A Community-Based Organization in North Carolina: Facilitating Transitions From High School to College for Refugee-Background Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how one community-based organization supports adolescents through the transition from high school to college, specifically looking at the experiences of three late-arriving refugee-background students who successfully gained access to higher education. Through the critical conceptual framework of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), we present this case study in hopes of ultimately sharing what community-based organizations can do to support schools and refugee-background students in their transition to higher education. We found that this organization helps refugee youth to (1) build social connections and a sense of community through mentoring and networking; (2) navigate a new environment by "walking alongside" students; and (3) bolster aspirations to go beyond by celebrating their successes. Additionally, we describe how the support is perceived by the students and how the support impacts them. Finally, we share implications for practice for the focus organization, other community-based organizations, and educators of refugee-background students.

Key Words: community-based organizations, refugee-background students, community cultural wealth, college access, higher education, educational attainment

Introduction

Daily, upwards of 100 students filter in and out of the small community classroom located in the heart of the apartment complex where "Coalition for Refugees" (CFR; Note: all names are pseudonyms) holds its many meetings. Staggering times between 2:30 pm and 8:30 pm on weekdays, kindergarten through college students come and go, seeking support from the dozens of volunteers who sit around crowded tables. Sounds of talking, reading, and laughing fill the small space as students receive help on their schoolwork.

In this study, we illuminate the experiences of refugee-background students during their adolescence and the support provided by CFR, a community-based organization (CBO) in a large metropolis area in North Carolina, to better understand the integral role it plays for students as they transition from high school to higher education. Given that only 6% of refugees worldwide currently attend college (UNHCR, 2023), CFR's support has been significant to the success of students. In this article, we focus on three late-arriving refugee-background students who have successfully graduated from high school and matriculated into college: Amora, an Afghan refugee from Iran; Sue Mar, a Karenni refugee from Burma; and Gabriella, a Congolese refugee from Burundi. All three of these young women arrived in the U.S. during their adolescence with minimal English proficiency. In conversation with these students, they have each attributed their success in part to their participation with CFR during high school which therefore is the focus of this current research study.

CFR began serving the community in 2007 and offers a variety of support programs for refugee and immigrant families including nightly homework help; early learning classes for three- to four-year-olds; the College Bound program intended to mentor junior and senior students through graduation and into higher education; ESL classes for adults; liaisons with local schools to facilitate communication between families and teachers; medical support to help transport patients to appointments and communicate needs to health workers; fellowship picnics and social gatherings; summer camp for school-aged children, among other services. Data provided by CFR indicate the success that their efforts have already made. From the 2020–21 school year, 14 of the 15 participants in the College Bound program went to institutes of higher education following high school graduation. In the 2021–22 school year, 15 of 15 participants graduated and went to college. Most recently, in the 2022–23 school year, another 15 of 15 participants graduated from high school and went to community colleges and universities. The program has consistently had 15 seniors, though there is no cap or stipulation on the number of students who can participate. The College Bound program currently has a total enroll-

ment of 28 students for the 2023–24 school year. The cumulative effects of going to college extends beyond the student to his or her family and has lasting positive effects, including breaking the cycle of poverty (Haycock, 2015; Streitwieser et al., 2020). Streitwieser and colleagues (2020) explain:

> The provision of higher education has significant implications for any human being, whether living in a developing country or in the so-called developed world. But learning opportunities beyond secondary school are a major component in successful societal (re)integration, where the employment market values and rewards higher-order credentials and specializations. (p. 205)

Therefore, we consider refugee background students' movement into higher education a success for them and their greater communities. Driven by the desire to extend and amplify the practices that have paved the way towards success for students and their families at CFR, we share the students' stories so that all refugee students can, as Gabriella remarked, "reach the goals…[and] win life."

Purpose of the Study

Author 2 spent more than a decade striving to provide the needed academic, emotional, and financial support to the newly arrived multilingual students in her English language arts ninth grade classroom and to their families. She felt committed to the community connections she had developed but felt unable to meet the needs of all of her immigrant and refugee-background students. During the routine home visits she made, Author 2 met Cynthia who began working to help settle newly arrived refugee families in 2007 and later founded CFR, a CBO in North Carolina. Partnering with her church, Cynthia recruited volunteers to assist refugee families and provide needed resources and educational support as they transitioned to the new country. Author 2 acknowledged that if CFR had existed when she was still teaching at the high school, the families who she worked with would have received more robust support. Retrospectively, Author 2 was motivated to better understand how CFR is now helping former students of hers and other refugee-background students navigate the educational terrain.

The purpose, then, of this study is to share how the CBO supports students as they transition into higher education so that it might be amplified and expanded into other communities with immigrant and refugee background families and students. Therefore, in this study we set out to explore the following questions: (1) What does CFR do to support high school students' success moving into college? (2) How is the support perceived by the students, and how does the support impact them?

In this article, our goal is to reduce barriers to college-going for refugee-background students by sharing stories from those who have successfully made their way to higher education. Secondly, we will present findings about the work of CFR and share suggestions that other CBOs and educators may borrow to better support refugee and immigrant students in the transition from high school to college. Lastly, we write this article as a demonstration of our resistance against deficit perspectives and low expectations of students from refugee backgrounds (Alford, 2014; Murillo, 2002; Shapiro, 2014).

Geographic and Social Context

North Carolina (NC), a new immigration gateway state, has seen a steady increase in immigrant and refugee families since the 1990s (Rong et al., 2017). In fact, at the pinnacle of the fourth-wave immigration to the United States, NC's foreign population grew at a rate of 625% between 1990 and 2000 (Rong et al., 2017). As of 2018, immigrants and refugees made up approximately 8% of NC's total population (American Immigration Council, 2020) and 18% of the total K–12 students in NC report a primary language other than English is spoken in the home (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2022). In addition, NC consistently ranks tenth in the nation for refugee resettlement, with one in four refugees settling in the large metropolis region (Refugee Processing Center, 2022) which is served by CFR. This CBO is headquartered within the community center of an apartment complex where hundreds of refugee families reside. Originating from an outreach program within a nondenominational, evangelical church, today CFR partners with over 18 religious organizations and has as a part of its mission the commitment to "respecting the dignity and competence of everyone and supporting families as they continue to grow and flourish in a new environment" (organization website). Their presence now exceeds the walls of the community center. CFR rents apartments for increased program space and recently secured a lease on a large facility next door. Additionally, many staff members live in the apartment complex.

North High School, where most of the students attend and where Author 2 taught for 10 years, is close to the students' apartments. The school's student population is made up of 16% former or current English language learners and has the largest number of refugee students in the state (personal communication, ESL teacher). CFR works closely with North High School, particularly the ESL and sheltered-content teachers. The school–community liaison from CFR regularly emails teachers and visits families to share information from the school.

