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For Our Children: A Research Study On Syrian Refugees' Schooling Experiences In Ottawa

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Abstract

During 2015 – 2016, thousands of Syrian refugees arrived in Canadian cities, many of them hoping to find permanent settlement and new life opportunities. In the coming years, these refugees will form communities as they settle in Canada, and develop their own understandings of citizenship and belonging. Using an acculturation framework that views schooling as a primary shaper of resettlement experiences, this qualitative study draws on narrative methodology to explore the overarching question: What are the schooling experiences of recently arrived Syrian refugee within the Ottawa public school system? Refugee narratives describe hopes and concerns for the future, and provide insights for school administrators, educators, and policy makers into the previous experiences of refugees, and current challenges. Findings suggest Syrians arrive to Canada with a determination to succeed, and have positive initial schooling experiences, but often face challenges such as: lack of information, change in family roles, and language barriers.

Dedication

“We were even going to take the death trip; for our children, for their certificates, so they can live”.

This thesis work is dedicated to the brave Syrian people who have showed so much resilience and strength since the outbreak of the war. The beauty and joy that I have experienced in the presence of the Syrian children in refugee camps, speaks volumes to the goodness and strength within them. This work is also dedicated to all refugees who embark on journeys of new beginnings for the sake of life. For those brave people who cross distances and leave home despite the fear and danger to seek a better life for themselves and their young. I stand humbly in awe of them and acknowledge my shortcomings in doing more for their service.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADM	Acculturation Development Model
MLO	Multicultural Liaison Officers
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
OCDSB	Ottawa Carleton District School Board
OCRS	Ottawa Centre Refugee Action (OCRA),
OCISO	Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO)
OLIP	Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP)
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since March 2011, Syrians have been experiencing the devastating effects of a destructive war. Namely, the war has been the cause of a major refugee crisis, displacing more than 16 million people according to the latest report by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The report states nearly four million refugees are situated in five neighbouring countries and more than 16 million displaced peoples are in need of assistance (UNHCR, 2015). In my four visits to Syrian refugee camps in Syria (Idlib and Aleppo in 2013), Turkey (Reyhanelli in 2014) and Lebanon (Tripoli in 2014 and 2015), where I worked in assisting with the education and psycho-social support of children, not only did I witness the emotional disorder of children, but I was struck by the limited resources available for formal and non-formal education programs. Stimulated by my first-hand observations of Syrian refugee camps and our government's decision to receive more than 30,000 refugees, I have become interested in the prospects and challenges of education for Syrian children in Ottawa.

To date much of the assistance directed towards Syrian refugees has been in response to immediate physical needs such as medical assistance and housing. While this type of assistance is certainly imperative for the immediate settlement of refugees, it does little to help them overcome the emotional and psychological trauma of conflicts they have experienced. Refugees not only face the trauma of the war, they also often experience many difficulties in the contexts they seek refuge in (transition countries) and the challenges of arriving to foreign environments (countries of permanent resettlement).. In contrast, while education has long been acknowledged as an essential form of humanitarian relief, and was formally recognized as such in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Bromley & Andina, 2010), it rarely receives the same degree of attention and resources directed for the immediate physical needs of refugees. Largely this is because education is generally regarded as a form of long-term development within relatively stable and peaceful social

contexts than as a form of emergency, or humanitarian, relief (MacKinnon, 2014). More recently, however, considering the number of refugee crises that have emerged globally, the multidimensional benefits of education have become the subject of a growing body of literature which has the potential to combine opportunities for learning with a much needed sense of hope and psycho-social normalcy for dispossessed refugee children (Butlar, 2015; Cahil, 2010; CIDA, 2010; Demirdijan, 2010; Mundy et al., 2011; Nordtveit, 2014; Sinclair, 2002).

As international attention to the Syrians' plight increased, many Canadians voiced their desire to receive more refugees. In 2015, the Canadian government pledged its commitment to receive 25,000 Syrian refugees, and since then the arriving refugees have outnumbered the original commitment. This commendable effort on behalf of the Canadian government, as well as sponsorship groups, and offers immediate relief for many Syrian families who have been trapped in difficult circumstances across neighbouring borders and countries. Their difficulties are magnified by their illegal status in many of these contexts, as well as the intractable nature the war is constantly assuming. Although the refugees' arrival offers immediate relief, nonetheless, this relief can quickly disappear as the challenges and difficulties of their new life in Canada become more apparent. This work is dedicated to understanding the schooling experiences of Syrian refugees who have recently arrived to Ottawa.

This first chapter offers a summary of literature regarding schooling challenges faced by refugees in both transition countries and countries of final resettlement. It has been compiled with the intention of highlighting the journeys through war, transition and resettlement, which Syrian refugees have experienced. The first section describes the general context of conflict and fragile states in relation to the educational experiences of refugees. Following which, the second section offers a specific exploration of the educational experiences of Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries where they seek shelter. Thirdly, this chapter offers a literature review of educational issues

in resettlement contexts. Finally, a brief illustration of the numbers of Syrian refugees arriving to Ottawa is offered, followed by an overview of the research article.

The second chapter of this thesis is dedicated to the research article, which includes a description of the theoretical framework, methodology, findings as well as a conclusion of the research project. Finally, the third chapter is intended to offer policy recommendations, suggested research agenda and a summary of the reflections and discussions which resulted from this research project.

Schooling in Transition Countries

Recent literature on the negative effects of war, conflict and displacement on refugee children informs the analysis of education for Syrian refugee children. Due to the Syrian conflict being a very recent one, few works have been dedicated to its study. Nonetheless, the general literature on refugee education, drawing from other countries' experiences is certainly informative. Different thematic views can be extracted from the literature on educating children refugees, however, only conflict and state fragility in relation to education will be examined. Syrian refugees are settling and seeking shelter in Lebanon, which is a weak and fragile state, therefore state fragility contributes to the bulk of challenges related to the application of the UN report's recommendations.

Conflict directly effects the quality of education and learning because it disrupts teacher training systems, destroys school infrastructure and creates an overall sense of violence which has an impact on classroom pedagogy and culture (Mundy et al., 2011). Furthermore, an increasing number of displaced population in the world have sought refuge in neighboring countries which themselves have extremely weak systems and minimal capacity to provide education (Mundy et al., 2011). Conflict often has disproportionate consequences on the "poorest and most marginalized groups, often because these children must contribute directly to household livelihoods" (Mundy et al., p.5, 2011).

Unlike traditional modes of warfare, contemporary conflict has increasingly involved internal groups within a nation's boundaries, as well as external military intervention (such as Afghanistan, Iraq and more recently Syria). Contemporary conflicts are deadlier for civilians and more destructive for infrastructure (including schools) than traditional warfare (Mundy et al., 2011). Authors, such as Kirk (2007) and Davies (2011) connected state fragility to violence, conflict and the overall inability of the state to provide services and security for its people. Davies analyzed the contributing factors to state fragility and identifies five main domains: problems of governances, lack of security, weak economy, cultural barriers to change and cohesion, and environmental degradation. The illustration by Davies also connected education to each domain and highlights the possibility of education to undermine or improve the domain depending on the intention of governments and political will (2011). By discussing the various ways that education can affect state fragility and is effected by it, one could conclude that education has double sided relationship with conflict.

Consequently, scholars have emphasized the need for conflict analysis and studies of state fragility to address education issues from a lens which views education not just as a service, but as a systematic and structural component contributing and perpetuating, or alternatively mitigating state fragility (Kirk, 2007). In other words, Kirk argues education "is cause, effect, problem and possible solution to state fragility" (Kirk, 2007). Therefore, education can be both a casualty of war and a cause of it. Governance and institutional characteristics of a fragile state can contribute to the development and intractability of armed conflict (Mundy et al., 2011). These characteristics include the inability of a state to provide adequate educational systems. Fragility thus can be understood as a range of economic, social and political factors, as well as, regional and historical context of governance.

Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq have experienced the immediate effects of Syrian displacement since the beginning of the war. As neighbouring countries, they have opened their

doors to displaced Syrian refugees, while the international community has supported and provided assistance in the receiving process. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan have had the largest number of Syrian refugees. The following are some details outlining the conditions and challenges Syrian refugees are facing in terms of education in these countries.

Models of school enrollment. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR there are various models for enrollment for Syrian refugees in the three host countries. In Jordan and Lebanon, Syrians have the advantage of speaking the same language as the native one. As such, students are able to enroll in the public schools and governments have set up second shifts for Syrian schools. While in Turkey, more community based schooling has emerged from the Syrians working on establishing their own schooling models for their children. Overall, according to a UNHCR report in 2014 seven models existed for Syrian refugee schooling, only one of which did not separate Syrians from the citizens of the host country. The other six separated Syrians and provided alternatives to their integration into the public schools. These models include: refugee schools in the camps, second shifts for refugees in public schools, community schools set up by Syrians, UNICEF schools not attached to camps, alternative educational programs, and religious groups based programs (UNHCR, 2014).

Rates of school enrollment. Culbertson and Constant (2015) undertook a study on the education of Syrian refugee children and managing this educational crisis in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. In their study, they highlighted the low enrollment rates of Syrian school aged children in these countries and include country specific data. During 2014 only 25 percent of school aged children were enrolled in formal education according to Culbertson and Constant (2015, p.14), and about 60 percent in Turkey and Jordan.

Barriers to schooling. The low enrollment rates are predicted by UNICEF's report in 2013 which identifies school space shortage as the biggest obstacle to accessing education for Syrian

refugees. The Syrians' arrival has increased Jordan's population by 10 – 20 percent and has caused a substantial strain on Jordanian schools (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). In 2014, Jordanian Ministry of Education announced its need for an additional 72 schools to accommodate Syrian refugees. The ministry has attempted to resolve this issue by adding second school shifts (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). Further barriers listed by UNICEF's report (2013) include: language barriers, lack of transportation, registration requirements, prioritization of survival, belief in imminent return to Syria, expenses, bullying and tension at school.

Quality education. While increasing the number of refugee student enrollment is a goal international agencies are actively working towards, it is not sufficient for improving the educational experiences of Syrian refugee students. Culbertson and Constant (2015) also study the quality for education offered to Syrian refugee students in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Jordan has accommodated the Syrian students by offering second shifts. Teachers who were hired for these shifts have mostly been new hires who lacked experience with general educational issues, and specifically have no experience or training to support students who have experienced trauma or war (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). Furthermore, due to overcrowding and constrained instructional time, students in these second shifts only have four or five hours in school, which is 800 hours less than the average schooling hours per year (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). At a basic level, schools are unable to accommodate the number of students; moreover, schools do not offer the specific educational curriculum that meets the needs of students who have experienced war, trauma and displacement. Students who eventually move to more permanent resettlement countries, and have access to better educational experiences continue to be challenged by their past experiences of war, as well as temporary transitional through fragile countries.

Refugee Schooling in Resettlement Contexts

The significance and potential benefits of schooling. Education is the “most direct way a country can promote its own economic and social welfare and lay the foundation for a democratic society” (www.worldvisoin.com). From an individual perspective education has the potential to contribute to one’s intellectual and personal development and it is a precondition to success later in life (Wilkinson, 2002). It is also linked to income, occupation and community integration (Mathews, 2000). For refugees, education has an added objective, as it introduces refugees to Canadian culture and society (Mathews, 2000; Wilkinson, 2002). Lori Wilkinson (2002) argues that determining how well refugee youth are doing in the school system, will help us in answering the question of how refugee children and youth are integrating into Canadian society. Schools give more than language immersion and a graduation diploma for refugee children and youth; through schools, refugee children and youth learn about how society functions, and schools provide a structured learning opportunity for children to adapt, understand and integrate in their host communities and countries (Rah, 2007).

Schools have multifunctional roles in our society. Going to school is not simply about learning the content of books, but also learning how to interact with others and how to develop one’s own voice. Children learn how to negotiate a place and space in the wider society through the relationships and identities developed within school (and elsewhere). The social aspect of schooling offers opportunities for adjustment to the new community and interaction with others for refugees and new immigrants (Walsh, Este, Krieg, & Giurgiu, 2011). Such opportunities occur for both the families and their children alike: when children go to school, their parents get to meet teachers, staff and other parents. The school offers a social window for parents through different experiences and events. Such social connections can have positive influence on mental wellbeing and social inclusion for newcomers to a community (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008).

Education has the potential to act as a tool for protection, promotion of self-reliance and assist in meeting their psychosocial needs of refugee children (Mathews, 2000). In the constant state of transition, uncertainty and movement experienced by refugee children and youth, education can offer stability in their disrupted life experiences. Therefore, school and other community agencies are vital for refugee communities in developing a sense of connection and in reducing the risk of suffering from stigmatization and deprivation in their host countries (Dippo et al., 2012). As well, education holds the potential to minimize the likelihood of marginalization, neglect and ghettoization of newcomers, by providing social connections and aiding in community development. Schools as institutions present ideal reception conditions for refugee students and can contribute to the settlement of refugees. The school thus has the potential to be a hub for building and nurturing inclusive supportive communities, as well as fostering and creating social capital to combat isolation and xenophobia (Dippo et al., 2012).

