Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

by

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Abstract

The conflict in Syria has now reached its seventh year (UNHCR, 2018b) and has been the greatest producer of refugees internationally (United Nations, n.d.). Given the state of this crisis, 52, 720 Syrian refugees were admitted to Canada between November 2015 and March 2018 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2018a). Schools are one of the first and most impactful systems that young refugees enter (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007) and the quality of early school experiences significantly influences how successfully and quickly they settle (Hek, 2005). Yet, there is limited research examining the school experiences of refugee children (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, & Mathieson, 2004) and within this limited information, there is a paucity of research considering early childhood education (Hoot, 2011; Prior & Niesz, 2013). Furthermore, little is known about the settlement experiences of Syrian refugee populations. Thus, the purpose of this focused ethnography study was to explore the social, emotional, and academic adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children between the ages of five to eight years within Edmonton schools. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three newcomer Syrian refugee children, their mothers, and teachers. Non-participant observations within schools were also conducted. Data was analyzed using Roper and Shapira's (2000) framework for analyzing ethnographic data and the following themes emerged: (1) Role of Language in Adjustment, (2) Attitudes and Perspectives Towards Education, (3) Bonds and Relationships, (4) Initial Frustrations, Anxieties, and Fears, (5) Children's Unique Strategies for Adapting in School, (6) Parental Involvement in the Schooling Process, and (7) Role of Personal Qualities in Adjustment. Implications for service-providers, including counsellors and educators, are discussed.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Raabia Ghazyani. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1, Project Name “Adjustment Experiences of Syrian Refugee Children Within Edmonton Schools”, No. Pro00063268, August 16, 2016.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my sister, Azima, my greatest source of inspiration who taught me the importance of living life to the fullest.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background Information

The conflict in Syria has now reached its seventh year (UNHCR, 2018b), becoming the greatest producer of refugees internationally and the "largest displacement crisis in the world" (United Nations, n.d.). The current number of displaced Syrian refugees has surpassed 5.6 million and almost half are children (UNHCR, 2018c). Given the state of this humanitarian crisis, the Canadian federal government pledged to bring in 25, 000 Syrian refugees by the end of February 2016 (Government of Canada, 2017a). Between the period of November 2015 and March 2018, 52, 720 Syrian refugees were admitted to Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2018). Of this total, 6, 070 Syrian refugees have settled in Alberta, of which nearly half are under the age of 18 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2018a). Furthermore, the city of Edmonton has welcomed 2, 485 Syrian refugees (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2018b) and, as of early 2016, approximately 120 Syrian students had registered in 25 public schools around the city (Stoddard, 2016).

The Syrian refugee population is highly diverse, as Syria was home for individuals from various religious and ethnic backgrounds and served as a refuge for people fleeing from conflict or persecution in other areas (Hassan et al., 2015). Approximately 90% of Syria's population is Arab (Hassan et al., 2015). Other groups include but are not limited to Kurdish, Turkmen, and Assyrians and many of these groups have integrated into Arab culture (Hassan et al., 2015). This population also has a variety of faith backgrounds, including Islam (which is practiced by the majority), Christianity, and Druze (Hassan et al., 2015). In addition, languages spoken by Syrian refugees may include Arabic and Kurdish. It is important to note that many Syrian refugees also

spent time in transition countries including Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon, or in refugee camps before resettling in Canada (Hadfield, Ostrowski, & Ungar, 2017).

Definition of Terms

Refugee. According to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is a person who:

> "owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (UNHCR, 2011, p. 14).

As the above definition discusses, refugees are those escaping persecution or armed conflict (UNHCR, 2016) and are unable or unwilling to return home out of danger. Thus, denying a safe asylum to refugees may lead to fatal consequences. Refugees are protected under international law and one of their most fundamental rights is that they should not be expelled or forced to return to conditions in which their security would be threatened (UNHCR, 2016).

Refugees can be resettled to Canada in three ways. Through the Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) program, refugees are referred to Canada by a referral agency, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and their initial settlement is completely supported by the federal government or the province of Quebec (Government of Canada, 2016). The Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program permits individuals and organizations residing in Canada to privately sponsor refugees and those in refugee-like circumstances (UNHCR, 2018a). These refugees are supported by their private sponsors for up

to one year after their arrival in Canada (Government of Canada, 2017d). Lastly, the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program matches refugees who are referred by the UNHCR for resettlement in Canada with private sponsors (Government of Canada, 2017b). BVOR refugees are supported by both the Canadian government and private sponsors.

When defining the term "refugee", it is useful to consider the differences between refugees and immigrants, as their experiences are often conflated in the research literature. Though refugees and immigrants may encounter many similar challenges during resettlement, such as having to learn a new language, there are also important distinctions between these groups. Firstly, an immigrant is one who chooses to settle in another nation, while refugees are forced to flee their homes (Government of Canada, 2017c). Furthermore, refugee children are more likely to encounter potential posttraumatic stress from exposure to violence and oppression, prolonged displacement including long durations in refugee camps, lack of time to prepare for transitioning to a new host country, separation from family members, and discrimination related to their faith or country of origin (Brenner & Kia-Keating, 2016).

Immigrant. An immigrant is a person who chooses to become a permanent resident of another country that is not his or her country of origin (Stewart, 2011). Immigrants most often choose to leave their native country and settle in another country for economic or work related reasons.

Early childhood. It is important to note that while there are differing definitions of "early childhood" in the literature, in this document the term is used to refer to "the period from birth to eight years old" (UNESCO, n.d.). Early childhood is seen as a crucial stage of development, which is foundational for children's future learning and wellbeing (UNICEF, 2001). Throughout the early childhood stage, children are greatly impacted by both their

environment and the individuals they are surrounded by (UNESCO, n.d.). The initial eight years of a child's life are critical for their cognitive, physical, and emotional growth (UNICEF, 2001). Consequently, stress during these early years can have negative and long-term effects on learning, memory, and brain function.

Adjustment. Adjustment is a long-term process in which a person changes their behaviour to develop a more compatible relationship with the environment (Stewart, 2011). The term "adjustment" indicates a multifaceted and reciprocal process of change between the person and environment. In psychology, adjustment is viewed as the behavioural process through which individuals maintain a balance among or between their needs and the obstacles presented by their environments (The Editors of Encyclopedia Brittanica, 2017). This definition may be taken a step further to include the individual's level of fulfilment in this balancing act (Stewart, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, social adjustment is seen as the process by which individuals maintain a balance with their social environment and the various relationships contained within it. Emotional adjustment, on the other hand, refers to an individual's efforts to maintain a level of emotional stability and an overall positive affect. Finally, academic adjustment concerns students' ability to adapt to their educational environment and meet the academic standards set by schools.

Statement of Purpose

Refugee children experience great distress when adjusting to a new culture during resettlement (Schottelkorb, Doumas, & Garcia 2012). Schools are one of the first and most impactful systems that young refugees enter (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Prior & Niesz, 2013; Tadesse, Hoot, & Watson-Thompson, 2009) and the quality of early school experiences significantly influences how successfully and quickly they settle (Hek, 2005). Yet, there is

limited research examining the school experiences of refugee children (Anderson et al., 2004). It is particularly important to consider refugee children of early childhood age, as they are in a foundational stage that shapes later development (Fischer, 2012). However, within the limited information on refugee students' experiences, there is a paucity of research specifically considering refugee experiences in early childhood education (Hoot, 2011; Prior & Niesz, 2013). Past research on young children has comprised mostly of studies *on*, as opposed to *with* refugee children, in that researchers have primarily relied on adults to learn about children's perspectives (Kortesluoma, Hentinen, & Nikkonen 2003). As a consequence, there has been little attention given to what children themselves consider meaningful and significant.

Furthermore, while there is an established research base examining refugee children in other crises, there is a lack of empirical information about Syrian refugee children (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Based on a thorough search using major databases (e.g. Psycinfo, ERIC, Google Scholar, etc.) and using key terms relating to school experiences, resettlement, adjustment, and integration within the Syrian refugee population, there is a scant amount of literature on young refugee children. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the school adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children between the ages of five to eight within Edmonton Schools. The research question is, "What are the social, emotional, and academic adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children between the ages of five to eight within Edmonton schools?" The answer to this question is sought from the perspectives of young children, their parents, and their teachers. This research will have theoretical contributions by building on gaps in the current literature, as early childhood has not been well researched in the refugee population and past research has mainly focused on adult perspectives of refugee children's experiences. From a practical perspective, the findings may guide school-

based interventions for refugee students, training programs for teachers, and counselling services for vulnerable populations, leading to culturally appropriate and high-quality care.

My motivation to address the above research problem stems from my past personal and academic experiences. In the early 2000s, I witnessed a huge influx of Afghani refugee families within my religious community. At that time, I participated in a volunteer tutoring initiative through my community to support the academic needs of the newcomer Afghani children. Through this experience, I came to realize the important role school played in these children's lives and the challenges associated with school-related adjustment. Specifically, I observed how the children I worked with struggled to simultaneously learn an entirely new language and keep up with their academics in classrooms where the curriculum was exclusively taught in English. Despite encountering these challenges, I was amazed to see the strong drive to succeed exhibited by these children.

Prior to entering the Counselling Psychology graduate program, I also had the privilege of working with my current supervisor, Dr. Sophie Yohani, as a research assistant in which I studied multicultural counselling and psychosocial practice with refugee children and families. It was during this research that I became extremely interested in the integration process of refugees. This interest was further reinforced during my teaching practicums in my undergraduate degree where I worked in highly diverse Kindergarten and Grade 1 classrooms and observed the barriers these children faced in acclimating to their new environment. Through this experience, I gained vital skills in regards to engaging with my students, their parents, and teachers in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner. Overall, my experiences in working with resettling refugee children and families has inspired me to gain further insight into their adjustment experiences within the school context.

Overview of Thesis

There are five chapters in my thesis, with the inclusion of this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 is a literature review, which examines the experiences of refugee children, both in pre-migration and post-migration (i.e. during resettlement), with particular emphasis on their educational experiences. The conceptual frameworks underlying this study are also highlighted.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used for this study and begins with a discussion of my research paradigm, followed by an explanation of focused ethnography. This chapter also includes a description of the sample, recruitment strategies, procedures for data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from this study through a discussion of the themes that emerged from the research data. A description of each individual theme is presented, along with relevant quotations from participant interviews, anecdotes from observations, and photographs.

Lastly, Chapter 5 is a discussion, in which the findings are situated within the guiding theories and relevant empirical research. Implications of the findings and proposed further areas of research are outlined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This aim of this chapter is to review relevant literature so as to identify knowledge gaps and provide a contextual background for this study. Firstly, an overview of refugee children's pre-migration educational and psychosocial experiences is presented. This is followed by a discussion of refugee children's school experiences during resettlement, with a specific focus on the challenges and relational factors impacting their school integration. The last section outlines the conceptual frameworks for this study, including the ecological model of human development, the ADAPT model, and the RAISED between Cultures conceptual model.

Pre-Migration Experiences

It is vital to consider the pre-migration experiences of refugee children, as these experiences can significantly impact their resettlement process (Loewen, 2004). Social conditions in the pre-migration period can be characterized to include the pre-departure stage, flight stage, and first asylum stage (Merali, 2008). The pre-departure stage is "characterized by an outbreak or exacerbation of social or political upheaval in the country of origin that disrupts local residents' normal lives" (Merali, 2008, p. 2). Syrian refugee children and their families may have experienced multiple forms of trauma during this stage, such as exposure to violence and separation from loved ones (Hassan et al., 2015), as well as disruptions in schooling. In the flight stage, individuals and families recognize the threats to their safety and make a decision to immediately relocate in order to ensure their survival (Merali, 2008). Due to the level of urgency in these situations, individuals often leave behind all of their possessions when fleeing. Next, in the first asylum stage, individuals and families arrive "at the first place of temporary safety" (Merali, 2008, p. 4), such as a neighbouring country or refugee camp. Living in refugee camps come with their own unique set of challenges, such as experience and exposure to violence,

limited access to food and healthcare (Merali, 2008) and further delays in schooling. For some refugees, there may be multiple asylum locations before permanently resettling in a host country. Given that refugee children experience a range of difficulties during pre-migration, they may already be at risk for developing psychological disturbances (Fazel & Stein, 2002) and learning problems upon their arrival in Canada. In order to gather a better understanding of these risk factors, refugee children's experiences prior to resettlement must be examined. Thus, the following sections examine the pre-migration educational and psychosocial experiences of refugee children.

Educational experiences during pre-migration. Conflict directly impacts the quality of children's educational experiences, as it disrupts teacher training programs, uproots school infrastructure, and produces a general sense of violence and destabilization that influences pedagogy and the school culture (Nofal, 2017). Many displaced individuals continue to experience educational difficulties even after leaving their home country, as the neighbouring countries they may seek refuge in often have frail educational systems themselves and limited capacity (Nofal, 2017).

***School enrolment rates in Syria and countries of first asylum*.** Before the war began, Syria boasted universal primary enrolment rates and near universal rates in secondary education (Watkins & Zyck, 2014). Steps were also being taken to increase rates of enrolment in post-secondary institutions. However, due to the conflict, "education in Syria has been thrown into reverse gear" (Watkins & Zyck, 2014, p. 3), producing an "education crisis for the Middle East" (Culbertson & Constant, 2015, p. 1). Half of all Syrian children did not attend school during the 2014-2015 academic school year, and this figure rose to three quarters in some of the hardest hit regions (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). It has been reported that Syria's primary school enrollment

rate is now among the lowest in the world (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). In addition, the access to and quality of education has been a challenge for Syrian refugee children living in asylum countries and most of these children are continually missing essential educational milestones (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2015).

The neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and Iraq have endured the immediate consequences of Syrian displacement and "opened their doors to displaced Syrian refugees" (Nofal, 2017, p. 4). Within these countries, Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan have had the greatest influx of Syrian refugees (Nofal, 2017). In Lebanon, approximately 20% of Syrian school-aged children are enrolled in school (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). In 2014, over two thirds of school-aged Syrian refugee children in Turkey were not enrolled in school and one third of school-aged Syrian refugee children in Jordan were not attending school (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). It is important to consider the enrolment rates and educational experiences of Syrian refugees in these countries of asylum, as many of the refugees arriving in Canada may have initially spent time in one or more of these countries. Furthermore, given the age group of the population in this study and the timing of the outbreak of conflict in Syria, it is likely that these children were too young to attend school in Syria for an extended period of time. Thus, there is a strong chance that the main school-related experiences they had before resettlement, if any, occurred in the first asylum stage.

Barriers to attending school in pre-migration contexts. Barriers to attending school in countries of first asylum may include, school space shortages, transportation, inability to provide sufficient documentation for registration, school fees, lack of residency status, and language-related issues (Culbertson & Constant, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2016a). In Turkey, for instance, children cannot enroll in schools until they have exhibited proficiency in Turkish (Sirin

& Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Within refugee camps, while there may be potential access to primary schools, some children are unable to attend for reasons such as, lack of funds to purchase school supplies, waiting in lines for food at distribution points, illness, or prohibition to attend due to gender-related biases (Government of Manitoba, 2012). Refugee students may also encounter physical barriers to schooling in refugee camps, such as distance and the lack of a physical school building (Mareng, 2010). Some children may have had multiple interruptions in their education and "restarts in one or more school systems, as they may have spent time in a number of different countries before arriving in Canada" (Government of Manitoba, 2012, p. 22). Given these conditions, many of the young Syrian refugee children entering Canadian schools may have missed the opportunity to develop vital literacy and numeracy skills taught in early childhood education contexts, which are foundational for future learning.

Educational disadvantages. For the Syrian children who have been able to access schooling in refugee camps, the collapse of Syria's educational system has left many of them with an "educational disadvantage" (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015, p. 7). Previous schooling disruptions in Syria place refugee children behind their counterparts academically. Thus, these children struggle to catch up with their classmates while also attempting to navigate the customs and culture of their host society (Sirn & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Many refugee children also encounter language barriers in school and end up spending a "disproportionate amount of time learning languages while often falling behind in age-appropriate academic content" (Dryden-Peterson, 2016, p. 142). In a study by Seker and Sirkeci (2015), teachers ranked the lack of Turkish language ability as a primary problem area for Syrian refugee children at a school in Eastern Turkey. The lack of Turkish language skills was found to hinder refugee children's school integration process and prevented students from developing friendships with their peers.

Refugee children are often exposed to numerous languages of instruction during their migration, which leads to confusion and insufficient opportunities to succeed academically (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). In addition to these issues, the trauma experienced by refugee children has the potential to impact their emotional, cognitive, and social development, further contributing to their pre-resettlement academic challenges (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

Experiences of discrimination in countries of first asylum. Refugee students often encounter discrimination in their pre-resettlement educational contexts (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). It is generally assumed, in most of the literature on refugee children, that their first experiences of cultural adaptation and marginalization within schools occur when they arrive in their resettlement country; however, these experiences are not new for the majority of refugees (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Most refugee children have previously entered a new school system within a country of first asylum and studies have shown that they frequently experience discrimination, particularly in the context of curriculum content and through direct treatment from teachers and classmates (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Curriculum content can range from being unrelatable for refugee students and, in worst case scenarios, extremely politicized and discriminatory (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Syrian refugee students in Lebanon reported being excluded by their peers and subjected to derogatory chants (UNICEF & Save the Children, 2012). Likewise, in Egypt, Syrian refugee parents discussed how their children were bullied by their classmates and questioned about going back to their own country (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). As a result of such experiences of discrimination, refugee children and their parents arriving in Canada may approach schools and teachers with caution (Dryden-Peterson, 2015).

Quality of education in refugee settings. When considering the quality of refugee education in pre-migration contexts, the literature suggests that it "is of low and uneven quality globally" (Dryden-Peterson, 2015, p. 1). Consequently, even those refugee children that are able to attend school in countries of first asylum likely possess skills and knowledge that are much lower than what is expected of their age-based grade level (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Dryden-Peterson (2015) suggests that the three aspects of educational quality in refugee settings that are especially important for the schooling of resettled refugee students in the United States are: (1) available resources for teaching, (2) learning outcomes, (3) and pedagogy. The availability of resources for teaching in refugee contexts is limited, as demonstrated by low requirements for teacher training and qualifications, as well as high ratios of students to teachers (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). There is a lack of quality teachers in refugee settings and there are insufficient structures set in place, specifically in regards to remuneration and training, to retain teachers (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). In a study examining the quality of education for Syrian refugee children in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, it was found that teacher experience varies greatly (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). Shift schools have been created in Jordan and Lebanon, as well as in UNICEF schools in Turkey, by dividing the day into two half-day shifts in order to accommodate the increasing number of Syrian refugee students (Human Rights Watch, 2016b). However, an outcome of double-shift schools is decreased instructional time for all students, which directly impacts educational quality (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). Many of the teachers hired to staff additional shift schools lack teaching experience and concerns have been raised in regards to their ability to manage the challenges associated with teaching refugee children and delivering high-quality instruction. Culbertson and Constant (2015) also found that such shift schools, along with community schools, in Turkey and Lebanon, lacked appropriate monitoring

and support. Similarly, a teacher at a refugee camp in Jordan expressed that he did not receive any formal training before beginning teaching, nor was his school visited by external quality monitors (Human Rights Watch, 2016b). Other refugee camp teachers also reported inadequate training and difficulty with teaching traumatized Syrian refugee children. Moreover, the use of corporal punishment by teachers at refugee camp schools has been cited as the result of a lack of training regarding classroom management and frustration with challenging classroom environments (Human Rights Watch, 2016b).

