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# THE ETHICS OF CARE AND REFUGEE EDUCATION: PROMOTING CARING ENVIRONMENTS IN U.S. URBAN SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS

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THE ETHICS OF CARE AND REFUGEE EDUCATION: PROMOTING CARING  
ENVIRONMENTS IN U.S. URBAN SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF  
UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS

TINA MEETRAN

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A MASTER'S RESEARCH PAPER

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and Environment

And accepted on the recommendation of

Laurie Ross, Chief Instructor

## ABSTRACT

# THE ETHICS OF CARE AND REFUGEE EDUCATION: PROMOTING CARING ENVIRONMENTS IN U.S. URBAN SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS

TINA MEETRAN

The United States has resettled more than 2 million refugees since 1975 and approximately one third of them are children. Some of the children who arrive in the U.S. are unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), meaning they arrive without a parent nor guardian. The absence of a parent figure heightens the adversities of escape and acculturation for URMs. However, due to the lack of available information on URM experiences, their physical, emotional and psychosocial needs in the U.S. are continually unmet. This paper considers the role that schools and teachers have as agents of care to foster positive growth and acculturation for URMs. Through an analysis of the challenges and needs of both URMs and teachers, the benefits of an ethics of care – supplemented with culturally responsive pedagogy – within classrooms is explored. By implementing an ethics of care, teachers are able to create comfortable, safe and supportive environments for URMs that motivate them through their acculturation process.

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Date: May 2016

Baccalaureate Degree: International Development and Social Change

Source: Clark University

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## DEDICATION

To My Mom, Dad and Sister,

Whose strength will always inspire and motivate me

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Terminology.....	8
Immigrant vs Refugee Identity.....	9
Unaccompanied Refugee Minors.....	9
Background.....	10
Migration of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors to the U.S.....	10
U.S. Government’s Immigration Enforcement Framework.....	11
Protection of Unaccompanied Minors’ Human Rights.....	13
Apprehension of Unaccompanied Minors.....	15
ORR Intake and Placement.....	15
Theoretical Framework.....	17
The Ethics of Care.....	17
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy/Culturally Responsive Teaching.....	19
Resilience across Cultures.....	21
Challenges and Needs of URMs in School.....	24
Separation and Loss of Family Members.....	25
Language Barriers.....	27
Psychosocial Well-being.....	29
Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination.....	32
Adapting to a New Culture.....	34
Challenges for Urban Schools.....	36
Lack of Training and Preparation for Teachers.....	37
Developing Modified Programs.....	40
Lack of Resources and Funding.....	41
Conclusion.....	45
Bibliography.....	48

## INTRODUCTION

Refugees have been resettling in the United States for years in different waves due to war, political violence, and fear of persecution. Since 1975, the United States has resettled more than 2 million refugees, with approximately one third arriving as children. In order to acculturate comfortably in the U.S., these children have specific needs that differ from adult refugees. This is especially true for unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) that arrive in the U.S. without a parent or guardian available to provide for their long-term care. Despite the many years of migration and resettlement history that URMs have in the U.S., their experiences continue to be insufficiently documented and their needs continue to be unmet.

Refugee children have shown to make up a significant fraction of refugee populations that arrive in the U.S. In recent data, children (defined as people under 18 years of age) have made about 33% of the total number of refugees arriving in the United States. In FY 2013, the percentage of refugees arriving in the United States between the ages of 0 and 17, was 33.8% of 69,909 total refugees. This percentage was 32.4% of 58,179 total refugees in 2012 and 34.1% of 56,384 total refugees in 2011 (U.S Department of Homeland Security 2014). The United Nations' definition of a refugee used by the 1951 Geneva Convention, is a person who:

...owing to the well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the country; or who, not having nationality and

being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (McBrien 2005).

Unlike most immigrants, refugees do not leave their home by choice. Rather, they are forced out of their home countries due to violence, war, fear of prosecution, and/or natural disasters. During this forced migration, many refugees witness or experience rape, torture and/or murders. Thus, they go through emotional and physical trauma that affects their ability to adapt to a new life in the United States.

While children represent approximately one third of the refugee population, much of the literature and discussions around immigration and refugees are focused on adults and their experiences of acculturation in the U.S. Refugee children experience many of the same traumas as adults, but they also experience different fears including new education environments, new social environments and identity formation. Some of these traumas appear even before children arrive in a new country. During their process of fleeing, refugee children are at high risk for rape, abduction and trafficking – especially those children who lose their family and travel alone. Some children are forced to be child soldiers and many girls become child brides (McBrien 2005). Many children lose social stability and access to education through these experiences. The journey of escaping one's home country can be very dangerous and life threatening, but many refugee children take this risk in order to have an opportunity for a better and safer life.

The experiences and feelings of stress, fear and trauma that becomes part of refugee children's daily lives, are heightened for unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) who lose their parents and/or guardians in the process of fleeing. An unaccompanied alien child is

defined by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 as a child who “has no lawful immigration status in the United States, is under 18 years of age, and has no parent or legal guardian in the country present or available to provide care and physical custody” (Byrne 2012). URM’s either lose their parents due to murder or separation during fleeing. Thus, they are forced to process and manage escaping from the terrors of their home country, arriving to the U.S., and acculturating to a completely new culture and lifestyle, all on their own. The fact of being alone in such circumstances exemplifies the crucial need of positive support, nurturance and guidance from other sources for URM’s. Nel Noddings is a philosopher best known for her work in philosophy of education and has been a prominent voice in promoting an ethics of care in education to not only benefit refugee children’s academic and emotional growth, but all children’s growth. There has been additional literature that points to education and schools as being important support systems for newly arrived refugees.

The United Nations has specified that education is essential for refugee children’s psychosocial adjustment in a new country (McBrien 2005). Due to the routine of attending school daily for a set amount of time, the classroom can be a place of comfort, safety and positive support, which URM’s are significantly lacking when they arrive in the U.S. Thus, adopting a culture and ethics of care is important for a better acculturation experience for URM’s. The ethics of care is an ethical theory that uses a relational and context-based approach toward morality and decision making (Noddings 1984). When applied to education, an ethics of care embodies the sense that we must do something right when others address us, and we should have the genuine interest to do so. In the classroom, this is communicated through the teacher’s response to the individual needs of their students. This

involves teachers working closely with students and adjusting to their needs and interests. This dedication to care must be based on an ongoing interest in the students' welfare (Noddings 1992).

While education is important for URM's adjustment in the U.S, the traumas experienced by URM's affect the way in which youth integrate into U.S. culture and to the U.S. educational system. Additional to traumatic experiences, welcome versus rejection, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination prevent refugee students' success in schools (McBrien 2005). Other literature also highlight language barriers, difficulty adjusting to a new culture and problems with peers as major obstacles that challenge refugee youth integration (Hartwell 2011, Hos 2012).

These obstacles allude to different needs of unaccompanied refugee minors in the school system. Most of the literature agrees that the key needs of refugee youth are psychosocial well-being, language acquisition, and social-emotional support (Hos 2012, Hartwell 2011, McBrien 2005, Mullooly 2013). Hos's 2012 study of refugee students' experiences in schools found that the school environment was generally unsupportive. However, a practice of ethics of care and culturally responsive pedagogy can help rebuild a more supportive environment for refugee youth. Hos states that teachers should practice patience and empathy for students by implementing appropriate English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) pedagogical practice, building student self-confidence and advocating for students (Hos 2012). McBrien's 2005 study also emphasized the importance of training teachers in cultural sensitivity and support, in providing appropriate and necessary education for refugee youth.

Overall, there are mixed experiences from refugee youth in U.S. public schools, but the literature has determined school practices to generally be unsupportive to refugee youth. Although different programs are available for unaccompanied refugee youth in education such as ESOL, sheltered immersion, transitional bilingual education and two-way bilingual education (Hos 2012); Programs seem to fail in providing them with sufficient emotional support. Thus, there is a need for schools to focus on elements of ethics of care and culturally responsive pedagogy when working with refugee youth.

