

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### Family Partnership with a Head Start Agency: A Case Study of a Refugee Family

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The attendance of children from refugee families at Head Start agencies provides the opportunity for Head Start staff to foster trusting family partnerships that are collaborative, respectful, and goal-oriented, yet little is known about how the actions of Head Start staff and families affect these trusting partnerships. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate and describe the actions of the Head Start staff and a refugee family that could have potentially developed a partnership between them and determine what factors facilitated or impeded the formation of a partnership. The findings indicated that the relationship between the family and Head Start staff was positive but not the type of trusting partnership that the Head Start national standards advocate. Factors that facilitated and impeded the formation of trusting partnership in this case study as well as implications for practice, policy, and research are discussed.

*Keywords:* Head Start; family-professional partnership; family engagement; refugee families

Head Start strives to engage families in order to build partnerships between Head Start staff and families, foster positive relationships between adult family members and their children, and cultivate ongoing learning and development of both adult family members and children in order to promote school readiness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, & Office of Head Start, 2011). The Head Start approach is to engage families in order to establish partnerships geared toward the long-term outcome of child and family success.

Head Start's mission to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services (About Head Start, n.d.) in partnership with families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2011) fits well with the Office of

Refugee Resettlement’s mission (Head Start Connection, n.d.). Many refugee families are members of the Head Start community. A refugee is 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.” (United Nations High Commission on Refugees, n.d.)

During 2011, the U.S. resettled 56,424 refugees (U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Thirty-four percent of refugees admitted to the United States in 2011 were under 18 years of age (U.S. Department of State et al., 2012).

Improving their children’s educational opportunities is a goal for many refugee families as they relocate to the U.S. (Schiller, Boggis, Messenger, & Douglas, 2009). Refugee and other immigrant families may, however, have perceptions of education (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Tadesse, Hoot, & Watson-Thompson, 2009), expectations for their children’s development (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Day & Parlakian, 2004; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001), and perceptions of their role in their children’s education (Kalyunpur & Harry, 2012) that differ from dominant perceptions. Each of these perceptions may vary from teachers’ perceptions (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Tadesse et al., 2009). Since “culturally-based differences may lead to conflict and feelings of being misunderstood or judged—for both families and practitioners” (Day & Parlakian, 2004, p. 1), practitioners and families should partner to respond to culturally-based differences in order to support each child, family, and practitioner’s positive development (Day & Parlakian, 2004; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012, Office of Head Start, n.d.). In sum, culture affects child development (e.g., Day & Parlakian, 2004; Office of Head Start, n.d.; Rogoff, 2003), and family partnership provides an opportunity for teachers and families to understand each other’s cultures and work together towards child and family outcomes.

Head Start recognizes the importance of promoting cultural responsiveness through strong partnerships with families (Office of Head Start, n.d.). The Head Start Act (2007) charges Head Start agencies with numerous responsibilities aimed at involving and serving families (42 U.S.C. § 9837(b)(1)-(7),(10)-(13)). Specifically related to family partnership, the Act states that each Head Start agency must “facilitate and seek the involvement of parents of participating children in activities designed to help such parents become full partners in the education of their children” (42 U.S.C. § 9837(b)(3)(A)). Although the Act does not define “full partners,” the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (hereafter referred to as the Head Start Engagement Framework; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2011) offers the following concise definition of family partnership: “Staff and families build ongoing, respectful, and goal-oriented relationships...[by] identifying and acting on family goals and aspirations and using program and community supports and resources to promote progress on family and child development goals” (p. 4). In addition, the code of federal regulations requires Head Start staff to:

“engage in a process of collaborative partnership-building with parents to establish mutual trust and to identify family goals, strengths, and necessary services and other supports... as early after enrollment as possible... [taking] into consideration each family's readiness and willingness to participate in the process. (45 C.F.R. §1304.40(a)(1))”

Although these descriptions of partnership are fairly consistent, the federal regulation is more explicit in that it specifies that collaboration, trust, and building on family strengths are inherent to family-professional partnerships. In addition, it states that Head Start agencies must ensure that “effective two-way comprehensive communications between staff and parents are carried out on a regular basis throughout the program year” (45 CFR §1304.51(c)(1)). With the overall goal of creating trusting, collaborative, respectful, and goal-oriented partnerships characterized by comprehensive two-way communication to support child and family outcomes, Head Start agencies are required to provide numerous activities that could help foster family partnerships. Research pertaining to this topic has focused mostly on these activities instead of the quality of the relationship. The overlapping terms of “involvement,” “engagement,” and “partnership” can cloud the intention of policy and research. In the family partnership section of the federal regulations, for example, such activities are referred to as “parent involvement” (45 CFR 1306.3 (h)). The Head Start Engagement Framework promotes “engaging families as equal partners in their children’s learning and development” (2011, p. 4). In this article, we refer to activities aimed at family involvement or engagement as “family partnership activities” and individuals’ participation in such activities “actions towards partnership.” We use researchers’ terms when referring to their research.

All studies of family involvement in Head Start have demonstrated a positive correlation between family involvement and child outcomes (Henrich & Gadaire, 2008). Family involvement is generally conceptualized as what families contribute to school, what families do at home to contribute to their children’s education, and activities in which families and school personnel interact (McWayne, Campos, Owsianak, 2008). Numerous studies demonstrate that family involvement in Head Start is effective at increasing family and child outcomes (e.g., Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childes, 2004; Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2012; Jeynes, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Researchers have sought predictors of family involvement in Head Start (e.g., Castro, Bryant, Piesner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004; McWayne et al., 2008; McWayne & Owsianik, 2004; Unger, Jones, Park, & Tressell, 2001). Notably, Hindman and colleagues (2012) reported that family involvement increased for all participant groups throughout the school year, but the overall variance accounted for by factors of ethnicity, race, and immigration status diminished over the course of the year. Castro and colleagues (2004) found that parent employment was the strongest predictor of parent involvement (negative correlation), and classroom quality and teacher experience were the strongest Head Start-related predictors of parent involvement. Researchers have also sought an understanding of barriers to family involvement (Hindman et al., 2012; Lamb-Parker et al., 2001). Lamb-Parker and colleagues (2001) reported that the three most substantial barriers to parent involvement at Head Start were busy schedules, having young children at home, and maternal depression.

Specific to refugee families with young children in preschool in the U.S., researcher have drawn three consistent conclusions pertinent to relationships between refugee families and Head Start staff. First, refugee families are often unfamiliar with the pedagogical techniques in U.S. schools and may find them to be inappropriate or confusing, which may result in their distance from the classroom (Birman, Trickett, & Bacchus, 2001; Dachyshyn & Kirova, 2008; Tadesse et al., 2009; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). Second, although many refugee families have an interest in their children's education, they do not always have the ability to be involved in their children's education in ways educators expect due to numerous potential barriers (e.g., lack of understanding of involvement, financial and family responsibilities, lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge) (McBrien, 2005, 2011; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). Third, refugee families often have different expectations for their children's behavior than teachers, which might hinder their involvement in their children's schools (Hurley, Medici, Stewart, & Cohen, 2011; Tadesse et al., 2009; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the actions towards partnership of a Head Start staff and a refugee family and determine what factors facilitated or impeded the formation of the trusting partnership to which Head Start aspires. The research questions guiding this study were: (a) What actions towards partnership did a Head Start staff and refugee family take during the first half of the year, and (b) What factors facilitated and impeded the formation of a strong partnership between the Head Start staff and refugee family during this time?