In terms of learning outcomes, which include literacy levels, dropout rates, and perceived level of skill development, the empirical literature suggests that outcomes for refugee children are extremely low (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). In comparison to Jordanian students, for example, Syrian students have been shown to fare considerably worse in school (Human Rights Watch, 2016b). Moreover, when examining pedagogical approaches, refugee education is typically teacher-centered with an emphasis on lecturing and factual questioning, despite a global shift towards child-centered and participatory methods of instruction (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). An overreliance on teacher-centered modes of instruction provide refugee children with few opportunities to actively participate in their learning (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Prior experience with teacher-centered pedagogy leaves refugee students unaware of the approaches to learning and behaviours commonly expected of them in their resettlement countries.

Psychosocial factors impacting refugee children in pre-migration contexts. During a period when refugee children's language skills, minds, and emotional stability are developing, refugee children find themselves in circumstances of great distress and trauma (CMAS, 2015). Concurrently, these children have not fully developed strong coping skills, which places them at a higher risk to the impact of trauma and stress (CMAS, 2015). Most of the Syrian refugee

children arriving in Canada are likely to have observed conflict firsthand, suffered the destruction of their homes and neighbourhoods, been forcibly displaced, separated from family and loved ones, and exposed to violence in their country of origin (Hassan et al., 2015). During the migratory phase when escaping to safety, refugee children continue to encounter dangerous circumstances (Murray, 2016). The flight to safety often involves traveling through dangerous terrain with minimal access to basic necessities, such as food and water (Henley & Robinson, 2011; Murray, 2016). The journey to resettlement may also entail stopping in refugee camps for extended periods of time in which children are met with additional challenges including, discrimination, limited access to food and water, lack of security, and few opportunities for education and healthcare (Henley & Robinson, 2011). A study conducted by Ozer, Sirin, and Oppedal (2013) of 311 Syrian refugee children in a refugee camp in Turkey found that over half of the participants had experienced six or more traumatic events, with nearly three quarters of all participants reporting having experienced the loss of a loved one. The distress that refugee children endure both in their home countries and during the flight to safety present a significant risk factor for the development of psychosocial adjustment difficulties in resettlement (Murray, 2016). Such adjustment difficulties may "range from anxiety, social isolation and depression to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (Murray, 2016, p .614). The most researched mental health diagnoses are PTSD, other anxiety disorders, as well as depression (Murray, 2016). Comorbidity among these diagnoses is common and refugee children may display multiple symptoms, which may not necessarily represent one single disorder (Fazel & Stein, 2002; Henley & Robinson, 2002).

Post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD estimates vastly differ within the literature, depending on the population and sample, diagnostic methods, and types of events experienced by

participants (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006); however, irrespective of the country of origin or resettlement, "research has shown an elevated presence of PTSD among refugee children" (Henley & Robertson, 2011, p. 54). Studies exploring the mental health of refugee children indicate that PTSD is the most commonly found mental health problem in this population, followed by depression (Hadfield et al., 2017).

Ozer and colleagues (2013) found that approximately 50% of their sample of 311 Syrian refugee children between the ages of nine to 18 years in a refugee camp in Turkey reported experiencing symptoms of PTSD "sometimes" or "often". Further, almost half of the surveyed children scored above the clinical cut-off for PTSD. In another study with 96 Syrian children at a German refugee camp, the prevalence of PTSD was 26% for children up to six years of age and 33% for children between the ages of seven to 14 years, which are higher than rates found within the general population (Soykoek, Mall, Nehring, Henningsen, & Aberl, 2017). A recent review of PTSD among children and adolescents in Arab countries affected by war and conflict has indicated that PTSD rates range from 35% to 50% (Baddoura & Merhi, 2015) of the national child populations. Research suggests that if PTSD is left untreated in children, it may continue to persist for an extended duration of time (Ruf et al., 2010). For instance, Almqvist and Brandell-Forsberg (1997) conducted a study examining the prevalence and stability of PTSD among 50 Iranian preschool children living in Sweden as refugees. It was found that 31% of the sample exhibited severe PTSD symptoms, while 21% met the complete criteria for a PTSD diagnosis. Most of these children continued to meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD after a follow-up period of two and a half years. Conversely, according to a study examining the prevalence of mental health disorders, including PTSD, among children who were exposed to warfare, only

1.4% of those diagnosed with PTSD continued to meet the full diagnostic criteria after a period of one year (Karam et al., 2014).

Depression and anxiety. In comparison to PTSD, depression and anxiety have been understudied in the literature regarding refugee children's mental health (Henley & Robertson, 2011). The extant research literature indicates that refugee children who have been exposed to warfare often report increased levels of depression and anxiety (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006). It is important to note that as is the case with PTSD, prevalence rates of depression and anxiety differ across studies. This discrepancy is likely attributed to factors such as variations among samples and time, as well as measurements used to assess mental health. Karam et al. (2014) studied the prevalence of major depressive disorder (MDD) among 386 war-affected children and found that 25.9% of participants presented with MDD; however, after a follow up period of one year, the prevalence rate was considerably lower at 5.6%. It is noteworthy that the persistence of mental health disorders at follow-up was associated with prewar disorders and having observed war events. Ozer et al. (2013) also measured symptoms of depression among their sample of 311 Syrian refugee children residing in a camp in Turkey. Over 44% of these children experienced debilitating symptoms of depression (i.e. a level of depressive symptoms that affected their daily functioning) and 20% showed the presence of a depressive disorder. When compared to norms in the United States, prevalence estimates of depression in children is around 2% of the whole child population (Wagner & Brent, 2009). Interestingly, the most frequently endorsed item on the depression scale by children in Ozer et al.'s (2013) study was related to bodily complaints. This is consistent with literature suggesting that somatic symptoms are common within cultures in which there is a limited awareness of mental health issues as characterized within Western countries. Ozer et al. (2013) report that the children in their study may express their

psychological distress in bodily terms, as mental health problems are not typically a topic of discourse in their culture and they may therefore lack relevant vocabulary to articulate their feelings. This demonstrates the important role that culture and context play in the way distress is expressed and communicated.

Cartwright, El-Khani, Subryan, and Calam (2015) surveyed 106 caretakers of Syrian refugee children between the ages of four to 10 years attending school at two refugee camps in northern Syria and southern Turkey. One of the scales completed by participants was the Pediatric Emotional Distress Scale (PEDS). The results indicated that almost half (49%) of the children had "clinically significant levels of PEDS rated anxiety and being withdrawn" (Cartwright et al., 2015, p. 10). This rate is consistent with the results from previous research studies on refugee children, which have shown rates of anxiety ranging from 49% to 69% (Fazel & Stein, 2002). When considering self-reports of anxiety, Syrian adolescents in Jordan voiced anxiety as one of their main concerns (UNICEF & International Medical Corps, 2014). Further, the findings from a recent study examining Syrian refugee mothers and children within their first month of arrival in the United States revealed that 61% of the children had a probable anxiety diagnosis, while 85% of children had a probable separation anxiety diagnosis (as cited in American Psychiatric Association, 2017). The researchers also reported a higher likelihood that children with probable separation anxiety were younger in age (American Psychiatric Association, 2017).

Additional psychosocial problems. Other frequently reported psychosocial problems faced by refugee children include bodily complaints, withdrawal, attention issues, a generalized sense of fear, irritability and agitation, increased dependency on others, and interpersonal challenges (Henley & Robertson, 2011). A study investigating emotional and behavioural

problems among newcomer refugee children in Australia found that children between the ages of four to 12 years from the Middle East presented with an increased level of problems in comparison to those from Africa (Ziaian, Antiss, Antoniou, Baghurst, & Sawyer, 2011). Syrian refugee children display a range of psychosocial problems including, fear, difficulty sleeping, withdrawal from others, sadness, displays of aggression, nervousness, speech-related issues such as mutism, stress, and somatic symptomology (Hassan et al., 2015). For example, in Cartwright et al.'s (2015) study surveying 106 caretakers of Syrian refugee children between the ages of four to 10 years, 62.3% of children met the clinical cutoff for being fearful and 45% presented emotional symptoms. Over a third of these children also appeared to meet the clinical cutoff for conduct problems. In addition, 22% of Syrian refugee adolescents in the previously discussed study by Ozer and colleagues (2013) in Jordan, displayed aggression, which directly impacted their ability to function. When asked to draw a picture of a person, 9% of the child respondents spontaneously added in blood, tears, or guns, which strongly indicate the presence of trauma (Ozer et al., 2013; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

Summary. As previously mentioned, refugee children's pre-migration experiences play a large role in shaping their future educational and psychosocial outcomes. Refugee children are often exposed to a number of traumatic events in their home countries, during the flight stage, as well as in places of first asylum, which continue to impact them even after resettlement. Due to conflict and displacement, refugee children may experience severe interruptions in their schooling and, even if they are able to access schooling in the first asylum stage, it may not be of high quality. To further complicate issues, refugee children often face a number of psychosocial issues before resettlement, such as PTSD and depressive symptoms. Given the risk that these

symptoms can persist after resettlement, service-providers must pay great attention to children's psychosocial adaptation and potential areas of challenge.

Post-Migration Experiences

Post-migration experiences refer to refugee children's experiences during resettlement in a host country. Although refugee children are no longer experiencing urgent threats to their safety during resettlement, they are faced with the challenge of navigating an entirely new host society. Given that schools are one of the first and most impactful systems that refugee children enter during this time (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007), the challenges they face within the school system and the relational factors impacting their educational process play a key role in their adjustment.

In-school challenges during resettlement. The empirical literature has suggested that refugee children face a range of in-school challenges during resettlement. These difficulties may include: language barriers, issues with grade placement, and discrimination. As there is limited information about the academic experiences of resettled Syrian refugee children, given that the conflict began fairly recently (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015), this section draws primarily from general research on refugee children's resettlement experiences.

Language barriers. Given that refugee source countries are primarily non-English speaking, refugee children are amongst the growing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in Canadian schools (Kaplan, Stolk, Valibhoy, Tucker, & Baker, 2016). As such, one of the greatest challenges for refugee students during resettlement "involves difficulties with transition into the new language, particularly in mainstream classrooms" (Birman & Tran, 2017, p. 4). These language-related challenges persist until children become skilled in speaking, reading, and writing English (Sekhon, 2008). Research has shown that resettled refugee

children's English language abilities are closely related to their ability to socially integrate within the school context (Wagner, 2013). In one study, for instance, Roma refugee parents reported that their children initially struggled to develop friendships with their peers as a result of their inability to speak English (Walsh, Este, Krieg, & Giurgiu, 2011). Other research has shown that young resettled refugees' lack of English fluency may contribute to feelings of marginalization (Young & Chan, 2014), anxiety about making friends, and fears of being judged by others (Hyman, Vu, & Beiser, 2000). The preliminary findings of a recent study exploring the school-based integration of newcomer Syrian refugee children in Calgary Public Schools suggested that children frequently encountered linguistic challenges (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2017). Teachers appeared to discourage children from speaking in their native language and openly reprimanded them if they did so, even if they did not understand English. In addition, children reported that teachers favoured Canadian students who were fluent in English, leading to them to feel lonely and alienated. In Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton's (1990) qualitative study of Hmong resettled refugee children attending an elementary school in California, participants expressed a sense of frustration and hopelessness when performing academic tasks involving writing or interpreting texts written in English. The researchers suggested that the children experienced trauma because of teachers' expectations that they execute complicated academic skills and demonstrate an awareness of cultural knowledge in a foreign language (as cited in McBrien, 2005).

Language barriers not only impact refugee children's social and emotional adjustment within the school context, but also their academic adjustment. The acquisition of basic language skills in a country's national language is considered compulsory for academic engagement and achievement (Brewer, 2016). Two types of second language proficiency have been identified in the literature: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language

proficiency (CALP) (Loewen, 2004). BICS refers to the language skills needed to effectively engage in face-to-face conversation (Loewen, 2004). On the other hand, CALP refers to the language-related knowledge and literacy skills required to effectively engage in academic work (Loewen, 2004). It involves being able to clearly and accurately communicate messages in tasks that are cognitively demanding and decontextualized (Loewen, 2004). Even in the most optimal settings, it has been found that oral proficiency in the English language develops within three to five years and academic English proficiency takes four to seven years to develop (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Distinguishing between BICS and CALP is necessary for service-providers, as "students who appear to learn [oral] English rapidly may be unreasonably expected to approach grade norms in academic skills" (Cole, 1998, p. 5).

Second language acquisition builds on learners' language and literacy skills in their first language, which is a problem for many refugee children, as they may have lower language and literacy skills than expected due to limited or disrupted schooling (Paradis, 2016). Thus, refugee children may learn English and acquire literacy skills at a slower pace than other newcomer children during resettlement (Paradis, 2016). This notion is consistent with research demonstrating that young ELLs with little to no schooling in their first language took up to 10 years to achieve academic language proficiency (Kaplan et al., 2016). Likewise, a study exploring the learning experiences of resettled Iraqi refugee students who had experienced significant disruptions in their previous schooling found that the Iraqi children's linguistic progress was much slower than their other ELL counterparts (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010).

Refugee children with little or no English language ability are often disproportionately referred for cognitive assessments to identify the presence of a learning disorder and are overrepresented in special education classrooms (Allen & Franklin, 2002; Kaplan et al., 2016),

despite their high potential (McBrien, 2005). This may occur when refugee children possess oral language skills but still lag behind in their academic performance, leading teachers and school personnel to attribute their underachievement to factors outside of language, such as a learning disability or disorder. In Trueba et al.'s (1990) study with Hmong refugee children, school personnel assumed that the children's academic difficulties were due to a learning disability; however, the researchers suggested that the children's academic difficulties were actually related to problems with communicating their learning in English. These types of misunderstandings appear to stem from a flawed system for determining children's academic competence, which is based on their ability to demonstrate acceptable cultural and linguistic responses (Trueba et al., 1990). Similarly, Afghani refugee children resettled in Edmonton, Canada, noted that language barriers were what impacted their ability to complete school tasks, as opposed to the subject matter itself (Kanji & Cameron, 2010). Again, in another study, resettled refugee youth noted that their limited English fluency led to challenges in understanding classroom instructions, asking teachers questions, and communicating with others at school and as a result, they fell behind in their schoolwork (Shakya et al., 2010).

In other cases, school staff may misinterpret refugee children's behaviour as mischievous or naughty, when in actuality they are struggling to understand and follow directions. For instance, Bash and Zezlina-Phillips (2006) conducted a case study of a resettled Kosovan refugee student attending primary school in the United Kingdom. The child's teachers considered his oral English to be highly developed and did not identify any substantial linguistic difficulties; however, through observations, the researchers discovered that the child's linguistic skills were not as developed as originally assumed. School staff assumed that the child understood classroom directions and thus in situations where he did not follow directions, it was perceived

as a conscious reluctance to do so or naughty behaviour. Through the researchers' observations it became evident that when the child appeared to follow instructions, it was not because he understood what the teacher was saying; rather, he was observing his neighbouring peers and mimicking their behaviour. This "mimicking strategy" allowed the child to camouflage his lack of language abilities and perform the task at hand. Overall, as the research clearly demonstrates, language barriers are a common problem for resettled refugee children in school settings and impacts their educational experience across a variety of domains (i.e. social, emotional, and academic).

Academic achievement and grade placement. Although there is limited empirical information on the educational outcomes of refugee children, particularly those children under the age of 10 (Graham, Minhas, & Paxton, 2016), research has shown that refugee students underachieve academically (Ayoub, 2014). As discussed above, the academic difficulties that refugee students face are often largely attributed to language barriers. In addition to language barriers, grade placement may also impact refugee students' school adjustment and achievement levels.

Graham and colleagues (2016) conducted a review in which they examined the empirical literature on the educational outcomes of refugee students. Their findings indicated that accurate educational assessments and grade placement were key determinants of academic success among refugee students; yet, refugee students were often inappropriately placed in classes that were actually unsuitable for their learning. Insufficient assessments of children's previous educational experiences frequently resulted in inappropriate grade placement and academic expectations. It was found that schools either overlooked the impact of interrupted education on refugee students or they failed to account for previous learning. The Canadian school system conducts an age-

appropriate grade placement in which students are placed in the grade appropriate for their age, regardless of their educational background (Rossiter & Derwing, 2012). While the province of Alberta and school boards concur that students should be grouped with their same-aged peers, many newcomer parents prefer that their children be placed in a grade that corresponds with the amount of formal schooling they have received (Rossiter & Derwing, 2012). As a result of this age policy, some parents feel that their children are predestined for academic failure (Rossiter & Derwing, 2012). Students placed in grades with "an ill-matched level of academic challenge may feel as though there is no way forward" (Miller, Ziaian, & Esterman, 2017, p. 7). In Stewart et al.'s (2015) study with newcomer African refugee parents in Canada, parents noted that the age-based education system created embarrassment for students. Age-based grade placement is especially problematic for refugee children who have had limited educational experiences or experienced significant disruptions in their schooling. Research has found that the achievement levels of immigrants with interrupted schooling in their country of origin were significantly below grade level when instruction was provided exclusively in English (Thomas & Collier, 2002) and the achievement gap increased with each lost year of schooling (Kaplan et al., 2016).

Discrimination. Upon arrival in Canada, refugee children may be susceptible to discrimination, bullying, and racism within the school context. To further complicate issues, many Syrian refugees identify as Muslim, and due to the stigma associated with Islam in Western countries, they may be at a greater risk of anti-Islamic discrimination within schools (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). In the case of many Muslim girls, they may not be able to conceal their religious identity due to family requirements to wear a hijab and conservative clothing (McBrien, 2005). For other Muslim students, their religious affiliation may become apparent when they fast during the month of Ramadan or search for a private space to conduct their ritual

prayers at school (McBrien, 2005). Consequently, this stigmatized component of their identity becomes known by others, which may lead to rejection and discrimination by those belonging to the host society (McBrien, 2005).

Refugee children have also reported being excluded (Closs, Stead, Arshad, & Norris, 2001), subjected to teasing (Ayoub, 2014), and encountering racial discrimination and bullying by their peers (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Almqvist & Hwang, 1999; Closs et al., 2001; Yau, 1995). Refugee children's experiences of discrimination by their peers and other barriers to forming peer relationships will be discussed in greater detail in a later section of this document. The empirical research has indicated that refugee children are not only discriminated against by their peers, but also service-providers in schools or childcare settings (e.g. educators). In Agbenyega and Klibthong's (2013) study of African refugee children attending early childhood settings in Melbourne Australia, it was reported that childcare staff favoured the white children and often neglected the African children. African refugee parents noted that childcare staff used derogatory terms to label their children, placed blame on them when there were any fights, and did not treat them with the same level of care compared to their white counterparts. Refugee parents have called for educators to approach their children with the same unbiased attitude that they approach mainstream, American-born students with and to make an active attempt to learn about refugee students' cultures (Tadesse et al., 2009).

Summary. In summary, refugee children experience a wide range of in-school challenges, including language barriers, issues with grade placement, and discrimination. However, there is limited empirical evidence exploring how these types of challenges affect refugee children of early childhood age. In addition, there is a lack of information on the in-school challenges faced by the Syrian refugee population specifically.

