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Two Diverse Communities Who Are Refugees Transforming Their Parenting and Self Efficacy Skills through Early Childhood Education

Deborah Young and Nicole Sager

Abstract

In our work we studied the process of working alongside Afghan women who are refugees living in Colorado, and women living in two refugee camps in Palestine. By design, our work centers the participants as the key producers of knowledge. We set out to collectively discover, define, and understand parenting, child development, and family dynamics. Participants were invited to explore how their dreams for their children relate to early childhood education. Informed by participant input, we designed courses with culturally responsive and sustainable curriculums to increase the quality of care for young children. Our investigation sheds light on how parents reconcile different cultural experiences and prioritize their child's development while trying to navigate novel contexts of childcare, preschool, or public school. In addition, the courses women took provided a pathway to enter the workforce in early childhood care, development, and education (ECCDE). This chapter describes our participatory action research process and the introspection and growth of resilient women transforming their parenting and their lives.

Keywords: parent education, cross cultural parenting constructs, co-constructed knowledge, participatory action research, family transformation

1. Introduction

1.1 Stressors of being displaced

At least 79.5 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 26 million refugees and around half of whom are under the age of 18 [1]. The proportion of the world's population who are displaced continues to rise. One percent of the world's population, or 1:97 people, is now forcibly displaced. This compares with 1:159 in 2010 and 1:174 in 2005 [2]. The

challenges that refugees[1] face before, during, and after being displaced have serious consequences for families. Refugees have faced volatile situations in their country of origin that disrupt basic parenting functions, including protection of children [3]. Parents often feel they have lost the power to guide their children during the times of change and challenge [4]. In times of upheaval the transition from country and community of origin transforms parenting practices. Prior to the disruption to their lives, parents could focus on educating children and nurturing their health and development, whereas during and post conflict and upheaval parents' focus shifts to keeping their children alive [5, 6]. Families' challenges are often compounded by movement from camp to camp, long waiting periods for resettlement, and lack of resources and cultural capital upon arrival to a new country. The processes of adapting to new cultures require and foster remarkable resilience. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network defines acculturation stress as a stressor refugee children and families experience as they try to navigate between their new culture and their culture of origin [7]. Examples include:

- Conflicts between children and parents navigating between new and old cultural views

- Conflicts with peers related to cultural misunderstandings

- The need for translation for family members who are not fluent in English

- Difficulty fitting in at school and the workforce

- Struggle to form an integrated identity including elements of their new culture and their culture of origin

In addition children and families experience isolation stress as minorities in a new society and country. Examples include:

- Feelings of loneliness and loss of social support network

- Discrimination

- Experiences of harassment from peers, adults, or law enforcement

- Experiences with others who do not trust the refugee child and family

- Stereotypes are often negative or based on deficit notions

- Feelings of not fitting in with others

- Loss of social and economic status [7]

Refugee children experience complex trauma stressors that can disrupt many aspects of their development and identity formation. In addition to complex trauma, refugees also experience mass trauma. The nature of modern warfare is

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[1] In alignment with the United Nations Reliefs and Work Agency (UNRWA), we define a refugee as one forced to flee their countries of origin due to well-founded fear of conflict and persecution stemming from racism, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social or political group. They either cannot return home or are afraid to do so.

such that whole communities (and at times whole populations as in the case of the Palestinians) are put in vulnerated[2] situations of witnessing and/or being exposed to extensive trauma, injustices, loss, and displacement. Thus, there are few, if any, emotionally regulated adults available to support the child through these events. Many adults and children, when fleeing, are worried about the safety of family members and friends or the death of a loved one. Children may react differently depending on their age and prior experiences. The length of recovery depends on the individual circumstances of the child, the family, and the community [8–12]. Refugees commonly experience sequential stresses that may compound over prolonged periods of time. Parenting in a new country and culture involves additional stresses including discrimination, ongoing situational trauma; shifts in family roles; separation from extended and/or nuclear family members; language barriers; cultural differences regarding "good" parenting, education, child care, and the navigation of workforce, and health care systems. Cultural differences in what is considered "good parenting" can be a particularly difficult aspect of resettlement as parenting and child development is not universal [13, 14]. Parenting and child development is contextually and culturally informed embedded with symbolic culture. Symbolic culture is the set of symbolic systems people use to communicate associated meanings to make sense of the human action system.

Individuals navigating the aftermath of international emergencies such as armed conflict and war need psychosocial support. Many conventional psychosocial tools and approaches can be used in ways that cause unintended harm. Particularly problematic are approaches that lack cultural and contextual understanding and sensitivity with no/minimal focus on capacity building. A continued focus on deficits and victimhood can undermine empowerment and resilience. Through our work in partnership with three communities, two communities living in refugee camps in Palestine (Camp 1 and Camp 2) and one community of Afghan refugees living in Colorado (Colorado group), we have learned that unsustainable, short-term approaches that breed dependency, create poor results and can actually leave participants in a worse place than before they participated in the program. Even in favorable conditions parenting is a complex and central issue for all families and those maneuvering relocation and life in refugee camps face additional challenges. In this work of supporting families it is critical not to impose outsider approaches of what child development and parenting "should" look like, rather the group should co-create a contextualized understanding of brain development, child development and stress responses [15]. We have found that using a foundation of social harmony, rather than individualistic and private methods yields better long term results in the communities we worked with. Fostering collaborative learning structures, prioritizing transparency of the entire process and involving individuals with different roles in the family lends itself to critical self and group reflection processes and context-specific solutions.

1.2 Parenting and the importance of parent education

Growing up with nurturing parenting practices enable children to acquire the abilities to become responsible caring adults and citizens of their society. Parenting comes from the people who are most intensely involved with children.

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[2] We embrace the term vulnerated and reject the term vulnerable so as to reframe/reclaim language that situate people in historical/societal contexts. This term recognizes how groups that are different in race, religious creed, nation of origin, sexuality, and gender have diminished power and voice compared to other members or groups in society. This aligns with the term Minoritzed referring to people labeled as belonging to a group that is mistreated or faces prejudice, is discriminated against due to circumstances outside of their control.

Yet, parenting education receives little support or recognition in Afghanistan or in Palestine. In the United States (U.S.) parenting education has become more available in the last decade, however, the focus is for families who are at risk which is defined as low income, limited formal education, single headed households, pregnant teens, parents who have experienced substance abuse, or households with reported child abuse or neglect. In the U.S. parenting education is still not widely available for all families [16, 17]. Often parents can feel isolated and without adequate support networks and this is exasperated with parents who are refugees. Little formal parenting education is available, and informal parenting education often involves fees or requirements that are difficult to meet. Holistic and comprehensive parent education programs that can reconcile differing beliefs and behaviors concerning child-rearing practices; affirm positive parenting practices; and adopt a strengths-based orientation have shown that most parents can benefit from some guidance in order to do the best job they can in raising their children [18, 19]. Parenting education can include family management concerns such as setting clear expectations for parents and children, consistent guidance and discipline strategies, and a plan to monitor healthy growth and development. Research has shown that children raised in supportive, warm, affectionate homes in which there are clear and consistently reinforced guidelines, are less likely to engage in at-risk behavior, be more happy, and are more likely to be successful in culturally appropriate ways [20–22].

