

Bridges to Literacy for Refugee Teens: A Model for Success

Presenters

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The Global Village Project <http://globalvillageproject.org>

Background

We work with a small group of teenage, female, refugee newcomers at the Global Village Project. These young women all have characteristics that require a very different educational program:

- They are refugees and have come from other countries and cultures not by their own choice
- Most have experienced some trauma due to war, poverty, and family disruption
- They are newcomers to English and to the US culture
- Their schooling has been interrupted, minimal, or nonexistent.
- They begin as nonreaders or beginning readers of English
- Almost all live in low-income families with minimum-wage jobs.
- Most come from cultures with very different cultural norms & expectations for women than the US
- The odds are against their successful completion of high school. Though we don't have disaggregated data regarding the success of refugees, we do know that the latest figures we have show the high school graduation rate for English Learners in Georgia is 34%. We expect it is much lower for refugee women with interrupted education.

The Global Village Project

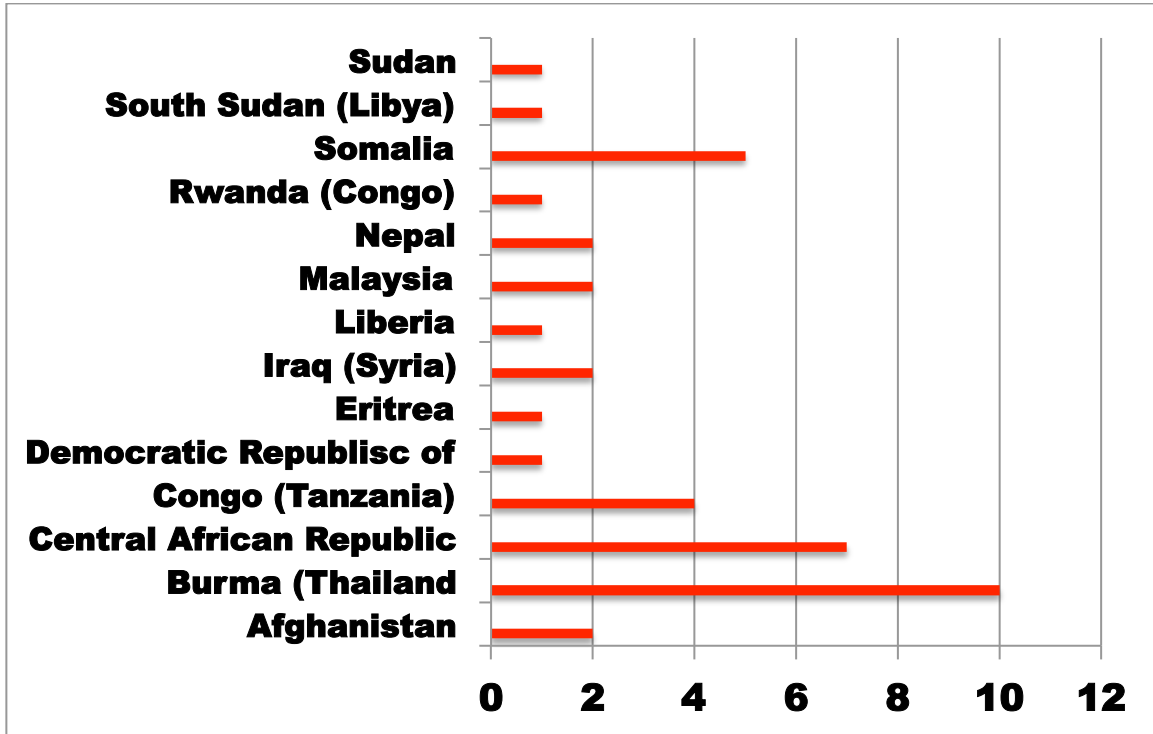
Which is why we established the Global Village Project, a private school completely supported by donations where we work with a small group of these learners. Our mission:

Our mission is to develop a strong educational foundation for each student within a caring community using a strengths-based approach and intensive instruction in English language and literacy, academic subjects, and the arts.