Schools can offer a protective environment that stands in contrast to the most recent experiences by refugee children as they escape their homelands and take on refugee status (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). In Canada, educational institutions can be generally characterized as peaceful environments of positive coexistence and learning. Schools are the first haven refugee children will likely encounter (outside of their own homes and families), and therefore have the potential to address settlement challenges and provide an alternative worldview and experience (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). A different worldview is essential to a generation of Syrian children whose young lives have been shaped by violence and destruction (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). The school's ability to make children feel safe and normal again is the environment needed for learning to commence (Mathews, 2000).

By promoting children's confidence, school policies can assist refugee children in overcoming the frustrations of social isolation. On the other hand, failure in school can have a detrimental effect on

refugee students who are re-building their lives and imagining a future in their new home (Mathews, 2000). In many cases, educational success and emotional well-being go hand in hand. A school can aid in the emotional well-being of children by providing a space for participation, communication, relationships, friendships, belonging and learning about oneself and others (Mathews, 2000).

This understanding of the potential contributions of education to the well-being and future of refugee children is not lost in the minds of refugees and their parents. A common sentiment often voiced among refugees is their hope their children will have better futures through being given better educational experiences. The dream of a better life for the children motivates many of these families, and consequently they view their children's educational attainment and success as the goal of their difficult journey. Their risks and sacrifices become worthwhile if their children are able to succeed in their new lives. Parents turn a blind eye to their own potential failures within the new system, and their financial restrictions in exchange for this potential hope of better prospects for their young (Steward, Dennis, Kariwo, Kushner, Letourneau, Makumbe, Shizha,, 2015).

Refugee children and youth also recognize the positive consequences of education on their new future. In a study by Shakya et al., (2010) refugee students acknowledge an increase in their own educational aspirations after coming to Canada. The authors argue that the increase in aspiration is due to many reasons, the first being the lower quality of education in the refugees' previous country of residence. Additionally, youth in this study indicate having positive educational experiences since their arrival to Canada, and this directly contributes to their higher educational aspirations. Finally, these high ambitions are linked to the belief that higher educational attainment will lead to higher income, and is positively correlated to a better life for refugees and their families (Shakya et al., 2010). The researchers report that refugee youth articulate an awareness of the political realities that contribute to the limited educational experiences and poor opportunities in their war-torn countries and refugee camps (Shakya et al., 2010). While their ambitions maybe high, refugee children must

overcome many challenges that evidently are unique to their circumstances as refugees and children of refugees.

Schooling challenges experienced by refugee children. The following sections will summarize the empirical literature that discusses challenges faced by recently arrived refugees in schooling in their host countries. The selection of the challenges is informed by the acculturation model, which not only addresses the child, but the external factors influencing their adjustment and settlement. The first immediate circle affecting any child is their family. Thus, a challenge faced by the family will lend its effects onto the child as outlined in the first section. The second section, addresses the circles in which the child is placed in within the school and the social and psychological challenges s/he will face. Finally, the third section calls for a more professional approach to the challenge of refugee education by outlining the lack of preparation teachers of refugee students have, for meeting specific needs related to the refugee students' experience.

Family challenges. Until children reach adulthood, their wellbeing is consistently linked to the wellbeing of their families, in any given context. Newbigging and Thomas (2011) highlight good practices in providing care for young asylum seekers, which include the good support and information for families and the establishment of safe and appropriate accommodation, support for educational experiences, and care for emotional wellbeing. The authors view the role of the family as central to the provision of care. Major factors, such as poor mental health, which affect one family member, has an impact on the entire family (Newbigging & Thomas, 2011). This interdependency between child and family is not limited physical and emotional wellbeing. There is also a correlation between academic success of minority groups and parental involvement (Jeynes, 2003; Rah, 2007). In general, positive relations between school and homes promotes students' academic performance (Bryk and Schneider, 2001). Moreover, Inna (2011) asserts that in the Unites States, parents'

education and occupation are the most important predictors of educational success for Hispanic immigrant and non-immigrant children.

Refugee parents face additional stresses associated with the experience of war and trauma, changes to family roles, separation or death of family members, and different cultural expectations about behavior (Gonsalves, 1992; Lamberg, 1996). Pre- and post settlement experiences can exert considerable pressures on refugee parents and children. For refugee parents, it is often difficult to separate their past experiences from their new beginnings. Upon arrival, parents cannot simply resume parenthood without bringing their stressful experiences from their countries of origin. Moreover, they remain occupied with their families back home mainly to find out news about the war, with the ever present concern of whether their relatives are dead or alive (Oliva, 2015; UNHCR, 2013). Such worries and preoccupations make ensure that their new experiences remain entwined with the realities of war and yield anxiety, depression, sleepless nights, and other forms of PTSD for the families and their children (Oliva, 2015; Phillimore, 2014). When parents are in this state, they are unable to practice healthy parenting, nor are they able to provide stability, set goals or adapt well to their new surroundings. This hinders their capacity to assist their children and be the support needed for children who are beginning new educational experiences.

Refugee parents often express their uncertainty about their role in their children's learning process (Strohl, Jecklin, & Dixon, 2005). Even when refugee families are keen to take a more active role in their child's education, they are faced with many challenges. Refugee parents often feel ill informed, and have doubts about their abilities to approach the school system or to become involved in their children's education (Gonsalves, 1992; Lamberg, 1996). They suffer from feeling inadequate, and lack skills and qualifications amidst a new society; they experience linguistic barriers, cultural difference, and adjustment difficulties. This feeling of inadequacy, lack of language proficiency, and their unfamiliarity with the educational system and content of learning, combined

with long working hours, limit parental support available to refugee children at home (Kariwo et al., 2015; Shakya et al., 2010).

Language is an important factor effecting refugees' transition and settlement into their host countries (Watts, White, & Trlin, 2001). One of the many challenges facing refugees upon arrival is learning a new language (Loewen, 2004). Most refugee families arrive in their host countries with limited or no knowledge of the language of the country. Consequently, they are unable to be actively involved in their children's education. Parents report the stress associated with communicating with schools while having limited knowledge of the language (Kauffman et al., 2001). Teachers commonly criticize the lack of involvement of parents of immigrant and refugee backgrounds (Protheroe, 2006), while schools have also expressed frustrations with the inability to engage refugee parents (Illinois State Board of Education, 2003).

Sohn and Wang (2006) observed that regardless of the length of time parents spent in the United States, the most reported barrier to parental involvement, is linguistic barriers. Parents who are not proficient in the language tend to be reluctant to contact or communicate with their child's school and shy away from participating in meetings, making calls or volunteering in the classroom (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Schools also are more likely to communicate via written materials, which parents may be unable to read. Parents in such situations will ask their children to translate these communications for them. However, children are not reliable translators (ISBE, 2003).

For schools to be able to build positive relations with refugee parents, ongoing support in forms of information and skill training is needed to provide parents with confidence and tools to feel like equal partners in their children's learning (Ester & Tane, 2000). Social support services are key to new comers' ability to manage stress and loneliness associated with migration, resettlement and parenthood (Kariwo et al., 2015).

Challenges faced by refugee parents do not only hinder their ability to support their children, but also put pressures on the children to take on parental roles. Refugee youth, after arrival to Canada, experience heightened increase in their family responsibilities and even role reversals (Shakya et al., 2010; Wilkinson 2002). Refugee youth often step into the role of interpreter, service navigators and caretakers for their families. Youth report taking the role of breadwinners as their employability is higher than their parent. Such responsibilities hinder the youth's ability to focus on their educational attainment and the high ambitions they once had are overshadowed by their heavy responsibilities (Shakya et al., 2010). In these cases parents lack the language fluency, education and health to be able to provide the traditional support of a parent, while in contrast, youth can master the language and adapt to the society much faster than their parents (Huyck & Fields, 1981; Ahearn & Athey, 1991). This as some research suggests, causes intergenerational conflict between refugee youth and their parents (Githembe, 2009).

Social maladjustment in schools. Displacement can have grave effects on human beings. Our attachment to a physical space deeply affects our emotional state. Hamilton and Moore (2004) define displacement in terms of the loss of attachment to a physical place, and the additional stress placed on individuals who must orient themselves to an unfamiliar new space. Refugees experience this loss coupled with multiple other forms of trauma as they transition to new host countries.

Gardiner and Walker (2010, p.199), identified the types of trauma refugees often experience including:

- forced separation, disappearance or murder of family members,
- being subject to, or witnessing torture, physical and emotional abuse,
- sexual assault, mock execution,
- imprisonment and solitary confinement, and
- illness and death of family members during flight or in refugee camps

Although such experiences are evident and often most severe among refugee populations, other traumatic experiences often unmentioned also have significant impacts on individuals and families.

These include: “the trauma of food and water scarcity, lack of shelter, untreated illness, the loss of household, educational opportunity, occupation and social structure” (Walker, 2010, p. 200) as well as the feeling of insecurity from long periods of transition.

After arriving to host countries, refugees’ traumatic experiences do not end. Children refugees also face trauma with new beginnings in host countries. When Walsh et al. (2011) studied the educational, social and health service needs of Roma children in Hamilton Ontario, they revealed school-related challenges related to fear of speaking English and difficulty in establishing social relations lead to social isolation. Immigrant and refugee children are often bullied, struggle socially and experience many forms of violence related to their race, religion and their limited knowledge of the social and cultural realities of the schools (Kanu, 2008, Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996; Walsh et al., 2011; Wilkinson, 2002).

According to Culbertson and Constant (2015) Syrian children have experienced “horrific events, loss and violence; lost parents or saw homes destroyed; are traumatized and face mental health problems” (2015, p. 60). Going to school can potentially present as a daily difficult task. Years of interrupted schooling amplifies the educational challenges facing Syrian refugee children. Students with low literacy, interrupted schooling and traumatic experiences might be expected to take 10 years or more to catch up to the average levels of cognitive and academic language (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Not only will refugee children be faced with the magnitude of adjusting to a new environment just as any new comer, they also carry the burdens of trauma and war, interrupted schooling and weak familial support.

Refugee students and their families have reported their frustrations with inaccurate academic placement regarding their level placement (Kanu, 2008; Kariwo et al., 2015; Shayka et al. 2010; Yau, 1995). Refugee children face a difficult challenge with placement due to disparities among languages of instruction, curriculum and educational structures in their countries of origin, their temporary

educational experiences and their placement in Canadian schools. Interrupted schooling coupled with trauma can set students back further in their studies and not simply put them at halt, as some placement strategies assume (Shayka et al., 2010). Inaccurate academic placement can lead to frustration associated with their inability to cope (or boredom) at these levels, and social isolation when students are unable to interact properly with their surroundings (Kariwo et al., 2015). The respondents in Wilkinson's 2002 study examining educational experiences of youth in Canada who felt their grade placement was too high, are more likely, to experience problems in school, and fall into the 'high school only' or 'behind/dropped-out' categories. Consequently, Wilkinson (2002) viewed appropriate grade placement as having a significant effect on the educational performance of youth despite the lack of coverage of this issue in the literature.

The post and pre-arrival experiences of refugee children can have a detrimental effect on their social adjustment in their new schools. Manifestations of such experiences include social withdrawal and regressive behaviors, hyperarousal or dissociation, flashbacks, aggression, inability to concentrate, attachment difficulties, memory difficulties, sleep disturbances, feelings of guilt, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety disorders (Fazel et al., 2002; Block et al., 2014; Murray et al., 2008; Steele, 2002). Dippo's research also argued these effects can surface in behaviors such as nervousness, anxiety, aggression, lack of concentration, mood swings, sense of disconnection, withdrawal, sadness, stomach aches, or other effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (Dippo, 2012).

Block et al. (2014) argue that these experiences and their manifestations can have significant consequence on the social wellbeing of refugee students, particularly if the school does not properly address them. The consequences of neglecting to address these experiences can emerge as a lack of engagement, feelings of disempowerment, absenteeism, failure to establish and sustain healthy relationships and early dropout from school (Block et al., 2014; Porche et al., 2011; Watson, 2009).

Moreover, students experiencing such manifestations are likely more susceptible to discrimination, which, as studies suggest, has significant effects on the academic success of refugee students (Steele, 1999). These effects are combined and exacerbated as time passes without targeted interventions to address them. Furthermore, the early drop out, and poor achievement, magnify social exclusion and contribute to significantly lower socio economic opportunities available for refugee students when they set out to seek employment (Block et al., 2014).

Teacher aptitude. The core most significant relationship students form in schools (apart from those with their peers), is the one that they develop with their teachers. If teachers are not able to welcome refugee students, respond to their needs and their aspirations, they will be unable to instruct them, motivate them and empathize with their specific situation. McKneivein's (2011) study of refugee students in Prince Edward Island focuses on the need to go beyond language training in teacher development and emphasize the importance of teachers understanding the core experiences which define refugee students' educational backgrounds. More specifically, she proposes that teachers develop strategies, which address interruptions in education and trauma experienced by these students. She also calls for introduction and improvements in counselling and one-on-one support. Unfortunately, teachers often do not know what they do not know and they fail to recognize a lack of training until they welcome a new refugee student into their classroom and struggle to make connections or to respond effectively to the student's particular needs. McKneivein argues that ideally, this training and preparation on appropriate ways to respond to refugee children should be conducted at the university level.