Often the resilience and internal and external protective factors are associated with the negative experiences of the refugee. Seldomly highlighted are the remarkable strengths and resilience that families demonstrate in spite of the adversity they face. We posit that understanding, centering and valuing this positive adaptation in the face of significant adversity is an essential starting point to collaborate with the families and the individuals who have experienced complex, cumulative, and mass trauma [23]. For the participants in this study, parenting is closely associated with identity. Most current interventions for refugee parents are designed to help wrap around services in access to health care, language immersion, housing, and education for their children. However, parenting and cultural interconnection is rarely integrated into these services [24]. The families in the two communities come from a cultural community where extended families live close by or with the family and their elders provide advice. When young parents had questions about child-rearing they would usually have an extended family member.

1.3 Understanding parenting across cultures

Symbolic culture contains paradoxical possibilities in that accepted fictions are many times equated with facts. The symbolic culture is dependent on subjective belief, the facts are true only while we believe in them, and once the belief is suspended the facts dissolve. Symbols cannot exist outside of the meaning people imbue to them. Understanding how symbolic culture contributes to the complexity of the human condition is necessary to understand the foundations of cross-cultural research [25]. For instance in the US, "parent involvement" is symbolized as involvement in the child's school (volunteering in the classroom, assisting with homework, communicating with teachers, attending parent teacher conferences) yet refugee and immigrant parents may have other ways of being involved with their children that could include cooking for their children, providing clean and maintained clothes, involving the children in chores at home, and teaching them social skills and religious values. Globalization imposes homogenizing pressure on notions of parenting and refugee parents are constantly navigating multiple cultural systems and adjusting their identities as a way to cope with the changing living situations.

Parenting is an important path for the transmission of cultural norms and societal behavior and refugee families often develop bi/multi cultural identities. Bi/multi cultural family and identity formation occurs when one part of an individual's identity is rooted in their culture of origin, while another part embraces the dominant culture where they are currently located [25]. This process is not always seamless and identity confusion and disconnectedness can emerge and undermine the culture of origin [25, 26]. This confusion can impact parenting practices and parents' and children's sense of belonging as they navigate a changing lifestyle. Refugees often feel alienation and the sense of deterritorialization is not just about the physical location the refugee is forced to leave [27]. Deterritorialization also negatively impacts communities' psychosocial and emotional wellbeing.

Although recent advances have been made in understanding the scientific underpinnings of the biology of adversity [28], interventions have yet to be designed to mitigate the impacts of toxic stress and complex trauma specific to children and families living as refugees. Toxic stress is severe, frequent, prolonged, and or chronic. It can cause lifelong developmental and health problems and can negatively impact interpersonal relationships between parents and children. In addition, toxic stress can disrupt the development of brain architecture of a child, which increases risk factors as an adult. When toxic stress is compounded by community trauma such as a natural disaster or conflict, community members may be impacted in different ways, where by some are traumatized and will exhibit symptoms [29–32]. Many of the family's voices have been vulnered and marginalized due to sociopolitical situations, language access issues, and economic positions within the communities they reside [33, 34]. Individuals living with the chronic sources of mass-level trauma, toxic stresses, anxiety, and fear need spaces to heal and sculpt their lives.

Research has shown how parent education has the potential to shift the developmental trajectories of young children who have witnessed or experienced adverse situations [35–38]. Parent education has the potential to provide that space provided it stems from a culturally-informed, asset-based lens that centers and values the lived experiences of the parents. The topic of parenting education with refugee families is an under-researched topic. With the increase of refugee and immigrant populations around the world, and the high proportion of refugees and immigrants being children, understanding this topic is extremely important. As we have outlined above, refugee children witness and/or experience multiple adverse experiences and they communicate the confusion that stems from these experiences through their behavior. There is little literature on international parenting education curriculums. We have found that the most commonly used conventional parent training paradigms typically promote western, white, middle-class standards and may not adequately meet the unique needs of the refugee population. The paradigm from which we operate differs in that the participants had the influence to adjust and remodel the curriculum to align with cultural values and beliefs [39]. In Palestine, through an iterative and collaborative review process of continuous discussion and reflection, the team provided specific cultural knowledge that was taken into consideration as they designed the child development courses and the home visitation programs. In addition to a participatory action research approach, Bronfenbrener's family system [40] and community-based methods were used. Using the local teams' context and cultural systems of knowledge, the team adapted the Partnership in Parenting Education (PIPE) "Listen, Love, Play," which focuses on listening, trust, language, problem solving, feelings, and how babies learn. Unique culture and contextual characteristics in Palestine included (a) parents do not typically play with their children (b) many parents had an attitude of "just tell me what to do" that seemed to stem from the school system

reliance on memorization and there is a "right" way of doing things (c) many of the women were not able to take part in outside activities that did not have approval of husbands and/or mothers-in-laws (d) women are responsible for child rearing, (e) for the most part activities were provided in same sex groups, (f) children and adults were not inspired to read recreationally, (g) if there were problems with the children it was because the mom was a "bad mom" and (h) there was an absence of talking about emotions.

Another difference stems from the fact that parenting and home visitation programs used in the west require trained professionals to deliver the home visitation program, whereas in one of the interventions in the Palestine study, the team trained community members in the content using input from community members, mostly mothers, only a few were professionals, and youth from the community. This not only built capacity within the community (minimizing dependency on trained professionals from outside their community) but also addressed the empowerment and self efficacy of the community on an individual level, family level, and community level.

In the case of the Colorado group, a requirement to receive funding for home visitation or parenting classes was the use of "evidence based" home visitation programs from The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV). The measures for success used by the MIECHV programs include

- Improvement in maternal and newborn health

- Reduction in child injuries, abuse, and neglect

- Improved school readiness and achievement

- Reduction in crime or domestic violence

- Improved family economic self-sufficiency

- Improved coordination and referral for other community resources and supports [41]

Several of these measures are not all contextually or culturally relevant to the Afghan community with whom we worked. For instance, there is no mention of addressing ongoing trauma from living in refugee camps, being forced to flee, or experiencing ongoing conflict and discrimination on an individual, family, and community basis. Defining maternal and newborn health is relative to context and culture. Improving family economic self-sufficiency is often constrained by external factors and parenting education and home visitation programs cannot address systemic discrimination. Therefore, measures for success needed to be developed by the community themselves.

The Colorado groups continue to develop measures of success as we move forward in the program. The program has also been funded to extend to four other refugee cohorts and includes refugees from Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Burma, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and the Central African Republic, representing five major language groups. Each group has different values and beliefs regarding family and parental roles, child rearing. They also differ in the extent to which they can attend parenting education classes. All of the groups wish to increase their knowledge of child development and increase their opportunities to enter the early childhood workforce. The current Colorado group study continues to use focus groups, key informant interviews, and surveys as the

methodology to investigate participant views on child rearing, child development, young children's behavior/misbehavior and how to uphold cultural values via parenting strategies. Key to understanding the details of our work is contextualizing the uniqueness and commonalities of the communities in our study. All the communities in the study are refugees who were forced to leave their homeland and have had severely adverse experiences.

