



THE RI-TELLER

***The Newsletter for Rhode Island Teachers of
English Language Learners & ELL Professionals***

www.ritell.org

Issue 13: Winter 2017

Welcome...to the latest incarnation of the RI-TELLER. We hope that you find it useful, informative, reliably entertaining, and even occasionally provocative. Mostly, we hope that this publication reflects and represents the spirit of our members who so devotedly serve our English language learners.

In looking over the submissions to this issue, we were struck by the many ways in which the theme of “welcome” prevailed in the writings. The words echo the Rhode Island Colony’s founding creed as a haven for people of different beliefs to live among one another on common ground. They are infused with the state’s legacy of welcoming immigrants and persecuted people from around the world to participate in our “lively experiment,” as Roger Williams called Rhode Island’s peculiar brand of democracy.

In the aftermath of the latest election, Rhode Island garnered attention once again as a place where people of all faiths and cultures are welcomed. Social media initiatives such as *One Providence* (#onepvd) and *Resist Hate RI* provided forums for committed activists to reassure immigrants and refugees that they are part of our family, and that we will take care of each other in this neighborhood. We'd like to think that RITELL is part of that communal welcoming effort.

-- Doug, Anke & Laura

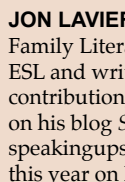


- 3 News & Notes
- 4 Welcoming Rhode Island
Brandon Lozeau
- 5 Resources for Empowering Learning & Language with Muslim Immigrant Youth
Heather Homonoff Woodley
- 6 Featured Blog: Speaking Upside Down
Jon Lavieri
- 7 Classroom Resource: Kahoot!
Laura Vawter
- 8 The Maple Leaf Becomes an Olive Branch: Keynote summary with resources
Paula Markus
- 10 Moving Beyond the Burning Grass
Mary Steele
- 12 The Lesson of the Doorway
Doug Norris
- 14 Adult Practitioner Award: Nancy Fritz
Doug Norris
- 16 Dorcas Builds Bridges for Immigrants & Refugees
Kathleen Cloutier
- 18 Resources, Strategies & Advocacy
Kathleen Cloutier
- 20 Advocate Spotlight: Omar Bah
Shelynn Riel-Osorio

MARY STEELE is from Massachusetts, where she attended Mount Holyoke College as an undergraduate. She has worked as a producer, writer and director in television news and documentary for 30 years. Much of her documentary work involved international travel. She has received a New England Emmy Award and an Edward R. Murrow nomination. She is earning her master's degree in TESL at Rhode Island College as part of a long-time goal to teach later in life and continue the vibrant and fulfilling work of engaging with people from many different cultures.



KATHLEEN CLOUTIER has over 20 years of experience in non-profits and currently leads Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island, where she has been Executive Director since 2013. This social services agency provides client-centered services, advocacy and opportunities based on their expertise in family literacy and adult education, employment services, refugee resettlement, translation, interpretation, U.S. citizenship and immigration services.



JON LAVIERI is a lead teacher with the R.I. Family Literacy Initiative and a teacher of ESL and writing based in Providence. His contribution, "Milk," was originally posted on his blog *Speaking Upside Down* (www.speakingupsideupdown.blogspot.com) earlier this year on March 17 (St. Patrick's Day.)



BRANDON LOZEAU is the Community Relations Manager at Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island. He has also taught ESOL classes in Rhode Island with adult immigrants, refugees, and low-income Rhode Islanders, as well as youth here and abroad. Before joining Dorcas in 2013, Lozeau lived and worked in Belgium and Korea for six years. He earned a B.A. degree from the University of Massachusetts and an M.A. in International Political Economy from the Brussels School of International Studies.



PAULA MARKUS is the ESL / ELD Program Coordinator with the Toronto District School Board, Canada's largest and most linguistically and culturally diverse school district. She is particularly proud of LEAP, the TDSB's intensive program to support students with limited prior schooling, one of the largest of its kind in North America. Markus has also trained teachers at several Ontario universities, and has developed and written curricula for the Ontario Ministry of Education. She is the founder of the "Celebrating Linguistic Diversity" Conference, Ontario's largest professional gathering of K-12 teachers of English Language Learners.

SHELYNN RIEL-OSORIO spends much of her time creating and facilitating curricula that is relevant and meaningful for adult learners, and advocating for equity in access to education. She obtained a bachelor's degree in Spanish Language and Literature, and studied Italian, French and Portuguese throughout her undergraduate career. At Rhode Island College, she pursued a master's degree in TESOL with the intention of engaging non-traditional adult learners in academia and the greater community. She is the Education Director at the Refugee Dream Center in Providence and serves as the Co-

ordinator of ESOL Programming at RIC. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, reading, writing and practicing yoga.

LAURA VAWTER is an ESL instructor at International House, Worcester Polytechnic University in Massachusetts. She has a master's degree in TESL.



HEATHER HOMONOFF WOODLEY is an educator, researcher, mother and activist. She is a Clinical Assistant Professor in TESOL and Bilingual Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning at New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Her research focuses on supporting teachers in meeting the academic, linguistic and social-emotional needs of emergent bilinguals, particularly Muslim immigrant youth who speak less common languages. Homonoff Woodley has published work exploring multilingual classroom practices and arts as social justice education, and received a 2014 Outstanding Dissertation Award from the National Association of Bilingual Education. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Morocco, and earned her doctorate in Urban Education at The Graduate Center, City University of New York.

EDITORS

DOUG NORRIS is the vice-president of the RITELL Coordinating Council and a lead teacher with the R.I. Family Literacy Initiative. He also serves on the Library Board of Rhode Island. He holds a master's degree in TESL from Rhode Island College and a bachelor's degree in Communications/Journalism from Long Island University. In previous lives, he was the arts editor of Independent Newspapers of Southern Rhode Island, the Rhode Island editor of Art New England, and the news director at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. In his spare time, he is a vagabond traveler, freelance writer, occasional poet and amateur photographer.

ANKE STEINWEH is a member of the RITELL Coordinating Council and teacher at North Providence High School. She also serves on the ELL Advisory Council of Rhode Island. She holds a master's degree in Elementary Education from the University of Rhode Island and is a K-12 ESL Specialist. She received her undergraduate degree in English and Psychology from Rhode Island College where she was also an editor of Rhode Island College's literary magazine many moons ago. Hailing originally from Germany, she lives with her husband, three children, two cats and five chickens in the south of our beautiful state.

LAURA FARIA-TANCINCO is a member of the RITELL Coordinating Council and has taught Adult Ed ESL in universities around the state. She has been in the ESL field for 10+ years and enjoys all the challenges & rewards that comes with the profession.

NEWS & NOTES

LOOKING BACK

RITELL's Fall Conference Our Families, Our Communities

On Saturday, Oct. 29, 2016 RITELL held its fall conference on the theme of "Our Families, Our Communities: Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Learners and Their Families" at Rhode Island College. The conference, co-sponsored by Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island, attracted 184 teachers, educators and ESL professionals, making it the best-attended event in RITELL's history. Paula Markus, the ESL / ELD Program Coordinator with the Toronto School Board, Canada's largest and most linguistically diverse school district, delivered the keynote presentation on how Toronto has embraced immigrant and refugee learners into schools and communities. She also gave a workshop on how to use identity texts to give voice to English Language Learners. Dr. Heather Homonoff Woodley, Professor in TESOL and Bilingual Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning at New York University, gave a workshop on how to empower learning and language with Muslim youth and their families. From Dorcas, Director Kathleen Cloutier and Community Relations Manager Brandon Lozeau collaborated on a session that promoted ways to build a welcoming classroom. Also during the conference, Nancy Fritz, the assistant coordinator of the R.I. Family Literacy Initiative and an ESL educator for a quarter-century, was presented with RITELL's Adult Practitioner Award.

CONTACTS

A Message from Dr. Sarah Hesson

Assistant Professor
Director, TESL Program
Educational Studies Department
Rhode Island College
shesson@ric.edu
456-8789

Dear RITELL community,
This fall, I have had the privilege of taking on a new role at Rhode Island College as the director of the TESL Program. At the same time, I was invited to work alongside the very talented team of educators at RITELL to help carry out the wonderful conferences they organize each semester. I feel so fortunate to have these opportunities to work with such dedicated and passionate educators across Rhode Island (and surrounding states!). Please be in touch to let me know how we can support you here at RIC, and also to get the word out about the wonderful things happening in your schools and districts with emergent bilinguals! I look forward to meeting all of you soon.