While teachers and social workers are trying to provide resources to address the physical, emotional and psycho-social needs of URMS, resources and information are significantly lacking on refugee youth. Most of the literature available are focused on refugees as a general population. If there is a focus on youth, it is more likely related to mental health status and how mental health effect acculturation; rather than social adjustment experiences. Information, resources or research on unaccompanied refugee youth – especially relating to experiences in school – is even more limited. There is evidence of literature focused on unaccompanied refugee minors and of literature focused on refugee experience in schools. However, there is close to no available literature on the intersection of those two topics, URMs’ experiences and needs in schools specifically. The two studies that addressed this gap and served as a strong basis for this paper were Carrie A. Hartwell’s (2011) study, *Former Unaccompanied Refugee Minors: Stories of Life in Resettlement*, and Rabia Hos’s (2012) study, *The Experiences of Refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education in an Urban Secondary School Newcomer Program*.

Hartwell's (2011) study focused on the life stories of twenty young adult refugees who were former unaccompanied refugee minors. She provided that before 2011, only thirteen studies have been published in academic literature regarding the lives and adaptation of URMs. Of these, only seven focused on the experiences of URMs resettled in the United States. The purpose of Hartwell's study was to discover and examine first-hand perspectives and experiences of former unaccompanied refugee minors through an inductive exploration of their individual life stories. The participants of the study were twenty young adult refugees (eighteen male and two female), located in the mid-Atlantic, who had been in custody of a URM program within the last six years. They were recruited through mutual contacts of Hartwell's and given compensation for their participation. The study involved one-on-one interviews with each of the participants, which lasted approximately 2 hours each. In these interviews, participants were asked to tell Hartwell about their life since they came to the U.S. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and analyzed to better understand URM experiences.

Similarly, Hos's (2012) study used an ethnographic methodology to examine the experiences of refugee students in an urban secondary school newcomer program – specifically refugee students with interrupted formal education. The study explored the practices of the classroom teacher as well as, the perceptions of adolescent refugee students of their experiences in a newcomer program. The participants of the study were nineteen refugee students (thirteen male and six female), grade 7 – 12 in a newcomer program at Georgetown high school. The study was conducted during the 2010 – 2011 school year and consisted of participant observations, field notes, video-recording of activities, one-on-one

interviews with the students and a collection of artifacts including curriculum and students work. The purpose of Hos's study was to provide insights to researchers, practitioners and policymakers to better understand the experiences of refugee students in secondary school and thus improve the education provided to them.

Hartwell (2011) and Hos (2012) inform the current study by providing URMs' direct experiences and perceptions of acculturation in the U.S. and in urban schools. The two studies are heavily relied on due to the personal and individual experiences recorded directly from current and former URMs. As Hartwell (2011) stated, before 2011 only seven studies were published about URM experiences in the United States. Thus, these two studies are crucial in providing necessary, recent evidence about the resources provided to URMs in U.S. urban schools and the perceptions of URMs on the quality of these resources. Unfortunately, the studies still lack in identifying effective practices and lesson plans that can be used to address the needs of URMs in the classroom.

The purpose of the current study is to address a gap in literature on the acculturation experiences of unaccompanied refugee youth in the U.S. and to discuss the role of schools in nurturing and supporting URMs through that process. The practice of an ethics of care, supplemented by culturally responsive pedagogy is emphasized to explore its influence on schools to foster positive relationships that encourage, motivate and guide URMs to better acculturate in the U.S. The research question guiding this study is, what are the benefits of implementing an ethics of care in urban U.S. schools that address the physical, emotional and psychosocial needs of URMs?

The paper first provides background information on the experiences of URM and their arrival process when they reach the United States. Next, a description of the theoretical framework is provided to inform an analysis of teaching methods in U.S urban schools. The next section, goes on to discuss the challenges and needs of both URM in schools, as well as teachers. These areas are then analyzed in conjunction with each other, to determine what is lacking in schools that make URM feel unsupported. This is followed by a discussion of the ethics of care and how it benefits URM experiences in schools and in their acculturation process, as well as the culture of education. By researching strategies of ethics of care and supportive inclusion, practices of creating a supportive environment in school will help unaccompanied refugee minors better acculturate in the United States. Without this additional research and understanding of URM experiences, they remain an extremely underserved population in the United States.

## TERMINOLOGY

The lives of children who migrate to the United States are impacted by how they are categorized and identified by the U.S. government. Depending on their categorization, they are eligible for certain services and must face certain proceedings. Thus, an understanding and clarification of terms, as they are used in this paper, is necessary. The terms “child”, “children”, “youth”, or “minor” are used interchangeably to refer to a person under the age of 18, which is the legal age in the U.S. To describe a child who comes to the U.S. from another country – through any means – the term “migrant child” is used. The terms of identity for migrant children become more complicated and controversial when children are determined to be immigrants, refugees and/or unaccompanied.

## IMMIGRANT VS REFUGEE IDENTITY

Whenever any population migrates to a new country there is always debate around whether the group of people are identified as refugees or immigrants. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines an “immigrant” as an “...alien in the United States, except one legally admitted under specific nonimmigrant categories,” and a refugee is any person who is outside of their country of nationality and is unable to return to that country due to violence or fear of persecution. Thus, the major and significant difference is that refugees are forced out of their home countries, often in violent circumstances, and cannot return. As a result, many refugees endure traumatic journeys and violence and oftentimes, witness killings and murders. They do not have a real choice to stay in their home countries, without continuing to endure the psychological, emotional and physical violence imposed on them. Due to these experiences, many refugees suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

It is important to keep in mind that when a person arrives at U.S. borders, the U.S. government officials assign his or her status. In other words, refugees are stripped of their right to their own identity, and must surrender that right to government officials. This process is problematic because many migrant children who have fled their home countries due to violence are denied refugee status in discretion of the U.S. government. This process enables government officials to abuse their power by not recognizing the experiences of these children.

## UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS

An unaccompanied alien child is defined by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 as a child who “has no lawful immigration status in the United States, is under 18 years of age,

and has no parent or legal guardian in the country present or available to provide care and physical custody” (Byrne 2012). The term “unaccompanied refugee minor” is thus used to distinguish children who not only arrive in the U.S. alone, but also face the traumatic experiences of being a refugee. These circumstances make URM’s a highly vulnerable population, especially when arriving in a completely new country. The next section provides a detailed description of the process of URM’s arriving in the United States and moving through the immigration system.

## BACKGROUND

### MIGRATION OF UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS TO THE U.S.

In the 1980s, the number of unaccompanied children arriving in the United States increased drastically due to war, violence, persecution and/or poverty. At the time, the majority of the children were crossing the U.S./Mexico border from Central America. This is still true today, where in FY2015, 97% of URM’s apprehended by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) were from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador or Mexico. This percentage was 97% in FY2014, 95% in FY2013 and 96% in FY2012 (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2015). The main reasons children reported for leaving their home countries to come to the U.S. were the increased violence and poverty that they were experiencing on a daily basis (American Immigration Council 2014, Jones & Podkul 2012). Often times, males feared assault or death for not joining gangs or interacting with corrupt government officials, while females feared rape or disappearance at the hands of some groups (Kennedy 2014). The journey of coming to the United States is a dangerous and risky one, in which children put themselves at risk to kidnapping, murder and rape. However, many children take the

journey to escape these traumatic experiences and/or reunite with their family members who have already resettled in the U.S.

## U.S. GOVERNMENT'S IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT FRAMEWORK

There is a large number of United States government agencies that interact with unaccompanied migrant children. These agencies have a complex web of relationships, in which they interact with each other to determine the circumstance and placement of each unaccompanied migrant child that enters the U.S. To understand the general flow of URM's in the immigration system, the main agencies to discuss are U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). As seen in Figure 1 below, CBP and ICE fall under the supervision of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and they are responsible for all immigration enforcement in the United States (Women's Refugee Commission 2014). ORR is responsible for the care, placement and release of unaccompanied children and operate under the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Each of these agencies are further explained below.

