As the UNHCR records unprecedented numbers of displaced people, the topic of refugee education holds immediate relevance in preparing educators worldwide. This presentation highlights my innovative use of technology in teaching English to a recently resettled Somali refugee family with varying levels of literacy, during a semester-long ESL Teaching Practicum.

Research shows that visual perception is impacted by literacy level. The use of emoticons to supplement written text provides a 2D color representation of objects. (Tarone, Bigelow & Hansen, 2007; Pettit & Tarone, 2015)

Research shows that print literacy and oral language development are connected. The audio messaging feature on WhatsApp allows students to supplement written text with oral language. (Reis, et.al. 2001) (Reis, et.al., 2006)

Our world of ever-advancing technology provides new means for teachers and students to bridge linguistic gaps. Refugee resettlement agencies provide clients with a mobile phone, which can be a critical tool in their linguistic development. In my ESL Practicum experience teaching English to a Somali refugee family of eight with a wide range of literacy levels, the use of the mobile application WhatsApp has drastically improved the English reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills of my students. This application features various modes of communication that hold many possibilities when intentionally implemented for linguistic development. WhatsApp is a platform through which we have also been able to foster and strengthen our dear relationship.

In the 2016 fiscal year, Michigan ranked 4th in top resettlement states, resettling a total of 4,258 individuals.