2. Participant context

2.1 Palestine

The Palestinian experience of dispossession and loss of a homeland is marked on May 15, 1948. During a 2 year time period leading up to May 15, 1948 around 750,000 people were displaced. Palestinian history was destroyed, cities and homes occupied, and over 15,000 people were killed. The wellbeing and human development of four generations of Palestine refugees have been impacted by displacement and loss of livelihood resulting from the 1948 conflict. Unlike other populations who are refugees, there has been no hope for return in the last 70 years. Resettlement and or living in the refugee camps are the alternatives. Today, there are about 7.98 million Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons who have not been able to return to their original homes and villages. Currently the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinians in the near East provide assistance and protection for about 5.6 million Palestinian refugees. The General Assembly of the United Nations has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate extending it until June 2023 [42].

2.2 Afghanistan

Since December 1979, continued waves of conflict and violence have forced successive generations of Afghan people to seek sanctuary elsewhere [43]. There are about 5 million Afghans outside Afghanistan, of whom 2.7 million are registered refugees. After four decades, the uncertainty of their future is continuously impacted by upheaval and the fear of growing international uncertainty. The international community has fallen short in meeting basic needs and ensuring the dignity of Afghans in countries of refuge. Large numbers of Afghan refugees began arriving in the United States in 1980 in the wake of the Soviet invasion. The vast majority of Afghan refugees in the United States arrived here not by choice, but rather out of necessity, as they fled warfare in Afghanistan. Many were educated professionals in Afghanistan, yet it was nearly impossible to obtain work in the US. This perpetuated their sense of being aliens in an unwelcoming land [44]. Although Afghans who have been in the U.S. for many years are more accustomed to U.S. culture, there has been little assimilation of Afghans into the American mainstream [45, 46]. Afghan refugees are still allowed entrance to the U.S on special immigrant visas and many have been interpreters or security officers for the U.S. military.

2.3 Group commonalities

For both groups, religion informs parenting in important ways [47]. As practicing Muslims, their daily lives are inspired from religious beliefs and values including respect for elders, modesty, humility, hard work, perseverance and a disciplined life [48, 49]. One major aspect of parenting inspired by Islam is the belief that children are the gift of Allah and the parents' role is to guide children in learning to

differentiate between right and wrong. Obedience and respect for elders is deemed important for maintaining moral and social order. This differs from more individualistic orientations that often lead parents in the US to cultivate independence and critical questioning. When conflicts arise between the values of the new communities and their beliefs, the mothers stated they share their opinions, provide advice, and act as role models to ensure their children adhere to the family rules based on their religious and cultural practices [49].

Both groups demonstrated differential parenting practices for their male and female children. Parents of girls are told that they are typically at a higher risk of losing their honor if their daughter does something that does not fit with the social norms and expectations. General goals around parenting that seem to be culturally shared include protection of children, support through developmental stages, guiding the development of morality and ethics, maintaining good health, and moving towards achieving economic stability and happiness. The ways in which parents achieve these goals are driven by culture, economics, politics, geography, religion, and other symbolic culture. The following sections outline the participatory action research (PAR) approach, an explanation of the sampling methods, data collection and analysis, the programs developed for each group, a discussion of lessons learned, recommendations and future directions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participatory action research approach

PAR is a community-led (distinct from community-based) research stance that aims to describe and understand, rather than to predict and control [50–53] PAR provides a way for researchers and community members (who become research team members) to work together to define the problem, take action, and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the interventions. PAR is an internally reflective, complex practice driven by social change and personal transformation through high levels of community ownership [51, 54]. Through the process of PAR people experience the empowerment and transformation that stems from participation and informed decision making [55–57].

The PAR approach is a bottom-up approach that can strengthen current early childhood systems because it centers children, families, and communities lived experiences. The imposition of uninformed, and often culturally inappropriate approaches can be avoided when local members of the population form part of the research team. When researchers outside the population work alongside community members as shared research team members, they can avoid common pitfalls such as: (a) contextual insensitivity (b) the inappropriate use of various research methods (c) the use of an individualistic orientation that does not fit the context and cultural systems of the community (d) an excessive focus on deficits and victimhood that can undermine empowerment and resilience and (e) the use of unsustainable, short-term approaches that reinforce dependency.

When local members' culture and lived experiences inform the study, the research results in critical self-reflection, greater specificity in ethical guidance, and a stronger basis for developing interventions and activities that support the well-being and thriving of young children and their families [58]. Kemmis and McTaggart state PAR is a "collective, self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social. .. practices" (p. 5) [58]. Traditionally, definitions of quality, and for this study, early childhood care development and education (ECCDE) quality,

come from "experts" typically from western industrialized nations and are based on quantifiable data where quality is considered to be inherent, identifiable, and universal. PAR is in direct contrast where the dominant vision of quality of ECCDE is not universal, rather it is variable, contextual, and requires negotiation among different viewpoints [59]. Gilbert's [60] view is that qualitative researchers aspire to uncover the world through another's eyes. In contrast to deterministic research paradigms, PAR allows for learning to emerge by providing the framework, opportunity, and facilitation for communities to learn and grow together. By providing the foundation of research knowledge/skills, and early childhood content, we set in motion an iterative discovery process of investigation and growth. This research seeks to impact the personal, the local, and the policy levels.

3.2 Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is a kind of self-selection sampling used to allow individuals as well as civic societies to choose to take part in study on their own accord. This method was utilized in our study to leverage the social networks of participants so as to gain further access to an ever-expanding source of potential participants [61]. In our study, those who heard about the activity, voluntarily wanted to join and then brought others with them. When the nature of the work is exploratory, qualitative and descriptive, snowball sampling is particularly appropriate for discovering the lived experiences of groups who might not be as readily accessible using other sampling methods [61]. In our study, community members initially visited several households in the community to inform others about the possibility of participating in initial focus groups that explained the purpose and approach of the study. Community meetings were held where parents, grand parents, children, and community leaders attended. From the initial focus groups, organized and facilitated by community members, additional interested subjects were identified and joined.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The study and projects that we sought to analyze were complex; occupying culturally and contextually diverse spaces and bringing together people occupying different levels of power. An analysis approach focused on understanding complexity rather than pursuing a reductionist understanding of phenomena was better suited to capture the dynamic processes and multiple outcomes. We used methods for triangulation both to confirm the data we collected through multiple collection methods and to ensure that multiple perspectives and tensions were accurately understood [62]. The team used participatory analysis processes methods so that determining how beneficial the outcomes were was directly informed by the participants' criteria of positive impact. Thus accountability was internal to our process [63]. The participants from the community and the university engaged in the analysis process as co-learners and co-creators of knowledge. This assisted in the inclusion of multiple distinct perspectives. Participants were continually encouraged to set agendas, ask questions, own the process and outcomes, and validate the learning that emerged [64].

Ongoing throughout the study, analysis was co-constructed by the team and participants to account for the various locations of power and those dynamics. During the initial phase of the study, the outside members, community participants, and local academic partners identified vocabulary and roles. The Palestine group elected to use the term "research team members" and included all participants who were involved in the design, implementation, and ongoing analysis of the study. We did not differentiate between primary investigator or partner organizations. The people

who received the project interventions including home visits and story hours were identified as recipients. The Colorado group chose to refer to all participants from the community and outside organizations as cohort members. We continue to use the term cohort because after the initial cohort shared their learning and impact, further funding was secured to expand the project to other refugee communities and we are currently working with three additional cohorts.