Dippo (2012) examined a workshop conducted by the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) to assist teachers in becoming more knowledgeable about pre-arrival experiences of refugees, the legal context and refugee determination processes, settlement issues faced by refugee families, and the complexity of trauma (Dippo et al., 2012). Among the most fundamental findings is

that teachers lacked contextual knowledge and understanding of important differences between “newcomers” and “refugees” or “forced migrants”. Frequently, teachers presumed to know all about “the experience of being a new comer with little or no appreciation of how the experience of flight profoundly affects the migration experiences of children and families” (Dippo, 2012, p.46). This presumption reflected on the lack of compassion teachers showed towards students who experienced difficult traumatic stages before arrival to Canada, and the lack of supportive and appropriate methods to address refugee students. Consequently, there is an essential need to augment educators’ knowledge and avoid presumptions and stereotypes regarding why people are forced to escape their country of origin, and the barriers to social inclusion for young refugees (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

When students interact with teachers who make them feel safe, valued and connected, they are motivated to contribute and engage with both the teacher and their classmates (Due & Riggs, 2016). The exceptional circumstances of refugee children and youth create unique teacher-student relationships. Teachers should be aware of refugee students’ specific psychological and academic needs; however, research reveals that teachers are often not equipped to address the emotional stress of refugee children (Szente, Hoot, and Taylor, 2006). This fundamental challenge requires specific training for teachers and adequate support to be better prepared to meet the needs of refugee students in their classrooms. Such training will provide more resources for teachers to assist students and help them benefit from their schooling and feel comfortable in their new environments (Due & Riggs, 2016; Szente, Hoot, and Taylor, 2006). Despite the high potential schooling has in providing acculturation opportunities, and positive resettlement assistance, schooling can also be very challenging for refugee children and their families.

Syrians Refugees Arriving to Ottawa

Of the millions of displaced Syrian refugees, Canada received 32,737 refugees between November 2015 and October 2016 according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). Across Canada 327 different communities have collectively welcomed these refugees (CIC, 2016). Ottawa, traditionally a hub for refugees and the federal capital, has welcomed 1,280 government-sponsored refugees and 334 private sponsored refugees as of October 16, 2016 (CIC, 2016).

Around half of the Syrian refugees arriving to Canada are children. As of May 2016, 100 refugee children had been placed in English public schools, 38 in English Catholic schools and 13 children were welcomed into French Catholic Schools According to the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) by May 2016, 499 newcomers had been assessed by the Family Reception Center (FRC) for September registration, and 475 of them were enrolled at the time in schools and 24 in junior kindergarten. These students, and more specifically their experiences of education, are the population at the focus of this study.

Refugee support organizations. The arrival of refugees to Ottawa has had a visible effect on the civil work and grassroots community organizations and agencies in the City. Organizations began to rally in support of refugees, and organizational capacities have developed in the process. Nonetheless, agencies have also reported shortage in their ability to accommodate the wave of refugees arriving. Ottawa's East food bank stated that 400 Syrian refugees are using its services, contributing to the 30% increase in the usual number of people they provide service to (CTV News, 2016). Other agencies are working assiduously in order to meet a small portion of the refugees' needs. Refugee613 is an organization that was founded following the government's announcement to receive Syrian refugees. This newborn NGO works on coordinating Ottawa's response to the global refugee crisis. Another prominent organization working to support Syrian refugee, is the Ottawa Centre Refugee Action

(OCRA), this organization has traditionally supported refugees arriving to Ottawa, bringing together volunteers who help refugees settle in Ottawa.

The OCDSB is working with Refugee 613, the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP) and the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) on supporting the refugees as they arrive. The board has brought together representatives from school staff, Curriculum Services, Equity and Inclusion, Learning Support Services, Facilities (Planning), Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLO), Continuing Education, Adult High School, Communications and the Family Reception Centre to work on a roundtable committee. As a school board, the OCDSB through all these members, is bridging efforts for refugee resettlement, in a way that highlights the importance of education. The committee explores opportunities to ease the transition and new arrival of Syrian students into the board's schools. The committee's most recent efforts have centered on "providing timely support to schools, including funds for resources (e.g., levelled readers, dual-language books, manipulatives) and additional interim staffing (e.g., long-term occasional classroom teachers and/or ESL support staff, as well as emergency Educational Assistants where required)" (Memo No. 16-103, May 2016). One of the goals of the aforementioned grassroots community organizations and school board services is to collectively support the integration of children, youth and families into Ottawa school communities and through this, into the wider communities within which they now live.

The Research at Hand

The above literature review illustrated the nature of the relationship between schooling and refugees' resettlement experiences, as well as the diverse educational challenges faced by refugees in after arrival to permanent settlement. The challenges have been grouped in three major categories: teacher aptitude in addressing specific refugee needs, social adjustment challenges, and familial difficulties.

After arriving to Canada, refugees will undergo significant life changes, while often experiencing a marginal position in society (Danso, 2002). Children refugees will experience these life changes as they grow and develop biologically, psychologically, cognitively and mentally. They will interact with the majority culture through schools as well as media, health care, and the workplace. The following study applied the Acculturation Development Model created by Oppedal, Roysamb, & Heyerdahl (2005). In this model they argue that the development of children of refugee and immigrant backgrounds will continue to be influenced by their heritage culture through their friends, parents' friends, neighbourhood and religious and ethnic communities. Oppedal et al. (2005) claim that cultural development for immigrant and refugee children continues to grow both in the domain of their own ethnic cultures, as well as the culture they acquire from their new context.

Acculturation theory explains the process of experiencing new cultures, as well as the choices newcomers and refugees make to navigate the new culture they encounter. The acculturation choices largely depend on the context in which newcomers arrive, as well as newcomers' experiences of this context. This context is connected to the policy and program options available to newcomers to settle in their new countries and accommodate their needs. For children and youth, this policy context is manifested predominantly in the educational institutions they interact with until they reach adulthood. These institutions – the school – will shape the children's experiences, and will help them form new cultural identities and learn more about their host cultures. Schools thus act as resettlement agents, shaping the 'new' experiences for refugee children and youth.

In order to understand the resettlement experiences of newly arrived Syrian refugees, this research followed narrative research methods to generate data which addressed a central question: what schooling experiences are newly arriving Syrian refugees to Ottawa facing? The narrative methodology utilizes participants' own voices to tell their stories. The benefit of using this method is to generate more insight on the lived experiences of participants and have genuine data which is not

segmented or taken out of context of past and present experiences. I am not Syrian and thus may be viewed by Syrian refugees as an outsider. However, in my own personal and familial relationships, I am often considered an insider. My husband is Syrian, and thus by extension his family members are Syrian. I am able to speak with the Syrian dialect, and as a Muslim woman I am viewed with an eye of kinship. This position is extremely instrumental when taking a narrative approach, which by its nature entails telling stories that require trust and relatability. Furthermore, as a community worker in Ottawa, I have already developed close relationships with cultural brokers, community members and social workers who are serving Syrian refugees, and these relationships add a further layer of mutual respect and trust.

Chapter 2: Research Article

My first exposure to the educational experiences of Syrian refugee children was during my visit to refugee camps in Idlib and Aleppo, two Syrian cities on the borders of Turkey, in 2013, where I worked as a humanitarian aid worker. From this initial experience, I became interested in assisting in the educational development within these camps, and I later returned to the Turkish-Syrian borders and worked as a teacher trainer in Al-Salam school for refugees in 2014 in Reyhanelli. In the summer of 2014, I founded and coordinated the first education program in a Syrian refugee camp in Tripoli, Lebanon as part of a socio-psycho support grant from the Union of Arab Doctors.

Shortly after these experiences of working in refugee camps, I was pleased with the Canadian government's decision to receive more Syrian refugees. I became intrigued to help Syrian refugees overcome some of the challenges I faced as an immigrant to Canada. Although my own immigration experience did not involve fleeing a conflict zone, it brought the challenges all newcomers might experience to the forefront of my attention. This interest, coupled with my extensive work in refugee camps, my concern for the future of newcomers to Canada, and the national affinity to Arab speakers as an Egyptian, provoke my passion to understand refugee experiences in my city – Ottawa. The families I have met all related experiences that I have witnessed first-hand both in refugee camps and with newcomers whom I have assisted at some point during my formative years in Ottawa.

Research Problem and Rationale

Since the outbreak of the Arab spring in 2011, the Middle East has become a place of instability and chaos. Syria specifically has suffered immensely after protests quickly turned into an intractable conflict. The effects of the conflict have extended beyond Syria's borders, into neighbouring countries and as far afield as Canada. Between November 2015 and October 2016, 32,737 Syrian refugees arrived to Canada, at the time of writing, and 18,000 more applications are currently in

progress (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016). This effort, on behalf of the government, is commendable; Canada has received recognition for providing homes, safety and comfort to those who have been forced to flee the Syrian war, in what has come to be recognized as the worst refugee crisis since World War II (UNHCR, 2016)..

Children are not immune to the devastations of war, and often suffer immensely as they flee and cope with the disasters of war and the process of securing refuge. In Syria, UNICEF estimates 8.4 million children have either been displaced internally or are refugees in neighbouring countries. In 2015 alone, the agency documented nearly 1,500 “grave violations” against children (www.childrenofsyria.info). Children are exposed to malnutrition and diseases due to poor sanitation, cold weather and lack of adequate shelter and health care (World Vision, 2016). Moreover, refugee children have to work in dangerous and vulnerable working conditions to support their families when their parents’ work is not sufficient (World Vision, 2016). Many children are unable to attend school, or attend only sporadically. According to UNICEF, between two and three million Syrian children are not attending school (2016). The U.N. children’s agency argues that the war has had detrimental effects on education and reversed 10 years of progress in education for Syrian children (www.childrenofsyria.info).

These difficult conditions push many refugee families to leave their country. Refugee families make significant sacrifices when they take this step. They often make such sacrifices for the sake of their children, and to protect their families. It is not surprising, therefore, that once resettled in a new country, refugee families might look to the educational success of their children as one way of securing a better future for their families. Unfortunately, refugee children face many challenges when they start their educational experiences in their host countries’ schools (Kanu, 2008; Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996; Walsh, Este, Krieg, & Giurgiu, 2011; Wilkinson, 2002).

Canada is one of the top five countries in the world in receiving refugees (Kariwo et al., 2015) and has built a particularly proud national image for its open doors. Welcoming Syrian refugees into Canada is thus an extension of the Canadian commitment towards newcomers. However, despite the historical experience our country has had with new arrivals and with accommodating displaced peoples, social programs and government services require more attention, improvements and advancement, especially considering the unprecedented numbers of refugees who arrived during 2016 alone. For example, research suggests refugees face discrimination when seeking employment even upon completing their Canadian qualifications. Refugees also report cultural insensitive policies when accessing services such as health care, as parents in a specific study were not able to perform cultural practices related to birth (Kariwo et al., 2015).

Schooling provides a structured learning opportunity for newcomers to adapt, understand and integrate in their host communities and countries. As well, it holds the potential to minimize the likelihood of marginalization, neglect and ghettoization of newcomers. Adequate educational opportunities and experiences have the potential to set the stage for a healthy integration process and a more comfortable transition for refugees in host countries. On the other hand, a lack of proper educational and other programs for children and youth can increase the sense of alienation for newcomers, increase divides between refugees and majority culture and will reduce the ability for refugees to have stable economic independence (Kanu, 2008).

Refugee students in Canada face many challenges (Dei & Rummens 2010; Rummens et al., 2008; Stewart, 2008). Among these challenges, refugee children often face difficulties associated with schooling and the need to overcome emotional and psychological trauma, as well as adapt to the differences in culture, ethnicity, language and religion of their new country. Additionally, they often lack the support needed from their families, as refugee parents themselves struggle to adapt, and lack basic skills such as language and knowledge of the school system required to support their children.

The current research literature discusses challenges faced by other refugee communities, but to date, no empirical research has been published regarding the new community of Syrian refugees in Ottawa.

Through this study, the schooling experiences of Syrian refugee children and their families, who recently arrived to Ottawa, were documented. By using a narrative methodology, this study recorded refugees' reflections on their experiences and identified common educational challenges and opportunities they have faced. Most of the Syrians who sought refuge in neighbouring countries had no other means of relocating when the war broke out. Thus, initially they were forced to move into refugee camps, with some of them having spent up to five years in the refugee camps.