Warmly,

Dr. Sarah Hesson

LOOKING AHEAD

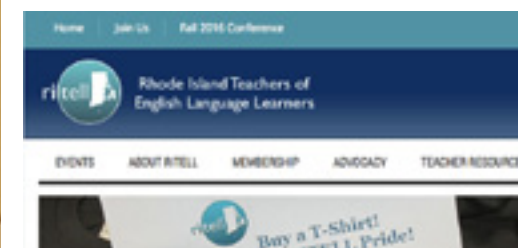
RITELL's Spring Conference Long Term ELLs

The RITELL Spring Conference is scheduled for April 1, 2017, and will take place, as always, in the Student Union building at Rhode Island College. The focus this spring will be on Long Term ELLs (LTELs). We are working to bring in several national K-12 experts on the topic and will focus on the research that explores what we know about LTELs, and the causes for their prolonged stay in ESL programs. Another cornerstone will be the sharing of best practices for moving LTELs forward, particularly with their reading and writing skills. For our adult ESL educators we will focus on learners that make slower than expected progress as they are moving through their English classes and how to help them gain greater success. As with the fall conference, we will post related resources for teachers and administrators on the RITELL site to complement the conference. These will consist of insightful reports and best practices documents. Dr. Sarah Hesson and Dr. Nancy Cloud, the Conference Co-Chairs, are working on setting up the program, and we hope to have a flyer ready by the end of February announcing the speakers.

STAY CONNECTED

www.RITELL.org

Don't forget to visit www.RITELL.org for teacher resources, conference information and much much more!



Welcoming Rhode Island

Brandon Lozeau

Brandon Lozeau of DIIRI was a presenter at the Fall 2016 RITELL Conference.

NOW more than ever, it is necessary to double down on Rhode Island's commitment to building the most welcoming and inclusive communities. Residents across the state have shown their support for immigrants and refugees in a multitude of ways, and this support is what drives the spirit of the *Welcoming Rhode Island* initiative. Hosted by the Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island, *Welcoming RI* is a community-based initiative that seeks to affirm our state as a welcoming place for all and continues to build strong, vibrant, and more cohesive communities across the state.

Welcoming RI also believes that we ought to:

- Share the responsibility to treat all our neighbors with respect and decency
- Advance the basic principles upon which the United States was founded, establishing the equality and dignity of all people, including immigrants
- Reject the use of dehumanizing language
- Raise the level of public discourse concerning immigrants and immigration
- Challenge common myths and stereotypes
- Be a vehicle for changing the public discourse on immigrants and immigration

Welcoming RI is guided by an advisory committee that is the driving force



behind our complementary welcoming strategies – communications and public engagement. Advisory committee members come from all walks of life and represent various sectors and fields, including business, government, law enforcement, social services, education, arts and culture, and academia. Advisory committee members commit their time and efforts to making their community more welcoming and assisting with fundraising, recruiting volunteers and public engagement efforts.

Welcoming RI's mission is to bridge the divide between foreign-born newcomers and native-born Rhode Islanders to foster a more inclusive and welcoming atmosphere. The initiative is doing this via three avenues: research, community education, and storytelling. These three pillars of *Welcoming RI's* work all contribute to building welcoming and inclusive communities that respect, understand, and embrace cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity in the Ocean State.

Welcoming RI uses a large variety of data sources and research, through a number of partners at the local and

national level to develop publications, materials, and presentations. This research is the key to correcting the vast amounts of misinformation present in our 24-hour news cycle and social media. The research helps to create substantive and educational presentations on immigration issues, refugee resettlement, building welcoming communities, even diversity and inclusion workshops, so that *Welcoming RI* can be a valuable resource to government agencies,

community organizations, faith-based groups, nonprofits, and employers. Being a portal of information is vital to the success of the *Welcoming RI* initiative.

The storytelling piece puts faces to the information. *Welcoming RI* can go on and on about how immigration is good for the state and tell you about the positive economic impact immigrants have on Rhode Island. But the stories of individuals and families, who have traveled from near and far, some under the most difficult and heartbreaking circumstances, are what highlight the importance of welcoming people from all walks of life to the Ocean State.

LASTLY let us remember that Roger Williams founded the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations as a place of refuge for those fleeing persecution. *Welcoming Rhode Island* remains committed to that vision and will continue to ensure that we build welcoming and inclusive communities in all thirty-nine cities and towns in the State. It is the help and support of all Rhode Islanders that makes it possible for us to continue in this important work.

HEATHER WOODLEY'S RESOURCES Empowering Learning & Language with Muslim Immigrant Youth & Families hwoodley@nyu.edu



What is the Truth About American Muslims Questions & Answers, Interfaith Alliance & the Religious Freedom Education Project; FAQs: <http://interfaithalliance.org/americanmuslimfaq/>
Full PDF: http://ia-joomla.danny.cshp.co/cms/assets/uploads/2012/10/What_is_the_Truth_About_American_Muslims.pdf

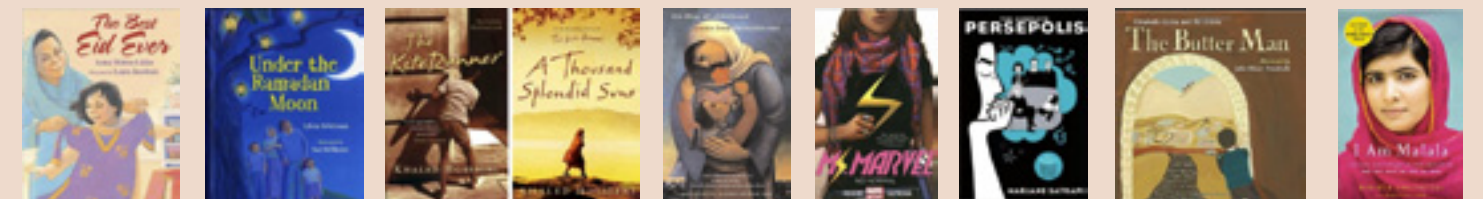
In the Face of Xenophobia: Lessons to address bullying of South Asian American youth; SAALT <http://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/In-the-Face-of-Xenophobia.pdf>

Rethinking the Region New approaches to 9-12 US Curriculum on the Middle East and North Africa <http://www.teach-mena.org/curriculum.pdf>

Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the US
<https://www.aarweb.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Publications/epublications/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf>

How do you bring Islam into the Classroom? Teaching Tolerance <http://www.tolerance.org/blog/how-do-you-bring-islam-classroom>

Literature Recommendations



It is important to portray Muslims in two different ways when choosing literature: (1) Characters that are deliberately Muslim and are explicitly identified. (2) Characters that “happen to be” Muslim and are not explicitly identified.

Literature with positive portrayals of Muslim characters, Islam and/or the Middle East/North Africa:

- The Best Eid Ever (Mobin-Uddin)
- Under the Ramadan Moon (Whitman)
- The Kite Runner; A Thousand Splendid Suns (Hosseini)
- The Flag of Childhood: Poems from the Middle East (Nye)
- Ms. Marvel (Wilson)
- Persepolis (Satrapi)
- The Butter Man (Alalou & Alalou)
- I Am Malala (Yousafzai)

List of literature with Muslim characters <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/muslim-characters>

List of picture books with Muslim or Middle Eastern characters <http://blog.leeandlow.com/2014/05/15/book-list-picture-books-about-muslim-or-middle-eastern-characters/>

Thornnwood Elementary School Dual Language Showcase (bilingual books) www.thornwoodps.ca/dual/

Bilingual Content Glossaries, NY State http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilingual/bilingual_glossaries.htm

The Languages of NY State: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators <http://www.nysieb.ws.gc.cuny.edu/files/2012/07/NYSLanguage-Profiles.pdf>

Translanguaging: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators <http://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/translanguaging-guides/>

Translanguaging in Curriculum and Instruction: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators <http://www.cuny-nysieb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Translanguaging-Guide-Curr-Inst-Final-December-2014.pdf>

Additional resources (videos, educator guides, student resources, leadership materials and more) can be found at www.cuny-nysieb.org
RITELLER - Winter 2017

Milk

Jon Lavieri



Photo of Nahla courtesy Jon Lavieri

*The flute speaks.
If I could only pass
Through Damascus like
the echo.*

*Silk sleeps at her shore,
Curves in cries
That die before I reach them.
Distance falls
Like tears.*

The Flute Speaks by Mahmoud Darweesh

a green card. It's almost as if her entire life had been grooming her for life in the US. All that selfless kindness toward others. Religious tolerance. And the experience of living another way.

She is neither refugee nor seeker of political asylum. She's simply an amiable immigrant in a simple, white hijab who shares the warmth of an enviable heart.

A couple of years ago, she went back to Syria for a visit. She had to fly to Beirut and drive to Damascus. I don't want to think of her having to pass through some arbitrary checkpoint manned by murderous ISIS sociopaths, or the fragile delicacy of that moment in which the wrong answer to a question could

snuff out the kind of life that nourishes all those it touches.

The other day, she said she wanted to show me the Syria she knew before it was ravaged by psychopathic bullies who've flocked there from all over the region on a blood-soaked adrenaline rush. She seems as much mystified as heartbroken over the surreal wave of brutality that has swept over her home. "Son kill father," she says. "Father kill son. Why?"