## METHOD

### Research Design

We used an embedded, single-case study design (Yin, 2009) to answer the research questions for this study as well as another study focused on adult actions in both home and school that facilitated the focal student's development of engagement and self-regulation skills (please see Haines, Summers, Turnbull, Turnbull, & Palmer, 2014). This design was able to incorporate a variety of evidence, including observations, interviews, and documents, to deeply explore the multifaceted social phenomenon of family partnerships (Yin, 2009).

### Case Selection

We used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to find a Head Start agency that (a) was within an hour's drive, (b) served refugee families, and (c) was agreeable to participating in this study. We started the search by contacting Head Start agencies that met the first two criteria and interviewing staff at two Head Start agencies that met all three criteria in order to determine their openness to this research. We selected Branford Head Start (all names are pseudonyms; BHS) for its diversity [exactly half of the families (66 out of 132) spoke a language other than English at home]; the range of countries from which refugee families came (i.e., Somalia, North Sudan, South Sudan, Liberia, Nigeria, Vietnam, Haiti, Burma, and Iraq); and the education director's interest in the study.

Once we found BHS, we sought one child who was (a) enrolled in BHS, (b) had parents or guardians who were refugees and willing to participate in this study, and (c) had a diagnosed disability or several disability risk factors. As enrollment began in August, the education director identified several possible participants; one boy, Haaruun, whose parents were refugees from Somalia, stood out because of BHS staff's concerns about his behavior and development. His family was willing to participate in the research and granted informed consent. All staff at BHS also granted informed consent.

## Data Collection

The first author collected data through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document collection. All data collection occurred simultaneously, and information from multiple sources served to triangulate data (Maxwell, 2005) and inform ensuing data collection (Yin, 2009).

*Observation.* Developing an understanding of the Head Start community, the refugee family, and the relationship between the family and Head Start staff required that the research team get to know the participants and contexts. To do this, the first author observed in Haaruun's classroom for approximately 50 hours (18 visits) and in his home for approximately 20 hours (9 visits) over 20 weeks. It was also imperative to experience the family partnership activities; the first author observed during the family/classroom orientation, two parent-teacher conferences, a parent activity night, and a fatherhood initiative activity. The observations were qualitative and descriptive, and they were conducted to grasp the complexity of the complex phenomenon under study.

The observations were participant observations; the first author was an observer first and a participant second (Adler & Adler, 1994). She attempted to minimize the effect of her presence on the research participants by alternating between engaging in their everyday tasks with them (e.g., helping to serve snack) and sitting separately when observing interactions (e.g., when a child displayed challenging behavior). To clarify what she observed and validate her interpretation of the intention behind actions, she conducted numerous informal member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) during and following her participant observations in the form of dialogical interviews (Carspecken, 1996). These dialogical interviews lasted between a few minutes and half an hour, and they usually took place on the playground or in the classroom or living room when the first author asked for an explanation of what occurred and why.

*Field notes.* Field notes enabled the first author to keep track of field observations for her own analysis and share the experiences of the field with the co-authors. While in the field, the first author wrote "jottings" and made "head notes" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.19) to aid her memory of important details when writing field notes from her office. She captured her field experiences on an audio recorder during the drive home, a technique that helped her process the information (Agar, 1996; Emerson et al., 1995). She used jottings, head notes, and audio recordings to generate typed field notes before going back into the field.

*Semi-structured interviews.* Semi-structured interviews were another critical method of understanding the participants and their views on family partnership. Although we focused this case study primarily on one specific classroom and the actions of its three teachers, we interviewed all the staff at the Head Start to inform our research process and ensure thorough data collection. Data from these interviews informed questions and conversations with the focal participants in the study. The first author conducted semi-structured phenomenological interviews (Charmaz, 2006) with 16 adults (staff at BHS and three of Haaruun’s family members). These interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours. She recorded and transcribed all but two of these interviews (two interviewees opted not to be recorded; she took detailed notes instead). The interviews all followed the same semi-structured interview protocol (Maxwell, 2005), which focused on (a) brief life stories (i.e., what they had done to bring them to their current life situation); (b) what the interviewees desired most for the child now, in the near future, and in the distant future; and (c) how they perceived their relationship with the other party (teacher/family). The interview questions were broader for teachers who did not interact with Haaruun on a regular basis; they were asked to think about students with similar profiles instead. Although much of the data from these interviews is not reported in this article, it informed subsequent data collection that directly shaped this study.

*Document collection.* Collecting documents helped the research team learn about written information, triangulate data from other sources, and generate further inquiry. Document collection included collecting lesson plans, newsletters, notes sent to families, assessment data, enrollment forms, Head Start policies, and curriculum guides. We used data from documents to confirm findings from observations and interviews as well as generate more questions to investigate in the field.

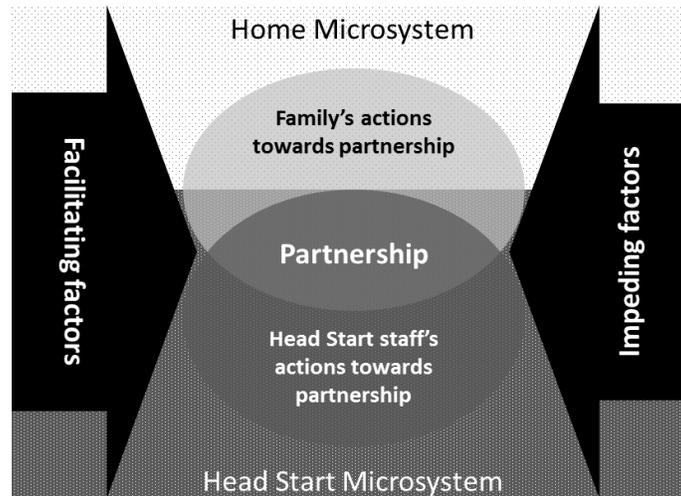
## Data Analysis

The recursive and fluid five-part cycle of data analysis we used included compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding (Yin, 2011). Using NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2012), the first author created a database for all field notes, interviews, and documents. While collecting data, she wrote analytic memos about themes that emerged from all data sources as well as her personal responses to the data (Maxwell, 2005). At least two members of the research team read these analytic memos bi-weekly. These memos and the team’s responses to them (written and verbal) became part of the database. Memo writing and sharing were components of the “interpreting” part of the analytic process, and the ideas were tentative (Maxwell, 2005).

The first author disassembled data by using open coding to create level one codes upon entry into the database (Yin, 2009), highlighting parts of data that supported each code in Nvivo to generate a chain of evidence (Yin, 2009). She used the theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2005) of microsystems (i.e., home and BHS) and the macrosystem (i.e., link between the two microsystems) derived from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory of human development to organize the codes as they emerged. The research team discussed in depth this organizing process. After collecting the data, completing the level one codes, and locating the codes in appropriate theoretical

categories, she reread all documents to revise codes and look for more specific patterns in the data. These patterns enabled her to reassemble and interpret the data to arrive at tentative conclusions. The first author checked these conclusions with BHS staff and Haaruun's family members (Yin, 2011) and used her new understandings of the constructions to revise the findings.

## RESULTS



*Figure 1.* Conceptual model of factors influencing each party's actions towards partnership.