These newly arrived refugees to Canada deserve research attention for the following reasons:

- The number of Syrian refugees arriving is the largest number Canada has received at any point in history from a single country (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).
- Syrians arriving are coming from one of the following transition countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan or Egypt, where circumstances for refugees are extremely difficult and lack of educational support is apparent (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).
- The Syrian educational system is different than systems in transition and host countries (i.e. Canada) in significant ways, especially in terms of language and structure (Culbertson & Constant, 2015).

In the following sections of this article, I present a brief description of the theoretical framework, methodology of the research, as well as the findings and implications of the research project.

Theoretical Framework

This research study is framed by a theory of acculturation which underlines the central importance of schooling in the lives of refugees. The following section introduces acculturation

theory, and a specific acculturation model by Oppedal, Roysamb, & Heyerdahl (2005) that is primarily focused on children growing up in multicultural societies.

Acculturation Theory

Acculturation is defined as a cognitive, behavioral and psychological change in an individual as a result of interacting with a different culture (Berry 1997, 2006; LaFromboise, Colman & Gerton, 1993; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboagnga, & Szapocnik, 2010). The term acculturation emerged early in the 20th century through anthropological and sociological discussions (Park & Burgess, 1924). Scholars have used the term to explain the subtleties of cultural flow and interchange which occur when people from diverse cultures interact on a continuous basis.

Walsh et al. (2011) explain acculturation as a change in the values and behaviors to adapt to a new culture. Through adaptation, people's behavior and belief systems change as they interact with the majority culture, through various institutions and communities. Over the years and decades, acculturation has been used with different connotations, and has also been used interchangeably with the idea of assimilation, usually referring to the American discussion of the melting pot (Berry, 1980).

The Acculturation Development Model

The Acculturation Development Model (ADM) is a specific framework developed by Oppedal, Roysamb, & Heyerdahl (2005) to address how refugee communities experience transition to a new country. ADM includes four major areas which describe how newcomers experience the majority culture: school, media, healthcare and the workplace. The model describes the ways in which refugees in general experience acculturation, rather than referring specifically to the experiences of children and youth. In this study, I suggest that the school, is a key formal institution that refugee children and youth interact with, and spend an extensive amount of time in, and thus schools hold a stronger influence when seeking to understand the acculturation of children and youth refugees than

do other institutions. Syrian refugee children arriving to Canada will formulate resettlement experiences which for the most part revolve around their schooling experiences.

As illustrated in Figure 1, I have adapted the ADM to highlight how children are influenced by schools and in turn convey the majority culture to parents, while parents convey their heritage culture to children through their traditions and connection to ethnic and/or religious communities. Figure 1 illustrates these bi-directional influences between the majority culture and the heritage culture through the interactions of children and parents.

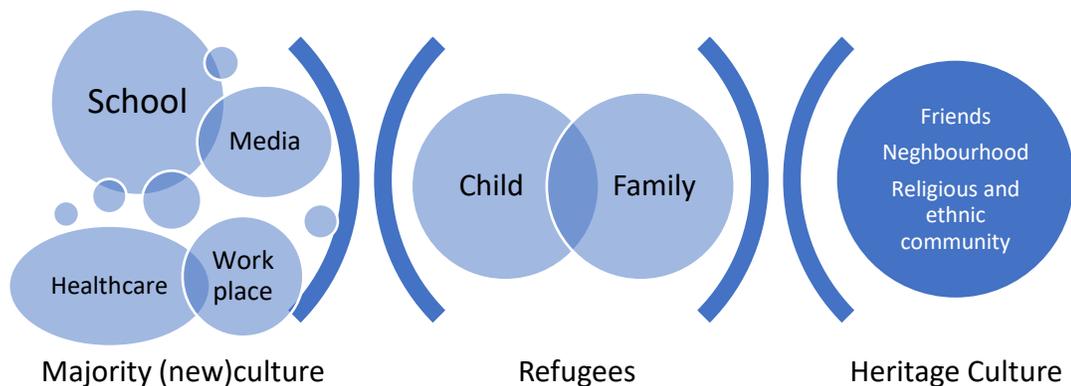


Figure 1 As adopted from *Development and Acculturation* Brit Oppedal (2005)

While the acculturation model illustrates refugee and new immigrants' experiences, this research is primarily concerned with children and youth refugees. Through the framework above, this study is concerned with the role of schools in shaping the resettlement experiences of refugees. However, these experiences must be studied in relation to the family context which has a substantial impact on how children experience resettlement through their schooling experiences. This overlapping relation is represented by figure 2, and the point of overlap represents the resettlement experiences of the child.

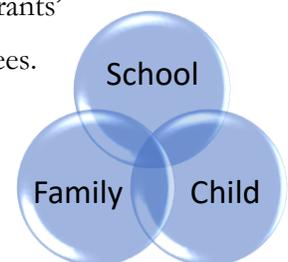


Figure 2 Resettlement experiences of children

Methodology

Research Questions

The specific questions the research investigated:

- What were the schooling experiences of refugees in transition countries, prior to arriving to Canada?
- What were the schooling experiences of refugees after arriving to Canada?
- What are their hopes and fears for their future and/or the future of their children?

Syrians enjoy telling stories and sharing their experiences. Arabs in general have a rich tradition of story telling. The research design was crafted in accordance to both the Syrian culture, as well as the purpose of recording the experiences of Syrians. As such, the narrative methodology was chosen as the primary method of collecting data.

Epistemological Rationale and Research Design

This study used the narrative approach to explore the educational experiences of Syrian children, youth and families recently arrived in Ottawa. A narrative approach “begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). The data collected was in the form of stories of lived educational experiences of Syrian refugees in Ottawa, while recognizing their previous stories – historical contexts – and their journeys of refuge that brought them to this city. By telling their stories, this approach provided a means for the families to convey their personal experiences and express their hopes and desires for the future of their children. This process of descriptive personal accounts does not simply entail ‘unloading’ the stories, but using the stories as a means to build relationships by sharing personal experiences and ease transitions. The researcher can find ways through these stories to be useful when listening to participants as they explain how they faced difficulties and offer counsel, guidance or basic support through listening (Creswell, 2013, p.75). The meetings and exchanges between researcher and participants included discussion about

the future, a sharing of hopes and dreams of the refugees, and brainstorming for directions and opportunities.

Data Sources and Collection

This narrative inquiry included stories told by the Syrian families regarding their educational experiences of their first months in Ottawa. Data was generated through 10 individual interviews and two focus group discussions. Individual interviews occurred with parents, children and youth. In total, the researcher met with 22 individuals (10 adults and 12 children/youth).

Participants included both government and privately sponsored Syrian refugee students and their families, who arrived to Ottawa between November 2015 and April 2016. The inclusion criteria sought to identify student refugees and their families who have been placed in a school in Ottawa and have had at least one month of educational experience in a Canadian school prior to the research study. These criteria were included to ensure families and students had spent time interacting with the school, and had developed a personal view regarding their experiences.

Participants were recruited through posters in local mosques and through word-of-mouth by liaison and community workers with whom I have worked in the Kanata, Bayshore and Vanier/Donald areas. In order to seek a broad scope of educational experiences, the study included families and students from various educational levels: elementary, middle and high school. My research also examined if different educational supports are available for refugees who are privately sponsored, in comparison with refugees who are government sponsored.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted in the refugees' first language – Arabic. The interviews and focus groups were audio-taped and, where necessary, translated into English by the researcher. Data analysis occurred by reading transcribed interviews several times to achieve a thoughtful overall understanding for them in relation to one another, and the various elements they convey (Creswell,

2013, p.332). Following which, data was segmented into meaningful units (e.g. *stories before arrival* and *stories after arrival*) with common codes (coding). Some codes were developed prior to the data gathering process based on a review of previous literature and the research questions (e.g. *language barriers* and *lack of information*), other codes were generated inductively as the data was analyzed (e.g. *first experiences in Canada*). Codes led to the development of common themes (thematization) or clusters of codes that were presented in the findings. The narrative approach allowed the researcher not to focus merely on technical challenges and logistical circumstances, but also on the emotional and psychological experiences reported by the participants. Using the acculturation framework model, the analysis focused on the themes related to arrival, and experiencing Canada for the first time.

Participant Profiles

The following is a list of families who participated in this research; all names used are pseudonyms.

Table 1 Participants' Profiles

Family/Name	Position in Family	Age of children	Country of Transition	Type of sponsorship	Arrival to Canada
Kassab Family			Lebanon	Private	Oct-16
Ahmed	Father	Adult			
Hala	Mother	Adult			
Noura	Daughter	11			
Louay	Son	4			
Nassri Family			Jordan(2 yrs)	Private	Jun-16
Samia	Mother	Adult			
Mohamed	Father	Adult			
Hedaya	Daughter	19			
Aseem	Son	12			
Mahmoud	Son	13			
Mahmoud Family			Lebanon (2yrs)	Private	Jan-16

Lina	Mother (Widow)	Adult			
Ali	Eldest Son	Adult			
Saleh	Son	7			
Noah	Son	15			
Nassar Family			Lebanon	Private	Feb-16
Omar	Father	Adult			
Laila	Mother	Adult			
Mohsen	Son	8			
Emad	Son	7			
Dania	Daughter	3			
Ruba	Daughter	4			
Arafat family			Turkey	Government	Jan-16
Rana	Mother	Adult			
Abdullah	Father	Adult			
Noha	Daughter	8			
Yousef	Son	13			
Husein	Son	16			
Maisa	Daughter	17			
Layan	Daughter	6			
Individuals					
Noor	Mother of 2 girls	Adult	Egypt	Government	Jan-16
Heba	Mother of 2 boys	Adult	Jordan	Government	Jan-16

Findings and Discussion

Refugees arriving from Syria have an abundance of war stories and trauma to share. These stories are in parallel with the literature on refugees' experiences of loss and transition which yield various forms of anxiety and trauma (Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Gardiner & Walker, 2010; Walsh et al., 2011). The narratives gathered in this study were generated within a relatively short time of the refugees' arrivals to Canada; consequently, stories still carried effect on the children as they were taking on their roles of being students.

The findings detail the pre-arrival stories and difficulties faced by refugees in transition countries. As well, Syrians expressed an overall sense of contentment with their initial educational experiences

in Canada. The data suggest Syrian refugee children and their families face numerous multifaceted challenges, that are also consistent with previous literature on other refugee students who are affected by war. All participants expressed their hopes and desires to succeed in Canada, and contribute to Canada. This is a result of the combined experiences of war, living in transition countries and the positive first experiences in Canada. However, several restrictions to these families' hopes and desires for the future existed, which could have negative impacts on their resettlement experiences. The challenges and opportunities discussed by the children and their families are presented under four main themes: circumstances in transition countries; first experiences in Canada; a determination to thrive in Canada; and, resettlement challenges: shifting familial roles, languages barriers and lack of information.

Circumstances in Transition Countries

Previous literature has listed poor educational circumstances in transition countries as a challenge for refugees settling in Canada, as it contributes to a setback in learning, and an overall weakness in academic performance (Kanu, 2008; Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996; Walsh et al., 2011; Wilkinson, 2002). Participants in this research opened another channel for understanding how transition experiences can be also viewed as opportunities. The poor circumstances experienced in transition countries were often the primary motivation for their journey to Canada. They compared Canada to these transition environments, viewing their current life to be an improvement, and the Canadian schools as “actual places of learning”. Mohamed, a parent of three children narrates his experiences in Lebanon:

We were trying to go to Europe, and the UN called us for Canada. We were living in the environment of refugees, no work, no money, and the kids go to school but the teaching was very bad. I went to see the teachers and I saw them chatting, cooking, and not paying attention to the children. Some of them are good, but the children didn't learn. They only go half day from

12-5. The teachers teaching the second time around, and they are already tired. They just take it out on the children.

We signed them up, but it took months for them to go to school, I had to get Wasta [an insider to help]. I know a friend whose wife works at the school. I was very sad that they were going to this school. That's why I left Syria so they leave the war and go to school and that's why I wanted to go to Europe. I worked on this process for seven months, and it was going to be illegal and I would have gone before them. And after I go it would take two years to bring your family legally. But the success rate is low because of the small boat in the sea. But after seven months I still couldn't get the passport [so] I thought I would just go back to Syria. Syria and Lebanon are not different we hear war there [Lebanon] too. That's why I am happy they are here. In Canada they can go to better schools.

Thus, Mohamed's experiences speak to the literature about emergency education, where scholars have mentioned that often displaced populations seek refuge in countries which are fragile, unstable and unsafe (Mundy et al., 2011). In Mohamed's words he says he could "hear war in Lebanon too". Lina, a widowed parent of three also narrates similar circumstances in Lebanon and highlights the poor placement strategies her eldest son experienced:

We had left Syria, we were in Lebanon. And there was no education, and no safety in Lebanon. That's why we left Syria in the first place. In Lebanon, they couldn't learn or go to school. The schooling for Syrians was only half day. And before I left I wanted to go get documents for Noah from the school that he went there and proof of his attendance for a year, and they said they don't have any documents for me. How can I tell them in Canada that he studied?!

