacher stated:

[It] is difficult because it is not a level of students in the group as it enters new students all the time. This means that the spread between the newest, which can at least, and the most advanced in the group often is huge. Then it can be hard to find good exercises to do together.

In addition to the rotating in of students, teachers must work with students from varying levels of education and skills. Notes a teacher:

It is a challenge to teach groups where students are widely distributed in educational background. If some students have never gone to school and cannot read in their native language while some students have passed many years in school, so it's hard to put education at the right level. If the school has many foreign-born students, there is the possibility to make multiple groups at various levels.

- What positive impact have immigrant students had in your classroom and/or school?

Teachers were quick to state how positive their refugee students were and how hard they worked. For instance, one teacher stated that their being at her school is “a positive thing,” and another elaborates:

Many are motivated to learn and contribute to a good academic standards at the school. It is also useful for everyone at school to meet people from different cultures and backgrounds. It gives us more and broader perspective on the world.

- Are immigrant students adequately served in your school? Your community?

This is truly a crucial question because it gets at the core of the study. Teachers are in general agreement that the communities are doing all they can, given the resources they receive from the federal government and what they can raise at the local level. Technology helps individualize instruction, but they still face the diverse concerns brought by the influx of refugees. Improvements can still be made as stated by one teacher:

There is some support, but it can be improved. During the last year, there have been many new refugees, and it has been a challenge for society to cater for all needs. However, I believe that we can learn and get better and better at giving the right kind of support, go on to our politicians to give local authorities the appropriate resources.

- What strategies do you believe would improve the educational attainment of immigrant students?

Teachers were not shy about providing possibilities for improvement. More staff and expertise was a universal response as described below:

In the school needed more on-staff for example, guidance counselors, counselors, administrators, caretakers ... for teachers to focus on their actual mission – to teach.

They wanted more professional growth opportunities, especially in teaching Swedish as a second language. This was articulated by one teacher:

More qualified teachers. There are so many who have no education who teaches in Swedish as a second language and it's not as simple as you might think – just because it is Swedish and speaks Swedish. You have to be able to see what is hard for other language groups and know the language and other language's structure.

U.S.

- What strategies do you find effective in meeting the educational needs?

Teachers spoke of integrating the students into the culture of the community and school, such as the “culture shock” that refugee students’ experience. Said one teacher:

You know, the kids do catch on [to the American culture]. It is also necessary to have an individualized introduction to how, and what, and why things are done [this way or that] in the classroom in the United States that is very explicit...that will work for the students because it gives them a better idea of the expectations. And to explicitly go over the frustrations they encounter, to not pull punches on it, to tell them these

things will happen and they have to try. Yes, we can say it's the teacher's responsibility all we want, but people working together solving a problem as opposed to just one. You have the student also realizing that they have to make an effort. It will be more helpful because they will say, "Oh, I see, this is what they told me could happen." Because the teachers are from this place, from the United States, [the students] didn't come from our country. Allow them to get the feel for things. Some kids catch on faster because the other kids coach them, but the first ones that come, in particular, it can be more problematic. If we have one child who is the only person from her country in the entire school. There may not be a translator or an interpreter for her. And it's like for those who are Spanish speaking kids, there are a ton of them. Kids from certain spots of Africa or the Middle East, there are a few common languages, but some kids from certain areas...

This teacher thought for a moment then added:

The thing is, is it reasonable to expect the district to spend tens of thousands of dollars on one new employee for that one student. I'm not going to say...the thing is, is it feasible? That's the other issue, is it okay [to hire someone] for just one student throughout the district?

- What challenges do you face in educating refugee students?

Overwhelmingly, the response was "language," but several also discussed cultural barriers such as how to act accordingly and how to ask for what they may need. Generally, there was a consensus that more help was needed to combat the language barriers and all that entails, including the additional time and energy needed to meet the multitude of needs of refugee students. As one teacher explained:

I need more support being prepared to teach these students, teaching language--I have no experience with that and there's a lot of language in science. And I also need support in the classroom. They need lots of attention as they have low English levels so I need, I feel like I need, more adult help in the classroom.

Bilingual Community Outreach Workers (BCOW) was a topic throughout the interview. While the students are thankful for this staff position, they believed they were in need of more of these.