As shown in Figure 1, we adapted Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework to organize the findings. In this framework, partnership is conceptualized as the result of actions of both the staff and the family, which interacted (demonstrated by the overlapping spheres) and occurred mostly in the Head Start microsystem but also in the home microsystem. Facilitating factors and impeding factors in each environment affected each party's actions towards partnership. We begin this section with a description of the participants, thereby describing the context for the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Next, we display in Table 1 the alignment of partnership activities offered by BHS with the federal regulations for Head Start. We present an analysis of the factors that facilitated and impeded the formation of partnership.

### Participants

*Haaruun and his family.* Haaruun was 4 years old and the oldest of four children. He lived in a three-bedroom apartment in the outskirts of a large Midwestern city with his mother, Aamino; father, Mahdi; grandmother, Fatu; and three younger siblings. Aamino, Mahdi, and Fatu were Somali refugees and spoke Somali to each other

and their children at home. Attending BHS in August was the first time Haaruun and his 3-year old sister, Zaynab, were ever outside their home without their parents.

At the beginning of this study, the BHS staff were concerned about Haaruun's development because he displayed unpredictable and often inappropriate behaviors when over-stimulated or in new situations at home and at BHS. For example, he impulsively ran from the classroom a few times, and his parents reported the same behavior at home. He also spoke little English, responded to teachers only by repeating their words, and spoke haltingly in Somali. His teachers referred him for special education evaluation due to possible language and cognitive delays.

Haaruun's parents, Aamino and Mahdi, had married 5 years earlier in the Midwestern city where they lived. Mahdi had come to the U.S. in 2000 as a Somali refugee. He was 16 years old and illiterate when he arrived, and he had never been to school. Four years later, he had graduated from high school and spoke English well enough to find steady employment cleaning rental cars. At the time of this study, he was 29 years old. Aamino was 15 years old when she arrived in 2006 (21 years old at the time of this study). She had lived in Dadaab, a large camp for Somali refugees in eastern Kenya, since she was a toddler. Aamino never attended school. She learned English by taking ESL classes at a local social service agency and watching TV. Fatu was 66 years old and had lived in the U.S. for 6 years. Fatu did not speak English, but Aamino and Mahdi were both proficient in spoken English.

Haaruun's family appreciated their four children as unique individuals and allowed them to develop within the safety of their apartment without much intentional adult intervention. Mahdi said children in Somalia grow up in "enclosed buildings with an open area in the middle and "they play outside with their cousins and friends and do whatever they want." Haaruun's family was extremely concerned with the perceived danger of the neighborhoods where they lived since coming to the U.S. Aamino stayed in the apartment with the children most of the time, leaving once a week to go food shopping alone (while Mahdi stayed with the kids). Occasionally, the whole family went together to visit relatives or go to Chuck E. Cheese. While in the apartment, Aamino and Mahdi enabled their children to access only materials they could not damage. They had no toys in their living room and spent much of their time watching TV and running back and forth in their apartment's long hallway. In sum, the children were restricted to living inside the apartment most of the time but experienced relative freedom with limited materials within those walls.

*Haaruun's teachers.* Haaruun's lead teacher, Chrissy, had worked in early childhood for 16 years, 5 of which were at Head Start. Chrissy was energetic and empathetic, understanding from her own experience as a single teenage mother some of the battles many of her students' families were fighting. Sharon, one of Haaruun's assistant teachers, had taught for 14 years at BHS and was the mother of five children (one biological and four adopted from foster care). The other assistant teacher, Nina, described herself as a "former illegal Mexican immigrant." She was a single mother who experienced substantial hardship during her quest for citizenship, and she started working at BHS as a cook 22 years prior to this study while her son attended the program. Although all three teachers were in the classroom, Chrissy is the most prominent in these findings because she was responsible for maintaining Haaruun's assessment portfolio and

running his parent-teacher conferences. Sharon often worked with Haaruun in the classroom, but Nina had limited interactions with him because she spent most of her time during this study with the Spanish bilingual students.

Partnership Activities

BHS accomplished the federal regulations for family partnerships in Head Start through numerous activities. Table 1 displays the alignment of BHS’ activities with the federal regulations. Details about BHS’ activities and Haaruun’s family’s involvement in them follow.

TABLE 1  
BHS Activities Corresponding to Federal Regulations for Family Partnership in Head Start

Federal Regulations	BHS Activities								
	Healthy University	Home visit	Parent-teacher conference	Communication from classroom	Family activities at BHS	Open invitation to classroom	Fatherhood initiative	Parent committee and policy committee	Parent activity night
Family goal setting	X					X	X		
Accessing community services and resources	X	X		X				X	
General parent involvement		X			X	X	X	X	X
Parent involvement in child development and education		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent involvement in health education	X	X	X	X	X				
Parent involvement in community advocacy	X						X	X	
Parent involvement in transition activities		X	X	X					
Parent involvement in home visits		X							

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*Healthy University.* Healthy University, held at the human services center where BHS was housed, was an event for families to enroll children in Head Start and access other community services. The staff of entities that provided services available at the center (e.g., public health services, mental health services, family therapy, employment services) set up tables in the foyer of the building. When families came to enroll in Head Start, the two full-time Head Start family advocates (Darlene and Cassandra) met with them individually within the foyer to assess their eligibility for Head Start. If a family met the eligibility criteria, they immediately set up Individualized Family Care Plans (IFCPs) intended to state the families' goals. In addition, the family was expected to complete the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1999), a 37-item behavioral screener, while at Healthy University. District special educators assessed children at Healthy University with the BRIGANCE Preschool Screen II (Brigance, n.d.) if the parent or family advocate voiced a concern about the child's behavior or development. The DECA was sent to the district office (the teachers never saw it), but the BRIGANCE became a part of the child's educational file.

Mahdi brought Haaruun and Zaynab to Healthy University. While Zaynab was calm and stood by her father, Haaruun ran around and did not respond to his father or other adults. Describing his behavior afterwards, an administrator apologetically said she could not think of another way to describe it then to say Haaruun "acted like an animal." On his BRIGANCE screener, the special educator wrote that she recommended a special education evaluation, "BUT could also be Somali culture??" She also wrote that he was "VERY distracted. Needed constant prompts from dad and me. Walked on toes. Dad says he uses Somali and English. Uses two words at a time. Dad says hard to understand and omits sounds in both languages. Points a lot."

Mahdi reported difficulty filling out all the paperwork while also trying to contain Haaruun, who kept trying to run away. The family's IFCP listed as the family goals enrolling Aamino in ESL classes and finding a medical and dental home for the children. The IFCP was not revisited during the following 6 months, and Mahdi and Aamino indicated that Aamino did not plan to enroll in ESL classes until their baby was in school (in 2.5 years). The family also expressed frustration with their health care situation, because their children's doctor would only see them for scheduled appointments and not in emergency situations, but they did not know how to gain better access to preventative healthcare.

*Home visit.* Haaruun's teachers visited his family in August prior to the start of school. This home visit lasted for approximately 20 minutes. The teachers reported that Haaruun, Zaynab, and Abdu were not home during the visit, but Mahdi said that they were sleeping in their bedroom with the door closed. During this visit, the following goals were set for Haaruun's development: "follow directions, write name, count 1-20, letters, social interaction, sharing." Chrissy said,

“We provide [families] with information for...getting ready for kindergarten... We give them resources if they need food, utility, or clothing assistance. We will provide them with information about safety. There are bits and pieces from the advocate and Head Start site that they throw into our parent-teacher conferences [at home].”

