

**A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Two Syrian Refugee Families:
Searching for Social Inclusion within Schools**

by

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry explores the experiences of two Syrian refugee families with preschool aged children who arrived in Canada. Narrative inquiry in this study is understood as both methodology and phenomenon under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The study focus is on their experiences over time as they navigated the complexities of making a home for themselves in Canada. The intent is to understand unique individual stories rather than to focus only on the larger narratives that generalize across families and that may silence individual's experiences. The study is nested within a larger study (Caine et al., 2017) that explored the experiences of Syrian refugee families as they left Syria and journeyed to Edmonton, Canada. Questions of belonging and social inclusion were central in the overall study and in this study. Within narrative inquiry, a relational methodology, researchers must attend to their own life experiences throughout the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In order to walk alongside participants, I began the inquiry by telling and inquiring into my stories of experience. I came alongside two families for 18 months and composed field texts including field notes of the places where we met and conversation transcripts of our meetings. I was accompanied in the field by a Syrian interpreter and cultural guide. In a first level of analysis, I composed two narrative accounts (Clandinin, 2013) with attention to the three dimensions of narrative inquiry: temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the second level of analysis, as part of the research team, we looked across all participants' narrative accounts to discern narrative threads. In this thesis I attend most closely to the bumping places of the families' experiences with dominant school practices and policies.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Gillian Vigneau. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Understanding social inclusion of refugee families.”, Pro00076466, first approved on January 26, 2018.

Chapter 2 is in press as Jennifer Dodd, D. Jean Clandinin, Gillian Vigneau, Hiroko Kubota, and Vera Caine University of Alberta. Factors to Consider in Syrian Refugee Families’ Journeys to Social Inclusion: A literature review. *McGill Journal of Education*.

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Chapter 1:

Narrative Beginnings Bringing Me to the Research Puzzle

In this narrative inquiry, I begin by inquiring into stories of my experiences through processes of looking backward at the places, relationships, and times in which I am composing my life. Thinking within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with dimensions of temporality, place, and sociality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I turn to telling stories of early experiences. As I did so, I awakened to memories, and to what had been nearly forgotten early experiences. As I wrote and inquired into them, new meanings emerged. This powerful experience allowed me to continue to learn through these stories. I found myself curious as I awakened to unfolding transitions made visible through writing these memories and as I made connections to new situations. I became more wakeful to what John Dewey (1938) names the two criteria of experience: continuity, and interactions. I was encouraged to stay open to possibilities, to not smooth stories over (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Early Shaping Memories: Familial Stories

I am the oldest of three children. Even though my father is Ukrainian, and my mother is Canadian, as she would say, we grew up celebrating our Ukrainian cultural heritage, a heritage my mother lovingly embraced. We were members in the Edmonton Ukrainian community, a community in which extrinsic things like grades, money, level of education and other people's opinions mattered most. I understood this at an early age. This dominant narrative of the community which focussed on external contextual signs of approval was a place of tension. Unlike my brother and sister, school learning did not come easily for me—I had to work at it. My work ethic is something that serves me well now, but as a child it made me feel unworthy

and different from my family and friends. It was difficult to achieve those external signs of approval. As a child, my community taught me that it was tangible things—marks, money, and awards that signified achievement. Now, when I think of achievement or doing well, I think of it holistically, as a whole person—with attention to the ways in which I contribute to the world and to others, and the processes through which I accomplish tasks.

I now understand this was a place of tension for me, what I believed and felt achievement should mean did not seem to align with what I was being told, and shown, achievement was. When I think about this now, I am curious why I did not simply disregard my beliefs about achievement and accept what I was being told and what others believed. Instead, as I grew and became my own person, I accepted it and leaned into it, allowing my beliefs to shape the stories I live of achievement today.

Both my parents are teachers and five of my aunts and uncles work in school administration or classrooms. I come from a teaching family and a teaching family life rhythm. As an adolescent, I was clear that I was not going to follow in their paths and become a teacher. In the fall of 2014, I started studying at the University of Alberta taking pre-requisites in science in order to enter pharmacy. I believed early that I was to become a pharmacist, so I could make a lot of money. After not getting the marks required and hating almost everything about the prerequisites, I felt lost and my heart was heavy. My failure, however, allowed me a moment to choose my path. A direction was not dictated to me. I was also struggling to navigate personal relationships; how to foster meaningful ones, and distance myself from toxic ones. For the first time in my life, I felt like I was the one holding the control; I was the one making decisions and also the one responsible to live up to expectations I set for myself. I was used to doing as I was told, without thinking. However, now I was wakeful (Greene, 1995) that I did not know how to

do it all on my own. At this time, it felt like every aspect of my life was in transition and discomfort. What I really wanted to do was walk away from it all. I had no knowledge or experience in working through these times of extreme discomfort. What I really wanted to do was take a break—walk away from everything that felt too hard. However, the one thing I had no agency over was that my parents would not allow me to drop out, or take a leave, from university.

As I inquire into this time in my life, it seems ridiculous that I considered taking a leave just because things felt hard—or because I was completely overwhelmed. As I inquire into my storied experiences (Clandinin, 2013), I began to attend to the privilege that seemed to surround me in my life. My difficulty with university was the first time I struggled on my own. I had not learned to work through challenging situations or to allow tension to be my teacher.

Faced with being unable to take a leave from university study without disobeying my parents, I began taking many mathematics courses at university. I took them because I was able to excel in mathematics. I enjoyed them, and I got it ... I got math. Now, in hindsight, it was like something like an ON switch clicked in my brain and I felt a sense of narrative coherence (Carr, 1986). The story that I had learned to live by in my family was that I needed a career identity. And suddenly I had a forward looking story of a career. I was going to be a *High School Mathematics Teacher with a minor in Chemistry*. Great, that sounded acceptable.

Sliding Back in Time to Understand My Privileges

I grew up privileged. It has taken me a long time to understand this. I am still continuing to understand this. The more I learn, the more aware I become of the privileges I had and continue to have. I am white—white skin is a prominent privilege. I am Canadian, able bodied

and was born to educated, financially stable, nurturing, healthy parents. For a very long time I did not understand that being born, and raised, in such privilege also came with responsibilities to understand the ways in which privilege affects my world and the world around me. Growing up this way sheltered me from many challenges. I understand that while this might be considered a blessing—I missed out on some crucial childhood learning experiences.

As I told and retold, that is, narratively inquired into, my childhood memories, I became aware that my experiences were not filled with the same difficult experiences that others with less privilege have. I have also not had the opportunity to persevere through significant hardships until I was challenged and failed in university coursework. When I think about this difficult time in university, I realize that I did not have experiences of persevering through difficult situations and had not learned skills I could draw on. I wonder if that is why, in part, I found my first experiences in university so difficult.

Learning Difference Through Teaching

The following year I started to teach dance to young children in Ardrossan, a small town outside of Edmonton. Even though I planned to teach older students when I became a certified teacher, teaching dance was a good experience to have on my resume—this is how I saw it early on in my teaching journey. I did not see that learning to teach children, or rather, people were part of my lived experiential learning. All experiences mattered. It does not matter the age or subject matter. As a young inexperienced teacher, I felt I had to justify my decision to teach dance to young children because I did not see any narrative coherence with my formal university education in teaching.

In order to be a dance teacher, I had to be certified through the Shumka School of Dance Syllabus. Through the Shumka Dance course, I was introduced to less traditional teaching practices that fostered children's creativity and expression of movement. I loved watching children have the freedom to express themselves and was intrigued by their engagement and willingness to contribute. I was learning something new about children when they were free to express themselves.

As a new teacher, I wanted to please the families, and the community, I was working with. When I was given feedback that parents were unhappy that I was exploring a new approach to teaching, I quickly reverted to traditional teaching practices—to satisfy the parents. Now as I inquire into those first teaching experiences within the three dimensional narrative inquiry space, I worried whether people liked me and worried I was not living up to the external story of what good teaching looked like (Carr, 1986). As I retreated in fear from teaching in new and different ways, I understood how the parents and community were shaping who I was becoming. Even now parents or other non-teachers like to give me, and my colleagues, teaching suggestions. Early in my work as a teacher, I tried to weave their suggestions into my classroom practice because I thought doing this would gratify them. I knew I liked to please people and I continued to navigate the story I live by (Clandinin, 2013) of pleasing people. Over time, however, I learned that I will never be like another teacher. I had to find ways to practice for myself. In following my own teacher knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), I came to love teaching and to create meaningful and optimal learning situations for my students. I have always wanted to foster and facilitate students' learning in my classroom. As I inquired into my experience in dance classes with very young children, I wanted to meet the children at their level. I wanted to make each child's experience fun, and to find ways to navigate each child's desire in order to co-

construct dance with me. This was the first time I experienced tension between the prescribed curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and what I imagined curriculum making could be. I recognize this as a bumping place (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) for me between teaching in ways the children are free to express themselves and being constrained within the institutional and prescribed knowledge markers within schools.

Learning to Teach Through a University Teaching Practicum

A few years after my experience as a Shumka dance teacher, I undertook my first practicum placement in Chemistry 20 and Science 14 at Queen Elizabeth High School. I was intimidated in Chemistry 20 from an academic standpoint; I was intimidated in Science 14 from a relational sense. I felt the gaze of other teachers, administrators, students, and parents, a gaze which saw me as a young, quiet, female who appeared unworldly. I surprised people by doing well. It made me feel good that they needed to unknow me as a teacher (Chung, 2016). When my two supervising teachers realized I could handle the Science 14 class, they were eager *to unload their class onto me* along with all the requisite marking and planning. They seemed to have no connection or interest in the students who were enrolled in a science 14 class which further supported the existence of Aoki's (1993) hidden curriculum revealing informal policies underpinned with oppression, racism, and many forms of inequity. In coming into this situation, I knew I would inevitably be faced with a situation like this, but I knew I wanted to think and act differently, to live differently. I wanted to come to know the students through talking with them and helping them have better feelings about coming to class. At the time I wondered how I could live that way. What could I do to create such a space? Is it possible?

As I observed this class for the first week, I felt tension growing around staff comments, lack of attention, and jokes made about the classes. There was a sense of why help them?, they're not going to get it anyway. At the week's end, I told my dad, a high school science teacher, how I was feeling and what I was experiencing. I told him "The day I give up on students is the day that I am going to quit teaching!" I thought my dad would agree with me, and support what I was saying. Instead, I watched him hold back his thoughts—and in turn my heart sank. I wonder now, in reflection, if he did not want me to know how hard teaching was.

In that silent exchange, I immediately began to worry. There were many things about teaching that I could learn through experience. Should I stay silent? Should I go back to living/teaching between the lines, following the mandated curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) fearful that I would not please others? Who would I become if I stayed silent? Would I become unattached, and emotionally unavailable to students over time? Is this how teaching within the dominant narrative works on teachers' lives? After that immediate sense of fear, I decided to try to live ethically in a way that was narratively coherent (Carr, 1986) with what I knew. A way of living that brought joy to teaching and that, quite possibly, would sustain me going forward. This time I knew that I could not accept or fit into the dominant stories of school—I had to navigate this differently than I had when I taught dance.

Learning the Importance of People's Stories

During my last semester of my degree, I was enrolled in a mathematics curriculum course with a professor who was working on a special project with *inner city* schools. Initially I did not question the label *inner city*. For one assignment, we each chose to work in one of her affiliated inner-city schools. As I watched her list the schools on the white board, I was astonished to

watch her write *Balwin* on the board. That was the junior high school I attended, a school just down the road from my parents' house. I remember thinking, *Wow, inner city school – it must have really gone downhill since I went there*. I can remember the exact room and chair that I was sitting in when this thought ran through my head. When I thought about the meaning of the label, I came to a place of tension as these are words and ideas that I am uncomfortable with now: downhill, inner city, marginalized, at risk. Without hesitation, I volunteered to work at Balwin. I was filled with wonder, as my stories of growing up in a place of privilege with opportunity and family surrounding me were being challenged by deficit and negative labels.

On our first day at Balwin, my cohort and I met with the school principal. He had been the assistant principal when I attended the school. I enjoyed him when I was a student. What were the chances that he was going to be the principal that I was going to work with? I was really excited. We sat at a big rectangular table, a place where I remembered taking my computer classes as a student. As we introduced ourselves, we said what subject and level we would be teaching in our practica. I vividly recall him interrupting the introductions after the first student spoke. He said, *No, you don't teach math. Never say you teach math. You teach kids, always say you teach kids*. I tucked that away into my repertoire, intending to use it to impress any future interviewer.

When he finally got to me, I introduced myself—Gillian Pysyk. His response was *Like THE Gillian Pysyk* referring to the fact that I was the Gillian whom he taught almost 10 years earlier. He immediately began to question me, asking me what my experience was like as a student at Balwin Junior High. I responded that either my parents did a really good job of raising me in a way that I did not realize the poverty and challenges that existed within the community, or that the neighbourhood was not like this when I attended. He chuckled and said, “Oh no. It

was like this when you were here”. I wondered how that could be. How could I have attended what was labelled as an *inner city* school and not have known? What I was learning about my former junior high school interrupted my story of myself as a child of privilege. My parents always taught me to look at the person – they never allowed us to talk or treat others poorly. When I attended school, I learned to see my peers as people with stories, as childhood friends, as school mates. I did not see them as marginalized, poor, at-risk kids.

I can still see myself sitting in the meeting with the principal. As I inquired into that moment, I awakened to new understandings of many of my childhood memories. When I inquired further into other memories, I came to new understandings of my parents and family. Yes, I grew up with privilege, and yes many extrinsic things were important to my parents, but it was from them that I learned to see and value all people. I learned everyone should be treated with kindness, dignity, and respect. I learned I should not accept systemic racism and inequity that exists within our cultures and institutions. I learned that I have obligations and moral responsibilities as a human being to disrupt racism and inequity everywhere I go. My mom and dad were the first ones to show me that peoples’ stories mattered, and it is important to be attentive to them. I knew all the *right* things but now I wonder if I lived them.

A Moment of Learning to Walk Alongside

After I finished my Education Degree and before I began teaching in a classroom, I worked as a nanny for a few months. During that time, I travelled a lot and, on one occasion, I visited my great aunt and uncle in Toronto. While I knew them relatively well, I knew little about a project they had dedicated their retired lives to. *Out of the Cold* was a project with two large components. The first piece involved the construction of an entire apartment building for

low income families that was built in the space designated as a church parking lot. I cannot imagine the fundraising, permits, grants, applications etc. that went into this phase of the project. The second phase is a soup kitchen, which was operated more like a family and community table. As I recollect this project, I am amazed by its complexity and humbled at how the project continues to shape me in the present.

When I stayed at Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Gordon's house, I wanted to experience *Out of the Cold*. I asked to go with them on Wednesday, the day they went to the soup kitchen. We awoke at 4:00 am to get to the church to start preparing breakfast for the guests. I was assigned to peel and cut up fruit for a few hours as the other volunteers arrived. It was then that Uncle Gordon took me on a tour to see all the different components of the soup kitchen.

First he took me to *the closet* which was filled with cleaned, organized, and nicely hung donated clothing and shoes. Guests could come to get needed clothing. We visited the physician's room that Uncle Gordon, a retired doctor, had built. It was important that guests could see a physician when needed. Interns and volunteer doctors worked on rotation so a doctor was always available. In another corner social workers waited for their friends. In yet another corner, guests could have ID ordered, if needed. He explained that some guests had expressed to him that obtaining ID was a challenge. They needed their IDs to complete government paperwork but also for applying for jobs – if they didn't have it, well then, I guess they couldn't apply. Uncle Gordon fixed that by bringing the service to them. He also described the mobile dental office in the parking lot, where dental care was provided. He described the challenges of getting the right kind of electrical outlet so the bus could obtain the required power and detailed the permitting process and the shockingly expensive cost of the entire project.

Uncle Gordon taught me many things about homelessness and about the people he had come to know. He told me that instead of giving money to someone panhandling, we should give them food. He also told me about helping an individual write a sign on a piece of cardboard so he could pan handle. His eyes sparkled, and he chuckled, as he told me this story. It was clear to me that his personal belief was not to give money to panhandlers but, simultaneously, he showed that his respect and care for others was such that he would help someone make a panhandling sign if that is what they thought they really needed. He didn't feel like it was his place to decide what someone else needed. He told me he had gone to court as a character witness for one guest who had really turned their life around. He met each individual where they were with the utmost respect. He valued each individual and their stories and respected their autonomy. He listened to them in different ways.

As people entered the building, it was evident they were familiar with the place. They regularly came to enjoy soup and the warmth of kindness and friendship. My uncle greeted them by name and told me a bit about each of their stories. He told me about how lonely a lot of them were. Many were men who desperately missed their families. Because I had finished helping prepare the food my job was to go and visit, to get to know the people and the community. Uncle Gordon has this amazing energy that I wish I could bottle, a soul warming smile and an infectious laugh. I recall his encouraging look, as he grinned and walked off with a guest and left me standing there – to go and visit, to make connections and listen to stories.

I was a 23-year-old girl from Edmonton who had a small understanding of the world and no understanding of my own white privilege. I didn't know Toronto. What was I going to talk to them about? All that I knew was that this was an important job and I wasn't about to let Uncle Gordon down. I put on a brave face and looked around for someone that might be willing to talk

to me. The first person wasn't interested in talking with me, but, as the day wore on, I met and talked with some members of this new community I was warmly welcomed into. I slowly learned that they didn't really want to talk with me, they wanted someone to listen, and care about, their stories (King, 2003). That day I did a lot of listening and a great deal of learning. I left a changed person. I learned that everyone has a story and what matters is that we need to create ways to make space for people to tell their stories to someone who can listen to them.

Retelling the Story

When I think *with* this memory now, I think this was the first significant moment where I learned to walk alongside others and to world travel with loving perception (Lugones, 1987). Although I had learned about kindness, generosity, and the value of hearing people's stories, my experience was still embedded within hierarchies and institutions. This time, I experienced it as Uncle Gordon taught me to see people's experiences from alongside them. Uncle Gordon allowed me to strip everything away and walk alongside the members of this community. I needed this experience to be out of my element, in a place I didn't know which forced me to be vulnerable so I could understand what it means to walk alongside someone. It also brings new tension for me, as I live and work within educational institutions and witness many of my seemingly well-intentioned peers try to *help* others within our community. I realize that sometimes they understand helping as deciding what they think is best and implementing that on to the person's life. The concept of walking alongside (Clandinin et al., 2018) others in order to listen to their stories hardly exists in many of the schools where I work. Embedded within institutions and hierarchies so many of us who are comfortable within an institution do not take the time to understand what it means.

Walking Alongside Others as a Teacher

After my first year of teaching, I was asked to be a co-teacher in a special project with Enoch Cree Nation. Initially my co-teacher and I were to teach Career and Life Management (CALM) to a group of girls who needed to finish courses in order to move toward graduation. Our challenge was to teach within the community, rather than in a school classroom. While I came to Enoch Cree Nation as a teacher to teach a course under the auspices of my school division, I knew I came as a guest to this place. I needed to remember that I came as an outsider, and could be seen as someone who symbolizes, for some members of the community, trauma and pain. I needed to be awake to how my presence might be accepted. I needed to listen closely and carefully, as I was learning to move relationally alongside Indigenous youth (Lessard, 2014). I was excited because this was an opportunity to teach in meaningful authentic ways, and I was supported by those directing the project. I saw this as different from teaching in a place called school but familiar with what I knew in other community places.

My co-teacher and I were discussing what to do for the module on volunteering and giving back to the community. We decided on a field trip to the Mustard Seed Community Support Centre in Edmonton. It seemed to fit in nicely as we were able to pull in pieces from other modules—nutrition, budgeting, and mental health. With approvals in place, we were excited to tell the girls about the field trip we had planned. When we told them, not only did they not have the response we were hoping for, but they outright refused to attend. This was an unplanned interruption to the story that I had been living. It was a moment for inquiring into the girls' responses. Again, I had acted from within my own story, and I did not understand the girls were living out stories different from mine. I had not world travelled (Lugones, 1987) with them

to consider how they would experience the day. Did they fear the stories of people they would meet there? How would the stories of those they met intersect with their own stories? At that time, I did not know how challenging the girls might find such a visit.

However, despite their resistance, we went as planned. Our visit started with making sandwiches for lunch for the guests and was followed by a tour of the Mustard Seed and information about its purpose and focus. It seemed that the girls were beginning to become interested, yet I still sensed resistance. They goofed around and were silly as we worked hard to make sandwiches. I wondered if their silliness came from a place of dis-ease (Lugones, 1987). As people filled the space to eat lunch, we were told that we could sit to the side, leave, or visit with the guests. With memories of Uncle Gordon in my mind, I took a deep breath and confidently joined a table, filled with the memory of the importance of sitting and listening to people's stories in relational ways. I saw the girls watching me, I was showing them a way to be within this community, a way that we could all learn together. A way we could all walk alongside each other.