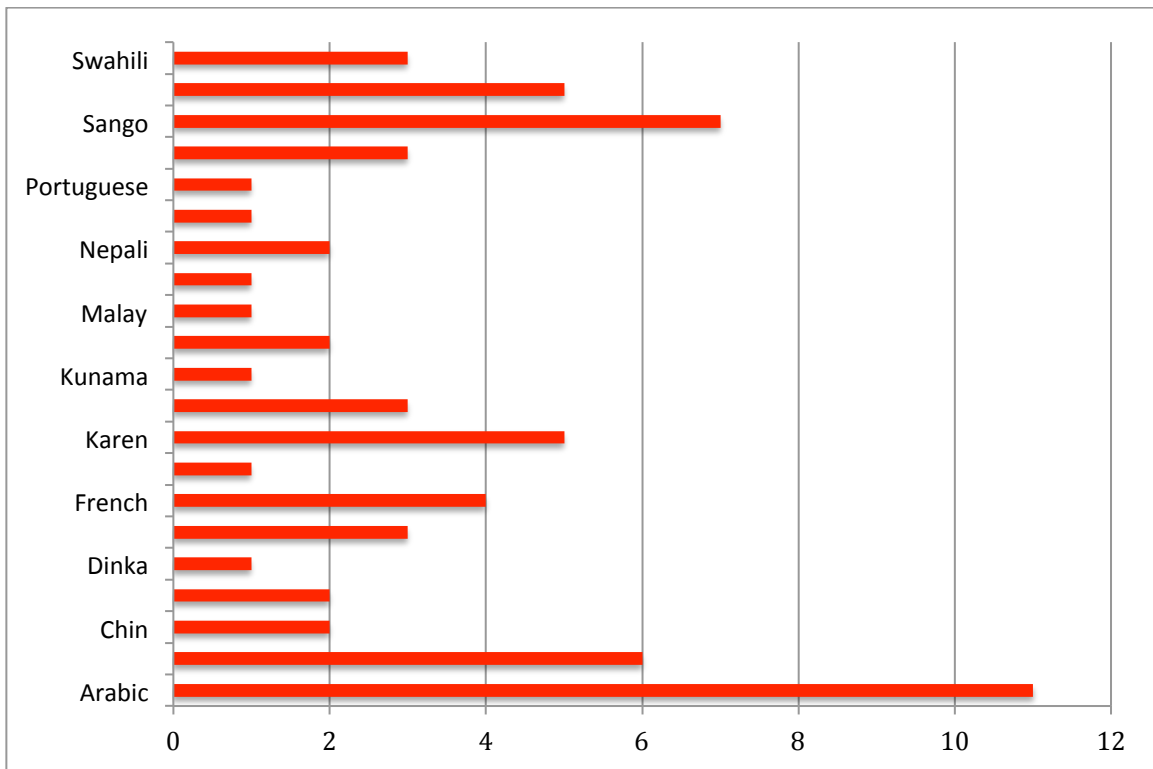
And our Purpose:

to demonstrate how—with an additive, rather than deficit, approach focused on students' strengths and resources—adolescent English Learners with limited and interrupted education can be highly successful students and empowered citizens. At GVP, we aim to provide an exemplary model of excellent and equitable education for newcomer refugee learners.

Our students, usually with 0-2 years in the country, come from 14 countries of origin in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (many with intermediate stops):



And speak 21 languages – many know 2 or 3 before starting to learn English



Our Literacy Aims (for our work in progress)

To learn what resources, instructional approaches and methods lead to success with these learners.

Principles we follow:

- Cultural relevance
- Integrated STEAM learning
- Rich scaffolding support and resources
- Meaningful real-world learning
- Quality, differentiated instruction in needed skills

Our Multi-Faceted Literacy Program

- Specialized and qualified ESOL teachers in all content areas
- Small classes
- Trained volunteer tutors for literacy workshops and class support
- Effective use of technology
- Literacy through content, e.g.
 - Music and arts instruction for language learning
 - The language of science
 - Drama for problem-solving

Music and Arts for Language Learning

- We have an artist in residence for music teaching classes and leading chorus weekly
- Instrumental music is available to all learners
- Music is integrated with all content through
- Students are singers/songwriters
- Visiting artists lead students in drama, dance, visual arts

The Language, literacy, and thinking of science, social studies, and math

- Theme-based, activity based science
- School-wide use of thinking maps to develop cognition
- Themes integrated in math, social studies, e.g., in our study of author Grace Lin, along with learning about and through the author and stories, learners studied the geography of story locations and mathematics of the dragon's age

Reading and Language Arts Instruction

Emergent readers

- Read aloud, oral literature, and media study
- Shared to guided writing with language frames and patterns – writing to learn
- Vocabulary play
- Guided reading
- Choice reading

Developing Readers

- Instructional conversations on literature
- Genre learning through reading and writing
- Guided Reading
 - Including additional materials for older learners
 - Expanding and leveling the school library
 - Helping learners develop home libraries
- Writer's workshop for language development

- Speaking opportunities for authentic audiences
- Independent Reading
 - Public library and school library use
 - Book swaps
 - Enrichment and summer book clubs
 - Collaboration through school-wide project-based learning

Project-Based learning

- School-wide themes

Work and Careers	Living Wax Museum	Machines
Poetry recitations	Women’s Wisdom	Gardens
Water	<i>When the Mountain Meets the Moon</i>	
How to	Wisdom of Elders	Poetry

Outcomes

Graduates

- 11 students completed our program last year and are now enrolled in high school.
- 7 alumnae graduated from high school last year.
- 7 alumnae are enrolled in college (one at Berry College; 1 at Georgia Tech, the rest at GPC).
- Over 90% of students who completed our program in the last 3 years have finished or are successfully pursuing degrees via high school, GED or college programs.