Figure 1: Federal Agencies that Interact with Unaccompanied Children as of December 2011

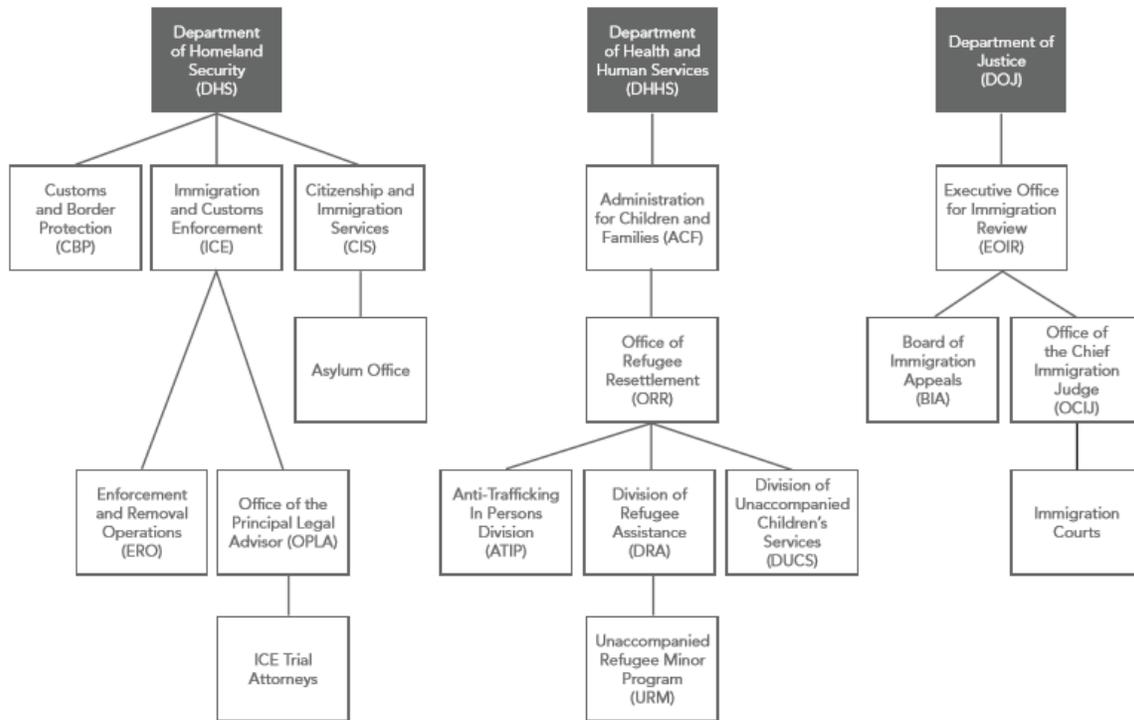


FIGURE 1: FEDERAL AGENCIES THAT INTERACT WITH UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AS OF DECEMBER 2011 (BYRNE 2007)

The primary mission of Customs and Border Protection is to prevent terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the U.S. It is responsible for apprehending individuals attempting to enter the U.S. illegally. Thus, it initially apprehends and detains unaccompanied children who are trying to enter the U.S. without authorization (Women’s Refugee Commission 2014). Two departments of CBP that are most likely to encounter migrant children are the Office of Field Operations (OFO)—which screens all foreign visitors—and Border Patrol (BP)—which works along U.S. borders, in areas between the ports of entry.

Immigration Customs Enforcement is responsible for enforcing immigration laws within the U.S and ensuring that people living in the U.S. have authorization to do so. Most of its resources are directed to its two principal operating components, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO). HSI is responsible for detecting criminal immigrant and ERO is responsible for removing migrants without authorization to remain in the U.S (Women's Refugee Commission 2014).

The most important agency related to the care and process of URM's is the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Most of their services address longer-term care and resources for unaccompanied children who are still undergoing their immigration proceedings. The Division of Unaccompanied Children's Services (DUCS) and the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program (URM) are two agencies created within ORR to better address the needs of URM's in custody. Through these agencies, children receive classroom education, health care, socializing/recreation activities, vocational training, mental health services, case management and assistance with family reunification (Byrne 2012). These agencies are the main actors in moving URM's through the immigration process in the U.S., whether that results in repatriation or reunification in the U.S. While under the supervision of these agencies, there are policies and laws in place that prevent government abuse and protect the basic rights of URM's.

## PROTECTION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS' HUMAN RIGHTS

There are specific policies in place that protect the general human rights of unaccompanied immigrant children during apprehension. The most important policy is the *Flores* Settlement Agreement approved in California court in 1997. The *Flores* Settlement

Agreement sets the national policy regarding detention, release and treatment of children in DHS custody. It requires that

juveniles are held in the least restrictive setting appropriate to their age and special needs, to ensure their protection and well-being; that juveniles be released from custody without unnecessary delay to a parent, legal guardian, adult relative, individual specifically designated by the parent, licensed program, or, alternatively an adult who seeks custody whom DHS deems appropriate; and that juveniles will not be detained with an unrelated adult for more than 24 hours (Women's Refugee Commission 2014).

There are other policies that supplement and reinforce the terms of the *Flores* Settlement Agreement including the 1967 United Nations Protocol Relating to Status of Refugees, the 2008 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act and the 2002 Homeland Security Act. The 1967 United Nations Protocol states that the U.S. cannot return an individual to a country where he or she faced prosecution from a government or social group (American Immigration Council 2014). The 2008 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act further protects unaccompanied children against violence by requiring that all unaccompanied children be screened as potential victims of human trafficking (ibid).

DHS and DHHS, including their subsidiary agencies (CBP, ICE, ORR, etc.) are expected to abide by these policies during apprehension to ensure accommodations that suit the needs and best interest of the unaccompanied children. Due to the absence of a parent or guardian, these agencies have full responsibility to the well-being of each URM that remains in its custody. The length of time a URM stays in ORR custody is dependent on the

determination if they can legally stay in the U.S. This process is explained in further detail in the next subsection.

## APPREHENSION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Unaccompanied migrant children enter the U.S. immigration system when they are apprehended by federal authorities for the suspicion of violating immigration law. They are normally apprehended by subsidiaries of DHS, such as CBP, the U.S. Coast Guard, or ICE. After the child is in DHS custody, they are placed in a temporary DHS detention facility, while DHS determines their identity and status (Byrne 2012). The DHS plays the most important role in the processing of immigrant children. As the “gatekeeper” in deciding which children are placed in DUCS custody, “the agency plays a key role in apprehending, repatriating and screening apprehended individuals, conducting age determinations, classifying children as unaccompanied, transferring children to DUCS” (Women’s Refugee Commission et. al. 2009). When officials are uncertain of a migrant child’s age, DHS sometimes request dental or skeletal radiograph (Byrne 2012). Once DHS determines that an individual is under the age of 18 and he or she meets the definition of an unaccompanied child, he or she must be transferred to an appropriate facility through ORR within 72 hours of apprehension (Women’s Refugee Commission 2014). If the person is determined to be 18 years or older, the person will stay in custody of DHS.

## ORR INTAKE AND PLACEMENT

Between 2008 and 2010, URM admissions into ORR averaged at a monthly rate of 596 new admissions (Byrne 2012). Once admitted in ORR custody, children receive care through different local providers including nonprofit organizations and governmental

agencies. As of July 2011, approximately 50 ORR/DUCS-funded facilities and programs were operating in 12 states. While ORR begins the intake and placement process, these facilities must provide URMs with classroom education, health care, socializing/recreation activities, vocational training, mental health services, case management and assistance with family reunification (Byrne 2012).