The schools in Lebanon, well Noah was 9th grade and they put him in 1st so he refused to go and only Saleh went. There was no care [and no] teaching happening. It was just the kids go to attend

school and that's it. He didn't even learn except a few words of French. And the teachers didn't treat the students well. He liked to go though, because he liked to play with the children.

In Culbertson and Constant's work (2015), they draw attention to the half day model which Lina mentions here. Additionally, the scholars describe that despite the seven various models available for refugee education in these transition countries, the quality is indeed poor, with many barriers to accessing such models. Participants who came through Jordan and Egypt also had similar experiences as Lina. Noor Azzam, a parent of two tells her experience in Egypt:

The second thing is my daughters. I was so afraid for them, she told me they did drugs in school. So I paid the attendance officer in the school so that they would record her as present and she doesn't have to go to school.... My other daughter was harassed in school. So I didn't let her go. My husband went to the educational board, and got a request for her not to go to school. The educational level for both of them was so bad by that point.

Heba Aboulmagd, a parent of three who came from Jordan relates a similarly saddening reality of both the education and the lack of any sense of stability and safety in employment in Jordan:

After we left Syria we stayed in Jordan for four years. The conditions were really tough and the education was extremely poor. I have four kids, two girls and two boys. The girls are married and now in Jordan and in Syria. My eldest son left school and worked, and my youngest left school. After four years of registering in the UN, we were finally called to the embassy because we were nominated to come to Canada. We had seen lots of harassment in Jordan. Because you know, that's what a Syrian now in Jordan has to face. And we just had a dream for our children.

In Jordan, it's insecure. Any moment they can kick you out because you are a Syrian. It's not a life. We just wanted to be accepted to Canada for our children and for their certificates. And we want them to take the citizenship for protection. I had to leave my daughter in Jordan, and I didn't imagine leaving her. But I had to for my sons. My eldest son was caught [by the police] a

few times in Jordan, because he shouldn't have been working. If he wants to work he has to pay for a permit which we can't afford. And he stayed in jail for one day, until he signed that he won't work again. And he kept getting harassed. And if he paid the permit for one employee he can't change work, or else he will have to pay for another permit.

My other son left school because the public schools are very weak. Except for private schools there isn't much attention given to children. He went to school for a while, just to write his name on the notebook. When he went to Jordan he was in the 5th grade. First when he went to Jordan he was 10 years old, he worked. He didn't go to school. He worked in a store that fixes watches and sells perfumes. We didn't have any money. So I worked, and my husband and even my daughter worked. She left school and had to work. She worked in a clothing store. My husband was really concerned for her, but we all had to help each other out.

Due to these difficult economic situations, whilst in transition countries, many refugees like Heba depend on their children's incomes to survive. The prioritization of survival is listed in UNICEF's 2013 report among the main eight barriers to schooling. Moreover, because child labour is not prohibited in these countries, it is easy for children to get employment and drop out of school. When children did go to school in Jordan, they also held similar opinions regarding the quality of education. Hedaya, an 11th grader who came from Jordan describes the school environment in Jordan as "tough" and "difficult". She says teachers hit them, and since the days were only half days, the academic levels in the schools were poor, and eventually, her parents moved her and her two brothers to a private school, a decision that is not financially feasible for many refugees. Yousef, 12, similarly describes his experience in Turkey:

I miss my friends the most. But I didn't like the teachers. Every time I would do anything I would get hit. They only taught us one lesson a week. The teachers were mostly Syrians. And they give us

the Syrian curriculum, and some Turkish. Here [Canada] is much better. They explain everything and when I don't understand they make me sit in the recesses and explain things to me.

Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt are countries known for their instability and fragility. The additional pressure created by the millions of refugees arriving is changing these countries socially, economically and politically. These countries' governments seem unable or unwilling to provide even basic documentation and rights to refugees. Beginning with their legal positions in these countries, most refugees lack documentation to work. This has an adverse effect on children's motivation to study, as they see no future for attaining education. It also debilitates their parents' abilities to find proper work, or work that is consistent with their experiences and qualifications. Moreover, like in Heba's situation, children often have to work to provide for their families who suffer from frail economic circumstances. When parents do work, they often work illegally and are underpaid.

On the educational front, transition countries lack the institutional structures and systems to provide newcomers with proper education, let alone special support for their circumstances (Mundy et al., 2011). All participants expressed their discontent with the quality of education they received in these transition countries; they described the quality of education as "bad" and unanimously agreed they "did not learn much". According to participants, in Lebanon Syrian refugee students are placed in the second school shifts that begin at 12pm and end at 5pm. During these half days, as one parent described, the teachers have already exerted themselves in the morning and they do not have the energy to teach. Furthermore, the quality of learning is less than mediocre, as the countries hold no interest in the education of people who are not citizens, or permanent residents. Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey all face employment restrictions. According to the Lebanese Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, these countries face high unemployment rates and place these restrictions in order to protect their own citizens from the sudden arrival of Syrians. In Canada,

however, Syrian refugees have all been arriving through legal channels and receive legal documentation. Within a very short period of time they are given permanent resident status and receive support in terms of language and social welfare programs.

Canada: First Experiences

The participants' educational experiences in transition countries stand in stark contrast to the refugees' first educational experiences in Canada. Despite the many warnings some families received before coming to Canada – e.g., many were told that they would not be accepted in Canada, that Canada would not allow them to practice their religion, etc. – participants confirmed that such dire warnings were baseless rumors. Overseas, these families were told that in Canada and western countries people were hostile towards Muslim and Arabs, and especially that Muslim women would not be welcomed. Noor Azzam narrates what she was told among her community in Syria and in Egypt about what to expect in Canada, and how it contrasted to what she found:

They made us very scared of foreigners (Canadians). Especially since we have girls. But we found that the Canadians were very nice, and the teachers are really nice. I requested a meeting with the teachers, because I wanted to feel better about my daughter. And I could request a translator.

Anyone can request a translator if they don't know English.

Another parent expressed similar episodes where she was warned of coming to Canada:

At the beginning, they told us scary things about the school, but thank God when they went [to school] I was happy to find that it was not true. They told us that the kids can leave the school when they want. But I found no, they need supervision. They told us our daughters will not be allowed to wear hijab. And when we came to Canada, I didn't want to come. I was so scared and they said it will be hard for Muslims. But since we got here everything was good. Canadians are very nice and they are dignified people.

This fear of stigmatization, and loss of culture acts as evidence as to why scholars have argued that schools have the potential to minimize isolation and make refugees feel a sense of belonging and acceptance into the larger society (Dippo et al., 2012), especially when they connect with others with who can relate to them. Nora recounted her first day of school:

I remember my first day in school here. It was really nice. Two girls came up to me when I was waiting for my dad at the principal's office. And they asked me questions and right away we became friends in the 6th grade. And another group, one of them was wearing hijab, and they also became friends. And they all treated me so well, even better than my friends in Syria. I had to move again, because we moved apartments. The teacher was smiling to me every time I said something, I thought she was laughing at me. But I later found out that she was being kind to me, and when I had to leave she cried. And my friends gave me gifts. It was hard leaving that school only after one month of being there.

Lina explains her first experience in Canada was the first day her sons went to school, and how it put her at ease, as education was amongst the main reasons she came to Canada with her family:

The first day he was very very happy. He went to school the first day with Amo Mutah. He really loved his school and his teachers. We prepared ourselves psychologically because education was our main goal. Leaving [Syria] was mostly for education. We prepared and we were very happy. And I was trying not to highlight any of the difficulties. I was trying to keep them focused on how great these opportunities are.

Participants consistently spoke of the warm reception they received in Canada and the very welcoming community. Public sympathy in Canada towards Syrian refugees grew exponentially after the image of Alan Kurdi made global headlines in September 2015. Kurdi, who was only three years old when his body was found on a beach in Turkey after he and his family attempted the Death Trip to Europe across the Mediterranean. While thousands of Syrians have lost their lives to

the Death Trip, Alkurdi's photo became iconic for the Syrian refugee struggle to find a safe haven. The media finally brought the discussion on refugees and the horrors of the Syrian war into Canadian public discourses, and a Canadian response began to develop in the aftermath of Alkurdi's death. The connection to Canada was heightened due to the fact that Alkurdi's Aunt had previously filed for refugee sponsorship of his family in Vancouver but her application had been rejected due to an incomplete form. Refugee groups, churches, and communities came together and backed the then prime ministerial candidate Justin Trudeau in his promise to open Canadian doors for 25,000 refugees.

For the transition countries, the affects of the war were immediate, as they have been witnessing the influx of refugees since 2012. Davies (2011) connects these realities of fragility to the State's overall inability to provide services for its people. Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon are underdeveloped countries struggling with instability, wars, or revolution. They suffer from a lack of resources for their own citizens, as well as refugees. In contrast, Canada is a stable country with a strong capacity to receive an influx of newcomers and meet their immediate needs. Moreover, Canada prides itself on its diversity, multiculturalism, and its open doors. This does not suggest that negative sentiments towards refugees and immigrants are not evident in Canada, however, it does attest to the identity of openness and diversity which Canadians strongly associate with. This helps contribute to the positive experiences of refugees, especially when the groups they first interact with are generally volunteers dedicating their time and energy to the resettlement needs of refugees.

The newly arrived Syrian community is also not the first Arab or Muslim community to arrive to Canada. According to the Canadian Household Survey (2011), more than 1 million Canadians identify as Muslim. Canadians who claimed to have Arab ancestry number more than 380,000 in the same survey. This presence of Muslims and Arabs in the country provided the newly arrived refugees with a feeling of ease and comfort. Nora noted in her description of her first day in school

that a girl who came to talk to her was wearing a hijab. One family told me they are happy they can find Arabic bread, and that the mosque was not too far of a walk from their building. This diversity, and historical presence of Arabs and Muslims whom Syrians can relate to and feel kinship with, contributed to the positive first experiences Syrians had in Canada.

Syrians view their arrival and initial experiences in Canada positively, in contrast to the experiences they had in transition countries. Coupled with their experiences of war, participants viewed their initial experiences as reasons for their improved outlooks on life. These experiences gave them a determination to succeed in their new situations. They believed war has changed them, and arriving to Canada meant they had a second chance in life.

Determination to Thrive In Canada

Experience of war and trauma has not only had negative legacies; it has had positive effects on the attitudes of newcomers from Syria. Participants in this study view their arrival to Canada as a “wonderful opportunity” comparable to a “one in a million chance”. Kanu (2008) captivates this sentiment quoting a newcomer who felt this was “like winning the lottery” (p. 923). These sentiments and attitudes provided both parents and students I met with a determination to do well and succeed. Noor Azzam explained this:

Syrians are accepting any circumstances, and we are coming from war so we are compensating for what we lost. I want to make it up for my children, and coming from war, that gave us strength. War made us stronger. And we got all the way here to Canada. And you will see my In-laws are in Germany and they are also doing well. War made us stronger, and we do not have any other option. I am one of the people who lost everything.

Another parent described how this attitude effected the speed in which her son was determined to learn English:

So back to my son, during those tiring years in Jordan, where he worked all day, he didn't open a book for four years. When we came here, he looked around him and said I have to learn English. Everything is in English. He said by four months I will learn English. He carried his notebook everywhere. He met a Canadian woman and he put his mind to it and with her help within three months he learned English. He is now fluent.

Parents also viewed prior difficulties as directly affecting their children's academics and attitude in school. Lina narrated:

Noah keeps getting pushed to a higher level. And his teachers give me very positive feedback and this makes me feel like we have made the right decision. He had not even gone to school for two years in Lebanon. He came back very strongly. Because now he has an opportunity. He is now running or even flying.

And Saleh his teachers say he is always smiling and he has very good relationships with his friends. He is always happy, always trying to help others. This could be because his personality, but it could be because of what we went through. It was hard.

The experience of taking refuge in Canada, having a safe haven, and finding education and health, for the participants gave them a determination to succeed as well as a desire to give back to Canada. Abdullah Arafat said in his final sentence in his interview: "We came to this country to take something, to take education and health. But we want to give back. To give this country its rights." His determination to succeed is also couple with a sense of gratitude towards the country, and a deep desire to give back. Other research has documented the ecstatic feelings of refugees upon arrival to Canada, however these finding are unique in capturing how such feelings have contributed to a strong determination to succeed. Despite these determined expressions, several challenges will face refugees. Participants in this research shared the challenges they have experienced since their resettlement.

Challenges in Resettlement

Although participants viewed certain events as early signs of success, as Lina describes her sons doing well in school above, it is nonetheless too early to determine how well refugee students will do in Canadian schools. The sentiments of determination to be successful can be translated into various acculturation responses, and they remain in the realm of possibility. They are the intentions of the refugees, and their hopes and desires for the future. These sentiments may not be the actual actions and/or reactions that will take place in the following 10 years of resettlement. Refugees, despite their hopes and desires, might not be able to integrate well into Canadian society. The reason is not that they did not want to or intend to, as their aspirations to succeed display. Rather, the challenges they face may impede them from integrating, or acculturating the way they would have wanted to. The challenges Syrian refugees begin to face, and will continue to face will constrict the ways they can experience resettlement. Furthermore, as these challenges vary from one family to another, and from one family member to another, so do the constrictions to resettlement and the ability for different family members to interact with the dominant culture. The following sections highlight the common challenges faced by Syrian refugees who participated in this research which include: shifting family roles, language barriers, and lack of information.