Sitting across a table from Nahla in our classroom at Hall Library in a city as obscure as Cranston is enough to remind you how violence is the worst kind of failure of the human spirit. Her air of peace and openness radiate like a kind of wisdom that strains to rise above the terrible weight of it all.

To repay this debt, I have nothing but words in a language that may make her life a little easier in the post office or supermarket, but will never ease her heart the way her native language can. So I tell her shokran tir.

Thanks a bunch.

But there's this: maybe it wasn't Nahla who was being groomed for life in the land of the free and the brave after all, but America being groomed to be a suitable home for someone like her. It's far from perfect, and probably even far from okay, but at least we have cops and soldiers we can trust...most of the time. And we're still capable sometimes of offering comfort and freedom to someone who deserves these things as much as she, even when we offer it kicking and screaming like privileged brats in a sandbox.

It's here where I come to understand a little more about freedom and kindness, sitting at the table facing a woman with a voice like a silk scarf, happy to speak of anything we please.

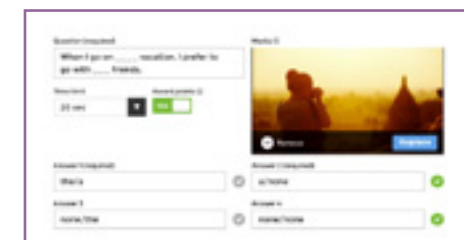
And shokran tir to Adrienne Gallo at Hall Library, and everyone at The Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative. Without them, there's be no table at which to sit with Nahla.

www.ritell.org

Utilizing Student Phones in Class with *Kahoot!*

Laura Vawter

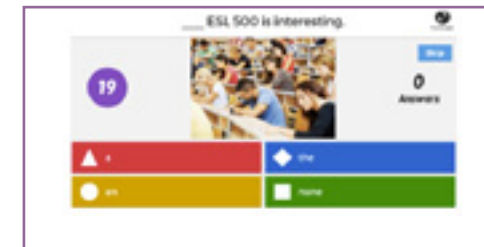
ONE topic that is ubiquitous in classroom administration is the use of cell phones. I am one who has been wearied by this battle. Often thwarted by under-table texting, I have focused my vigor on the utilization and optimization of phones and tablets in language instruction. Now I focus my efforts on incorporating mobile language apps to help re-focus my learners' attention and engagement. Kahoot! is one such app.



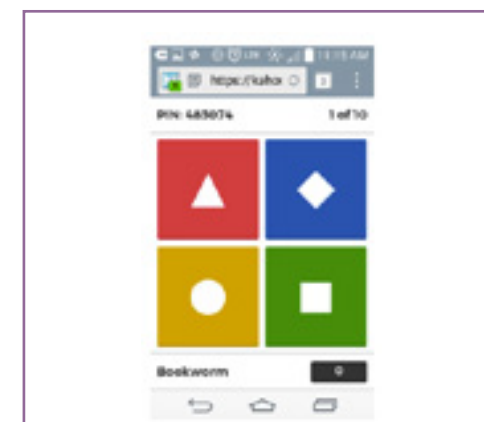
Kahoot! is both a free instructional tool as well as a social learning app. It is a platform for discussions, surveys and quizzes to test learner knowledge. My favorite aspect of this app is creating and sharing quizzes. I have found that one of the most consistent ways to engage students is through competition. No matter a learner's age, nationality or background, there is nothing as thrilling as winning a competition against your peers. Kahoot! provides a way for individual learners and teams of learners to compete. As the instructor, you either design the multiple choice questions or load pre-made quizzes and administer the quiz. If you are creating your own questions, you also have the option of adding photos and customizing scoring and time limits. Depending on how long and complex the sentence is and how advanced the learners are, I usually give between 15-30 seconds to answer each question. In addition, you have the option of selecting multiple answers as correct for each question. I really like this option because language is communicative as well as dynamic.

One of my preferred ways to use Kahoot! quizzes is when introducing new grammatical topics or

www.ritell.org

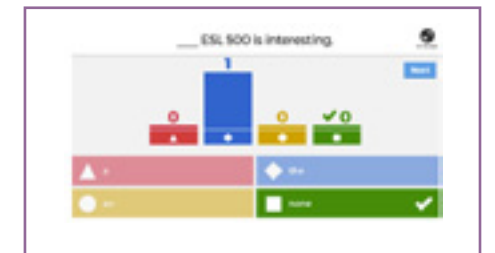


material. It is beneficial in assessing how familiar learners are with the content as well as gauging their aptitude in it. Kahoot! also serves as a great pre-test review of material. If the learners are unfamiliar with Kahoot! as well as new to the content, I prefer to start out with a team competition. I divide the learners into groups of 2-3, have one person in each group go to kahoot. it on their phones or tablets, type in the code, enter a team name, and begin the quiz. One benefit of doing a team competition is that Kahoot! gives an extra 5 seconds for learners to read and discuss the question or sentences before they are able to select an answer. During the quiz, the learners read the questions and answers on the screen in the front of the class and select the correct option on their phone.



At the end of each question, Kahoot! graphs which answer each team chose as well as the correct answer. Furthermore, it gives points to each team with respect to how fast they answered the question and whether they answered correctly.

The team who answers both correctly and fastest gets the most points. Kahoot! rates teams by points throughout the quiz and announces winners at the end. You also have the option of assigning additional points to teams who answer multiple questions in a row correctly. This helps reward learners who have high accuracy but whose response speed is sub-par. Once the quiz has finished, I go over the questions and give students time to ask their own questions and clarify their understanding. I find that when learners have the chance to debate language meaning and use they are more engaged in their language learning.



Kahoot!'s strength lies in its promotion of a communicative language environment. Its interactive approach to language learning further motivates learner participation. It is not, however, a cure-all. I find it most beneficial as a means of syphoning off "phone time" in the classroom. By providing approved times in which translators or communicative apps can be used, learners are more willing to put their phones away and keep them away outside of these times. Learning apps such as Kahoot! have helped in my struggle for the learners' attention when the phone is continuously pulling their attention away. On the other hand, instructor discretion is vital. Introducing apps like Kahoot! could be detrimental to the learning environment. It could open the floodgates of under-table texting and surfing and communicate to learners that phone use in the classroom is always OK. The instructor's knowledge of his or her learners and the classroom dynamic is invaluable in determining whether to use such apps.

<https://getkahoot.com>

RITELLER - Winter 2017

SOMETIMES it's only about what it feels like, and anything you think you can teach or learn dries up and petrifies like gum that got stuck on the underside of your chair sometime while other wars were being waged. So when I walk into the room on a typical Monday morning, morose and spiteful over giving up the first, crystalline hours of the day to anything other than my own Herculean penchant for dreaming, Nahla's eyes settle on me and widen. Her smile breaks open over a sigh while her hands clasp together in front. She calls me a name - no, a title - I don't truly deserve. She has more to teach me than I have for her.

Nahla has a singular talent for making certain moments feel like an entire springtime. It's in the way she hugs the Cambodian Buddhist who sits beside her in class. Or the Christian woman from Syria, her own homeland. It's in the way she treats every one of us as something valuable and beautiful about her day.

As a baby, she was nursed by a Christian wet nurse, a neighbor whom Nahla's mother loved like family, and for all of her young life, the two families lived as such. But that was the Syria we barely paid attention to: a Syria in which Muslims and Christians shared mother's milk.

Then, three months after getting married, her husband confessed he was Shiite. Nahla is Sunni, and as she was already pregnant, her husband wanted to give her the chance to change her mind and leave the marriage before it got any deeper. But it didn't matter. What mattered was that she loved him enough to spend the next thirty-five years with him, and have six children together. He was a civil engineer, and his career brought them to Saudi Arabia, where they spent twenty-seven years hiding the fact that he was Shiite.

After his passing, Nahla went back to Syria, but her eldest son, a dentist in Massachusetts, sponsored her for

The Maple Leaf becomes an Olive Branch

Paula Markus

Toronto District School Board welcomes Syrian newcomer students and families.

CANADIANS had already been aware of the dire situation for Syrians fleeing their war-torn country for some time when the heartbreaking photo of the lifeless drowned body of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi shocked the world on Sept. 2, 2015. All over our country, people began organizing and lobbying for Canada to offer a new home to Syrian refugees without delay. This grassroots movement coincided with the federal election campaign of October 2015. The Liberal Party Leader of Canada, Justin Trudeau, had promised that, if elected, Canada would act immediately to bring 25,000 refugees to its shores. Trudeau's Liberal Party swept in with a majority government, and speedily set about the task of interviewing and selecting Syrian families to come to Canada. The careful work of security screening and arranging transportation for these many thousands of people saw most of these 25,000 government-sponsored refugees arrive between mid-December 2015 and the end of February 2016. In addition, thousands more refugees sponsored by private community action and faith groups continue to arrive in cities and towns across Canada, more than 33,700 in total as of the end of October 2016.