Relational factors impacting school adjustment during resettlement. The relationships that refugee students share with their teachers, parents, and peers, play a significant role in their adjustment within the school context. The significance and impact of these relationships, as discussed in the relevant literature, are outlined below.

Role of teachers. One of the most significant relationships that students develop during their schooling is with their teachers (Nofal, 2017). If teachers are unable to appropriately respond to refugee students' aspirations and needs, they will be unsuccessful in effectively teaching, motivating, and empathizing with their students (Nofal, 2017). The literature has identified a lack of training and information about refugee experiences as a key challenge that teachers encounter in instructing refugee children (Hoot, 2011; Miller et al., 2017; Nagasa, 2014; Rossiter & Derwing, 2012; Wagner, 2013; Shallow & Whitington, 2014). As a result, teachers may misunderstand or overlook their students' background and culture, carry unreasonable expectations, and use their own personal biases or assumptions to guide their work.

Whiteman (2005) conducted a survey examining teachers' experiences of integrating refugee students into their schools. The results indicated an overwhelming need for more reliable information about these students' experiences. Specifically, teachers felt that they were lacking information about refugee students' language needs, special educational needs, medical history, current family circumstances, immigration status, background information about their country of origin, and prior schooling. The teachers indicated that misunderstandings and a lack of knowledge about refugee children's background and culture, specifically with reference to expectations of education, was a barrier to refugee children's successful integration in the school context. In regards to staff training, respondents from 10 of the 24 schools that participated in the study noted that they did not receive specific training for supporting refugee students and the

need for additional training and resources was identified. On a similar note, teachers at an elementary school in the United States reported that they did not receive formal training on refugee issues in their teacher education programs (Nagasa, 2014). In their study of war-affected children's resettlement approaches, Blanchet-Cohen and Denov (2015) also found that service-providers, including teachers, did not feel sufficiently prepared to support war-affected children. In addition, one of the major findings from a study investigating the special needs of refugee children between the ages of five to eight years enrolled in the public school system in Buffalo, New York was that teachers reported feeling under-prepared in dealing with the emotional distress experienced by refugee children (Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006). In the province of Alberta, both Alberta Education and the Alberta Teacher's Association do not require teachers to have specific training for working with ELL children, a group that many refugee children often belong to, despite the potential benefits of doing so (Rossiter & Derwing, 2012).

Teacher's unfamiliarity with refugee students' linguistic and cultural heritage "has resulted in misunderstandings, misdiagnosis, and counterproductive remediation attempts" (Graham et al., p. 9). For instance, in one study, Canadian primary school teachers misinterpreted newcomer refugee children's avoidance of direct eye contact with adults, a sign of respect in their native culture, as inattentive and disrespectful (Usman, 2012). In another study, Iraqi refugee children displayed distress in their academic learning and teachers deduced that this was because there was something innately wrong with the children (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). However, the author of the study highlighted how teachers failed to understand that the content of some of the literacy resources used with the Iraqi students was culturally inappropriate, which in turn led to noncompliant or boisterous behaviour among students. Due to their limited experience or training in working with refugee students, teachers may end up relying on existing stereotypes

and thus fail to build on students' strengths (Ayoub, 2014). According to a review of the empirical research on learning problems and educational outcomes among resettled refugee students, cultural stereotyping of refugee students was found to be related with biased assessments, relationships, behaviours, and expectations (Graham et al., 2016). It was also found that low teacher expectations of refugee children are common both in primary and secondary school settings, "with the risk that such expectations would become a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Graham et al., 2016, p. 10). For example, African refugee parents of preschool aged children reported that teachers had low expectations for their children and did not challenge them enough (Tadesse et al., 2009). In Rousseau, Drapeau, and Corin's (1996) study of school performance and emotional problems among resettled refugee children from Southeast Asia and Central America, the results demonstrated comparable grades and assessment scores among children from both groups; however, school authorities identified more severe learning difficulties among the Central American children. Rousseau et al. (1996) suggest that the teachers' preconceived notions regarding the academic capabilities of Central American and Southeast Asian children are what led to more or less frequent diagnoses of learning problems among the children from these groups.

Additional barriers that teachers with refugee students may encounter include language and cultural differences, having access to few resources, and balancing the needs of refugee students along with the rest of the class (Anderson et al., 2004). Early childhood educators in Melbourne, Australia noted that one of the main difficulties they encountered was misunderstandings with families because of language barriers (Abgenyega & Klinthong, 2013). In addition, they reported challenges with differing cultural expectations between themselves and refugee families about how to teach their children. The educators followed a play-based

curriculum, while the refugee families preferred structured teaching. Tadesse et al., (2009) had similar findings in their study in which preschool teachers believed play was the most effective method of teaching children but found this approach was not always approved by parents of African refugee students in their class who favoured more directive and structured forms of instruction, as this was the dominant educational practice in their home countries.

Birman and Tran (2017) examined the academic adjustment experiences of Somali Bantu refugee children at an elementary school in the United States. It was found that teachers struggled with managing large class sizes and they described challenges in locating appropriate resources for the Somali Bantu students while effectively executing the lesson plan for the larger class. In addition, teachers discussed how attending to the specific needs of the Somali Bantu children resulted in reduced instructional time for the rest of their students, thereby decreasing the overall academic performance of the class. This is comparable to findings from Rousseau et al.'s (1996) study where teachers expressed feeling overworked and not having enough time to deal with refugee children's low achievement levels and socioaffective problems.

Role of parents. *Parental involvement* in the schooling process has been shown to have a positive impact on children's academic performance and behaviour (Hamilton, 2004; Young & Chan, 2014). Refugee parents play an important role in helping their children form trusting relationships with school staff and the development of a positive relationship between schools and parents is crucial for the successful school-related adjustment of refugee children (Cranston & Labman, 2016). When there is a lack of parental involvement, refugee students run the risk of failing academically and socially, even if in-school supports are in place (Cranston & Labman, 2016).

Refugee parents face a variety of obstacles during resettlement such as, economic hardships, unfamiliarity with the Canadian school system, limited language proficiency, and demanding work schedules (Cranston & Labman, 2016, Young & Chan, 2014), which may prevent them from effectively engaging in their children's schooling and providing their children with academic support (Ayoub, 2014). For instance, a study exploring the integration of newly arrived Syrian refugees in the United Kingdom found that Syrian refugee parents' limited English proficiency prevented them from being able to initiate communication with their children's schools (Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017).

In another instance, refugee parents of early childhood age children reported that *language barriers* impeded them from assisting their children with their homework and becoming involved at school (Shallow & Whitington, 2014). Furthermore, in a study exploring the challenges faced by newcomer refugee parents from Africa who had resettled in Canada, parents described how they were unable to devote time to their children and keep track of their school work due to heavy work schedules (Stewart et al., 2015). As a consequence of receiving little academic support from their parents, refugee children may experience continued difficulties in developing critical literacy and numeracy skills (Prior & Niesz, 2013). Although refugee parents struggle to actively participate in their children's education (Ayoub, 2014), they often report high hopes for their children to receive a quality education and succeed academically (McBrien, 2011; Miller et al., 2017; Nilsson, Barazanji, Heintzelman, Siddiqi, & Shilla, 2012). Thus, refugee children are placed in a frustrating situation, as their parents expect them to excel academically but are unable to provide adequate academic support (Ayoub, 2014).

The *cultural gap* between parents and schools has also been perceived as major hurdle (Rousseau et al., 1996). As discussed earlier, refugee parents and teachers may have different

perceptions about the most effective method of instruction, where many newcomer refugee parents prefer structured teaching methods, while a great deal of early childhood educators consider play to be a suitable mode of instruction. As a result of these differing views and refugee parents' unfamiliarity with the educational system in the host society, they may be dissatisfied with the quality of education their children are receiving. However, refugee parents are often unable to express their views or concerns to schools due to language barriers or out of deference to school authorities (Rah, Choi, & Nguyen, 2009; Tadesse, 2014). Refugee parents may also experience concerns that their children are not provided with enough opportunities to learn about their homeland and native culture in school (e.g. Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2013). Additionally, in Nilsson et al.'s (2012) study, refugee parents reported feeling as though schools undermined their authority over their own children, as their children were taught in school that their parents could not physically hit them, although this is an acceptable parental practice in their native culture. Consequently, parents felt misunderstood and unsupported by the school system. Refugee parents have also described concerns about the lack of discipline in schools and insufficient training in behaviour (Rousseau et al., 1996). Parents have "attributed [such] problems of cultural dissonance between school and home to mutual lack of knowledge" (Rousseau et al., 1996, p. 246).

Role of peers. Relationships with peers "are important for the emotional well-being and psychological development in children, especially during the preschool and early school-age period" (Almqvist & Hwang, 1999, p. 179). Peer relationships play an important role in refugee children's academic success, social integration, sense of belonging, language acquisition (Dusi & Steinbach, 2016), and long-term adaptation (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999). Research has also demonstrated that that the development of friendships at school promotes resilience among

newcomer refugee children (Kanji & Cameron, 2010). Furthermore, Almqvist and Broberg (1999) found that social adjustment has been shown to be best predicted by peer relationships, along with the amount of time one has spent in the country of resettlement. Specifically, having a friend to play with was shown to be a highly important determinant of positive social adjustment during resettlement.

Although there is potential for peer relationships to have a remarkably positive influence on refugee children's school adjustment experiences, refugee children often experience difficulty in developing and maintaining relationships with their peers (Graham et al., 2016, Young & Chan, 2014). Refugee children may experience such difficulties as a result of mental health issues, social impairment, linguistic challenges, racism, and marginalisation (Hadfield et al., 2017). Refugee children have reported experiencing exclusion (Closs et al., 2001), feelings of loneliness (Duci & Steinbach, 2016) and being subjected to teasing by their classmates (Ayoub, 2014). The literature also indicates that refugee children frequently encounter racial discrimination and bullying by their peers during resettlement (e.g. Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Almqvist & Hwang, 1999; Closs et al., 2001; Yau, 1995) and suggests that peer groups may pre-condemn refugee children on the basis of prejudice (Closs et al., 2001). For instance, Guo et al. (2017) found that Syrian refugee children had a difficult time forming friendships with their mainstream Canadian classmates and were subjected to racist behaviour and bullying, which impacted their sense of belonging. Furthermore, a number of Syrian refugee students were ridiculed by their peers during their prayers and asked to return to their home country. Similarly, Amjad (2016) found that Muslim immigrant students were rejected by their peers as a result of biased attitudes towards their Islamic faith. Experiencing rejection from peers may threaten the quality of children's educational experience, level of social inclusion, developmental process,

and identity formulation (Dusi & Steinbach, 2016). In addition, difficulties in developing peer relationships may lead to loneliness and emotional distress (Graham et al., 2016) and negative peer relationships have been shown to result in decreased self-worth and poor social adjustment among refugee children (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999). Almqvist and Hwang (1999) found that social withdrawal was a common coping strategy among young refugee children who experienced rejection and harassment at school. Alternatively, children who had the support of a friend were able to confront their aggressors. Thus, as the literature indicates, peer relationships play a critical role in refugee children's adjustment and cannot be overlooked by service-providers.

Summary. Overall, as this section demonstrates, teachers, parents, and peers have a direct impact on refugee children's adjustment within the school context. There are evident gaps in the literature in this area, as there is limited information specific to the Syrian refugee population and refugee children of early childhood age. Additionally, a great deal of the literature discussed, both in regards to in-school challenges and relational factors impacting adjustment, appear to have origins in resettlement contexts outside of Canada (e.g. United States, Australia, Sweden). Therefore, it is important to examine these issues within a local context.

Conceptual Frameworks

This research study is informed by three theoretical frameworks: (1) the ecological model of human development, (2) the psychosocial conceptual framework of Adaptation and Development After Trauma and Persecution (ADAPT) model, and (3) the RAISED between Cultures conceptual model. A brief description of each framework is outlined in the sections below.

Ecological model of human development. As the focus of interest in this study is on the role of context and not only the individual intrapsychic component, the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) is a suitable guiding theory. Furthermore, the literature has documented how the interplay of various factors (e.g. socioeconomic circumstances, social supports, mental health history, etc.) influence refugee children's experiences, which has resulted "in calls in the last decade to view trauma and adjustment in children from ecological perspectives that view children's responses from the vantage of their developmental level and life contexts" (Yohani, 2008, p. 866).

An ecological perspective on human development argues that one must consider the whole ecological system in which growth occurs in order to gather a complete understanding of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This model posits that development occurs through processes of increasingly complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving human being, and the individuals, objects, and symbols in his or her immediate environment. In order to be effective, this interaction must take place on a consistent basis over extended durations of time. These enduring forms of interaction in one's immediate environment are labelled as "proximal processes" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 38). According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), the "form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically" (p. 38) as a combined function of the developing child, the environment (where the proximal processes are occurring), and the nature of the developmental outcomes being considered. The ecological environment is perceived as a set of five interrelated and nested structures, with each inside of the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These structures are referred to as the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The most direct influences, which are closest to the developing child (e.g. family) are viewed as

embedded within those located more distantly from the child (e.g. cultural contexts) (Hayes, O'Toole, & Halpenny, 2017). The developing child "is located at the centre of the model" (Hayes et al., 2017, p. 16).

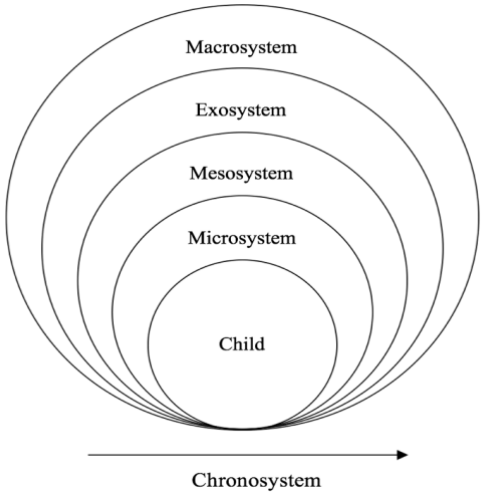

Figure 1. Visual representation of the Ecological Model of Human Development.

The microsystem is referred to as the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal connections that a developing child experiences in a provided face-to-face setting "with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 39). Examples of such settings for Syrian refugee children include a child's family, school, peer group, early childhood practitioners (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Hayes et al., 2017), and religious community. It is important to note that the relevant aspects of any environment are not only limited to its objective properties, but also include the way these properties are perceived by the individuals in that environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The mesosystem consists of the connections and processes occurring between two or more settings that contain the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) and is further extended

each time the developing child enters a new setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To put it simply, "a mesosystem is a system of microsystems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). This system emphasizes how one's behaviour in any particular setting is not only affected by experiences within that setting itself, but by the total range of settings experienced by the individual (Hayes et al., 2017). An example of a mesosystem may be a meeting between a Syrian parent, who is part of the child's family microsystem, and their child's teacher, who belongs to the school microsystem.

The next ecological context, the exosystem, refers to settings in which the developing child is not a direct participant, but in which events take place that impact, or are impacted by, what occurs in the setting that contains the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examples of exosystems in a child's life may include the parents' workplace, local school board activities, parents' social networks, and a sibling's classroom. For instance, if a child's parent is experiencing tension in their workplace, this may affect the quality of communication with their child (Hayes et al., 2017).

The macrosystem involves the "overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options embedded in each of these broader systems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.40). This system comprises those influences that occur at a cultural level, such as sociocultural beliefs regarding the significance of early childhood education (Hayes et al., 2017). Though children are not directly in contact with macrosystems, decisions made at this level substantially affect their lives. As the macrosystem defines and guides the greater society, it can greatly affect newcomer families' adjustment to the host society (Paat, 2013). For instance, if the host

country's immigration and refugee laws and policies are perceived as welcoming in nature by newcomer families, they will likely feel supported during the adjustment process (Paat, 2013).

Finally, the chronosystem considers the change or constancy over time in both the characteristics of the developing child, as well as the environment in which the child resides (Brofrenbenner, 1994). This may include changes over time in family structure, socioeconomic status, and location of residence. Specific to immigrant and refugee children, cross-national migration, timing of migration, and duration in the host country are examples of changes that may be experienced over time (Paat, 2013).

Psychosocial model of adaptation and development after trauma and persecution (ADAPT) Model. The use of the ADAPT model (Silove, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2013) as a guiding conceptual framework builds on the ecological systems theory, as it focuses on war-affected individuals, with a particular focus on groups who have undergone mass trauma. The ADAPT model identifies multiple domains that are affected when individuals and communities experience traumatic events, as has been found in the literature. A recent review of the experiences of war-affected children and adolescents has demonstrated the initial utility of this model with pediatric populations (Yohani, 2015), though more evidence is needed. As such, the application of the ADAPT model in this study will contribute to the research in this area.

The ADAPT model is a "psychosocial framework for connecting the multiple issues, stressors, and resources facing war-affected individuals" (Yohani, 2015, p. 2). The model is based on the assumption that human beings are skillful in survival and adapting to changing environments (Silove, 2005). The survival strategies they employ are rooted in universal systems of behaviour; however, the way in which these are expressed is greatly shaped by one's cultural and contextual setting. Thus, human beings' main survival and adaptive systems (which will be

discussed below) are thought to have reciprocal representations in psychobiological systems at the personal level and in sociocultural structures at the collective level. According to this model, human beings' responses to trauma are guided by the evolutionary need for survival in which individuals and communities' utilize their innate capabilities to adapt to changes brought about by trauma and rebuild their own institutions when they have appropriate resources (Yohani, 2015).

The ADAPT model proposes five core survival and adaptive systems, which include the functions of safety and security, bonds and attachment, identity and roles, justice, and existential meaning (Silove, 2005). Though these systems are described individually, they have evolved in an coordinated manner to ensure that, under normal conditions, the interaction between a person and his or her community takes place in a synergetic way that fosters personal and social homeostasis (Silove, 2005). Further, these systems evolve over time as individuals and their groups encounter different stressors, generating different needs that require differing responses (Yohani, 2015).

Safety and security. When considering threat-based definitions, safety can be defined as "the relative assurance of the physical, psychological, and spiritual integrity of individuals and their community" (Yohani, 2015, p. 3). A sense of safety is critical for one's mental wellbeing (Silove, 2013). Threats to the safety system are events that pose a threat to the survival or integrity of an individual or people close to the individual (Yohani, 2015). As discussed previously, Syrian refugee children and families often experience multiple traumatic and/or life-threatening events, such as exposure to violence (Hassan et al., 2015), which present major threats to their safety. According to the ADAPT model, reactions to trauma must be considered within contextual circumstances (Yohani, 2015). Therefore, arousal, hyper-vigilance, and

avoidance of trauma-related stimuli after being exposed to war violence can be perceived as adaptive behaviour, particularly if there is a further risk of danger (Silove, 1998). It is important to note, however, that while this type of posttraumatic stress reaction resulting from threats to one's safety is deemed as a normative survival response, it can become dysregulated (Silove, 2013). When PTSD and anxiety-related symptoms persist in an individual, even after arriving in a safe environment, this is considered maladaptive, as such symptoms can significantly impair one's level of functioning (Silove, 2013; Yohani, 2015).