Theoretical Framework

We approach this study through the critical conceptual framework of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) with an eye on emphasizing the assets inherent in the refugee community and pushing back on deficit perspectives readily espoused about this population. The framework guided our analysis of the data collected, the findings, as well as the implications for future practice.

Community Cultural Wealth

Community cultural wealth centers knowledge and experiences possessed by culturally and linguistically diverse learners and pushes back on deficit perspectives, "one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. schools" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Deficit perspectives focus on what the students lack rather on the strengths that they bring (Valenzuela, 1999). Recognizing, and perhaps more importantly, giving room for students to use and share their community cultural wealth, has the power to "transform the process of schooling" (Yosso, 2005, p. 70) by validating students' knowledge and experiences as worthy of inclusion at school. The goal should not be to change the refugee students to better fit school norms. Rather, the goal is to learn from and transform the educational institutions to better fit the experiences, skills, and needs of the students that enter the school doors. Yosso (2005) identified six categories of community cultural wealth that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds bring with them to school: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Jimenez (2020) added a seventh category of capital: migration capital (see Table 1 in the Implications section for more information on community cultural wealth types of capital).

In this study, we will use the lens of community cultural wealth to explore the "multifaceted portfolio of cultural assets and resources [which] facilitate the survival and resistance of communities of color" (Yosso & Garcia, 2007, p. 155), in this case, refugee communities. Cultural capital is "accumulated, like a deposit in the bank, but cultural wealth is meant to be shared" (Yosso, 2006, p. 77), making an important distinction between the individual nature of capital and the communal nature of wealth. Therefore, possessing, utilizing, and growing community cultural wealth enriches the entire community. For example, familial capital, one aspect of community cultural wealth, includes a "commitment to community well-being" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) and the desire to help others "transcend the adversity in their daily lives" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80), thereby shifting the focus from the individual to the collective. Community cultural wealth is also a valuable tool for viewing students through an asset perspective

because it identifies skills, strengths, and advantages that they already possess due to their life experiences. Bañuelos (2021) explained, "...community cultural wealth highlights the unique and valuable information, obligations, trust, and norms that pool in communities of color because and in spite of their historical marginalization" (p. 1).

Therefore, we will analyze the efforts of CFR through the lens of community cultural wealth, highlighting how the organization is focused on students' assets and supports students' transitions from secondary to higher education. We will also use community cultural wealth as a framework to examine elements that are missing or are underdeveloped in the CBO and propose ways to further strengthen its offerings and better support of the refugee community and, most importantly, help refugee-background students achieve their goals of attending college and pursuing their dreams.

Literature Review

Obstacles and Aids for Refugees Accessing Higher Education

Refugees come to the U.S. to escape violence, poverty, and extreme conditions (UNHCR, 2020). They also come with greater educational opportunities in mind for their children (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008) and go to great lengths to ensure that their children have access to quality education. However, despite their interest and dedication to their children's educational achievement, there are many well-documented reasons explaining the struggles refugees face with schooling. First, the process of migration for refugees often involves emotional trauma and may result in post-traumatic stress disorder (Tuliao et al., 2017). Therefore, the loss, grief, and uncertainty that refugee students face may understandably distract them from their studies. El Yaafouri (2022) calls this "transition shock" to describe the multiple factors, including "persistent stress, transition-related anxiety, trauma, traumatic stress, high incidence of adverse childhood experiences, vulnerability, and culture shock," that affect children as newcomers to the U.S. (p. 2).

Another factor relating to lower academic achievement for newcomer students are gaps in children's formal education before and during the resettlement process (Daniel & Zybina, 2019). Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) have had at least two fewer years of schooling than their peers and have varying levels of formal education (Hos, 2016). One Haitian student explained how school was intermittently in session due to violence in the community: "You always have to ask when there is school. They are always doing something strange in the street—killing. You can't get an education. My father wanted me to come [to the U.S.] so that he can give me an opportunity

for tomorrow" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008, p. 30). In addition, many refugees who come from nonindustrialized areas may have limited technological skills and formal education (Tuliao et al., 2017), further complicating their ability to catch up to school-aged peers in the U.S.

In addition, adjusting to a new community is itself a difficult task, "situating oneself within a new context of language, culture, community, and shifting personal identities" (El Yaafouri, 2022, p. viii). Central to their adaptation is learning the English language which has been shown to take significant time (Daniel & Zybina, 2019; Hoff & Armstrong, 2021; Hos, 2016; Roxas & Roy, 2012). Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), language used in academic instruction, has been shown to take five to seven years to develop once immersed in English (Cummins, 1996). Yet, students are routinely put at a disadvantage in schools when they are denied the opportunity to translanguage (García & Kleyn, 2016), or draw from their home language, a practice shown to be effective for new language learners, and instead are forced to complete all assignments in English (Kleyn, 2016). Furthermore, refugee students often face mixed reception by community and school personnel (Roxas & Roy, 2012). While initially welcomed into the host community, hostility and resentment often grow after a few years in the U.S. (Roxas & Roy, 2012). Tuliao et al. (2017) explains the many competing demands on immigrants, "they are expected to juggle new roles while simultaneously learning English, adapting to a new country, finding a job or working, and studying" (p. 17). Teachers may not be aware of the circumstances regarding the students' migration experiences and may deem student work as demonstrating deliberate laziness on class assignments. For example, one teacher criticized a refugee background student when, in fact, he was "working relentlessly to finish assignments, but was overwhelmed" (Roxas & Roy, 2019, p. 479).

Overall, there is evidence of a continued deficit perspective held by teachers and administrators towards immigrant and refugee students and a subsequent lack of access to rigorous learning opportunities (Alford, 2014; Daniel & Zybina, 2019; Lau, 2012; Ngo, 2017; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Shapiro (2014) noted that refugees are often "presumed to be educationally deficient, not predicted to reach high levels of achievement, and therefore may not be encouraged to challenge themselves academically (p. 397)" (as cited in Daniel & Zybina, 2019, p. 351). There also tends to be a lack of sufficient ESL programs, qualified teachers, and translators (Roxas & Roy, 2012). Refugee students, like other English language learners, are often filtered into low-track classes that do not adequately prepare them for postsecondary opportunities, including education and work (Alford, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Shapiro, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999). Shapiro (2014)

explains that English language learners "spend much of their day in separate academic tracks, where the primary focus is linguistic remediation and not the learning of grade-level content" (p. 387). These factors contribute to isolation and rejection by peers and teachers at school and culminate in lower achievement on standardized tests and higher dropout rates (Barton & Tan, 2020; Juvonen, 2007; Nasir et al., 2011).