When asked about this home visit, however, Aamino said, “They came to fill out some papers.”

*Parent-teacher conference.* Chrissy met with Mahdi at BHS for 25 minutes in mid-November. This conference took place in the foyer of the site (a public space) and was scheduled at Mahdi’s convenience. This conference followed a checklist Chrissy was required to follow. Of the 25 minutes of the conference, the first 9 minutes consisted of Chrissy telling Mahdi about Haaruun’s academic development. She used a strengths-based approach as she explained his development and current skill level, stating that she had “never seen a child learn some things so quickly, as far as writing and letters and numbers and things like that.” Mahdi interjected short statements while Chrissy talked but generally just listened to what she said and repeated some of her key words as she said them. Chrissy did not offer him a chance to talk during this part of the conference. After 9 minutes, Chrissy stated her goals for Haaruun (increasing lower-case letter recognition and counting 1-15), and then asked Mahdi, “What other things would you like him to be working on?” Mahdi said he would like him to work on putting words into sentences, and Chrissy said, “we will get him there... he is always watching... and repeating.”

When Chrissy paused to check off the first three items on her checklist and write Mahdi’s additional goal after the goals she had generated, Mahdi volunteered that they are also working with him at home on these skills. Chrissy suggested some strategies Mahdi could use with Haaruun, such as naming items seen while driving. She then turned the conversation to Haaruun’s linguistic ability in Somali and asked Mahdi if he had any concerns for Haaruun’s development in his home language. He reacted by saying they had no concerns and “we’re doing the best that we can.” Chrissy responded: “You’re obviously doing really well with him, because he is picking up everything very quickly for us.” At the conclusion of this conversation, Chrissy asked Mahdi if he had any questions; he said he did not. She then checked off that item on her list.

Chrissy then read aloud a worksheet on transitioning to kindergarten. Although she and Mahdi had just set goals for Haaruun, Chrissy explained that “they” (presumably kindergarten teachers) wanted him to be able to follow three-step directions and develop social skills (e.g., “talking more to his friends and being able to relate to them”), fine and gross motor skills, pre-literacy skills, and self-help skills. She gave Mahdi a piece of large-ruled paper for Haaruun to use to practice writing his name. When she finished explaining this new set of expectations and goals, she checked it off her list, added “social skills” to the list of goals, and began to speak about her biggest concern.

Chrissy stated that her biggest concern was that Haaruun would not eat at BHS, but Mahdi did not seem to share her concern. She asked Mahdi precise questions, such as if Haaruun ate specific items (i.e., fruit, vegetables, and bread). Mahdi answered her precise questions explicitly but did not expand on them to offer contextual information.

In actuality, Haaruun ate a full Somali meal at 11:00 AM before going to BHS every day and again when he returned home at 4:30 PM. His mother served him, and he sat on the couch or floor and ate by himself out of a bowl. This style of eating contrasted greatly with the expectations at BHS, where children were expected to serve themselves and sit politely at a table. In addition, the food tasted different, was displayed differently, and had different textures. Though Haaruun's nutrition was a major concern for Chrissy, she did not solicit from Mahdi information about how he ate at home, if his family was concerned about his nutrition, or strategies he thought might help Haaruun start to eat at school. After discussing his nutrition, Chrissy wrote two more goals: "nutrition, try new foods." Mahdi had expressed neither concern about his nutrition nor desire for him to try new foods. At the conclusion of this conference, Chrissy signed the checklist she had used (Mahdi had not yet seen it) and then passed it to Mahdi for his signature.

Mahdi did not seem rushed or annoyed by Chrissy's use of the checklist or the paperwork they needed to complete. After she had explained where to sign, he clicked his pen constantly while reading through the form, taking 58 seconds. He then signed it. Notably, immediately after this conference with Chrissy, Mahdi met with Zaynab's teacher and encountered the same paperwork and checklist.

*Communication from classroom.* The teachers used numerous techniques to communicate with families, including weekly newsletters, weekly lesson plans, in-kind homework sheets, phone calls, and a monthly menu. These techniques, however, were uni-directional, as discussed subsequently.

*Weekly newsletters.* Sent home in children's backpacks on Mondays and displayed outside the classroom, the newsletters reviewed specific lessons, how the class responded to them, and how they connected to learning objectives. They also explained objectives and lessons for the week to come and their importance for child development. The newsletters showed photographs of students engaged in activities. They suggested ways families could help develop target skills at home and provided talking points for families to use with children to discuss the activities completed at BHS. At the bottom of the newsletters, the teachers compiled requests of parents to help the classroom run smoothly (e.g., send in appropriate clothing) and encouraged families to visit classrooms and check children's backpacks for school materials.

Haaruun's family expressed appreciation of the teachers' communication efforts. Although they acknowledged the newsletters and said they read them, they kept the items in Haaruun's back pack. Conversations about the newsletters revealed that they had some knowledge of what was communicated but not a complete understanding. For example, they knew when events were scheduled but not what Haaruun did at school. Chrissy explained this as a phenomenon among three or four immigrant families in her class every year: "We had a little girl that came to school with her sister's backpack from the past...it still had everything in it from her sister." She said she did not think the families that left all the papers in their children's backpacks read them, stating "there's so many papers in there...they probably wouldn't even know which ones they read or not."

*Weekly lesson plan.* On Mondays, Haaruun's teachers also sent home a detailed lesson plan for the week and posted it in the hall at BHS. Lesson plans listed large group and small group lessons and objectives and included sections on family partnerships (i.e.,

notes to families about how they could support classroom activities), outside activities, health and nutrition, assessment, Conscious Discipline, classroom climate, and materials used. Similar to the newsletters, Haaruun's family kept these in his backpack for the duration of this study.

*In-kind homework sheets.* These sheets encouraged families to spend time engaged with their children in academic tasks. Haaruun's family did not turn in these sheets, but they said they did the assigned tasks. Possibly, they did not understand how to complete the sheets which had several small boxes for the names of participants, book titles, times spent on reading, and signatures.

*Notes pinned to children's shirts.* These notes communicated directly with families about urgent matters. An example of a note sent to Haaruun's family pinned to his shirt was the consent form for his special education evaluation. His family returned it the following day in his backpack.

*Phone calls.* Teachers handled items that required discussion by calling families directly. As mentioned above, for example, Chrissy called Mahdi to request parental consent for a special education evaluation for Haaruun. She followed up the phone call with the consent form pinned to Haaruun's shirt. This was the quickest way to get a response from Haaruun's family, whose speaking ability surpassed their reading ability in English and who were very responsive to calls on their cell phones.

*Monthly menu.* The monthly menu was sent home to inform families what food children were served at BHS. Aamino acknowledged receiving the menu but expressed that she did not know what foods her children were served at school. Possibly, Aamino and Mahdi had difficulty reading the crowded writing on the menu (the entire month was on one 11 x 17 piece of paper) or understanding the vocabulary used to describe food items (e.g., "roasted winter vegetables").

*Uni-directional communication.* Communication was mostly uni-directional, from BHS to Haaruun's family; there was no clearly articulated mode of communication for his family to use to communicate with teachers. For example, on the first day of school, Mahdi followed Haaruun's school bus to BHS (a 30-minute circuitous drive) and then accompanied Haaruun to his classroom after waiting for other buses to arrive (a 10-minute wait on the sidewalk). He then waited for a few minutes in the hallway with no attention from the teachers. Finally, he motioned for a student teacher to come to the door. He asked her to get a teacher and then told Sharon (the teacher who responded) he was concerned about Haaruun using the bathroom when necessary. It appeared that Mahdi knew no other way to get this simple information to the teachers than to follow these time-consuming steps.