Welcoming and supporting newcomer immigrant and refugee students and families from all over the world is our core mission in the Toronto District School Board ESL / ELD Department. Working together with a large committee of professionals from



Photo courtesy RITELL

Welcoming and supporting newcomer immigrant and refugee students and families from all over the world is our core mission...



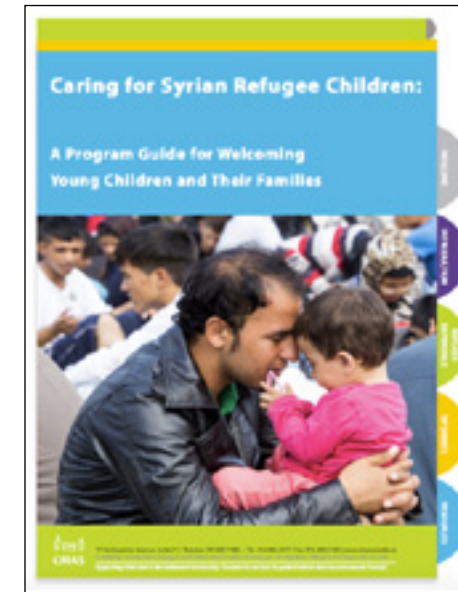
Photo courtesy RITELL

all departments of the school board, we quickly got up to speed in preparing to welcome hundreds of new students and their families. When the families began arriving in large numbers in January 2016, many were temporarily housed in hotels across the city, and the TDSB created temporary welcome classes for children of various ages where students were bussed each morning to acclimatize to the Canadian school environment and start to learn basic English. As the families found permanent accommodations, ESL teachers in their local schools welcomed the students and carried out assessments of their English and mathematics skills, often also requesting support from our first language assessment service to determine students' level of literacy and prior schooling in their home language. Students of grade 4 and above with limited or interrupted formal schooling are directed to our special LEAP classes (Literacy Enrichment Academic Program) to help those with limited prior schooling catch up to their peers. Currently, the Toronto District School Board has LEAP classes in 17 elementary and 13 secondary schools, with at least half a dozen having been added since the Syrian newcomers began to arrive.

For more information about the TDSB's LEAP classes, please contact paula.markus@tdsb.on.ca

Syrian Newcomers

In the past 10 months, approximately 850 Syrian children in Kindergarten through Grade 12 have been welcomed into Toronto District School Board schools. We look forward to continuing to support them and the many other students who arrive at our schools on their path to becoming integral and productive members of Canadian society.



The following are some Canadian resources specifically focused on the needs of the Syrian newcomers.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada Population Profile: Syrian Refugees
<http://lifelinesyria.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/EN-Syrian-Population-Profile.pdf>

School Mental Health-Assist Info-Sheet: Welcoming Syrian Newcomer Students and Families to School
<http://smh-assist.ca/blog/2016/01/21/welcoming-syrian-newcomer-students-families-to-school-info-sheet/>

Promoting Success with Arab Immigrant Students: Teacher Resources
<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/For-Members/Professional%20Development/Diversity,%20Equity%20and%20Human%20Rights/AR-CMEF-4%20Arab%20Resource.pdf>

Caring for Syrian Refugee Children: A Program Guide for Welcoming Young Children and their Families
http://cmascanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Supporting_Refugees/Caring%20for%20Syrian%20Refugee%20Children-final.pdf

Newcomers from All Language Backgrounds



The following are some of the resources available to newcomer students and families in the TDSB, which are helpful in supporting students and families from all language backgrounds.

Ontario Ministry of Education – Resource and support documents for teachers of ELLs at both the elementary and secondary level, including Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling, Supporting English Language Learners in Kindergarten, and Many Roots, Many Voices, a resource for classroom teachers of English language learners. <http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/HOME/index.html>

The Ministry of Education Parental Support - A website for parents with information in many different languages, including booklets about prevention of bullying, mental health issues, supporting children in developing literacy skills and more. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/multiLanguages.html>

Settlement Workers in Schools - A government program which provides settlement assistance for new Canadians. Information on every aspect of the newcomer's adjustment to Canadian life is available in multiple languages. www.settlement.org

Paula Markus' Resources continued on page 13

Moving Beyond the Burning Grass

Mary Steele

For refugees, crossing cultures can be a difficult adjustment

It is said that while all refugees are immigrants, not all immigrants are refugees. The distinction is a critical one for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, who are often on the frontline of a new refugee's American experience. Yet, many teachers of English language learners are unaware of the status of the student sitting before them—refugee or immigrant—and why it matters so much. Ultimately, the capacity to learn a country's home language is representative of the larger target objective: self-sufficiency marked by the newcomer's ability to successfully navigate the adopted culture. If the American public wants these new residents to thrive in society rather than disrupt it, it is imperative that ESL teachers recognize the challenges that fall squarely at the intersection of culture, language and science.

A refugee is defined as someone who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (UNHCR, 2016). Indeed, our American story begins with refugees and, despite shifting public opinion, it continues to be written with and by them.

The Pilgrims, of course, were arguably the original refugees, fleeing religious persecution in England and seeking safe haven here. Famine, war, disaster, civil unrest and prejudice have forced millions to flee their homes throughout history. In the United States, the first refugee legislation was enacted to protect Europeans displaced by the Second World War. Later, the U.S. would provide admission and assistance for those fleeing Communism. After the Vietnam War,



Photo courtesy Doug Norris

An immigrant leaves his homeland to find greener grass.

A refugee leaves his homeland because the grass is burning under his feet.

Barbara Law,
*More Than Just Surviving Handbook:
ELL for Every Classroom Teacher*

The Refugee Act of 1980 would provide federally supported services to all refugees admitted to the United States. Since 1975, the U.S. has admitted more than three million refugees, with more than 70 nationalities represented (U.S. Department of State, 2015).

The hardships refugees suffer before, during and after their forced displacement often leave mental as well as physical scars. The challenges of teaching a new language multiply exponentially when students are refugees experiencing the effects of trauma. The ability to process new information may be impeded by fear, anxiety, depression, and an exhausting struggle with culture shock. Teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) may recognize symptoms of trauma

in problematic student behaviors such as missing class, poor concentration, and inappropriate or extreme responses (Mojab and McDonald, 2001). The connection between trauma and foreign language acquisition is an important topic during a year in which some 85,000 refugees are expected to enter the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2015) because many of them, children and adults, will enter America's classrooms.

Refugees often suffer three types of stress during the resettlement process: traumatic stress, migration stress, and acculturative stress (Adkins and Sample, 1999). They typically leave their homes with no time to say goodbyes and perhaps anguished over the fate of family members. Their pre-migratory experiences may have included torture, violence, starvation, witnessing atrocities, and political or economic oppression (Steel, Silove, Phan & Bauman, 2002 Emeroth, 2011). Refugees sometimes live for years in refugee camps under poor conditions as they wait for their resettlement application to be processed. When they arrive in the U.S., they can expect \$925 and 6 months of federal support, so there is pressure to acculturate quickly (Ascentria Care Alliance, 2016). Scientific studies point to a critical link between English acquisition and self-sufficiency (Anh & Healy, 1985; Westermeyer et al., 1990; Tran, 1992). Simply put, communication in English is key to adjustment and autonomy in the United States.

As a result of the stress of displacement, many refugees arrive on our shores suffering from mental health problems including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depressive disorder (MDD). Symptoms may include difficulty beginning new tasks, blame, guilt, concern for safety, depression, inability to trust, fear of risk taking, disturbed sleep, eroded self-esteem, inability to

concentrate, and panic attacks (Mojab and McDonald, 2001). Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that may manifest in flashbacks, numbing of responsiveness, a sense of impending danger, dissociation, lack of concentration, and memory impairment (Isserlis, 2001).

Learning English as a refugee in America is critical to economic well-being, emotional and physical health, and a sense of belonging. In one study, a group of Bosnian refugees stressed the importance of language learning as a way to cope with hardships and feelings of culture shock, loneliness, humiliation, psychic numbness and grief (Keys and Kane, 2004). Despite the key role of ESL teachers in early refugee adjustment, the field of second language acquisition (SLA) has yet to offer a theory about the impact of trauma on foreign language learning. However, it is clear that operations demonstrably affected by traumatic experiences—cognitive processing, attention, and memory—are key to second language acquisition (Gordon, 2011).

Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis offers the most direct connection to traumatized language learners and it provides a rich area for future research. Krashen theorizes that affective factors including anxiety, self-confidence and motivation can support or disrupt new language acquisition. Consider the refugee suffering intense anxiety and low self-worth in her new home. Krashen would posit that those factors would effectively create a barrier through which comprehensible input simply cannot pass (Krashen, 1982, 1985).