While there is much research into the barriers for young refugee students, there is far less research surrounding the factors that contribute to their successful completion of secondary education and enrollment and attendance in college. One factor that has been explored as playing positive roles in students' success is mentorship by a caring adult (Hos, 2016; Roxas & Roy, 2012; Stewart, 2015; Symons & Ponzio, 2019; Wooley, 2009). Hoff and Armstrong (2021) call this "ethical care," explaining, "building caring relationships with educators helped refugee-background students feel supported and encouraged" (p. 3). Likewise, El Yaafouri (2022) discusses the four essential pillars for working successfully with refugee-background youth: (1) connect—building and maintaining authentic relationships with students; (2) protect—cultivating trust and safety in the learning space; (3) respect—fostering student voice, choice, and collaboration; and 4) redirect—facilitating self-efficacy and sustainability.

Methodology

Through the use of a qualitative case study methodology, we focus on the nuanced situation of late-arriving refugee-background youth navigating college enrollment and the supporting role that one CBO, CFR, provides to these students (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Case study provides us with a robust approach to research that is best used in the pursuit of highly contextualized knowledge (Baxter & Jack, 2008, Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Stake, 1995). It explores a real-life, bounded system through a detailed and thorough collection and analysis of multiple sources and forms of data, and then subsequently reports the findings in a descriptive manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Stake, 1995). Our case study is nuanced, contextualized, and personal. It is bounded by the confines of CFR and makes use of numerous sources of data including semi-structured 1:1 and group interviews, data from the CBO, and documents such as letters from teachers, personal writings, and awards. Case study allows us to refine our understanding as we seek to closely explore alternate and multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995), also affording the opportunity to illuminate this specific case and provide in-depth insight into the ways CFR supports refugee youth during critical years of high school. In this study we focus not just on the

staff at CFR, but on three late-arriving refugee students who named CFR as a central factor in their success.

Data Collection and Analysis

This article reflects data collected from a three-year-long case study in which Author 2 first followed the trajectory of two of her former high school students, Amora (from Afghanistan) and Sue Mar (from Burma), as they moved into and navigated higher education. The case study was expanded to include a third refugee student, Gabriella (from the Congo), who participated in the College Bound Program at CFR and enrolled in community college in 2022. In this study we draw from multiple semi-structured interviews (1:1, group, and asynchronous) conducted with these three refugee college students as they reflected on their support during high school. We also interviewed the founder and director of CFR; the coordinator of the College Bound Program; the liaison with the high school; a mentor in the College Bound Program and former guidance counselor at North High School; and the community college liaison who has served as a facilitator for refugee students entering the community college. Other sources of data include document analysis of letters from teachers, personal essays, and school awards related to Sue Mar's high school work as well as an interview with the English teacher–researcher (Author 2). Data was also collected from CFR on student success in the College Bound Program (see the Appendix for the list of the data sources).

Interviews lasting 30–60 minutes were conducted with each of the refugee-background students and personnel associated with CFR between one and three times. The interviews were conducted and recorded via a video conferencing platform, providing a partial transcript of the conversation. The transcripts were then corrected by watching the interview and filling in missed and incorrect words. Using a video recording was helpful, especially with refugee students, because understanding the message was sometimes reliant on body language and facial expressions. The interviews gathered information on students' experiences at school and at CFR as well as other information about the process of applying to college and their future plans. Interviews with CFR support personnel focused on practices, goals, and outcomes of their outreach programs, particularly the College Bound Program.

A key strategy in data analysis was adding interviewer notes. These described the context of the interview and key parts where the data glowed and produced wonder (MacLure, 2013). Authors 1 and 2 hand coded the data for emergent themes independently of one another and shared our codes during meetings. Some codes that emerged at this stage were persistence, asking questions, mental fortitude, and educator support. Codes were clarified and condensed during subsequent readings of the data.

We used additional documents to help triangulate data from multiple sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). For example, we used the documents collected to triangulate codes identified in Sue Mar's interview transcripts. Initial data collected in preliminary interviews directed subsequent data collection to clarify details during follow-up and asynchronous interviews.

In the second round of data analysis, we overlaid the types of capital identified by Yosso (2005) and Jimenez (2020) in community cultural wealth to analyze the data and identify ways in which the students, teachers, staff, and mentors in CFR recognized and made connections to student assets. Refugee-background students bring experiences and knowledge that are valuable to their lives and to the interactions in community spaces such as the classroom and school. The role of CFR is not to provide or give these students "missing assets" that they need. Rather, CFR serves as a conduit between the refugee-background students and the new context in North Carolina.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the ability to clearly delineate between forms of community cultural wealth is difficult given that they overlap and are reliant upon another. For example, a student may have navigational capital, understanding how to negotiate educational spaces, but also needs aspirational capital to move forward, especially in the face of adversity. Success for students, measured here as entry into higher education, is dependent then upon the harmony of multiple forms of capital working simultaneously. Therefore, we reviewed the transcripts for a third time for how students and refugee support staff described support from the school, other adults, other refugees, and CFR. This round of coding led us to insights about the role of the CBO in identifying and making connections to the assets that the refugee women possess. It also pointed out places where the CBO could strengthen its practices. Lastly, we analyzed the data a fourth time, using values coding (Miles et al., 2020) to determine the students' perceptions of the support and the impact on them.

Positionality

Author 1 is a White, bilingual educator in higher education. She has focused her work on understanding the impact of involving families and communities in K–12 classrooms to support teachers and their students. For example, as a high school Spanish teacher, she involved her students in the community by seeking opportunities to speak Spanish locally and interact with neighbors. Later, she connected Spanish-dominant and English-dominant parents at their dual language school through language classes and cross-cultural conversation time. She values the contributions of CBOs in facilitating these connections between school and home.

Author 2 is a White, monolingual doctoral candidate and researcher who has been an educator in North Carolina public schools for 16 years and has been deeply concerned with educational inequities since she first recognized them in her own life. Born to teenage parents in a low-resourced rural community, she recalls being cognizant of educational inequities as early as Kindergarten. These memories serve as a catalyst for her commitment to educational equity. She spent a decade as an English teacher, teaching sheltered English literature to classes of newly arrived immigrant and refugee adolescents, and later became an elementary English as a second language teacher, where she worked to help ensure greater academic access to curricular content for her students. Amora and Sue Mar, study participants, are former students of hers who have now gone on to higher education. Her aim has always been to create more opportunities for success for students for whom success did not feel guaranteed.

We, as researchers, approach this study placing great value on immigrant and refugee-background students' experiences and knowledge which they bring to the classroom and community. We see our work with them to honor and share their stories with educators and community members. We feel it is a privilege to be invited and welcomed into the lives and experiences of Amora, Sue Mar, and Gabriella and the work that CFR does in the community. These spaces have been generously opened to us.

Findings

In this section, we will share our findings on how CFR supported students' success moving from high school to institutions of higher education by recognizing and making connections to their community cultural wealth. Specifically, it was found that CFR helps refugee-background students (a) promote social connections and sense of community; (b) navigate a new environment; and (c) bolster aspirations to go beyond. We will also present how CFR's support was perceived by the refugee-background students and how the support has impacted them long-term. Our findings are presented with an intentional centering of all the participants' voices to honor the valuable wisdom and insight they bring to this research. This is essential, because in Ramsay and Baker's (2019) meta-scoping study of 46 papers on students from refugee backgrounds in higher education contexts, they found a stark lack of refugee-background student voices and issued a directive for researchers to "reduce the dominance of our own voices" (p. 81), and that is what we are seeking to do in this article by centering the voices of others.