We have community outreach workers, but [the one assigned to me] is not always there. And she actually, like, chooses to be in which classroom she's going to be in. She's like "what classrooms are going on right now? which ones do I feel would be most beneficial?" But she can get called out to translate a phone call at any point. Like in 4th block [today] she was

only there for 10 minutes. But I think having a dedicated outreach worker, whoever...some sort of associate to be there all the time to meet the needs of the students is helpful.

- What solutions do you see to allow you to overcome the challenges you face?

The conversation focused on the need for more personnel to break down the barriers of language and culture, allowing the teachers to build close relations to their students. Said one teacher:

It helps a lot to have someone else there. I see a lot of what's working with the students who are calling your name out from three or four different places. It's impossible to get around. We need more help with things like that.

Another teacher explained how he was currently using the BCOWs assigned to his classroom:

In math, I use them more as co-teachers and they'll sit down with me after a lesson and say "let's try something that's more visual." Or "Hey, I saw this at a different school, let's try this" and so we try to collaborate a little and make the content digestible for all students. Those outreach workers, it's really good to have their perspective. Looking forward, "this is going to be a struggle." There's a lot of vocabulary in biology or whatever that may seem normal to us, but not because they've already been in our kids' shoes.

As the online survey did not allow for the teachers to provide instructional strategies that they believed were effective with refugee students, they were asked this here. Graphic organizers and other visuals, repetition, and going over content matter in multiple ways were mentioned. When asked where they learned these, some said from other teachers, others said from SIOP training.

When asked about more challenges they face, one teacher said:

I just think we get the feeling we're not doing enough. I think that's the biggest challenge. You just don't know if you're doing enough.

Several went on to add that the refugee students are the hardest working in the school, which was one of their responses for #2. But the conversation went back to cultural issues:

I think the kids have no idea whose role is which, who's responsible for it...whether a teacher's responsible for it or them. It's that sinking feeling that they think you haven't done enough for them...and knowing that you

could have done more for them if you had more time, more energy, more help.

Finally, a teacher summed up the frustration with teaching a population of students for which she felt unprepared to serve:

I would love to know what's effective for teaching [refugee students]. I haven't quite figured it out.

Student Interviews

The student interviews in Sweden were conducted in English which all eight spoke fairly well.

- How could your school improve to meet your needs?

None had a suggestion for the school; however, they were in agreement that they needed more time to speak Swedish with Swedish people outside of the school setting. A discussion took place in both groups about “språkcafé” (language coffee) which the community (and school) offered on a weekly basis at a facility in the community. The intent was to gather both native Swedes and non-native Swedes to drink coffee and speak Swedish. These sessions were sparsely attended and then, only by non-Swedes.

In the U.S., the Intake Specialist and a translator were interviewed together. The former coordinates all documentation for refugee students including their immunization records. This person works closely with parents who, in turn work with Immigration Services (IMS), to ensure all documentation is appropriate and on record. Oftentimes, parents will ask the school for records, such as attendance, to provide to IMS. The intake staff spoke passionately about the school's administration's and community's willingness to take in refugees and the tireless and selfless efforts of the school's teachers and staff, calling it a “forgiving school” with “lots of tolerance” and was a small “slice of the world.”

Both the translator and the Intake Specialist spoke of the many services the district and school provide including a “welcome page” at the district website, and crucial information on the school's website. Additionally, the district employs translators, Bilingual Community Outreach Workers (BCOW) and various professional development opportunities (most significant, they believed, were Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and Cultural Proficiency (CP)).

Some of the challenges the two found were most significant for refugee students pertained to culture. For instance, some parents are accustomed to spanking their children but reported to the translator that they are afraid they will be reported to social services; thereby, putting their immigration status in jeopardy. The translator and Intake Specialist discussed how community organizations, especially churches, lent significant support to both parents and students such as providing school supplies, food, and clothing.

The most significant struggles, in their opinions, was intergenerational in that parents and their children were in cultural conflict; the children were embracing an American culture which was sometimes at odds with their native culture. One example cited by the translator was perceived disrespect shown to parents by their children because of American cultural influences.

Analysis of the Data

This section utilizes the framework of the research questions to ensure fidelity to the focus of the study. The overarching question which this study attempted to answer was the following:

- How do school personnel meet the educational needs of their refugee students?

Sweden

Both in Sweden and in the U.S. site, this is done mostly through trial and error, it seems. Some Swedish teachers had university degrees in SSA, and others have some training in it, while others have no such training or education. They must rely on their basic teacher education to ensure that proper pedagogical practices are in place. What both schools have found (through trial and error) is that individualized learning is necessary. Each student comes to the schools with different levels of Swedish language acquisition as well as knowledge and skills in various subject matter. In response, teachers have formed individualized plans for the students, and utilized small group and one-on-one instruction for the bulk of their daily practices.