As the girls and I gathered at the end of the day, I knew something had happened for all of us. That day changed our relationship, just as Uncle Gordon had taught me, we were all co-creating, co-existing, and walking alongside each other. Changing our physical place and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable connected us in new and meaningful ways. I walked alongside them and learned from my students what their experience was on our field trip which also connected to, and allowed them to share, other lived experiences with stories and emotion, something they rarely let us see. For the first time, I finally felt myself to be a teacher, a teacher of children. That day, I understood what the principal of Balwin meant. I felt what it meant to teach children and I achieved it. Who I was as a teacher was no longer defined by subject

matter—I experienced that I could teach in relationally ethical ways (Clandinin et al., 2018). I was filled with memories of how I had dreamed about teaching years before as a dance teacher.

I remember being scared afterward that somehow, someone within the institution would rule that we could not give them credit because it wasn't *CALM*. But of course, it was. At other times when I tried to teach *outside of the lines* my attempts had not been received well. I was afraid this was going to happen again. But this time I was recognized for having *taught* those children and that they had *learned CALM*. There was only positivity associated with my *different way of teaching*, a different way of listening to stories. There was not the resistance as when I taught dance in those early years, when I improvised outside of the lines. I was encouraged to continue working, to keep going in good ways alongside youth.

Forward Looking Stories

Two years later I was hired by an administrator who knew of my work with the youth of Enoch Cree Nation. He encouraged me to work on a new class for Grade 10 students who were failing. At this high school I created a math 10 preparatory class for students struggling in transition from Math 9 to Grade 10 math. I could no longer simply *teach math*. I had to teach the youth. I wanted to make a difference for students. I knew I had a passion for working with youth, and a special gift to be able to connect with youth often seen as difficult. This school was also a welcoming centre for new Canadians, which explained the high immigrant population of students from India, Africa, and the Middle East. I learned how to work effectively with youth labelled as at-risk and with new Canadians, who taught me about their culture, religion and the challenges of moving. I was learning to teach by coming alongside and I was learning to live in ways congruent with world travelling.

Our preparatory math course was highly successful, but, after a few years, I realized there was only so much a single intervention class could do. Many of the students' challenges with math were foundational difficulties and stemmed back to junior high and elementary math classes. I wanted to learn more about when students became labelled as "at risk" math learners. As I researched *when* students became "at risk", the literature suggested it was at ages 3-4, the preschool years. I found this shocking. I became increasingly interested and attentive to preschool aged children.

Learning More

Prior to applying for my master's degree program, I took a class on narrative inquiry at the Gandhi Summer Institute at the University of Alberta. It was here where I felt a sense of validation of how important people's stories were. I felt that I could not do my job properly, as a high school mathematics teacher, without learning the stories of my students. Sometimes I wondered why I felt a calling to learn people's stories. It was here, learning of the theory and methodology of narrative inquiry that I felt so much clarity as a person, teacher, and aspiring scholar. In studying narrative inquiry, I realized it was difficult to learn to think narratively and to engage in narrative inquiry. I found much growth as I engaged in an autobiographical narrative inquiry.

Further along in my course work I engaged in a curriculum inquiry course. I knew that narrative inquiry was the way in which I personally viewed how research to understand human experience should be done. However, I struggled in understanding and distinguishing narrative inquiry as a way of thinking narratively about curriculum making as distinct from narrative inquiry as a way of thinking narratively as a research methodology. I was challenged to consider

differences and to inquire into narrative inquiry as a way of thinking narratively about curriculum making. I was encouraged to understand that I could think narratively about my work as a curriculum maker (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) and to think narratively as a researcher into my stories as a teacher (Clandinin, 2013).

I was beginning to consider the research I would undertake for my masters' thesis. I was no longer as curious about high school students—but I was completely focused on preschool children. I could consider children's experiences through thinking narratively, as narrative inquiry was both theory and methodology. Around this time, I was aware from the media and from the discussions in my school district that many Syrian families were arriving as refugees into our Edmonton society and schools. My personal, professional, and academic interests focussed on the experiences of people new to Edmonton. Shifting my research focus to the social inclusion of Syrian refugee children and families may have seemed a drastic shift from my initial research focus. However, considering my new knowledge and vantage point, it seemed very fitting as it gave me a way to bring together my interests in students' experiences, especially the experiences of students who often struggle to belong, or fit in, in schools.

Inequities that exist within institutions of education have always pulled on me and on my sense of responsibility to the world we are making together. I feel an ethical and moral responsibility to be awake to inequities and injustices and to awaken others around me. My storied experiences are shaped in profound ways by stories of inequity such as those that I experienced in my first practicum. I felt responsible to do something, to act differently to address the experiences of youth.

An Invitation to Join a Larger Research Project

As part of my master's degree program, I wanted to engage in research and my supervisor also wanted me to engage in research. "Would you like to do your masters research in the context of a larger project?" he asked. "That is how I did my masters research. Right now, I have a project inquiring into the experiences of Syrian refugee families as their young children enter their early education". And with that he shared the SSHRC-funded proposal (Caine et al., 2017) with me. I read the following:

The **goal of this study** is to develop new knowledge about how preschools can create places of belonging, identity making and agency for refugee children and their families by creating socially inclusive spaces. Socially inclusive spaces are spaces where dignity and safety are norms, diversity is recognized and accepted, and everyone feels encouraged, supported, and included. They are spaces where a shifting balance of power emerges. Socially inclusive spaces provide opportunities for identity building based on relationships, respect and responsibility. Such spaces also allow authentic interaction and learning to occur between different parties. The **overall study purpose** is to come to understand the experiences of refugee children and their families as well as the experiences of teachers and practitioners as their lives meet in early childhood settings in Canada. In order to understand the experiences of refugee children, teachers and families, we propose narrative inquiry as our research methodology. Engaging in a narrative inquiry alongside children, teachers and families, our intent is to offer insights into questions of identity-making and agency, particularly framed within what it means to experience social inclusion and belonging for the children and families. We will provide fresh, innovative and bottom-up strategies to overcome intractable (global) issues and to develop principles for social inclusive innovation.

The study has four important **objectives** that will map the development of an overall understanding. These objectives are to:

1. understand the children's and families' identity making, agency and sense of belonging within the preschool context before, during, and after the transition phase.
2. explore the children's and families' agency as they intentionally work to change their social and material worlds to better fit their stories of experience.
3. inquire into how the experiences within a preschool context shape the sense of belonging to a larger community and nation over time.
4. inquire into the stories that teachers live and tell as they work with refugee children and families in their preschool settings.

My supervisor explained that I would be a part of the research team, but I would also engage in a narrative inquiry with two families. As I considered the possibilities this seemed like a project that connected with me. The wonders that the larger study were framed around seemed to be ones I had been exploring my whole life: wonders about identity, about belonging, about inclusion, about respect and reciprocity.

As I considered my narrative beginnings, I began to imagine my research puzzle nested within this larger study. I wondered what I would learn. I wondered how the experiences of Syrian children and parents will intersect with mine. I wondered what I have been missing as an educator and human being. I wondered how this would shape my future teaching. I wondered if there would be pragmatic, pedagogical and possible policy shifts in the advocacy of families from *other* places and spaces.

Research Puzzle

Through my autobiographical narrative beginnings, I came to understand that I am very curious about the experiences that young children and families have as they arrive in Canada. As a teacher I understand the importance of coming alongside learners and their families in order to work in relational ways. As young families become displaced and arrive as refugees in Canada, the school system is a pivotal institution they will have to navigate in their new home. Their experiences in schools are important in creating social inclusion. Between November 4, 2015 and August 25, 2016, Alberta received about 3800 Syrian refugees, 47% of whom were children 14 years of age and younger and 16% of whom were children between 0-4 years of age (Resettlement Dashboard Alberta, 2016).

Social inclusion is a term commonly used in social policy, sociology and political science to describe the bonds that bring people together, in the context of cultural diversity. Within the larger study, questions of social inclusion for preschool children and their families are most central. However, my research puzzle, within the larger study, focusses on the experiences of the families as they engage with schools. My research puzzle focuses on the experiences of two Syrian refugee families as they first encounter schools. While there is some research (see Chapter 2) on refugee families' experience from the perspective of those in schools, we know little about the refugee families' experiences as they encounter schools. Through coming alongside two families over 18 months I propose to come to understand their experiences more deeply in my research.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 outlined my narrative beginnings of coming to the research, a brief outline of the larger study in which my study is embedded, and a statement of my research puzzle. Chapter 2 is a co-authored published review of the Canadian literature relevant to my research and the larger study. It is in press with the McGill Journal of Education. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and methods used in the study. Chapters 4 and 5 are narrative accounts of the refugee families that I worked with in the research. Chapter 6 is a co-authored paper with other members of the research team that focuses on the refugee families' experiences of seeking narrative coherence in their life composing that is disrupted as their lives bump against dominant institutional policies and practices. Chapter 7 is a reflective turn on the experience of undertaking the research with attention to personal, practical and theoretical justifications.

Chapter 2:

Factors to Consider in Syrian Refugee Families' Journeys to Social Inclusion:

A Literature Review¹

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Abstract

This paper offers a review of the research literature on the experiences of young children and their families who left Syria as refugees and resettled in Canada. We identify five key factors that influence Syrian refugees' experience of social inclusion within the context of the public-school systems as well as unveil the silences in and across the current studies. The five factors are pre-arrival experiences; mental health; social supports; acquisition of English language skills; and lack of preparedness of teachers and schools. Based on limited availability of research, we outline needed research to better understand social inclusion of Syrian refugee families with young children in Canada. There is a call to pay particular attention to their educational and social encounters.

Resume

This paper offers a review of the research literature on the experiences of young children and their families who left Syria as refugees and resettled in Canada. We identify five key factors that influence Syrian refugees' experience of social inclusion within the context of the public-

¹ Chapter 2 is in press as Jennifer Dodd, D. Jean Clandinin, Gillian Vigneau, Hiroko Kubota & Vera Caine University of Alberta. Factors to Consider in Syrian Refugee Families' Journeys to Social Inclusion: A literature review. *McGill Journal of Education*.

school systems as well as unveil the silences in and across the current studies. The five factors are pre-arrival experiences; mental health; social supports; acquisition of English language skills; and lack of preparedness of teachers and schools. Based on limited availability of research, we outline needed research to better understand social inclusion of Syrian refugee families with young children in Canada. There is a call to pay particular attention to their educational and social encounters.

Keywords: Syrian refugees; young children; families; social inclusion; schooling

Mots-clés : Syrian refugees; young children; families; social inclusion; schooling

In her memoir *The Boy on the Beach*, Tima Kurdi (2019) recounts her family's escape from war-torn Syria. After fleeing to neighbouring Turkey, Kurdi's brother and family embarked on a perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea with the hope of finding a brighter future in Europe. Kurdi's sister-in-law and two young nephews drowned during the crossing. On the morning of September 2, 2015, the world awoke to the image of Kurdi's 3-year-old nephew Alan lying face down and motionless along a Turkish shoreline. The photograph of Alan's tiny lifeless body in a red T-shirt and blue jean shorts raised the global consciousness to the plight of Syrian refugees and prompted an outpouring of generosity from the international community. Alan Kurdi's death was a wake-up call for the world.

Alan Kurdi, his brother, and his mother did not live to arrive as refugees in a European, or in any other, country. Many children and families are, however, finding their way out of refugee camps and into Canada where they are in the midst of a transition to a new country and a new home. We know little about the experiences of children and families as they endured upheaval in Syria, as they fled, as they became refugees and, later, when they arrived in Canada.

Since the eruption of Syria's brutal civil war in 2011, countless families have endured

loss and suffering. To date, over 6 million Syrians have fled their homeland, constituting approximately one-third of the total global refugee population (UNHCR, 2019). Although many Syrians found asylum in countries throughout the world, they continue to experience adversity once they arrive in resettlement countries (Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2016). Many dominant narratives depicted by media sources in Canada have fueled stereotypes of Syrian refugees as needy, helpless, and potentially dangerous; in all cases, subordinate to Canadian-born citizens (Walker & Zuberi, 2020). Such national discourses create less-than-hospitable social and cultural milieus as Syrian refugee families resettle to start a new life.

In this article, we review the education literature on the experiences of young children and their families who left Syria as refugees and resettled in Canada. We identify five key factors that have influenced Syrian refugees' experiences of social inclusion within the context of Canada's public school system as well as unveil the silences in and across the current studies.

Social inclusion is a term commonly used in social policy, sociology, and political science to describe the bonds that bring people together in contexts of cultural diversity. There is no single agreed-upon understanding of the key terminology of social inclusion in the research literature (Allman, 2013; Wong & Turner, 2014). By social inclusion, we draw attention to spaces where dignity and safety are norms, diversity is recognized and accepted, and everyone feels encouraged, supported, and included. Socially inclusive spaces provide opportunities for identity building based on relationships, respect, and responsibility. Such spaces also allow for authentic interaction and learning to occur between different parties.

Based on the limited availability of data and research in this area, our purpose is to integrate current publicly accessible research to better understand what is known about the social inclusion of Syrian refugee families with young children in Canada. There is a need to pay

particular attention to their educational and social encounters. First, however, we provide a brief overview of the Canadian contexts of Syrian refugees with particular attention to the authors' home province, Alberta.

Situating the Review

As part of the Government of Canada's Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, Canada received over 52,000 Syrians between November 2015 and March 2018 (IRCC, 2018). Between November 4, 2015, and August 25, 2016, Alberta received about 3,800 Syrian refugees, 47% of whom were children 14 years of age and younger, and 16% of whom were children between 0–4 years of age. More have arrived since then, and refugees from Syria will continue to arrive in 2020 and beyond.

Considering a growing number of Syrian families with young children have entered Canada as refugees, it is imperative to think about how to create safe and inclusive places for them with new perspectives that highlight the complexity and diversity of each refugee family. Preschool is often the first contact for refugee families and children with the new dominant culture (Adair & Tobin, 2007; Grieshaber & Miller, 2010), providing opportunities for families to come to understand something of their new society (Vandenbroeck et al., 2009). However, the Canadian approach to early childhood education may not be easily understood by refugee families. Few studies have investigated the transition experiences of refugee children and families into early childhood settings (Gioia, 2015; Grieshaber & Miller, 2010). Poor transition experiences have been identified as a potential contributor to increased stress and long-term health and well-being consequences for refugee children and their families (Sims & Hutchins, 2001). Given the increasing numbers of refugee children and families, it is important that the

narratives of the transition process become a focus of inquiry. We cannot assume that the experiences of all refugee children and families are similar to one another as they transition into early childhood education and schooling. Cultural, familial, religious, and institutional narratives may significantly shape the experiences of refugees from different countries that make their way to Canada. We do know that refugee children and families require access to socially inclusive spaces in schools that will afford them a sense of belonging and allow them to shape meaningful stories in, and of, schooling and education—contributing, over the long term, to their social inclusion into new places and new homes. Social inclusion can only be fully understood in relation to membership, belonging, and social integration. Belonging is held to be a foundational human need.

Omidvar and Richmond (2003) point out five critical dimensions, or cornerstones, of social inclusion:

- 1) *valued recognition* (conferring recognition and respect on individuals and groups)
- 2) *human development* (nurturing the talents, skills, capacities, and choices of children and adults to compose lives they value and to make contributions both they and others find worthwhile)
- 3) *involvement and engagement* (having the right and the necessary support to make / be involved in decisions affecting oneself, family, and community and to be engaged in community life)
- 4) *proximity* (sharing physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions, if desired, and to reduce social distances between people)
- 5) *material well-being* (having the material resources to allow children and their parents to participate fully in community life)

Another view of social inclusion is offered in which attention is not directed at political, legal, or managerial measures, but instead towards connecting people by opening a dialogue in which life stories are exchanged.

Methods for Undertaking the Review

In this integrative literature review (Torraco, 2016), we were focused on the experiences of refugee children and their families as they navigated unfamiliar preschool settings in Canada; an integrative literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of a specific topic. Recognizing factors that potentially affect the experiences of young refugee children and identifying the role that the educational encounter plays in their transitions could significantly shape the knowledge foundation for further studies with refugee families with young children from Syria. The literature on refugee children from Syria and their transitioning experience into educational settings in host countries encompasses a wide range of academic disciplines including education, sociology, developmental science, health science, public health, social work, and psychology.

We conducted a literature search for both peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature including theses, dissertations, and government or non-government reports. We included a search of the grey literature using Google to identify unpublished government reports. We completed searches by accessing several databases: Academic Search Complete, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), CINAHL, MEDLINE, SocIndex, Sociological Abstracts, Proquest Dissertations & Theses Global, and NEOS Catalogue. In addition, we reviewed reference lists of our selected articles and hand searched key journals, including the *Canadian Journal of Education*. A combination of the following terms was used for each search: Syria AND refugee or asylum seeker AND preschool, kindergarten, child, or toddler. Our initial inclusion criteria were: 1) literature written in English, 2) studies that focused on Syrian refugee children and their parents, and 3) studies that examined the intersection between Syrian refugee children and school

settings.

With these key terms and inclusion criteria, we identified 170 relevant titles. We further scanned and assessed the titles and abstracts of these 170 titles with a second set of inclusion criteria: 1) studies done in Canadian contexts and 2) studies that focused on the experiences of Syrian refugee children and their parents within primary school settings. Among 170 titles, most of the literature focused on the contexts of Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, including refugee camps. These studies directed attention to an emergency response to children's educational needs. The focus was often on policy reviews related to education or the immediate mental health needs of refugee children from Syria rather than on the long-term adjustment processes of refugee children. Overall, there is a paucity of studies concerning early childhood experiences of Syrian refugee children in preschool settings globally, including in Canada.

Being attentive to the experience of young Syrian refugee children and their parents during their transition into Canadian school settings, we reviewed articles and extracted information from six relevant scholarly works that met our inclusion criteria: four peer-reviewed journal articles and two master's theses (see Table 1). We reviewed these six scholarly works and identified potential factors that affected the experiences of young Syrian children and their families in their first encounters with Canadian educational systems. We also raised silenced aspects such as religious beliefs, which do not appear in the current literature yet are significant in shaping the experiences of Syrian children and their families. As recommended by Torraco (2016), our analysis focused on the "literature's strengths, deficiencies, omissions, inaccuracies, and any contradictions about the topic" (p. 66).

Table 1

Summary of included studies on Syrian refugee families and their preschool experience.

Author/ Year/ Source	Research question	Methods/ Population	Results
Clark, A. K. (2017). Master's Thesis, University of Toronto.	What are the experiences of teachers of Syrian refugee children?	An interview study with two Ontario teachers of Syrian refugee children.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers identified the importance of recognizing the specific needs of newly arrived Syrian refugee students to develop appropriate support strategies. 2. Teachers identified the need for support in using English language learning (ELL) pedagogies to support the emotional and academic growth of newly arrived Syrian refugee students. 3. Teachers felt a lack of readiness, experience, and support in teaching the children, including appropriate ELL strategies. 4. Teachers noted that students who had previously lived in a refugee camp were more responsive to socioemotional triggers. 5. Teachers identified rehabilitation needs connected to trauma that have been unmet. 6. Friendship is an important support system to develop a sense of belonging for both children and parents.
Gagné, A. et al., (2017). <i>Intercultural Education</i> .	Inquiring into and addressing issues of teaching about refugees in initial teacher	Using a self- study approach, two of the authors (teacher educators working in universities) and one author (a	Teacher education needs to be informed by the lived experiences of refugee students, and culturally responsive pedagogies should be developed based on the students' diverse backgrounds and complex cultural identities. It is important to encourage teachers to move

Author/ Year/ Source	Research question	Methods/ Population	Results
Hadfield, K et al., (2017). <i>Canadian Psychology/ Psychologie Canadienne</i> .	Understanding pre- and post-arrival mental health of Syrian refugee children and adolescents in Canada.	Literature review on pre- and post-arrival factors of Syrian refugee children and adolescents resettled in Canada and the impact on their mental health.	beyond teaching strategies to become agents of change who challenge and transform systemic inequities. Young refugees experience traumatic events before resettling in Canada such as “living under war conditions, witnessing events of violence, the torture or murder of family members, parental imprisonment, separation from parents, personal injury, and living in a refugee camp” (p. 195), which harmfully affect their mental health. Post-arrival factors such as family support, peer relationships, social cohesion, and service provision are influential to the mental health of refugee children and their sense of well-being. Cross-sector and interdisciplinary approaches are necessary to help them cope with various potential difficulties in their resettlement countries.