Reading Achievement

- 2014 mid-year assessments using Fountas & Pinnell Benchmarks administered to 34 students.
- On average, students increased 3.5 instructional reading levels between Enrollment (August-October) and December.
- One student increased more than 10 levels and another almost 7. Most increased 2-5 levels.

Comments and Challenges re Assessment

Re: Reading scores:

- Nonfiction vs. fiction selections for Fountas & Pinnell skewed this winter’s assessment – lesson learned for spring assessment.

Re: next year

- We’ll also have and use MAT midterm scores
- Online WIDA may also help us some by providing scores more quickly

Re: Assessment in general

- We are new and have recently established assessment processes
- There are many challenges of long-term assessment with a transient population

Recommendations

Texts

- Seek appropriate and accessible wide range of texts
- Work to provide texts to go home with students

Staff

- Seek highly qualified teachers with interest in, concern for refugees
 - Knowledge of reading is essential but not always part of MS preparation

- Work toward low student-teacher ratio
- Find, train, support volunteers – and provide leadership to do this

Instruction

- Differentiation through flexible grouping and leveling with careful formative assessment

Questions we are working on

- What is the best way to accelerate learning?
- How can we best support learners after they exit? How to assure sustainability of our mentor program
- How can we better support our content teachers to be integrated language and literacy teachers?
- How can we make our literacy development even more culturally responsive and better include families and community?
- How can we enhance our use of the arts in literacy development?

Your feedback and input are most appreciated!

Appendices:

- A. Sources of hi-Lo, multicultural books
- B. Strategies for newcomers
- C. Newcomer resources

Appendix A: Sources of High Interest, Age-Appropriate, Culturally Relevant Accessible Books

Trade books (fiction and non-fiction)

- *by multicultural authors*
- *about multicultural young people*
- *addressing issues refugees face*
- *from or about their countries of origin*
- *related to content relevant for ages, but accessible (e.g., non-fiction picture books)*

Leveled Readers (fiction and nonfiction)

- *Scholastic*
- *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*
- *Benchmark*

Appendix B: Strategies for Working with Newcomer English Learners

1. **Adapting Oral Language to Increase Comprehension:** Teachers use a variety of means to provide comprehensible oral input, including speaking slowly, clearly, matching language structure to learners' levels,
2. **Culturally Responsive Instruction:** Teachers learn about and use as resources in the classroom learners' cultural, language, and heritage. Connections are elicited and made between learners' experiences and what they learn in school.
3. **Total Physical Response:** Teachers use oral language (eventually leading to writing) through actions, usually in command form, to help learners acquire language and demonstrate their learning through actions.
4. **Chants, Songs, Poetry, and Raps.** Teachers use language with rhyme, rhythm, and repetition to introduce sounds, features, patterns, and vocabulary of English along with the joy of expression.
5. **Language Frames:** Teachers focus on language usages and patterns important for a situation/genre and create language frames through which learners begin to express themselves.
6. **Guided Reading:** Teachers use leveled books in small groups to introduce language, features of print, and reading strategies.
7. **Shared Reading:** Teachers and learners read and learn from large printed or projected texts together, gradually working from teacher responsibility (read aloud), to reading together, to supported reading, to independent reading.
8. **Shared Writing:** Teacher acts as scribe helping learners to construct writings about class or individual experiences or learnings. Skills and processes of writing are introduced as the writing is revised and edited.
9. **Language Experience Approach:** Teacher takes dictation as learners relate a shared experience. The text – including primarily vocabulary within learners' experience, is then used for reading activities.
10. **Vocabulary Introduction and Practice for Newcomers:** Important vocabulary is introduced with explanations, many examples, and connections to what learners know, and opportunities to use the language.
11. **Dipsticking:** Teachers frequently checking comprehension of all learners in the process of the lessons. Dipsticking might include such activities as signals, signs, questions, entry or exit tickets, a one-question quiz, etc.
12. **Differentiated Rubrics.** Teachers create rubrics according to language proficiencies and use the levels to suggest target goals for learners. Teacher and learners refer to the rubric throughout the learning process.

Appendix C: Resources on Working with Newcomers and Refugees

- Alcala, A. (2000). A framework for developing an effective instructional program for limited English proficient students with limited formal schooling. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 7(9). [Online]. <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=9>
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- Freeman, Yvonne S.; Freeman, David E. (2002). *Closing the Achievement Gap: How To Reach Limited-Formal-Schooling and Long-Term English Learners*. Portsmouth, NY: Heinemann.
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- Nieto, S. and P. Bode (2008). *Affirming diversity: the sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.
- Peyton, J. (Revised 2000). *Dialogue journals: Interactive Writing to Develop Language and Literacy*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
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- Short D. & Echevarria J. (1999). *The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol: A Tool for Teacher-Researcher Collaboration and Professional Development*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Short, D. J. & Boyson, B. A. 2012. *Helping Newcomer Students Succeed in Secondary Schools and Beyond*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
<http://carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/Reporter/23/helping-newcomer-students-succeed-in-secondary-schools-and-beyond.pdf>