To determine the placement of each URM, the ORR gathers as much information as possible from ICE about the child – including gender, age, country of origin, date and location of apprehension, and medical and psychological condition. This information is used to classify the child according to security level and needs, evaluate which DUCS-funded facilities have available capacity, and make the placement decision (Byrne 2012). ORR has 4 initial facilities to place URMs: shelter care, staff-secure care, secure care and short-term foster care (Women’s Refugee Commission 2014). Additionally, URMs may also be transferred to long-term foster care, extended-care group home, residential treatment centers, or specialized therapeutic staff-secure programs. ORR field staff are instructed to continually assess each child to determine whether they should be transferred to an alternative placement, which results in URMs constantly moving through different facilities. URMs remain in ORR custody until they are released in one of two ways: reunification with a sponsor in the U.S. or repatriation (repatriation refers to the process of returning an individual to their country of origin or citizenship). The process of finding a sponsor normally begins within 24 hours of the URM arriving at the facility. Between 2008 and 2010 the length of stay per DHS referral to ORR custody ranged from less than a day to 710 days (VERA 2012). The majority of URMs (75%) during this time remained in DUCS care for

one week to four months. Once a URM is released, they have a right to enroll in local schools, while awaiting any immigration proceedings, regardless of their or their sponsors immigration or citizenship status.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents three theoretical frameworks that are drawn upon for the current study: (1) ethics of care, (2) culturally responsive pedagogy, and (3) resilience across cultures. The section describes the core principles of each theoretical framework and describes the relationships among the theories. The theories are further discussed through their contribution to the analysis of teaching methods used in U.S. urban schools to meet the needs of and effectively educate URMs.

### THE ETHICS OF CARE

The ethics of care is an ethical theory that uses a relational and context-based approach toward morality and decision making (Noddings 1984). An ethics of care emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between the “one caring” and the “one cared for.” Although the positions of giving and receiving care will always be identified in the relationship, it is a reciprocal action because both parties are required to have a willingness to acknowledge the other person’s right to be who they are. They must also have an openness to encountering them in their authentic individuality and a loyalty to the relationship (Starratt 2004). In other words, as much as the one caring expresses their care through their action, the one cared for must also express care through appreciation of receiving it. When applied to education, an ethics of care embodies the sense that we must do something right when others address us, and we should have the genuine interest to do so. Doing right by someone

in the classroom is still a reciprocal interaction, although different positions of power of teacher and student are in play. In the classroom, this is communicated through the teacher's response to the individual needs of their students and the students' response to the efforts of their teachers. This involves teachers working closely with students and adjusting to their needs and interests. When teachers dedicate to an ethics of care it must be based on an ongoing interest in the students' welfare (Noddings 1992).

Noddings (1984) believes that caring should be at the core of the educational system where the teacher is the "one caring" and the student is the "one cared for." An ethics of care in educational contexts include aesthetic caring and authentic caring. Aesthetics caring addresses the teacher's engagement and connection in the profession. Authentic caring on the other hand, addresses the teacher's investment in the individual students themselves, apart from the curriculum (Noddings 1984). Thus, to be an effective, caring teacher one must be engaged with the student, committed to the student and motivate the student by means of education.

Noddings emphasizes that although schools are not often the place where caring is fulfilled, teachers have the agency to create caring environments that foster caring individuals (Noddings 1984). Schools are often focused around discipline, academic success and improving learning habits. In their nature, schools are rarely focused on teaching students how to be caring, which is an important for their growth. Thus, through practicing an ethics of care not only build strong relationship with students through caring, but it also teaches students to be caring towards the teacher and towards each other. This learning occurs through the model of being caring that teach exemplifies by practicing an ethics of

care. In order for ethical care to occur, teachers should see themselves as responsible for empowering the students and as a result, students are more motivated and feel more confident to perform well in school. There are four means in practicing an ethic of care in schools: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings 1992). Modeling is the act of teachers performing behavior they expect from students and what it means to care. Dialogue refers to the engagement in discussions with students about topics they care about and providing an open and honest space for these discussions. Practice is providing opportunities for the students to exercise caring relationships with each other as well as teachers and administrators. Lastly, confirmation refers to encouraging the best in students and utilizing their strengths in the classroom.

The practice of an ethics of care in classrooms is important when working with URM students, because when they arrive in the U.S. they no longer have familiar parental or guardian figures that accompany them in the process of acculturation. Thus, these sources of nurturing and care are sought elsewhere, often times in schools. This can be a difficult emotional and mental process for URM students in accepting and trusting another adult figure in their lives. An ethics of care from teachers can help alleviate those tensions, because the teacher as the “one caring” has the willingness to be understanding and provide a welcoming environment. This allows URM students to take time to become comfortable and trusting of the classroom and the teacher. In order to effectively establish caring relationships with URM students, teachers must also become familiar with students’ cultural backgrounds. This leads to the next theoretical framework applied to the study, culturally responsive pedagogy.

## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY/CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching is reform that grew out of the civil rights movement and the emergence of multicultural education. In urban schools, most teachers are trained to teach students from middle-class families. When teachers find themselves in a classroom of minority students, immigrant students and students from diverse backgrounds, they are inadequately prepared to teach and care for these students (Brown 2003). Culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching is “a response to traditional curricular and instructional methods that have been often ineffective for students of color, immigrant children, and students from lower socioeconomic families” (Vavrus 2008). It facilitates and supports the achievement of all students through teaching and learning that “...occur in a culturally supported, learner-centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement” (Richards et. al 2007). Culturally responsive pedagogy strives to increase the engagement and motivation of students from diverse backgrounds, by acknowledging and infusing the culture of students into school curriculum and making meaningful connections with community cultures (Vavrus 2008).

There are three main components to culturally responsive pedagogy. The first is institutional, which addresses the need for reform in school policies and procedures to better accommodate the diverse student population in schools – urban schools especially. Second is the personal dimension which addresses the cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage to become culturally responsive. This includes self-reflection, confrontation of biases, and learning about the history and experiences of diverse groups. The last dimension is instructional which requires the recognition and utilization of the students’ culture and

language in instruction materials, strategies and activities (Richards et. al 2007). Teachers must develop a knowledge base about cultural diversity by communicating with ethnically diverse students while demonstrating care and building learning communities (Gay 2002). Culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to acknowledge the conceptual and cultural resources or assets that culturally different students bring to their schools and then to affirm the backgrounds of all students (Vavrus 2008). It creates an environment where all students are welcomed and supported and provided with the best opportunity to learn.

Culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching is a crucial practice for urban schools that work with URMs, because their identities as refugees adds additional cultural differences that separate them from U.S.-born students. It adds the difficulty of language barriers, new learning styles and unfamiliarity with the culture of U.S. schools for the URM student. URM students also have the vulnerability of adapting to a foreign country and may not have found a comfortable environment in which they feel they belong. Thus, teachers must also provide spaces of care and trust, through culturally responsive practices, which bridges the ethics of care to this theory. It is the responsibility of the teacher to exercise culturally responsive teaching through awareness and knowledge of different URMs' cultures and experiences. Through this practice, teachers can better accommodate to URMs social, emotional and cognitive needs, while also providing them with their best opportunity for quality education. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching enables teachers to notice the strengths of the students and highlight those strengths in their school performance. This ties into the next theory that emphasizes a strength-based approach to refugee child development.

## RESILIENCE ACROSS CULTURES

The theory of resilience across cultures offers a culturally cognizant perspective on the traditional risk and resilience framework, stating that global, cultural and contextual aspects of people's lives contribute to their resilience. Resilience can be defined as "...patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant risk or adversity" (Ungar 2008). When discussing youth resilience, different families and communities may offer a child different resources that sustain a child's well-being. It is important to recognize those cultural and contextual differences that may impact a child's resilience.

The central concept of resilience across cultures is "...the capacity of individuals to access resources that enhance their well-being, and the capacity of their physical and social ecologies to make those resources available in meaningful ways" (Ungar 2010). Ungar emphasizes defining resilience as an interaction between individuals and their environments, not simply individuals' attributes. He argues that resilience is influenced by a child's environment, and that the interaction between individuals and their social ecologies will determine the degree of positive outcomes they experience. When applied to youth development practices, the resilience across cultures theory focuses on positive adjustment within youth, in the face of adversity and trauma, while accounting for cultural and social influences.

The resilience across cultures theory is useful and relevant to the current study because it connects to the traumatic and adverse experiences of URMs. This theory provides a strength-based approach of development in school that recognizes the URMs' active roles in survival. Practicing this theory in classrooms allows the teachers to focus on the strengths

and assets of URMs, rather than highlighting their downfalls. The students' resilience and ideas of resilience can be utilized to help them progress in a new education system.