Author/ Year/ Source	Research question	Methods/ Population	Results
Walker, J. & Zuberi, D. (2019). <i>Journal of International Migration and Integration.</i>	Understanding school-aged Syrian refugees' pre-migration and resettlement experiences and their educational challenges in Canada to respond to their needs and address potential gaps in educational support and resources.	Data analysis and research on school-aged Syrian refugees and social / educational discourses in Canada. No clear methodology/method was identified. No age was identified for the children.	Five recommendations are posited for Canadian public schools to promote psychological well-being and academic achievement of school-aged Syrian refugees in Canada: 1) strategic planning on school inclusion, 2) special education resources to offer individualized educational support, 3) teacher training in trauma-informed care / practice, 4) professional development for teachers in culturally competent teaching strategies and techniques, and 5) clinical training for school-based mental health professionals in trauma-informed interventions for children.
Yamashita, A. C. (2018). Master's Thesis, University of Toronto.	What are the factors contributing to refugee families' migration experience in relation to the language and literacy development of Syrian refugee children in Canada?	Participants were five Syrian refugee families and nine children (6 to 14 years) in the greater Toronto area of Canada. Interviews with parents and with children. Quantitative language measures with children.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Found the importance of first language maintenance as well as the importance of second language acquisition. 2. Quantitative language measures showed children were significantly behind compared to their peers in language and literacy development. 3. Findings from interviews with children showed English played an important role in their integration and making friends, a key support system for the children. Learning English was a high priority for them. 4. Findings from interview with parents showed learning English was more difficult and posed an obstacle for career advancement

Author/ Year/ Source	Research question	Methods/ Population	Results
Yohani, S. et al., (2019). <i>Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education.</i>	What are the strengths and barriers that Syrian refugee families with young children face during early resettlement?	The authors use a community- based participatory research approach and critical incident method involving semi- structured interviews and focus groups with 10 Arabic- speaking cultural brokers working with Syrian refugee families during early resettlement.	and for their involvement in their children's school lives. Parents' lack of English proficiency was a barrier to them becoming more involved in their children's school experiences. 4. All families spoke of the importance of preserving their first language at home. The research provided a framework for educators to guide them in identifying both strengths and challenges that face Syrian refugee children and their families during early resettlement within a school context. Drawing on their previous research, this article highlights the vital role that educators play in the psychosocial adaptation of refugee families with young children during early resettlement in Alberta, Canada.

Results

Overall, the studies we reviewed speak to the complexity of social inclusion of children in schools and take children, families, and teachers into account. Yet current studies neither forefront children's nor families' voices, nor do they engage in a contextual analysis of

phenomena under study. We structured our results around five key factors discussed in the existing literature that influence the experience of Syrian refugee children and families in relation to schools. While these factors intersect and often work synergistically, it is important to understand the depth of each one. These factors include pre-arrival factors, mental health, social support, acquisition of English language skills, and lack of preparedness of teachers and schools.

Factor 1: Pre-Arrival Factors

Pre-arrival factors are important in the resettlement of refugees. Pre-arrival factors are inclusive of three stages: pre-departure, flight, and first asylum (Merali, 2008, as cited in Yohani et al., 2019). There is little research on the departure and flight stages of pre-arrival factors in the research literature, although information about these stages can be inferred from journalist accounts and agency reports. For instance, *Homes: A refugee story* (al Rabeeah & Yeung, 2018) provides an autobiographical account of one boy's pre-departure and flight experiences.

Yohani et al. (2019) note that an important pre-arrival factor is trauma. Trauma can be caused by war, violence, separation from loved ones (Hassan et al., 2015), disrupted schooling, food shortages, unemployment, language difficulties, mental health, and overall health concerns. Experiences during the pre-arrival stage in the first place of asylum are pivotal for young refugees (Clark, 2017; Yohani et al., 2019); these experiences shape their lives in significant ways.

In Clark's (2017) interview study with two Ontario teachers, participants pointed out that first asylum living situations are important, noting differences between refugees living in apartments or other types of housing versus those living in temporary structures in refugee camps. Participants noticed that students who had lived in a refugee camp were more responsive

to socioemotional triggers, which called forth emotions such as fear. The triggering of such emotions can impact a student's sense of belonging, which is critical to social inclusion. Therefore, refugees are often in survival mode and have difficult life experiences that contribute to how they conduct themselves and respond to situations once they are resettled. Finally, the teachers in Clark's (2017) study also noted that during the first asylum, many girls were required to take care of the home and family whereas boys were able to go to school, which afforded them opportunities to socialize outside of the home.

Factor 2: Mental Health

Mental health is both a pre- and post-arrival factor for Syrian refugees. Exposure to armed conflict, displacement, separation from loved ones, or threats to personal safety increase the likelihood of developing a mental health condition (Hadfield et al., 2017; Yohani et al., 2019). Refugee children in particular tend to experience high rates of psychological trauma symptoms (Hadfield et al., 2017; Walker & Zuberi, 2020). Psychological trauma can impair a child's social, emotional, and cognitive functioning, as well as negatively affect growth and development (Stewart, 2014; Walker & Zuberi, 2020).

Refugee children are vulnerable to mental health difficulties and tend to experience more sleep disturbance, psychosomatic symptoms, issues with attention, and separation anxiety, and they may demonstrate externalizing behaviours such as aggression (Hadfield et al., 2017; Yohani et al., 2019). Protective factors, however, such as family, peer, and community support, may help to mitigate the impact of pre-arrival trauma on young Syrian refugees (Hadfield, et al., 2017; Yohani et al., 2019).

In Walker and Zuberi's (2020) literature review, the impact of pre-migration trauma and

post-migration stressors on the resettlement of school-age Syrian refugees in Canada was examined. They pointed out gaps in the literature on how to best support the psychological well-being of Syrian refugee children within Canadian public schools. Most school-based counsellors and Canadian teachers feel inadequately prepared to work with children who have experienced trauma (Stewart, 2014). They proposed five recommendations for Canada's public school systems: 1) address issues of inclusion at school; 2) provide adequate funding to reduce wait times for psychoeducational or language assessments; 3) provide ongoing training in evidence-based, trauma-focused care to teachers and school administrators in schools where a large number of refugee students are enrolled; 4) offer teachers professional development opportunities that consider culturally relevant teaching strategies; and 5) provide school counsellors with specialized training in evidence-based, trauma-informed care (Walker & Zuberi, 2020).

Teachers in Clark's (2017) study noted the unmet rehabilitation needs of children that are connected to trauma. Many Syrian refugees resettled in Canada feel social isolation and loneliness (Yohani et al., 2019). Yamashita (2018), in her study with five Syrian refugee families and nine children in greater Toronto, noted refugees' socioemotional well-being may be related to their resettlement in an ethnically diverse, liberal society where they experience culture shock and find it difficult to navigate the lack of gender segregation. Many refugees also face discrimination (Hadfield et al., 2017; Yohani et al., 2019) and some experience hate crimes (Walker & Zuberi, 2020). These experiences greatly affect how people feel about, and engage with, their new communities.

Yohani et al. (2019) identified the importance of Syrian refugee parents' mental health. Children's psychological well-being is strongly influenced by their caregivers' emotional state.

Some Syrian refugee mothers, during pregnancy or postpartum, have reported symptoms of depression and anxiety. Syrian refugee parents face a number of psychosocial stressors that may negatively affect mental health, including language barriers, social isolation, discrimination (real or perceived), poverty, and challenges navigating social, educational, and health systems.

Factor 3: Social Supports

It is important that Syrian refugee families with young children be connected to social support systems to mitigate potential challenges that accompany the experience of relocation. Social support can help facilitate a smooth resettlement in Canada. Hadfield et al. (2017) noted that the well-being of young refugees is closely related to their perceived degree of social cohesion, that is, their sense of belonging and integration into a new environment.

Refugees often experience systemic barriers that are part of education and health systems in Canadian society. Their experiences with these barriers often prove debilitating (Yohani et al., 2019). Yohani et al. (2019) noted financial challenges and poverty. Furthermore, many refugees found the healthcare systems challenging to navigate and the needs of children with disabilities unmet. While many refugees find support through their private sponsors, government agencies, mosques, and the Syrian community (Yamashita, 2018), proper support does not exist for effective integration (Clark, 2017). Without connections to communities, some struggle to build a sense of belonging (Clark, 2017). Experiencing language barriers can contribute to a lessened sense of belonging, which inhibits integration and the ability to make friends (Clark, 2017; Yamashita, 2018). Language is also a barrier to pursuing career aspirations, progressing in school, or attending post-secondary educational institutions (Yamashita, 2018; Yohani, et al., 2019).

The social support resources that encourage social connection and that refugee families find helpful to develop a sense of belonging in Canada are as follows: 1) extended family, 2) sponsors, 3) communities, 4) friends, and 5) school. First, extended family serves as a vital source of social support for Syrian families; they rely on extended families for support in raising children, maintaining daily life, and promoting the well-being of family (Hadfield et al., 2017; Yamashita, 2018). However, when Syrian refugee families are physically separated from their extended families, they experience disconnection (Yamashita, 2018).

Secondly, sponsors are also a social support for refugee families. While most Syrian refugees in Canada are government-assisted refugees, some refugees are privately sponsored (Hadfield et al., 2017; Yamashita, 2018). Sponsors are the first point of encounter for refugee families upon their arrival in Canada, and sponsors provide them with basic supports such as housing, finances, various registrations, skill support, and orientation in the local community (Hadfield et al., 2017). Syrian refugee families who have private sponsors are reported to receive more personalized and constant support in finding housing, enrolling children in schools, arranging work, becoming familiar with new lifestyles and environments, and integrating into Canadian culture than government-sponsored refugees (Hadfield et al., 2017; Yamashita, 2018). Privately sponsored families largely depend on their sponsors for both practical and emotional support, which may differentiate the resettlement experience of government and privately sponsored refugees.

Thirdly, Yohani et al. (2019) reveal “the importance of having social connection to one’s community in increasing children and family’s overall sense of well-being” (p. 24). Community entails relationship-building that is not limited to family or physical locale, but also includes cultural, ethnic, or religious communities, such as Syrian communities, English classes, or

mosques. Yohani et al. (2019) demonstrate the significant role of community-based cultural brokers in establishing connections between refugee families and social environments. These cultural brokers can serve as important liaisons between refugee families and useful community resources, offering them a sense of community through their relational support (Yohani et al., 2019).

Fourthly, friendship is an important support system for children and families and plays a role in developing a sense of belonging (Clark, 2017; Yamashita, 2018). Hadfield and colleagues (2017) note that peer relationships promote social adjustment and confidence in refugee children. Friendship can grow into a significant source of support for English learning for both parents and children (Clark, 2017; Yamashita, 2018). For children especially, having friends helps them adapt to their new school environments and foster social networks. It also facilitates smooth integration into new social and school lives (Yamashita, 2018).

Lastly, positive school experiences can be a protective factor to mitigate risks and create a foundation for academic, social, and emotional growth and empowerment as well as integration into a new country (Hadfield et al., 2017; Yohani et al., 2019).

Factor 4: Acquisition of English Language Skills

Learning to speak, understand, read, and write a second or additional language is often one of the primary barriers for all non-English-or-French-speaking refugees coming to Canada. English language classes are often provided early for children, youth, and families through settlement programs. When children and youth are enrolled in schools, English as an additional language is given high priority. Adults are encouraged to attend English classes for as long as they are able. Clark's (2017) study identified the importance of recognizing the specific needs of

newly arrived Syrian refugee children when developing appropriate support strategies. One area where support was needed was in using ELL pedagogy to support the emotional and academic growth of students.

Developing abilities in English is interwoven with the mental health of Syrian refugee children and youth (Hadfield et al., 2017). As noted earlier, the mental health of children and youth is influenced by adults' mental health. As Hadfield et al. (2017) suggest, language as a social determinant affects parenting and parent-child relationships and may influence the mental health and development of children and youth. Without English skills, parents struggle to find employment and, if they do find employment, they struggle to find time to learn English. Hadfield et al. (2017) cite other researchers (e.g., Danso, 2002; Renzaho et al., 2011; Thomas, 1995) working with refugee populations who found that parents may be forced to take menial and labour-intensive jobs due to their poor English skills or low levels of education, resulting in less time to parent their children. They suggest that, without fluency in English, parents struggle to learn Canadian child-rearing customs and regulations. While refugee parents want to help their children, they may be unable to access many services due to language, transportation, and childcare barriers. Language acquisition is an obstacle for refugees, given that acquiring basic language competency does not translate into academic language and literacy skills (Stewart, 2014). Walker and Zuberi (2020) also highlight that students' poor English language skills can negatively affect teacher ability to assess refugee students' strengths and needs. Unfortunately, English language acquisition is often not well supported because of financial constraints.

Yamashita (2018) highlighted the importance of first-language maintenance and second-language acquisition. Quantitative language measures demonstrated the Syrian refugee children were significantly behind norms in language and literacy development. Yamashita's results, from

her interviews with children, indicated that English played an important role in children's integration and making friends, a key support system for the children. Learning English was a high priority for them. For their parents, however, learning English was more difficult and posed obstacles for career advancement and involvement in their children's school lives. All families spoke of the importance of preserving their first languages through speaking their first language at home and through media, religion, and upbringing. They did not draw attention to the ways that, as children became more fluent in English and as parents struggled to learn to speak English, there was the possibility of distance between parents and children that may lead to difficulties for both. Yohani et al. (2019) raised the concern that many children enter schooling before they are fluent speakers of their first language and can lose their first language because they perceive English to be the legitimate language. They also suggest that the loss of the first language has harmful effects on the relationship children have with their parents and extended families.

Factor 5: Lack of Preparedness of Teachers and Schools

School is one of the most influential contextual post-arrival factors for families. It is vitally important that educators recognize the social, political, and cultural contexts from which refugee students come from before arriving in Canada (Clark, 2017; Gagné et al., 2017). Teachers who understand children's unique cultural identities can better support their transition to the classroom (Clark, 2017; Gagné et al., 2017). Without cultural awareness, teachers and administrators may assume that refugee students who are from the same part of the world share a collective identity (Clark, 2017). In Clark's (2017) study, for example, a first-year Ontario teacher reported that six newly arrived Syrian refugee students in Grade 4 were placed in the

same classroom because teachers and administrators believed they would feel more comfortable staying together, yet these students varied greatly in their religious and cultural practices, socioeconomic status, language, and dialects. Consequently, one of the six Syrian refugee students was shunned by her Syrian peers because she came from a lower social class (Clark, 2017).

While some Canadian teachers have attempted to develop culturally relevant pedagogies and curricula to support the inclusion of Syrian refugee students into the classroom environment, many report significant systemic barriers (Clark, 2017; Hadfield et al., 2017; Walker & Zuberi, 2020; Yohani et al., 2019). Limited opportunities for teacher development, lack of communication between various levels of the education system, lack of adequate notice to prepare for the arrival of Syrian refugee students, and a paucity of resources, including ESL teachers, have left educators feeling unprepared to address the complex needs of Syrian refugee students (Clark, 2017; Gagné et al., 2017; Hadfield et al., 2017; Walker & Zuberi, 2020). Clark (2017) explained that a “lack of communication between the Ministry of Education and schools, insufficient teacher development opportunities and ineffective resource distribution lead to a significant lack of teacher readiness” (p. 33).

Limitations

Literature on the resettlement experiences of Syrian families with young children who came to Canada as refugees is scarce. To date, most studies have focused on the mental health of Syrian refugees while living in their first place of asylum, including refugee camps, and few have been conducted outside of the Middle East. While these studies are important, there is a risk of perpetuating dominant narratives rather than hearing more nuanced and contextual

understandings of the lives of children and families. All six scholarly works included in this literature review considered the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee families with children within school contexts. While we were particularly interested in the experiences of young children, given the scarcity of available research we also included studies that involved older children. Including studies that involved older children might have identified factors not as relevant to young children. None of the studies we found mentioned religion explicitly. This was surprising, as religion (with most of the population identifying as Sunni Muslim) shapes many of the values of Syrian families. To our knowledge, no studies have focused specifically on narratives about the transition process within the preschool context over time.

Discussion

In our integrative review, several insights were uncovered, which provided us with a comprehensive understanding. Firstly, we found that forced migration has a profound impact on the mental health of refugees. Mental health is one of five key factors that determine how well Syrian refugee children will transition into Canadian classrooms. Exposure to war and violence, and separation from family and friends, increases the risk of developing a mental health condition (Hadfield et al., 2017; Yohani et al., 2019). Yohani et al. (2019) reported that many Syrian refugee families feel socially isolated and lonely. Other families struggle with living in a culturally diverse and liberal society (Yamashita, 2018). Syrian refugee children in Canada reported high rates of symptoms of psychological trauma, and many reported being the target of racist bullying by their peers (Hadfield et al., 2017; Walker & Zuberi, 2020). While Walker and Zuberi (2020) found that school settings are one of the best places for school-age Syrian refugees to access mental health support, Canadian teachers and school counsellors are not trained in

trauma-informed care. As Walker and Zuberi (2020) cautioned without this specialized training, it will be challenging to address the unique needs of Syrian refugee students who require mental health support.

Another major factor that influences social inclusion within the context of Canada's public school system is the acquisition of English language skills. Yohani et al.'s (2019) research highlighted that learning to speak English while maintaining the first language is important as the first language is woven tightly with cultural, religious, and familial threads. The authors suggested that it is difficult to isolate language as a separate factor in the experiences of refugee families. What also became evident is that learning to speak English is experienced differently by children. Children are motivated by social integration and achievement in schools, while parents are motivated by a desire to obtain employment, explore career possibilities, and access resources, including school resources, for their children. There is generational tension between encouraging speaking English and maintaining culture and relationships through a first language.

Several researchers cited issues with the lack of teacher and school preparedness to receive Syrian refugee students. It is clear that more preparation, resources, and training are needed to provide educators with the tools they need to adequately meet the unique needs of the Syrian student population. While some Canadian teachers have tried to prepare culturally relevant pedagogies to support newly arrived Syrian refugee students, many teachers are unaware of these pedagogies. Teachers have reported systemic barriers including a lack of communication between provincial departments of education and schools, lack of notice to prepare for the arrival of Syrian refugee students, and a dearth of resources, including ESL teachers (Clark, 2017). As a result of trauma exposure both pre- and post-arrival, and because teachers have little or no training on how to adapt the curriculum to address the unique needs of

refugee students, educators in Canada may be unintentionally causing further psychological distress (Hadfield et al., 2017).

Future Research

What was most surprising about the literature was the absence of the voices of Syrian refugees. The stories of forced migration and resettlement in Canada, as told by Syrian refugee children and their families, remain hidden. As the global refugee crisis continues, and as Canada continues to accept children and families from war-affected nations, it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of refugee children and their families' experiences of belonging, agency, and identity as they attempt to settle into Canadian society. Preschool is often one of the first places that Syrian refugee families and their children encounter Canadian culture. Educational institutions and early childhood settings, in particular, are uniquely positioned to provide safe and socially inclusive spaces for Syrian refugee children and their families. Creating socially inclusive spaces within the preschool context, where diversity is celebrated, and where people typically feel supported and included, may help to facilitate integration and alleviate the distress caused by transitions. Research in this area is urgently needed.

Conclusion

When waves of refugees arrive in host nations, fleeing from political instability and danger in their countries of origin, there is a tendency to create a dominant story. This dominant story is most often based on limited knowledge about the past, present, and possible future lives of refugees. Often the uniqueness of the lives of refugees is obscured, and stories are told in relation to unknown cultural, political, institutional, familial, and linguistic narratives. Despite a

strong sense of a global world, and a world in which no country has been untouched by the arrival of refugees, the ordinary, intimate, and diverse lives of children and families who are refugees remain obscured. At the same time, refugees often draw on the memories of their homelands to define who they are and who they are becoming. School is an integral part of the lives of refugees. Without attending to the diverse voices and experiences of refugees and the complex history of forced migration and displacement, it is challenging to work with refugees in respectful, meaningful, and engaging ways in schools that intend to focus on social inclusion. Researchers, teachers, and school administrators have the potential to further the social inclusion of refugee children and families by attending closely to the stories they tell.