Bonds and attachment. Bonds and the presence of social networks are critical for humans to function (Silove, 2013). Attachment has been defined as a tie that binds individuals "together in space and endures over time" (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). It is "a bond based on the need for safety, protection, and comfort that begins in infancy between and a child and their caregiver(s)" (Yohani, 2015, p. 5). For children who have experienced war-related trauma, the need for comfort and protection is particularly important (Yohani, 2015).

One of the major disturbances from war trauma, torture, and refugee experiences is the resulting impact on survivors' interpersonal relationships (Silove, 1999). In these instances, individuals often experience multiple separations and losses, both physical and symbolic. Refugees may have had to deal with the death of family members, as well as the loss of their possessions. They may also struggle with a loss of their sense of belonging and culture upon arrival in their host country. Adaptive reactions to these types of losses include arousal, separation anxiety, and grief initially (Silove, 2005). Refugees may also experience cultural bereavement, which refers to a great yearning or longing for one's culture of origin and previous way of life (Silove, 1999). On the other hand, extreme responses such as prolonged or

pathological grief, depression, bodily complaints, and other comorbid diagnoses are viewed as maladaptive (Silove, 2013), given their incapacitating effect on individuals.

Justice. Human rights violations and abuses, such as torture, represent challenges to the justice system in this model (Silove, 2005). These types of justice violations are mentally traumatizing, as they induce shame and humiliation among affected individuals and communities (Yohani, 2015). Threats to refugee children's justice system can occur both in their country of origin, as well as during resettlement. For instance, resettled refugee children have reported experiences of discrimination and racism within the school system (e.g. Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; McBrien, 2005). While anger, frustration, hesitance to trust others, and a commitment to justice are examples of adaptive responses to such threats, extreme anger, resentment, mistrust, and paranoia are viewed as maladaptive responses that interfere with individual and group functioning (Silove, 2005).

Identity and roles. In circumstances of mass conflict and displacement, roles and identities are inevitably threatened (Silove, 2005). This is particularly important for young refugees, as they are in critical stages of development in which they are beginning to form their own identities. After moving to a country of resettlement, refugee children may feel confused about their identity, due to differences between their culture of origin and that of the host society. According to the ADAPT model, an example of an adaptive response to threats to the roles and identity system is the creation of a new or hybrid identity, which supports adaptation (Silove, 2013). Maladaptive responses may include marginalization and social withdrawal (Silove, 2013).

Existential meaning. Exposure to conflict and displacement can significantly disrupt one's worldview and belief systems (Silove, 2013). Individuals often draw on religion and spirituality to make sense of the world around them (Yohani, 2015) and refugee children

frequently report their faith as a source of support, strength, and hope (e.g. Kanji & Cameron, 2010). In situations where "institutions and practices are threatened, it may strip away children's ability to make sense of pain and suffering" (Yohani, 2015, p. 11). When an individual's existential meaning system is challenged, responses such as existential doubts are normative and adaptive (Silove, 2005). Conversely, extreme responses such as a loss of faith (Silove, 2005), alienation, and depression (Silove, 2013) are viewed as maladaptive.

RAISED between cultures model. The RAISED between Cultures model (Brosinsky, Georgis, Gokiert, Mejia, & Kirova, 2018; Georgis et al., 2017; Kirova, Georgis, Gokiert, Brosinsky, & Mejia, 2017) was also selected as a guiding theory, as it has been specifically developed for young, resettling immigrant and refugee children. As this model is fairly recent, there is currently no research examining its application. Thus, the use of the RAISED between Cultures model in this study can provide initial insight into its applicability as a guiding framework in research with newcomer refugee children.

The RAISED between Cultures model was created as a tool for service-providers to engage in reflective intercultural practice in working with young immigrant and refugee children (Kirova et al., 2017). The model aims to facilitate a greater awareness of refugee and immigrant children's experiences, which may differ from the middle class and Eurocentric developmental expectations of young children's development. Additionally, it assists educators and other service providers in forming a holistic understanding of children's play, learning, and developmental outcomes through consideration of their social, cultural, and migratory experiences. This model identifies six major determinants or factors influencing the development of immigrant and refugee children: culture, pre-migration experiences, post-migration systemic barriers, family and community strengths, connections between early socialization environments,

and outcomes across cultures. These factors are interconnected and interact with one another to directly and indirectly influence immigrant and refugee children's development in their host country.

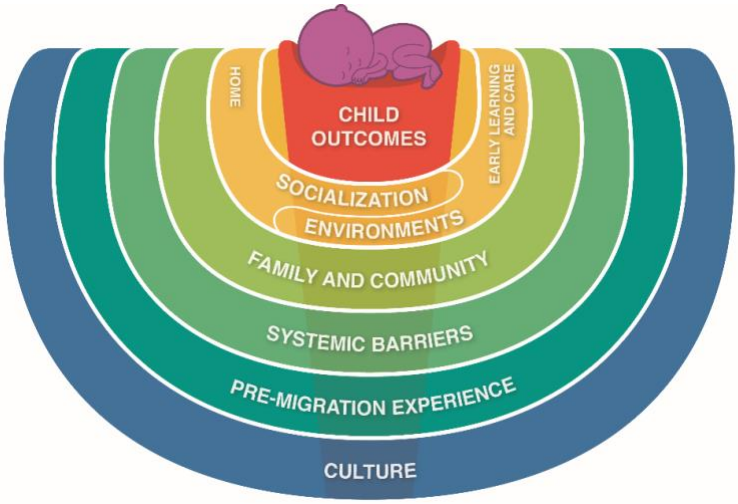

Figure 2. RAISED between Cultures: A Nested Conceptual Model (Kirova et al., 2017).

Within this model, culture is viewed as having visible and invisible components (Kirova et al., 2017). Visible components of culture may include language and clothing, while invisible components may include beliefs about learning. Immigrant and refugee children's pre-migration experiences, which entail families' pre-migration story and general home country life, are also considered to be an important factor influencing development. Pre-migration experiences may include exposure to trauma, separation from family members, and residing in refugee camps. In addition, systemic barriers encountered during resettlement further affect newcomer children's development. Examples of barriers may include language-related challenges, social isolation, economic hardships, racist encounters, and un- or under- employment among parents. Kirova et al. (2017) also identify child, family, and community strengths as determinants of development. Knowledge, resilience, multilingualism, cultural capital, strong intergenerational connections, relationships with extended family members, and supports within the community have been

recognized as examples of such strengths. Next, socialization environments (i.e. the home environment and early learning or care environment) are seen as major influences of development. This model highlights how the socialization environments that immigrant and refugee children belong to may differ in regards to expectations and goals. Immigrant and refugee families' expectations, beliefs, and values regarding early childhood education are typically molded by their culture of origin, while the expectations, beliefs, and values of early education centres are reflective of the majority culture of the host society. Finally, this model encourages the examination of learning and acculturation outcomes, as well as protective effects across cultures. Developing a healthy bi-cultural/bi-lingual identity and the ability to function as a competent member of the host culture as well as the home culture are key outcomes for immigrant and refugee children.

Summary. This section presented a brief overview of the conceptual frameworks underlying this research study. The ecological model of human development is used as a guiding framework for my research, as it takes into account the interplay between the developing child and his or her environment. The ADAPT model provides a psychosocial framework for examining participants' coping behaviours and assessing whether they are adaptive or maladaptive. Lastly, the RAISED between Cultures model is extremely useful in gathering a holistic understanding of participants' learning and developmental outcomes through careful consideration of their lived experiences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter includes a discussion of the rationale for using qualitative inquiry, my underlying worldview and philosophical assumptions, along with a description of the selected methodology (i.e. focused ethnography). Participant recruitment strategies, data collection, and data analysis are also outlined. Lastly, steps for evaluating the study and ethical considerations are explained.

Qualitative Research

In order to gather an in-depth understanding of the school-related adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian children of early-childhood age, qualitative methodology was deemed most appropriate. Qualitative research methods are applicable when the research purpose is to understand a topic which little is known about, make sense of a complex phenomenon, learn about participants' subjective experiences, develop a theoretical framework reflecting reality, or gather a detailed understanding of a phenomenon (Richards & Morse, 2007). Qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Merriam (2009) suggests that there are four characteristics of qualitative research: (1) the focus is on process, understanding, and participants' constructed meanings, (2) the researcher is the principal instrument of data collection and analysis, (3) the research process is inductive, and (4) the resulting product is rich in detail.

Qualitative inquiry was best suited for the present study, as there is a paucity of information on the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugees and young refugee children's school adjustment has been under-researched, and this study seeks to contribute to these gaps in the literature. Furthermore, the objective of this study was to gather an in-depth understanding of

the children's adjustment experiences from the perspectives of the children themselves, their parents, and their teachers.

Interpretive Framework: Social Constructivism

Researchers carry particular beliefs and philosophical assumptions, which provide direction for and inform their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The four philosophical assumptions guiding qualitative research are ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological, and are typically framed within paradigms, also known as interpretive frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A paradigm is a "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17) and in many ways operates like one's worldview. This study was conducted within a social constructivism paradigm, which holds the following assumptions:

Ontological assumption. Ontology refers to "the nature of reality and its characteristics" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). Qualitative researchers using a social constructivist interpretive framework embrace the concept of multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to the social constructivism framework, humans seek to understand the world they live in and form subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2012). These meanings are developed through interactions with other individuals, and cultural and historic norms that exist in people's lives. Thus, it is evident that different individuals may construct meaning in a variety of different ways, even when considering the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). When working from this paradigm, rather than beginning with a theory, researchers inductively develop a pattern of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The social constructivism paradigm supports my assumptions regarding newcomer Syrian refugee children. For instance, I believe that the way refugee children make sense of the world around them is greatly impacted by their migratory journeys, as

well as the quality of their interactions with family, peers, teachers, and other important figures in their lives.

Epistemological assumption. Epistemology has been defined as "the study of the nature of knowledge and justification" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 87). It has also been described as "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). According to a social constructivism paradigm, the meaning of events, actions, or ideas is not discovered, but constructed against a backdrop of mutual understanding, languages, and practices (Schwandt & Cash, 2014). In qualitative research, knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of humans (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, it is important to conduct research studies in the "field" (i.e. the contexts in which participants live and work) in order to reduce the distance between the researcher and what is being studied, as well as to gather a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of the participants. When applying the social constructivism framework in practice, questions are broad and open-ended to allow participants to construct the meaning of a particular situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, researchers are addressing the processes of communication between individuals.

Axiological assumption. Axiology considers the role that the researcher's values play in the research process (Ponterotto, 2005). Given the close and extended contact that researchers working from a social constructivist paradigm have with participants, it is impossible to remove the researcher's values from the research process (Ponterotto, 2005). Consequently, researchers accept that their personal backgrounds shape their interpretation and they position themselves within the research to acknowledge how their interpretation is influenced by their subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My objective as a qualitative researcher working from a social constructivism worldview was to interpret, or make sense of, the meanings participants in

the study have about the world them (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and, as noted in the introduction to this thesis document, I acknowledge that my interpretation of participants' narratives is shaped by my personal and academic background. Specifically, I recognize that my experiences as a Muslim, first-generation Canadian woman of South Asian descent impact how I perceive the world around me. Moreover, I am aware that my experiences in the school system, both as a student and student teacher, played a role in my understanding of participants' school experiences. Lastly, I appreciate how my prior understanding of the literature on refugee experiences has shaped my views about this population.

Research methodology. Methodology is the plan of action or design underlying the choice and use of specific methods leading to desired outcomes in research inquiry (Crotty, 1998). Ethnography is a research methodology, which has been described as "the process and product of describing and interpreting cultural behavior" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 96). Ethnographers seek to "[learn] about people by learning from them" (Roper & Shapira, 2000, p. 1) and explore situations as they occur in naturalistic settings to gather a detailed perspective (Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013). This typically involves multiple methods of data collection, which include participant observation, extended cultural immersion, interviews, and document analysis (Higginbottom et al., 2013).

For this study, a focused ethnography (FE) design was used to examine the central phenomenon. FE is "a more targeted form of ethnography" (Mayan, 2009, p. 39) used to explore specific features of a cultural group and setting (Creswell, 2012), in which participants have relevant knowledge regarding an identified problem (Higginbottom et al., 2013). For a list of distinctions between conventional ethnography and FE, see Table 1. Focused ethnographers attend to small elements of society (Knoblauch, 2005) and highlight a distinct issue or problem

within a specific setting among a small group of individuals residing in a larger society (Roper & Shapira, 2000). Specifically, the focus of FE is on the common behaviours and experiences of participants, which result from their shared features (Richards & Morse, 2007). It has been largely used "in the investigation of research fields specific to contemporary society which is socially and culturally highly differentiated and fragmented" (Knoblauch, 2005, para. 2). FE has been primarily utilized in practice-based disciplines as a pragmatic means for capturing specific cultural perspectives and practically applying these newfound understandings (Wall, 2015).

Table 1

Comparison of conventional ethnography and focused ethnography.

Conventional Ethnography	Focused Ethnography
Long-term field visits	Short-term field visits
Experientially intensive	Data/analysis intensity
Time extensity	Time intensity
Writing	Recording
Solitary data collection and analysis	Data session groups
Open	Focused
Social fields	Communicative activities
Participant role	Field-observer role
Insider knowledge	Background knowledge
Subjective understanding	Conservation
Notes	Notes and transcripts
Coding	Coding and sequential analysis

Note. Retrieved from "Focused Ethnography" by H. Knoblauch. 2005, Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 6(3). Copyright 2005 Forum: Qualitative Social Research.

According to Higginbottom et al., (2013), the primary features of FE are as follows:

- conceptual orientation of single researcher
- focus on a discrete community or organization or social phenomena
- used in academia as well as for development in healthcare services
- involvement of a limited number of participants
- problem-focused and context-specific

- participants usually hold specific knowledge
- episodic participant observation

In addition to these features, FEs typically have pre-selected topics of inquiry, utilize interviews and topics that are organized around the issues, and limit or eliminate participant observation (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013).

FE is highly suitable for this study, as the objective was to understand the school-related adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children, a distinct group with the shared experience of fleeing their country of origin, arriving in Canada as refugees, and newly navigating the Edmonton school system. In addition, FE was considered appropriate for a master's thesis study, since it is conducted in a relatively short period of time, as opposed to conventional ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005). FE is often used when research questions are best answered through descriptive analysis and interpretation (Higginbottom et al., 2013), which is consistent with a social constructivism paradigm.

Participants and research sites

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants in order for me to select the most information-rich cases whose study would provide deep insight about the research questions (Patton, 2002). Information-rich cases "are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p.230). In addition, purposeful sampling is the most commonly used sampling strategy for focused ethnography (Higginbottom et al., 2013). I selected three Syrian newcomer students of refugee status enrolled in the Edmonton Public School system, between the ages of five years to eight years, along with one of each child's parents and teacher, for a total of nine participants. This sample size was sufficient for data saturation, as focused ethnography involves a limited number of participants

(Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013). The selected children and parents had arrived in Canada for no more than one year at the time of initial contact, in order effectively capture the children's early adjustment experiences within schools. In addition, parent participants had lived in Syria for a minimum of ten years prior to migrating to Canada to maintain the uniformity of experiences among the families, with all having lived in Syria prior to recent conflicts that led to forced migration. For a demographic summary of the participating children, see Table 2.

Table 2

Demographics of child participants at time of initial contact.

Demographics of Child Participants							
Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Refugee Status	Country of Origin	Transition Country	Primary Language	Religion
Haya	6	Female	GAR	Syria	Lebanon	Arabic	Muslim
Khalid	8	Male	PSR	Syria	Lebanon	Arabic	Muslim
Maryam	8	Female	GAR	Syria	Jordan	Arabic	Muslim

Parent and child participants were recruited through a partnership with the Edmonton Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative, an organization that supports multicultural newcomers as they transition to Canada and includes programming for refugee youth initiatives and intercultural early learning. My supervisor connected me with an Arabic-speaking cultural broker employed by this organization who worked closely with many of the recently arrived Syrian refugee families. A cultural broker serves to bridge individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds in order to create change or reduce conflict (Jezewksi & Sotnik, 2001). The cultural broker was provided with copies of my recruitment letter (Appendix A) and reached out to potential families who were eligible to participate in the study. These letters were given directly to parents by the cultural broker and translated to ensure that the participants obtained accurate information. On the form, parents were able to indicate whether or not they were

interested in participating in the study and grant permission on behalf of themselves and their children to be contacted by myself. With the assistance of the cultural broker, I arranged meetings with the consenting families at a time and place that was convenient for them. At these initial meetings, I conducted a pre-screening interview (Appendix B) to decide eligibility. Once it was determined that participants met the eligibility criteria, I proceeded to explain the research study in detail and informed them that their participation was completely voluntary. Parents were also informed that their decision to participate would in no way impact their children's academic careers. Information letters (Appendix C) were given to each parent, which discussed the nature of the study, procedures, associated risks and benefits, voluntary consent, and confidentiality. Consent forms (Appendix D) were then provided to the parents, which were reviewed and signed. As the child participants in this study were of a very young age, parental consent was acquired on behalf of the children. However, assent forms (Appendix E) were read to child participants and their verbal agreement was considered appropriate assent. Lastly, each parent's consent was also obtained for contacting their child's teacher for potential participation in the study. The cultural broker was present at the meeting to act as an interpreter throughout the pre-screening interview and consent process.

After recruiting the families (i.e. parents and their children), I first reached out to each child participant's school principal by telephone to seek permission for contacting the children's teachers, as per the Edmonton Public School protocol. Once this was obtained, the principals provided me with their respective teachers' contact information. I reached out to each child's teacher(s) by email to set up an initial meeting to review the study and seek their consent to participate. One of the child participants had two teachers, of which one responded to my email and agreed to participate in the study. I met each of the interested teachers at their respective

schools at a time that was suitable for them. During these meetings, I went over the letter of information for teachers (Appendix F), which outlined the purpose of the study, risks and benefits, voluntary participation, and confidentiality as outlined and approved by the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board (REB) and the Faculty of Education's Cooperative Activities Program (CAP). The teachers then reviewed and completed the consent form (Appendix G).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with participants to obtain a detailed and broad understanding of Syrian refugee children's school-related adjustment experiences. Semi-structured interviews are considered appropriate when the researcher has enough information about the domain of inquiry to develop relevant questions about the topic, but not enough to foresee the answers (Richards & Morse, 2007). The interviews were conducted to "validate observations, provide directions for future observations… and collect data on non-observable phenomena including feelings" (Higginbottom et al., 2013, p. 5).

Interviews were held at a time and place that was most suitable for participants. The interviews with parent and child participants were held at their respective homes and interviews with teachers were conducted at schools. Interviews with adult participants (i.e. parents and teachers) focused on child participants' school-related experiences since arriving in Canada, as well as challenges and opportunities they may have encountered. The interviews progressed from broad questions about the participating children's general adjustment (e.g. How has your child's overall adjustment been?), followed by more specific questions targeting the children's emotional, social, and academic adjustment (e.g. Can you share a specific school-related incident or story that would say how your child is doing socially?) "to gain depth of exploration" (Higginbottom et al., 2013, p. 5). These open-ended questions were supplemented by clarifying

and elaborating probes. To maintain a level of consistency across the interviews, an interview protocol was used (Appendix H).