The research team members did acknowledge issues of power and privilege and tried to accommodate so voices typically silenced in heterogeneous groups were heard. For example, in Palestine when we held meetings, we first held conversations in homogenous groups such as age, gender, mothers, mother-in-law's. We then followed up with heterogeneous groups using more members in the group from a group perceived as having less power. During the meetings the numbers of female youth were higher than mothers and there were more mothers in the groups than mother-in-law's, and even fewer members from the organizations and university partners. The outside members of the group were typically the note takers and added their understanding and ideas during the analysis process after initial analysis from community members took place. At every turn intentional practices were implemented to squarely shift the locus of control away from conventional societal norms. This process not only provided a space for many voices to be heard and valued, but also supported the development of confidence, agency, and increased self-esteem; all factors that contribute to resilience and empowerment [65]. This strengthened the local community members' participation. In other words, the analysis processes are part of the outcomes.

The Colorado group had similar experiences; the analysis team included the mothers from the cohort and the two representatives from the two initial nonprofit organizations. The new cohorts currently starting the program include more partners in the analysis process. State agencies, state level nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), various colleges, funding agencies, and an outside evaluation contractor are also involved. The addition of new partners has led to new strategies to ensure that community participants continue to be part of the analysis process. Reflexive dialog is an instrumental part of the analysis process to ensure learning is the focus rather than accountability and participatory analysis can enhance the validity of data [66]. Participant analysis allows for complexity and fosters buy-in, thus enhancing quality of the analysis. In addition, Freie's idea is of how naming, critical reflection, and informed action are interconnected and crucial for transformative change [52]. Foundational to PAR is discovering ways to change power relations, elevate voices that are typically not heard, and forge pathways for participants' to realize their agency. Therefore, the evaluation process must also be participatory and transformative so as not to replicate the very dynamics of privileging certain voices over others, especially when the study aims to address the parenting and early childhood care practices impacting children who are refugees [52, 66].

Our investigation aimed to shed light on how parents reconcile different cultural experiences and prioritize their child's development while trying to navigate novel contexts of childcare, preschool, or public school and cultural constructs around parenting. We explored how the identity of parents influences parenting practices, involvement in parenting education, and parental decision making. Our data analysis procedures were primarily informed by the outcome harvesting approach [67]. Unlike other evaluation approaches, outcome harvesting does not necessarily measure progress towards predetermined outcomes or objectives. Rather, the evaluator collects evidence of what has been achieved, and works backward to determine whether and how the project or intervention contributed to the change. In this sense, the approach is analogous to sciences such as forensics, criminal justice or archeology.

There were two groups from two different refugee camps in Palestine and one group of refugee women from Afghanistan living in the U.S. Participants in all groups were mothers of 6 months to 6 year-olds. The outcome harvesting framework helped us understand how the contributing factors influenced the results. The first cycle of data was generated in community meetings, focus groups discussions and semi-structured key informant interviews. Those data were analyzed to determine participants' priorities and from there, the team designed parenting education to support the families' ideas and orientation toward parenting. This parent education included culturally relevant modes of supporting protective factors such as knowledge of child development, social connections, concrete supports, and parental resilience. The following sections outline the parenting and ECCDE programs that unfolded cyclically as we involved participants in devising our collaborative learning experiences.

4. Program implementation process and results

4.1 The Palestine program

The study in Palestine emerged from conversation with the director of the camp's women center in collaboration with a small team of professors from educational sciences, medical, and social work departments and the first author on a Fulbright Award. Several students from the department also joined the team. The women's community center in the refugee camps asked the team to meet with mothers from the community to talk about early childhood opportunities in the camps. There were no programs for mother's to learn about parenting or early childhood development and the women sought information and skill development beyond the family to deal with behavior challenges. During the initial meeting 28 mothers attended the study's Camp 1 site and 18 attended in Camp 2 site to share their story, concerns, and desires. The culmination of the first meeting the team and the women agreed to hold further meetings to share information about child development and parenting strategies, and design programs that could be suitable for their community.

Advertisements and the first line of information were through civic organizations and local university connections. Initial advertising for volunteers took place via announcements through local civic organizations interested in supporting the study and through connections with professors from the University and students living in the refugee camp sites. Selection for acceptance into the study was based on a preference for those who could commit to participating for at least 6 months. Community meetings were initially conducted with 68 community members from the first site (Camp 1) and 42 community members from the second site, (Camp 2). In addition, 18 key informant interviews were conducted with moms of ages 16–41. The participants in the study lived close to families of a shared cultural group and similar experiences. All participants were mothers and the fathers' perspectives were brought into the discussions through the mothers' lens.

The need for early childhood education and care in refugee camps was one of the women's priorities when deciding their strategic plan for the next 1–3 years. UNRWA provides primary and secondary education schooling, preschool is not provided. Unemployment is around 25% for the West Bank due to the persistent challenge of the Israeli military occupation as well as a cultural mindset of preferring mothers to stay at home with the children rather than work outside the home [65]. The camps in the study and throughout the West Bank are very densely populated (155,462 per sq. km in Camp 1 and 166,666 per sq. km in Camp 2) [68]. Unemployment and

overcrowding are severe issues with a stark absence of play spaces for children. Poor shelters and cramped living conditions offer no privacy for residents in their personal lives, adding to the residents' physical and psychosocial? strain. Only 34% of children are in Early Childhood Care and Education, and only 47% engage in childhood development activities in the West Bank. These numbers are even lower in the refugee camps. Children fortunate enough to be enrolled in early childhood education and care programs face overcrowding, book shortages, poor ventilation and a lack of adequate space [69]. The needs in the refugee camps are dire compared to those in the nearby municipalities.

Meetings continued for 1 year and the team developed home visitation programs and story hours. Social workers, teachers, youth, mothers, and mother in-laws from each of the Camps participated. The initial workshops worked on identifying key issues around early childhood and multiple ways of addressing the issues. To help participants prioritize early childhood topics participatory methods such as problem trees, Kegan and Lehay's *Immunity to Change,* [70] community mapping, priority and ranking exercises were utilized. In addition, training on brain development, using Zero To Three *Growing Brain* curriculum [71]; child development coupled with home visitation skills using Partners in Parenting Education (PIPE) Curriculum [72], and the *Brain Architecture*, from the Center of the Developing Child Harvard [73] were provided. Both curriculums are easily adapted to cultural and contextual situations. PIPE is situated in trauma informed relationship building between adult and child and is play-based.

Weekly meetings were held for the first 2 months while participants worked in pairs and trained to start home visits in the Camps. Home visits and story hours continued in formal and informal ways for the remainder of the one-year study. Story hours were provided by a few members from the team along with youth from the camps. Story hours was a response to one of the identified priorities. Young children did not have safe places to go to for socialization and the children needed support in literacy and numeracy. Due to major funding cuts in UNRWA, teachers had to be laid off and the class sizes doubled, with some class sizes over 60 students. Individual attention is very challenging when class sizes are so large. Story hours provided a venue where children had fun learning about language and literacy. Numeracy was also included via games, and children were learning culturally appropriate ways to socialize and play. Female youth from the camps were very interested in the information about child development and fun ways to learn literacy and numeracy. In Camp 1, eight youth became part of those who provided story hours and 12 joined the home visitation teams.