Promoting Social Connections and Community: "It's Kind of Like You Are Family"

CFR offers important support to refugee-background students like Amora, Sue Mar, and Gabriella by promoting social connections and creating a sense of community among refugee families. The CBO hosts community gatherings frequently, often every week. Amora explains,

> Honestly, [the] community center, they always have parties or something. They invite all students and their families and kind of spend time with them. Which all of us gonna go, and, it's kind of nice. You talk with some of them. Especially moms…they all getting friends with each other.

Amora likewise described the role that these social relationships play for her mother:

> You can talk to them [refugee-background individuals who live at the apartment complex], and then some people also like learning the language and some words from them, which is nice.…They are always talking [about] what they want to do in the future.…My mom just learned from them and wanted to be friends with them. It's like you are family.

By facilitating relationships among refugee-background families, especially mothers who tend to be more isolated in immigrant and refugee families (Northcote et al., 2006), newer refugee families are supported by those who have been here longer. Kayla, in her role as liaison to the schools, explained how she noticed these connections when refugee families began to help newly arrived refugee families. While previously she would have been the first called by the school to pick up a child due to illness or to learn about a problem at school, refugee mothers and families began to help one another navigate problems at school.

> I ended up actually…passing it off to them and their friend, so one of their friends that worked as the translator for it, so, instead of me being the one that got a call. If she didn't show up or if something happened, I'm still on the list, but I'm now second. It's another family from the same country that's been there longer that is friends with them that is now the first contact because she can immediately call and translate everything to the parents.

The sense of community and shared purpose among refugee families provide an important support system for families who have just arrived in the United States. With their newly acquired English, families who have been here

a little longer can understand and translate the information to the home language of the other family. They can also serve as cultural mediators to explain how things are typically done in the U.S. schools and classrooms from their shared cultural perspective.

CFR also encourages students to look to other refugee-background students for models. For example, Cynthia, the founder and executive director of CFR, mentioned the effect of having other refugee-background students who had gone before into higher education as having a positive effect on the current students enrolled in the College Bound Program since they form a part of their shared community:

> So, I feel like it even expands beyond just the students that we work with…it's like a culture of…"I can do it." This [refugee-background student] did it…or this person did it…and so I can do it.

There is an aura of success at CFR and a buy-in that if others made it through the process, they could as well.

Sue Mar often spoke of the power of talking to or learning about the experience of a fellow refugee-background person. For example, she shared that she read the autobiography of former First Lady Michelle Obama but felt that, while impressive, she couldn't relate to Obama's personal life story since she is not from a refugee background. In contrast, when Amora met a dentist from Iran through connections made in the apartment complex, she was inspired to stick to her plan of becoming a dentist because he was a refugee-background student at one time and had achieved his dream, so she might, too. She explained, "[W]hen I went to the dentist they told me—the doctor was from Iran. So, I was talking to him, and he said that [studying to be a dentist] is not that long. He said, 'If you love it, just do it!'"

Help Navigating a New Environment: "Start Early—Walk With Them…[Walk] With Them Beyond."

CFR supports the entire refugee family in acclimating to their new environment. They help families navigate many practical necessities such as a place to live, a job, medical care, English classes, and education support for their children. CFR is integral in placing families in a furnished apartment and helping them get their bearings when they first arrive. CFR's support for students is extensive, including homework help, school supplies, and the College Bound Program which includes 1:1 mentors, academic skill nights, college visits, and career nights, in which a professional from the community shares about his/her profession. Amora explained the importance of homework help at CFR:

> Honestly, that place [CFR] was really good though. Especially, like you when you are just getting to the country, and you need help, and then they have really nice people coming. Some of them are teachers or professors and then some of them are really smart people. And they come to help, honestly. They have different skill[s]—some for biology, or math, or English which is nice. They have a lot of volunteers to help the students.

In addition to providing nightly homework help, CFR was also a place to obtain school supplies. At the beginning of the year, school supplies including backpacks, notebooks, and pencils could be purchased at a minimal price. The center was also a place where students could print class notes, papers, and other documents needed for class. During the COVID-19 pandemic when classes moved to online learning, Amora regularly went to CFR to print slide decks from online lectures. She explained, "Mostly I'm gonna go there to print stuff because I have [an] online class which is—they [are] all on PowerPoint, and I have to print them and study." Having consistent access to needed materials for schoolwork helped ensure students could succeed even as instruction moved online. Additionally, Amora routinely went to CFR to receive help on college essays and yearly went for support with her financial aid application. Amora explained that the volunteer who worked with her did not just help her to fill out the documentation, but "he kind of teach [sic] me how to do it," resulting in her completing it for her siblings in subsequent years. In this way, the volunteer served as a literacy broker (Perry, 2009), helping bridge the cultural, navigational understandings that were hindering Amora's comprehension of the application. Access to these resources was vital for the students to sustain college enrollment, particularly during a tumultuous period.

Another key navigational component for student success is the mentor–refugee student relationship. The refugee-background students receive important advice from mentors, including how to navigate school procedures and policies, such as what to do when they miss school or struggle with class assignments. Kayla, CFR employee and liaison to the schools who also lived in the apartment complex with the refugee families, regularly counsels students regarding their academic work. She explains her role in helping students see the importance of addressing problems early on and in encouraging students to communicate directly with teachers:

> When there's a week left of school…there's very little I can do to help you not fail the class, like that's not something that's possible, so I've been trying over the last year to really emphasize that, like hey, if you have a problem, come quickly, and teaching them to reach out to their teachers…and the ones that I've seen do that are improving a lot.

Students may be unaware of the fact that teachers are often receptive to student requests for help or more time on an assignment. Additionally, in U.S. culture, students are welcome and encouraged to speak up for themselves. Kayla helps them to better understand this two-way communication between students and their teachers, making a significant difference in their ability to perform at their optimal level.

Finally, the College Bound Program provides essential support for students as they make the transition beyond high school to higher education. Cynthia explained the origins of the College Bound Program after seeing the struggles students encountered after high school graduation:

> I think the reason I started the [College Bound Program] in the beginning was because what I was seeing in our community was…first kid in a family to go to high school, much less finish—like [graduation] pictures taken…whole family, teachers, anyone that they knew, just like pictures, pictures, pictures, and then at the end of the day when I saw the kids back in the community, it was just like this panic of what now? What do I do now?