This section incorporates three theories to create a framework for the analysis of teaching methods in U.S. urban schools to address the needs of URMs. The intersection of the three theories – an ethics of care, culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching and resilience across cultures – speaks directly to the unique experiences of URMs and how their needs can be addressed in the classroom. By embodying caring and culturally responsive practices, teachers not only allow themselves to be aware of the different individual circumstances of each student, but also create a supportive learning environment that is cognizant of each students' needs. Thus, the incorporation of activities and learning content that is representative of each URM student acts as a motivating tool for the students to do well. It also is a validation of students' identity, giving them a sense of belonging, which in turn fosters a nurturing relationship between URM students and the teacher. While, the classroom curriculum does not need to be completely individualized, this does not prevent the teacher to provide extra resources when necessary, for the benefit of the students' educational and personal growth.

This commitment to fostering a positive educational, psycho-social and physical development of URM students is further enhanced with the addition of the resilience across cultures theory. This last theory emphasizes the importance of focusing on the strengths of students due to their ability to remain resilience and seek out resources, despite the adversities they have had to experience. When being culturally cognizant and practicing resilience across cultures, teachers are able to identify URM students by their strengths and

personalities, rather than by their refugee status. Thus, by creating a caring and culturally conscious environment that is able to provide resources for resilient URM students, teachers are able to address URMs psycho-social, physical and educational needs, while also being a positive adult support system in their lives.

## CHALLENGES AND NEEDS OF URMS IN SCHOOL

In order to examine the ways that an ethics of care can benefit the acculturation experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors in the U.S., we must first identify their challenges and needs. URMs are a distinct group in the U.S. that have high needs, but get little attention. Many refugee minors in general have experienced and witnessed traumatic events including political violence, war, mass murders, family deaths, torture and rape. These events that force them out of their home countries, effects their psychosocial, emotional and physical well-being, which often leads to difficulties in resettling in a new country. URMs have a unique experience that makes them more vulnerable in a new country, which is arriving without a parent or guardian. Some URMs lose their parents to death or murder, while others lose them during their journey to a new country. Thus, URMs face the additional challenge of lacking guidance from someone they trust, while trying to adapt to a completely new country and culture.

In this section, the challenges for URMs in schools are discussed and analyzed. Most of the challenges discussed apply to the general experience of URMs adapting to a new life in the U.S, but for the purpose of this study, the focus is placed on school environments. The major challenges that have been identified consistently in different literature are (1) separation and loss of family members, (2) language barriers, (3) psychosocial well-being,

(4) stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, and (5) adapting to a new culture (Hos 2012, McBrien 2005, Lee 2012, Hartwell 2011, Cooper 2014, Gahungu et al. 2011, and Bogner 2005).

These challenges are further analyzed to determine the needs of URMs to successfully acculturate in the U.S., which can be met in schools. Through the lens of a caring, culturally responsive and strength-based framework, teachers are able to nurture URM students through these different challenges and schools are able to become supporting and motivating environments. In order for teachers to do this effectively, there needs to be an intentionality in their curriculum to support the diverse backgrounds of students that are at the root of how they experience these challenges.

#### SEPARATION AND LOSS OF FAMILY MEMBERS

The separation and/or loss of a family member due to war and conflict is a major challenge for URMs that makes their experiences of acculturation in the U.S. unique from other refugee children. The loss of a child's parents and family members can lead to an increase in migration stress which is defined as "the confusion that arises when one moves to a new place without the support of family and friends" (Hos 2012). Many URMs experience anxiety and depression because they find themselves in a completely foreign world, without someone to console, guide or support them. Although many URMs end up in foster care or reunited with an identified family member, this does not necessarily provide URMs with a safe or familiar environment. In many cases, URMs do not know the people in the foster homes and they do not know the identified family member due to lack of communication. In Hartwell's (2011) study of the experiences of former unaccompanied

refugee minors, one of the males she interviewed talked about his initial feelings of being in foster care and how he had to share a room with a guy he did not know. He stated,

...I was really scared for him, all night, all night...because he was this big guy and he was tall, really... I don't think if I slept for a couple nights...and I didn't know who this people are. I don't know if they're gonna kill me...I have nothing, no idea at all. And even if I am not comfortable, what should I do? I didn't have anything to do. I didn't have any options. I mean, I have to stay here. I don't know anybody. (Hartwell 2011).

This was a common feeling expressed by other former URMs in Hartwell's (2011) study. Thus, these seemingly sufficient support systems result in an increase of anxiety for URMs due to unfamiliarity and distrust of their host families.

This circumstance effects how URMs navigate their new environment and culture, and the responsibilities that they must take on due to the absence of an adult figure. The major challenges that coincide with the loss of family members are lacking the guidance and support of parents, difficulties in foster care, and bearing weighty and multiple adult responsibilities at a young age (Hartwell 2011). One male in Hartwell's (2011) study stated, "What the hardest stuff is not having parents with you...to like, guide you, or to put you in the right path, or, to tell you if you are doing wrong or right. Or, a parent you can talk to...or something..." (Hartwell 2011). As mentioned in the quote, a common theme identified in literature is the vulnerability of URMs to negative peer or cultural influences due to lack of adult guidance (Hartwell 2011, Lee 2012, Hos 2012).

It is clear that URMs are in need of safe and trusting relationships with adult figures that will help them through the process of resettlement and acculturation. The loss of their parents require them to search for this nurture and care elsewhere. This is where the role of teachers and administrators in schools has a significant impact on the lives of URMs. Youth are in school for approximately eight hours of the day, in the presence of the same teacher/s every day. By implementing an ethics of care and embracing culturally diverse backgrounds, teachers and administrators have the ability to create welcoming environments and caring relationships with their students. In the circumstances of URMs, teachers become one of the few guardian figures that they can grow to trust and feel safe with. In order to feel comfortable and supported in the acculturation process, URMs need nurturing relationships with an adult figure in the U.S. When teachers are one of the few adult figures they consistently encounter daily, it becomes a responsibility of the teacher to nurture and care for URM students.

## LANGUAGE BARRIERS

One of the most common and well-known challenges for all refugee children coming to the U.S. is the challenge of learning a new language in a new country. Some refugee children come to the U.S. with little English skills, but most come with no English skills at all. The lack of English language skills effect a wide variety of everyday situations that they encounter and do not understand. It presents many difficulties for URMs especially, in learning about their new environments, keeping up with school work, understanding their social workers and teachers, and making friends in school. In multiple studies, it was found

that there is a strong correlation between alienation and insufficient English language skill (McBrien 2005, Hartwell 2011, Hos 2012). In Hartwell's (2011) study one male stated,

Most of them were kind, I mean, until I reached middle school and that's when, it was like, 'Oh, you can't speak this word, you can't hang with us.' Part of it felt like it was (because I was) from another place, and part of it felt like it was just the English deficiency (Hartwell 2011).

Many former URMs in Hartwell's (2011) study expressed this feeling of being isolated and rejected because of their heavy accents and difficulty with English. In some situations, URMs also found it difficult to get adults to intervene in problems they experienced, because of their limited ability to communicate the situation and their needs (Hartwell 2011). Other times, URMs would experience being falsely accused for acts they did not do, either because others were taking advantage of their limited English skills, or because they were unable to explain or verbally defend themselves. Although most URMs acquire formal English language skills, they still lack skills in casual and slang usage in the English language (McBrien 2005). This would further separate them from their peers.