4.2 Palestine results

During the study, team members met weekly to reflect on the activities and how they were supporting our progress towards the identified goals. If deficiencies in the implementation of the training were identified, decisions were made on how to course correct. For instance, after the first 2 weeks of home visits we realized our organizational system for data collection was not functioning as planned. The field notes team members were taking were not sufficiently articulated to identify some of the important information needed for the study. Thus, we decided to role play and from the role play the team decided to create a checklist with important items that needed to be identified and modified the note-taking protocol. Each folder would then be prepared with the labeled paperwork prior to the visit and team members could focus more on the content of the visit, than the organization of the field notes from the visit. During the review of field notes, each pair switched folders with other pairs so that team members were reading different field notes. Each pair made

comments and asked questions for clarification. This strengthened the team's ability to take detailed notes and they started understanding the importance of reliability. The amount of field notes taken can be an all-consuming activity and can grow to a substantial database of notes. Each week part of the analysis process was the organization and identification of patterns and shared themes. The coding process of assigning meaningful labels to elements of field note and other recorded information was taught to and practiced by the team. Constant and frequent analysis and coding were necessary, not only due to the sheer quantity of field notes, but also to inform the team how to proceed. Eventually patterns of behavior and patterns within households in the community emerged.

The team broke down the data into manageable pieces, then sorted and sifted through the data sets, searching for patterns, sequences, processes, and aggregates. The aim of the analysis process was to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible systematic manner. Coding was the primary step taken during the analysis to organize, categorize, and make sense of the data. The team members found the analysis process quite arduous. Coding was not a mechanical or technical exercise, rather it was a dynamic and creative process using inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing. As the team members gained experience through the process of coding, a deeper understanding of what they had been studying developed; simultaneously, the research team members continued to refine their abilities and their interpretations. During the team's weekly sessions they coded that week's data by identifying patterns regarding the effectiveness of their implementation. In this way, they identified gaps that still existed, discovered new concerns, and developed recommendations for adjustments to the implementation process. The following findings were derived from the coding and analysis of field notes generated from self-reports from the mothers and other family members or observations from the home visiting pair.

Mother's from both camps reported an increase in knowledge and skill in their relational building skills with their children and with other family members. Tabulation of field notes showed that 80% of mothers reported playing on the floor for the first time with their infants and 60% of those mothers reported that fathers joined them. Over 80% of the mothers reported they felt more confident in attending to children's challenging behaviors, as they had a greater grasp of child development. Importantly, they demonstrated the ability to show compassion once they had understood that the child was emotionally out of balance and not necessarily trying to "be bad" or "manipulate" the parent. When the mother-in-laws were positively involved, there was an increase of family involvement and intentionality in raising the child collectively. In the cases where mother-in-laws were not supportive, over 65% of the mothers could not continue to receive further home visits after the first six visits which they had initially signed up for. Eighty percent of the mothers reported higher levels of self efficacy in terms of parenting. At the onset, less than 20% reported having the knowledge and skill to deal with their children. Sharing the knowledge of child development together with simple ways to play with the young child, multiple strategies to deal with conflict, and mindfulness practices to help regulate one's nervous system, 45% of the mothers stated that extended family members were able to align in their parenting strategies rather than engage in conflict around differences in parenting strategies or blaming the mother for the child's challenging behaviors. Sixty percent of the mothers reported that learning about brain development and mindfulness practices were most helpful to understand their reactions to their children. The mothers reported a change in their ability to observe the situation, mitigate their own stress, and more appropriately guide the child to the desired behavior. In over 60% of our meetings the topic of tolerable and toxic stress emerged. Thirty-five percent of the fathers reported that they wanted to be

an active part of the child rearing. The role of the father in terms of child rearing is changing, partly due to the continued arrests of young men by Israeli military and partly due to changing mindsets of the younger generation. Participants and the university team members were very interested in understanding their own stress. Participants learned to recognize and understand stress-induced behavior in adults and children, and understand how to activate the parasympathetic nervous system in order to better manage tension.

Team members from the university reported an increase in understanding the living situation of the families living in the camps. The team became open to identifying the stereotypes they held, such as high community and domestic violence, neglect of the children, lower value of education, and low hygiene levels. At the onset most of the team members reported that they were afraid to enter the camps. Every team member from outside the camp reported the experience contradicted the stereotypes they held. This mindset shift opened doors between the university and the camps to more collaboratively work together to address unique issues that families face living in such overcrowded spaces with increased Israeli force violence such as demolitions, harassment, and arrests. The Camp 1 site had weekly encounters with Israeli forces, while people living outside the camp heard of the incidents but were not individually impacted by most of them. Collective impact of the occupation increases with each incident and the understanding of how stress impacts the brain was noted as some of the most valuable aspects of participants' learning.

Many of the parents living in the refugee camp stated they were not sure how to play with their infants and toddlers. Understanding that play is important in the development of children expanded their understanding of the importance of play in child development. Converging evidence shows that play is key in building children's coping skills as the interactions during play support the development of regulatory abilities. Play can help children cope with adversity and traumatic events and provides a context that supports resilience, the ability to work through changes, challenges, and toxic stress [74–76]. Parents have a critical role in fostering the kinds of culturally and contextually appropriate playful experiences and interactions required for children facing adversity. Demonstrating, modeling, and providing videos for analysis was embedded in each week's workshops and home visits using the PIPE curriculum. The videos typically showed role plays of the teams practicing the home visitation. First individually, and then as a group the women analyzed the role plays, provided feedback, and worked through adjustments to increase their skills, accuracy of knowledge, and effectiveness of their visits. Practicing these participatory methods proved to be essential as they were most accustomed to rote learning educational methods.

Other compelling aspects of transformation include opening pathways for capacity building in the community. For instance, one of the community members who were a trained nurse who had not worked for over 15 years, co-taught the classes with me. Her interpretation and cultural mediation of the knowledge and parenting skills used in the curriculums was key. She now has entered the workforce as a home visitor for an early childhood program and works with children living in the camps. Gaining this position was thanks largely due to word of mouth from the mothers whose children attended the program. Another example of capacity building is a male graduate student participating in the study who not only became an advocate for fathers, but also provided weekly story hours for children in the camps. Yet another example is how one male professor connected with the several Imams to talk about the importance of fathers' understanding of child development. Through these talks in the Mosques many of the fathers became more involved in what the mothers were learning.

4.3 Colorado program

The Colorado group emerged when it came to light that the state agency in Colorado responsible for collecting data on early childhood program availability, access and quality was surveying people solely in Spanish and English. It quickly became clear that refugee and immigrant voices who are not Spanish speaking, were not represented. An Early Childhood professional, the first author was mentoring an Afghan woman at the time and organized focus groups in collaboration with two local nonprofit organizations. Focus groups with families who are refugees in four different areas in the Denver metro area were held in the participants' preferred language.

The stories and challenges reported included limited access to quality programs, discrimination, mistreatment of their children (that in some cases led to suspensions and expulsions), warranted fear of bullying, a mismatch of beliefs and values, including foods and eating habits, cleanliness, social harmony and independence, and self reliance. The women described how once they entered the US, they had fewer resources, dramatically worse living circumstances, problems providing for children, navigating unfamiliar cultural expectations, and guiding and disciplining their children.