Importantly, research also indicates that factors such as anxiety, motivation, social isolation, changing family roles, interrupted education, and the view of learner ethnicity in the country of asylum are inseparable from the language learning process of a refugee (Borrell, 2011). Studies of people enduring trauma indicate that learning is

key to survival in adversity (Williamson, 2000) and thus an important intention of this article is to suggest ways that educators might help refugee language learners not just survive but thrive by regaining control, connection, and meaning. A review of various studies (Kerka, 2002) suggests a multifaceted approach that includes:

A Holistic Perspective: Teachers should understand the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their refugee learners and how traumatic



Photo courtesy Doug Norris

experiences affect mind, body, emotions and spirit. Veteran teachers of refugees suggest that teachers let students signal whether they want to address the past, rather than trying to elicit information that may be a trauma trigger. Group methods such as cooperative inquiry create paths to healing and connection through sharing stories, art, movement, song, poetry, theatre and dance (Rosenwasser, 2000).

Establishing a safe place for learning: This may include financial assistance for shelter/transportation, counseling, child care, access to legal services, flexible time frames, avoiding classificatory testing, allowing the choice of opting out of activities, creating a setting of beauty and comfort that enables learners to take ownership of the space and creates a sense of well-being (Horsman, 2000; Rosenwasser, 2000).

Narrative Techniques for Telling One's Story: These may include journal writing, nonverbal storytelling, and talking circles (Horsman, 2000; Rosenwasser, 2000; Lykes et al., 1999; Morrish, 2002).

Collaboration and Referral: Educators should have knowledge of reporting requirements and immigration laws, as well as a system of partners including counselors, the justice system, media, clergy, social service, shelters, and healthcare so that learners have access to critical services (Isserlis, 2001).

Classroom Policy and Advocacy: Time limited programs, assessment practices and attendance policies often ignore the particular needs and stressors of refugee learners affected by trauma. A learner-centered approach enables community to develop in the classroom. Teachers may be able to adapt more sensitive and flexible classroom policies such as allowing students to choose their level of participation and they can also serve as refugee advocates outside the classroom (Horsman, 2000).

ESL teachers are likely to be a crucial link in a team of advocates helping students struggling with cultural adjustment and mental health issues. Regardless of the political climate and shifting tides of pro- and anti-refugee sentiment, refugees will continue to fill thousands of seats in America's schools. Therefore, it would be an optimal time for ESL researchers to more deeply investigate trauma as a factor in language learning and to educate teachers about the issue and its implications. The high value Americans place on independence is reflected in public policy that favors resettlement services where self-sufficiency is the single goal (Corvo and Peterson, 2005). However, the evidence suggests students will have more success learning English by means of a holistic, culturally sensitive, and supportive approach aimed at helping refugees navigate their strange, new world.

The Lesson of the Doorway

Doug Norris

ONE of my teaching locations is a church basement. For a small donation, church administrators leased the space to our program, so that we can offer two levels of English – an intermediate class in the church and a beginner class in the neighboring library. Among the conditions of use is the requirement that students use a certain doorway, located on the top floor, which has to remain either locked or supervised at all times. So about 15 minutes before class, I walk upstairs, turn the lights on in the corridor and serve as a doorman for entering students, who arrive by that entrance after dropping off their children at the library.

Because many students show up late, and with no volunteer to take on the task, I often find myself standing by the door 15 minutes into class. Students arriving before then are now conditioned to go to the room, sign the attendance sheet and begin working on the entering activity that is stacked on one of the tables. The first few times I held the door open, I felt as if it was wasted time. But something interesting soon happened. As students came, and I greeted each of them individually, chatting about the weather or their families or the impossible parking or the type of day they had before class, I felt connected to them more quickly than in most classes I teach. All classes ultimately feel like families at some imprecise point, but this was a little different. The class itself was still working to strengthen its communal bond, but my personal relationship with each student was already established.



Photo courtesy Doug Norris
An artwork from Shanghai-based Hu Ziangcheng's *Doors Away from Home-Doors Back Home* (2016), part of this year's *Megacities Asia* exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Annerys, a student from the Dominican Republic, didn't speak much among her peers at first, but that changed after she missed a couple of classes. When I saw her next at the doorway, she told me about her ailing mother being in and out of the hospital and how much that has affected her life and work. As the weeks went on, our doorway conversations about our families expanded, and in class Annerys began sharing more of her personal experiences: She flew to the U.S. on

Valentine's Day, 1998. Leaving her country was scary and sad, she said, but her memory is more painful because, while she was in the air, her father died unexpectedly in the Dominican Republic. "Always I am very sad on Valentine's Day," she said.

Another woman, Sokleng, from Cambodia, began having doorway conversations with me about her job. She gets up every morning at 3:30 a.m., six days a week to work in a factory. When she comes to class every Monday and Tuesday evening, she is operating on almost no sleep. She told me at the doorway that she practices English by watching British television programs, such as "Mr. Selfridge," "Downton Abbey" and "Doc Martin." ("He a straight doctor and he has a problem. He can't see the blood.")

In the doorway, I shake hands with Richard, a Jamaican man, who volunteers to feed the homeless in Rhode Island, and we discuss the graffiti wars and street violence between gangs in the West End and the South Side of Providence. What he wants most in life, he told me, is to be thought of and remembered as a good father.

Sometimes the students will bring me food. Sokleng drops off bags of oatmeal. Vannika occasionally gives me nime chow and mangos. Basemah, whose family moved to Houston last year, would often present what she called "Sweet Arabics," a variety of Syrian cookies, which she described as having significance as special desserts after sundown during the holy fasting month of Ramadan. Sopheap, a Cambodian monk who spent much

of last year practicing driving around Cranston for his impending road test, will bring me bottled water or coconut water, and we'll talk about the work he does at his temple and the small community that gathers for popular festivals such as Pchumben.

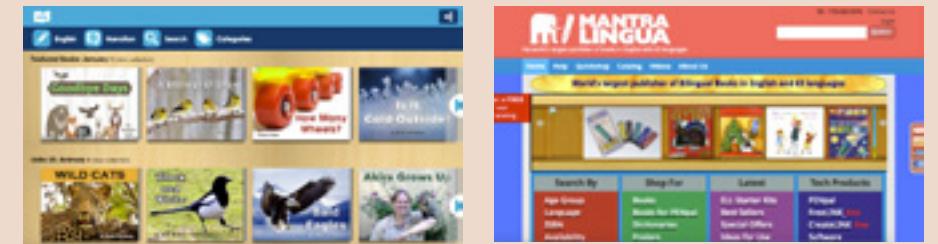
The doorway, in short, soon became a portal to trust, deeper communication and cultural education. As a lifelong reader, I shouldn't have been surprised. In folk wisdom and literature around the world, doorways symbolize the transition from one state of being or world to another. They represent passage from the known to the unknown, and crossing the threshold is the first step to new knowledge, experience and illumination.

Humankind has manifested this idea in stone and wood, rendering the symbolic crossing over from the realm of the profane to the sacred in ornate doorways and gateways of cathedrals, churches, mosques and temples. Ancient Egyptians painted a false door on a tomb to allow the spirits of the dead to pass into the afterlife. The two-headed god Janus, gazing into the past and the future, was the god of doors and doorways, and the Roman deity associated with beginnings and endings, transitions and time. Medieval architects paid particular attention to doorways as conduits for eternal aspiration. A doorway is therefore acknowledged in human tradition as a place where we embrace the possibility of change.

So that is what I think of now, as I hold open a door on top of a church ramp, chatting casually with students passing through on their way to our basement ESL classroom. It turns out that being a doorman isn't a waste of time at all. It's just another way to be a teacher. It's a way to learn more about my students and build relationships that encourage them to engage in class. It's a way to talk about issues that go beyond the classroom. Most importantly, it's a way to start the night with a smile and a story, and turn small talk into a rite of passage.

Dual Language Materials

Sources for dual language materials in a wide variety of languages include:



Provides access to **hundreds of books for children with Multilanguage online narration** www.uniteforliteracy.com

One of the largest publishers of high quality **dual language children's books** www.mantralingua.com



Thornwood Public School's Dual Language Showcase, a project in Mississauga, Ontario under the leadership of Dr. Jim Cummins, where children collaborated with their parents to create dual language readers <http://thornwood.peelschools.org/dual/index.htm>



"Family Treasures and Grandma's Soup", a dual language book project led by Dr. Hetty Roessingh of the University of Calgary <http://homepages.ucalgary.ca/~hroessin/>



The website [MyLanguage.ca](http://www.ryerson.ca/mylanguage/) and *Hold On to Your Home Language* at www.ryerson.ca/mylanguage/ provides information for parents and community members on the benefits of **maintaining children's home languages**. Brochures are available to download at no cost in a number of different languages. This site is maintained by Dr. Roma Chumak-Horbatsch of Ryerson University in Toronto.