Interviews with children first involved them drawing a picture of themselves doing something at school, as the use of drawings stimulates children to provide a detailed account of their feelings and experiences (Ogina, 2012). In addition, it increases the reliability and validity of children's accounts, as they may initially face challenges in verbalizing their feelings and thoughts (Ogina, 2012). Following this, children were asked a series of questions exploring their social, emotional, and academic adjustment within the school context. A separate interview protocol (Appendix I) was created for these child interviews, in order to match the children's cognitive and linguistic stages of development (Kortesluoma et al., 2003). Past research has primarily relied on adults to learn about children's perspectives; therefore, interviewing children provided an opportunity to directly obtain information regarding their subjective experiences (Kortesluoma et al., 2003). The cultural broker served as an interpreter at all of the interviews with parent and child participants. Near the end of the school year (approximately five to seven months after the initial interviews), follow-up interviews were conducted with each participant to discuss any changes in children's school-related adjustment. Parents and teachers were provided with $20 at the end of the follow-up interviews to reimburse any costs that may have been incurred (e.g. travel costs). All interviews were audiotaped using a digital audio recorder, as recording devices are commonly used in focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005). These recordings were then transcribed verbatim.

Observations. Non-participant observations were also utilized, as it is less time-intensive than taking on a participant-as-observer role (Higginbottom et al., 2013) and "open participation is hardly any more possible" (Knoblauch, 2005, para. 22) in many practical settings.

Observations of thirty to sixty minutes in the school setting were held on a monthly basis for four months in order to gather contextual data regarding child participants' general day-to-day school experiences. Each observation was arranged approximately one week in advance by email with participating teachers in order to accommodate both of our schedules. Most of the observations were conducted in the child participants' classrooms during which I typically sat at the back of the room and recorded field notes. One of the observations took place during a school assembly and another was during choir practice. The field notes included descriptions of the participants, physical setting, classroom activities, interactions between the participants and others present in the classroom (e.g. peers), as well as my personal insights and reactions (Creswell, 2012). I also paid attention to nonverbal cues and participants' body language throughout this process.

Data Analysis

When analyzing data collected in focused ethnography, researchers engage in a cyclic, iterative, and reflective process in which initial interpretations are challenged and data is constantly reexamined (Higginbottom et al., 2013). The analysis begins during data collection, as the researcher reflexively uncovers additional themes and chooses to follow some avenues for more thorough investigation (Roper & Shapira, 2000). Data analysis is "characterized by the identification and classification of the data, which then progresses to abstract generalizations and explanation of patterns" (Higginbottom et al., 2013). For the purpose of this study, Roper and Shapira's (2000) framework for analyzing ethnographic data was utilized. I began the analytic process by immersing myself in the data (i.e. interview transcripts and observational field notes). The audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately after they were conducted and field notes were recorded during each observation. I reread the transcripts and field notes multiple times in order to familiarize myself with the data. The areas requiring additional

investigation in future observations and follow-up interviews were identified through the concurrent analysis of transcripts and enduring data collection (Okraku, 2017).

Next, in the second stage of analysis, I began to use qualitative data analysis software, NVivo to code and organize the data. I coded for descriptive labels, in which I examined the data and grouped it into meaningful segments (Roper and Shapira, 2000). During this phase, I went through the data and assigned descriptive labels to segments of text (i.e. words, sentences, and paragraphs). Following the generation of codes, I then sorted the labels into broader and more abstract categories (Roper & Shapira, 2000) based on how they were related or distinct from one another (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For instance, one of the teacher participants noted that she caught her student (i.e. one of the child participants) cheating on a spelling test at the beginning of the year but chose to view this as a means of coping with the barriers presented by language instead of misbehavior. I coded this as "Cheating as Initial Coping Strategy". This was then collapsed into the broader category of "Coping Strategies", which included a range of other coping strategies that emerged during interviews and field visits. Upon further analysis, patterns and connections among the categories began to emerge, leading to the fourth step in Roper and Shapira's analysis (2000) framework, the generation of major themes that recurred in the data (as cited in Okraku, 2017). For example, the categories "Facilitative Role of Language" and "Impact of Language Barriers" were collapsed into the general theme, "Role of Language in Adjustment". Some categories were broad enough to stand on their own as themes.

I also paid attention to outliers, which were cases that were inconsistent with the majority of the data (Salkind, 2010). Rather than discarding these outliers, I recognized that they offered valuable information, which would ultimately help me to better understand my findings (Roper & Shapira, 2000). The last step of analysis involved connecting my findings to the three theories

I had identified in Chapter 2, which could be used to interpret, or make sense of, the complex data (Roper & Shapira, 2000). I sought to find connections between the emic meanings of participants and my own etic interpretations of those meanings and then developed theoretical understandings from these (Roper & Shapira, 2000). In addition, I engaged in memoing throughout this analytic process, which involved recording personal insights and reflections about the data, which included notes from non-participant observations. Memos "enable meaning to be extracted from the data, permit the researcher to maintain momentum, [and] aid in mapping of research activities" (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008, p. 74). As Roper and Shapira (2000) emphasize, analysis does not take place in a linear and orderly fashion but rather moves back and forth among the different phases of coding, memoing, sorting for patterns, and generalizing.

Evaluating the Study

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework for evaluating trustworthiness were used in this study. These criteria are as follows: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the congruence between how participants view the world and the researcher's representation of this (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). To ensure credibility, the strategy of triangulation was used. I corroborated evidence from different individuals (Creswell, 2012) and used multiple sources of data (i.e. interviews and observations) to facilitate a deeper understanding of the central phenomenon under investigation (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Member checks were also conducted where participants were provided with the opportunity to review preliminary findings and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. In addition, I used the strategy of peer examination (Mayan, 2009), in which my supervisor reviewed my work throughout the research process and provided me with feedback. Through discussions with

my supervisor, I was able to test my developing interpretations and recognize my own biases (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, credibility was established through regular memoing, which served as a means of recording and clarifying my personal assumptions.

Transferability. Transferability assesses the applicability of findings from one study to other settings (Mayan, 2009). Transferability is achieved through the strategy of providing readers with an extensive and thick description of the participants and context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mayan, 2009). The purpose of this study is to inform service-providers, such as mental health practitioners and teachers, about newcomer Syrian refugee children's initial adjustment experiences within the school context. By providing a rich and detailed description of the participants, their worldviews, and the setting in this document, service-providers will be able to apply the findings from this study to situations in their own clinical or classroom settings.

Dependability. Dependability assesses whether the findings of a research study can be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, it is important to note that qualitative research is not conducted for the purpose of isolating human behavior (Merriam, 2009). Instead, researchers attempt to describe and explain the world from the perspectives of those experiencing it. Replicating a qualitative study will not produce the same results but this does not discredit the results of original or subsequent studies, as there can be multiple interpretations of the same data (Merriam, 2009). Thus, it is more important to consider whether the findings of a study are consistent with the data that was collected. Strategies for assessing dependability include triangulation, peer examination, and the audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). As discussed in the credibility section, triangulation and peer examination were conducted in this study. Audit trails permit readers to "authenticate the findings of a study by following the trail of the researcher" (Merriam, 2009, p.223). An audit trail involves a description of how data was

collected and categories were discovered, along with the decision-making process that took place throughout inquiry (Merriam, 2009). As such, I recorded memos containing my reflections and insights throughout the research process. In addition, I included a detailed account of how this study was conducted and analyzed in the above sections of this chapter (Merriam, 2009).

Confirmability. Confirmability addresses whether the findings from a particular research study are grounded in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is comparable to the notion of objectivity (Shenton, 2004). Ensuring real objectivity is exceptionally difficult, as even questionnaires and interview guides are constructed by humans, and hence "the intrusion of the researcher's biases is inevitable" (Shention, 2004, p. 72). However, steps must still be taken to ensure that findings result from participants' experiences, rather than the researcher's biases, as much as possible (Shenton, 2004). I engaged in a cyclic and iterative analysis of the data in which my initial interpretations were consistently challenged, leading me to constantly re-examine the data. Furthermore, I consulted with my supervisor throughout the research process and she reviewed my emerging findings to ensure confirmability. Finally, as discussed earlier, I also recorded and acknowledged my personal assumptions through memoing.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB1) was obtained for this study. In addition, an application was submitted to the Faculty of Education's Cooperative Activities Program (CAP) for permission to conduct research within local school board districts. In accordance with the conditions of approval from CAP, participation in the study was completely voluntary, written parental permission was sought on behalf of participating students, personal information was only used for the stated purpose of the study,

and measures were taken to ensure the anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of information.

Informed consent. Before commencing with data collection, informed consent was obtained from adult participants and assent was obtained from child participants. The cultural broker translated the information letter and consent form for adult participants, which discussed the purpose of the research study, procedures, risks and benefits, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. During this process, participants were encouraged to voice their questions and concerns. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they had the ability to withdraw consent at any point before August 31st, 2017. Similarly, child participants were presented with an assent form, which discussed the nature of the research study in developmentally appropriate language to ensure their understanding. The information on the assent form was explained to the children with the assistance of the cultural broker.

Potential risks. This study posed minimal risk to the participants. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the nature of the study required participants to reflect on their adjustment experiences, which could have led them to experience some discomfort if traumatic memories or experiences resurfaced. Furthermore, given that this study focused on school experiences, there was a possibility that child participants would be reminded of school-related losses in their home countries. To minimize the potential risks and discomforts, I ensured that participants were as comfortable as possible before beginning data collection. With the assistance of the cultural broker, I was able to develop a strong rapport with participating families, as she had a previously established trusting relationship with them. Furthermore, participants had the option of being provided with a list of mental health related resources to consult if they needed support. The

organization that I partnered with, the Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative, also has psychosocial and mental health supports embedded within it that participants had access to.

Confidentiality. In order to protect participants' privacy, computer-generated information related to the study, such as transcripts and typed observational field notes, were password-protected and stored on an encrypted computer, while hard data, such as written notes, were kept in a locked cabinet. Participants' real names were replaced by pseudonyms in all transcripts, notes, and final documents. In addition, the cultural broker signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix J) ensuring the privacy of participants.

Research with children. Children are a vulnerable population with differing levels of maturity, which can present difficulties for research design and the consent process (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC, 2010). However, despite these concerns, involving children in research increases the community's knowledge of and ability to respond to the distinct needs of children as they develop. Hill (2005) recommends that qualitative research aiming to appreciate children's experiences should be guided by the following ethical considerations:

- welfare: the purpose of the research study should contribute to children's well-being directly or indirectly
- protection: study procedures should be designed to avoid stress and contingency arrangements if any risks arise
- provision: whenever possible, children should feel good about their contribution to society through their participation in research
- choice and participation: children should be given the opportunity to make informed choices about the nature of their participation in the study

This research study met the above guidelines, as the overall purpose is to enhance teachers, counsellors, and other helping professionals understanding of the adjustment experiences of newcomer children, which in turn will help them to provide higher quality and culturally appropriate care to these populations. As discussed in the potential risks section above, this study posed minimal risk to participants and arrangements were made in the case that children experienced any distress during the process of the study. As I have had previous experience working with young children, both in the capacity of a student-teacher and counsellor, I closely observed participating children for any signs of discomfort or anxiety and ensured that they were comfortable throughout the interview process. If children did not feel like responding to a question, they were not pressured to do so. In terms of provision, children were directly informed about how their participation in the study provided useful information for supporting other newcomer children transition to their new schools. Finally, children were given the choice of participating in the study and were assured that they could withdraw if they did not wish to continue.

Chapter 4: Findings

Three newly arrived Syrian refugee children, along with their mothers and teachers, participated in this study. The objective of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the social, emotional, and academic adjustment experiences of child participants within the school context, through semi-structured interviews and observations. In this chapter, a brief introduction to each child participant will be presented, followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged from the interview and observational data. The following seven themes were identified from the data that answer the research objective: (1) Role of Language in Adjustment, (2) Attitudes and Perspectives Towards Education, (3) Bonds and Relationships, (4) Initial Frustrations, Anxieties, and Fears, (5) Children's Unique Strategies for Adapting in School, (6) Parental Involvement in the Schooling Process, and (7) Role of Personal Qualities in Adjustment.

Portraits of Participants

Haya. Haya is a six-year-old Muslim female who came to Canada with her parents and siblings as a Government-Assisted Refugee in 2016. She has an older brother and sister, and her mother gave birth to a fourth child over the course of data collection. Haya and her family escaped Syria when she was a year old and they lived in a refugee camp in Lebanon before arriving in Canada. While they were residing in the refugee camp, they were faced with repeated threats to their safety, as undercover police officers would frequently terrorize the camps. Haya did have the opportunity to attend school in Lebanon but disliked it due to the strict nature of her teacher. During our interview, she recalled being punished by her teacher when she was unable to complete academic tasks correctly (e.g. incorrectly spelling a word). Haya noted that she initially experienced sadness when she came to Canada, as she did not know anyone. Over time, however, she became friends with the younger siblings of her sister's friends who were also

Syrian and spoke Arabic. Moreover, Haya discussed how she initially hated school in Canada but became used to the schooling system over time. Haya and her siblings attended a highly diverse school that had a large number of newcomer Syrian refugee students. Haya's attachment to her Syrian, Arabic-speaking peers immediately became apparent through her drawing from our initial interview. In this picture, she drew herself playing with two of her Syrian friends at recess. An image of this drawing is not available, as Haya kept the drawing and it was later misplaced before I had an opportunity to photograph it.

At the time of data collection, Haya was repeating kindergarten and was placed in a new classroom with a different teacher from the previous year. She expressed her discontent with being in a different classroom from her Syrian Arabic-speaking friends and old teacher. Overall, Haya and her mother described Haya as "happy", while her teacher indicated that Haya sometimes presented with signs of grumpiness and irritability in the classroom. Haya's teacher described her as a "perfectionist" and reserved. Consistent with her teacher's reports, I noticed that Haya primarily kept to herself and occasionally played with her classmates during my initial monthly observations. Haya's teacher also mentioned that Haya was able to let loose around her Arabic-speaking Syrian friends during recess and was more open in one-on-one settings. At the time of the initial interview, Haya knew the English alphabet and some basic phrases, but was not able to communicate fluently in English. According to Haya's mother, Haya would sometimes try to avoid going to school, as she felt she was unable to understand others and they were unable to understand her. Haya primarily spoke in Arabic at home and with her Syrian friends. She noted that she did not have any struggles at school and was supported by her teacher if she needed help. Both Haya and her mother discussed their desire for Haya to succeed in school. In addition, Haya expressed her desire to learn the Quran. At the follow-up interview,

Haya's teacher reported that Haya was progressing in her academics and had made considerable gains in the English language. She also reported that Haya was becoming more comfortable and outgoing with her peers. This is congruent with my later observations, in which Haya presented as more energetic and social and seemed to develop a strong friendship with one of her classmates. Consistent with this observation, at the follow-up interview with Haya, she drew a picture of herself playing with a new, non-Syrian friend from her class (see Figure 3). Haya later indicated that she also wished to draw another friend from her class but ran out of time.

Figure 3. Image of Haya's drawing from the follow-up interview.

Khalid. Khalid is an eight-year-old Muslim male who arrived in Canada with his parents and siblings as a Privately-Sponsored Refugee in late 2015. Khalid has three older sisters and his mother gave birth to another boy during the process of data collection. Khalid and his family moved from Syria to Lebanon during the war and lived there for two years before coming to Canada. Khalid attended kindergarten in Syria but was unable to pursue his education in

Lebanon, as his family did not have permanent residency and school fees were too costly. As a result, although Khalid's parents wished to stay in Lebanon due to its close proximity to Syria, they decided to move to Canada in order for their children to receive an education. Khalid's mother indicated that Khalid was much happier in Canada and preferred the Canadian school system, as it was less strict than what he had experienced in his previous schooling. When Khalid first arrived in Edmonton, he was placed in a mainstream Grade 2 class, as opposed to a specialized class for newcomers focusing on basic language skills, as his teacher at the time deemed him capable of handling the regular programming. Khalid and his family lived in an area of the city with a large Arabic-speaking population and his school demographic also reflected this. At the time of data collection, Khalid was in Grade 3.

At our first meeting, I found Khalid to be quite quiet, shy, and soft-spoken, which was congruent with his mother's and teacher's descriptions of him. However, Khalid's mother mentioned that he did engage in playful mischief at home with his family. Both Khalid's mother and teacher expressed that he was adjusting well at school and had developed friendships with some of his classmates, most of whom also spoke Arabic. During my observations, I frequently saw him laughing and chatting with a few of his male classmates, in what appeared to be a smattering of Arabic and English. Though Khalid experienced some difficulty with applying higher level English skills, such as using complex vocabulary and comprehension, his teacher noted that he was able to understand what was expected of him and at times would translate for his Arabic-speaking classmates. Similarly, Khalid's mother described how he was able to translate English content into Arabic for his parents. Khalid's mother attributed his positive adjustment and quick acquisition of the English language to the fact that he was young in age and therefore learned better. Interestingly, she also pointed out that, unlike his older sisters,

Khalid had not learned how to read or write Arabic in school in Syria, which may have been an advantage for him in learning English quickly. Khalid's teacher discussed how Khalid was focused and participated in classroom activities, especially in subject areas he was more confident in, such as math. Khalid noted that he enjoyed math, gym, and playing soccer with his friends at recess. This was also evident through his drawings, as he drew a picture of himself working on math problems at the initial interview and playing soccer at school with his friends at the follow-up interview (see Figure 4). Khalid's teacher indicated that classroom rules were very important to Khalid and he often displayed concern for his classmates. Khalid and his mother both consider school very important and Khalid expressed his desire to improve at school. He aspires to be a soccer player and pursue a career in engineering.

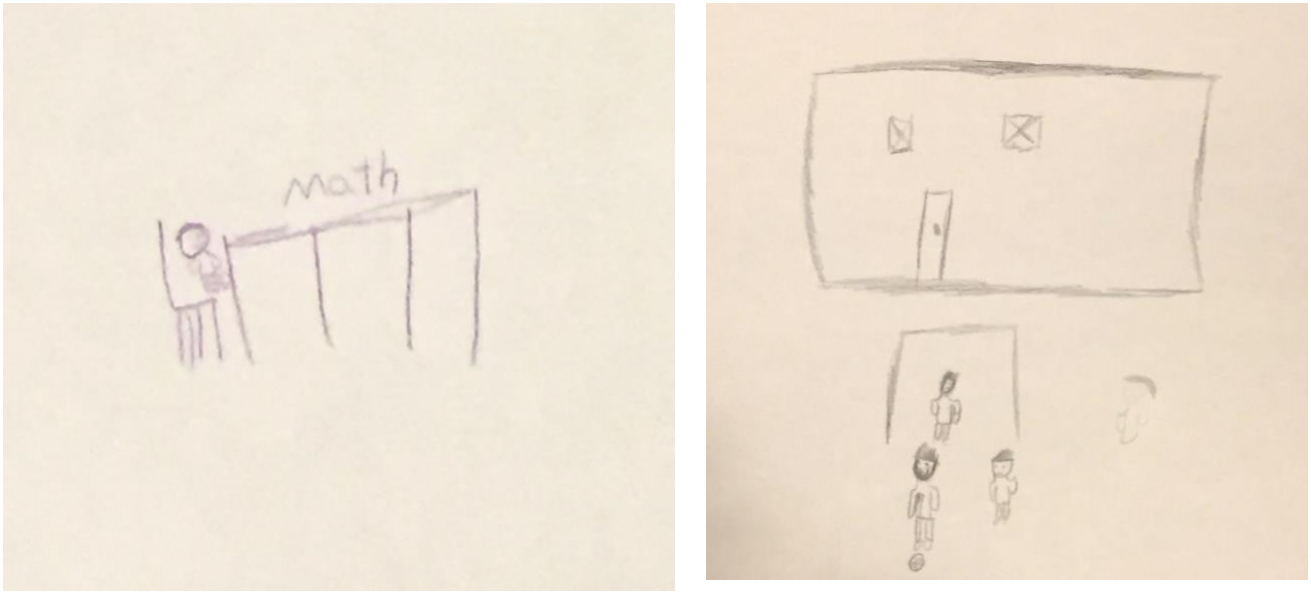

Figure 4. Images of Khalid's drawings from the initial interview (left) and follow-up interview (right).