Shifting family roles. Consistent with refugee and immigrant literatures, scholars have documented the shift in family roles which occurs after settling in countries of refuge (Shakya et al., 2010; Wilkinson 2002). Usually, the eldest child carries the greatest burden from these shifts as they typically step in to act as a parent. Several families recount their eldest must earn money because the parents are unable to quickly learn how to enter the job market. Parents' inability to find employment pressures the eldest to find employment and thereby loses the opportunities of schooling and gaining Canadian qualifications. Furthermore, the burden of having to be the family contact for medical, financial and educational needs is evident in the participants' narratives,

especially with the strong language barrier described by many Syrian families. Noor Azzam described how unfortunate but necessary it is for her eldest daughter to work and provide for the family:

When we got here they only had one month left [in school]. They started language here, she didn't have any English training. My other daughter needs English to go to college. But we need money so she has to work, she isn't going to language courses now. She has to work, but that contract will end soon and she is looking for another job. She worked many things in Egypt. It takes her two and a half hours to get to work. Now we are on welfare, but the welfare gave us \$1084 and our rent is \$1200. So the money she makes goes to the difference. And we also need her work to eat and live. She is now looking for a job.

Loujain is moving, but Rama I feel her future is lost. She spends two hours on the way, and two hours on the road back. So she doesn't have energy to study after that. She needs to work because we need the money. Loujain I see she is getting many opportunities, but her older sister I feel like she lost her future.

Noor attests here that despite her eldest daughter's ambitions, her responsibilities towards her families will hinder any potential development she can undertake for herself. The pressure and the missed opportunities is a theme well documented in the work of Shakya et al. (2010). Heba Aboulmagd described a similar reality for her eldest son:

The only social problem was that you know in Syria we have cousins and relatives, and we know everyone in the street. But here the first days we came we didn't know what to do with ourselves. We go out and we needed a translator. And it affected us. We were worried if we had made a mistake. Alaa is the one who would translate for us, and he is also the one who's phone number is the school's contact for Omar. And even at the doctor, if there is no translator, his number is always our contact. Before he started work, it was ok, but now that he works, it is probably hard. He works from 9 am–7pm every day. He works in a Shawarma store. That's why some days I

want to take off some of the load off him. He is the only one who is working, and the only one who is fluent. The younger one is a bit shy to talk sometimes.

An additional phenomenon experienced by refugee families in this study which also emerged in studies by Shakya et al. (2012) and Wilkinson (2002) is role reversals. In the study, Hedaya explains how she must negotiate insurance contracts on behalf of her father, as well as act as the guardian for her younger brothers in school:

I have to talk to the bank and to insurance and the school for Mahmoud and Assem. It's a responsibility. When you were waiting for me in the car, I had been reading an email from the insurance company for my father. Assem, sometimes I will be sitting and he will just give me five papers of questions from his school. And contact for their teachers' and for all their field trips and events. A few times I had to go to the bank, even though I am not that fluent, but I understand very well. So, I am like the mother sometimes and the father.

As family roles shift, different members of the family will interact more with the society and understand Canada differently. In other immigrant and refugee communities, different experiences in the host society has often times led to generational gaps (Githembe, 2009). Parents and children are ultimately experiencing different "Canadas" as children go to school for most of the hours of their day, and older children who have jobs get to interact more with society. Parents, however, are likely to remain secluded and interact more with communities that speak their language and have a similar upbringing and culture to themselves.

Syrians are amongst the more culturally conservative Arabs. Since the 1970s, previous president Hafez Al-Asad imposed nationalistic-socialist policies which kept Syrian borders closed. This has conserved the Arabic language, but also, culturally, kept Syrians from being exposed to the world around them. Despite such cultural conservatism, the data from this study show that Syrians arriving to Canada want to become part of society. Their acculturation views were centered around success

and giving back to the country. Nonetheless, parents during the interviews expressed generational concerns, and concerns of their children holding on to their values. Heba Aboulmagd, a parent of two, explained her concerns:

You have to keep talking to him, everything is new and looks attractive and he wants to be accepted here, so you can't tell him everything isn't allowed. You have to keep telling them that you just want to talk to him and to keep that relationship open. And who we are, and what we believe in. And this is a problem with all immigrants, when the generational gap keeps increasing, and parents and children start becoming less and less kind towards each other. The best relationships are when they are all still talking to each other.

Hala also expressed her concerns for both her son and daughter, but especially for her youngest who is too young to have inculcated their culture from Syria:

I am worried about Nora. Even though we have Arabs and other Muslims in school, I am worried about her ideas and values. So many things I am worried about. She doesn't have to wear hijab. But I want her to be attached to her religion. I am so worried she will drift away from us. I am worried about Louay more since he is younger. Nora already knows Arabic and she knows our culture well. But Louay is too young.

Ultimately, as other refugee communities have experienced, the primary reason why family roles shift within refugee communities is the ability of younger members to learn the local language more quickly than the elder ones. The most common theme in literature on parent refugee is centered on the linguistic gap between parents and their children (Huyck & Fields, 1981; Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Shayka et al., 2010). Generational fears exist as parents fear their children will lose both the language and culture of their country of origin. This process of loss and gain of culture is closely attached to language. Parents may spend 10 or more years in the host country without learning its language, while children can learn it within a few months of being immersed in school.

Language barriers. Every participant who was interviewed in this study mentioned the difficulty they faced due to their lack of English proficiency. It is not uncommon in refugee studies to find language as a major barrier to resettlement (Kauffman et al., 2001; Loewen, 2004). In helping participants overcome this challenge, some of them receive assistance from other Arabic speakers in their community or school. Some of these individuals were as young as seven years old, classmates of the refugee children who spoke Arabic and made a huge difference in their experience. One of the parents expressed his deep belief that if his son would have the support of an Arabic volunteer or individual at school, he would be able to overcome so many difficulties. While discussing the trauma experienced by his son, Mohamed said:

We really want them to have someone who would speak both Arabic and English to work with them especially at this stage. And even the papers we receive, maybe if we get them in Arabic we would understand. The reception was very good. But the problem was the language. There isn't a teacher who speaks Arabic, and the best thing there were students who speaks Arabic. The problem is he is very, very shy, and he doesn't know the language. But he also has trauma from the bomb. He wasn't this shy, he used to speak and understand everything, but after this incident he would have nightmares. Even when we came here. When he first came, he would always come to me and cry. But no one in the school is a specialist.

They fear that the absence of a specialist who speaks Arabic will mean more delays in their son's education, and his inability to ever be "the same". This boy's younger brother commented on his behaviour in school: "I see Mohsen, he only plays with me and my friends. He isn't happy, and he doesn't really like the school". Evidently Mohsen is also suffering from social maladjustments resulting from various refugee experiences which are described in Hamilton and Moore's work (2004). Saleh, seven years old, tells me of his friend Jad who helped him make friends with others:

It was so easy to make friends right away, my friend who speaks Arabic would take me to other friends and he would help me. And I would play with them soccer all the time. And I am still getting new friends. And now I am helping a guy who came new, and I am helping him with getting friends. Before I was talking I had a lot of trouble, because my friend Jad would go for three weeks I would be in a lot of trouble because I didn't know how to speak.

Yousef, 13, said the one who helped him in school was his classmate who spoke Arabic. Another young boy, Moatssem, 12, shared with me his story about a similar friendship:

The hardest things is to make friends with people you can't speak their language. But then a boy came to school who can speak English and Arabic, and Persian. And he helped me make so many friends and till today he is my friend and helps me.

His brother Mahmoud in a different classroom had a similar experience, and even learned from students who did not know Arabic by engaging in a language exchange:

The first day I remember the teacher showed us around and then took us to class. There were some other Arab students. And like I said we used to go with this special mentor. These other Arab students helped me and I taught some of those who don't speak Arabic some Arabic and they teach me some English.

Hedaya, their eldest sister, said that knowing people who have lived in the Arab world is important because they are able to explain the Canadian system in a contrasting way:

The people that helped me most where others who also lived in the Arab world because they clarify the differences. The comparison really helped. Because unlike the ones who just describe their system, these people understand my confusion.

Lina explains that the assistance in language facilitation and translation eased her difficulties:

“They helped us with language, different people, with schools with doctors. I thought everything was going to be easy when we get here, but I am so glad there were people to help us. People's help

eased our burdens”. However, she also experiences language difficulties on a regular basis when receiving information from her son’s school:

When they would ask things from him and I wouldn’t know. You know here they send so many papers and I am always worried I would not understand something important or I would miss something. Or that I signed a paper that isn’t correct. That’s the only thing that is difficult.

According to research parents have expressed stress associated with communicating with schools while having limited knowledge of the language (Kauffman et al. 2001). Hala shared with us how the absence of individuals who speak Arabic was further complicating her son’s experience:

Louay, it was very difficult for him. He couldn’t understand anything. He wasn’t happy and not comfortable. When he gets upset, he couldn’t even talk to the teacher. Just this week is the first week he is starting to get used to things... Louay has some challenges emotionally since the beginning of school. He sometimes sits on the sides alone, or he gets very angry. I think that’s because he can’t express himself in school... I just think that for Louay, it would have been helpful to have a teacher that speaks Arabic. It would have eased his social and emotional pressure. Till now he isn’t normal. He is still stressed. The teacher communicates with me how he was every day.

Her husband also lists this as a fundamental need for his son, and refers to several instances where this has been evident:

For Louay, I had a negative experience. They called me to say he was sick and we have to come pick him up. By coincidence, there was a meeting that his mum was already going to. It turned out he was bored, and he wasn’t engaged, he just wanted to sleep. They could have asked his sister to come translate, or another person who can speak with him Arabic and understand what his needs are. There is a shortcoming in understanding what his needs are. Or asked any other student who can speak Arabic could have helped him.

Not surprisingly the challenge of language is a multidimensional challenge that impacts family roles, the social adaptation of refugees and the ability of schools to provide specialized support. The data explicitly show that high school students and adults, and very young children, experienced this challenge the most. High school students can only receive a grade placement after finishing all minimum levels of English as a Second Language (ESL). These English courses are essential to their grasp of other subjects in high school. However, unlike their siblings or friends who are directly placed in their grade levels, high school students in ESL classes described feeling behind. Abdullah Farahat explains how his daughter experienced this in high school:

They were all placed in their grades except Maisaa. She is in the 10th, she should be in the 12 or graduated. That's why she isn't happy. She wanted to be done. Even though she went to school in Turkey.

It is difficult for older students to accept more years of schooling. Thus, frustrations in high school are exacerbated by students' lack of awareness and not understanding the information related to grade placements. Parents and students both spoke of frustration related to lack of information and understanding of the system.

Lack of information. Participants, throughout the various interviews, emphasized the benefits they reaped from individuals who helped them understand the school system. Mohamed, father of three, said:

Our sponsor comes every week to explain to us what is happening and how the system works, and even helps the children with the homework. I show her the weekly email from the school and she will help me understand it. This happened weekly for the first four months. This was so important because we needed a push. We needed them to put us on the beginning of the road.

Data from this study show that participants who were privately sponsored recognised they were receiving plentiful support from their sponsor and individual volunteers in the community. On the

other hand, government sponsored refugees expressed they have been “all alone”, and “feeling constantly lost”. The general literature on refugee parents suggests that they often express uncertainty about their role in their children’s learning process (Strohl, Jecklin, & Dixon, 2005). The experiences of participants in this research are consistent with feelings of being ill-informed as described in the literature (Gonsalves, 1992; Lamberg, 1996). Both private and government sponsored groups expressed that their primary challenge, when it comes to success in schools, is a lack of information about the system and how to navigate it. Surprisingly, even the students said they needed more information, and that they felt they are “held back” due to not knowing how the system works and “what to expect in the future”. Lina clarified her worries about her son in high school, who does not have enough information about university applications:

But they are supposed to give him more information about the university stage. Because he is now in high school and wouldn’t know what to study or what to do after. The school should give them an overview that is more specific to Syrian students who haven’t been experiencing this system for a long time. And they do not understand the job opportunities and how to construct a plan.

Heba Aboulmagd – a government sponsored refugee – expressed her frustration with feeling lost:

We stayed one month in the hotel and the government did some lectures and workshops, but it wasn’t deep and it didn’t give us much awareness of what life here is about. When I came to sign the lease for this apartment, there were 16 papers and we didn’t know anything in these papers. I didn’t even know that this place also isn’t good for schools. There is a lot of things we didn’t know about. A lot of my friends and I think it will be very hard for us to live here.