The ESL/ELD Resource Group of Ontario (ERGO) provides a set of free-downloadable readers for English language learners on a range of financial literacy topics of relevance to newly arrived adolescents. The booklets were all co-created by English language learners and ESL educators at Ontario high schools. Audiobook versions of each reader are also accessible, as are reading and mathematics lessons to accompany each topic.

Go to <http://www.ergo-on.ca/> and click on the "Making Good Choices" icon. Also available from ERGO is a new set of beginning readers that focus on health and wellness topics for newly-arrived students who may be undergoing adjustment challenges. Click on the "Live Well Series" on the ERGO website to access these free materials for elementary and secondary ELLs.

Nancy Fritz receives RITELL's Adult Practitioner Award

Doug Norris

LIKE many people who teach adult ESL and work with immigrant populations, Nancy Fritz arrived at her career in a roundabout way, beginning as a volunteer before becoming a teacher and an administrator. Fritz, the assistant coordinator of the Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative, parlayed an early love of languages into a quarter-century of instructing and administering students and assisting Rhode Island's ESL community. For her accomplishments, RITELL presented her with its annual Adult Practitioner Award at its fall conference at Rhode Island College.



Photo courtesy Larry Britt
Nancy Fritz, assistant coordinator for the RI Family Literacy Initiative, received RITELL's 2016 Adult Practitioner Award for her work in teaching and administering ESL students in Rhode Island

"I was totally surprised and honored and very excited," Fritz said, during a sit-down interview at The Coffee Depot in Warren. "It was unexpected."

Fritz was born in Pennsylvania, but soon moved to New Jersey, and lived there until she was 10. Her family then moved to Maine, where she went to Colby College for her undergraduate degree. After college, she migrated to the Boston area (Medford) to go to graduate school at Tufts, specializing in political science, and around that time, she married. She and her husband, Greg, a child psychiatrist, settled in California, just south of San Francisco, where he was completing his residency. While there, Fritz worked for the World Affairs Council and raised her family.

When two of her children were old enough to go to preschool, Fritz noticed that a lot of the other students enrolled there were from other

cultures, including Spanish speakers and Vietnamese. Seeing such diversity in the classroom prompted her to wonder what it might be like to work with students from different cultural backgrounds. Soon afterward, the an opportunity arose when her husband got a job at Brown University, and the family moved back East, to Cumberland, R.I.

"I still had a young child at home, and I wanted to do something interesting, and I've always been interested in languages, so I thought, well, I'll volunteer for Literacy Volunteers," she said.

Fritz helped out at Literacy Volunteers of Northern Rhode Island (now Project Learn), working with several students. Because of that experience, she decided to go back to school, enrolling at RIC, earning an ESL Cross-Cultural Studies degree, which enabled her to take some classes at Brown and some at

RIC. It took her a couple of years to complete the degree, but in the meantime she kept working with Literacy Volunteers. At the end of one of her classes, someone came from CCRI to announce job openings. She applied and got a job at the One-Stop Career Center in Woonsocket.

"Now I'm back at the One-Stop in Providence," she said, laughing. "So it's full circle. But I was like a typical adult ed person. I worked part-time for several different agencies."

Fritz worked with Rhode Island Regional Adult Learning (RIRAL), Progreso Latino, and elsewhere until 1997, when she

finally got a full-time job at Genesis Center in South Providence. After about four years of working there, the adult education director left, and Fritz took over. She worked there for about seven years, before joining RIFLI.

"I didn't really have a plan, but it all just worked out," she said. "I always liked languages. I loved studying French in high school. I thought I might major in French in college, but then I thought, 'Oh, I don't really want to teach French,' because a lot of people take it because they have to, not because they like it. The thing I like about teaching English as a second language is that the people that are in your class really want to be there."

Fritz speaks English and Spanish. "I knew French, but it's gone," she said. "I can read it, but..." She would like to become more fluent in Spanish, and she still takes lessons whenever her schedule allows. At RIFLI, she is

responsible for managing data, including class lists, data entry, test scores, etc. Three afternoons a week she works at the Network Rhode Island office in Providence trying to help people get into job training programs. She also substitutes for the lead teachers occasionally and assists people who come to various library Learning Lounges, where students show up for a range of reasons, including improving their English, mathematics, job skills, studying practices or other academic, employment or language-oriented purposes.

"Last year at RIFLI, we had students from 52 countries," Fritz said. "That's pretty amazing."

Fritz said the most challenging part of the field is the "low pay," citing a lack of full-time positions and lamenting that a lot of people who are good teachers and love the work just can't afford to keep doing it. She thinks the field is moving in the right direction, and praised agencies like RIFLI that are committed to creating as many full-time positions as possible, but overall funding remains a concern.

As anyone working in ESL knows, the job never seems the same year to year. Fritz said that one aspect that has been lost is the notion of family literacy. Two decades ago, there was funding. Today, there isn't.

"And yet it makes so much sense for so many students," she said. "I mean, we're lucky at Auburn (Library, in Cranston), where people can bring their children. It's not really a family literacy program, but at least there's a program at the same time for kids as there is for the parents. There are an awful lot of people that can't come because they have to take care of children."

The future of ESL, like many educational initiatives, appears to demand an increasing emphasis on jobs. Fritz worries that some students will be

left behind: older people, retired workers, people who have learning disabilities or those who don't do well on standardized tests.

"If the funding for agencies depends more and more on people showing progress on the tests then those other people will be left out," she said. "There will be nobody to take them because nobody will have the funding for them. That's a problem."

Still, Fritz emphasizes that her career has had many highlights. One was participating in the Persistence

Last year at RIFLI, we had students from 52 countries.

That's pretty amazing.

Study directed by World Education in 2005, when she was still working at Genesis Center.

"We were working on improving student persistence with several teachers, including Barbara Al-Sabek (the 2014 recipient of RITELL's Adult Practitioner Award)," she said. "It was a great learning experience, and really helped us to improve our outcomes."

Fritz is also proud of the fact that, while she was there in 2009, Genesis Center was named the #1 Adult Education Provider by the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE). And she has specific memories about her classroom experience, describing one at Genesis Center where "there was just really good chemistry between Russian students and some Dominican students. Everybody just really liked each other. We had a great time."

Like all educators, Fritz also remembers certain students who stand out for one reason or another. When she was at RIC, she was required to find a student to tutor for an extended period of time.

"So I got this Literacy Volunteer student, who was a guy from the Ukraine, who had recently come here," she said. "He won the lottery. He sort of vaguely wanted to come to the United States, but he wasn't dying to, but he won the lottery, so he came with his wife. He didn't know a lot of English. We worked together for a long time, probably two years or so. He was very motivated. He ended up learning a lot of English. And he was very interested in computers. Now he's working for CVS in Woonsocket, and I've kept up with him for probably 20 years. So now we're friends on Facebook. Every once in awhile, he drops into the library to say hello. That was very rewarding, working with him for so long and watching him make so much progress. He and his wife became citizens. Now they're living in Cranston."

When she's not working, Fritz likes to cook. She loves to try new recipes, and has taken several cooking classes. Her other hobbies include walking and hiking, reading and studying Spanish.

As she approaches retirement, Fritz said she remains grateful for the opportunities she has had in the field that she "stumbled upon," and has a quick answer for anyone who asks her what she enjoyed most.

"Meeting the students," she said. "They've had such interesting and different lives. I'm always in awe of how they picked up and moved from their countries to the United States to make a better life. It's incredible. I can't imagine doing it. The other thing I really like about the field is meeting the other teachers and administrators. There are a lot of really good people in this field – interesting, dedicated, inspiring and devoted to their students. It's a great field."

Dorcas Builds Bridges for Immigrants & Refugees

Kathleen Cloutier

A 95-year-old nonprofit shifts the emphasis from struggle to triumph.

IMMIGRATION and refugee issues have seized the public's attention in recent months. In Rhode Island, which has a sizable immigrant and refugee population, Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island has been helping newcomers to feel at home—and long-time residents to welcome them—through interaction and an emphasis on positive narratives.

Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island, a 95-year-old nonprofit located in the heart of South Providence, offers a wide range of programs to help integrate the state's sizable immigrant and refugee population. We support all individuals who are working to overcome cultural, educational, economic, and language barriers, and we empower them to achieve self-sufficiency and participate actively in their community. We envision all people, including immigrants and refugees, as having the opportunity to reach their greatest potential, engage with their community, and fully contribute their talents, expanding prosperity and well-being for everyone.

Rhode Island's Immigrant Population

As of 2014, Rhode Island was home to almost 140,000 immigrants, who represent 13 percent of the population.¹ This makes Rhode Island second only to Massachusetts among New England states as a host to newcomers, and puts Rhode Island among the 15 states with the highest percentage of immigrants.² These newcomers contribute mightily to the economy, both as consumers and employers. As consumers, the 2014 purchasing power of Latinos in Rhode Island totaled \$2.8



Photo Courtesy Doug Norris

A citizenship class meets Saturday morning at William Hall Library in Cranston.

billion, while that of Asians totaled \$1.1 billion.³

As consumers, the 2014 purchasing power of Latinos in RI totaled \$2.8 billion, while that of Asians totaled \$1.1 billion.