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Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Narrative Inquiry as Conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly

Narrative inquiry, as conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is a qualitative research methodology. The most commonly accepted definition of narrative inquiry is that it is a way of understanding experience,

a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (p. 20)

Dewey's (1938) conception of experience, that is, that experience is "a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39) shapes the work narrative inquirers undertake. It is a pragmatic ontological research methodology that looks to understand, and study, the meaning of experiences thought of narratively. While seemingly straight forward, it is not. It is complex, it is multifaceted, it has multiple dimensions. It is a way of knowing and is situated in relationality and community by inquiring into experiences (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry is rooted and built upon Dewey's theory of experience (1938) and is a way to understand and study experience which is composed and lived over time (Clandinin, 2013).

To narrative inquirers the phenomenon, people's experience, "is seen as narrative composition; that is experience itself is an embodied narrative life composition. Narrative is not, as some would have it, merely an analytic or representational device" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38). "Narrative inquiry, as its own methodology, has developed important terms and distinctions that have become more apparent and well-recognized as guiding what counts, or what fits, within the

field of narrative inquiry or narrative research” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 12). Narrative inquiry is not just a story, it is a way in which to study and understand experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

The focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals’ experience but is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Understood in this way, narrative inquiries begin and end in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study the individual’s experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing living alongside another, and writing and interpreting texts. Through the inquiry, we seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18)

The Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry

Working with Dewey’s (1938) two criteria of experience, continuity and interaction, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. Dewey’s (1938) first criteria of experience is continuity which means that an experience is not an isolated segregated phenomenon—but something that is experienced and composed over time. And, as Dewey (1938) writes, “It ought not be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience” (p. 34). Interaction, Dewey’s (1938) second criteria of experience, states that we must “assign equal rights to both factors in experience—objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions” (p. 38). These two criteria of experience, continuity and interaction, along with situation give rise to the three commonplaces. Thinking “simultaneously backward and forward, inward and outward with attention to place(s)” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 39), narrative inquiry is distinguished from other methodologies as a way to understand and inquire into lived experiences.

It is important to consider the commonplaces that Clandinin (2013) outlines and attend to the idea that experiences are co-constructed through one's prior experiences (temporal commonplace), personal conditions (sociality commonplace), and physical and topographical location (place commonplace). Narrative inquirers understand experience as a narrative phenomenon and consequently we inquire into experience with attentiveness to the commonplaces (Clandinin, 2013). In inquiring into experiences by considering the three commonplaces, we can begin to create meaningful understandings of lived and told stories.

When we, researchers, inquire into experiences, we attend to the temporality of both participants and our own lives and of “the temporality of places, things and events as we engage in inquiries” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 40). Attending to temporality means that as we inquire into experiences, we consider people, places, things, and events through attention to their past, present and future (Clandinin, 2013).

As narrative inquirers consider the sociality commonplace, they attend to both personal and societal conditions. The underlying narratives in which the experience is constructed are the social conditions—the cultural, social, institutional, familial, and linguistic narratives within which lives are embedded (Clandinin, 2013). The personal conditions to which we attend are the beliefs, morals, and feelings of an individual (Clandinin, 2013).

The physical and topographical places in which one lives shape experiences and are the third commonplace we attend to when inquiring into experience (Clandinin, 2013). Typically, place is something taken for granted and not often purposefully attended to. However, Indigenous peoples draw our attention to the connection of experience and topography (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin (2013) cites Leslie Marmon Silko (1996), as she reminds us that we

must consider place as we inquire into experience, otherwise we are suggesting that experience is without, and separate from place/

Methods

Finding a Place for the Study

In 2017, as described in Chapter 1, I accepted my supervisor's invitation to participate in a SSHRC-funded research project into the experiences of Syrian refugee children and families. During the fall of 2017 I began attending the research team meetings for the research project. It was here that I was able to meet the whole team including Dr. Sean Lessard, Dr. Vera Caine, Dr. Jean Clandinin, Dr. Heather Raymond, and Dr. Hiroko Kubota. Dr. Kubota was a postdoctoral fellow on the project. I also met Jennifer Dodd, a doctoral student working with the project. My research focus was within the larger project which focussed on the experiences of social inclusion of Syrian refugee children and families. Dr. Vera Caine had already made connections with the Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB), an organization that focussed on helping newcomers to Edmonton. Dr. Caine had worked previously with the MCHB and they invited us to attend their English classes where we hoped to be able to connect with mothers of preschool aged children interested in working as research participants.

Friday Morning Volunteering in the English Language Program

Beginning February 2018, I began volunteering at the MCHB English language programming for Syrian refugee mothers. The program was located on the northeast side of Edmonton in the second story of a walk up building located in a strip mall. On Fridays the MCHB hosted free English classes for mothers who qualified. Mothers were invited to bring

their preschool children. I, along with other members of the research team, volunteered on Friday mornings for about 3 months. We helped out wherever we were most needed. Although there could always be more assistance in the English classes, frequently our help was required in the childcare room. There were staff there to care for the children, but it was a small room, and sometimes there were many children. In the childcare room there were also young children who did not like being separated from their mothers. There were also babies who needed to be fed. Navigating all their needs were challenging and usually required as much help as possible. As researchers we became very involved with the young children and with the mothers. We sometimes sat in on the English classes and became involved with the mothers. We were also involved informally with the mothers and children at snack time when everyone gathered in the large carpeted area of the meeting room.

At this time, I had my son, aged 2.5 years, and my newborn baby, born a month earlier. My boys came with me to the Friday classes. The mothers came to see me in a different way when I had my boys with me. I was a mother rather than just a teacher or a researcher. Considering my inability to speak Arabic and the mothers' limited English skills, I communicated with the mothers by knowing nods, smiles, and caring for our babies alongside each other. Being able to be mothers together allowed a special way for us to connect with each other.

Finding Participants

My supervisory committee had suggested I work with two families of preschool-aged children. After getting to know the mothers and their children, Dr. Caine introduced our research to the mothers and asked if anyone would be willing to have conversations with us about the

school experiences of their children. There was a flood of enthusiasm. Many mothers wanted to participate—even mothers who did not have preschool-aged children wanted to work with us. We found enough mothers to almost fill the overall need for 11 families. However, in the weeks following the initial introduction, mothers approached Vera during the Friday classes to ask if we were still looking for participants because their neighbour or friend wanted to participate.

While I participated in the English classes, I connected with a mother named Gamila. She attended the Friday classes with her two youngest daughters—her baby, Nour, and her young daughter, Hibah, who was 4. The language barrier between us was challenging but Hibah spoke a little English and she told me that she went to school. I wondered if Gamila would be willing to share their experiences of Hibah going to preschool here in Canada. After Dr. Caine spoke about the study, I asked Gamila if she would be willing to have conversations about her family's experience of Hibah attending preschool. I was very happy when she agreed. We exchanged phone numbers. I told her I would message her to find a time we could get together. Communicating through text was easier for her, as she could translate it on her phone if she didn't understand.

Another mother, Fatima, also attended the Friday classes. Although I noticed her a number of times and I knew her outward appearance, we had not created a relationship. Dr. Caine suggested that I ask Fatima if she would be interested in working with me, as she had a young son, Azim, attending preschool at the time. When I approached her, she agreed. I looked forward to getting to know her and her family. We also exchanged phone numbers and I also told her I would message her to find a time we could connect.

I messaged both participants and asked to meet them wherever was most convenient for them and whatever time of day worked for them. They both asked me to come to their home. I

was so appreciative to be welcomed into their home and invited to meet with the rest of their family. When I came to their home either Hanan or Zamard, my language and cultural interpreter, would come with me. During the first visit the study was translated in entirety including all the paperwork and consent to make sure both Fatima and Gamila fully understood the study. Now knowing that they understood exactly what the study was about I made sure they were still interested in participating. Both families were. As per the required paperwork the mothers both signed the consent for their children to participate and I also received the children's, Hibah and Azim's, signed consent.

I met with the families approximately every 2 weeks for 6 months in their homes. Each meeting was audio recorded, transcribed, and translated into both English and Arabic. For each tape recorded conversation the family was provided with a thirty dollar gift card to Walmart.

Working with a Community Translator/Cultural Guide

Working with a translator and cultural guide added complexities while also addressing the language barrier that existed. Zamard and I worked with Fatima's family and Hanan and I worked with Gamila's family. It was challenging working with two different translators as it meant I had to navigate how each woman worked and had to create relationships with each of them and both families.

Adding translators and cultural guides, while absolutely necessary, also added complexities to our relationships and conversations. Sometimes it felt like we were sitting together in a circle—all of us contributing to the conversation in different ways. However, sometimes it felt like a linear relationship—either Zamard or Hanan in between myself and the mother and her family. I felt so dependent on Zamard and/or Hanan to be able to relay

everything to me and that the mothers and I could not share anything directly with each other. This was difficult, and I often considered what was happening during our conversations. I knew I was hearing Gamila and Fatima through Zamard and Hanan's stories, through their own experiences. What parts of Fatima and Gamila was I not getting? How much was I understanding that was also part of Zamard and Hanan's experiences? As we shared more time together I tried to have Gamila and Fatima speak to me as much as they could in English or through pictures on their phone. I noticed nonverbal communication that was happening during our conversations which added to my understanding of Gamila and Fatima's experience.

Both Zamard and Hanan were refugees. Hanan was a refugee from Syria, new to Canada, and Zamard was a Syrian-born refugee from Venezuela. Hanan was a few years younger than Fatima and Gamila. She lived at home with her parents and sibling. Zamard lived with her husband and her small son. Their first-hand knowledge of life in Syria and being displaced as refugees can be such a blessing because they are able to relate to Fatima and Gamila. But I wondered how much of their stories were also different from Gamila and Fatima's stories.

Relational Ethics

The larger study was approved by the University Ethics board at the University of Alberta, relational ethics was the main guide to how I lived alongside participants. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, ethical matters in narrative inquiry are not something that can be attended to once and then left as completed; they must stretch across the entire process and can shift and change. I have learned that narrative inquiry research is difficult, and complex. A narrative inquirer cannot enter the relationship, ask directed questions, and conclude with data analyses. With narrative inquiry, I must enter into a relationship with a participant, slowly and

patiently, in order to allow stories of experience to be co-constructed and properly inquired into. I need to sit alongside participants, both metaphorically and literally, and draw in all the complexities of the experiences that allow for exploration within the three dimensional narrative inquiry space (temporality, sociality, and place).

As a researcher I understand that conversations cannot be rushed. The answers to my questions might eventually emerge or might not. I learned that the more focused I was for certain answers the less I received. But the more open I was for their stories of experience to emerge, the more I learned. My job was not to provide clear, concise answers to questions posed during the research but to co-compose, with participants, in-depth rich narrative accounts. Within that careful relational space, the resonant threads across the participants' experiences emerged. Within the narrative inquiry space, I could alongside participants engage in world-travelling (Lugones, 1987).

Field, Interim, and Final Research Texts

During my conversations with Gamila and Fatima's family, my field texts consisted of audio recordings of our conversations, field notes that I wrote after our meetings, transcribed conversations, and notes I made as I revisited the audio recordings of our conversations. I also made field notes about our Friday English classes, and about the family BBQ we had for all the participants of the larger study.

Each audio recording was transcribed, and all artifacts and field notes were included to be analyzed. As I listened to voice recordings, read transcripts, and considered my artifacts and field notes, I continued to inquire with them through the three dimensions of narrative inquiry—temporality, place and sociality. During the inquiry into field text, I carefully considered who I

was and who my translators were through the process. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) say, narrative inquirers themselves are not absent in the field. “When narrative inquirers are in the field, they are never there as disembodied recorders of someone else’s experience. They too are having an experience, the experience of the inquiry that entails the experience they set out to explore” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81).

I paid careful consideration to allow the field text to turn into interim research texts and resulting in final research texts to unfold organically and not lead it to the place that I thought was important for the research. I learned that this is truly one of the more difficult parts. If I could have directed the way in which the text unfolded, I would have known exactly how the stories and thoughts would have been organized and it would have made the process much easier. However, I was mindful that the objective is not to create a story for entertainment purposes; nor was it focused on answering my research question. It was important that I was mindful to allow the process the true integrity that it deserved. I was careful to honor their stories and the process of co-constructing the retelling of their stories.

These ethical considerations are foundational during the entire process of narrative inquiry; however, it is even more important to have a heightened ethical awareness as the research begins to take the shape of final research texts. I ensured that I took time to inquire into the three dimensions, temporal, social and place to ensure they are woven through our co-constructed stories, so that I could articulate their retold stories with all its richness, complexity and dimensionality. This is an integral way to honor my participants and their stories.

Moving from Field Texts to Research Texts: Composing Narrative Accounts

Interestingly, the experience of composing narrative accounts for my two participant families was very different. Upon reflection it shouldn't have been surprising as the stories that were shared and the experiences I had with the families were very different themselves. Now thinking back, it is only natural that creating their narrative accounts would be reflective of that.

I found composing Gamila's narrative account to go rather smoothly. I began writing some of the pivotal stories that had to be told. These stories were so traumatic, so racist, so heart wrenching. These stories were ones that I had spent a lot of time thinking *with*. I had spent much time retelling and inquiring into these stories with myself, my peers, fellow educators, and my research team. Although one is never done inquiring, when I sat down to write these stories, I felt that I had sat with them, understood the importance of them, and knew what it was that needed to be written.

After having written those stories I went through my field texts finding stories or memories that helped me stitch it together. With all that in mind I also wanted to make sure that I gave a strong sense of who Gamila and who her family was. It was only after trying to write Fatima's account that I realized how *easy* it was for me to write Gamila's. I really struggled writing Fatima's account. I spent much time thinking about what to write and going through my field and research text. Having not done narrative inquiry before I began to panic, thinking I must have done a poor job in my conversations with Fatima because I had *nothing* to write about. Unlike Gamila's stories, there were no stories speaking to me, I only found mundane common life experiences in my texts and transcripts.

I listened, again, to my audio recordings with Fatima as I simultaneously went through my notes, hoping I had missed some stories that I could tell. Listening to the recordings in a

different time and a different place, provided me with different insight to our conversations together. Although this was different than my first experience of hearing our conversations, making me think differently than the first time, the reality was the stories were not different. Having felt very stuck I began giving myself writing goals. I would sit down and make myself write three pages, or five pages—depending upon the amount of time I had to write. It felt like I wasn't writing anything significant or anything that would contribute to Fatima's narrative account but I knew I had to start somewhere.

Through this process with much reworking and reorganizing, the narrative account began to take shape. I was very lucky for the feedback Dr. Clandinin provided me. It acted as such a helpful guide as to what ways it was that I needed to continue to work and write. One important piece of feedback provided to me was that I needed to work in more stories about Fatima, that her narrative account was missing her voice. I thought with this and realized how it paralleled the way in which Fatima lived her life—an extraordinarily important foundational pillar. Fatima was often in the shadow. Just like the way in which she would invite me into her home, hidden behind the door.

In one of my meetings with Dr. Lessard and Dr. Clandinin I was asked about what my process was in regards to writing my narrative accounts. At first, not understanding, I didn't know how to answer. Not seeing myself as a writer and never engaging in such a writing process before, I thought it was pretty self-explanatory—I looked through my field texts and research texts, identified stories and moments, and wrote them down. But in thinking further it became clear as to why my experiences between the two accounts were so different. Because some of the stories with Gamila's family were poignant I was called to inquire into them many times before writing them. However, with Fatima's stories, I had not yet inquired into them. The inquiry

process with Fatima's stories happened for me as I wrote them, clearly requiring a lot more time and energy. There is much to be learned from Fatima's mundane stories as I learned when I engaged and inquired with them.

Chapter 4: Gamila's Family

Meeting Gamila

When I circled back and thought about Gamila, the relationship we have built, and the stories that she shared with me, I thought of her as a woman, a mother, a wife, student, homemaker, seamstress, daughter, sister, and the most gracious host. When I thought of Gamila, I thought of a warm smile and gentle laughter. When I thought of Gamila, I thought about her living room in the front of her townhome located in the community of Evergreen, Edmonton.

When I first met Gamila in her home, her living room was stuffed with oversized leather sofas and loveseats with which the unit was first furnished. While initially the leather furniture felt out of place, with Gamila's gentle touch, over time and with careful selection of wall hangings, pillows, and special Muslim and Quran objects, the living room came to reflect Gamila's family. The way in which that room transitioned over the time I spent with her made me feel warm and homey. I felt such warmth in my heart on each meeting with her and her family when I was able to comment on the newest interior decoration strategically placed in their home. Each time, Gamila beamed with pride and pointed out something in the item that had drawn her to it, telling me why it was special.

When I thought about Gamila, I thought of strong Arabic coffee. Every time we met, she served coffee near the end of our visit—usually around the time I mentioned it was time for me to go. I smile when I think about the timing of coffee. She always made me feel like she didn't want me to leave. She was a gracious host—not only did we share great conversation and company, enjoy delicious treats and coffee together, but, most importantly, she made me feel

cared about and valued. Every time I left, I was reminded of how good it felt to be connected and in relationship with people.

She always served coffee on a collapsible table positioned for my optimal convenience. Coffee was served in the most beautiful traditional set of coffee cups—one of only a few of Gamila’s prized possessions brought with her from her life in Lebanon, where she was first displaced from her beloved home—Syria. After pouring the hot coffee into the cups she would inspect the cups and find the one with the most bubbles, this would be the one she would always serve me. She told me the more bubbles the better the coffee, and she would always make sure I was served the best cup of coffee. Such care was taken to ensure the coffee I was served was as perfect as possible. This is how she served coffee, every time. Sharing coffee was not just drinking a deliciously hot liquid—but it was an experience. One in which left me feeling special and cared about, every single time. Sharing coffee was a way for Gamila to be able to honor her guests, and it would fill me with love every time she would serve me coffee. It was an honor to share coffee with Gamila.

Back to the Beginning

I met Gamila and her youngest two daughters, Hibah and Nour, at the Friday morning English classes offered by the Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB). Because Gamila had a child younger than 18 months of age, she was not eligible for the free childcare provided to mothers that allowed them to attend full-time English classes. The MCHB offered classes twice a week for about 3 hours per day. There was childcare provided in a room just outside the door of the English classroom. However, it was challenging for children who were not yet of school age who did not like being away from their mothers, and for the babies who needed to be fed by their

mothers. The weather factored into how many mothers and children attended each Friday. On cold days, many mothers did not want to venture outside in the dangerously freezing temperatures with their small children. While some mothers relied on public transportation to get them to the classes, others were driven by their husbands. When the roads were treacherous, mothers did not come. Every class provided a different dynamic, depending upon who was there. Additionally, on school holidays, mothers brought all their children and the childcare room seemed to burst at the seams with energy and excitement as many school age children and younger children filled the room.

Although I did not have many opportunities to converse with Gamila at the English classes, I was able to interact and watch her two daughters. Because Nour was not quite a year, she mostly sat in a bouncy chair with a childcare worker bouncing her and cooing to her in order to keep her content. Hibah rarely engaged in play or conversation with me. When I offered to read or color with her, she took the book and looked at it herself, or she softly smiled and listened as I chattered about what we were coloring. She did not respond. She liked to dress up in frilly pink and purple dresses. She wore glasses that wound around the back of her ears to help keep them in place, something she hated.

Over the 6 months that I regularly attended the weekly English classes at MCHB, I learned through watching the mothers and children, and through chatting with childcare workers. The childcare workers enjoyed having my company, as they spoke of their loneliness and of missing their families. Strategically MCHB sought to employ as many refugees and new Canadians as possible. The childcare workers had all been refugees. We talked about many different things and they found pleasure in teaching me about their interpretations of the Quran. As I had worked at a school with a few Muslim families, I was familiar with some of their beliefs

and teachings. One memorable conversation was around when women had to wear their hijabs and burkas. I learned from them that women must cover up when they were around men that they could marry. If the female was only around her father, brother, children, husband, or females, she could remove her hijab and burka. However, if she was in the presence of anyone else, she must cover up, even when she was married, because there is always the chance that a woman might have to marry again such as when a husband passed away, and a woman needed to remarry.

Being Welcomed into Gamila's Home

On March 19th, 2018, I was first welcomed into Gamila's home and stepped into her life. I was honored with the privilege of hearing her life stories of before, during, and after she became a refugee. She and her family were displaced from Syria and eventually came to Edmonton. I was nervous entering Gamila's house and meeting her husband and other children. Because this was my first experience as a narrative inquirer, everything was new to me. I wanted to do everything well and respectfully. I picked up Hanan, who became my interpreter of many things—language, culture, and community. Not only was it challenging for me to understand Gamila and her family because of language barriers, but there were many things we didn't know or understand about each other. I am sure Gamila and her family found me challenging to understand.