Another challenge that is not often discussed is the difference between spoken English and academic English. In some cases, URMs may have sufficient English language skills, but be deficient in academic English, which includes language of instruction and academic jargon (McBrien 2005). Teachers often assume that URMs' spoken English language skill is reflective of their ability to understand academic English, which still leaves

URM students confused in classrooms. As students become overwhelmed by this language barrier, or misidentified as being able to use academic English, they become more prone to failure and giving up (Cooper 2014). Teachers must be aware of URMs' actual English language skill on all levels, to more accurately tend to their needs. This can be achieved through the practice of an ethics of care and culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers can take the initiative to invest in extra time to work one-on-one with students to determine their English language skill levels, academically and socially. By committing this time for each student, teachers display an interest and care for each student's personal growth, which can be positively received by the student to invest in their own growth. Additionally, being culturally responsive and taking time to understand the backgrounds and experiences of each student, will help teachers better understand their students' skill levels and challenges. As a result, teachers as well as students can work more effectively together towards educational and psychosocial growth for URM students.

It is evident that students with good English language skills are better adjusted to their U.S. school environments (McBrien 2005, Hartwell 2011). As a result, URMs need effective English Language Learning (ELL) classes in order to retain and acquire English language skills, not only to prosper in the classroom, but to also help them navigate everyday life. Improving English language skills is crucial for URMs to communicate with others and to express themselves in their new environment. Through these social practices, URMs are able to identify a sense of self and belonging in the U.S., improving their experiences with acculturation.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

The various experiences of URM's are likely to cause many psychological problems such as depression, sleep disorders and emotional instability (Hos 2012). Therefore, a major challenge is maintaining a healthy psychosocial well-being when resettling in the U.S. As mentioned previously, many URM's arrive in the U.S. with PTSD because of the loss of family members, stressful memories of war and violence, homesickness and unfamiliarity with the place where they are resettled. The stress and fear many URM's experience are influenced by their difficulties to find a sense of safety on their own, in a new environment. In addition to the existing stress of navigating a new environment and culture, URM's find themselves trying to navigate their own identities. Upon arriving in the U.S., URM's are left to find a sense of self, while adjusting to the cultural expectations of a new country and maintaining a connection to their heritage (McBrien 2005). When URM's arrive to the U.S. at a young age (0-17 years old), they are in a stage of self-discovery. When adding the influence of a completely new environment, their identities are reshaped with U.S. influences. Many URM's struggle with the frustrations of needing to adapt to U.S. culture to be accepted, while also wanting to keep their native culture very present in themselves. This negotiation can be a difficult and stressful process for URM's.

The psychosocial stress experienced by many URM's also affects their performance in school, as well as in their everyday lives. In Hos's (2012) study on the experiences of refugees in an U.S. urban secondary-school, the experiences of one Burmese boy as a child soldier largely effected his ability to focus in class. He would easily become upset during class and could not pay attention for the rest of the day (Hos 2012). The teacher stated she would send him to counseling services, but they often just sent him home. This exemplifies

the lack of a caring environment in schools because there is no psychological support for URM students, and the counseling resources provided did not invest time in their students. When URM students are not emotionally or psychologically stable, they lose motivation and confidence to continue their efforts in school and in their resettlement process. In such a situation, components of the ethics of care and resilience across cultures framework can be implemented, through the school's investment in counseling resources. The practice of caring would inform students that counseling services will always be available when they need it, and in the case of this Burmese student, a counselor can work to identify his personality strengths from his experience of being resilient, despite being a child soldier. This nurturing conversation can turn into goals made by the URM student and counselor together, to use those strengths to continue to grow in his personal and academic life.

Different refugee students in Hos's (2012) study voiced their need for psychological support, especially in school. The more opportunities that URM students have to explore their cultural and ethnic identities, the more self-esteem they will have and the less depressed they will feel. Additionally, the opportunities that URM students have to interact and become involved with U.S. culture, such as extracurricular activities, going to different local areas, and understanding their neighborhoods also effects their psychological well-being. URM students must learn how to navigate these two environments simultaneously, which can further cause anxiety and discouragement. These psychological difficulties exemplify that analyzing school and classroom practices in the lens of a caring, culturally responsive and strength-based framework is crucial, for not only promoting URM students educational growth, but also supporting their psychosocial, emotional and physical well-being. Thus, there is a need for

readily available counseling that is both understanding and sensitive to URM's experiences. This would provide URM's with the necessary guidance on how to grasp these drastic changes in their lives and how to manage them effectively, especially when they are also experiencing prejudice and discrimination in their new environments.

## STEREOTYPES, PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

The psychosocial well-being of URM's is largely affected by the treatment they receive when they arrive in the U.S. – whether people are welcoming or rejecting to their presence. Unfortunately, many URM's experience stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination from adults, teachers, and their student peers. After being forced out of their home countries, facing traumatic experiences, and arriving in the U.S. completely alone, prejudice and discrimination are some of the biggest emotional challenges that URM's have to face.

In some schools that serve URM students, there are hostile social environments that go unaddressed, from both the students and the teachers. Some teachers make assumptions about URM students that affects their learning. These include the assumption that refugees don't value education, refugees have low intelligence, and refugees have learning disabilities (McBrien 2005). In Hartwell's (2011) study, one female stated that her teacher was talking to her as if she came from a jungle (Hartwell 2011). This treatment and attitude from teachers diminishes URM's validation of their own identities. When their teachers treat them as if they are disabled and worthless, some URM's often internalize this behavior and this affects how they perform in school. In some cases, URM students drop out of school because of their self-perception of their academic ability decreases and the negative environment that school becomes (McBrien 2005).

This discrimination is also experienced with their peers. There is a lack of awareness of stereotypes regarding other students' background and cultures, so many students end up insulting and isolating URMs based on their race and identity as refugees. In Hartwell's (2011) study, one student talked about how his peers would ask stereotypical questions or make comments about their home continent. He stated,

“They was nice to me, but the students, sometimes they pick on me, because of the way I talk, the way I dress...They used to ask me... do y'all wear clothes in Africa? Do you have cars? Do you all eat food? Do you all walk naked on the street? So I used to keep to myself all the time” (Hartwell 2011).

URM students would constantly be bullied and teased in their classrooms. This is the type of negative environment that would discourage URMs to do well in school and it would cause them to question their place and belonging in the U.S. This discrimination can increase school-dropout rates to increase for URMs. The rejection from peers and teachers make URMs feel segregated and this fear prevents them from participating in school activities (McBrien 2005). Many URMs are not prepared for the stereotypes that they experience, and thus do not know how to handle them. The experiences mentioned here do not take into account any discrimination the URMs may face outside of school. Thus, instead of practicing a value of rejection in classrooms, teachers need to practice caring with their students and encourage and teach students to care for each other. The more that teachers openly embrace

cultural diversity and caring relationships in their classrooms, the more comfortable URM students will be with themselves and their belonging in the U.S., easing their process of acculturation.

Stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination is not productive, helpful or supportive for any group of people, especially for URM students. These examples call for a need in culturally responsive environments in schools serving URM students. In order for URM students to feel comfortable and welcomed to acculturate in the U.S., culturally sensitive spaces must be provided, so URM students do not feel ridiculed, unimportant or insignificant. They must be supported and motivated through cultural exploration while also learning about U.S. culture.

#### ADAPTING TO A NEW CULTURE

The last significant challenge for URM students discussed in this section is the difficulty of adapting to a new environment and culture in the U.S. This challenge is a combination of all of the challenges and circumstances mentioned above, while also taking into account cultural differences such as etiquettes and social norms. When arriving in the U.S. many URM students experienced a lack of information or preparation for the resettlement process. They have little or no knowledge about where they were going or about their living arrangement once they arrived to the U.S. This caused high anxiety about who would be their caregivers once they arrived. In Hartwell's study, one young man recalled his experience of meeting a social worker, "I said we cannot live with this lady, we don't understand what she's saying. I can't communicate with her. So I was just worried" (Hartwell 2011). Many URM students experienced this feeling of fear and anxiety because of the uncertainty of what was going to happen to them.

After settling in with their caretakers, URM students still faced challenges with understanding cultural differences in everyday life, as well as in school. This was a big issue, because sometimes URM students would not be able to request assistance because of their inability to effectively communicate with those around them (Hartwell 2011). This also became evident as an issue when URM students would get into fights and arguments with their foster families over cultural misunderstandings.