*Family activities at BHS.* There were two family activities at BHS during this study: family/classroom orientation and Bring Your Parent to School Day.

*Family/classroom orientation.* The week before school started, new families were invited to bring their children to the classroom to participate in some of the typical routines. BHS offered several orientation sessions to honor families' work schedules. Family members and children participated in classroom ritual songs and dances and explored the classroom. The children sat at tables and, using plastic tongs, served themselves bags of Goldfish crackers. After about 1.5 hours of activities with the children in the classroom, adults attended an orientation to Head Start logistics while the children

played in other classrooms. According to the education director, Barbara, this orientation targeted teaching immigrant families how BHS expects children to behave and to “develop a common language about behavioral expectations.”

Mahdi brought Zaynab and Haaruun to the morning session of the family/classroom orientation (though the children were in their respective classrooms). Mahdi interacted with Haaruun and tried to make him behave according to how he thought the teachers desired. For example, Haaruun cried and curled up in a ball when the teachers put on music, and everybody else started to dance around and act like animals. Mahdi lifted his son and held him into a standing position so he could participate like the other children. He moved Haaruun’s arms for him as if they were a tiger’s paws. Haaruun alternated between laughing and crying during this activity. When Haaruun went to the science center to play with a toy that made music, Mahdi instructed him to stop touching it; Chrissy came over and explained that it was okay for him to play with the toys. Haaruun chose to do a complex alphabet puzzle; Mahdi tried to help him but did not know how the pieces fit. Chrissy came over to help them and praised Haaruun for being able to match so many of his letters. Mahdi then encouraged Haaruun to say the letter names out loud; Haaruun whispered some of them, and Chrissy wrote them down on a sticky note for his assessment portfolio.

Reflecting on it afterwards, Mahdi said, “actually it was a little bit hard. It [was a] difficult first day for school of the kids... is my first time [at the kids’ school]... I remember different rules every time.” He said Zaynab was “friends with everybody... she just play every time;” but Haaruun was “shy if he don’t know the place and people. He’s quiet and shy and don’t want to talk to nobody. Just quiet... and covered his ears. He not like it.”

*Bring Your Parent to School Day.* On this day, families attended school with their children. They were exposed to typical activities and routines at BHS and had the opportunity to interact with teachers. Mahdi attended this activity for about an hour, splitting his time between Haaruun and Zaynab’s rooms, and leaving to get to work 2 hours after the activity started. Mahdi was very active during his time in Haaruun’s classroom. He took charge of making books out of cereal boxes by organizing the materials and enlisting Haaruun and another 4-year old in the class to assemble the books. Commenting on it afterwards, Mahdi expressed enjoying the time in the classroom but wishing he could have stayed longer and did not have to leave to go to work: “It [was] good. It difficult... I don’t have a lot of time to go to work. I think they want me to stay more time in school.”

*Open invitation to classroom.* BHS welcomed families into the classrooms. Teachers and administrators expressed this invitation during activities at BHS as well as in written material sent home to families. Several family members came to the classroom while the first author was there, but nobody in Haaruun’s family came for unscheduled events.

*Fatherhood initiative.* The fatherhood initiative focused on planning activities to bring fathers to BHS and interact positively with their children. The fatherhood initiative activity during this study was about fire safety. Mahdi attended this activity with Haaruun. Facilitated by the business manager (the only male on staff), this activity

started with a movie about fire safety and evacuation. The fathers then discussed with their children evacuation routes at their homes. Mahdi said, “It’s OK, but a little difficult to leave Aamino with the kids on my day off. Friday’s the Muslim holiday, like Sunday for Christians.”

*Parent committee, policy committee, and parent activity night.* Head Start parent committees are charged with advising staff on local program policies, activities, and services; planning and conducting activities for parents and staff; and participating in recruiting and screening potential employees (45 CFR 1304.50(e)(1)-(3)). The first parent activity night was the elections for the parent committee and the parent representative to the policy committee. The 40 parents present elected a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, and vice secretary for the BHS parent committee, as well as a parent representative and alternate for the policy committee while their children played outside and ate dinner in the classrooms. Barbara led the meeting, which lasted from 5:30 PM until 7:30 PM, while teachers stayed with the children. There was no translator present; one Arabic-speaking mother expressed frustration that she could not understand or participate for lack of translation. No member of Haaruun’s family attended this event because it took place in the evening while Mahdi was working.

The parent committee was charged with organizing parent activity nights with Barbara’s guidance. Barbara was particularly interested in hosting parent trainings in Conscious Discipline, the behavior management curriculum employed by BHS and described by Barbara as “a passion of mine.” Conscious Discipline, premised on the belief that changing child behavior starts with changing the behavior and self-awareness of the adults who interact with them (Bailey, 2000), has a training series for parents that BHS invested in the year prior to this study. The opening of a new Head Start site with the same leadership as BHS, however, took much of Barbara’s time during the duration of this study; the parent activity nights did not happen this fall because she was occupied with opening the new center.

*Summary of actions towards partnership.* While the BHS staff and Haaruun’s family had a positive relationship overall and several activities enabled Haaruun’s family to learn from BHS staff, there were few opportunities in which the BHS staff solicited information from Haaruun’s family about their perspectives and goals for Haaruun. The result was a positive relationship but not the trusting, collaborative, respectful, and goal-oriented partnership characterized by comprehensive two-way communication to support child and family outcomes to which Head Start aspires. In the following sections, we describe facilitating and impeding factors that influenced the formation of such a partnership between these two parties. Figure 2 displays these factors.

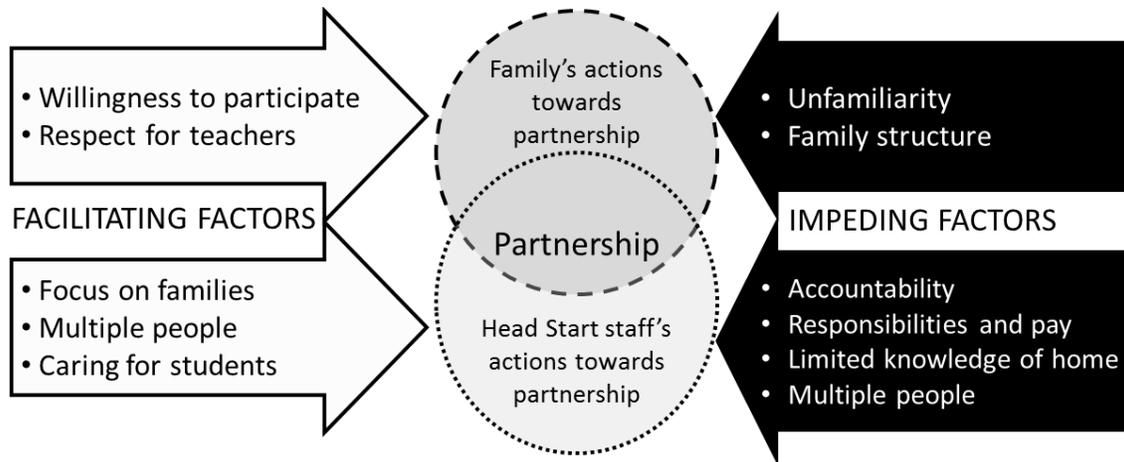


Figure 2. Factors that facilitated and impeded each party's actions towards partnership.