As Hanan and I pulled up to the complex of row townhomes where Gamila and her family lived, I noticed women walking around in burkas and hijabs. We found Gamila's home and rang the doorbell. Nadim, Gamila's husband, opened the door and, without thinking, I immediately extended my arm to greet him with a handshake. In that instant, the conversation about when it is appropriate for women to be without burkas and hijabs flooded my mind.

Although I was not Muslim, I knew many Muslim men do not touch women other than their wife or family members. He graciously smiled and, stepping back, he folded his hands on the bottom of his chest and bowed his head. Embarrassed, I quickly pulled my hand back—I knew better but had forgotten in my nervousness. Hanan laughed at my misstep and she and Nadim introduced themselves to each other in Arabic. Although this was not my desired first impression and introduction, it was the perfect introduction to Nadim.

Gamila's Family

Nadim was gracious and welcoming—I had not worked with many Syrian families, but even at this moment I felt this experience was going to be different. He was an invested father who clearly had special relationships with his children. It was apparent as he played, wrestled, and laughed with them. Nadim smiled often and made me feel welcome in their home. Nadim wanted to participate in my conversations with Gamila. Initially I wondered if he wanted to supervise our conversations. However, as our visits continued, he left part way through our conversations or joined in partway through. If we were speaking about something that he believed to be sensitive in nature, he graciously excused himself. I loved these kind and attentive qualities in Nadim.

Nadim's values, beliefs, and personal qualities were magnified when, approximately halfway through our time together, I found out that while Gamila was in English language classes, he was not. Because he was the one at home, he took on the household responsibilities of cleaning and cooking. I remember his belly laughter and wide eyes, as he told me how much work it was to clean the house every day and make food for their family. *Cook, cook, cook, clean, cook, clean, clean, clean—it is so much work. Phew, I tired!* Nadim told me. We all

laughed at his animation and honesty. He also said that the only thing he knew how to make was soup, so they ate soup every day. He said he couldn't wait for his English language classes to start so Gamila could cook again. I loved that he shared this with me and took on the woman's responsibilities and worked with Gamila as a team.

Gamila had five children, born in different countries, during the years her life transitioned from living peacefully in Syria to being a refugee in Canada. Junaid, a 9-year-old boy, and Hafsa, an 8-year-old girl, were the oldest two children, both born in Syria. They remembered their time in Syria and Lebanon and told me they were happy to be in Canada and that they loved school. Anwar, a 5-year-old boy, and Hibah, a 4-year-old girl, were born in Lebanon. Nour, the 1-year-old baby of the family, was born in Canada. Both Gamila and Nadim laughed about Nour's birthplace and affectionately called her *The Canadian*. It became a family joke and every time Nour did something a little different they said, *It's because she's Canadian!*. As I learned with my young sons, teaching children to eat is much more difficult than one might think. Over the time I met with Gamila's family, Nour was being introduced to solid foods—she showed an aversion to Arabic food and they told me that she seemed to prefer plain food, Canadian food. They said, “Of course she likes that better—Nour Canadian!”

I had recently given birth to my second son and Gamila and I connected over that. One of the things that allowed me to feel a deep connection to Gamila was motherhood and the love and protection we felt for our children. As we continued our conversations, I shared with Gamila that I was a teacher in the public school system. Gamila shared with me that in her culture it was customary to keep their baby's umbilical cord and to take it to a special place after they were born to bury it. In Syria, she carefully took both of her babies' umbilical cords to the school and buried them there—in a way to honor schooling and to show her deep respect for education. She

hoped to bless her children with the gift of scholastic intellect. In her sharing of this story, she showed how much she valued and cherished school. Gamila herself stopped attending school in Grade 6, which I learned was typical in Syria. It was common belief that after Grade 6, girls could stay home and help take care of the home and family.

During one visit, Gamila mentioned that she wanted to show me something. She left the living room, went upstairs, and returned with some garments draped across both her extended arms. She was proud and excited to be sharing these items with me. Since arriving in Canada, she had obtained a sewing machine and had created some beautiful dresses for herself and her girls. Gamila was a seamstress! She had been a seamstress in Syria, and she was excited to be able to sew again. It was wonderful to see Gamila begin to restore herself in her new homeplace and context as an experienced and skilled seamstress.

The Journey to Canada

Gamila and her family had lost everything in Syria—their family home had burned down 3 years before they were relocated to Canada. The fire forced them to flee Syria for Lebanon and to obtain refugee status. While the journey to Lebanon was a 1-hour bus ride, they were held up at the border as everyone on the bus had to be cleared and vetted. Gamila and her family were held for a long time as the officials were giving them an extremely difficult time about the name of their daughter, Hafsa. They questioned why they named their daughter in this way. The name, Hafsa, meant Liberation, to free someone/something. It was the name of some of the Syrian rebel groups. Initially they did not want to let their family enter Lebanon as they believed they might have been rebels themselves. However, after a long time of trying to convince the officials that it

was *just a name* and that there was no connection, they finally let them pass and continue on their journey to Lebanon.

Gamila's family spent 3 years in Lebanon as refugees. During the first 2 years they waited for things to settle in Syria so they could return. They had not thought they would be moving. They were focused on waiting out the unrest and war in Syria so they could return home. During the third year in Lebanon, they realized that they, who had refugee status, would not be returning to their beloved home. While Lebanon had provided refuge from the rebels in Syria, Gamila and Nadim found it was a difficult place to live. They lived in an old office condo made of cement with few windows. Because their home had burned, they had no possessions. Living in Lebanon with almost nothing was devastating. Nadim worked in construction but was not always paid. Nadim and Gamila felt the people of Lebanon did not respect them. The children recounted school experiences where they often felt scared. They hated school in Lebanon and remembered being disciplined by being hit and yelled at. The children experienced racism in schools and Nadim experienced racism in the workplace. Their experiences in Lebanon contributed to their decision to find refuge in another country, somewhere far away from their beloved Syria, their family, and friends. Seeing now how much they cherished their family, friends, and their country, I can only imagine how difficult things must have been for them to agree to move so far away from everything they had ever known.

Nadim carefully considered the country to which he would agree to move. In asking questions and using the internet to research, he decided he would only move his family to either Australia or Canada. Should they be offered another country, he would refuse. When they were offered Canada as a place to relocate, Nadim shared that he wanted to learn about Canada first and used YouTube as a research platform to try to learn about life in Canada. Nadim also had a

friend who lived in Edmonton which allowed him to ask questions and learn some foundational pieces about life in Canada. This allowed him some understanding of what their life would be like in a new country, so different than anything they had known.

Arriving in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

When they first arrived, they spent 14 days at the reception house and were then moved to a two-bedroom apartment in a small walk up in the Bell area of northeast Edmonton. It was a small space for two adults and four children. Junaid, Hafsa, and Anwar were enrolled in Bell, the community school at the beginning of the school year. In November of that year the family was excited to be connected to subsidized housing in a nearby neighborhood. They would be moving to a two-story row townhome with three bedrooms, a basement, and a small backyard. This would be so much more comfortable for their large family and they could not wait to move. The townhome was around the corner from another elementary school, Evergreen. Nadim, assuming it would be better for the children to attend the closer school, switched his children's school to Evergreen in November. The rest of that school year the children struggled a lot, especially Junaid, the oldest. Gamila and Nadim quickly learned of the variability of Edmonton schools and how different school experiences could be, even though schools were physically close together.

Schools Are Not the Same

When it came time for the family to confirm registration for their children for the following September, Nadim desperately wanted the children to return to Bell School. Nadim questioned me about the school registration processes in Edmonton during one of our visits. In trying to understand exactly what was going on, I asked why it was, exactly, that he wanted the

children to return to Bell. Firstly, he told me, the demographics of Evergreen were much different. Many of the students were Arabic-speaking, Muslim, and were their neighbors. Nadim found this troubling as his children, new to the English language, did not practice it at school as they spoke Arabic with their peers. He also did not share the same beliefs and values of some of the other families. Some of their values were influencing his children in troubling ways. Secondly, the staff and teachers of Evergreen did not seem to be able to create meaningful relationships with Nadim's children, and his children longed for relationships with their teachers. The school culture at Bell was different than at Evergreen. The children, Nadim, and Gamila felt much more supported at Bell. Thirdly, the most pressing issue was that all the neighborhood children attended Evergreen. Nadim and his family lived in a low-income subsidized housing complex where many of the school children lived. Living in this complex was one specific boy, 2 years older than Junaid, who bullied him at school and at home. This was to such an extent that neighbors and even the boy's own uncle had called the police on this child. I had the heart wrenching experience of witnessing the bullying myself during one visit.

This bullying had horrible effects on Junaid. He endured it at home in his neighborhood but also at school. Junaid had already been through so much trauma in his life. He remembers the war in Syria, and the poverty and racism in Lebanon, as well as his abrupt arrival in Canada with no English language skills. Although Junaid did not want to share stories of the bullying with me, I knew his angry outbursts and running away were causing tension at school and resulted in tension between Junaid and his parents and life at home. Nadim and Gamila told me they did not know what to do. They knew they had to change him back to Bell. Their perception was that he was getting the help he needed there: he was met with kindness and respect, and he could get away from his bully—for at least some of the day.

As Nadim was trying to figure out how to re-register the children in Bell school, I offered to go with him. My intention was to ensure that there were not any misunderstandings between Nadim and the schools. First, Nadim called Bell and made an appointment for both he and I to attend a meeting. During that meeting, the assistant principal said that before he could approve the transfer for the children, he would have to get approval from Evergreen. As we sat in the office, he called Evergreen and was told that we needed to meet with Evergreen staff first. Nadim called and made an appointment for us to go to Evergreen. When I met Nadim the following day to go to the meeting at Evergreen, his body was much tenser and he was more nervous than he was the day at Bell. I told him not to worry as we were there to have a discussion with Evergreen staff. He was desperate for them to approve the move to Bell school. Nadim brought Junaid and Hafsa with him this time and they led us into the school and to the main office. When we arrived, two people were waiting for us and met the children with greetings and conversation that were an attempt to show themselves as having a good relationship with the children. The person, who did not introduce herself, led us into an office where we all, including the two children, sat around a circular table. I was seated between the two women facilitating the meeting but slightly behind them, in a way that I was cut off and not really part of the circle. Without introductions, without greetings, or an outline of the purpose of the meeting, they began to berate Junaid by recounting behavioral instances that had taken place in the school. A few times Nadim tried to redirect the conversation by saying that he did not want his child to have to revisit these difficult moments and that all he wanted was to get approval to return his children to Bell School. It didn't work. They started talking to Hafsa, tag-teaming off each other with comments such as, *You don't like this school? Why don't you like Evergreen? You don't like your friends here? You don't like your teacher here?*. The intensity in

their voices was nothing I had ever experienced. I was in shock during the whole meeting. It was clear that we just needed to get out so Nadim quietly said *Ok, Ok, Ok, yes, thank you, thank you* as he tried to end the meeting. While I cannot remember all that was said, the very last thing they said was recounting an instance when Junaid supposedly said he wanted to go back to Syria and wanted to *Shoot this (Evergreen School) place up*.

Neither person, who I later figured out were the principal and vice principal, spoke to me or made any attempt to learn who I was or why I was there. I was disgusted by the ways they treated Nadim and his children. As a teacher, I trusted that those in the teaching profession worked in the best interests of children and families. The experience made me question many things as I awakened to what could happen to children and families in schools.

Gamila's English Classes

Upon the arrival of Gamila and her family in Edmonton, she was immediately scared of the westernized ways and the lack of division between males and females. Both Gamila and Nadim had almost no English language skills upon their arrival to Canada. In order to apply for Canadian citizenship as well as to be able to use English to live and work, they were required to enroll in English language classes. During the intake interview, Gamila purposefully did very poorly on the English language exam and acted like she had almost no reading or writing comprehension. She wanted to be placed in the schooling for illiterate women so she did not have to be in a class with men. Shortly after being enrolled and beginning to attend classes, she realized how slow the progression of the classes was and came to realize how long it was going to take her to get to the appropriate level so she could apply and write the exam for citizenship. Realizing this, she tried to switch her registration so she could more appropriately indicate her

skills. By then, she had grown used to being in close proximity to men, other than her husband, and was now comfortable enough to take classes with men.

She was told she could not switch and that she would have to complete the class in which she was registered. Becoming desperate she began asking Hanan questions about how to register in English classes during one of our visits. All of the information did not make sense to Hanan and I. We made some phone calls and finally realized that Gamila would have to go in person and meet one of the intake workers to sort it out. However, when she and Nadim had gone alone, they were completely disregarded and told that she could not redo the exam. This conflicted with the information Hanan and I were being told over the phone. It seemed we would have to go to Catholic Social Services in person to try and have Gamila placed in the appropriate English language class.

I accompanied her to the same Catholic Social Services office where she and Nadim had already gone and where they had asked for assistance to allow Gamila to redo the admittance exam and be placed in her appropriate level. When we were finally able to see one of the intake workers, he seemed annoyed that we were there. Considering Gamila had already completed the test, he saw no point in us being there. Gamila was nervous and too intimidated to speak up for herself. I spoke on her behalf.

While I had not intended to speak on her behalf, I felt it was important that her concerns be heard and addressed. I wanted to make sure that Gamila and Nadim fully understood what was being communicated to them, and I wanted to make sure that they were explaining their situation clearly to the intake worker. I wonder how my stepping in at this moment impacted the trajectory of what was to come. I had felt some tension around accompanying Gamila. My intention was to act more as a culture brokerage than a representative. However, as I spoke on

Gamila's behalf, I wonder if the intake worker was trying to appease me and did not ever have any intention of offering Gamila the support she needed. While the intake worker seemed resistant, he finally gave us an appointment in 2 weeks for Gamila to return and rewrite the exam. Nadim and Gamila were so happy.

At my next visit I was anxious to hear how her exam went. When I asked her about it, she told me that she had gone but when she arrived, they told her she wasn't allowed to rewrite the exam and had to remain in her current class. I remember the sinking feeling I had. Somehow, though I had a feeling that might have been the outcome. I was angry that Gamila and I were treated so differently. When I was present, the intake worker promised to give Gamila what she was requesting. When I was not there, his commitment made to her was not honoured. I, with so much privilege, could get Gamila the outcome that she needed—however, without me, her request was not honoured. Gamila continued to stay in the lower-level class. And I learned something about how privilege and racism worked.

Hibah

During one of our visits, Nadim enthusiastically shared a story about Hibah who had been attending preschool classes. Typically, preschool classes are private and must be paid for by parents but Hibah was enrolled in the Edmonton Public School Board's preschool program and was eligible to attend for free under the ELL (English Language Learner) qualification. Nadim and Gamila did not know much about Hibah's experience in the class. However, as part of the program, a facilitator came to the home of each child to meet with their family. During the facilitator's first visit, Nadim described how they were given some papers and the preschool was described. They did not know that Hibah refused to speak at school. They did not know that she

communicated very little there. During the second visit, the facilitator came equipped with resources and information with the intention of coming up with a comprehensive plan with the family to support Hibah's lack of verbal communication. As Nadim told the story, he laughed robustly, saying that she must have the wrong child because *His Hibah* would not stop talking at home.

Interestingly she had been attending preschool for 3 months where she had yet to communicate verbally. It is interesting that it took this length of time for the school to begin to reach out to the parents to begin a more authentic partnership with Hibah's education at the heart of the relationship. It was so strange, why did they not question her silence earlier? Was it some sort of racism or some kind of arrogant perception? After the second meeting with the facilitator, and with the preschool facilitator's realization that Hibah was able to communicate verbally, Gamila and Nasir and the school could work together to have Hibah begin to speak at school. She did begin to speak at school, slowly.

A Family Meal

In December 2018, we arranged a celebratory dinner. There was so much hype around Christmas, technically a Christian holiday, I felt it was important to honor and celebrate something special from Gamila's Arabic-speaking Muslim traditions. Pausing and thinking about the magnitude of Christmas, reminded me of the way in which Christmas was commercialized in Canada. Christmas was often celebrated with Santa, presents, feasts, and statutory holidays from work and school and not as the birth of Christ. Even though I knew that Gamila and Nadim did not celebrate the religious holiday of Christmas, I knew they could not miss the commercial cultural component of Christmas.

Hanan and I planned a celebration that would occur before the December school holiday. Hanan facilitated the ordering of all the dishes required for a proper Arabic feast. When we got to Gamila's house with the meal, we were invited into the kitchen where they spread out a large blanket on the floor. All five children, with Nadim, Gamila, Hanan, and I, sat around the perimeter of the blanket and shared the meal of salad, chicken, and rice together. I loved watching Nadim and Gamila interact with their children—both of them were so attentive to their children, waiting to eat their own meal after the children had eaten. I found it beautiful to watch how their caring and generosity had shaped their children as all the children took care and helped each other reach the dishes or refill their plates. The parents' generosity had also shaped how their children interacted with me as they were all mindful of me. To say I overate during that meal is an understatement. However, even though I was already too full, I had to eat the last stuffed grape leaf that they insisted I have, and I had to eat the second and third helping plated for me by Junaid and Hanan. That uncomfortably full belly was an honor.

We all enjoyed that meal together. They loved the opportunity to share their favourite dishes with me and to tell me all about them. I found it so lovely for all of us to be sitting together, sharing smiles, laughter, and jokes—which is always how I experience their home. Near the end of our dinner, Hafsa commented that this was the evening of their school Christmas concert. At first I felt horrible, thinking that they had intentionally missed the school concert because of our dinner plans. However, they made it clear that because they do not celebrate Christmas, they had not planned to attend.

Chapter 5: Meeting Fatima's Family

Meeting Fatima in her home

I first visited Fatima at her home on March 19th, 2018. This was not the first time I had met her as I had met her several times earlier as she was a regular participant in the Friday morning English language classes at the Multicultural Health Brokerage (MCHB). But this was the first time I had seen her in the ways that I saw her that March morning in her home in Edmonton.

Having parked a short distance away, I walked up to their row town home in, what is called in Edmonton, a low income housing complex. Hanan, the person who accompanied me as a translator, and I rang the doorbell and stepped back to wait for her to come to the door. The door slowly opened and, to my confusion, there was nobody there. As I stood there feeling puzzled, I heard a faint voice saying "come come, come in". I nervously entered the home and, once having done so, I saw Fatima hiding behind the door. It took me a couple moments to realize who was hidden behind the door. It was Fatima, but without her religious garments! When Fatima attended the English classes, she always wore a burka and niqab and I had not seen her face. As I stood there in her entranceway, I did not recognize her. Not until she spoke a few words and laughed did I realize it was her. I recognized her familiar voice and her laughter. As I visited subsequent times, I became accustomed to her way of greeting me, as it was always how I was welcomed into her home. A slow opening of the door that she hid behind to make sure no passerby's saw her without her burka and niqab. Even though I was always met by a door cautiously opening and an empty entryway the way in which she would be welcoming me with her kind and enthusiastic words made it so inviting. As soon as we were in her home and she closed the door I would be met with her excited energy and smiling face and eyes.

Welcomed into Her Home and Community

On that first visit, when Fatima welcomed me into her home, she also welcomed me into part of her Edmonton community. That first day she had two friends at her home and I was invited to sit with them. What a pleasure it was as my hour-long visit was filled with energy, laughter, treats, and friendship. However, the way she welcomed me into her home and community raised questions about what Fatima thought my intentions were. Did she know I was there as a researcher or a possible new Canadian friend? Earlier, at the MCHB, I asked Fatima if she would be willing to have conversations with me about her family's experiences of Azim's preschool and early childhood experiences. At the MCHB, she was enthusiastic about participating. With her welcome to her house, I was worried that she had not fully understood me. Perhaps she did not want to work together in a researcher/participant relationship.

I felt I needed to make sure she understood. In order to make sure Fatima understood, I asked Hanan to clearly translate my purposes for being there. Hanan translated what I said and also translated the necessary paperwork—the ethics agreement and the participant consent letters. Fatima told me that there were some people in her community that were connected with volunteers who would come visit them in their home to help them practice their English and be a social connection. Fatima longed for visitors and social stimulation as it was one of the things she missed most about her life in Syria. However, even as Hanan and I explained our purposes and had Fatima sign the consent forms, Fatima continued to be excited about my presence in her home and her willingness to be involved. Even though I could not understand much of the conversation, and even though Hanan was there with me, I chose to simply sit in their company. The women were excited and enthusiastic in their conversation. The language that I could understand was a language of laughter and smiles; the energy was of happiness and fun.