The challenge of adapting to a new environment and culture was also prevalent in school systems. Many URM students did not know the requirements for high school graduation when they entered the U.S. public school system. Thus, when they thought they could graduate the same year as their U.S.-born student peers, they actually had a couple more years to complete. This is because, students do not receive credit for newcomer program courses that they take before enrolling in public school (Hos 2012). This affects their future career trajectories and their understanding of what they need to do to achieve their goals. Another big challenge in school that is experienced by many URM students is the anxiety or dissatisfaction with school placements in relation to their prior education. Sometimes students would be placed in a higher grade than they had attended prior to their arrival in the U.S. or in a lower grade (Hartwell 2011). These inaccuracies and misinformation affect the URM students' perception of themselves and how they perceive success in the future.

The evidence of these discrepancies calls for a need of U.S. culture courses or workshops to be integrated into URM education in the U.S. In addition, there is a need for teachers and administrators to carefully assess URM students' level of education and correctly place them in the necessary grade level. This can be done by again, practicing an ethics of care

and investing time in their students to understand their circumstances and nurture their educational growth. In addressing these needs, URM students will be educationally supported and motivated to accomplish their goals in the U.S.

This section discussed five major challenges that URM students face when acculturating in the U.S. These included the separation and loss of family members, language barriers, psychosocial well-being, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, and adapting to a new culture. These challenges experienced by URM students implies that there is a need for positive social support – especially from an adult figure, effective ESL classes, psychological counseling services – that promote identity exploration, positive and culturally aware educational experiences, and effective U.S culture workshops. In the lens of the theoretical framework for this paper, these needs can be met through a change in attitude and practices in school systems. While an entire school system may not be changed immediately, teachers can implement an ethics of care to create emotionally safe, comfortable and nurturing environments for URM students. Considering the amount of time spent in school and the level of importance of education for URM students' acculturation experience, teachers have the ability to create positive environments that promote URM students' success. Through the use of safe and supportive learning environments in classrooms, teachers can meet the psychosocial, emotional, physical and academic needs of URM students in the U.S.

## CHALLENGES FOR URBAN SCHOOLS

UNHCR stated that education is not only a fundamental human right, but also a component of refugee children's rehabilitation (McBrien 2005). Education is crucial for restoring social and emotional healing for URM students, because schools are one of the first places

they encounter in the U.S. Once enrolled in school, they are put in a routine of going there every day, in the same environment with the same people. The environment of school and education becomes the resource for URMs to learn social and academic skills that influence their acculturation in the U.S. Thus, teachers and administrators are key in facilitating socialization and acculturation for refugee children in the U.S. However, they also face challenges that hinder them from providing URMs with the best opportunity to quality education and learning.

In this section, the challenges of teaching URMs for teachers and administrators in schools are discussed. Overall, many teachers find it challenging and overwhelming to manage the education of students from different cultures and different language abilities. The major challenges that have been identified are (1) lack of training and preparation for teachers, (2) developing modified programs that cater to students and (3) lack of resources and funding from the city. Unfortunately, there was no literature found specifically addressing URMs, but this information still applies to their circumstances. Analyzing these challenges through the lens of an ethics of care, culturally responsive pedagogy and resilience across cultures, in conjunction with URMs' challenges, will help distinguish necessary practices necessary in U.S. urban schools to support URMs.

#### **LACK OF TRAINING AND PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS**

In urban schools, teachers have the responsibility of catering to a racially and socioeconomically diverse group of students. However, when faced with an influx of URM students in their classrooms, the differing levels of skills and circumstances increase. Teachers now face the challenge of educating students that differ in various English language

skills, educational experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Classroom management in these urban schools is more difficult than in rural or suburban schools because teachers must gain students' cooperation while ensuring their learning involves addressing students' cultural, ethnic, social, identity development, language, and safety needs, as well as their academic growth.

Unfortunately, the literature indicates that many teachers feel unprepared or unable to adequately meet the psychosocial needs of refugee and URM students, due to the lack of training and preparation given to teachers. Most teachers in urban schools are trained to teach students from middle-class backgrounds (Brown 2003). In a study done by Jenny Miller, Jane Mitchell and Jill Brown (2005), it was found that teachers had difficulty dealing with the new and highly vulnerable group for which their prior teaching experience had not prepared them, accompanied by feeling that they were barely able to cope with the demands of the students. For example, one teacher commented that "...she needed to go back to basic number operations for 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Students didn't know the difference between a fraction and a percentage, and her comment was, 'that's not the part we are supposed to be teaching'" (Miller 2005). It was evident that mainstream teachers felt that long experiences in teaching were of little practical use, when working with refugee students. This often results in teachers not only inadequately educating refugee students, but also teachers questioning their own professional skills.

A specific challenge prevalent in the literature was determining the grade level in which a refugee and URM student should be placed. Refugee children are usually enrolled in school with the help of their refugee resettlement agency. Additionally, the refugee

resettlement agency works with the schools through a series of surveys and assessments to determine the URMs' grade placement (Gahungu 2011). However, it is evident that this method is ineffective, because many refugee students end up in grades lower or higher than their grades back in their home countries, or in grade levels that don't match their educational skill level. Teachers have expressed acknowledgement of this issue, but also do not know how to more accurately assess students' educational skill level while taking into account English language level and resettlement experiences in the U.S. (Bogner 2005).

While there is pressure put on schools to address educational needs as well as children's nutrition, housing, psychosocial well-being and other welfare gaps (Bogner 2005), challenges for teachers are increased due to their inadequate knowledge of the strategies needed to connect to diverse students. Teachers are sometimes offered training on cultural competency and refugee experiences that include presentations from professionals in the areas of mental health, English language acquisition, refugee resettlement (Gahungu 2011). However these trainings are hosted after school and are optional for teachers to attend. In many urban school districts, resources are also limited so the backgrounds and needs of various groups are generalized (Nur 2009). The generalization practiced in trainings has a negative impact on how URM students especially, are treated in classrooms.

The unique experiences of URMs and challenges they face discussed in the previous section, exemplifies a need for in-depth and quality training for teachers to be able to address the needs of URMS. Effective teacher trainings are ideal environments where teachers should be encouraged to practice culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms. This would address the prevention of discrimination in classrooms, provide spaces of belonging

for all students, and promote diverse cultural learning. These practices will enhance all students' learning and provide URM students with comfortable spaces to learn about their new environment. As mentioned before, teachers are key in this process of education and acculturation for URM students, so it's imperative they are given the tools and methods to effectively do their jobs.

## DEVELOPING MODIFIED PROGRAMS

The various circumstances and experiences that refugee students have, call for a curriculum that is representative and relatable to their experiences. In entering a completely new environment with new cultural norms and etiquettes, refugee students need an educational environment that not only helps them improve their English language skills and American cultural knowledge, but also is representative of their culture. Additionally, URM students need the nurturing and supporting environment in their curriculum to compensate for going through resettlement on their own. However, with each URM student varying at different skill levels, it is a major challenge for teachers to develop modified programs and curriculums that address every student's needs.

One author recommended individualized instruction, assessment and curriculum that are personalized for every student, based on their needs (Gahungu 2011). However, individualizing supports creates more work and more layers of difficulty for teachers, especially in a class of 25 students consisting of U.S born, refugee, English fluent, ESL, lower-class, middle-class, etc. students. In Miller's study, one teacher strongly expressed,

How can we possibly put all the students in one class, when firstly they enter? They come ...all throughout the year and they are different year levels to begin with, so

how is that going to logistically work?...these are the things that we keep on just going around and we are trying to figure it out and it's quite frustrating as teachers... (Miller 2005).

When teachers do try to develop strategies to cater to students' needs and to help support their acculturation into the mainstream, the teachers have seen uneven success. While some refugee students appreciate the modified work and find accelerated literacy programs helpful, other refugee students completely reject these modified programs. Some students insist on doing the same tasks as other students and are unwilling to enter separate support programs (Miller 2005). Many of the refugee students have expressed that these programs makes them feel embarrassed and they see it as a punishment. Thus, teachers are faced with the dilemma of wanting to devise programs that maximize students' success, while also understanding the students' rejection of these programs (Miller 2005).