## Facilitating Factors

This section describes the numerous factors facilitating a partnership between Haaruun's family and the BHS staff (as displayed in Figure 2), starting with the family's facilitating factors and continuing with the staff's facilitating factors.

**Family's facilitating factors.** The main factors at home that facilitated Haaruun's family's actions towards partnership were their willingness to participate and their respect for teachers.

*Willingness to participate.* Mahdi's attendance at all parent activities offered by BHS that did not conflict with his work schedule demonstrated his willingness to participate. He also responded quickly to phone calls and notes sent home. He was present and patient at Haaruun's parent-teacher conference and the home visit. Aamino did not go to BHS but was present during the home visit.

*Respect for teachers.* Haaruun's family felt very positively about their children's experiences at BHS and respected the teachers for their expertise. For example, Aamino expressed gratitude for the work of the teachers when she explained how it affected her life: "School is good... He has learned different things. Since he started school, Haaruun does not run away when I open the door. And since he does not run away, Abdu does not run away." She was also very proud that Haaruun taught his brother some of the self-regulation skills he learned at school: "One time, Haaruun said to Abdu, 'You can't do that. Don't do that—the teachers say, 'Don't do that!'" In addition, Aamino commented about not knowing how to teach her kids ("I don't know how to teach them. I don't remember how they do it in Somalia") but indicated her trust in the teachers to teach them all they needed to know.

**Staff's facilitating factors.** The main factors that facilitated the staff's actions towards partnership were their focus on families, multiple people working with families, and caring for children.

*Focus on families.* Working with the families of the diverse groups of refugees who have moved into BHS' catchment area in the past few years has been challenging for BHS but, according to Barbara, they have welcomed the challenge. Their focus on families has remained strong, and they created some innovative ways to bring families into BHS. For example, the family/classroom orientation had previously been much shorter and focused only on the logistics of coming to school (e.g., bus schedule, sickness policy). Barbara spearheaded the classroom-based component of the orientation to demonstrate BHS' expectations for children, create common language between home and school, and increase families' comfort level in the BHS classroom environment.

*Multiple people.* While taking actions towards family partnerships was important to the program and staff, teachers at BHS had multiple responsibilities in the classroom. Therefore, the actions of staff towards family partnerships were shared between multiple staff members, including the family advocates; Barbara, the site supervisor; the business manager; and the special educators who worked for the district where BHS was located. The three teachers in Haaruun's room took responsibility for maintaining the assessment notebooks for specific children for the duration of the year (approximately 11 students each). Communicating with families, however, was shared among all the teachers, with the exception of Nina solely talking with families who spoke Spanish only. Family advocates worked with all families in specific rooms (Darlene worked with all families in both sessions of Haaruun's classroom and one other classroom), setting up the IFCPs and connecting them with necessary resources and services. Having multiple people working towards creating partnerships was a facilitating factor because it allowed for quicker responsiveness. It was also an impeding factor, however, as will be discussed subsequently.

*Caring for children.* Overall, the staff at BHS was drawn to their work because they cared about their students and families. Specifically towards Haaruun, Chrissy manifested this care through loving actions (e.g., hugging him on the first day of school because she saw he was scared), speaking about him positively (e.g., stating to Mahdi: "He is very fun to have in class. He makes me laugh every day and that is the best medicine."), and taking an interest in getting to know him. Chrissy said: "That child is eager. He wants to learn. He is a sponge. But I think that's great because he is learning that language and eventually it will click."

## Impeding Factors

Numerous factors impeded the formation of a partnership between Haaruun's family and BHS staff. The right side of Figure 2 displays these factors and the following section provides more detail, starting with the family's impeding factors and continuing with the staff's impeding factors.

*Families' impeding factors.* Two factors impeded the family's actions towards partnership: unfamiliarity with partnership and family structure.

*Unfamiliarity.* Haaruun's family had no experience with Head Start or any other preschool. They never attended school before coming to the U.S., when Mahdi attended an accelerated ESL high school program. Mahdi and Aamino understood that family

involvement was an important aspect of Head Start, and Mahdi attended every BHS event that did not conflict with his work schedule; but they did not seem to understand or have high expectations for family partnership. When asked about how they wanted to work with teachers, Mahdi said, we “want to learn ways they do it over here. Our kids do not know. The kids they don’t know...” When pressed for more information about partnership with teachers, Mahdi said, “They teach kids and help us understand what they do here... We want to learn from the teachers, because they know what the kids should do here.”

*Family structure.* Contrary to the majority of families at BHS whose mothers were more involved in their children’s schooling than their fathers, Mahdi was more involved in BHS-based activity than Aamino. In fact, Aamino had never been to BHS because she was “so busy with the kids.” Asked if she would attend an event if BHS offered childcare for her children (which they did), she replied that she would not leave her children with strangers because strangers might get angry with them for doing something wrong.” Aamino saw her primary role as making sure her children were safe and did not want to compromise their safety to attend events at BHS.

Furthermore, Aamino reported that she did not foster her children’s development as much as she would like because she did not know how. She expressed a desire to learn more about parenting strategies that would facilitate her children’s development of these skills and acknowledged that the teachers at BHS had these skills. However, she did not have any ideas for how she could learn from them more directly.

While Aamino was not involved in the BHS community, she was extremely involved in Haaruun and his siblings’ education at home. Mahdi worked 40 hours a week, returned home late at night, and needed to sleep in. During this time, Aamino took care of the children. She did not, however, have a clear idea of Haaruun and Zaynab’s experiences at BHS. She worked with them on reading and speaking English, mostly by allowing them to watch *Your Baby Can Read* (n.d.) DVDs on the TV and engaging in the program’s songs and dances with them. Conversely, the teachers did not know what Aamino did with the children at home. Since she was the primary caregiver for the children at home, her absence at Healthy University, the parent-teacher conference at BHS, and family activities at school impeded the formation of partnership.

*Staff’s impeding factors.* Four factors impeded the BHS staff’s actions towards partnership: accountability, responsibilities and pay, limited knowledge of home, and multiple people.

*Accountability.* A strategy to maintain consistency and accountability was the use of mandated checklists to document formal interactions (i.e., parent-teacher conferences, home visits). These checklists, while useful for ensuring consistency in agenda items, dictated the order and manner in which such interactions took place. The checklist-guided conference lacked the fluidity and responsiveness characteristic of reciprocal conversations. Although Mahdi shared information at Haaruun’s conference, Chrissy was checking off required components of the conference while he spoke. During a member check with Barbara, she commented on this issue, acknowledging that the checklist caused teachers and families to “lose eye contact.” Completing this task and losing eye contact while he talked could have given the explicit impression that Chrissy was not listening and the implicit impression that she did not value his ideas, though Mahdi did not seem to take note of this behavior and, in retrospect, expressed satisfaction with the

conference. All papers needed to be signed by family members and teachers. In aiming for consistency in content, these checklists diminished responsiveness, as demonstrated by the previously described unnatural flow of Haaruun's parent-teacher conference and Aamino's belief that the teachers came to her house for a home visit in order to "fill out some papers."