Therefore, in effort to support students beyond high school graduation, the College Bound Program was put in place, according to Cynthia, to show "that commitment to walk with them for the long haul, and that you're not…going to leave them at the door of college. Start early—walk with them…[walk] with them beyond." When students join the College Bound Program, they are assigned to a mentor who meets with them regularly during their remaining years in high school and into college. They also have access to daily homework help, tutoring sessions, and academic skills nights. There are, in addition, evening informational sessions that include topics such as applying for financial aid and scholarships, writing college applications, and deciding upon majors and career paths. Ashley, the coordinator of the College Bound Program, expressed that college access was important because they witnessed that students "ended up falling into the same jobs that their parents did, which are not necessarily bad jobs, but they keep their family in a cycle of poverty" and helping them to navigate access to college was a way to change students' personal and familial trajectory. Kayla, the school liaison, explained the role of the College Bound Program, since it is unlikely that their parents have gone through this process before:

> We do college tours. We help with the college applications. We help with the FAFSA applications. We help with other scholarship applications. Just because a lot of times, like let's face it, we knew that there were scholarship applications because our parents were like, all right, well, it's

> time to apply for this. You've got to make sure you get things in [by] this time, like those scholarships are going to close, and their parents don't know the American college rules.…They didn't go through our system, and it's difficult to kind of find them out.

Gabriella, a recent graduate from the College Bound Program, agreed that the program was instrumental in her decision to go to college because it introduced her to the academic programs and possible careers:

> From the [College Bound Program], I should say they help us a lot. Like to make a meeting with somebody, to just share their knowledge with us. I can say, making appointments with people [who] work in [a local community college], [a local university], so we just meet many people here…we [are] just meeting the doctors; we [are] meeting the dentists.

An important part of the program was encouraging students to think realistically about their interests and strengths and what they might like to do with their lives. Often mentors challenged students to think about personal goals. Kayla explained the role of CFR in helping students navigate career choices and the pressures that might be placed on them by parents and family members:

> The biggest thing that we do with I think in the [College Bound Program] is discussing reasonable goals and what is it that [students] actually want—helping them find a dream and a vision and a way of doing it, because a lot of times you have a lot of pressure from parents—you will be a doctor—and they want don't want to be, and it's very hard to be a doctor.

Mentors help students identify subject areas that interest them and help them find a career path that would align with their strengths. They sought to bring more information and resources to the students through guest speakers and mentoring to improve their ability to navigate the many career choices. For example, Cynthia recalled a student thinking about becoming a hairstylist or vet and thought that the two careers would require equal amounts of schooling. Therefore, the career nights have provided needed information to students about possible careers and their degree requirements. Cynthia explained the rationale behind career nights to highlight diversity of options:

> We have career nights where we have different people come in and speak, and we've kind of tried to approach it like—nursing…a lot of women want to be a nurse. Okay, what is a nurse? And what are all the kinds of things you could do with a nursing background, you can be a CNA—low threshold, low pay. You could be a doctor's office nurse—more investment of time, but probably lower on the pay scale, all the way up to being

> a nurse anesthetist or a PA. And then there's male nurses, and there are reasons that they need male nurses, and dental hygienists, and dentists.

Luis, the recruitment and outreach officer at a local community college, partners with CFR to facilitate the community college application process for their students. He provides campus tours and workshops on completing an application, applying for financial aid, and other skills. For example, he recently conducted a workshop on mock college interviews. Luis, however, acknowledged that for access to higher education, the biggest barrier for immigrant and refugee students is their life realities, which he describes as "competing against life." He realizes that for refugee students, the need to make money to provide transportation, childcare, food, and housing often supersedes the desire and aspiration to pursue a college education. Luis explained that most low-resourced students face "the cost of not knowing." Students feel badly asking for help. He explained that his role is to provide needed resources and information about navigating the community college without them having to ask.

Collectively, these individual players—CFR's director, the school liaison, other CFR staff, the homework help volunteers, the mentors, and the community college recruitment liaison work together to accelerate the refugee-background students' navigational knowledge. They help the adolescents to expand and apply their knowledge to a new setting, resulting in positive outcomes for the students and, ultimately, for their communities.

Bolstering Aspirations to Go Beyond: "[We] Provide…a Community of Hope"

CFR also helped support refugee-background students by reinforcing their aspirations for life. Amora, Sue Mar, and Gabriella demonstrated strong aspirational capital as they worked to meet their academic goals while also caring for their families by working part time jobs, helping with younger siblings, and serving as family language and literacy brokers (Perry, 2009)—translating during appointments, explaining important mail, and bridging the school–home connection for younger siblings. Amora has plans to become a dentist and is in her senior year of college. Sue Mar hopes to open a textile factory using environmentally safe methods in her home country of Burma and recently completed her bachelor's degree in fashion design. Gabriella expressed her goal to become a pharmacist developing new drug compounds in the lab and is in her first year at a community college. Gabriella's aspiration, hard work, and determination were clearly communicated, as well as her belief that her success depends largely on her own efforts:

> I want to reach the goals, because I want to win life, because many people want to win this life, yes, want to be [at] some higher levels, [but]

> they don't want to do anything, so they [are] just sitting there, and they want to be [at] higher levels. So me, I want to walk by my power—I want to work by my energy. I'm going to spend my energy to get something by myself.

Unlike others that she might have observed, Gabriella feels compelled to act on her desires and not sit idly by, merely hoping.

CFR helped celebrate and bolster the aspirations held by refugee-background students and their families. They adopted a "culture of celebration"—celebrating all the good news in students' lives as they progressed towards their goals. Cynthia, the founder and executive director of CFR, explained how celebrating success had become central to their work:

> [We have] kind of taken [it] on almost as a core value of celebration. Because it's so hard. What these families are trying to do is so hard, and so just to celebrate everything—we can celebrate every small movement, I think, it builds [more success] too…so, I think that if I boiled everything down…I think the thing that we do provide the best is just a community of hope.

With a "community of hope" firmly in place, CFR relies upon relationships between refugee-background families and volunteers to fortify their dreams. Cynthia explained, "You have to believe that someone really cares about you." Gabriella attested to this fact when she shared that her CFR mentor encouraged her to persevere: "[She gave] me some advice, like…keeping in school and standing by my decision. Just like she just told me to stand by my decision and do what is right for me." This advice gave students confidence that they were progressing towards a better future and that they were doing the right thing.

Tammy, a mentor for students at CFR and also a former guidance counselor at North High School, explained her role as a mentor to sustain and build students' aspirations:

> It's been a lot of, let's talk about our classes at school, why are you not doing well in this class, how can we improve, and let's plan for college.… [Her mentee] wants to take classes at [a local community college] during her senior year, so [she] needs to go ahead and get a jump on it. So, we've talked about how to go ahead and get some college classes completed while she's a senior.

Tammy's insider knowledge about early college access for high school students allows her to counsel students on how to pursue "early college," taking college level courses without having to pay tuition, making it more likely that her mentee will continue this path to higher education upon her graduation.