Maryam. Maryam is an eight-year-old Muslim female who arrived in Canada with her parents and siblings as a Government-Assisted Refugee in 2016. Maryam is the fourth of seven

siblings, ranging from 16 years to one month old. Maryam and her family moved from Syria to Jordan during the conflict and lived there for three years before coming to Canada. They spent the first 20 days of their time in Jordan in a refugee camp and then moved to their own apartment. Maryam's mother explained that Maryam did not have much freedom in Jordan, as she only traveled between school and home and was not able to go anywhere else. Maryam described the strict nature of her school in Jordan and noted that students were only permitted to go outside for recess if they were behaving. Further, Maryam's mother discussed how her daughter's teachers in Jordan did not put any effort into getting along with students or attend to their needs, as compared to here in Canada. Maryam's mother indicated that Maryam was happier after moving to Canada, as she was excited to be in a new place and learn a new language. When Maryam and her family first arrived in Edmonton, they lived in an area with a large Arabic-speaking population. However, after six months, when Maryam was in Grade 1, they relocated to another part of the city and Maryam was moved to a different school near her new home. At the time of data collection, Maryam was in Grade 2.

Maryam discussed how learning English and trying to understand others initially posed a great challenge to her adjustment. At home, she primarily spoke in Arabic with her family. Maryam considered school to be very important, as she wanted to learn English and apply these language skills to help others, such as her mother and other Arabic-speaking newcomers. She reported that she would like to be a teacher in the future. In addition, she stated that she wanted to get to a point where she no longer needed help from others. Both Maryam's teacher and mother described Maryam as hardworking and eager to learn. Maryam's teacher also noted that Maryam was willing to seek out and accept support from others if needed. She reported that Maryam appeared to be shy and reserved at the beginning of the year, which she suspected was a

result of the language barrier. However, with time, she became more comfortable and confident in the classroom. Maryam's teacher described Maryam as outgoing, happy, and eager to fit in. Maryam also described herself as generally happy at school and indicated that she enjoyed spending time with her friends. During my observations, I often saw Maryam chatting animatedly and giggling with her classmates. Although Maryam generally liked school and her English skills were improving, she indicated that she struggled most with spelling tests both at the initial interview and at follow-up. Interestingly, Maryam's drawings from both of the interviews also involved spelling (see Figure 5). Maryam noted that her first drawing from the initial interview was of her memorizing how to spell with the help of her teacher, while her second drawing from the follow-up interview was of herself and her classroom friends working on a spelling test. When asked about her favourite part of school, Maryam identified recess, particularly playing on the monkey bars.

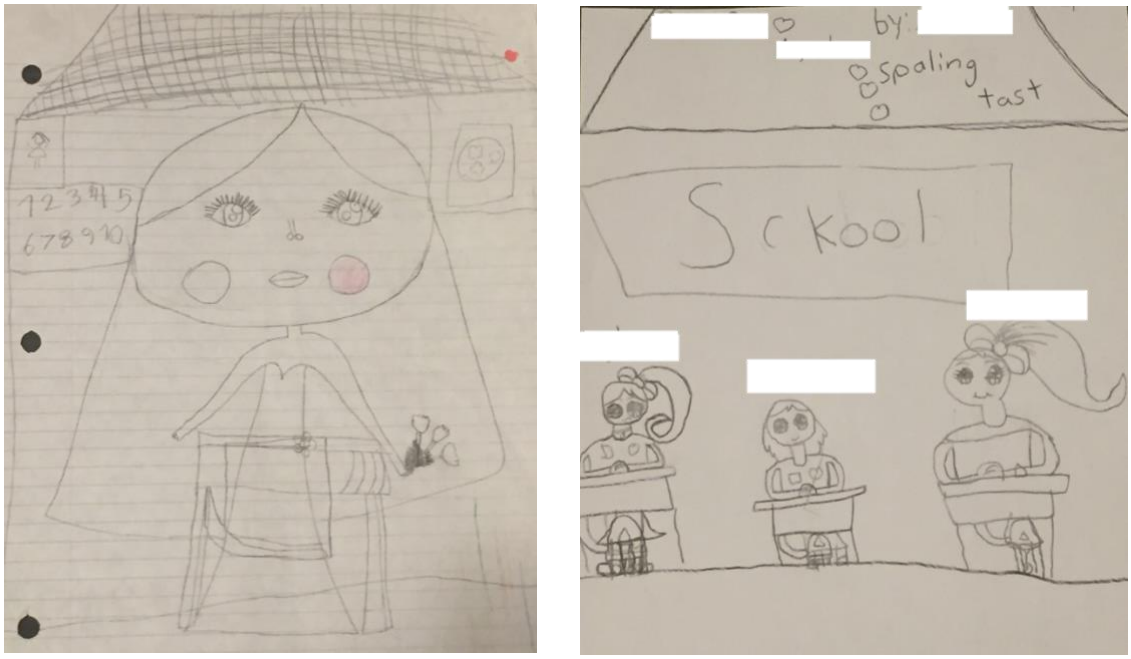

Figure 5. Images of Maryam's drawings from the initial interview (left) and follow-up interview (right).

Themes

The seven themes that emerged from the findings were: (1) Role of Language in Adjustment, (2) Attitudes and Perspectives Towards Education, (3) Bonds and Relationships, (4) Initial Frustrations, Anxieties, and Fears, (5) Children's Unique Strategies for Adapting in School, (6) Parental Involvement in the Schooling Process, and (7) Role of Personal Qualities in Adjustment. These themes will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Role of language in adjustment. This theme addresses the impact of child participants' English language abilities on their social, emotional, and academic adjustment at school. Particularly in the early stages of adjustment when the child participants' English language skills were not as developed, they experienced *language* as *a barrier to adjustment*. However, as the child participants' improved their English skills, they experienced improvement in their adjustment experiences, demonstrating the *facilitative role of language*.

Language as a barrier to adjustment. Language barriers were consistently identified as one of the primary challenges to school-related adjustment across almost all of the interviews. The inability to communicate with others in English was associated with social difficulties at school for two of the three child participants. At the time of data collection, Haya was repeating kindergarten and was assigned to a classroom where her teacher and the majority of her classmates did not speak or understand Arabic. As a result, Haya's interactions with her classmates were fairly limited. Haya's teacher commented on the contrast in Haya's behaviour when she was with her English-speaking classmates compared to when she was spending time with her Arabic-speaking friends at recess. She stated:

> [Haya's] interacting limited with other classmates because they are all speaking English. When I see her actually playing and really letting loose and enjoying herself is when she's out at recess or lunch with other Arabic speaking peers and it appears to be these are all kids that came from Syria at about the same time.

In addition, Maryam's teacher shared that Maryam was shy and quiet at the beginning of the school year, which she suspected was related to a lack of English language abilities. She noted that the language barrier initially presented an obstacle for Maryam's social adjustment, which Maryam was "getting over" with time. She also explained how Maryam's limited English skills restricted her ability to communicate with others earlier on in the school year:

> So at first she wouldn't talk much in class at all right. And I would come to her and ask her questions to see if she would talk with me and she would give you know a word here or there or a lot of hand gestures to show pictures…

On a similar note, Maryam noted that her limited English ability was the main challenge in developing friendships when she first came to her current school. Maryam's mother also touched on how Maryam wanted to speak with others but was not able to due to language barriers, stating "if someone wanted to speak to [Maryam] in the beginning and like she wanted to answer but she didn't know how. That was a challenge."

Language barriers also appeared to take an emotional toll on Haya. Haya's mother indicated that Haya experienced frustration, as she was unable to understand others and they were unable to understand her. In addition, her mother discussed how Haya felt uncomfortable in her new class as no one spoke Arabic. Haya's mother described how Haya would sometimes try to get out of going to school in the mornings by making statements such as, "What's the point of going? They don't understand me and I don't understand them." When describing her emotional struggles resulting from the language barrier, Haya's teacher again described the contrast in Haya's attitude when she was with her Arabic-speaking friends as opposed to when she was in the classroom, stating:

> Again I would go back to that contrast of when she's with friends that know her language and know her culture, very different kid than when she's in the classroom. In the classroom she is very serious but we're finally starting just in the last week or two, to see some like real happiness and real joy in her work in her play… but again… it's still tough

> for her. There is still too much, as much as I try to break down the language for her, it's still too much English. It's still too much language for her so emotionally it's really tough for her and you can see that she's really up and down a lot throughout the day. There are moments where she is quite happy and then she is down... But in the afternoons we definitely see a huge energy drop and she's often she will fall asleep, so emotionally like it's, she's really up and down which is not atypical of the kindergarten age kid but she seems to be a little bit more so than others.

Maryam's mother indicated that Maryam was initially very quiet and isolated when she arrived at her current school, as she was unable to communicate in English. Maryam's mother explained that that during their family's first six months in Canada, Maryam did not learn a lot of English since they lived in an area where she was surrounded by many Arabic-speaking children. Thus, when Maryam moved to her new school, her language skills were still fairly limited. Maryam noted that understanding others was especially challenging and she used to avoid those that spoke to her in English by running away. Maryam's mother narrated an incident, which highlighted the types of emotional struggles that new language learners may experience. As the cultural broker translated:

> [Maryam's mother] is just telling me a story about when [Maryam] goes to school she takes her little sister with her and one time someone was speaking to them in English on the way and [Maryam] didn't realize she was speaking Arabic so he got annoyed or something so you know [Maryam] felt bad…

However, Maryam's mother clarified that Maryam soon forgot about this incident and it did not seem to have a lasting impact on her.

As the literature on newcomer refugee children's school experiences suggests, language presented some level of academic difficulty for the each of the child participants as well. All of the participating parents and teachers cited language, or some aspect of language, as the biggest academic challenge for child participants. Haya's teacher shared how Haya was able to understand math-related concepts, but struggled in domains where oral language skills were required:

> …it's the oral language because Kindergarten is oral language-based and so that's where the barriers are for her. She… understands the math concepts and things like that and that's all coming, it's just a matter of building that English base and being willing to share what she knows…

At the follow-up interview, Haya's teacher shared that Haya "still has a lot to learn" in regards to oral language. In addition, she indicated that Haya was "understanding a lot more than she is able to say", as she lacked some of the higher-level vocabulary needed to express herself.

Similar to some of Haya's teacher's reports, Khalid's teacher noted that math did not appear to be a problem area for Khalid, as she described it as more of a "universal" subject, with less reliance on language skills. She indicated that while Khalid was able to read and spell, it was understanding complex vocabulary and comprehension that presented the greatest academic challenge for him:

> He is able to read and [has] the vocabulary but sometimes [the struggle is] understanding exactly what the story is about... he's kind of got an idea by looking at the pictures but may not necessarily [know] what a duck is. You know? If he's never seen it before and that. I think his challenge is just accomplishing the English- being able to read and understand the context of the story and what it really means. You know, he's able to read words and he's able to do spelling on the vocabulary, the words that they take home their lists. He does very very well but you know there is, there is a lot to understanding some of the stories and the higher more difficult higher level thinking, questions he… cannot do because he doesn't have the background knowledge of the English language and that and even the background of probably where he comes from you know?

Khalid's teacher further explained that there were still some tasks that Khalid was not able to do, as he was still learning English. For example, she noted that it would take Khalid time to learn the academic terms used in science, which are not used in general day-to-day conversations.

Maryam's teacher also indicated that "English was kind of like a big barrier for [Maryam] to begin with" and described how Maryam's initial interactions with her consisted mostly of hand gestures with few spoken words. Maryam's mother identified a different aspect of language that was academically challenging for Maryam: writing. Specifically, she discussed

how the way words are spoken differ from the way they are written or spelled in English, which led to confusion for Maryam. Consistent with these reports, Maryam stated that she struggled most with spelling tests at school. The participants' narratives highlight how language presented a major obstacle for the children's social, emotional, and academic school-related adjustment.

Facilitative role of language in adjustment. At the time of follow-up, language was still reported to be a major barrier for adjustment, especially academic adjustment, for all three participants. However, it was evident for some of the child participants' that as their English language skills developed, they also experienced improvement in their socio-emotional adjustment experiences. For example, at the follow-up interview Haya's teacher reported that Haya was showing increased signs of happiness in the classroom. When asked for her opinion on the reason behind this she stated, "I think the grasp on English is getting a little stronger." Moreover, Haya's teacher noted that Haya was no longer displaying as many ups and downs and her emotions had become more stable. She attributed this change to Haya's newfound ability to communicate her needs. She further explained:

> I think now that [Haya] can express when she's worried or scared or happy, it's a little easier like her language is no by no means perfect, it's definitely still quite far behind a regular English speaker but she's able to communicate those needs and wants and there is no frustration because my teacher's going to understand me and she trusts that now whereas I don't think she had that trust before because there wasn't somebody able to interpret for her.

In addition, Khalid's mother reported that Khalid's ability to quickly pick up the English language was helpful for Khalid's social adjustment and he did not experience any social difficulties at school. When considering language acquisition and academic adjustment, Haya's teacher reported that Haya's language and academic improvement occurred simultaneously.

The participants' accounts indicate that language played a critical role in the child participants' adjustment process. It was repeatedly reported that language barriers presented a

major obstacle for the child participants' social, emotional, and academic adjustment at school. However, it is important to consider that as the children's language abilities developed, they also experienced positive changes in their experiences.

Attitudes and perspectives towards education. The next theme that emerged from the data relates to the child and parent participants' personal attitudes and perspectives towards education. Specifically, the findings revealed motivation and engagement in the learning process and strong educational aspirations and hopes, both which appear to play a significant role in the child participant's school adjustment.

Motivation and engagement in the learning process. Most of the participants described a sense of eagerness to learn within the child participants and pointed out signs of the children's engagement in the schooling process, such as active participation in classroom activities and seeking out support as needed. Maryam's mother noted that Maryam was "trying to take in more than what they're [i.e. teachers] are teaching her. She's… like overworking to learn." She further stated that Maryam's interest in school is "too much". Maryam's teacher also stated "you can tell she's excited about learning and wants to do well". According to Khalid's mother, Khalid always wanted to attend school and "never like disagrees to going to school like 'I don't want to go.' He never says that." Khalid's teacher discussed how "[Khalid's] very focused and he wants to do good" and that "school is very important" to Khalid. All of the child participants reported that they considered school to be important and expressed a desire to learn more. Both Haya and Maryam's teachers indicated that Haya and Maryam displayed excitement and pride in their work. In addition, Maryam's teacher shared how Maryam was beginning to gain enough confidence in her abilities to share her answers or work with the class:

> If I ask a question sometimes she'll raise her hand and she'll give an answer for it. Or if I like today we did some journal writing and then I asked for a few people to share and she

> was one of the people who wanted to share… she read her writing. I think that's great that she's growing in her confidence to do that kind of stuff …

At the follow-up interview, Maryam's teacher indicated that Maryam was continuing to participate in classroom activities and was even more willing to share her work with the larger class. Likewise, at the follow-up interview with Haya's teacher, she discussed how Haya was now "actually engaged [in classroom activities] whereas before she wasn't" and was "willing to answer questions in class". Khalid's teacher also commented on how Khalid became willing to share his answers in front of the class after some time once he had gained more confidence in his abilities. Consistent with her reports, I frequently observed Khalid raise his hand to answer questions presented during classroom instruction during my field visits. Khalid's teacher elaborated that Khalid shared his work in subject areas he enjoyed and was more confident in on a more frequent basis:

> …he will share his stories that he writes and his writing isn't bad for English as a second language. So yeah. Depending on the subject areas that he's confident in, like music he's, he likes his music, he likes gym, math is really you know something that he's more confident in… but he will I think he will offer in the other subject areas but if depending on the course he's more confident and will frequently you know be willing to do more.

Another indication of motivation and engagement in the learning process was a readiness to seek and accept academic support from others. Maryam's teacher noted, "I'm just seeing that she is relying on people and accepting help from people and that people love to help her as well." She also indicated that Maryam was "not afraid to ask for help" and commented on how Maryam often sought support from herself and a classmate that sat nearby. These reports correspond with my observations, as I often observed Maryam receiving support from her teacher and neighbouring classmate.

Khalid's teacher also reported that Khalid actively sought help in the classroom if he was experiencing difficulty with his schoolwork. Like in Maryam's case, Khalid's teacher stated "if [Khalid's] not sure about something that he's working on he's not scared to come and ask me."

Aspirations and hopes. Each of the child participants reported high hopes and aspirations for educational success. Khalid indicated that school was important to him, as he wanted to learn in order to "get better" at "everything." At his young age, he already aspired to be an engineer in the future. Maryam expressed her desire to learn English at school and use her language abilities to help her mother and other Arabic-speaking newcomers. She aspired to become a teacher. Haya stated that school was important to her so that she could "grow older and learn." When asked what her three wishes for herself were, her first response was "to study", which I perceived as a desire to work hard at school and progress in her academics.

The parents in this study also expressed their hopes for their children to receive a quality education and succeed academically. Khalid's mother stated that she thought Khalid was doing well in his studies and hoped for him to continue getting "better and better". Additionally, she stated that she "wishes [Khalid] grows up and goes to university, picks something he's good at and make a career out of it." Similarly, Maryam's mother hoped that Maryam "excels in school." She wished for her daughter "to go to university and pursue a career helping others [and] giving back to the community." Haya's mother indicated that academics were the "most important" thing and voiced her desire for her children to learn, as she "doesn't want them to end up uneducated like her." She continued that education was the foundation for her children to "build their whole life."

In summary, this theme highlights the child and parent participants' different perspectives towards the schooling process. Participants frequently touched on the importance of schooling, as well as their desires for the child participants to succeed academically.

Bonds and relationships. The child participants' bonds and relationships impacting their adjustment within the school context are explored in this theme. Specifically, the child participants' relationships with their peers, teachers, and families are discussed. The data suggests that while most of the child participants' relationships had a positive impact on their school-related adjustment, others were potentially harmful. Child participants also experienced losses of bonds and relationships due to the conflict in Syria, such as being separated from family members back home, further impacting their overall adjustment experiences.

Peers. The child participants' relationships with their peers played a pivotal role in their school-related adjustment experiences. For the most part, the development of peer relationships positively impacted child participants; however, in some cases, the peer relationships that were formed had a negative influence. Both Khalid and Maryam's teachers reported that Khalid and Maryam were well-liked by their peers and had developed strong friendships with their classmates. Maryam's teacher expressed that Maryam "does fit in and… the rest of the class likes her and I mean she plays with everybody." Maryam also stated that she had "lots of friends." Comparably, Khalid's teacher stated, "everybody likes Khalid… you don't hear anybody complaining about him or anything like that… he's basically really helpful and everybody you know I think they all really like him." In contrast to Maryam, most of Khalid's school friends also spoke Arabic and were of a similar ethnocultural background, as he attended a culturally diverse school with a large Arabic-speaking population.