*Responsibilities and pay.* Teachers' time was limited: They were non-exempt employees required to complete tasks that took up most of their time while on duty. BHS operated two sessions four days a week, which required twice as many meetings and relationships, as well as double the paperwork, organization, and cleaning than a single day-long session would. Teachers reserved Friday for professional development, meetings, paperwork, cleaning the classroom, collaborating, and crafting communications. Barbara said, "it's just so many things coming down on teachers."

Accountability paperwork took a substantial amount of time. In addition to the paperwork for meeting with families, compiling comprehensive assessment data in a timely manner, and ensuring the room was cleaned to standards (for which there was a checklist), the teachers had several accountability checklists to complete every day for routine items with children. The teachers were required to do a roll call every time they entered or exited the building, which was at least four times every day. They also needed to check off the children's names every time they were served food. Teachers also had to write the purpose of each outing and sign the forms properly. Barbara reported that each time teachers conducted a roll call "takes seven minutes... think about it...seven minutes when you cannot have your eyes on the children, and you cannot be engaging with the children." Although this accountability paperwork did not necessarily have an impact on the formation of trusting family partnerships, ensuring its accurate and timely completion appeared to take precedence over fostering these trusting partnerships.

In addition to their numerous responsibilities, BHS teachers were classified as non-exempt employees and, according to them and Barbara, they were paid less than they needed in order to cover their personal expenses. Chrissy worked a second job as a gymnastics teacher to make enough money to support her family yet still struggled financially. She said, "I really appreciate what the program has done for me and what I have learned about children and the way to really deal with families ...Ideally I would work here and get paid what the school district pays." The teachers were not paid over the summer and did not receive health care coverage during that time. Chrissy shared,

"I hurt my knee this summer and had no insurance so I was walking on a torn MCL for about six or seven weeks before I had any kind of insurance. And it was just a rough start to the year... If I could just transfer out that money and benefits that comes with the school district job then that is what I would do because I want to be with this job."

Nina was a former Head Start parent and had recently been demoted from lead teacher to assistant teacher, because she did not have the college credits necessary to be a lead teacher, based on recent changes in requirements for Head Start staff. Barbara said, "We were forced to not only reduce her status but to reduce her pay... and she is a past Head Start family who is being successful and is here because of her heart... and it is getting harder and harder to hold on to that." Although Haaruun's teachers successfully

supported students as they were expected to, the high level of responsibility, low pay, and accountability measures diminished their ability to perform the parts of their job for which they were not specifically held accountable, including creating trusting family partnerships.

*Limited knowledge of home.* The teachers had a limited understanding of Haaruun's family life in general. Chrissy said,

“It's a pretty big family. Family is very supportive, especially the dad. I think he's more Americanized and he feels more comfortable to come ask questions and come here and to check it out. He wants to come here to make sure he is doing everything that he can.”

Chrissy was surprised, however, when the first author mentioned that Haaruun's family spends significant time watching *Your Baby Can Read* because they want their children to read. Once she knew that information, they talked about how Haaruun's habit of repeating words might come from that program's emphasis on repetition. It was apparent to Chrissy that such simple information could have informed her instruction of Haaruun, but she had not solicited it from his family.

*Multiple people.* A strategy to lighten the teachers' responsibilities was to spread responsibility for working with families among numerous people, a facilitating factor to partnership discussed previously. It was, however, also an impeding factor to partnership activities, because numerous people worked with the child and family but did not always share information amongst themselves. For example, the teachers had not seen Haaruun's family's IFCP, which was created by the family advocate and kept in Haaruun's family's file in her office. Although teachers and special educators had concerns about Haaruun's development significant enough to refer him for special education evaluation, there was no IFCP team meeting for him during this process, and the family advocate was not aware that he had been referred for evaluation.

In addition to the three teachers in the classroom, the local school district's special educator and speech pathologist came into the room to work with individual students with individualized education programs (IEPs). While there, they also performed casual observations of other students, including Haaruun. A mental health worker consulted for the district and, similar to the special educators, supported specific students but also worked less formally with others, including Haaruun. In addition, a behavioral specialist for the Head Start region came in a few times during the duration of this study to offer support for students, including Haaruun. These specialists all came to the room for several hours during this study but did not provide systematic feedback to Chrissy. In Chrissy's words, “It's so stressful...they've added more kids with more special needs and more language barriers. Everybody's overwhelmed... and [they haven't] really given me any input a lot of times...there's kind of that breakdown of communication... and everything's running together.” Haaruun's file showed no input from any of these specialists, most likely because he did not live in the district for which most of them worked, and they were therefore not authorized to work directly with him. Haaruun's family did not know any of these specialists or that they were working, however informally, with Haaruun.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to (a) investigate and describe the actions of the Head Start staff and a refugee family that could have potentially developed into a trusting partnership between them and (b) determine what factors facilitated or impeded the formation of this partnership. In sum, the findings demonstrated that BHS staff offered multiple activities for family engagement and that Haaruun's father participated in the events that did not conflict with his work schedule. Communication was mostly from the school to the home, however, and the BHS staff did not genuinely solicit information from Haaruun's family about their perspectives. Haaruun's family did not have high expectations for partnership, and the BHS teachers did not raise those expectations.

Overall, factors that facilitated Haaruun's family's actions towards partnership were their willingness to participate in family engagement activities and their respect for the teachers. The factors that facilitated BHS staff's actions towards partnership were a focus on families, multiple people interacting with the family, and caring for the students.

Factors that impeded the family's actions towards partnership included the family structure (e.g., mother being the primary caregiver but not willing to leave children with strangers) and unfamiliarity with the school system and family partnerships. Factors that impeded the BHS staff's actions towards partnership included strict accountability measures, numerous responsibilities and low pay for the teachers, limited knowledge of the home context, and multiple people working with the child and family but not communicating.

By describing and analyzing the relationship between the refugee family and Head Start staff of one child at risk for disability, this study fills a gap in the literature base by describing the family engagement activities that could potentially lead to trusting family partnerships at Head Start and, more specifically, describing the actions towards partnership of a refugee family and their child's teachers and the factors that facilitated and impeded the formation of this partnership. Although numerous quantitative studies offer substantial data on family involvement (e.g., Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Hindman et al., 2012; Jeynes, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), no study specifically investigated both sides of building trusting partnerships with families nor specifically focused on refugee families.

Although this study's focus on family partnership with a refugee family makes it stand alone, its findings do add to the research base on family engagement and the research base on refugee families interaction with the school system. Haaruun's father participated in the events that did not conflict with his work schedule, while his mother was neither involved in activities at BHS nor was particularly active in home visits. This finding contrasts with the findings of most large-scale self-report studies of Head Start families that have found mothers to be more significantly involved than fathers (e.g., McWayne et al., 2008). However, Aamino's low level of involvement in conferencing is consistent with previous research that has found a correlation between the mother's education level and her involvement in home-school conferencing (Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Lareau & Shamar, 1996; McWayne et al., 2008).

That this study found communication between home and school to be generally from school to home, not bi-directional, is not surprising. This finding relates to Hindman and colleagues' (2012) finding that few families from their nationally representative

sample communicated with Head Start staff more than a few times per week. Bernhard, Lefebvre, Killbride, Chud, and Lange (1998) found that immigrant parents in their Canadian sample wanted more information from teachers than teachers volunteered but did not want to be disrespectful or demand too much of the teacher's time. Furthermore, much of the uni-directional communication from BHS was in writing despite Haaruun's family's low literacy level. Nderu (2005) found that Somali families of middle school students reported that written communication was a barrier to their involvement in school because they did not know what papers to return. These families preferred oral communication (Nderu, 2005).