CFR's invitation to Tammy to participate as a mentor was a strategic decision due to Tammy's 30 plus years as a guidance counselor at North High School and her established community connections.

CFR's explicit goal is stated in their motto: *that all may thrive*. The bolstering of aspirations is central to their mission and observable in their programs and among the refugee families in this "community of hope." Walking around the apartments and speaking with students and families, there is a sense of hopefulness for what is to come in this resettlement country.

How the Support Was Perceived by the Young Women

The support provided by CFR was perceived by the refugee-background women as helpful, kind, compassionate, and for Gabriella, the result of divine intervention. For example, through her participation in homework help at CFR, Sue Mar connected with an alum of a local four-year university. She filled out the paperwork for Sue Mar's transfer application from the community college and wrote a letter requesting financial aid for her. Sue Mar reflected on how helpful this was to her and how she felt excited and supported by the CBO in her transition:

> I'm really excited because she wrote them a letter…I was like, yeah! They need to help you because they help a lot of people, and they [are] not better… [they don't just] help only the *other* people, [they] will help you, too…she knows a lot of people, too. And she also went to school there. It is really helpful that she helped me.

The interactions the students had with CFR were consistently described as kind and compassionate. The perceived kindness and compassion are significant because, had the students not felt this warmth, then they likely would not have chosen to continue accessing these resources through the CBO.

Sue Mar described her interactions with volunteers from the community organization and the overall feeling of it being helpful and compassionate.

> Carrie is one of the refugee sponsors. She used to be my cousin's sponsor, but I got to know her through there. So, she was talking to my uncle and everybody there, and I go to her house, and that's how I meet her. So, she's supposed to not help me, but I go and ask her help.

Sue Mar found help from her cousin's mentor even though she had not been assigned to help her. Finally, in the week following her high school graduation, Gabriella attributed her success to divine intervention, claiming that God had brought CFR into her life and without this influence, she is not sure if she would know the career she hoped to pursue as she enrolled in the local community college the following semester: "I'm not yet success. But I should say

God because he just helping me to get…peoples [from CFR] coming my way, because without God to send them to me, I don't know who…who I might be." Overwhelmingly, the young women in this study looked at CFR as a vital resource in obtaining their future goals of higher education.

How the Support Has Impacted Them Long Term

The support from CFR has impacted each of the young women's lives in significant ways. Sue Mar has finished all the credits needed to graduate from her four-year university after successfully transferring from a community college with a degree in fashion design. However, despite being provided some financial assistance and scholarships, she has a small remaining balance, and the university is withholding her degree until they are paid in full. Sue Mar has been making monthly payments and will soon hopefully overcome this final barrier and be permitted to walk across the stage and receive her diploma after seven long years. Amora graduated in the Spring of 2023 from a four-year public university after commuting from her home to attend classes an hour and a half away, allowing her to save money. Gabriella is still considered a newcomer since she has only been in the U.S. for four years at the time of this writing. However, she has successfully graduated from high school and entered a pharmacy program at the local community college. All three women have expressed the desire to extend their schooling beyond a four-year undergraduate program.

Discussion

In many ways, the roles of CFR in this study reflect those in existing literature of CBOs who serve the needs of multilingual learners and their families and are aligned with the findings of 1) providing social connections and sense of community and 2) helping to navigate new environments. For example, Wong (2010) demonstrated the role that CBOs play in providing needed social and emotional support by providing a "sense of trust and caring, sense of ethnic self and identity, sense of home and safe space, serving as role models, and sense of being a teenager" by creating a new and hybrid third space between home and school (p. 710). Harris and Kiyama (2015), likewise, stressed the importance of community-based programs for establishing safe spaces built upon *confianza* (mutual trust) where relationships with caring adults were forged. Mentors in these programs played an integral role in the students' learning to negotiate school spaces and resulted in higher graduation rates for students. Culturally and linguistically diverse students' success in school is largely influenced by the social interactions that they have with caring adults by providing educational expectations, social support, and "academic press," that is pressure for students

to exhibit consistent effort at school (Woolley, 2009, p. 10). This study contributes to the existing literature in that it examines the role of the CBO in supporting refugee-background students in their move into higher education, which has not been an area of research. Once Cynthia, director of CFR, recognized that students involved in the programs were not going on to college, she began to emphasize students' progress beyond high school. The College Bound program provided by CFR, therefore, also focuses on bolstering students' aspirations to go beyond high school graduation, navigate the process, and ultimately, pursue further educational goals.

While the students involved in the CFR's College Bound Program all went on to higher education, this is not always the case. Many refugee background students do not go on to higher education (Streitwieser et al., 2020). Even within their own families, there are discrepancies between members of the family, some who clearly draw upon their community cultural wealth in this way and those that do not. For example, Amora and Sue Mar shared frustrations that they cannot convince their younger siblings to work hard in high school and to apply for college. They feel that their siblings who arrived in the U.S. at a younger age than them did not face the same challenges that they faced in acquiring English and also do not fully comprehend the struggle and the value of accessing college that they themselves have undergone.

We see that CFR is contributing to the success of students who enroll in its programs. It is important to note that we are defining success in this article as the ability to enroll in higher education. However, not only is data lacking on the effects on students and their families of this decision in the subsequent years, but it also fails to consider the importance of defining success more broadly to include students' ability to accept themselves fully including their cultural and historical background. El Yaafouri (2022) describes a former student who, in his opinion, achieved true success—combining elements of his home culture and the adopted western culture:

> I zoomed in on his picture and saw a confident, simple, Western-style business suit, and a Nepali *tilak* on his forehead. He'd made it. Let me clarify, though. By "made it," I mean that he'd not only managed resilience and academic accomplishment but also achieved integration. [My student] had learned to navigate the world of his new home without compromising the integrity of his personal and cultural identity. (p. 5)

In an effort to consider success more broadly, we looked for signs from the participants that they too have held onto their cultural identity while also expanding to adopt some features of the U.S. culture. Sue Mar demonstrates that she has "made it" in much the same manner El Yaafouri (2022) described

success as the ability to navigate and, in some aspects, integrate the new culture while still maintaining and holding fast to one's own cultural identity. Sue Mar explained that the Burmese military has been suppressing and seeking to eradicate her Karenni culture through banning their use of language, forcing cultural assimilation, and the genocide of Karenni people. Over time the Karenni people have begun to dress like Burmese people, despite having a distinct culture and dress. Sue Mar is pursuing a career in fashion design, so to reclaim her cultural dress and integrate it with American culture, she designs Karenni clothing and accessories which merge the cultures in such a way that honors both countries which are important to her identity as a Karenni American woman. In the dress featured in Figure 1 and Figure 2, Sue Mar draws on her culture with the traditional Karenni color of red as well as the scarf-like fabric drawn around the waist.