I would hope that there is a translator always in the school who would call us and update us with what is going on in school. Imagine, when my son first started going to school here they had an incident where a drunk student had a gun and shot at the school. And he didn’t tell me. And when

I go it's always hard to understand what's going on when there isn't an Arabic translator. Just like a counsellor or someone who would give you some feedback about what is going on in school.

I don't even know what his relationship with his teachers is. I never feel like I am at ease after I go to the school. There is nothing special for newcomers. Anyone who is a refugee needs more support. The school is the most important thing. There should be communication with the parents more. I know it's hard for them because we are a big group, but we need that support. Nobody helped us with any information to understand what is the school. My son is staying in the school more than he staying with us. And there is no one telling us what is going on.

It is not only parents who feel they are not properly informed, and struggle with lack of information. Students also expressed experiencing this challenge. As a high school student, Hedaya explained that she did not have any information about her study plan, such as when she would graduate and what courses she needed. Hedaya also explained how lack of information was going to cost her an additional year of school, and forced her to switch schools:

I had a situation where I was supposed to go to a higher level, but the teacher never told me. The teacher, I thought, was supposed to do that. But it turned out I had to go and tell them. And when I went to tell the administration that I need to move up, and they said I had passed the deadline. And now I had to be stuck in this level. And I didn't know it would be my decision. Even though she would see me pass the tests. So, for that reason I changed the school and it was so hard to change. Because the school doesn't take into account the other school's placement tests, so in order to move, I had to do all the tests again, but it was worth it because I was placed in the correct English level which saved me a year compared to the other school. But I had to take the tests again and that was so difficult. There are English tests for ESL but there are also tests for the regular English language.

Now I am in EO. Which is the last ESL level. And then after they will tell me. And then in the other school [I] did the math test, they said I am in the 12th grade Math, but they can't put me in it because I haven't finished Math. And the same for science. That's why I changed my old school which they placed me in C which would have taken me a year and a half more. And still I don't know because they didn't tell me how much they will count from grade 12 Jordan. And they will not count grade 10 and 11 from Jordan. That's why they put me in grade 10 and 11 tests all over. Even those I got it verified from the ministry in Jordan. And it's in both languages. And it has been really frustrating, and I don't think I should have been put through this. Especially if you look at Math, Arab countries have a stronger Math system than here. And I did the whole exam which was 60 pages, and till now they wouldn't tell me if it will be counted. They didn't even mark it until I finish ESL. I just wish they would mark it.

In addition to lack of information, Hedaya's situation depicts frustrations regarding inaccurate grade placement that is well documented in research by Kanu (2008), Kariwo et al. (2015), Shayka et al. (2010) and Yau (1995) which they believed often happened due to disparities among languages of instruction, curriculum and educational structures in their countries of origin, their temporary educational experiences and their placement in Canadian schools. These frustrations are intensified by lack of information regarding the future of the students' studies. Samia, Hedaya's mother, expressed her views on what her daughter experienced:

She didn't know what are the subjects that she needs for university. And when she went to the family reception she wasn't prepared for all these tests. I mean language is ok, but for Math and other subjects you need to prepare. And then every school has a system, then they repeat all the exams. And till now we do not know which courses they will count from Jordan or other countries. Till now I do not know. And they won't tell me until I finish the ESL. It's a problem, there is no

source of information. I do not know how to get information. And we are never told all the information we need.

And it's still not clear what will be counted, and how did she do on her tests. It's a bit vague and confusing. And every school is different. And even they don't tell them that there are courses that will take you to university and another that will not. And we in our countries weren't used to all these options and choices.

While this sense of confusion is most evident among students and parents of students in high school, it was also expressed by parents of children in primary levels. This information shortage deprives parents from the proper knowledge that will help them guide their children and empower them to make the decisions which are best for them. Such statements acts as evidence for why Scholars such as Ester and Tane (2000) argue that ongoing support in forms of information is needed to parents to feel confident as equal partner's in their child's learning. Ahmed, parent of two, described his feelings:

Until now I feel I don't understand the school enough. They are supposed to provide us with information sessions on the nature of the education system in Canada. Till now we didn't meet anyone who told us the school system in Canada is 1,2,3 ... For example, I don't know how the curriculum works, how do they get to the university they want. If the parent knows it will help us direct our children to how to succeed. How can I direct them to what I don't know? I didn't even receive a booklet or a pamphlet. What and how do teachers carry out the curriculum.

There are things that seem like a no brainer for those who live here, but for newcomers it's not understood. There is no specific curriculum and there is no follow up. So, I don't know what he is doing or how he is doing. This is very unusual compared to our systems. They don't send enough homework, or any homework at all. Especially for newcomers I don't know how are they doing.

Refugees felt overwhelmed with the amount of information they are told when they arrive, nonetheless, they appreciated the documents they received in Arabic. Documents, or simple pamphlets can be revisited when needed. Documents about the school, for example, might be more helpful than information received via word of mouth when they arrive at the airport and feel overwhelmed by the journey and new beginning. If they receive information in print form, and preferably in Arabic, they can always revisit them later. Ahmed continued to clarify to me his inability to properly assess the system, and give feedback, if he does not understand it:

I need to understand the system better to be able to give feedback about it. If they just explain to me in like a guide, just like when you buy a printer, to explain the education system. And now for example, she is studying language, what after that? What is the road map? On the website they can include a guide to newcomers to education. They should give it to you when you do an assessment. With a simplified way, they can explain basic and preliminary things.

Heba echoed the need to know more about the overall system, while clarifying that refugee parents should be provided with specific specialized assistance:

I would like the school to have a councillor that is always in touch with us regularly. I don't even know the relationship my son has with his teachers. I go listen to a couple of words and I don't know anything about him. There is nothing special for us the refugees, we need to know what are the laws, habits, regulations, opportunities.

Language and information about the schooling system are closely interlinked when it comes to the challenges faced by the participants. It is likely that much of the information they need is available, but not in their primary language – Arabic. Moreover, participants referred to this challenge in terms of understanding unspoken norms in Canada, versus conflating them with the norms in Syria and the Arab countries. While many aspects of schooling might seem like common sense to Canadians who have lived here their entire lives, participants argued that for newcomers, the assumption should be

that the system is different and requires clear explanation. This process of sharing information regarding schools, should not be viewed as merely an educational service, but a resettlement one that gives refugee families the confidence and resources necessary to lead their new lives in Canada.

Conclusion

Through an exploration of the narratives of participating Syrian refugees, this study describes preliminary schooling experiences of refugees in Ottawa. The narrative approach was utilized as a significant tool to present refugees' journeys to Canada, and their first schooling experiences in the country. Participants revisited their past experiences and reflected on what it meant for their relationship to their new home. For the refugee parents, it is evident that educational opportunities for their children was the main reasons they chose to come to Canada. Their understanding of success in this new life depends largely on their children's ability to succeed in school. This centrality of schooling to the resettlement process and success in the new life is paralleled by the acculturation framework's view of schooling as a significant contributor to the interaction with the majority culture.

Several factors of schooling place it as a significant actor in the life of newcomers, particularly more than other areas of life such as media, healthcare, and work. The first factor, according to the findings of this research, is that many parents after arriving to Canada are not able to gain employment. This occurs as a result of language barriers, lack of credentials, job market and the absence of experience and knowledge of the Canadian society and culture. Thus, parents do not have an institution to interact with on a daily basis such as the school. Their children however, spend long hours in school, and return home to convey experiences and culture to the entire family. Secondly, other institutions will interact with refugees on an individual level such as resettlement officers or doctors, but in schools, students experience the culture as a member of a large group without general differentiation. Finally, at schools, students (newcomers and others alike) are in a

learning context where they are continually interacting with peers and teachers. This process is unlike when refugees experience institutions as employees, clients or customers and they are not viewed as vessels to be filled.

This study provided evidence to how previous experiences shape refugee expectations and intentions for their resettlement future. Negative experiences in transition countries pushed Syrian refugees out of refugee camps and other poor circumstances, and forced them to make the decision to come to Canada. These circumstances gave them high aspirations for Canada, and a determination to be successful. Parents and children alike, who participated in this study, expressed positive emotions and feelings from their first experiences in Canada. These experiences, as portrayed in the findings, are centered on schooling. However, their aspirations and dreams may pan out differently than their goals, as the study shows the various multifaceted challenges Syrian refugees have experienced since their arrival. Evidently, shifting family roles, low language proficiency and a lack of proper information and knowledge regarding the education system affected the ability of Syrian refugees to have confidence in their educational performance. It has also meant an uncertain future for them in terms of their educational plans. Coupled with lack of available resources inside schools, parents and students both stated their need for more assistance and support. These findings were consistent with the general body of literature presented in the introduction chapter. However, only limited references were made by participants regarding social maladjustments in schooling such as bullying or isolation as was identified by UNICEF (2013). Furthermore, in contrast to the literature (e.g. Culbertson & Constant, 2015; Diplo, 2012) participants did not indicate teacher incompetence in supporting them or their children. In fact, positive views of teachers and administrators were evident throughout the narratives.

Implications

As psychologists, Oppedal et al. (2005) argue that developing cultural capability and relatedness, to both the majority culture and the culture of ethnic origin, has the potential to help in the adaptation and wellbeing of children of immigrants and refugees. More importantly, they believe experiences in school are significant contributing agents to the children refugees' development of cultural relatedness. The primary concern of this research has been initial experiences of schooling for Syrian refugees in Canada. Schools have the potential of being agents of forming and shaping citizenship because of the immersive nature they have with children. Students spend most of their days in schools independent of their parents, and experience extensive social interactions during these long hours. Schooling under the acculturation development lens is a primary negotiator in the growing consciousness of the child's sense of belonging. The argument that school plays an important role in a child's life is not eccentric; however, it is important to draw the link, especially for 'new citizens', between schooling and resettlement experiences in order for educators and policy makers to pay close attention to how refugee children are experiencing Canada for the first time through their schooling. In particular, refugees who will have particular needs as survivors of war and trauma, and new settlers in the country. However, the ADM proved to be inadequate because it views refugee students as part of the group of 'newcomers' and not a particular group in themselves. Oppedal et al. (2005) do not differentiate between refugees and immigrants, whereas the findings of this study demonstrate that refugees have a specific expectation of the country of resettlement and thereby unique attitudes towards interacting with the majority culture. As well, the model does not take into account previous experiences and how they influence acculturation choices. When refugee faced difficult circumstances in transition countries, these experiences led to a determination to succeed and a feeling that Canada is the only option and it is the only possible home. In order to

understand how newcomers will interact with the larger society in Canada, a serious effort should be directed towards studying their background, history and journeys prior to arriving to Canada.

From the discussion, it is apparent that government and privately sponsored families felt different about the available resources for support. Thus, educators and school administrators should recognize that different refugees may have different support systems depending on their category. Participants in this study who were government sponsored felt like they were alone, and focused more on the challenges they have faced. They expressed lack of support more than privately sponsored refugees and suggested more support be guided toward government sponsored families. While many families and communities do not have the financial means to become private sponsors, they might be willing to act as volunteers in a buddy system. The Arafat family suggested government sponsored refugee families be paired with buddy families, who will help them specifically in relation to language and school needs during their first year. This system can be developed further into a refugee-to-refugee buddy system. Participants suggested school boards and administration provide Arabic resources. It was also apparent from the findings that the needs of high school students differed from those of elementary students, especially as the high school students navigated the years set back by ESL and missing school.

Exploring the various narratives of Syrian refugees allows this study to act as a voice for refugees in expressing their needs, and becoming part of the process instead of recipients of services only. Furthermore, the study explains for education providers, community workers and policy makers the pre-arrival experiences of refugees, highlights their hopes, and desires to succeed in their new country. By reading parents' and students' accounts, educators will be able to gain a deeper insight into the challenges facing students and their families and how significant these challenges can be for the learning experiences and educational successes of students. Moreover, the study does not only focus on academic performance, but it also provides educators with understandings on how these

challenges also act as hindrance to the resettlement process. This study is limited in telling only the perspectives of refugees in one city – Ottawa. Further research should include voices from school administrative bodies, principals and teachers, as well as policy makers and service providers.

Coupled with the perspectives of community leaders around the city, further research can provide all-inclusive data on the quality of services, and assess the extent of coordination between efforts across the city. Such research will provide further understanding of the governmental and non-governmental efforts that are harbored to support newcomers.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Reflection

The title of this article, 'For our children', crystallized as more Syrians expressed why they made their long journeys to the various neighbouring countries, as well as subsequent journeys of permanent resettlement. Whether it was the choice to stay in a refugee camp, to cross the Mediterranean illegally or to accept the UN's nomination to come to Canada, the reason for the refugees' decision was often "for our children". As Heba, a parent of two who came from Jordan after a difficult four-year transition, explained "we just wanted to be accepted to Canada for our children and for their certificates". Education is clearly the driving force behind her family's decision to come to Canada. Later, as she spoke about the 'Death Trip' – the illegal trip to Europe done by sea to claim refugee status – she mentioned how she was considering it "for the future of our children". The father in the Nassar family echoed these same sentiments. He told the story of how he spent seven months preparing for the illegal trip to Europe "just so my children will live". He continued, "I wanted them to go to school, I wanted them to have a future". His view of them having a future was inseparable from quality schooling and proper education.