"New Americans in Rhode Island," American Immigration Council, 2015, <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/new-americans-rhode-island>.

As employers, foreign-born entrepreneurs accounted for 12.9% of all RI business owners in 2010.

"The Contributions of New Americans in Rhode Island" The Partnership for a New American Economy 2016, <http://www.renewoureconomy.org/reports/state/?abbr=ri>.

As employers, foreign-born entrepreneurs accounted for 12.9 percent of all Rhode Island business owners in 2010.⁴ In the Providence metro area in 2013, that percentage was even higher: 24.5 percent for "Main Street" business owners.⁵ Immigrant-owned businesses generated \$36.5 million in business income in 2014.⁶ And immigrant businesses are providing jobs: in 2007, the last year for which US census data is available, 27,605 people in Rhode Island and Vermont were employed at firms owned by immigrants.⁷

How Dorcas International Institute Helps

Immigrants and refugees make vital contributions to Rhode Island's economy and culture, but when they first arrive, they often need assistance. At Dorcas International, we take a two-pronged approach.

First, we provide a wide range of client-centered services and opportunities for newcomers based on our expertise in family literacy, adult education, workforce development, refugee resettlement, translation, US citizenship, and immigration legal services. We have integrated these services with wraparound case management to create a seamless continuum of support at each stage of our clients' integration. Our organization recognizes and respects the gifts and strengths of those we serve: we see our work as an investment in a stronger and more connected community.

Here is an example of how our wraparound services work: Marie U., originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo arrived with her husband and twin sons in 2010. Her husband got a job with help from Dorcas Interna-

tional, while Marie learned English in our adult education center. We assisted with their children's school enrollment and health care access by providing translation services and a school liaison to facilitate the parents' full engagement in their sons' education. Volunteers mentored the family and helped orient them to American culture. Marie continued with her education, ultimately completing her high school equivalency exam, and enrolled in a training program we provide for careers in health care. We introduced Marie to the community garden where she eventually took on a leadership role. We later helped her prepare to become a U.S. citizen, using our immigration services. Marie was recently successful in petitioning to bring her mother and sister to Rhode Island.

Secondly, we draw on the community to assist us with newcomer integration. We have found that in order to break down barriers, people must have meaningful opportunities for interaction with each other. At Dorcas International, we create these opportunities through our Welcoming Rhode Island initiative, whose objective is to bridge the divide between foreign-born and native-born Rhode Islanders in order to foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment. The initiative is staffed by Dorcas International volunteers.

Our Outreach Strategies

Dorcas International Institute has been extremely successful in developing community support through the use of outreach and education strategies that bring immigrants and community members together to increase their understanding and connection across differences in race, class, culture, language, national origin, and more. We do that by providing information, education, and meaningful storytelling to those that do not always see the benefits of having immigrants and refugees in their community. We use these tools to reframe the local conversation about newcomers and attempt to shift people's perception of refugees and immigrants by defining them less by their struggles and more by

their triumphs. We illustrate in very practical ways, how welcoming our immigrant neighbors can be a force for economic growth.

We continuously collect and compile both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the benefits of immigration, and we issue an annual report to inform the Rhode Island public about the impact of our foreign-born population. In addition, we develop complementary publications as informative outreach tools for use at agency-sponsored events and meetings. We also create "one-pagers" targeted to specific audiences, such as elected or ap-

We have found that in order to break down barriers, people must have meaningful opportunities for interaction with each other.

pointed officials, business leaders, and employers. We draw on this research and data for social media postings designed to stimulate further public discourse.

Faith groups and educators often ask for cultural competency training and/or information on the refugee resettlement process. We are currently transforming our agency website into a portal for information, resources, tool kits, and directories. Local educators, students, tourists, nonprofits, government agencies, and the community at large will soon have a single place where they can find information on our foreign-born population, immigrant-owned businesses, cross-cultural competencies, and more.

The Importance of Stories

Although Dorcas International makes sure to have the most per-

tinent facts available to share, facts rarely change how people think and feel. In fact, the opposite is true: people tend to process facts differently based on their previously held understanding of a subject, especially when the topic is emotionally or politically charged. We have found that presenting facts to people who do not already agree with us does not change what they think. People have to be ready to hear our information and be primed to believe it in order to actually process it. We use personal stories to prepare a more fertile foundation for our information. Through stories, we get people to process, remember, and share our information.

Dorcas International's annual *My Story, Our Community* project, conducted in partnership with Providence College's Global Studies Department, has proven a successful model for effective community storytelling. Through it, we have been able to put a human face on our compiled data. Each fall, Providence College students interview local immigrants and refugees, documenting their success stories and introducing these stories at the annual *My Story, Our Community* public event. Over 100 immigrants and

refugees have participated in the project to date, and we now plan to use a rotating selection of their stories and photos as a traveling exhibit to be publicly showcased in each of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns, creating greater statewide understanding of and support for our new neighbors.

These efforts give a sense of Dorcas International's strategic approach to ensuring that immigrants and refugees can fully integrate, with equitable access to services, economic opportunity, education, civic engagement, and safe and connected communities.

1 "The Contributions of New Americans in Rhode Island" The Partnership for a New American Economy 2016, <http://www.renewoureconomy.org/reports/state/?abbr=ri>.

2 Jens Manuel Krogstad and Michael Keegan, "15 States with the Highest Share of Immigrants in Their Population," Pew Research Center, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/14/15-states-with-the-highest-share-of-immigrants-in-their-population/>.

3, 4, 5 "New Americans in Rhode Island," American Immigration Council, 2015, <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/new-americans-rhode-island>.

6, 7 "The Contributions of New Americans in Rhode Island" The Partnership for a New American Economy 2016, <http://www.renewoureconomy.org/reports/state/?abbr=ri>.

Resources, Strategies, and Advocacy

Kathleen Cloutier

A Bibliography of Supports for Refugees, Refugee Advocates, and ESL Teachers

RI Community Centers - Providing Services to Refugees



Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island
<http://www.diiri.org/>
North Campus: 220 Elmwood Avenue, Prov, RI
South Campus: 645 Elmwood Avenue, Prov, RI
(401) 784-8600



Refugee Dream Center
<http://www.refugeedreamcenter.org/>
340 Lockwood Street
Providence, RI
(401) 499-2745



Genesis Center
<http://www.gencenter.org>
620 Potters Avenue
Providence, RI
(401) 781-6110

Websites



Colorin Colorado!
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/how-support-refugee-students-ell-classroom>

“How to Support Refugee Students in the Classroom” is a comprehensive, well-organized, and lively resource for educators and advocates of refugees. It includes refugee facts, testimonials, a concise list of challenges refugees face, a practical list of potential supports educators can provide, as well as a Refugee Resource Section that includes videos, books, and relevant websites. Videos include testimonials and advice from ESL professionals. Highly recommended.

Refugees International <http://www.refugeesinternational.org>
This group is perhaps the best known of any refugee advocacy organization, with a history spanning nearly forty years. Its mission is to improve the lives of displaced persons all over the world and it advises policymakers on solutions. The website is rich with images and information about refugee crisis, and the stories include assessments and recommendations. It will provide information at a glance for educators and advocates seeking information about situations their students have fled.

UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>
The purpose of this agency is to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of refugees. The website offers up-to-date news stories about refugees all over the world and includes a video gallery. It is useful for educators and advocates who want to understand the scope of the issues and to see advocacy in action.

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) <http://refugees.org/resources/>
Provides extensive resources for refugees, immigrants, and the people who support them. The Resource Library includes valuable tools for refugees, employers, lawyers, advocates, and more. The online resource library has manuals, pamphlets, brochures, and more available on a variety of resettlement topics such as cultural orientation, financial literacy, health, family strengthening, etc.

U.S. Department of State - Refugee Admissions <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/>
Provides invaluable background, statistics, and procedural information about refugee resettlement in the U.S. Also provides many links to related information. A must-have tool for educators and advocates in order to understand the admissions process to inform their understanding of the refugee experience.

Welcome to the USA.gov <http://www.welcometousa.gov>
For immigrants and refugees who need information about finding a job, learning English, learning about their new home, childcare, personal finance, healthcare, etc. Includes many links to other resources and publications, some of them in English and Spanish.
Note: an English language learner might need support navigating this wordy site.