I was happy to see that Fatima had established a community in a short time. However, as I came to know her over time, I learned that Fatima and her family were quick to establish communities. On that first visit, I enjoyed witnessing a typical afternoon for Fatima. After that first visit, and her new understanding of why I was there, it was only her and her husband, Abeer, waiting for me in subsequent visits. I did not ask Fatima to not invite her friends when I visited, but she clearly understood that was not what I wanted. She wanted to fulfill her obligations to me. When Fatima does something, she does it to the very best of her ability. After the first visit, Fatima was ready to be a participant and engage wholeheartedly in the research.

Slipping Backward in Time: The Stories That Came Before the Laughter-Filled Welcome

Fatima grew up on a farm. She loved being surrounded by animals and dreamed that one day she would become a veterinarian. She told me that when she was a child she was fascinated with ants—she gave them sugar and watched them carry the crystals back to their home. Watching animals was intriguing to her. I began to understand that Fatima is a very inquisitive, involved, hardworking, and high achieving woman. In Syria in her community, it was typical for girls to stop their formal education at Grade 5—Fatima completed Grade 10. This was quite exceptional. Knowing her in the way I do now, I no longer find this surprising. I saw her fascination with what was around her in her actions. Her attentiveness to detail was always present. The food that she prepared for our visits was the best and the most intricate labour-intensive dishes. She prided herself in doing things well.

The Journey from Syria to Lebanon to Canada

“When we came here, it’s like when you come back from hell.”

Fatima March 19th, 2018

When Fatima remembered or spoke of Syria and her journey to Canada she often told me that she wanted to forget everything before Canada. Life in Syria before the war was hard because of the lying and cheating. There was no place for children to play soccer nor were there swimming pools.

When Fatima and her family fled Syria, she was separated from Aveer. Aveer was able to enter Lebanon on his work visa but Fatima and the children were not allowed to enter. Aveer and Fatima explained that gangs helped them cross into Lebanon but there was a cost. It cost Aveer a payment of \$200 USD to the gang before Fatima and their two small children could enter. Shortly after they crossed, the price substantially increased to about \$1,000 USD/person. In order for Fatima and the children to enter, they snuck through the brush and, when it was safe, the gang members helped them cross the water to the other side. Fatima and Aveer emphasized how short the distance was-- about 2 meters!. Aveer spoke about how ridiculous this was. He laughed enthusiastically when he explained that this is how his family had to escape the war—*no choice!* he said. It was clear that he thought it was unbelievable that he could simply enter Lebanon with no problems because he was working but his own family, his wife, and two young children, had to sneak through the wilderness and through the water without him. And the thought that he had to pay for this! Pay for the gangs to escort his family—Aveer hung his head and shook it in disbelief.

Life as refugees in Lebanon was very difficult for Fatima and her family. They were unable to bring anything with them as they fled for their safety from Syria to Lebanon. Although Aveer was technically working in Lebanon, he was not always paid. They lived in Lebanon for 4 years, where it was very expensive and difficult to find work. They lived in a single room

apartment which had no doors and only cement. They only had electricity for certain hours during the day. The lack of electricity made it difficult to manage the home and to cook. They had to cook when the power was on and keep the fridge door closed so food did not go bad. The internet wasn't very good which made it difficult to stay connected with family and loved ones.

Fatima and her family experienced harsh racism as Syrians in Lebanon. Fatima told me how she felt safer and more accepted wearing her niqab here in Canada than she did in Lebanon. Schooling for Syrian children in Lebanon was very difficult and Fatima expressed that "kids have depression from school". Abeer and Fatima laughed and told me that when their children were misbehaving at home here in Canada or having bad attitudes they would threaten, *You want to go back to Lebanon?* and the children would enthusiastically reply *no, no, no!*

Fatima's Family in Edmonton

Fatima is very proud of her five children. Adnan, her oldest, was born in Syria and is now 10 and in Grade 4 at Connor School. During our time together, I enjoyed seeing him step in and help his parents when needed. One significant moment occurred when his younger brother, Rafiq, fell off a swing at the playground and broke his arm. Adnan went to the hospital with his dad and Rafiq to help his father with translation. The oldest girl, Abia, was also born in Syria and seems to emulate her mother's positivity, and hard work. Fatima often says that *Abia is a good girl. She always do everything like a Mom do.* The next two boys, Rafiq, 7 years old, and Azim, 3 years old, were born in Lebanon. The adored baby, Najam, was described by Abia as *1 year and 3 months old and the only Canadian!*

From my first meeting with Aveer, Fatima's husband, he was smiling. He is friendly, inviting, and always kind to me. He welcomed me into their home immediately and offered an open invitation for me to come back anytime. He made me feel wanted there.

Aveer's family enjoyed eating nuts and he offered them to me—however, I have a severe nut allergy and immediately explained how dangerous they were for me. I did not want them to think I was ungracious, so I needed them to understand the severity of my allergies. Aveer shared that in Syria when he walked home from work, the street was full of the delicious aroma of roasting nuts. Vendors had large vats of roasting nuts and he often picked some up on his way home. He motioned to me how he cracked the nuts open with his teeth and enjoyed them. He ate so many that he had a divot, which he showed me, in his front left tooth from cracking the shells. Whenever I saw his nut-cracking tooth, I was spirited away to an imagined street in Syria. I understood that nuts were special for Aveer and Fatima. It was more than the taste and the enjoyment of eating them, but it was also a small piece of their home in Syria. When Aveer shared his story, he told it with such enthusiasm and passion I felt I could smell the delicious roasting nuts and imagine myself walking down the street.

Fatima and Aveer were not offended and understood that I wished I could enjoy the nuts with them, and the numerous treats Fatima cooked with pistachios, but I couldn't. True to their attention to detail, they never brought nuts out again.

The Family Left Behind

Aveer had brothers and sisters who lived near each other in Lebanon. Many of Fatima's family still live in danger in Syria, but it is too difficult and expensive for them to leave now. Sadly, Fatima is still very worried about their safety. However, she does not want to return to

Syria even though she misses her home and her family terribly. She says she doesn't want to return because she is *thinking to the future of her children*.

Tragically, Fatima had two brothers killed in the war in Syria, her oldest brother Omar and brother Mustafa. Fatima has one sister, Urooj, living in Dubai, who works for the United Nations and is an artist, a painter. Both Fatima and Aveer are very proud of her because she has worked hard and created a good career for herself. They wish she could come to Canada. However, they understand that while Urooj could come, her children cannot come with her because of a complex situation with her ex-husband. Aveer explained that, in a Syrian divorce, children stay with the father. While Urooj is allowed to see her children for visitation, they live with their father and stepmother. The children claim that the stepmother is very mean to them and they want to live with their mother, but it is forbidden. Fatima and Aveer believe Urooj's connections in the UN would enable her to come to Canada but she will not come without her children. In order to come with her children, she needs permission from their father. Urooj lives in a complex for single women with security guards monitoring the building. She has visitation with her two daughters and is allowed to bring them into her building for short periods of time but they are not allowed to stay there. Both Fatima and Aveer are upset with this and think the children should be able to stay with their mother but understand that it is just not the way things are. Fatima, Aveer, and I spoke often about Urooj. They are very close to Urooj and talk to her often over the internet and through text messages. Both Fatima and Aveer are hopeful that she might come to Canada and dream that she might be able to live close to them.

Navigating Canadian Institutions

Over our visits the ways in which Fatima and Aveer were able and willing to learn to navigate the many institutions that make up our Canadian, specifically Edmonton community, were increasingly apparent. On my first visit, Fatima and Aveer asked many questions about our education system. Our first meeting was in the spring and the summer months, which brings summer break, were fast approaching. They were curious about summer break and said that they wanted their children to keep learning over the summer. I learned from them that there was summer school available for young children new to Canada, which Fatima planned to utilize. The parents' excitement and enthusiasm was certainly shared with their children and they excitedly shared with me that it was *really fun* and they got to go on many field trips.

They had many questions for me about Azim, their 3-year-old child, who was currently attending both preschool and daycare. They were so happy with the progress that he was making, especially in English and they were curious if his school and daycare would stop over summer and if there was school he could go to during summer holidays as well.

At the time it felt like a casual conversation, but, in reflection, I now see their willingness and desire to understand the new ways of life in Canada were so they would be able to utilize them in the best ways possible for their family. During one conversation, I asked Fatima and Aveer how Mustafa's daycare and preschool were scheduled. Preschool has limited classroom hours and there is a fair amount of organization required with bussing, daycare and preschool. As we were trying to negotiate meaning in this conversation, Aveer pulled his wallet from his back pocket and shuffled through a stack of business cards. He pulled out a business card for a social worker he had been working with and a business card for ABC daycare. He used these business

cards to help explain, and communicate, how he was able to get bussing for Azim and have him properly registered in school and daycare.

During one of our first visits Aveer shared with me how he enjoyed taking his children to Clareview recreation centre. He had figured out how to apply for an admission pass that the city gives to low income families. He showed me pictures of them playing at the indoor park and told me how he could take the children skating and swimming there as well. These were some of the many things they loved about Canada. The children chimed in with giant smiles saying how fun it was to go there. In a following visit when we were catching up on what had happened since our last visit, Aveer excitedly showed me pictures and videos of when he took his children to the trampoline park near their home.

Finding Places Like Home: Outside Places for Family Play

During the summer of 2018 Aveer, Fatima, and their children explored parks and green spaces in their quadrant of the city. They recounted their memories through sharing their photos of their summer experiences with me. The children played on countless play structures. The joy it brought them was completely apparent as they beamed when they were telling me about it. My favorite was a photo that Abia snapped of her mom swinging on a swing. Fatima shared with me that she did not have the chance to swing on a swing at a playground before and it was something that brought her great joy. The family really enjoyed spending time at Rundle park and cooking meals at the BBQ pits available there. Fatima and Aveer spoke about how different it was to be living in a row town home when their life in Syria was on a farm. They said it brought them so much joy to their entire family to be able to be outside with so much space to enjoy.

Stories from School

On the day that I asked Fatima if she would be willing to speak with me about Azim's preschool experiences and work with me for my research she agreed enthusiastically. She then immediately shared a story about her older son, Rafiq. One day he returned from school with a loonie and she did not know where he got it from. She was upset and worried that he may have stolen it from someone at school. I encouraged her to go speak to his teacher about the situation to see if she could find out what happened. During our next visit Fatima and Aveer enthusiastically updated me on the story. Fatima said, Rafiq found it *in van, no got it at school!* After some back and forth and working with Zamard for translation, I finally understood that Rafiq found the loonie in the van and innocently put it into his lunch box—he did not steal anything. We all shared a good laugh at the misunderstanding of the situation. Fatima and I agreed that it was so good that she went and spoke to his teacher, it was the right thing to do and certainly cleared things up. She confirmed that in the future she will keep open communication with her children's teachers. She was grateful to me for suggesting that she do that as she told me school is much different here than it is in Syria and Lebanon. She was not used to being able to ask the teachers questions in this way—I told her it is usually encouraged here.

Thinking Once More with Fatima's Experiences

As I have combed through and thought about my experiences with Fatima and her family it was much different than that of getting to know Gamila's family. Every time I was welcomed into Fatima's house she and her husband Aveer were there. I never got the sense that it was because he or she were uncomfortable being with me alone, but because they both genuinely

wanted to be there with me, together. Fatima and Aveer's educational background was impressive, and I could certainly see how this impacted the ways in which they conducted themselves. After fully understanding why I was there and ready and available to share their lived experiences with me, they also tried to optimize their time with me. Usually, when I came to visit them, they would have questions for me about Canadian systems, institutions, or cultural norms that they did not understand or were trying to navigate. They were very much aware that things operated very differently here and they were trying to figure out to the best of their ability. They also operated very much as a team. I had much less time with Fatima and myself, alone, because it seemed like they both wanted to be there together so they could be there to ask me questions and clear up any confusion they may have had.

When I think back to first meeting Fatima at the Friday morning English classes, it's very clear that she did not attend them for language acquisition. She was there for the community, friendship, but also ask questions. She would usually arrive on Friday mornings late with a baby on her hip and a couple more in tow. If it was a non-instructional day at school she should bring all her kids. Her bubbly demeanor and presence about her apparent even under the layers of religious garments she wore. She would be respectful and participate but I could tell she was really there for the breaks or transition time at the end of the class to engage with others.

Fatima was always very aware and concerned about the well-being of her children. She was fully aware that the ways in which things functioned here was much different than her life experiences—and that caused her much anxiety. She often told me that she was worried about her children and school and told me she did not understand how schools operated here—it was so different than what she was used to. The unknown of what her children were being exposed to at school scared her. She did not want her children to be introduced to drugs or bad role models.

Fatima and I also had conversations about internet safety. She hated her children playing Roblox or having open access to the internet. She did not want her children, especially her oldest Adnan, to get misinformation about Syria and want to go back. We discussed how important supervision was especially when children are online. She was also worried about what the children have access to online—I told her that this is a concern that she shares with many parents, including Canadian parents. Even with all her worry, she hesitantly allowed her children to play on the computers downstairs alone because it was something many of their peers were doing and ultimately she wanted her kids to be happy. She really struggled with balancing her children's happiness and creating rules and boundaries that she was comfortable with. The hardships that life had dealt her and her children were unfair and she was struggling with how to be a woman and mother in a new place she didn't understand.

Fatima also struggled with the new way of life in Canada. Having grown up on a farm with plans to raise her own children in a wide open space, she struggled with trying to reimagine life in a row townhome with shared walls on both sides with five children and no family and friends. She and Aveer were so amazing at taking their kids out of the home and experiencing and doing things with them, but she found it exhausting. She shared with me that in Syria the kids can run around freely and that there is such a sense of community. Everyone takes care of everyone—and the kids are not solely the parent's responsibility. She said that if she knew more about the life in Canada *5 kids too many!* In addition to this, the winter months made it so hard to entertain a family of seven in such close quarters.

Making a Home in Edmonton: The Challenges of Being Transplanted

For so long Aveer had been trying to find work. During the first winter they were in Canada he slipped on ice, fell, and broke a bone in his wrist, which required surgical repair. His wrist never fully healed and remains painful. Because of this injury, the jobs he could apply for were limited. He was unable to do manual labour or lift heavy things with his injured wrist. Both he and Fatima were happy when he finally found work as a delivery driver for a bakery.

On one visit with Fatima, it was much quieter than usual as the children were at school and Aveer was working. It was the first time that a smile did not come easily to her face. At this point, they had been in Canada for about 2 years. However, it seemed as though life might be getting harder. Aveer was finally working but it did not mean more money in their pockets. When his income rose, the support subsidies they qualified before diminished. This meant that it was even more difficult to improve the ways that they provided for their family.

Fatima was not currently in English classes so she was taking care of the home and her family. Although she was happy that Aveer finally found work, she missed her husband and did not enjoy taking care of the children alone when he was away working long hours. Fatima expressed how hard it was to care for five children. In Syria, she said, it is normal to have many children, in fact, it was encouraged. In Syria, she said, it was much easier to care for more children as she did not have to care for them alone. There were many family members to help and everyone cared for each other's kids. Having grown up on a farm there was much outdoor space for the children to play and run and she was able to provide that for her two older children when they were still in Syria. It was how she imagined she would be able to bring her children up.

Imagining a Future in Canada

During one of my visits with Fatima she was prepared for my visit with many questions about farming. Because she grew up on a farm and around animals, her heart felt most at home there. We talked often about farms as I have also always loved, and felt a calling toward, farming as my dad farms the homestead that my grandfather immigrated to.

Fatima's family doctor was from Libya and told them that he owned a farm outside of Edmonton and was looking for someone to work the land and take care of the animals. Considering Fatima had knowledge about farming lifestyle she had many questions. She wanted to know if there would be a school that the children could attend and wondered how they would get to a doctor if needed. I told her that typically a bus would pick the children up from the farm and take them to school and, usually, as long as they had a vehicle, a hospital or doctor's office would be within driving distance. She was very concerned about being isolated and asked me how many families work on farms here. We talked about how, typically, one family will work a farm and that sometimes because the family is given a free place to live the amount of money they receive is of a lesser amount. Fatima listened carefully and told me that she wanted to take the farming job because she would be able to help her husband and they would be able to work together. She told me that Aveer's arm hurt all the time and it was difficult for him to lift things or work with his hands. However, if they took the farming job then she could help him and they could work together.

The way in which Fatima and her husband Aveer worked together was a privilege to witness. It was clear, as we talked, that Fatima was considering the farming job. She thought about it often. It was also a mutual consideration as Aveer was always helping out around the house and picking up or dropping off the children when I was there. But it was most prominent

during the month of May (2018) when there was no availability for English classes for Aveer but Fatima was able to go to daytime English classes. Aveer stayed at home and cared for Najam and cooked and cleaned while Fatima was at English classes during the day. Fatima told me that every morning when Aveer dropped her off he would joke with the teacher, asking if today there is room for me?. The teacher replied, every day, that there wasn't and that he had to leave. Both Fatima and Aveer laughed as Fatima told me. It was clear that this joke had become their morning drop off ritual. Aveer laughed as he told me how hard it was to be home and every morning he would wish that the teacher would finally say that he could stay for English class.

Chapter 6²:

Understanding Social Inclusion:

Stories of Disruption Through School Policies/Practices in Refugee Families' Life Making

Abstract

Composing lives that have a sense of coherence is part of the identity making of refugee families and shapes their attempts for social inclusion. Their struggles for narrative coherence are shaped by the bumping places and tensions that they experience as their lives bump against dominant narratives that structure the policies and practices of many institutions including schools. Using narrative inquiry, we inquired into the experiences of four Syrian refugee families as they bumped against institutional policies and practices. Drawing on 2 years spent alongside children and their parents we composed field and research texts that showed the importance to understand social inclusion in school settings through the experiences of individual children and families. It is important to focus on experience to redefine the significance of narrative coherence in relation to social inclusion and to create spaces for telling stories that can help transform school policies and practices.

Key words: Syrian refugee families, narrative inquiry, social inclusion, narrative coherence, bumping places

² Chapter 6 will be submitted as co-authored by Gillian Vigneau, Hiroko Kubota, Vera Caine, D. Jean Clandinin, & Heather Raymond, University of Alberta. Understanding social inclusion: Stories of disruption through school policies/practices in refugee families' life making. The paper will be submitted to the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*.

Introduction

Elham's story of school: A name that does not fit

My teacher was really... really mean to me. She didn't call my name correctly. She always changed my name when she calls me. When I said to her that is not my name, she said, Go back to where your name is from. I was always sad and cried a lot.

Elham, a 5-year-old girl, slowly and carefully wove her words with her emotions as she told of her experience at preschool. She was always hesitant whenever Hiroko asked about her preschool experience. Initially, while still in preschool, Elham implied that she struggled with making friends, but she was not willing to share more details. However, this time, after starting Grade 1, she slowly told more of her preschool experience: stories of her teacher and of how classmates excluded her in the classroom and at recesses. Elham recalled a moment when she asked her classmates to push her on a swing. *They pushed me really hard, and I fell off.* In another story, her classmates called her *stealer*, even though she had not stolen anything. Elham remembered that her teacher even believed she had stolen her classmate's bracelet.

She told of one preschool teacher who strongly shaped her experiences. In her kindergarten, Arabic-speaking students were a minority. Already nervous and unsure in an unfamiliar environment in a Canadian school setting, Elham must have experienced deep discouragement and perplexity during her interactions with her teacher, particularly when her teacher told her to *Go back to where your name is from.* Hiroko wondered if Elham felt disconnected from the teacher, other students, and the school environment, all of which Elham might have envisioned as a space for acceptance and inclusion. When Elham recognized her name being disrespectfully distorted by her teacher, she experienced a disruption in her stories to live by, her identity. It disrupted an identity nurtured during her life in Syria and Jordan, and that holds many loving memories of her extended family. In her Canadian preschool environment,

Elham found herself an outsider, uncertain how to create narrative coherence around these disruptions in the midst of composing her life. When Hiroko asked if she remembered any happy moments in her kindergarten, Elham quickly replied, *There was not a happy moment in the kindergarten. I was always sad.*

We begin with Elham's story as a way to show how educational experiences can disrupt refugee families' stories of composing their lives in a new context. As part of the Government of Canada's Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, Canada received over 52,000 Syrian refugees between November 2015 and March 2018 (Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada, 2018). Between November 4, 2015 and August 25, 2016, Alberta received about 3800 Syrian refugees, 47% of whom were children 14 years of age and younger and 16% of whom were children between 0 - 4 years of age. More refugees have now arrived through private, government, and blended sponsorships and various settlement supports are provided.