Haaruun's family's unfamiliarity with the school system and respect for teacher expertise resulted in low expectations for a partnership with the Head Start staff. This finding is consistent with previous research on refugee families (BRYCS, 2007; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; McBrien, 2011; Nderu, 2005). Families' respect for teacher expertise is a common theme in partnership literature, especially for immigrant (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012) and working-class families (Lareau, 2011), but it often leads to an imbalanced relationship in which teachers do not learn about the home environment, and families do not know how to communicate with teachers (BRYCS, 2007).

### Implications for Practice

The time when their children are at Head Start, especially for refugee families and/or families whose children are at risk for disability, is extremely important in launching families as partners in their children's education. Achieving trusting, collaborative, respectful, and goal-oriented partnerships with refugee families characterized by comprehensive two-way communication to support child and family outcomes would increase teachers' knowledge of home environments and families' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), which would in turn improve their teaching (Moll et al., 1992; Office of Head Start, n.d.). Such partnerships would create cohesion between environments, and families would learn from Head Start staff and appreciate the value of their own knowledge (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). Teachers and families would both benefit from building these partnerships, but children would stand to benefit the most because their potentially parallel worlds would have increased cohesion and appreciation of each other. To work towards creating such partnerships, Head Start staff should be given more authority and professional development to be responsive to the families they serve, options for family involvement should be more accessible to all families, and families should be knowledgeable about their options for partnership.

*Teacher responsiveness.* If Head Start staff were given authority, time, and professional development to be responsive to the families and children they serve, they would be better positioned to learn more about the home environment, families' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Office of Head Start, n.d.), and families' concepts of family involvement and partnership (Dachyshyn & Kirova, 2008; Moll et al., 1992; Lopez, 2001). Professional development could help Head Start staff to engage in true

reciprocal communication with families (as contrasted to the lockstep adherence of checklists) to learn this valuable information from families (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012) and develop an awareness of their own perspectives on families (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Lea, 2012). In addition, Head Start agencies should increase their methods of communication from home to school to ensure everyone can access them, and they should make certain that families understand these methods. A review of strategies to create culturally responsive partnerships is beyond the scope of this chapter; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak and Shogren (2015) and Kalyanpur and Harry (2012) provide recommended strategies.

*Family involvement options.* Increasing family involvement requires understanding both family preferences for involvement (Nderu, 2005) and ways families are already involved (Lopez, 2001) and responding accordingly (BRYCS, 2007). BHS demonstrated the desire to increase family involvement in creating the family/classroom orientation and other family involvement activities. Hurley, Saini, Warren, and Carberry (2013) found that inviting refugee families to plan menus and prepare ethnically diverse food resulted in more responsive partnerships. Planning activities that could involve younger siblings (BRYCS, 2007) could help alleviate the barrier of families not wanting to leave their children in childcare. Families should be involved in the process of creating increased options for family involvement, but different understandings of involvement and partnership might inhibit families' generation of innovative solutions to their barriers (Ariza, 2000; BRYCS, 2007).

*Family awareness of partnership.* Increasing families' awareness of partnership in Head Start and the U.S. education system is paramount to increasing their expectations for trusting, collaborative, respectful, and goal-oriented partnerships characterized by comprehensive two-way communication to support child and family outcomes. Rights come with responsibilities, and families, especially immigrant and refugee families who are unfamiliar with the U.S. education system, need to learn about both their rights and the corresponding responsibilities (Waterman & Harry, 2008). Starting during the cultural orientation activities typically provided by resettlement agencies, refugee families could be taught about family partnership expectations and opportunities in Head Start and the K-12 education system (BRYCS, n.d.; Waterman & Harry, 2008). Ideally, this education would be offered by Head Start and school officials in concert with other orientation programs offered by resettlement agencies (BRYCS, n.d.).

## Implications for Policy

There is an inherent conflict with respect to policy. On the one hand, it seems clear that Head Start policy should emphasize, and Head Start practice therefore should advance, trusting, collaborative, respectful, and goal-oriented partnership characterized by comprehensive two-way communication to support child and family outcomes. On the other hand, there are other justifiable policies that take precedence; these emphasize various types of accountability and occupy Head Start staff so much that advancing

partnership is secondary. To move creating these partnerships to the forefront, policy can support building accountability measures and appropriate measurement instruments. Although important research about family involvement from the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey data set (e.g., Hindman et al., 2012) informs Head Start policy in meaningful ways, the data measured only family involvement but not the quality of the involvement nor whether the involvement itself created partnership; relationship quality was an absent element of this research. The Measure of Family-Provider Relationship Quality (Forry et al., 2012 ) could potentially provide a measure appropriate for this task. Similarly, the Head Start Engagement Framework takes a critical step in evaluating parent and family engagement within specific activities and uniting researchers with a shared definition of family engagement but does not attempt to measure the quality of family partnership (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service et al., 2011).

### Implications for Research

Researchers should seek innovative Head Start agencies that serve refugee families with which to partner and research the partnership activities they have in place as well as document how they established these activities. Many of the strategies at BHS, for example, were commendable and successful. The BHS leadership and teachers were committed to identifying weaknesses in their program and attempting innovative solutions to them. Working with such dedicated and knowledgeable leaders, researchers can bridge the practice-to-research gap by documenting and evaluating responsive programs aimed at increasing partnership with refugee families. The field will benefit from more in-depth study of refugee families' perceptions of partnership and what practices they would like to see in place to increase partnership. Such research should include both refugee family members (Hurley et al., 2011) and Head Start staff as part of the research team and could be conducted within a participatory action research approach (Hurley et al., 2011; Santelli, Singer, DiVenere, Ginsberg, & Powers, 1998).

### Limitations

There were two main limitations to this study. The first limitation was that data collection spanned the first 20 weeks of the school year (August-December); Hindman and colleagues (2012) found that family involvement increased throughout the year. Following this family and staff for an entire school year would have been ideal and would have revealed more information, but time restraints precluded doing so. In any case, Sharon moved to a different state in January, and Chrissy and Darlene both took a leave of absence for personal reasons starting in February. It would also have been interesting to follow Haaruun into kindergarten and beyond, but his family moved at the end of the academic year to be closer to Aamino's family in a different state.

The second limitation was the senior author's data collection method at Haaruun's home. She felt most comfortable getting to know the family over the 20 hours she spent

in their apartment by engaging with them and their children. They watched movies, cooked, ate, and played together, but she did not take detailed notes on everything or tape record most conversations while in their home because she perceived that it would have been too unnatural.

## CONCLUSION

Children from refugee families' attendance at Head Start provides the opportunity for Head Start staff to foster trusting, collaborative, respectful, and goal-oriented partnership characterized by comprehensive two-way communication to support child and family outcomes. Such partnerships could help launch refugee families as partners in their children's education in the U.S. and ultimately improve family and child outcomes overtime. This study examined the relationship between a refugee family whose child was at risk for disability and the staff at the Head Start he attended. The findings indicated that the relationship between parties was positive but fell short of the type of partnership Head Start advocates. As a result, the Head Start staff and family did not take full advantage of the opportunity to learn from each other. The Head Start community will greatly benefit from increased focus on building trusting, collaborative, respectful, and goal-oriented partnership characterized by comprehensive two-way communication to support child and family outcomes for all families, especially refugee and immigrant families new to the U.S. education system.

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