Figure 1. Sue Mar's Dress During Construction

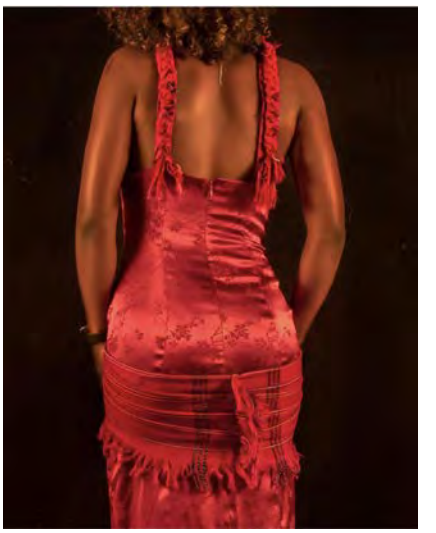

Figure 2. Sue Mar's Dress on a Model

In addition to the complex nature of defining success, this study has revealed the multiple factors that interplay to determine the trajectory of students. Not only is the CBO essential to this process, but so are the actions and beliefs of the students themselves and the many teachers, coaches, mentors, neighbors, and parents that also influence the lives of young people. We may desire an

easy formula to follow to ensure the success of CBOs in helping refugee background students transition to higher education, but we have to realistically acknowledge the multifaceted nature of this situation. Success for each student will be manifested in different ways depending upon their journeys, dreams, and the relationships they form along the way (Mann & Turner, 2023).

Implications

When we set out to write this article, one goal was to push back on deficit notions that persist about refugee-background students and school achievement. We want to highlight that the refugee-background students featured in this case study, Amora, Sue Mar, and Gabriella, demonstrate personal strengths and assets including aspirational capital, social capital, and resistant capital that help them persist in their path to higher education. Ultimately, they are the main catalysts of their success. Yet, the work of CFR was instrumental in sustaining and helping direct their efforts from time to time to ensure their success. In this section of the article and in an effort to amplify refugee-background students' voices, we will share implications of our research for CFR, other CBOs, and educators.

CFR plays an important role in the success of refugee-background adolescents pursuing a college education by helping students build social connections and a sense of community, navigate the new environment, and dream to go beyond. However, an approach that is better aligned with a community cultural wealth perspective would involve more focus by CFR on the strengths that members of the refugee community possess, instead of what they may lack. Rather than attempting to stack on new knowledge and skills that are relevant and valued in the U.S. context, it would be more beneficial for CBOs to first identify the skills and experiences that refugee students and their families already bring with them from their past experiences and lives, and then apply those in the new context. For example, we learned that Sue Mar's father had been a teacher in Burma prior to their relocation and her mother was a seamstress who clothed many people in their village. Taking the time to know people's backgrounds and past expertise could help fulfill needs in the new community where they have been resettled. Sue Mar's father could be invited to assist with Burmese refugees' sustaining of their home language during afterschool tutoring sessions. Sue Mar's mother could assist others in fixing or altering clothing for families. Through interviews with the leadership of CFR, we learned that they are eager to help and feel pressure to rapidly move refugee families into places of stability. They could, however, more deliberately consider how the individuals might contribute to the caring and serving of other refugee-background families and CFR. The relationship between CFR and the

refugee families tends to follow a top-down transmission with the members of the CBO in control of programming decisions. However, refugee-background families are well suited to identify concerns and needs that they want to address for their community, and the opportunity to participate should be made readily available. Therefore, we recommend that CFR focus first on recognizing and tapping into the refugee-background students' community cultural wealth and then look for ways to shape or extend these assets to serve the refugee-background students' best interests.

Refugee students' resistant capital could be tapped into by looking for opportunities to involve refugee-background individuals in leadership and in decisions for the CBO. Currently, there are no refugee-background people employed at CFR; a few have worked as interns at times. Refugee-background individuals can shed light on practices at CFR that might contribute unknowingly to the discrimination and exclusion of others or reify deficit perspectives in the community. A better practice would be to hire members of the refugee-background community into leadership and advising roles in their organization. The refugees served by the CBO could vote or offer their opinion on applicants for positions within the organization.

Refugee-background families and students should be represented by someone who they feel understands their experiences and knows their concerns. As Sue Mar explained, while reading about the life and work of Michelle Obama was interesting and inspiring, it still was not the same as following the life example of a refugee-background person who has experienced similar experiences and challenges as she has. She said, "Cause if I see someone born in the U.S. do something amazing, it's like, that's amazing, but *that's not my life*… [Michelle Obama] didn't came from refugee, and she knew how to speak English when she was younger." CFR acts from a place of caring and love and could better serve the refugee-background families if they prioritize the inclusion of refugee-background individuals on their staff and board.

Additionally, refugee-background families and students could have regular opportunities to come together in a shared space, to openly discuss their experiences and identify concerns that they have as a community. Meetings could be organized according to cultural and linguistic groups to provide spaces in which participants could truly express themselves in their home language. The assistance of a leader in a paid position for each cultural/linguistic group would facilitate these meetings as well as amplify the voices of the community. Once key concerns are identified, CFR could invite leaders within the refugee community to help find solutions, centering the refugee community at the heart of its organization. Additionally, the cultural/linguistic liaison would work alongside the CFR staff to organize events based upon the needs

and preferences of the community they represent. This would shift dynamics and allow CFR to more fully lean into the community cultural wealth that is currently underutilized.

In order to build upon students' existing social capital gained through years of navigation of complex political rules, CFR could foster greater social networks among refugee students by more frequently inviting refugee-background students to the center who are visiting from college or have graduated from college and are in careers. They could share what they have learned about majors, career choices, and interacting with professors and classmates. If a large enough group of college students and graduates are invited, discussion groups could be created for each home language of the participants to better share intimate knowledge.

Finally, we provide resources for those serving in educator roles so that they may more fully recognize and bolster their students' community cultural wealth. In Table 1 below, we highlight the forms of capital, descriptions/definitions, examples from the current study, and suggestions for teachers to tap into and leverage these sources of cultural wealth in their multilingual students.

Table 1. Sources of Community Cultural Wealth, Examples from the Current Study, and Suggestions for Teachers who Work with Multilingual Learners (Adapted from Yosso, 2005 and Jimenez, 2020)

Form of Capital	**Definition of capital by Yosso (2005)***	**Example from Current Study**	**Suggestions for Teachers**
Aspirational	"Ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77)	Amora dreams of becoming a dentist and, despite hardships of funding, difficult classes with native English speakers, and having to commute to school, she is succeeding at her goal.	-Take students to visit local colleges and universities in the area. -Have refugee background college graduates come and talk to students about their participation in higher education so that students can "see" someone like themselves in these spaces. -Have guests come to class to talk about career options. -Ask students to interview a family member or friend about professional or educational hardships they have encountered and overcome. -Have students create multimodal identity projects (Cummins et al., 2015) about who they are and who they want to become.