Many urban teachers find it difficult to balance the curriculum to address the different circumstances of URMs in their classrooms. They are presented with the challenge of supporting the growth and comfort of URM students, while also providing them with the necessary tools to develop their academic and English language skills. While it can be done, the practice of culturally responsive classrooms and materials requires the support of teachers through adequate resources and funding.

#### LACK OF RESOURCES AND FUNDING

The capacity of a teacher to provide the necessary resources to address the academic, psychosocial, emotional and physical needs of URMs are very dependent on the resources and funding available to them. Unfortunately, many teachers that serve refugees and URMs

are insufficiently supported by school districts and cities. The resources and funding sources that are provided to them to address the needs of URM students are often very limited and often not enough to obtain resources such as different workbooks, textbooks, mentors, ESL tutors and ESL programs for their students. Thus, one of the biggest challenges for teachers serving URM students is gaining sufficient resources and funding, or working with limited funding to provide URM students with quality support and education.

In most cities and school districts, there is a certain amount of money allocated to support the education of immigrant and refugee students in U.S. schools. However, with the increase in immigrant and refugee population in the U.S., funding gets stretched thinner and thinner (Cooper 2014). In most urban schools there is only enough funding to provide a certain number of students with tutors and ESL tutors. This causes administrators to prioritize certain students over others, and sometimes these decisions can cause tension in schools. As described by one teacher in Cooper's (2014) study,

...they decided to tutor the students who were borderline going to pass the End of Year tests. The vast majority of my students were actually below that threshold and so I was told last year that my students were too low to be in this tutoring program. And as a teacher you are like 'what in the world does that mean? That there is a child that is too low to be helped?' (Cooper 2014).

In this situation, the students who need the tutoring, especially ESL students, are denied the service of getting extra assistance in school. The same teacher went on to say that snacks and transportation were provided to students in this tutoring program, so many refugee students who needed those additional support services were denied that.

In conjunction with lack of funding for URM and refugee education support, teachers struggle with a lack of resources to provide for these students. Many teachers serving URM students often have difficulty finding suitable texts and resources for these students. Most mainstream textbooks are at an inappropriate level for URM students who are enrolling in school with limited or no education experience. These students have difficulty understanding English academic language, since they are in the process of learning spoken English language. Some teachers put in a lot of extra work to adapt units and worksheets to the several different ability levels present in their classrooms. In trying to overcome these obstacles, they seek out materials for students with limited literacy or get copies of textbooks that students can take home with them to study more in depth (Miller 2005). However, teachers have difficulty not only in locating accessible materials that address different literacy levels, but also with having the money to purchase more suitable resources for URM students (Miller 2005). As an alternative, teachers would seek materials, booklets and units online to print and photocopy for their students, but they also ran into issues with this because they often had photocopying budgets that limited their ability to produce mass materials.

Many teachers in different urban schools in the U.S. have expressed this frustration of not having enough support or resources to obtain the materials URM students need. In Bogner's (2005) study of refugee education in New York, administrators and teachers expressed how they must independently seek out resources and partnerships for their own schools. One teacher stated,

We don't get any support. Whatever an individual school will do in terms of outreach for the children or family, there is no support from anybody. If you're

talking about the Department of Education, there isn't any; from the region, there isn't any. I mean, you have to have your own resources in terms of knowing what to do and how to go about getting it (Bogner 2005).

The obstacles and lack of support that teachers experience to address the academic needs of URM, puts the pressure on them individually to provide the best quality education and support for URM acculturating in the U.S. While many of these teachers are committed to providing URM with basic needs and promoting their well-being in a new country, as well as promoting their academic achievements, without the financial support of their districts, it is a strenuous and often emotional exhausting demand to fulfill.

This section discussed three major challenges that teachers face when working with refugees and URM in U.S. urban public schools. These included the lack of training and preparation for teachers, developing modified programs for refugees and URM, and the lack of resources and funding. It was evident in the literature that most teachers understood their responsibility to not only fulfill the academic needs of URM, but also to fulfill their emotional, psychosocial, and physical needs. However, most teachers were not provided with sufficient knowledge nor resources to effectively address URM's needs.

The challenges faced by teachers intersect with the challenges experienced by URM discussed in the previous section. At the same time that URM students have difficulty with language acquisition, psychosocial well-being and adapting to a new culture, teachers are having difficulty with funding ESL and tutoring programs, obtaining skill-level appropriate materials, and understanding how to navigate culturally diverse classrooms and creating comfortable spaces. This intersection displays an interest from both students and teachers to

adapt to this new environment and nonconventional form of teaching in the U.S., which can be achieved through an ethics of care.

While, a caring, culturally cognizant and strength-based resilience framework does not address the funding needs of teachers, it still provides a strong basis to build an effective and supportive learning environment for URM students. In terms of practicing culturally responsive pedagogy, this would address URM students' fear of being in a new environment, as well as the teachers' anxiety of teaching a class of diverse backgrounds. By requiring students to talk about their cultures, the students become more comfortable learning about each other in a new environment and the teacher feels more comfortable learning about their students. This could be done through multi-language activities, sharing activities and implementing different cultures in curriculum.

In this cognizant practice of teaching, an ethics of care emphasizes the importance of the development and support of each individual student in a teachers' classroom. The teacher has the ability to instill a practice of care in everyday behavior, tasks and activities in the classroom. This gives teachers the opportunity to know their students more closely and it gives URM students the nurturing and care that they have lost due to the loss of their parents. Through nurturing practices, teachers create a positive, welcoming and safe environment for students to feel comfortable and feel confident in themselves. These positive reinforcements and support system help URM students have a better acculturation experience.

## CONCLUSION

The current study offered a review of available literature on the experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors in U.S. urban schools and how classrooms can be used as a

means to address the psychosocial, emotional and physical needs of URM's in the U.S. It was found that there are two parallel streams of research related to the needs of URM's that do not meet. There is research on the experiences of unaccompanied URM's and research on the experiences of refugees in school. However, there is close to no research on the experiences of URM's in U.S. schools. Consequently, many teachers and administrators are ill-informed and poorly trained on how to work with URM's in classrooms, which leaves the needs of URM's highly unmet.

Due to the absence of a parent or guardian figure, URM's must navigate the stresses, fears and uncertainties of resettling in a new country all on their own. They face challenges such as loss of family members, language barriers, psychosocial well-being, prejudice, and adapting to a new culture. This can cause psychosocial and emotional problems for URM's and create a negative acculturation experience. The loss of their parents is a loss of a caring guardian figure and caring environment, but fortunately these caring systems can be fulfilled in schools. By practicing an ethics of care, culturally responsive pedagogy and strength-based resilience, teachers in urban schools can be those positive and supportive role models and really address the physical, emotional and psychosocial needs of URM's.

The ethics of care emphasizes the relationship of doing good towards those you interact with. This embodies modelling how to be caring, expressing genuine interest to the people you care for and practicing caring within your circles. When applying this practice in classrooms with URM's, this involves the teacher become culturally cognizant, embracing cultural diversity, investing time in working with students individually and having a genuine interest in their academic and social success. Practicing an ethics of care in classrooms will

nurture, motivate and empower URM students to succeed academically and socially. These environments can be easily created in classrooms, where URM students are brought into a routine, encountering the same people and environment every day.

The classroom is a space of opportunity for URM students to become comfortable in their new environment, familiar with U.S. culture, skillful linguistically, and comfortable with their identities. The presence of a supportive and committed teachers and peers is crucial to this process, because even if URM students do not perform well academically, they still need education to become informed and responsible citizens in their new society. Implementing an ethics of care would foster healthy relationships between the students and between the students and teacher, help build confidence within students, provide a trusting environment within school and validate students' experiences and identities. An ethics of care is not only beneficial to URM students, but to all students and it can transform the culture of education to become more invested in building nurturing relationships with students. With additional research on how to practice an ethics of care within the classroom, schools can mobilize in improving education practices to more effectively address the psychosocial, emotional and physical needs of URM students and help them better acculturate in the United States.

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