As mentioned above, the principals are seeking local funds from their respective communities to bolster the federal funds which are not meeting the needs of the refugees. Additionally, they are using flexible scheduling and democratic structures to empower the teachers so that they can utilize individualized instruction.

Each community is offering additional funding to the federal funding, and they are supervising housing for unaccompanied minor and even adult students. Great care is taken to ensure that someone who knows each refugee's language and culture is available to supervise this housing, although the supervisors do not live in the housing if the students are adults.

U.S.

Similar to Sweden, school personnel meet the needs of their refugee student by a combination of "heart," professional development, staff and collegial support, and trial-and-error. It is apparent by their comments during the interviews that they have great desire to overcome the many challenges that face them in their teaching of this population; one teacher stated her frustration that she did not feel she was doing enough for them, despite previously stating how much she

was indeed doing for them. Others were in what appeared to be complete agreement. Although they often went to other teachers to ask their advice, it became apparent that they were desirous of deliberate, yet informal time to meet regarding “best practices” (as well as to vent).

1. What strategies do school personnel find effective in meeting the needs of their refugee students?

Sweden

Teachers mentioned many ways in which they attempted to meet the learning needs of their students. These included *visuals* such as graphic organizers, *repetition* of content explanations and activity directions, deliberate *group configurations* that allow for collaboration for both content learning and socialization, and creating a *welcoming learning environment*. Professional development and collegial support were important in finding ways in which to be successful in their teaching of this population, but so was trial-and-error. SIOP was praised as were the support staff including the SILs, Instructional Leaders, Translators, and BCOWs. Although they praised these, they did have some concerns that will be addressed in #3. Visuals were learned by a combination of professional development and collegial discussions, as was repetition and group configurations. Administration supported various group configurations as specially designed desks were used in all classrooms that aided this strategy, and professional development suggested the strategy’s use.

2. What challenges do school personnel face in meeting the needs of refugee students?

Sweden

Challenges were many, as a reading of the relevant literature would predict. Most challenges, however, could be placed within one category: communication — both in language and culture. ELL is a field of study that is growing and whose literature on which this report depended as educating refugees is not a robust field of literature at this time. Teachers were seldom fully trained/educated, in their views, to meet the needs of their ELL students. They believed that smaller classes were needed as well as dedicated staff in order to meet this challenge. Although they had high praise for staff, they were uncertain as to their actual roles and offered suggestions on how to better use them, suggestions that will be addressed in #3. Class size is a topic of discussion when any group of teachers is brought together, but these teachers reported that losing teaching staff from last year to this, caused their class sizes to greatly increase. They expressed frustration at not being able to get to all the refugee students in need of their attention, and the lack of staff support (in numbers) to assist them.

In addition to communication, curriculum issues were discussed by the teachers. It was believed by some that they did not have the proper resources to

meet their instructional needs including the correct curriculum. For instance, the content of ELL books and other resources were not designed for adolescents but for elementary-aged students. They, therefore, must spend a great amount of time creating their own curriculum.

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While admitting that they do not fully understand all the cultures of their students (nor could they, given the vast diversity within their classrooms) the teachers did not believe that was nearly as much of a concern as their students not understanding how to navigate the culture of their classroom, the school, or the community. When a student was *not* the first from her culture to arrive at the school, the challenges were not nearly as great as when she was the first to arrive. When she has others with whom she can talk with in her own language and who understand her culture, then she will learn how to navigate her surroundings quite quickly.

In addition to communication, curriculum issues were discussed by the teachers. It was believed by some that they did not have the proper resources to meet their instructional needs including the correct curriculum. For instance, the content of ELL books and other resources were not designed for adolescents but for elementary-aged students. They, therefore, must spend a great amount of time creating their own curriculum. Also brought forward was the need of more specific curriculum for ELL students so that teachers would be able to advance students from one level to the next without a lot of guess work. This is tied to standards to which they must use for all students as per State mandate; they did not feel these standards were helpful or even fair to refugee students.