Through engaging in a narrative inquiry alongside children and families, we offer insights into questions of identity-making, particularly framed within what it means for Syrian refugee families to experience social inclusion. Inclusive spaces are spaces where everyone's dignity and safety are norms, diversity is recognized and accepted, and everyone feels encouraged, supported, and included (Odmivar & Richmond, 2005). They are spaces where a shifting balance of power emerges. Inclusive spaces provide opportunities for identity building based on equitable relationships, respect, and shared responsibilities (Richmond, 2014). Such spaces also allow authentic interaction and reciprocal learning. Based on our literature review (Dodd et al., in press), we noted the lack of focus on the experiences of refugee children and families in research. Our overall study purpose is to understand the experiences of refugee children and their families, including their experiences in early childhood settings in Canada.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is a commonly used term in social policy, sociology, and political science to describe the bonds that bring people together in contexts of cultural diversity. Because social inclusion is a complicated and challenging concept which cannot be characterized with one dimension or meaning, there is no single agreed understanding (Allman, 2013; Wong & Turner, 2014). Most often the term is defined in opposition to social exclusion (Silver 1994); yet, it can only be fully understood in relation to a particular vision of membership, belonging, and social integration.

Understanding Narrative Coherence as Part of Social Inclusion

As we wonder about the social inclusion of preschool refugee children, we understand they are not isolated individuals, but are part of families and communities. To understand the social inclusion of preschool children, we must consider the interconnectedness of family and community. We are reminded, as we attend to the stories that individuals and families live and tell, of Carr's (1986) notion that people seek narrative coherence. As we live our lives we seek coherence, sometimes in situations in which coherence is seemingly impossible. Carr (1986) writes:

Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pregiven condition but an achievement. Some of us succeed, it seems, better than others. None of us succeeds totally. We keep at it. What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are. (p. 97)

Carr (1986) reminds us that narrative coherence is “a constant task, sometimes a struggle, and when it succeeds it is an achievement. [...] To experience, to act, to live in the most general sense, is to maintain and if necessary to restore the narrative coherence of time itself” (p. 96). While we understand Carr’s argument that achieving narrative coherence is a task for all people, we understand that the struggle for narrative coherence may be more intense and complex when people are in contexts where what they have known has been disrupted. In our view, the experience of being a refugee makes the struggle for narrative coherence amidst disruption particularly resonant for refugee children and families. As we came alongside refugee families and listened to their stories, even as they were in the midst of recomposing their lives in Canada, we saw multiple ways they bumped against, and were disrupted by, institutional school policies and practices.

Methodology and Methods

Narrative inquiry was selected for the study given the focus on the experiences of refugee children and family with early childhood programs. We work from a Deweyan (1938) view of experience in which experience and life are deeply intertwined. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain “narrative is the closest we can come to experience [... The] guiding principle is to focus on experience and to follow where it leads” (p. 188). The focus within narrative inquiry “is not only on individuals’ experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42). Narrative inquirers work within a relational ontology that shapes methodological considerations and particular research methods. Experience is

understood, within narrative inquiry, as a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally.

In our research we worked closely with Yvonne Chui, Executive Director of the Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB), an organization that has supported immigrant and refugee families in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada since 1994. Working with Yvonne and through the ongoing work of the MCHB enabled us to come alongside families in diverse community settings. Shortly after Edmonton, Canada began welcoming Syrian refugees, the MCHB opened a gathering place for them. At the Syrian Center, diverse programming offered extensive support such as an English language class for women on Friday mornings. With university ethics approval, we volunteered for 9 months in the English language program with mothers and their young children. Through our work as volunteers, we met potential participants and came alongside them slowly. We offered the possibility of participation to mothers in the program. We met individually with each family and reviewed the study's purposes and gained informed consent from them, advising them of confidentiality and anonymity. With the assistance of two community-based Arabic-speaking women, Hanan Alhendi and Zamard Rajab de El Houchaimi, we engaged in conversations with 11 families. We met each family over 1 to 2 years with a focus on the experiences of at least one child in each family who was in an early childhood education program and at least one parent. We completed multiple conversations with each family.

Coming alongside families in a narrative inquiry consists of writing field texts and, through a collaborative process of interpretation and analysis, research texts. Diverse field texts (data), including tape recorded conversations, family photographs, memory box artifacts, field notes on activities to which researchers were invited, researcher journals, work samples, art work, and informal conversations were composed alongside participants, as we attended to the

temporal unfolding of their lived and told stories of experience. We wrote field notes on events as well as on conversations. Diverse forms of field texts invited participants into the research in ways that enabled them to actively document their unfolding lives so that the complex connections between their experiences in particular times and places could be understood. Field texts were interpreted alongside participants from within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Caine, 2008), with attention to temporality, the personal and social contexts, and place.

As researchers, we attended carefully to place, community, time, and social contexts, as well as personal feelings and aesthetic reactions. As we analyzed field texts, including field notes and conversation transcripts, we composed narrative accounts for each participant (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative accounts are “interpretive constructions of individual experiences attentive to the three-dimensional inquiry space (temporality, sociality, place)” (Clandinin et al., 2014, p. 51).

After narrative accounts were shared with research participants, we met as a research group to undertake a second phase of the analysis. We read all narrative accounts and began to discern what we called narrative threads, those aspects of experience that resonate, echoing across participants’ experiences. We engaged in an 8-hour session with all members of the research team, including Zamard and Hanan. We noted families frequently bumped against dominant institutional narratives. This required us to attend closely to the moments when tensions that may have been disrupting the families’ struggle for narrative coherence became evident. We selected 4 stories from the narrative accounts that allowed us to open questions around the bumping places that families experienced as their life making in Canada bumped

against institutional narratives and disrupted their struggle for narrative coherence. In this paper, we explore four stories including stories of Elhan, Gamila, Fatima, and Jaan and their families.

Story 1: Elham and her Family

We introduced Elham, a child of Syrian parents, at the beginning of our paper. Elham lived and told a story of herself as someone who understood the importance of composing new lives for herself and her family. As we have written elsewhere (Kubota et al., in press), Elham worked to enable her mother, Maria, to learn English. She saw herself as someone who was an agentic person in helping her family settle in Canada. In school Elham bumped hard against stories that perceived her as *other*. Her teacher and classmates excluded her in visible ways. Elham was often silent, and silenced, in her kindergarten class. It was not until a year later, when in a new class, she felt she could tell Hiroko, by then a trusted friend, about how sad she was in her first year in the early childhood setting. Elham pushed back, resisted, the story of being excluded as she continued to live out her story as a person who had agency in her family. Elham's sense of agency allowed her to make sense of the disruptions, rather than letting these disruptions define her; she actively worked against becoming the girl from somewhere else as she continued to struggle for narrative coherence within her family and as she progressed into other school settings.

Story 2: Gamila and Family

When Gillian thinks about Gamila, the relationship they built, and the stories she shared, she calls forth images of a woman, a mother, a wife, student, homemaker, seamstress, daughter, sister, and the most gracious host. Gillian thinks of her warm smile and gentle laughter. When

Gillian first met Gamila in her home, her living room was stuffed with oversized leather sofas and loveseats. While initially the leather furniture felt out of place, with Gamila's gentle touch, over time and with careful selection of wall hangings, pillows, and special Muslim and Quran objects, the living room came to reflect Gamila's family. When Gillian noted the new decor, Gamila told Gillian why it was special. We imagine Gamila was shaping a home place where she felt at ease.

When Gillian thinks about Gamila, she thinks of strong Arabic coffee. Every time they met, she served coffee and delicious treats. Gamila made Gillian feel cared about and valued. We saw Gamila working to compose narrative coherence in this new place as she decorated her home with what she knew from Syria. Serving coffee and treats was the way she knew how to invite people into her home in Syria. Gillian was a guest in her newly imagined home.

Gamila's husband, Nadim, was an invested father who cultivated a special relationship with each of his children that was apparent in the ways he played, wrestled, and laughed with his children. Gamila and Nadim had five children. Junaid, a 9-year-old boy, and Hafsa, an 8-year-old girl, were the oldest two children, and were both born in, and remembered, Syria. Anwar, a 5-year-old boy, and Hibah, a 4-year-old girl, were born in Lebanon. Nour, a 1-year-old baby, was born in Canada. Both Gamila and Nadim affectionately called her *The Canadian*. It became a family joke and every time Nour did something a little different they said, *It's because she's Canadian!* As they raised their children they struggled to, in Carr's (1986) terms, achieve narrative coherence—they bumped up against dominant institutional narratives, stories of school.

Junaid, their 10-year-old son, began school at Bell School in September 2017 with his younger sister, Hafsa. Upon their arrival in Edmonton, the family were first homed in a small two-bedroom apartment. In November they were advised by their settlement social worker that

they could move to a three-bedroom townhouse, more spacious accommodation that was better suited to their family size.

Although they could have continued to go to Bell School, because they were in close proximity, Nadim thought it would make most sense for the children to change schools. Nadim assumed, based on his experiences in Syria, that schools were all the same. Yet, Junaid experienced extreme difficulty at his new school, Evergreen School. Within weeks, Nadim and Gamila were contacted by Junaid's teachers and administrators to inform them of the trouble he was having at school. He did not connect with his teachers, he did not feel supported, and did not want to attend. At home, Nadim and Gamila noticed his outbursts of anger and reluctance to attend school. While Nadim knew that Bell was not a perfect school, Junaid had settled in there and it had been a much more positive experience. Nadim was desperate to move his kids back to Bell school. However, it was not until some months later that he told Gillian he had tried multiple times throughout the school year to move Junaid and Hafsa back. He was told consistently by the administration at Bell school to wait until a later time. He had not raised his desire to move the children out of Evergreen school with the staff at Evergreen school. He waited until the end of the school year, and again asked the Bell school administration if he could re-enroll them, but was told to wait until the beginning of the school year in September.

Gillian sensed that what was happening to Nadim was not what she knew as inclusive practice. It seemed that he was being brushed off. Nadim questioned Gillian about school registration processes during one visit. In trying to understand what was going on, she asked why he wanted the children to return to Bell school. Firstly, he told Gillian the demographics of Evergreen school were much different in that many students were Arabic-speaking, Muslim, and were their neighbors. Nadim found this troubling as his children, new to the English language,

did not practice English at school as they spoke Arabic with their peers. He also did not share the same beliefs and values of some families. Some of their values were influencing his children in troubling ways. Secondly, the staff did not seem to be able to create meaningful relationships with Nadim's children, and his children longed for relationships with their teachers. The children, Nadim, and Gamila felt much more supported at Bell school. Thirdly, the most pressing issue was that all the neighborhood children attended Evergreen school. Living in the same complex was one specific boy, 2 years older than Junaid, who bullied him at school and at home. This was such serious bullying that neighbors and even the boy's own uncle had called the police.

The bullying, in the neighborhood and at school, had horrible effects on Junaid, according to Nadim. Junaid had already been through so much trauma in his life as he remembered the war in Syria, poverty and racism in Lebanon, and his abrupt arrival in Canada with no English language skills. Although Junaid did not share stories of being bullied with Gillian, she knew his angry outbursts and running away caused tension at school and resulted in tension between Junaid and his parents at home. Nadim and Gamila told Gillian they knew they had to move him back to Bell school. Their perception was that in his short stay there, he had received the help he needed.

Gillian suggested that she go with Nadim the next time he met with the Bell school administrator. They went together to Bell school with the intention of registering the children there. When Gillian and Nadim arrived, the administrators welcomed them in and it seemed to be an experience familiar to Gillian. The Bell school vice principal, as they watched, phoned the administrator at Evergreen school to release the children from their list of school registrants. He was informed that would not be possible unless Nadim went to a face to face exit interview.

Gillian was surprised that a parent would be required to attend an exit interview. When they returned to Nadim's house, Nadim called to make an appointment for an exit interview. Gillian ensured she was free to go with him. Gillian later learned that Bell school could have, and should have, registered Junaid and his sister to attend for the upcoming school year, without the necessity of an exit interview.

When Gillian met Nadim the following day to go to the meeting at Evergreen school, his body was tense and he was more nervous than the previous day. Gillian was confident as she saw herself as a teacher who trusted the education system. Her story was that if Junaid felt more comfortable at Bell school and seemed to be doing well there, he should be allowed to return. When Nadim, Junaid, Hafsa, and Gillian got to the office, they were abruptly greeted by two women who spoke, in what seemed to Gillian, to be loud voices. All four of them were led to an office and seated around a circular table. Gillian was positioned somewhat away from the table and was not introduced. The two women immediately focussed on Junaid. *You don't like it here? So you're saying you don't like any of your friends here? Or the teachers?* Junaid looked down and shook his head, as if to suggest they misunderstood how he felt. They asked the same questions to Hafsa who was timid and quiet to answer. They shifted back and forth between Junaid and Hafsa, berating them with comments about how it was their fault they were having negative experiences at school. Nadim tried to redirect the conversation by saying he did not want his children to have to revisit these difficult moments and that all he wanted was to get approval to return his children to Bell school. The administrator then brought up some of Junaid's negative behaviours and the incident in which he said he wanted to *Shoot this place up*. It was clear the administrator was trying to shift responsibility away from the school. The intensity in their voices was unfamiliar to Gillian. This was not what she had experienced in

school meetings. Nadim quietly said *Ok, Ok, Ok, yes, thank you, thank you* as he tried to end the meeting. When Nadim advised the Bell school administration, the children began, and remained there, for the school year.

As we turn back on this story, we see the ways that this story was disruptive not only for the stories that Nadim and Gamila were trying to compose for themselves and their family but also for Gillian who had not known that such disrespectful encounters could happen for children and families in school. For Nadim and Gamila, education and schooling are central to their stories of settling in Canada. They knew that if they were to belong in Canada, the children needed to have strong educational experiences. They endured 7 months at Evergreen knowing that it was negatively impacting the children and family. It was a significant disruption to their attempts to settle the children in respectful learning environments. Their treatment both at Bell, where the onus was on them to seek the release of registration for the children, and at Evergreen, where they were abused at a meeting, threatened a positive educational experience for the children and for the parents. As the family settled back into Bell school, we do not know what images linger for Gamila, Nadim, and the children about schools.

Story 3: Fatima and Her Family

Gillian first visited Fatima at her home on March 19th, 2018. It was not their first meeting as Gillian met her several times in the Friday morning English language classes. But this was the first time Gillian saw her in the ways she did that March morning. Gillian walked up to their row townhouse, accompanied by Hanan. Gillian rang the doorbell and stepped back to wait for Fatima to come to the door. The door slowly opened and, to Gillian's confusion, there was nobody there. As Gillian stood there feeling puzzled, she heard a faint voice saying *come come*,

come in. As Gillian entered, she saw Fatima, without her religious garments, hiding behind the door. Not until she spoke a few words and laughed did Gillian realize it was Fatima. When Fatima attended English classes, she always wore a burka and niqab and Gillian had not seen her face. In subsequent visits, Fatima always greeted Gillian with a slow opening of the door that she hid behind to make sure no passersby saw her without her burka and niqab.

On that first visit, Gillian was also welcomed into part of Fatima's Edmonton community. Fatima had two friends at her home and Gillian was invited to sit with them. Gillian's hour-long visit was filled with energy, laughter, treats, and friendship. However, Gillian wondered if Fatima saw her as a researcher or a new Canadian friend?

Earlier, at the Syrian Centre, Gillian asked Fatima if she would be willing to have conversations about her family's experiences of Azim's preschool and early childhood experiences. She was enthusiastic about participating. However, with her welcome to her house, Gillian thought that Fatima may not have fully understood her. Fatima told her about people in her community that were connected with volunteers who came to their homes to help them practice their English and be a social connection. Fatima longed for visitors and social stimulation as it was one of the things she missed most about her life in Syria. However, even as Hanan and Gillian explained their purposes and had Fatima sign the consent forms, Fatima continued to be excited about Gillian's presence in her home and her willingness to be involved. Gillian was happy to see that Fatima had established a community in a short time. However, as Gillian came to know her over time, she learned that Fatima and her family were quick to establish communities. After that first visit, only Fatima and her husband, Aveer, were waiting for her.

Gillian got to know Fatima as an ambitious, hard working woman. She completed Grade 10 when it was common for women in Syria to stop formal schooling at Grade 5. Fatima grew up on a farm. She loved being surrounded by animals and dreamed that, one day, she would become a veterinarian. As a child she had been fascinated with ants—she gave them sugar and watched them carry the crystals back to their home. Watching animals was intriguing to her. Over time Gillian understood Fatima to be very inquisitive, involved, hardworking, and high achieving.

She was very aware that she did not know about raising her children in Canada, a new place. She tried her best to be relevant and support her five children, who she was very proud of, with her husband, Aveer. Aveer was a kind man who was welcoming and often smiling. Adnan, was Fatima and Nadim's oldest child who was born in Syria and is now 10 and in Grade 4 at Connor School. The oldest girl, Abia, was also born in Syria and seems to emulate her mother's positivity, and hard work. Fatima often says that *Abia is a good girl. She always do everything like a Mom do.* The next two boys, Rafiq, 7 years old, and Azim 3 years old, were born in Lebanon. The adored baby, Najam, was described by Abia as *1 year and 3 months old and the only Canadian!* Fatima struggled with learning how to live in Canada. Having grown up on a farm, she planned to raise her own children in a wide open space. It was difficult to reimagine life in a townhome with shared walls on both sides, five children and no family and friends.

Fatima and Aveer were able and willing to learn to navigate the many institutions that make up the Canadian context. On one of Gillian's first visits, Fatima and Aveer asked many questions about the education system. They were curious about summer break and said that they wanted their children to *keep learning* over the summer. Gillian learned from them that there was summer school available for young children new to Canada, which Fatima planned to utilize.

The parents' excitement and enthusiasm were certainly shared with their children and they excitedly spoke of how they got to go on many field trips.

At the time it felt like a casual conversation, but, in reflection, Gillian can see their willingness and desire to understand the new ways of life in Canada were crucial to creating a home in Canada. During one conversation, Gillian asked Fatima and Aveer how Azim's daycare and preschool were scheduled. Preschool has limited classroom hours and there is a fair amount of organization required with bussing, daycare and preschool. As they were trying to negotiate meaning in this conversation, Aveer pulled his wallet from his back pocket and shuffled through a stack of business cards. He pulled out a business card for a social worker he had been working with and a business card for ABC daycare. He used these business cards to help explain how he was able to get bussing for Azim and have him properly registered in school and daycare.

Every time, for the first year, Gillian was welcomed into Fatima's house, she and her husband Aveer were there. Usually, when Gillian came to visit them, they would have questions about the Canadian systems, institutions, or cultural norms that they did not understand or were trying to navigate. They were very much aware that things operated differently here and they were trying to figure out to the best of their ability. They operated as a team.

During one of our first visits Aveer shared with Gillian how he enjoyed taking his children to the recreation centre. He had figured out how to apply for an admission pass that the city gives to low income families. He showed Gillian pictures of them playing at the indoor park and told her how he could take the children skating and swimming there as well. These were some of the many things they loved about Canada. The children chimed in with giant smiles about how much fun it was to go there. Fatima and Aveer were amazing at taking their children outdoors and doing things with them, but Fatima found it exhausting.

When Gillian thinks back to first meeting Fatima at the Friday morning English classes, it's very clear that she did not attend them for language acquisition. She was there for the community, friendship, but also to ask questions. She was respectful and participated but was there for the breaks or transition time at the end of the class to engage with others.

For the first year or so in Canada, Fatima and Aveer worked hard trying to reimagine a new life for their family. They learned as much as they could about the ways they could participate in life. They worked as a team and participated in sports and activities. As they made a community for themselves Aveer was always alongside them and present for much of the day.

During the first winter they were in Canada Aveer slipped on the ice, fell, and broke a bone in his wrist, which required surgical repair. His wrist never fully healed and remains painful. Because of this injury, the jobs he could apply for were limited. He was unable to do manual labour or lift heavy things with his injured wrist. Both he and Fatima were happy when he finally found work as a delivery driver for a bakery. However, his new job which took him away from home, was also a disruption to the family life they had been living.

On one of Gillian's visits with Fatima, it was much quieter than usual as the children were at school and Aveer was working. It was the first time that a smile did not come easily to Fatima's face. At this point, they had been in Canada for about 2 years. However, it seemed as though life might be getting harder. Aveer was finally working but it did not mean more money in their pockets. When his income rose, the support subsidies they qualified for diminished. This meant that it was even more difficult to improve the ways that they provided for their family.