For Khalid and Maryam, their classmates were repeatedly named as their main sources of social, emotional, and academic support. For example, both Khalid and Maryam's teachers responded with "friends" in response to being asked about Khalid and Maryam's social supports at school. At the follow-up interview, Maryam's teacher noted, "I don't see [Maryam] so much with her sisters like we did at the beginning of the year when they would wait for each other at recess. So definitely just like the friends would be the big one now." Similarly, Khalid and Maryam's teachers indicated that their friends were some of their primary emotional supports at school. Khalid's teacher reported that the Arabic-speaking children in the class specifically, were a source of emotional support for Khalid. In terms of academic supports at school, classroom friends were again reported as a source of support. For instance, Khalid said that he experienced difficulty when "the teacher asks us the hard questions in science" and thus approached his friends for help in these situations. Likewise, Khalid's mother stated that Khalid's "friends teach him science and he teaches them math." Khalid's teacher also reported that "there are children that speak Arabic in the classroom if [Khalid's] not sure about something the other ones that are Canadian born or have been here for a while and… have a grip on English, they will translate…" For Maryam, one of her classmates in particular was her main source of academic support at the time of the initial interviews. As Maryam's teacher explained:

> She does often ask the girl who sits beside her as well right like if like we were just working on writing then if I haven't gotten to her yet and I'm trying to get to a few other kids when I get to her she's often getting some help from that girl.

During my field visits, I often observed Maryam receiving help from this same classmate. In some cases, Maryam reached out to her for assistance and in other cases, Maryam's classmate voluntarily checked Maryam's work. It is important to note, however, that Maryam's teachers changed the class seating plan near the end of data collection period, and Maryam no longer sat

next to the same classmate. At the follow-up interview with Maryam, she indicated that she still talked to her classmate but did not receive much help from her, since they no longer sat together, and noted that she approached her teacher when she needed help with her schoolwork instead.

As will be discussed further in the theme *Personal Qualities Impacting Adjustment*, Haya presented as withdrawn in class and had not established many remarkable connections with her classmates at the time of the initial interviews. Haya's teacher reported that Haya played with her Arabic-speaking friends at lunch and recess, who arrived from Syria at about the same time as Haya. These friends were not from the same class as Haya and were generally older in age. Haya's teacher pointed out that there was a stark contrast in Haya's behaviour when she was with these "friends that know her language and know her culture" compared to when she was in the classroom. Specifically, she noted that Haya "gets a little crazy and definitely more comfortable" with her Syrian friends. When discussing Haya's relationships with her peers in the classroom, Haya's teacher reported that Haya generally kept to herself and the limited interactions she did have with her classmates were primarily with other females:

> Directly in the classroom, she'll only generally interact with girls. Very much a girly girl. Very like her relationships are, "if you're sitting down and coloring with me or playing dolls with me", she will engage a bit, but other than that she's more of an island.

Although Haya's interactions with her peers were very limited at the start of data collection, there were still some indications that her classmates played a positive role in her adjustment at this time. For instance, Haya stated that she did not know how to draw when she first arrived at school and that two of her male classmates taught her how to draw. In addition, when Haya was asked about who helped her with her schoolwork, the cultural broker translated "she has a Somalian friend that understands her and she understands. So they talk and she helps her." By the time of the follow-up interviews, Haya' teacher reported that Haya showed the most progress

in her social adjustment and was starting to develop connections with her same-aged classmates who were outside of her "cultural social circle." Haya's teacher explained that Haya was now "willing to go talk to other kids, play with other kids, even argue with other kid[s] if something is not going their way which is very typical for a kindergarten student, so very willing to participate with them."

While the peer relationships that the child participants formed largely played a positive role in their school-related adjustment, others were not perceived to be as helpful. Specifically, Maryam's teacher commented on Maryam's relationship with her classmate who used to sit next to her, discussed earlier in this section. While Maryam's teacher acknowledged that Maryam's classmate was an important source of support at school, she also discussed how Maryam's classmate had a negative influence on Maryam. At the time of the initial interview, Maryam's teacher described how she had recently found Maryam and her classmate cheating on a spelling test. As she put it:

> …and then actually just lately in the past two weeks when Maryam would probably know the words her and her desk buddy who is also that girl would have no issues with the spelling but both of them are cheating off of a little notebook…

Maryam's teacher explained that she had previously caught Maryam cheating on spelling tests at the beginning of the school year but perceived it as a "strategy that [Maryam] needs right now when she doesn't probably even know what the words mean…" However, she expressed her disappointment when she noticed Maryam cheating again more recently, as she felt Maryam was now familiar with the words and capable of spelling. Maryam's teacher suspected that the cheating "started up again because of the person [Maryam's] sitting next to."

Furthermore, Maryam's teacher shared another incident in which Maryam and her classmate had stolen prizes from the class reading box. Again, Maryam's teacher shared her suspicion that Maryam was influenced by her classmate:

> I was quite surprised when I heard about [the stealing incident] because I just felt like [Maryam's] kind of sweet, wants to please, she wants to fit in and do you know what you do at school and stuff and that's why I did kind of feel like it was probably the other girl more.

At another point in the interview Maryam's teacher elaborated:

> I feel like Maryam is probably following along with the other girl. That's what I kind of thought about [the stealing] situation and I wondered that about like the…cheating thing too. I think that she's following along with that girl because that girl tends to help her out on a lot of things. So she can be a positive influence but this other girl can be a negative influence as well for Maryam.

At the follow-up interview, Maryam also described another negative peer experience. She described being teased by one her peers, which led her to experience sadness and loneliness. Although she did not discuss these events in detail, she indicated that her classmate passed comments to her such as, "you're not smart, you don't know how to read."

Teachers. Overall, the child participants appeared to shared positive and trusting relationships with their teachers, in which the teachers were a source of social, emotional, and academic support. Khalid's mother noted that Khalid's relationship with his teacher was "good" and that Khalid liked when his teacher praised him. Likewise, when asked to describe her relationship with Khalid, Khalid's teacher stated:

> Good. Good. Like I said I know he will smile, he will tell me things, he's not scared to come up and ask. I'm not scared to ask him things. He does know that I'm the teacher and if I say you know, "Khalid we need to get back to work" he will get back to work. He knows that that is his job. No, really good I think so.

Furthermore, Khalid's teacher discussed how Khalid was always eager to approach her and talk to her explaining, "he will come to me and he will talk to me. He's always telling me

something every morning or whatever. Smiling and that. I think we've developed a good relationship."

In regards to Maryam's relationship with her teacher, it is important to note that she had two teachers, one of whom participated in this study. Both Maryam and her mother indicated that she liked her teacher. Maryam's mother discussed the contrast between teachers in Jordan and teachers in Canada and commented on how the teachers in Canada took on a more involved role in students' experiences:

> So the teachers are a lot closer to their students here. In Jordan the teacher just gives the lesson and leaves. Here the teacher actually tries to get along with the child and see if they're happy or not or struggling right now.

When asked about whether Maryam appreciated the increased closeness with her teachers, her mother responded affirmatively. Maryam's teacher stated that she had a trusting and comfortable relationship with Maryam and shared the following:

> I feel like she trusts me and feels comfortable with me. So I think that's a good thing… and yeah like I said I noticed that soon when she wanted to talk to me and tell me things and like little extra stories right like not just the stuff that she has to talk about like "Can I go the bathroom or something?" right. She wanted to talk about extra things so I did feel that she was comfortable with me right from the start.

Similar to Maryam and Khalid, Haya also shared a positive relationship with her teacher. Although Haya missed her Arabic-speaking teacher from the previous school year, Haya's mother reported that Haya liked her current Kindergarten teacher. At the follow-up interview, Haya's teacher commented that Haya had become more comfortable with her over time and was able to move past the fact that she did not speak Arabic. She stated:

> [Haya's] definitely more open with me. She's more willing to like let me give her a hug and hi fives and things like that. Yeah definitely more willing to come show me things and wants my attention and interest whereas before I don't think she was too sure but more comfortable now and I think with [the teacher from the previous schoolyear] she was more… maybe a little more comfortable sometimes because she does speak Arabic but now she's okay with it like and totally show me her pictures and shows me a lot of

> pride like "I'm so excited I did a good job" knows she's done a good job and is seeking more like affirmation that "yeah you're doing a great job sweetheart" kind of thing so… I think it's a lot warmer now than it was because she didn't want a whole lot to do with me before but I think she's realized I'm not going to eat her alive and that I'm a safe person…

Moreover, participants consistently reported that the teachers in this study were a source of social, emotional, and academic support for the child participants. When asked about the child participants' main academic supports, almost all of the parent and teacher participants responded with "teachers". All of the child participants noted that they reached out to their teachers if they needed assistance with academic material. Additionally, when asked about emotional supports, teachers were frequently mentioned. For instance, Haya's teacher mentioned that she was Haya's "go-to" emotionally. In terms of social supports, teachers were again brought up by some of the participants. For example, Khalid's teacher listed herself as one of the main social supports for Khalid and stated "he will come up to me and talk to me about whatever is happening and you know, whether this one was running and didn't follow the rules…"

Family. The child participants' bonds and relationships with their family members also influenced the quality of their adjustment experiences. The role of parents in the adjustment process will be discussed in greater detail in the *Parental Involvement in Schooling* theme. Generally speaking, the parent participants had limited involvement in their children's schooling, which was primarily related to language barriers. It appeared that the parent participants were eager to learn more about how their children were doing at school, but often lacked the resources to obtain this information. Further, the data showed support for the potential positive impact that parental involvement can have on children's schooling experiences. For example, Khalid's teacher attributed part of Khalid's improvement in his academics to his parents' involvement in his schoolwork at home.

It was also found that the child participants' siblings provided a great deal of support across all three domains of adjustment and two of the three child participants in this study (i.e. Maryam and Haya) had siblings attending the same school as them. Both Maryam's teacher and Haya's teacher identified siblings as one of their main social supports at school. Siblings were also identified as a source of social support by Khalid's teacher. Maryam's teacher noted that Maryam often played with her sisters during recess at the beginning of the year and as she developed friendships with her classmates, she spent less time playing with her sisters. Similarly, Haya's mother mentioned that Haya's siblings helped Haya by playing with her at recess. In terms of academics, it was reported that Haya and Khalid's older siblings helped them with their studies.

Although the child participants' family members generally played a supportive role in their adjustment experiences, a potential over-dependence on family led to difficulties with adjustment, particularly for Haya. Haya's teacher noted that it was emotionally challenging for Haya to be away from her family for a full day program, though she acknowledged that this was a common issue for other same-aged children as well. Further, the data suggests that Haya was over-reliant on her siblings, as indicated through Haya's mother reports that Haya was unwilling to go to school if her siblings were not attending. As the cultural broker translated:

> …because [the] the older kids were fasting so [Haya's mother] was telling them to go for the first half of school and then come back because it was hard. [Haya] said "no I will come back with them because I can't be alone there without them" so she doesn't want to go to school without her siblings.

Moreover, Haya's teacher related Haya's unwillingness to venture out of her comfort zone in class to being coddled by her siblings, stating:

> Some kids are happy to learn a new language, but I don't think she's happy, I think she very much wants to be with her familiar things and stuff but again I think part of that

> plays into her being the youngest and very much when the siblings come get her they very much coddle her and watch out for her.

Loss of important relationships. One of the major losses that Haya experienced upon moving to Canada was being separated from her family members back home. Haya's mother explained that Haya and her cousins "were like siblings and then she had to part from them so she's missing them very much. She's always mentioning them." As a way of comforting Haya, Haya's mother noted that she would tell her daughter "hopefully we'll see them soon" and reassured Haya that she was still with her. At the initial interview with Haya, she indicated that she experienced feelings of loneliness when she first arrived in Canada. As the cultural broker translated, "when she first moved here [Haya] didn't know anybody. She was only playing with her sister. So she was a little sad cause she didn't know anyone."

Haya experienced another loss when her current school assigned her to a different classroom from the previous year and she was no longer in the same class as her Syrian friends that lived in the same building as her. Haya's mother noted that Haya often complained about her current class because she missed spending time with her friends. Haya's mother did attempt to transfer Haya to the other class, but the school administration declined, as they were already a month into the schoolyear at the time. Additionally, Haya reported that she missed her teacher from her previous class, as this teacher spoke Arabic and liked Haya "very much". When Haya was asked if she could change anything about her school at the initial interview, she responded with "changing her classroom." As the cultural broker translated, "last year she was in the other teacher's class and she liked it more because she speaks Arabic and she understands her."

Maryam also experienced a loss to her important relationships/bonds, as she had to switch schools shortly after arriving in Canada because her family moved to another part of the city with a much smaller Arabic-speaking population. Maryam's mother shared that it was

initially difficult for Maryam to move to a new school, as she did not have any friends and there were no other Arabic-speaking students but noted that Maryam "got used to it over time."

In summary, this theme discussed the bonds that the child participants shared with their peers, teachers, and family. Most of these bonds were helpful for adjustment and others were at times harmful. The loss of relationships that the child participants experienced upon arriving in Canada were also explored as major threats that impacted their adjustment in school.

Initial frustrations, anxieties, and fears. This theme considers the unique frustrations, anxieties, and fears experienced by the child participants in this study during the early stages of adjustment in the school context, that are not commonly experienced by other children in this age group. There were several notable issues that surfaced. Firstly, as discussed in the *Role of Language* theme above, child participants experienced difficulties and frustrations related to the language barrier. For example, Haya's mother noted that Haya experienced frustration because of an inability to understand others at school. In addition, Haya's teacher reported that there was "too much English" in the classroom for Haya, which led her to experience a lot of ups and downs emotionally on a daily basis. Likewise, Maryam expressed that adjusting to learning English and understanding others was emotionally challenging.

Haya's teacher raised another issue that was potentially anxiety-provoking for Haya and her siblings: going outdoors in the cold weather. She explained:

> I think the cold is a big deal for Haya too she's very uncomfortable in the cold so I think there is a whole bunch of things at play here…and then we had to some discussions as a staff about because they were often those kids were often hanging out inside like her whole family and I finally said, "You know guys they just came from a war torn country where there is bombs when you're outside so they may not feel comfortable being outside" and they are like "Oh yeah let's think about this" but now the weather is nicer and things are more comfortable they are more willing to be outside because Haya is a kid you have to shove out the door but now not so much not now so if it's the weather or she's more comfortable conversation wise but we're not kind of herding them out of the bathrooms.

Being out of one's comfort zone and an unfamiliarity with classroom activities and routines also appeared to trigger anxiety. For Haya, this anxiety manifested as irritability. Haya's teacher reported:

> I would say like, the grumpiness and the irritability are… what impacts her the most. Because she's, it's hard sometimes to cajole her along and get her to move forward but I think when I think of her overall big picture I look back and when I'm seeing that behaviour, it's when she's not comfortable or out of her comfort zone and it's more of an anxiety probably, irritability than it is "I just don't want to do it because I don't want to do it" it's more about "this is not what I'm used to, this is not familiar to me, this makes me uncomfortable and I can't communicate it in any other way and I know I'm supposed to do my job and I'm going to do my job regardless but I'm uncomfortable".

Lastly, Maryam's mother noted that she was initially fearful of sending her children to school, as she had heard a story of children being kidnapped in Canada. However, over time, she became more comfortable because she personally dropped her children to school and the school was close to her home. As the cultural broker translated:

> They heard a story of like kids kidnapped in Canada and it scared them very much. Like both mother and daughter. And so [Haya's mother] was a little scared but she used to take them school and pick them up so she was feeling a little more assured and … cause the school's nearby… there's a lot of people so she wasn't afraid.

As discussed above, the language barrier, going outdoors in the cold weather, unfamiliarity with classroom routines, and an uncertainty about children's safety in Canada led to frustration, anxiety, and fear.

Children's unique strategies for adapting in school. The next theme that emerged from the data is the strategies used by the child participants for adapting in school. Specifically, these were the mechanisms employed by child participants to cope or deal with challenges that arose during the early stages of their school-related adjustment. Some of these strategies were adaptive or facilitative for adjustment and others were maladaptive.

Adaptive strategies. One of the adaptive coping strategies consistently used by Khalid and Maryam was to actively reach out to others, such as their teachers or peers, if there was a problem or they needed academic support. For instance, Khalid's teacher reported:

> …he gets the help when he needs it, if he's not sure of something there is someone else that will help him. He comes and he asks, he does ask and he's not afraid to come and ask, he will come constantly… and let me know if there is a problem.

Khalid also noted that he reached out to his friends when he needed assistance with science. As discussed earlier, Maryam's teacher reported that Maryam was "not afraid to ask for help" and described how Maryam reached out to herself, the teaching assistants, and her peers for academic support. Similarly, Maryam indicated that she reached out to her classmate or teacher if she was struggling with her schoolwork.

Another adaptive strategy that arose from the data was using drawing as a means of coping with difficult emotions. When Maryam was asked about what she did to make herself feel better when she was experiencing feelings of sadness or loneliness, she responded with drawing. Even when Maryam completed her drawings for the interviews, she became highly engrossed in the task and appeared to pay little attention to what was occurring in her immediate surroundings.

The final adaptive strategy that came up in interviews was using one's observational skills to learn what to do in challenging or unknown situations. Maryam's mother reported that Maryam responded to challenges at school by observing how her friends dealt with the situations and repeating their actions or behaviours. For instance, Maryam's mother explained, "like if [Maryam] doesn't know how to say something she waits for like someone to say or ask different to say it and she'll say after."

Maladaptive strategies. Avoidance was a maladaptive strategy used by some of the child participants in response to difficult or anxiety-producing situations. For example, Haya's mother reported that if there "is a book or anything [Haya's] had trouble with, if [Haya] doesn't understand it she'll just leave it." Maryam, on the other hand, recalled running away from people if they spoke to her in English when she first arrived in Canada. However, it is important to note that this was a short-term strategy and Maryam no longer avoided interacting with others as she developed her English language skills.

The second maladaptive strategy that surfaced was cheating on spelling tests. As noted earlier, Maryam's teacher recounted episodes of Maryam cheating on spelling tests at the beginning of the schoolyear and again around the time of the initial interview. While Maryam's teacher perceived Maryam's more recent instances of cheating as a result of following along with her classmate, she believed that Maryam initially used cheating as a "coping mechanism." She explained:

> … I thought well if [the cheating] is a strategy that she needs right now when she doesn't probably even know what the words mean that we're doing... And I can see because at the beginning when she would be writing out spelling words for spelling test it was a few letters maybe the beginning sound or something right and so then when I saw that she had her little cheat sheet a couple times in her desk. I talked to her about it but I kind of thought "okay maybe that's what she needs. At this point she just needs to copy something down to feel like she's part of what everyone else is doing…"

Overall, it was evident that the child participants relied on different strategies to cope with the adjustment process. Strategies such as reaching out for support, drawing to feel better during times of sadness, and learning through observing others were adaptive. On the other hand, the strategies of avoidance and cheating on exams can be viewed as maladaptive.