3. What possible solutions do school personnel believe can help them better meet the needs of their refugee students?

Sweden

Suggestions for improvement in their own practice and ways in which the school and district could help them meet the needs of their refugee students were many, and were quite thoughtfully communicated. Better utilization of the staff assigned to the ELL classrooms was first and foremost. Finding resources that are aligned to the needs of teaching adolescent ELL students appears to be a great need. Teachers wondered if these could not be found in larger cities throughout the U.S. (e.g., Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York) where tens of thousands of ELL students were educated. They strongly recommended that their students not be forced to follow the same standards as native-born students, as the current standards do not take into account the unique challenges these student face—and the challenges the teachers face in helping them learn.

U.S.

Suggestions for improvement in their own practice and ways in which the school and district could help them meet the needs of their refugee students were many, and were quite thoughtfully communicated. Better utilization of the staff assigned to the ELL classrooms was first and foremost. The roles and responsibilities (as well as the training and background) of the support staff were not well known among the teachers, who wanted much more than translation help; they wanted another trained instructional person in their classrooms. The principal spoke of encouraging teachers to co-teach and would do more of this, if she had more resources. Teachers also mentioned their desire to do more co-teaching.

As mentioned in #2, class size was an issue and the hiring of more faculty is an obvious solution to this problem, a solution that ostensibly covers the perceived need for additional adult support in the classroom found above. Teachers were skeptical of Cultural Competence (CP) training as they felt it was teaching to those who are at a low level of CP, not to those who are already tolerant and accepting of refugee students and the cultures from which they come. They suggested that CP not be eliminated, but to have it more individualized so that those at higher levels can continue to grow, not have to attend what they deemed to be a poor use of time for some.

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Although SIOP training was mentioned time and again as a source for their learning a specific strategy, they still believe that this could be improved by

focusing it on individual concerns, not what the facilitators assumed were *every* teacher's concerns.

Discussion and Conclusions

Teachers and staff at all three school sites were open to discussing their practice including the challenges and opportunities that may exist. It was found that the majority of professional members of the school community were passionate about meeting the needs of their immigrant students. The challenges were what the literature for refugee populations identify, namely those relating to communication; but the literature also points toward a mismatch in curricula, both in content and alignment to standards (Banki, 2012). A dearth of specific teaching methods for the teaching of refugees seems to exist worldwide, causing professional development to come from the literature on "second-language learners" populations. The educators at these schools faced this concern along with the ever-present lack of funding to meet the specific needs of this population.

Further analysis suggests that refugee education should be treated as is Special Education in funding, curricula, standards, and accommodations. The district website in the U.S. pointed to legislation that it supports including expanding funding for second-language learner populations. This includes changing curricula and standards to meet the realities of second-language learning needs. As one teacher stated:

It's almost unfair, this goes back to curriculum. It's almost unfair to assess them the same way. The standards do need to be adjusted, or we need to—not like a tracking system—but an [second language learner] version of a class.

Cultural challenges were discussed at length by the teachers all three schools; they were focused more on the cultural clash that their students faced more than what it was *they* faced in educating their refugee students. Some mentioned efforts by the communities to send teachers to local refugee-receiving agencies for this purpose.

Finally, it was evident the teachers and staff involved in these studies were passionate about meeting the needs of their refugee students. One U.S. teacher expressed her frustrations at her perceived inability to meet those needs:

I just think we get the feeling we're not doing enough. I think that's the biggest challenge. You just don't know if you're doing enough. It's that sinking feeling that they think you haven't done enough for them...and knowing that you could have done more for them if you had more time, more energy, more help.

In short, the schools in this study were found to demonstrate great efforts to meet the educational needs of their highly diverse groups of students. At the Swedish sites, they come in with at least 16 languages as their primary mode of communication, and to the U.S. school with an amazing 30 languages other than English. In addition, the data reported a need for more funding for education of refugees, education that would appear to be more expensive, given the unique needs of this population, but the schools actually receive less to educate them than they would if they were native Swedes.

The literature for educating refugees focuses on the concepts of Cultural Competence and Relational Closeness, as mentioned in the Literature Review. The faculty and staff (including administration) demonstrated their desire to become culturally competent educators by their attendance at ongoing professional development sessions designed to increase their competence.

The passion the schools' professional educators showed for their refugee students and their families goes a long way in meeting the tenets of Relational Closeness (Banki, 2012; Dooley, 2012; Kirova, 2012). This closeness was displayed most tellingly in their willingness to continually find ways to better meet the learning, physical, and emotional needs of this population. Although the teachers and staff provided many possible ways to improve their work with refugees, they believed that they, the schools, and the community were quite supportive of their efforts. The data in this study suggest this belief to be accurate.

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