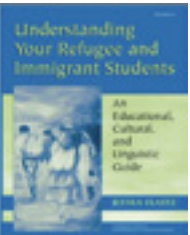
Online Articles & Papers that include Implications, Responses & Resources Useful for Educators & Advocates

CAELA – Center for Adult English Language Acquisition
CAELA is a repository for a number of very good and fully cited papers addressing issues related to best practices for ESL educators who also serve as refugee advocates. At the end of each article are suggestions that include: ways to support second language development; factors to consider in designing programs for refugees; recognizing signs of mental distress; recommended curricular approaches; ways to promote cultural adjustment and mental health; how to become a part of a larger network of providers; and implications for practice that make the classroom safer for all.
Recommended articles can be found through the links below:
Q&A http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/beginQA.html
Mental Health http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/mental.html
Trauma & Learning http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/trauma2.html
Refugee Issues & Concerns http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Refugee.html



Trauma and Adult Learning by Sandra Kerka, 2002. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED472601.pdf>
Includes strategies for educators facing symptoms of PTSD in the classroom, such as dissociation and all or nothing reactions. It also outlines a number of realistic adult education responses to learners dealing with trauma.

Books



Flaitz, J. (2006). *Understanding Your Refugee and Immigrant Students*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. A good resource that seems well researched. The author focuses on 18 countries that contribute the majority of refugees and immigrants to the United States. She creates country profiles that include statistics, a historical synopsis, overview of the education policy, linguistic systems of the languages, and cultural perspective of each country. In doing so, she creates a developmental snapshot of refugee students that will help educators and advocates understand the cultural background of their students. This volume also features a problem solving section containing classroom strategies. I find the format of this book extremely useful and easy to use. However, I would like to see additional volumes because very often, my students’ home countries are not among the 18 featured. Highly recommended.

Faltis, C. and Valdes, G. (Eds.). (2010). *Education, Immigrant Students, Refugee Students, and English Learners*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

This book includes several essays and chapters on the issues relevant in the ESL field today. It includes a chapter that “counters the notion of refugee-ness as a condition to overcome in favor of a holistic and action oriented approach to the experiences of refugee students and their families”. The last section presents recommendations for educators.

Haines, D.W. (2012). *Safe Haven? A History of Refugees in America*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press. From the blurb: “The notion of America as land of refuge is vital to American civic consciousness, yet, over the past seventy years the country has had a complicated and sometimes erratic relationship with its refugee populations. Attitudes and actions toward refugees from the government, voluntary organizations, and the general public have ranged from acceptance to rejection; from well-wrought program efforts to botched policy decisions. Drawing on a wide range of contemporary and historical material, *Safe Haven?* provides an integrated portrait of this crucial component of American immigration and of American engagement with the world.”

Video



Fleming, M. (2014, October). TED Talk. **How to Help Refugees Rebuild Their World.**
https://www.ted.com/talks/melissa_fleming_let_s_help_refugees_thrive_not_just_survive?language=en
Description provided: “Today’s refugee crisis is the biggest since World War II, and it’s growing. When this talk was given, 50 million people had been forcefully displaced from their homes by conflict and war; now, a year later, the number is 60 million. There were 3 million Syrian refugees in 2014; now there are 4 million. Inside this overwhelming crisis are the individual human stories — of care, growth and family, in the face of lost education, lost home, lost future. Melissa Fleming of the UN’s refugee agency tells the refugees’ stories — and asks us to help them rebuild their world.”

Omar Bah

Founder, Refugee Dream Center

Q&A Session Below you will find Mr. Bah's responses during an interview with Shélynn Riel-Osorio conducted on Nov. 11, 2016.

WHO is Omar Bah and what does he stand for?

My name is Omar Bah. I am the Founder and Executive Director of the Refugee Dream Center in Providence, Rhode Island. I am a torture survivor, former journalist and refugee from The Gambia in West Africa. I am the winner of the 2016 John F. Kiffney Public Service Award from the Providence Newspaper Guild; and recipient of 'One of the Rhode Islanders of the Year 2015' award from Rhode Island Monthly Magazine. I am also the author of the book, *Africa's Hell on Earth: The Ordeal of an African Journalist*. I represent the state of Rhode Island at the Refugee Congress of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Washington, DC. I hold a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies with a minor in political science from the University of Rhode Island; master's degree in Public Administration from Roger Williams University, and a master's in Counseling Psychology in Global Mental Health from William James College where I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Leadership Psychology. I have also completed trauma treatment certification at the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, and I do trauma-based therapy. I am immensely thankful to the United States for giving me a chance for a second life. I have now dedicated my career to supporting refugees who have passed through the same journey as me.

WHAT is the Refugee Dream Center & what was your motive in founding it?

The Refugee Dream Center (RDC) is a non-profit (501(c)(3) post-resettlement refugee organization based in



Photo courtesy Refugee Dream Center
Omar Bah

Providence, Rhode Island. It offers customized services targeting the refugee community by ensuring continuation of services in their efforts towards self-sufficiency and integration. Providence is a major hub for refugees from Congo, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and many other nations. We recognized that there is a tremendous gap in services and a need for filling this gap. When refugees arrive, they are supported by federally funded agencies for a brief period, an average of six months, after which they are mostly on their own. It is, however, practically impossible for refugees to be self-sufficient within six months because it includes learning the English language and building the skills to properly integrate into life in the U.S. As a result, the Refugee Dream Center offers a post-resettlement approach through which we provide services in four major areas. These areas include functional English and workforce development courses, case management, health promotion and education, as well as youth mentorship and leadership training. Our services aim to bridge even some of the most peculiar gaps within the refugee community. For

instance, we recently added an additional section of our ESL/ Workforce Development class to satisfy the needs of about a dozen Syrian refugee women. These are people who otherwise would not be able to access services due to their culturally conservative roles as homemakers and caregivers and thus, lack of access to transportation and childcare. Our board members and volunteers provided transportation for these individuals, and we utilized staff and volunteers as homework helpers for their children, so while their mothers were learning the English Language, they too were

engaged in meaningful activities. No barrier stands in their way to access services.

WHAT do you think the country is doing well for the refugee population? What about the state of RI?

Well, despite some political rhetoric in certain corners, this country is undoubtedly the most welcoming to refugees. Refugees are grateful to have a chance for a second life and to be safe. There are abundant opportunities. If you look around, refugees in America are probably more successful than those resettled in other countries. In Rhode Island, our greatest strength in refugee resettlement is our welcoming environment. The people in the state are greatly supportive to the refugee cause and I think this makes most refugees feel at home here.

WHAT are some existing deficits that you notice?

The biggest deficit in the refugee resettlement process, in Rhode Island particularly, is the absence of proper funding for services. There is a tremendous need for support in housing,

including lead poisoning prevention, rent vouchers, funding for agencies such as the Refugee Dream Center, jobs, and the public education system for our refugee children. I believe there is room for much improvement in these areas.

WHAT is the important thing for teachers to take into consideration when working with newly arrived refugees?

The best teacher for refugees is the culturally aware or competent one. Each refugee is unique as a person and due to their experiences. All refugees are not the same; all refugees from the same country of origin are not the same. It also important to note that some refugees are highly educated and skilled in their own languages. To those, the main task of a teacher is to help them build English language skills in order to make their previous education useful in their new country. Some refugees however, do not have even the most basic of education - meaning that they are non-literate even in their own languages. These refugees will need individualized approaches and patience on the part of the instructor. Remember, there is extreme trauma due to loss, victimhood, and current economic and cultural challenges. Thus, learning basic alphabet and language skills, and the ability to concentrate can be very daunting challenges.

ENGLISH language aside, what are some vital inclusions within curricula serving the refugee population (e.g., socio-cultural training and workforce specific skills)?

As I stated earlier regarding the need



Photo Courtesy of Refugee Dream Center Website
<http://www.refugeedreamcenter.org/gallery/>
Donation Pick-Up Day: Refugees pick up donated goods from the Refugee Dream Center.



for cultural awareness and competency, it behooves professionals to understand that teaching adult refugees requires [...] being versatile and flexible. You will realize that at some point, you are doing more than teaching - there is case management, there is psychoeducation that needs empathy, there is the need to do referrals to additional services and support in various ways. Thus teaching additional skills is a very useful approach in teaching English language to adult refugees.

WHAT do you hope for in regards to the future of the refugee crisis? What are the implications of the current political climate in refugee affairs?

I am confident that the supporters of refugees will continue to support us. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the new administration is likely to encourage resentment against refugees and even halt the resettlement of refugees to this country. We will see how things unfold. There is also going to be immense fear among the refugee community as many may feel not a sense of belonging. However, that makes our work even more daunting and needed today. The refugee community needs us more than ever and we are just gearing up for more meaningful work ahead.

WHAT can busy professionals do to support the refugee community, both locally and on a greater scale?

People can help refugees in many ways. People who have time and resources come to our center to volunteer and drop off donations such as clothes, kitchenware, toiletries, and office supplies. To answer

your question specifically regarding busy people, I suggest they donate their money. Remember at the center, our biggest need and challenge is financial. We have to pay rent for the building we occupy, salaries for staff, and many other expenses. Donating any small amount can make a huge difference.

For more information about Omar's incredible story and the work he is doing at the Refugee Dream Center, visit www.refugeedreamcenter.org