

A woman without relatives dances with children on her back: Somali families and social connection

This presentation draws on a study of Somali parents' experience of their children's education after making Melbourne their 'home' following the outbreak of civil war in Somalia in 1991. Using *Creating Conversations*, a program developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to engage families in discussion about drug issues, this study explored Somali parents' understandings of education in Australia and their hopes for the future of their children. Memories of 'homeland', experiences of war and displacement and the contemporary realities of settlement in Australia are also explored in this presentation in relation to their impact on social connectedness and availability of support. This study used an empowerment perspective to explain how Somali parents built connections with their children's teachers to gain benefit for their children despite the manifest inequalities in their access to resources as a consequence of their refugee status. I frame parents' desire to building connections with their children's school within the broader processes of developing social capital.

Short Bio

Robyn is the Manager of the State wide Programs Unit in the Victorian Department of Education and Early Development. She has been involved in the development of resources, curriculum, programs and research projects in the drug education and student wellbeing areas of the Department for the last 8 years. She is a former teacher and has worked for many years as a Student Welfare Coordinator in a Secondary School in the West of Melbourne.