Table 1, continued

Linguistic	"Intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78)	Sue Mar hopes to one day open a fabric factory in her home country of Burma where she could provide quality employment for women of her country. She has maintained her linguistic and cultural connections to her home country. Gabriella speaks three languages: French at school in Burundi; Swahili at home; and Ngondi with friends (and is now learning English).	-Allow for and promote translanguaging practices (García & Kleyn, 2016) in the classroom and school. -Bulletin boards, word walls, entry ways should feature languages represented at the school. -School environments should be text rich and in multiple languages allowing students to draw upon their linguistic capital in the classroom. -Encourage students to complete components of assignments (research, pre-writing, discussion) in their home language or draw pictures to express ideas.
Familial	"Cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin), that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition… expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship" (p. 79)	Gabriella's father was a nurse in the Congo prior to their fleeing to Burundi. This influenced Gabriella's desire to study pharmaceutical development. Sue Mar's grandfather taught her mother to sew, and she sewed clothing for her family and many in their village. Sue Mar's mother taught her to sew when she was just five years old. She now wishes to pursue a career in clothing design based upon these skills developed at an early age.	-Help students see the value of their familial expertise by inviting family members into the classroom to share their experiences and knowledge about a topic in person or via video. -Conduct an oral history or record a StoryCorps of traditions that parents and extended family members practice.
Social	"Networks of people and community resources" (p. 79)	The refugee community at the apartment complex fortified Amora's desire to be a dentist because, through her connections there, she met a dentist who was a refugee from Iran. He told her, "If you love it, just do it!"	-Connect students with people in the community that share their interests and who might help them achieve their goals. -Provide opportunities for social gatherings where networking can occur among families. -Ask parents to share about their children in family engagement sessions.

Table 1, continued

(Social, continued)		CFR provided important access to networks of people in schools, health care, and employment to provide support and opportunities for refugee-background families.	-Help students make connections to the bilingual community—at church/faith-based, sports, or volunteer organizations, etc. -Use social media platforms including WeChat, LinkedIn, etc. to create extended groups of refugees that have graduated from the local school.
Navigational	"Skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (p. 80)	As refugees, parents have negotiated complex problems including securing refugee status and ensuring the health and safety of their family during migration. They may have developed ways to navigate government paperwork and gain access to food and health care for their children.	-Help students connect with older students and community members to learn from their experiences navigating past challenges by creating a buddy system in which graduates share what they have learned along the way. -Role play and share experiences in the classroom about successful navigation of institutions.
Resistant	"Knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80)	Sue Mar was told by a classmate that going to the university was not for her and that she should apply to the community college. This strengthened her resolve to apply to the university. Amora found that taking biology class with all native English speakers was a challenge due to differences in language knowledge. She decided to study biology as a major in college to show that she could master difficult things.	-Invite refugee-background students to be a part of the leadership team and to shed light on practices that are discriminatory and exclusionary at school. -Invite parents of refugee-background students to take part in leadership meetings and identify issues of concern for their families.

Table 1, continued

*Migration (Jimenez, 2020)	"Knowledges, sensibilities, and skills cultivated through the array of migration/immigration experiences to the United States or its borderlands" (Jimenez, 2020, p. 779)	Sue Mar traveled by foot for months to reside in a refugee camp in Thailand for many years before permanent resettlement in the U.S. Gabriella lived for many years in a refugee camp in Burundi before her permanent resettlement. Amora lived with undocumented status in Iran for many years while her mother sought to obtain permission to relocate to the U.S. & was only granted permission due to her status as a widow. Their families navigated the complex legal process to apply for refugee status and permanently relocate to NC.	-Explore migration experiences through literature in the classroom by using a class text such as *When Stars are Scattered*; *Inside Out and Back Again*; *We Are Displaced*; *Enrique's Journey*; *My Diary from Here to There/Mi Diario de Aquí Hasta Allá*; *We Are Not From Here/No Somos de Aquí* -Ask students to write about and share their family's (or a friend's) migration story. -Identify sources of strength and knowledge from these experiences.

Conclusion

Looking forward, future research could examine the role of other refugee role models in the lives of refugee-background students who are transitioning from high school to higher education and from a community college to a four-year university. We have seen in this study evidence that the lives and experiences of other refugees are influential for younger generations in learning about overcoming barriers and acknowledging the hardships ahead.

We are also interested in exploring the characteristics of successful mentorships in the CBO. The majority of mentors at CFR identify as White, monolingual, middle class, evangelical Christians. They talk about their relationships with their mentees as being "like family." Mentees mention their mentors as playing a role in their ability to register for college but stop short of calling them part of their family. Is the relationship between mentors and mentees reciprocal? How do mentors connect with and influence their mentees who differ culturally and linguistically from them? Are there aspects of a training program that might improve outcomes for the success of these relationships? Is there a way to support mentors so that they can sustain their efforts across multiple mentees and therefore, apply what they have learned in these collaborative relationships?

CFR and other refugee-serving CBOs have been grappling with many complex issues. It is our hope that scholarly research in the area of refugee com-

munities and educational outcomes continues to grow. Specifically, we hope to see many scholars from refugee backgrounds continuing to join this urgent work. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948) states, "everyone has the right to education." We, therefore, ask that higher education truly be made accessible to all, eliminating unnecessary barriers and challenges to those who want to seek higher education. In doing so, we can have a more prosperous society in which people's lives can be improved through educational opportunities.

It is with anticipation and expectation that we look to CBOs to continue making a significant contribution in the lives of refugee-background students and their families during their K–12 education. We hope to bring attention to these efforts so that we can learn from their example what works in supporting students' community cultural wealth and fostering aspirations in pursuit of higher education so that all refugee-background students can thrive in their communities and schools.

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Appendix. Data Sources

Name/ Pseudonym	Role	Data Sources
Author 2	Teacher–Researcher	1:1 Interview
Amora	Refugee College Student who received support from CFR Pursuing a career in dentistry	Three 1:1 interviews One group interview One asynchronous interview
Sue Mar	Refugee College Student who received support from CFR Pursuing a career in fabric development and production	Three 1:1 interviews One group interview Documents including letters from teachers, personal writings, and awards
Gabriella	Refugee College Student who participated in the College Bound Program and received support from CFR Currently attending the community college to earn a degree in pharmacy	One 1:1 interview
Cynthia	Founder & Executive Director of the CBO, CFR	One 1:1 interview One asynchronous interview
Ashley	Coordinator of College Bound Program—a CFR program bridging the gap between high school and college	One 1:1 interview One asynchronous interview
Kayla	Staff member of CFR; Lives at the apartment complex and served as a liaison between families and the schools	One 1:1 interview
Tammy	Mentor in the College Bound Program & former high school student services counselor to Amora & Sue Mar	One 1:1 interview Two asynchronous interviews
Luis	Local community college recruitment liaison	One 1:1 interview
College Bound Program Data	# of students enrolled in the College Bound Program & number of students who go on to higher education	Data drawn from the years: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023