To address some of the concerns that emerged from the focus groups Empowering Communities Globally (ECG) and Family Lutheran Services Rocky Mountain (LFSRM) continued conversations with 20 of the women involved in the focus groups. We looked at how we could provide sessions designed to help parents cope with stress and emotions and work on ways of guiding their children that bring family members closer together. Engaging the mothers, using problem trees and ranking tools, several priorities emerged. The top priorities were to: find child care for their children, enter the workforce in a field that aligns with their cultural values, learn English better, and continue their education with a majority of wanting to take college courses.

The two organizations explored various pathways to enter the early childhood workforce, as the early childhood workforce aligns with the values and culture of the women. We were able to forge a pathway that was willing to accept a community cohort based model. Although there were some workforce pathways offering coaching and tracking of the requirements, no pathway offered a community based cohort model. Since a strong cultural value is social harmony, it was important for the women to enter and move through the pathway together. In this way, not only could the women support one another, but it also reduced competition/suspicion of being left out or receiving differential benefit.

There were four focus groups conducted, each with 12–18 participants. In addition eight key information interviews were taken with moms between 22 and 32 years of age. Participants lived close to other families of a shared cultural and linguistic group and similar experiences in Afghanistan and their relocation to the U.S. All participants were mothers and the fathers' perspectives were brought into the discussions through the mothers' lens and at times the father/husband would join the group to ask questions or to see what the class was teaching.

We started our journey with the *Growing Brain* training [71]. Several of the women in the group spoke English proficiently and became the interpreters and cultural mediators for the presentation of early childhood content. All the women reported it was the first time they learned about early childhood development and early childhood brain development. The training focused on the lived experiences of the group, including living and growing up in war, going to (and fearing attending) school during war, raising children in war, and having to flee to the US knowing they may never see their family and friends again. During the class all

participants came for every class and completed all homework. The participants formed learning communities of three to four people who studied, read articles, and wrote summaries together. Learning communities also met together once a week. This provided a planned and structured time to do the homework. The women wanted this so they could coordinate with someone to watch their children so they could focus.

4.4 Colorado results

Reports from the participants on how they viewed their children's behavior and how they responded shifted during the training. The reports overwhelmingly demonstrated their new understanding of how children's behavior is a communication of stress behavior rather than misbehavior. The training gave the women more communication skills and coping mechanisms for themselves. They reported they were able to bring more compassion to the situation. Lastly, they reported the time with their children was more meaningful and joyful. One testimonial, "I feel more empowered, I have positive ways of doing things with my children and family, and I feel like things are working better for me and my family."

From their earlier work, emerged The Pamoja Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program. Pamaja is an early childhood-focused lead teacher certification program for refugee women in the Denver metro area. The program prepares refugee women for success in becoming lead teachers in ECE classrooms through wraparound supports and services including: contextualized ECE English class; a college credit ECE 101 course taught in the women's first language and English; and job placement into a paid, on-the-job training experience at an early childhood care facility. As part of Pamoja, refugee women collaborate with mentors who walk alongside their mentees providing homework, job placement, and emotional support in addition to engaging in social activities. This model provides a unique, culturally comprehensive support system to refugee women as they work towards the ECE Lead Teacher Certification.

Pamoja works with a cohort of Afghan refugee women to support their education and training to become certified multilingual ECE teachers. Prior to the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, classes were taught at a local community center with onsite babysitting provided for the women's children. With COVID arriving overnight, our program had to be adjusted quickly. The groups worked closely with partners to transition all program components to remote learning to ensure that women still had support in place and could continue with their certification. Pamoja is currently running all program components remotely successfully. With a huge shift from in person classes to a 100% virtual model it has been incredible how seamlessly the women transitioned to the remote style of class and that they stayed committed to the class and engaged - especially considering that none of them had ever taken a course virtually before COVID! It is also very helpful that the women could now be home with their children while attending. The switch to remote ESL classes proved very beneficial in that all women in the cohort began attending the ESL class, whereas before less than half were attending. This is perhaps a lesson learned for future programming for women, even after COVID 19. Additionally, we are now working with a local Community College to facilitate virtual professional development learning experiences as part of the women's apprenticeship requirements. Lastly, the women have been meeting virtually with their mentors. The biggest challenges are navigating and working with technology kinks and finding time that works for the women to meet when children are napping or can be cared for by husbands.

5. Discussion and lessons learned

Many of the commonly referenced theories, perspectives, and practices regarding child and human development that currently guide early childhood education and care are seriously flawed in that they situate child and human development as a universal phenomenon. Though nature does have universal effects, the nurture or environmental, cultural and contextual differences influence child and human development in distinct ways [77]. Scholars such as Rogoff [78], Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa [79], and New [80] support the necessity for educational theories that guide early childhood education and care to intentionally reflect cultural contexts in child development. Relying on theories and perspectives that do not value how cultural and contexts influence child and human development perpetuate cultural domination, ethnocentrism, and neo-colonialism. It was important for all members of this program to develop and use culturally inclusive theories, pedagogies, perspectives, and practices in terms of parenting, child development, and early childhood education and care.

5.1 Commonalities between groups

Results for both groups showed that the most commonly viewed causes of child misbehavior were the lack of ability from the parents to support the child's needs, pressure from other family members and neighbors, the child's temperament, negative peer influence and negative interactions with other adults in the community. Ideologies in political, social, religious, racial, ethnic, and gender influence parents' identity and their decisions regarding parenting. Each group described what parenting strategies were acceptable (e.g., the use of praise, rewards and punishments) and others objectionable (e.g., ignoring the misbehavior, not showing control of the situation). In all cases, the moms in the group had little consensus on what parenting techniques were best. Results highlight the critical need for aligning parent goals at the outset of parent education, and the need for psychosocial components aligned with cultural values and contextual situations [69, 77, 81]. Stressors were interrelated to various dimensions of parenting: (1) economic hardship prevents parents from meeting their children's basic needs and having positive parent-child interactions; (2) perceptions and experiences of insecurity, low self-efficacy results in less effective parental guidance, and (3) parental psychosocial stress contributes to stricter and tougher parenting responses to behavior and control. Greater concrete economic resources, social network, and knowledge in child development emerged as gaps. Addressing these gaps increases the potential protective factors for maintaining positive parenting despite previous exposure to war and displacement-related adversity. Our findings suggest that implementation of culturally responsive pedagogies helped remove structural Euro-centric barriers to the women's self-efficacy and had positive impacts on parenting quality and child psychosocial outcomes [82]. Parent education training is important for refugee families to reduce the impact of trauma on children.

The community living in the US faces religious discriminations, and most families are socially and economically impacted by downward social and class mobility, which heightens feelings of alienation and frustration. With the continued growth of an anti-Muslim environment in the US, the mothers continue to worry about raising their children and sending them to childcare or school. As a result, most of the participants stayed within their own trusted social and religious circles. Some of the concerns around schooling, where the food served was not halal. Eating non-halal food goes against their Islamic guidelines and is deemed inappropriate by

mothers. The difference between individualism and collectivism in preschool was undesirable and perceived as negatively influencing the cohesiveness of their family unit and. Many of the mothers felt they could not influence the school classroom and thus decided to keep their young children at home, even though entering the workforce would benefit the family economically.