Fatima was not currently in English classes and her days were spent taking care of the home and her family alone. Although she was happy that Aveer had finally found work, she missed her husband and did not enjoy taking care of the children alone when he was away

working long hours. Fatima expressed how hard it was to care for five children when she was on her own for much of the day. In Syria, she said, it is normal to have many children, in fact, it was encouraged. In Syria, she said, it was much easier to care for more children as she did not have to care for them alone. There were many extended family members to help and everyone cared for each other's children. This forward looking story was sharply disrupted in her new life in Canada.

As Fatima and Abdallah composed their lives within Canada, their struggle for narrative coherence became visible. They learned how to negotiate the institutions, not just school, but other institutional supports and resources for their children and for themselves. As they worked hard to find employment for Abeer and income for their family this was disrupted by a decrease in subsidy income for their family and Fatima's increased needs for support at home. Even though Fatima has worked hard to establish communities for herself, she still finds herself alone much of the time and without the support of extended family. As Gillian saw Fatima without her usual smiling face, and listened to her stories, she saw that she felt alone. We came to see how the institutional supports were not available in the community in a way that welcomed her. While she could attend language classes it required that she was able to go to the classes while still being able to care for her home and five children. Institutional supports did not seem to be offered in ways that supported Fatima in her home. The institutional supports were often defined by narrow plotlines.

Story 4: Jaan and Her Family

It is now well over 3 years since Vera came to know Jaan and her family. Vera first met Jaan at the Syrian Centre. Vera recalls Jaan's quietness—she rarely talked in their initial

encounters, yet her entire body always carried a warm and welcoming smile. When Vera asked, with the help of an interpreter, if Jaan would participate in the research, Vera was delighted when Jaan accepted. What followed were many visits that were marked by generosity and care.

Throughout those first few months Jaan and her husband engaged in English language classes and much of their daily lives was organized around these and their two children's attendance at preschool and daycare. When asked about her pre-migration experience Jaan became quiet and indicated that it would be too hard to talk about this and rarely did Vera and her return to these experiences.

After several months Jaan let Vera know that they found subsidized housing in a different part of the city and that they would be moving. It was a move to a slightly larger space, which was welcomed as Jaan was expecting a child. While the prospect of a larger and subsidised space was welcomed, it soon became evident that there were many challenges. Many of these challenges were marked by the limited knowledge Jaan and her husband had on how to navigate systems or how to activate support. Throughout the transition period, Vera and Hannan, who accompanied Vera in her role as an interpreter were frequently asked to interpret letters, to assist with phone calls to government agencies, and to help address what appeared to be never ending paperwork. The complexity of the issues was significant and evolving.

One issue that arose was that Jaan and her husband were unable to access full time kindergarten or daycare spaces close to schools. In addition, the schools had very few Syrian families, no access to school personnel who spoke Arabic, nor was there anyone who understood diverse cultural backgrounds. Access to full time schooling or care was critical to Jaan and her husband and their ability to continue their English classes, as well as their ability to balance

poverty. For Jaan and her family, the school or daycare was at times a holding place for the children so they could manage the other pressures.

After Jaan and her husband informed the school that they would be leaving and that they had no choice but to relocate a significant distance from their old home, the school did not offer any help to transition the children. No one asked about the children's needs—what school and daycare support were accessible to them, or if they needed help in becoming connected. No visible attempt was made by their current school to build connections or to put in place a transition plan, despite knowing that the family had little to no knowledge of the system.

When Jaan's husband approached neighborhood schools, some principals did not return calls, or were not open to visits. One principal asked her frontline staff to speak with us and simply said they were not interested in taking in the family and that they felt no obligation to do so. There was no assistance offered to the family and they were told that they would have to figure this out on their own. There was no conversation about the family's experiences, the trauma they had experienced, or how they could be part of inclusive learning spaces. As the stories unfolded Hanan and Vera learned much more about a school system that was unresponsive to the needs of refugee families.

While Jaan and her husband faced many challenges when they arrived in Canada, they had found ways to compose new stories that allowed them to have a sense of narrative coherence. Yet, when housing policies mandated that they relocate, their experiences began to unravel and their narrative coherence was disrupted. Little made sense to them, and they would often ask: why would they be placed in a neighborhood that had few refugees or immigrants and why did the school not actively engage in establishing a transition plan for their children?

Discussion: Disrupting Refugee Families' Struggles for Narrative Coherence

In this paper, we closely attend to the lives of four refugee families from Syria as we engage in considerations around social inclusion in school settings. Given our starting points in the lives of four families, we frame our wonders around their struggles to achieve narrative coherence. As noted earlier, Carr (1986) wrote that “[t]he unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pre-given condition but an achievement” (p. 97). We understood the families’ stories of experience as complex attempts to recompose their lives in new places amidst very different institutional contexts than the ones they had previously experienced. The composing and recomposing of their lives happened in the midst of negotiating complicated institutional policies and practices.

Composing narrative coherence is a continuous process; narrative coherence also entails ongoing struggles and challenges. For the families we came alongside, there were many challenges. As the families encountered moments of disruption, they metaphorically stumbled but continued to work at composing their lives. Considering these as moments of disruption, we highlight that these are unexpected interruptions to what was expected. They are unexpected in two ways: there was no expectation that any interruption was about to occur, and the interruption was significant enough to shift and change the stories that the families were living. The families constantly worked at life composing in markedly changed and changing times, in places, and with people, hanging on to memories of what was, as they restoried who they are despite dominant, that is, the most taken for granted and unquestioned, institutional policies and practices that disrupted their lives.

The experience of social inclusion entails a sense of belonging and acceptance. However, when we discuss social inclusion, we know that it holds many tacit or unspoken stories of social

exclusion. As we lived alongside these four families, we listened to, and witnessed, multiple bumping places that the families experienced and how these bumps against dominant institutional policies and practices disrupted their narrative coherence. It was as participants broke their silences and told of their experiences that the bumping places and disruptions became evident. Pratt and Rosiek (2021) highlighted:

The language of being wakeful and looking for bumping places encourages attending to small things and impressions laden with significance, listening carefully to colleagues, and pulling on loose threads in a way that may ultimately lead to intricate transformations of our lived relation to institutionalized oppression. (p. 5)

As we lived alongside participants, we saw the diverse lives of Elham, Gamila, Fatima, and Jaan. They constantly worked to live through the challenges they or their children experienced in school settings and school systems. Often, their stories of school were silenced and not given space to be told and listened to by others. The experiences of all four families bring to light their daily struggles and how their struggles were in tension and bumped against dominant institutional practices and policies. Elham's first school experience in Canada was characterized by loneliness when she found herself mistreated and misunderstood by her teacher and classmates. When Junaid was bullied and desperately unhappy in his new school, Gamila and Nasir struggled with the school system to allow them to transfer their children back to their previous school. Fatima felt isolated when she had to stay home with her children, when she preferred to have more open spaces which she could share with others as they worked to build communities. While Fatima and Ameer actively sought institutional support and resources for their children, Jaan and her husband were puzzled about how to navigate their children's schooling as they were given new subsidized housing in an unfamiliar area where Syrian refugees were few. Within each family, narrative coherence was disrupted amidst school policies

and practices, they were frustrated and felt they did not have agency. The lack of information and institutional coordination significantly intensified their difficulties. While being a refugee, and composing lives in Canada, all of them struggled to compose threads around which they could build narrative coherence, at least for a time.

Conclusion

While social inclusion is often understood only from an institutional or systemic perspective, social inclusion in school settings also needs to be understood through the experiences of individual children and families who become part of unfamiliar policies and practices. It is important to focus on experience to realize and redefine the significance of narrative coherence in relation to social inclusion and to create experience for telling the stories that can help to transform school policies and practices.

The Syrian refugee families we came alongside have been living through various forms of transitions interlaced with anxiety, uncertainty, fear, and hope. When they send their children to Canadian schools, they are also entering into a new world with their children and working to imagine and live out new stories in Canada. Children's experiences at school are entwined, and in reciprocal relationship, with their family stories. Children's school experiences shape the family's experiences of social inclusion and their sense of community, belonging, and acceptance and, in doing so, their narrative coherence. For the families with whom we talked, they believed the Canadian educational system would help their children learn and equip them with opportunities for the future. Yet, to make this possible it is critical to imagine. Caine, Clandinin, and Lessard (forthcoming) delineated;

For believed-in imaginings to take hold they require a relational space, and an attentiveness to an unfolding life. It is within this space that people can compose and recompose their lives in ways that create narrative coherence (Carr, 1986), and a space where ‘narrative-inspired imaginings can influence belief and action’ (Sarbin, 2004, p. 6). The emplotted narratives in this way create ways to make sense of the continuities and discontinuities, the gaps and silences that are part of all of our lives. Yet, it does more. It creates the possibility to shift a life. (p. 145)

Within relational interactions and communities underpinned by kindness, care, and world-traveling (Lugones, 1987), the experiences of disruption that shaped Elham, Gamila, Fatima, and Jaan and their families experienced as they bumped up against school policies and practices, could be heard. It is these bumps and their responses to the bumps that shaped their abilities to create narrative coherence.

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Chapter 7: Looking Back/Looking Ahead: A Reflective Turn

Personal Justification: Looking back

During one of my first visits to the English language classes at the Syrian Centre set up by the Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB), I arrived and saw a familiar face. I was there to volunteer with the refugee mothers and their young children as they attended the English language classes. As a research team, we had decided working alongside the mothers and children in ongoing programming was a way to come to know them. Seeing someone who looked so familiar was a surprise. It was clear she was an important person in the Centre as I watched her busily moving about the offices, answering questions, and providing direction. While I watched her, I was sure I knew her from somewhere. But where? I was unable to place her. Several times in the morning, our eyes connected and I could tell that she recognized me as well. During coffee break I approached her, told her she looked familiar, and apologized for not remembering where we had met. She smiled and responded that she recognized me as well. She also was not sure where we had met. We laughed together and proceeded to name places, and experiences, where we could have met. After some time, we realized we had gone to junior high together—Balwin Junior High School. Memories of the long ago came quickly to mind as Niga Balal Barzanji reintroduced herself to me and I to her. I marveled that our paths had crossed again. Since that day in the Syrian Centre, I have heard her speak at our teacher's convention and she has shared with me parts of her story that I had not known.

Her story, as I recollect it writing this reflective turn, goes something like this. Niga arrived in Canada as a student to Balwin School after fleeing Iraq with her parents when their city was attacked by troops under Saddam Hussein's rule. Her family became refugees and lived in Turkey for 2 years before being granted asylum in Canada. I felt pain as I heard her describe

her first 6 months of being in Canada as comparable to being in another war. And then she told me that she had left Balwin and did not continue on to the high school that I, and many of her other classmates attended, because she had faced horrific bullying at Balwin and had attended four different high schools because of the bullying. I caught my breath as I listened to her words. I was there in that junior high. Where had I been while she underwent such severe bullying?

Later, driving home from the Syrian Centre and now as I write this reflective turn, I start to remember being in school with Niga. I remember how my story of her was that she was *different*. She dressed differently and she looked different. Who was I in that moment of junior high school? I do not think I mistreated her or was intentionally mean. But perhaps my silence and indifference to coming to know her was worse than that. I did not reach out to her, and I did not try to include her in my activities or with my family or try to get to know her.

Living in a Small World

As I wrote in Chapter 1, I lived within a family of teachers and learning did not come easily to me. I was focussed on learning so I could go to university as was expected of me. I had little sense of myself as privileged although I knew that my family and extended family lived comfortable lives. When Niga and I were at Balwin I had not yet spent time with my aunt and uncle in their “Out of the Cold” project. I had not yet known anything about what it meant to walk alongside an *other* and to world travel (Lugones, 1987). I was unaware of my privilege and of what it meant to try to enter others’ worlds to come alongside. When I first met Niga, I had not begun to wonder about world issues and about how provisional lives could be when confronted with war and the need to leave one’s home to become a refugee. I knew little of hunger and poverty. I had limited understanding of how difficult some people’s lived

experiences were. Looking back now I think about what a naive person I was in my far-too-small world. Thinking about Niga's life, I wish I had been a different person, one who could have come alongside Niga, a youth my age who was labelled and lived as a refugee. How difficult it must have been for Niga to be new to our school, to our city, and to Canada. How difficult it must have been to only feel the gaze of others who constructed her as other, as less than, as an object to be bullied.

Practical Significance: The Teachers We Needed

As I take this reflective turn, I also wonder about the teachers who taught both Niga and I. Did they try to create spaces for Niga to be included, to belong in Balwin school? What did they know of her life? Did they know, or want to know, of her struggles to compose a new life in a place where the other students made her feel she did not belong? If not, why did they not know? Niga, though visible as a young person, was invisible in terms of her experience. When I think about the stories she told of her experiences in Balwin and four other schools, I am reminded of Junaid and the ways he was bullied in Bell School and in his neighborhood. Similarly to Niga, Junaid faced horrific bullying. I recollect the day when I sat with Nadim, Junaid, and Hafsa as they/we were berated and blamed for what had happened at Bell School. Rather than accept responsibility for failing to provide the support that he needed, they tried to make Junaid and his family feel that they were the problem. I wonder if Niga had similar experiences in her schools. I think about the ways Junaid and his family were failed by the school system and wonder what parallels exist between his story and Niga's.

I have been privileged to come alongside Junaid and his family and to see how he/they were trying to make sense of the trauma of war, violence, and all the complexities of becoming a

refugee and being displaced. Instead of looking to create educative spaces for him, the school staff allowed bullying to continue and failed to support him as he sought a place of belonging. It is only in retrospect that I am coming to know Niga and to hear her stories of experience in schools, but I wonder about the ways in which the schools made the bullying worse and retraumatized both Niga and Junaid. Twenty years have passed since Niga and I went to school together and she experienced severe bullying and yet Junaid's school experience seems so similar to Niga's. I wonder that things seem not to have changed all that much in schools.

Being Who I Needed at the Time I First Met Niga

As I take this reflective turn on my encounter with Niga and hearing her stories and on my research journey alongside the children and families, I find myself asking who am I as a teacher. Who do I need to be in the lives of the children and youth I teach? What did Niga need from her teachers when she was in school? What did I need? Thinking in this way helps me think about my journey to being, and becoming, a teacher and the kinds of experiences I had, as well as the kind I needed. I think, too, about the kinds of experiences I need to create for student teachers who come to my classes from their university teacher education programs.

When I think about that fall morning when I re-met Niga, and began my research journey, it pulls me back to many years earlier. I am taken back to my journey through school and through post-secondary education. I think about my days in junior high school where I was a student in the same school, perhaps even the same classrooms, with Niga. Focussed as I was on my own experiences, I barely noticed Niga, although clearly we both had noticed each other enough to be able to recognize a face. How little I knew. I wonder if she wondered about who I was as I did not wonder about who she was.

Becoming a Teacher

As I reflect back on my journey to becoming a teacher, I think about where I am now, how awake I am trying to become, yet aware of the work that I still need to do and the work that needs to be done in our schools. I feel the sense of urgency that I need to be the teacher that both Niga and I needed as young students. I think about the reality of inclusive education and practices in the world of education and know that many educators and our educational systems are ill equipped to create inclusive spaces for all children. I think again about the experiences I had at the summer school at the Enoch Cree Nation. The teachers that I worked with wanted to meet the youth in their home place on the Enoch Cree Nation. The course we were teaching was CALM (Career and Life Management) and we were to engage them in the community, an aspect of the mandated curriculum. I had wanted to take the youth to the Mustard Seed “Sandwich Group”. As a class, we donated a lunch which meant that we had to prepare, grocery shop, and serve the lunch to the community members. It was so similar to what I had experienced in the *Out of the Cold* program. The students initially resisted, fearful perhaps that they would see people from their home communities or have to think about some of their difficult forgotten familial memories. And yet working through their resistance, it became a way for me, as teacher, and the other teachers, and the youth to come together to know more about all of our lives. I began at that time to imagine education in a different way, in a relational way with the children and youth.

Forward Looking Stories for Preservice Teachers

In my experience the students who come to my classroom as part of their practica too often come with a focus on subject matter and not enough on the children they are preparing to teach. I have to work carefully to help them see the youth as people trying to learn and to see themselves as teachers of each child who is trying to figure out their lives. Starting in this way with the lives of the children shifts what they do and who they are in relation with the children and with the subject matter. This is quite a shift for some students who were more concerned with classroom management and strategies to ensure students follow the rules and behave properly.

While I knew something of the importance of teaching the child and attending to each child in ways that did not silence them, working in classrooms in this way does not seem to be part of what the preservice teachers were ready to practice. My task as a teacher educator in the classroom alongside them is to help them be curious about the children's lived experiences.

Part of my task as a teacher educator in the classroom is to help preservice teachers continue to learn about the diverse lived experiences in each student's world. One of the ways I have learned to do this for myself is through autobiographical work. I am learning to turn inward, in order to understand who I am and where my teacher knowledge comes from. I want them to learn, as I am learning, to begin to consider ourselves and who I am in relation with the youth.

As I came alongside Junaid, Hafsa, Nadim, Gamila, Fatima and other family members in the study, I experienced many moments when the youth were being discriminated against. And meeting Niga at the start of the research journey highlighted for me how much I could still learn alongside the youth and reminded me how closely connected I was in this work.

The education system as a whole needs to learn about what it means to be a teacher of classes where refugee children are present. I know how unprepared I was when about 5 years ago, my vice principal stood at my classroom door with a youth beside him. It was half way through one of my mathematics classes. I do not remember what I was teaching but, as I looked up and saw them, I stopped. He said, “this is Assam. He is a refugee and he will be attending your mathematics class”. At that time, I felt an inward gasp. What did I know about refugees? What country had he fled from? Was he here with his family? The administrator turned and left. The youth stayed. That was all the information and training I received. Now after coming alongside Junaid and Hafsa, and Abia, my mind is filled with images of them as they write over, in my memory, that morning and meeting Assam. I knew that I was like many other teachers who meet refugee students when an administrator brings them to the classroom door and leaves them. Like other teachers, I did not know what I did not know. I did not even know what questions to ask. But now I know that the youth I meet at the classroom door are in the midst of negotiating new lives here in Canada and they need me to be someone in their lives. And they need, like I did when Niga came to my classroom in junior high, to make sure the other children come to know something about their lives and about their struggles. The question needs to be what did Niga need in that classroom, and what did I and the other students need. Who did we all need to become in relation *with* each other?

Social Justifications: Creating Belonging Places in Schools

Who am I in schools? Who can I become as I teach children and youth who are new to Canada. Being part of the project, reading the literature on children’s and families’ experiences in coming to Canada as refugees, helped me think more about social inclusion and belonging. As

noted in chapter 6, social inclusion can only be fully understood in relation to a particular vision of membership, belonging, and social integration. As I learned from coming alongside Fatima, Aveer, Gamila and Nadim as they worked to compose new lives of belonging in Canada, it was necessary that they find ways to compose their lives with narrative coherence, that is, to compose them in ways that make sense to them. They struggled to compose their lives in ways that hung together as they bumped against institutional narratives that threatened to disrupt their life making.

Niga dedicates her life's work to helping refugees restory their lives in Canada. She works to provide guidance and support to newcomer youth. When I heard her speak to the teachers at Teachers Convention, she told her story of arriving and not having support and of how traumatizing it was for her. She needed her mother for support. She and her mother now work to support new Canadians in the ways that they themselves had needed support. Her experiential knowledge provides such insight to schools and other educational institutions. As she told of how traumatizing the bullying was for her, her experiences resonated as I came alongside Nadim and Junaid. It is her stories and the stories of the families I came alongside that helped me understand something of what it means to be forced to flee your home and become a refugee in a world different in every way than what you know. And to come to know that you are different in this world to which you have fled.

As I think about forward looking stories I know there is much that I can do to help create a world where a refugee new to Canada would feel welcomed and supported in all the ways that they really need. I am reminded again of how my uncle taught me that it is not my job to decide what the needs are of a refugee new to Canada. It is my job to learn from the people who have become refugees what their needs are so I can support them in the ways that they want. He

helped me see that I needed to start small, to listen to people. And I know he and my aunt worked to create a community, they did the work *with* others. How can I help other educators become part of this work? How can I share what I have learned from Nadim, Junaid, Tahir, Gamila, Fatima and Aveer? And how can I share what Niga taught me about what we need to help all children and youth create belonging spaces in schools. The stories that the families and I tell in this thesis are one way of sharing their/my experiences in educative ways.

This work takes time. It is slow work. I am hopeful as I see others who believe in this work, others who are intrigued but have not yet started, and others who are already dedicating their life's work to welcoming and supporting refugees. It is almost poetic that we are working both at being the people we had wished we had in school to support us as we shape belonging places in our classrooms.

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