In a country as old as Syria, and with family lineages extending centuries back, it was apparent that the decision to leave home was not easy for any Syrian. Moreover, it was surprising to also hear the very negative rumors Syrians heard about living as Muslims in a non-Muslim majority country. The more participants shared their stories and feelings about leaving Syria, the more I understood the complexity of leaving a home that is no longer safe. In North America and the West, rhetoric about refugees often assumed every refugee would, without hesitation, accept the UN's nomination to be received by Canada. By contrast, visiting the refugee camps in December 2015 proved the falsehood of this assumption. Some refugees, chose not to come to Canada for fear of prejudice and discrimination. They feared they can no longer practice the religion and cultural values which were important to them. Others simply did not want to go any further away from their land. A family I

met on the Lebanese Syrian borders wanted to be as close to the borders as possible, even though this meant living in a tent.

Reflections on Acculturation Development Model

While the ADM by Oppedal et al. (2005) reflects the various influences that shape refugees' resettlement experiences, it does not include the influence of their previous circumstances, transitions, and lives on their current reality. It assumes that the experiences prior to resettlement seize the moment refugees come to Canada. Furthermore, this assumption crystalizes in not distinguishing between refugees and immigrants in the model. Without making a distinction between refugees and immigrants, it is implying their journeys to Canada are all the same. Participants in this research depict through their narratives a deep connection between refugee attitudes, resettlement and previous experiences. As mentioned above, they were willing to take dangerous measures to make it to Europe and have a new beginning. In the case of this study, the difficulties of war and transition made refugee families more determined to succeed and have new beginnings in Canada. Because the war is increasingly turning into an intractable conflict, which has led to much destructions, Syrian refugees are not assuming any return to their home land soon. They are determined to build a new life in Canada. As well, the difficult circumstances in transition countries, and the failure of these states to provide adequate support, compelled refugees look upon the simplest efforts by Canada as substantially opposite attitude to the one they have experienced in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt.

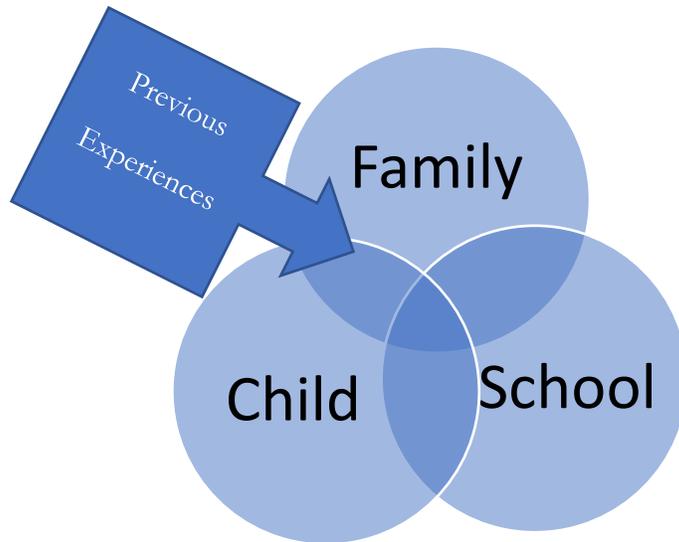


Figure 3 Suggested framework for design and analysis

Previous experiences should also be viewed in light of the added challenges they present. Refugees and immigrants with different countries of origin, language, religion, social class and educational level will experience being in a multicultural country, where they are a minority, differently. Thus, the acculturation development model would accurately depict the full story of refugees and immigrants, and their children, particularly when it includes a holistic depiction of their experiences.

What Can We Learn From 2016?

Despite the historically substantial experiences Canada has had with receiving refugees, 2016 was nonetheless a momentous year for Canadian – refugee history. A year of the highest refugees ever received and the highest number ever received from a single country. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, by January 2017, Canada had received 40,081 Syrian refugees. The ministry also stated this number was the highest Canada has ever received in a single year and the highest from a single country. The refugees arrived through three different refugee categories: Government – Assisted Refugees, Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees, and Privately Sponsored Refugees.

Below are the specific numbers breakdown by category. Up until 2015, the highest number from a single country was from Columbia at 17,000 refugees.

Table 2 Refugee Categories by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Date of access: May 2017)

Breakdown by category (Data as of January 29, 2017)	
Refugee Category	Number of Refugees
Government-Assisted Refugee	21,876
Blended Visa Office-Referrred Refugee	3,931
Privately Sponsored Refugee	14,274
Total	40,081

Policymaking and government decisions. From table 2, it is apparent that government sponsored refugees are the largest group in 2016. However, as explained by participants in the research, this group is often the least in receiving support, guidance and resettlement care. Consequently, government needs to work on capacity building in terms of resettlement programs, and dedicating support for this particular group. In order to do so, government should not focus on ‘offering more’, rather it can improve internal capacity through policy coordination, information and accessibility improvement. The major theme of “lack of information” in the findings, points to the apparent lack of awareness and thereby accessibility to much of the government efforts by ways of programing. Governments should pay attention to how much of their programs are being used compared to the numbers of the group the program aims to serve. Finally, policy coordination should extend beyond government actors, and coordinate with the dedicated communities and even individuals concerned with the particular issues the government services and programs. Policy coordination and partnerships between local community groups who are well connected with the refugees, cultural brokers and refugee support individuals.

The data suggests more assistance should be provided to parents who are unable to enter the job market quickly. Services towards improving the system for recognition of foreign credentials and providing specific skills training for parents will enable them rapidly attain jobs they are qualified for. This will reduce economic burdens on the eldest children, and provide them with more opportunities to gain their own Canadian credentials and training. It will also empower parents by giving them a space to engage with the Canadian society, have more language acquisition opportunities, and facilitate more prospects for a better resettlement experience.

The Arafat family suggested government sponsored refugee families be paired with buddy families, who will help them specifically in relation to language and school needs during their first year. This system can be developed further into a refugee-to-refugee buddy system, where Syrian families who arrived earlier can support and guide refugees arriving in the following years. This idea arose as participants explained their moments of joy when explaining aspects of the school they already knew, to newcomers who arrived after them. Students and parents both described incidents where they were asked to translate for and assist other refugees. They described a sense of gratitude from helping others, and not being merely recipients of help.

The needs of high school students differed from those of elementary students, especially as the high school students navigated the years set back by ESL and missing school. Participants also explained that the Canadian and Syrian systems differ in their structures and options, languages, and STEM subjects. To facilitate smooth transitions and positive experiences for high school students, initial assessment tests and grade placements should be improved, including more information about how students will be placed, and how long they will be enrolled in language proficiency courses. Furthermore, high school students should be given workshops and training regarding higher education and the job market in Canada. These support mechanisms will particularly empower students who are transitioning into a 12-year system in the last one or two years.

Participants suggested school boards and administration provide Arabic resources, which will be helpful for parents to be more engaged in their children's learning. One parent suggested a brief manual be given to parents in Arabic with an overview of the education system in Canada, and a few introductory tips. Furthermore, schools should attempt, when possible, to send parent forms and leaflets in the Arabic language. This will ease parents' fears of missing important information for their children, and will ensure parents see and sign these papers rather than the elder siblings or the students themselves. Another parent emphasised the need for the presence of an Arabic mentor or assistant at school for the students, during the first few months of their entry into the school system. Further, as seen from comments of participating students, other students who spoke Arabic acted as translators and support persons to the student refugees. If a school cannot have an Arabic translator, students who speak Arabic can volunteer to be known for translation needs.

The school community: an opportunity for student leadership, community building and mentorship. During the interviews, students highlighted the essential role other students played as translators, cultural brokers and social connectors. Consequently, the arrival of Syrians and newcomers in general, presents a unique opportunity for Arabic speaking students, and other students to take a leading role in mentoring and easing the school integration experiences of newly arrived students. Students who speak Arabic are able to work as translators, and experiences genuine opportunities of leadership and mentorship, which are based on dire needs of new students, and can contribute to bettering the future of their fellow classmates. In addition, during the research, no mention of student led support groups or student organizations, which are dedicated to welcoming new students, particularly refugees and immigrants. Student to student support is an essential pathway for community development within schools, and can play vital roles in creating healthier social relations within the school. Finally, another vital group in the school community is parents. Participants did not indicate involvement in any parent committees or other parent led

initiatives. Parents led initiatives can inform new parents of how the school functions, provide them with guidance, and act as support groups during difficult times.

A Research Agenda For Canada

In light of the policy recommendations above, it is imperative to examine the current academic and research work conducted, to understand which areas of knowledge about refugees are being covered and which areas lack exploration. In order to sample current research conducted on Syrian refugees, the 2016 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grants were surveyed. Following which, these research projects were grouped according to themes to understand which themes are receiving attentions, and which themes require more research.

Sample current research.

Resettlement

- Settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in Alberta
- Reception and integration of Syrian refugees in secondary cities in New Brunswick and Quebec: the cases of Moncton and Sherbrooke-Granby
- Optimizing the provision of information to facilitate the settlement and integration of refugees in Canada: case studies of Syrian refugees in London, Ontario and Calgary, Alberta
- Syrian refugee arrival, resettlement and integration in Newfoundland and Labrador
- Parenting stress in settlement: assessing parenting strains and buffers among Syrian refugee parents during early integration into Canada
- A quantitative investigation of Syrian refugee retention in New Brunswick
- Rural reception contexts: a study of the inclusion and exclusion of sponsored Syrian refugees in Northumberland County, Ontario

Special issues in resettlement

- Needs and opportunities for employment preparation of Syrian refugees

- Finding housing for the welcome Syrians refugee newcomers: a cross-Canada analysis of initiatives, challenges and lessons learned
- The impact of socio-economic and cultural factors on household food security of Syrian refugees in Canada
- Transportation barriers and access to destinations

Community resilience and mobilization

- A comparative evaluation of Local Immigrant Partnerships (LIPs) and their role in the Syrian refugee resettlement process in three Ontario reception centres
- Mapping the terrain: assessing the scope, strength and future potential of civil society organizations active in Syrian refugee sponsorship and early integration
- Building bridges: exploring police and community partnerships among Syrian refugees
- The impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on local systems of support: disruption leading to innovation

Psychology and mental health

- Enhancing psychosocial adaptation of LGBT refugees resettling from Syria: mixed methods pilot for longitudinal community-engaged research
- Cultural brokering with Syrian refugee families with young children: an exploration of challenges and best practices in psychosocial adaptation
- Exploring the mental health and service needs of Syrian refugees within their first two years in Canada

The private sponsor

- The sponsor's perspective: motivations, expectations and experiences of private sponsors of Syrian refugees

- Perspectives on Private Sponsorship in Québec Issues, Challenges and Levers of Intervention

Education and schooling

- Promote the social and educational integration of Syrian refugee students by developing their sense of belonging to school, their psychological well-being and that of their families Quebec
- Exploring initial school integration among Syrian refugee children
- Refugee student integration: a focus on settlement, education, and psychosocial support

Social justice

- White post-secondary youth's observations of racism towards refugees in two Canadian cities

International research

- Canada-Germany research collaboration

Academic regulations

- Ethical guidelines for research with Syrian refugees

Additional research needed. The research above covers a wide range of areas but clearly lacks policy focused research and research which is primarily concerned with policy making processes, especially educational policy. Moreover, the current research falls short in examining best practices from communities, cities and provinces across Canada. Research efforts can also be improved by beginning with the population in question, and exploring what solutions would they like to see implemented, and what program ideas do they suggest. Beginning with the refugee community will yield more pragmatic solutions, which are birthed from the populations being examined. The sample research currently available depicts a variety of interests and concern for this newly arrived population. However, similar to policy coordination, research coordination can improve the effectiveness of these research efforts. Research coordination involves highlighting major areas of

research, which to be conducted across cities and provinces to understand differences, variables and best practices.

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Appendices

Appendix A Sample Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to come to Canada?
2. What schooling experiences did you/your child have before coming to Canada?
3. Did you enjoy going to school? Why or Why not?
4. Are you/your child currently enrolled in school in Ottawa?
5. How was your/your child's first day at school?
6. How is your relationship with your teachers? Class mates? Other parents?
7. Do you think you will be successful in School?
8. Who has helped you understand the school and how to succeed in the school?
9. What were your first experiences with school administration and teachers?
10. Have you been in contact with out-of-school education providers?
 - a. What language support have you received?
 - b. What are your experiences with the Multiculturalism Liaison Officer?
11. What are the constraints/challenges you have faced in the school?
12. What do you think about the grades you/your child have been placed in?

Appendix B Sample Group Interview Questions

1. What do you think of schools in Canada?
2. What problems have you and your children faced in starting school?
3. What help do you think you need to be better equipped to succeed in the school system?
4. Do you think going to school will help you have a better life in Canada?
5. Are schools allowing you to know more about Canada?