Even the communities in Palestine faced discrimination and as refugees were viewed to be poorer, more violent and unable to parent the "right" way due to the generational constraints of living in cramped quarters. They lack access to employment and were provided a different education system. We found that home language/s were silenced by strong monolingual ideologies experiences outside of their home at work, in their community, and in schools. We found that it was very important to make early childhood parenting education programs more culturally responsive and intentionally avoid typically curriculum and pedagogical practice that reproduce normative identities and practices. In both groups it was essential to meet weekly to make decisions that impact the group, participate in parenting and life-skills training, discuss issues of mutual interest, which became a platform to raise awareness on important topics, and together find ways to take action to improve their lives and communities. Through parenting education, learning about child and human development, women become more self aware. This awareness is the foundation to empowerment.

5.2 Palestine

Parents described how living conditions placed huge pressure on their ability to care for their children. They worried about their children's health due to extremely dirty conditions and lack of basic sanitation in the camps. This concern was further exacerbated by the very limited supply of water to wash, cook, and drink. They were concerned about the people their children were now exposed to, and consequently for their safety. "I do not know who is around us, all types of people are here, and they can harm the children" [83]. This led to conflict between children and parents, as some parents were reluctant to let children leave the home by themselves or with their friends. Some of the women were more sympathetic to their children's needs and allowed them to play outside despite tier fears and the lack of space. Many of the women reported a loss of control; they lacked the confidence in their parenting skills to meet the children's needs and support them in positive ways to counter the violence and "bad" behaviors displayed by others in the camp. The women stated that many of the issues that living in the camps presented were completely new to them. The women felt that the external uncertainty the families and children were experiencing due to the Israeli occupation aggravated their children's and their physical and emotional reactions to their experiences in living in the camps. The women reported inappropriate child behaviors as a core concern, and this behavior increased as the children grew and had more contact with outside communities. They reported their children's play had become more violent and the women worried that this reflected their exposure to the occupation and increasing tension and poverty in the camps. The women expressed strong commitments to their children's future, especially in terms of educational opportunity, and many felt the density and continued tensions of the occupation were barriers to opportunities for the future. They saw the changes in their children as a reminder that without better parenting skills the plans for the children were diminished.

5.3 Women from Afghanistan living in Colorado

Common among the women in the cohort was the value of having preschools that were affordable and near home. The quality of a school was determined by the

recommendation by someone from their social networks. The trust in families with similar historical and religious histories provided valuable and culturally appropriate understandings of quality care and education. Although mothers struggled to know how to support their children, they still felt they knew their children well and could identify subtle differences in their behavior and personalities. Seventy percent of the women in Cohort 1 reported their husbands or children helped them read the articles written in English required for class, complete their homework, and help with the technology to hand in assignments and attend classes virtually. This collaboration within the family resulted in increased dialog with their husbands about child rearing and working outside the home. These conversations increased over the course of the program. Presently five women are employed in ECE, two others start in a week of when this was written, and three others had interviews. For 80% of the women, this was the first time they worked outside the home. All the women reported that the classes had a positive impact on how they observed and understood their children's behavior and stated that they now have more strategies to address their children's behavior and felt more confident in knowing what to do as a parent. Specific learning included knowing how to set routines and micro routines. Routines consisted of general patterns of the day such reading a book or telling a story before bedtime followed by brushing teeth, washing, and saying prayers, and then getting into bed and falling asleep. Micro-routines are more related to pedagogy and the dynamics of communication interpersonal relationships and shared emotional experiences. In addition, all of the women reported that their husbands were more involved in parenting and looked to the women for decisions in terms of responding to the child's development and guidance and discipline. All of the women also expressed that they want to continue in the program and continue to take classes together, with an emphasis on classes that will provide them college credit. They continue to attend classes together, with an emphasis on early childhood mental health.

Another result that emerged from the study included having mentors from the U.S. to help the women learn U.S. cultural norms and expectations. This helped the women more clearly understand how their values aligned with those in the U.S. Tailored to the women's needs, the English classes provided were content-based using the early childhood content to reinforce their studies and to develop ECE workplace language. The women's home language, Farsi, was leveraged in instruction to increase engagement and comprehension. Women reported that the English ECE class and the college classes were the most enjoyable and helpful aspects of the program. Other program supports included weekly check in meetings, individual and group monthly check ins, support for writing resumes and cover letters and job interview skill development.

With the ever-growing diversity in the U.S. population it is all the more essential to build capacity in the field of education so that we have teachers in our schools and early childhood programs that share common background and language experience with the children. The women refugees in this study possess valuable linguistic and cultural resources that are often unnoticed/undervalued. Implicit bias stemming from Western ideologies permeates the system the women are trying to navigate. These systems can be challenging to navigate even for people born and raised in the U.S. with the inherent unearned privileges of being white, middle class English speakers. The women in Cohort 1 were continually asked to take initiative, work individually, and fill out countless forms and applications for partners providing funding, college courses, and early childhood workforce pathways. When one stops to reflect on all of the adversity people face in fleeing their country: witnessing and surviving violence and conflict, seeking safety, having to uproot their lives suddenly and often multiple times, it is humbling to witness their success. We see refugees as

courageous, resilient humans who add positive energy, diversity and ethics to our schools, workplaces, neighborhood, and country. We need to continue to name, and make visible the assets the refugee population brings to our communities.

This program has now been funded to expand to include 50 more women. The new cohorts include women from Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, Afghanistan, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and the Central African Republic. The cultural and contextual variations will continue to change and adapt the program. We look forward to learning and developing programs that better suit the needs of women who are refugees inside their home life and in the public life in their locations.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Centering human dignity

Our work, and more importantly, the way we approach our work is grounded in horizontal reciprocity between all people and interactions in which everyone's honor and dignity is upheld. It is essential to understand the contexts of all people and recognize that justice exists when people operate out of mutual reciprocity. We firmly believe that no one person is more human or important than any other human. At the time of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) [84], the notion of human was inclusive of certain particularities. For example, in 1979, there was an added decree, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) [85]. Clearly, within the United Nations, in 1949 the notion of a universal human being was shaped by certain patricharial and colonialistic privileges. In addition, it was not until September, 2007 that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly [86]. One cannot talk about human rights unless there is an understanding of what it means to be human, once this happens then human dignity can become clear and upheld. Who shapes the discourse about human rights? Men? Women? Indigenous peoples? Even using the terms men and women are gender binary and exclusive. Current declarations of equality and inclusion do little to address the inequities inherent in our laws, policy, and culture. Unless people are willing to deeply reflect and unpak implicit bias we will not be able to build equity and horizontal reciprocity. In the case of our two popula-tions, rights have been denied to them due to their vulnerated circumstances. Our parenting education classes situate people as fully human from the onset. It was found that the limits of the U.S. and Israeli policies are not inclusive of all beings. In the U.S. and Israel, agency is only granted to those who align with, or at least work within, the dominant patriarchal and colonial, capitalistic views. Thus women defined as refugees must overcome tremendous barriers to develop the agency to not only survive, but also to thrive.

6.2 The importance of linguistically and culturally sustaining pedagogy

We assert that research methodology, early childhood education and care and parent education is optimized via a critical participatory action research approach. Researchers participated in the study while teaching about parenting in a culturally sustaining manner. In addition, a critical participatory action research approach integrates culturally and contextually relevant pedagogies that many times are overlooked when examining the educational and emotional life of the classroom. Ensuring that the first language is used in the classroom for the adults and the

children promotes multilingual literacy in the social and cultural context. This allows for a better balance of pluralism reducing the privileging of Western notions and cultural parenting norms. Using a participatory action research approach, the participants became the group engaged in the discovery and research process [55–57]. The team held reflective meetings to more clearly understand how their thoughts influence the awareness and perception of the life in which they participate and how reductionism has fragmented the world [61, 64, 66]. Complexity theory suggests that when there is enough connectivity between the agents, emergence is likely to occur spontaneously. Using this idea, the team and community members programs moved away from trying to change the organizations who make decisions and developed programs that helped create a new paradigm for understanding situations and developing grassroot approaches.

The exclusion of home origin language perpetuates educational disadvantages and restricts inclusive practices that are central to healthy early childhood parenting and educational practices. We strongly recommend early childhood parenting and teaching practices embrace heritage and origin languages to help ensure that parenting and educational programs are culturally and contextually appropriate. Offering the programs in first languages promotes sensitive and responsive pedagogical practices to the cultural, racial, and linguistic diversities represented by the families. The classes were developed in collaboration with participants to include lived experiences from their cultures and communities to make education meaningful and relevant. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recommends that perspectives on human development consider the effects of heritage cultures on child development, with an emphasis on children's global rights [87]. The classes used the lived experiences of the adults and the children, including family histories, past and current experiences, and the varied environments the families lived in. The curriculum inculcated the importance of valuing the parents' culture, context, and unique desires for their children. This study makes a strong case in support of parenting education programs to be grounded in local context, culture, and community of the parents and families involved. This foundation of inclusion helps make visible the voices and lived experiences of heritage languages and the refugee context. Current developmental theories bereft of linguistic and cultural influences are inadequate and can silence the heritage culture and language.

6.3 Women developing agency

Women's empowerment is closely tied to workforce. While the focus on economic empowerment is critical, these approaches need to also address the social and gender norms that underlie and perpetuate inequitable behaviors such as violence, women's limited freedom to dissolve their marriages, lack of resources, property allocation and parenting decision-making power. We suggest that donors strongly consider including a parent education component, based on culturally and contextual meaningful content and skills, that provide women a sense of self-efficacy and decision making power within their home. We believe this provides a foundation that will permeate the workforce as well. Working on parenting self-efficacy through increased knowledge of: child development, brain development, mindfulness skills for self and co-regulation, we have found that women have been able to approach their relationships with their family members, husbands and mother-in-laws differently. They are more equipped to make life-determining decisions. Empowerment stems from self respect and women who have children increase their self respect and confidence when owning the knowledge and strategies to be an effective and supportive parent. Becoming an equal partner in parenting, in a marriage, and in the community requires an investment in parenting. Parenting education in

community-based cohorts is a way for women to learn skills and build capacities, increase self-esteem, develop agency in accessing information and resources, and promote collective action and community organizing. Learning parenting skills can lead to opportunities to enter the workforce in early childhood and education, which has shown to align culturally and religiously in many refugee communities. This combination of family, social, and economic empowerment positions women as leaders and decision-makers in their households and communities. It is important to recognize that a sole focus on economic empowerment is steeped in the capitalistic misogynistic structures of our society. Parenting is part of human development, part of our human curriculum. Perhaps parenting education focused on growth and self awareness and family decision-making can assist in breaking down the oligarchical structures stemming from colonial and capitalistic societal underpinnings. Parenting is unpaid work that contributes to every society. It includes the direct and indirect care of people. The care is primarily provided by women, and also to varying degrees provided by girls, men and boys. This unpaid work has a negative impact on gender gaps and the person's ability to participate fully in the economy of employment [88, 89]. Parenting is a way to support empowerment of women and the rest of the family by addressing the unequal distribution and decision making in unpaid work. It can also provide an opportunity for women to enter the workforce. Many times women who have children are discriminated against in that the woman needs to be available about 4 hours each day to nurse the baby. It is difficult to measure this cost, however, it has been shown that there is a cost savings of $3.1 billion in health care costs. In addition, the women that work in salaried positions are more able to stop and pump milk for the baby than women in hourly positions, which most women who are refugees can more readily access. A social ecological model is necessary to analyze the complexities of the cultural and contextual lived experience of women who are refugees. Parenting education is part of our community outreach and advocacy response to the refugee parents and families we work with as an element of an ecological system of restorative and healing responses that are culturally and contextually appropriate [90].

Participants' engagement in the analysis process guided what indicators were important and what to consider in terms of interventions and adjustments to the project. Many studies involving refugees use more traditional methods of analysis that focus on countering and mitigating deficits (PTSD for example) rather than focusing on how to nurture and cultivate strengths (resilience, agency, and empowerment). The participatory analysis process capitalizes on the participants' knowledge and abilities to overcome the challenges they have faced. It is a process of seeking ways to support people's ability to integrate their multiple identities and cultures. We believe that the participatory methods built capacity with the research team members and cohort members and helped engage the donors for funding to expand their project and begin new cohorts.. Capacity building was not hierarchically organized, rather it was multidimensional, with peer learning at its center. Many of the analysis discussions went beyond the study or project. The discussion included ways to include family members, husbands, and to deepen understanding such as including husbands and male family members in play with the children, including Imams from the local mosque to support the importance of intentional and attentional child rearing practices, addressing not only traditional and cultural values, but also the stressors children face.

Interestingly, the academic partner participants seemed to be the most hesitant and least flexible in terms of viewing participatory analysis as valid. However, by the end, the academic partner participants were on board and recognized that the learning and transformation would not have been as meaningful, relevant, nor extensive had participatory analysis not been used. This was evidence that the academic partners' growth and capacity building as a result of the study. Participatory

methods are robust even in contexts where participants have low English literacy and in many cases little formal education because participants are included in the development and measurement of indicators.

6.4 Research as growth

Finally, the authors wish to express gratitude for the privilege of working with these remarkable women. Through a deconstruction/reconstruction, self-reflective process, our intellect, our hearts and our compassion expanded. We learned that only through on-going dialectical interaction with people from the culture we were studying, did we begin to understand the profound impact of being able to hold different symbolic cultures as valid and true at the same time, even when in contradiction with each other. Some of the cultural challenges included the semantics of words and phrases in terms of culture values, meaning, and communication. As we started to code the data and discover patterns or deviances in the stories gathered, we were surprised at the abundant patterns of power imbalance, gender bias, and hidden histories. These are all themes that speak to the importance of heart and healing in research. As society continues to become increasingly multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural, we need educators who know how to support young children's development and learning by providing culturally relevant pedagogy that increases knowledge and love of self and others. In this way we work towards building a society with the knowledge and skills needed to live together respectfully and stand up to ignorance, prejudice, and discrimination. "Apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" [52, 73].

Acknowledgements

Author details

Deborah Young[1]* and Nicole Sager[2]

1 Empowering Communities Globally: For the Care of Children, Boulder, CO, United States

2 I Have A Dream Foundation, Boulder, Colorado, United States

*Address all correspondence to: dyoungecg@gmail.com

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