Parental involvement in the schooling process. This theme refers to the level of parent participants' engagement in their children's educational experiences. All of the parent

participants appeared to lack in-depth information about their children's schooling experiences to a certain degree. For instance, when Khalid's mother was asked about Khalid's relationship with his teacher, she indicated it was "good" but was not able to elaborate beyond this. Similarly, when Maryam's mother was asked about the nature of Maryam's interactions with her teacher, she stated that all she knew was that Maryam and her teacher liked one another. Moreover, Haya's mother reported that she did not know about Haya's relationship with her teacher. Haya's mother also shared that she did not know about how Haya was doing socially at school. She noted that she attempted to speak to Haya's teacher to learn more, but was unable to do so because of the language barrier. When asked about how Haya was doing academically, her mother again indicated that she did not know anything. While Haya's mother did receive progress reports from the school, she was unable to understand them, as they were written in English and the school did not provide any supports to assist her interpreting the reports.

Parents' lack of information regarding their children's schooling extended beyond their children's classroom experiences to a general lack of awareness regarding how the Canadian school system operates, as demonstrated in Khalid's case. Khalid's teacher shared how Khalid's parents were hesitant to send him on field trips since they did not understand their educational value and thought his attendance was not required. However, Khalid's teacher emphasized that field trips were an important part of the educational process and were embedded within the curriculum. She explained that she was ultimately able to convey the importance of attending field trips to Khalid's parents through the support of the school's success coach, who spoke Arabic and served as a liaison. As she explained:

> field trips was a problem… [Khalid's parents] were very hesitant on going on field trips and but we've encouraged… with… our liaison- people that are able to speak Arabic and talk with the parents and that… you know it's important that they go on field trips because I find that field trips they didn't feel was really important and didn't feel that

> they had to go… but we've, they've stressed to the parents that it's important and that they go on these field trips because it is part of the education and part of the whether it's Ukraine we've studied and going to the Ukrainian village and learning the Ukraine culture and its important… so he wasn't going to go if I'm right but in the end he did go and quite enjoyed it…

Although the parent participants lacked information about their children's school-related adjustment experiences, it was evident that they were eager to learn more. For example, during my interview with Haya's mother, she asked me questions such as, "What did the teacher tell you?" and "Is [Haya] getting along with her friends?" In an effort to learn more about how Haya was doing at school, she would reach out to a school administrator who spoke Arabic. Although she was not satisfied with the amount of information she was able to obtain, she reported that she trusted the administrator's judgment "in telling her if everything is good at school or not". Maryam's mother mentioned that she would approach Maryam's teacher "asking with the very little English she knows [to learn] that how they're doing". Additionally, she sought the help of an Arabic-speaking friend whose daughter was in the same class as Maryam to ask the teacher how Maryam was doing on her behalf, as her friend had a greater command over the English language. Khalid's mother was also open to hearing about how her son was doing at school and "told teachers if anything happens please call me but they haven't called…"

Communication between the parents and schools also seemed to be limited. For example, Khalid's mother indicated that her primary interactions with Khalid's teacher were during parent-teacher conferences, which took place a few times a year. During these conferences, a translator was present to assist with communication. In Haya's mother's case, she reported that she did not visit Haya's school unless she was called in. Haya's teacher also stated, "I don't know exactly what is going on at home because I don't have a lot of conversations [with the family]." At the member check with the teacher, she elaborated that she had only met with

Haya's mother at parent-teacher conferences, during which a translator was present. Apart from this, Haya's teacher stated that she had spoken with Haya's father a few times when he was picking up Haya, but communication was a challenge due to the language barrier. To address this barrier, she would attempt to find other parents who also spoke Arabic to translate their conversations. Consistent with the other participants' reports, Maryam's teacher shared that she had one meeting with Maryam's parents where an interpreter was present a few months before our follow-up interview. Therefore, as the data suggests, there seemed to be little communication between the parents and teachers, apart from the formal parent-teacher conferences or meetings. Interactions taking place outside of these meetings were often challenging, as a result of the language barrier.

It was also found that parental involvement in the schooling process can have a positive impact on adjustment. Khalid's teacher indicated that Khalid had made significant progress in his studies over the course of the year and attributed part of his progress to his parents' working with him on his academics at home:

> He's of the children that, the newcomers he's the one that has made a lot of gains. I think part of it is the parents working with him. They do want him you know to learn the language and the concepts and reading and being able to read, so like they will read with him at home and mom and dad I don't know if you've met them probably have but like… education is important.

These findings provide insight on the barriers to parental involvement, as well as the potential positive impact parental involvement can have on newcomer children's adjustment experiences within the school context.

Role of personal qualities in adjustment. This theme refers to how child participants' personal qualities impacted their adjustment experiences. Sociability and a supportive nature appeared to be helpful for adjustment, while qualities such as a perfectionistic tendencies and

being introverted or withdrawn presented initial obstacles for successful adjustment. Furthermore, a desire to fit in seemed to be a neutral quality, which was helpful at times and problematic at others.

Sociability. Sociability refers to the quality of being sociable, that is, inclined to seek or enjoy the company of others (Merriam Webster, 2018). Maryam's teacher's and mother's reports demonstrate that Maryam displayed sociability as a personal quality, which ultimately assisted with her adjustment. Maryam's teacher described Maryam as an "outgoing, easygoing, friendly kid" and noted that her "easy personality" helped her to fit in with her class. She indicated that Maryam did not face many challenges in regards to her social adjustment and when asked for the reason behind this, she responded:

> I think it's her… willingness to get involved in things and get to know people… she likes to be outgoing and likes to play with people so she's going to get involved in things. So when I see her outside yeah she's playing with kids and she's running around and meeting up with kids.

Maryam was consistently described as outgoing by her teacher and someone that fit in with the rest of the class. On a similar note, Maryam's mother stated that Maryam likes "being social" and "making friends". She further stated that Maryam "likes [when] people like her. [Maryam] wants to be likable and tries hard for others to like her and she likes making new friends." Khalid's mother also discussed how Khalid enjoyed the company of his friends and looked forward to being around them.

Supportive nature. A supportive nature also emerged as a positive personal quality. Khalid's teacher noted that Khalid often displayed concern for others by informing her if there was a problem and making himself available to help others. For instance, she explained that Khalid often helped translate communication between herself and other Syrian newcomers:

> He's a really concerned… he is concerned about people around him if they get hurt. With the other newcomers that are, their English is not good at all and have difficulty explaining what has happened he is right there to help them out and ask the questions and interpret from them and let me know what is happening and I will ask and he will again translate to them what I'm asking and that so. Yes, very helpful, very helpful.

During my field visits, I also observed Khalid assisting his classmates with his academics. In one instance, he assisted his classmate in completing a math-related worksheet. Maryam's teacher also alluded to Maryam's supportive nature stating, "I see her helping other students too right. Like in her little group there's another student who needs a lot of support and she has helped him out as well."

Perfectionism. While personal qualities related to sociability and concern for others generally seemed to facilitate school-related adjustment for the most part, qualities of perfectionism and being reserved posed initial barriers. For example, during our first interview, Haya's teacher discussed how Haya's perfectionistic tendencies prevented her from participating in class and using more English. She noted:

> I kind of would have thought by now she would have been using a little more English. She can but still won't in front of a whole group, Haya is quite a perfectionist so she's not going to give that out until she knows she's got it perfect. So, just even when she's cleaning or doing her printing or anything like that, it's perfectly done. It's perfectly clean. It's organized well. So, I feel like she's a kid that's not going to start offering up until she has it down pat. One on one, definitely will talk more but definitely not in the group.

It is, however, worth noting that as Haya became more comfortable in her classroom and with the English language over time, she was much more willing to talk to others and participate in class. Although her perfectionistic tendencies kept her from doing such activities initially, once she was confident in her abilities, her English abilities and academic performance suddenly blossomed in the last few months of the schoolyear. Haya's teacher explained:

> …but Haya… always kind of held back, watched, watched, watched, learned it, learned it and then you could see her almost rehearsing it in her head and then …boom… she

> would do it. So now at the end of the year she's able to, she's performing better than some of the English speaking kids in the class for writing and stuff.

Withdrawn nature. Haya's teacher also pointed out that Haya's withdrawn nature was one of the main social difficulties Haya was facing at school, alongside communication barriers. She stated "communication is the biggest barrier but also her personality. She's not as interested in developing those relationships with other kids whereas some of my other kids, the other kids that came from Syria recently are." Furthermore, Haya's teacher related Haya's lack of peer relationships to Haya's personal qualities, noting:

> I think it's her personality. I'm trying to think of other kids I have had, they tend to be really interested in other kids and she's not horribly interested in other kids, like she doesn't ignore them but she certainly isn't seeking them out…

Desire to fit in. It is worth considering that while the notion of wanting to fit in and be liked by others is related to the quality of sociability and generally perceived as positive or helpful, it can also lead to unfavourable circumstances. For example, as mentioned earlier, Maryam's teacher described incidents in which Maryam and her classmate stole prizes from the class reading box and cheated on a spelling test. Maryam's teacher indicated that she did not believe Maryam instigated these acts, but instead was "following along" with her peers out of a desire to please them and fit in. Thus, it is important to consider how this quality can be positive or problematic depending on the particular context or setting.

Overall, this theme demonstrates how child participants' personal characteristics had the potential to greatly impact their adjustment experiences within the school context.

Summary

Based on a reflective analysis of the data gathered from individual interviews of three newly arrived Syrian refugee children, their mothers, and teachers, as well as observations within the school context, the following seven themes emerged: (1) Role of Language in Adjustment,

(2) Attitudes and Perspectives Towards Education, (3) Bonds and Relationships, (4) Initial Frustrations, Anxieties, and Fears, (5) Children's Unique Strategies for Adapting in School, (6) Parental Involvement in the Schooling Process, and (7) Role of Personal Qualities in Adjustment. In this chapter, each theme was described and explained in detail, along with supporting evidence (i.e. descriptive quotes from the interview transcripts and anecdotes from the observational field notes).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children between the ages of five years to eight years within Edmonton Public Schools. The following seven themes emerged from the data: 1) Role of Language in Adjustment, (2) Attitudes and Perspectives Towards Education, (3) Bonds and Relationships, (4) Initial Frustrations, Anxieties, and Fears, (5) Children's Unique Strategies for Adapting in School, (6) Parental Involvement in the Schooling Process, and (7) Role of Personal Qualities in Adjustment. In this chapter, several of the themes are further examined in light of relevant research literature, as well as the RAISED between Cultures (Brosinsky et al., 2018; Georgis et al., 2017; Kirova et al., 2017) and ADAPT (Silove, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2013) conceptual models and the Ecological Systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) theory. Implications for counselling, limitations, and directions for future research are also discussed.

Role of Language in Adjustment

Consistent with the research literature, the findings from this study indicated that language barriers presented major challenges for child participants' social, emotional, and academic adjustment. As the RAISED between Cultures model suggests, language is a common systemic barrier faced by newcomer families' post-migration (Georgis et al., 2017). According to this model, systemic barriers arise when "systems have practices, policies, processes/procedures, and beliefs that do not take into account the social, cultural, and language realities of all families and may prevent meaningful participation and equitable access to programs and services" (Georgis et al., 2007, p.16). It is critical to identify post-migration systemic barriers, as it leads to a better understanding of newcomer families daily experiences and the presence of such barriers can strongly impact the wellbeing of parents and children (Georgis et al. 2017).

As Wagner (2013) pointed out, refugee children's English language abilities are closely related to their ability to socially integrate within the school environment. When refugee children are unable to develop English language skills, they experience difficulties in their school adjustment experiences. In terms of social adjustment, both Haya and Maryam encountered hardships related to language differences. For instance, Maryam indicated that her limited English ability was the primary challenge in developing friendships when she first arrived at her current school. Although she wanted to speak with others, she was not able to because of the language gap. Likewise, Roma refugee parents residing in Canada reported that their children were initially unable to develop friendships with their peers, as they did not speak English (Walsh et al., 2011). Similar findings have also been reported in the research literature with refugee adolescents. For example, the findings from a study with resettled Southeast Asian refugee youth showed that a lack of English fluency led to marginalization within the school context (Hyman et al., 2000).

The impact of language barriers on emotional adjustment was also evident in this study, particularly in the cases of Haya and Maryam. Haya experienced immense frustration in the classroom, as she was unable to understand others and they were unable to understand her. Haya's teacher indicated that Haya was overwhelmed by the amount of English used in the classroom, which led her to experience a lot of ups and downs emotionally throughout the school day. In Maryam's case, she experienced a sense of social isolation when she first came to her current school, as she was unable to communicate with others in English. Likewise, Guo and colleagues (2017) found that Syrian refugee children in their study experienced loneliness and isolation at school, which stemmed from linguistic challenges.

When considering the child participants' academic adjustment experiences, language again played a large role. Language, or some component of language, was the most commonly reported academic challenge faced by child participants. As has previously been reported in the research literature (e.g. Kanji & Cameron, 2010), language barriers were what often impeded the child participants' ability to complete academic tasks, as opposed to the content of the task itself. Haya's teacher noted that Haya was in the bottom third of the class academically; however, she indicated that this was not because Haya presented any intellectual deficits, but rather because of the language barrier. The teachers in this study recognized the strong connection between students' English language abilities and educational outcomes and were careful not to misinterpret child's participants' academic difficulties as the result of an intellectual deficit or learning disorder. This finding is in contrast with some of the research literature which has shown that refugee students with little or no English language ability are commonly disproportionately referred for cognitive assessments to check for the presence of a learning disorder (Allen & Franklin, 2002).

At the time of the initial interview, Haya appeared to struggle with oral language, which presented academic difficulties, as oral language was the basis of the Kindergarten curriculum, according to her teacher. On the other hand, Maryam and Khalid had developed a level of oral language proficiency that allowed them to carry conversation with others, but they had not fully acquired the English language skills required for some higher-level academic tasks. Khalid's teacher reported that Khalid was able to effectively communicate with others but struggled with comprehension and complex vocabulary. Maryam's mother indicated that Maryam had difficulty with another academic task, writing. As the literature suggests, it is important to recognize that the English needed for academic tasks such as, literature, science, and social studies, takes

significantly more time to acquire than oral language proficiency (Kaplan et al., 2016). The teachers in this study appeared to have an understanding of this, and commonly acknowledged that developing English language skills, particularly those needed to succeed academically, was a gradual process.

Bonds and Relationships

Peers. This theme examined the microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), which influenced the child participants' social, emotional, and academic adjustment within the school context. These microsystems comprised of the child participants' peers, teachers, and families. As the literature has indicated, peer groups are an important support system for newcomer children and social contact with peers in the school setting can strengthen and promote social adjustment in the host society (Paat, 2013). It has also been claimed that peer relationships are vital for the emotional wellbeing and psychological development in children, particularly during the preschool and early school age period (Almqvist & Hwang, 1999). In this study, the child participants' peer groups played a primarily positive role in their school-related adjustment and peers were consistently listed as sources of social, emotional, and academic support by participants. Even when considering Haya's limited interactions with her peers, they appeared to be supportive in nature. Similarly, refugee children resettled in Italy indicated that their classmates were the most helpful, particularly when it came to learning the language of their host country (Dusi and Steinbach, 2016). Dusi and Steinbach (2016) note that the "school and classmates are the gateway to a newcomer's affiliation with his new world" (p.822). Almqvist and Broberg (1999) also provided evidence for the potential positive impact that peer relationships can have on refugee children's experiences. The findings from their study indicated

that the quality of current peer relationships best predicted participants' social adjustment in their sample of Iranian refugee children.

Interestingly, as the research has also shown (e.g. Due, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2016; de Heer, Due, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2016), two of the three child participants in this study primarily sought friendships with peers who had similar ethnocultural and linguistic backgrounds. For example, based on my observations and Khalid's teacher's reports, Khalid's friends at school comprised mainly of boys from similar backgrounds who also spoke Arabic. Similarly, Haya appeared to be more interested in spending time with her Syrian and Arabic-speaking peers, rather than her English-speaking classmates. Maryam, on the other hand, did not appear to have any friends from the same background as her. This is likely because her school was not as ethnoculturally diverse as the schools attended by Khalid and Haya and none of her classmates spoke Arabic. Unlike Khalid and Haya's schools, which had a large influx of Syrian refugees, Maryam and her sisters were some of the few, if not only, newcomer Syrian refugees at their school. Young refugee students attending a primary school in Australia reported that friendships with children from similar cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds increased their sense of belonging at school (Due et al., 2016). The literature has also shown that friendships with children from similar backgrounds seem to be a key contributor to social support for newcomer children who are in the process of integrating into a new school and culture (de Heer et al., 2016). Seeking relationships with peers who are familiar may decrease the social stress associated with transitions for newcomer students. However, research suggests that it is also useful for refugee children to establish relationships with others from the majority group, as this helps with developing a sense of belonging within the larger community (de Heer et al., 2016). Therefore, while "friendships with those from similar cultural backgrounds help individuals feel

more comfortable whilst they transition, friendships within the majority group are more likely to give individuals the sense that they are 'fitting in'" (de Heer et al., 2016, p.300).

This study also showed that while peers are often a source of support for refugee children within the school context, they can also have a negative influence. For instance, Maryam described instances of being teased by one of her peers where she was told comments such as, "you're not smart, you don't know how to read", leading to feelings of sadness and loneliness. This is consistent with the research literature demonstrating that refugee children are often subject to bullying and teasing (e.g. Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Ayoub, 2014; Caravita, 2016). Somali refugee students attending Canadian English elementary schools reported experiencing teasing and name-calling, which triggered feelings of sadness and not wanting to be at school (Ayoub, 2014). Similarly, exposure to bullying and harassment (verbal or physical) was found in a sample of resettled Iranian refugee children residing in Sweden (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999). In yet another study examining 771 children attending Italian primary and secondary schools, it was found that migrant and refugee children face a higher risk of bullying compared to other students (Caravita, 2016). Research has also documented how refugee students are often discriminated against at school based on their ethnicity or religious affiliation in countries of resettlement (e.g. Guo et al., 2017). However, no such evidence was found with the students in this study. This may be because two of the three schools that the child participants were attending were already highly diverse with a great number of visible minorities, including Muslim and Arabic-speaking students. In addition, all of the child participants appeared to physically fit in with the majority group in terms of their appearance and clothing. There is a possibility that older children are more likely to experience religious-based discrimination, as their religious identities often become more visible overtime. For instance, some older Muslim

girls may begin to wear hijabs, making their religious identity more apparent. In addition, older children's religious identities may become more noticeable when they engage in ritual prayers at school or fast during the holy month of Ramadan (McBrien, 2005).

In addition to experiences of teasing, Maryam's teacher expressed concerns that Maryam's involvement in activities such as cheating on a spelling test and stealing prizes from the class reading box were out of a desire to fit in, or in other words, to belong, with her peers. When considering the literature, there is a paucity of research exploring school belonging in younger refugee children (Due et al., 2016). However, within the limited research examining this population, Due and colleagues (2016) found that young refugee children between the ages of five years to 13 years who had been living in Australia for less than a year developed a sense of school belonging through relationships with their peers.

Teachers. According to Christie and Sidhu (2002), the school experiences of refugee children are greatly dependent on their teachers and individual teachers often have a larger impact on student outcomes than schools themselves. For refugee students, "teacher relationships at school may be one of the first community connections formed in a new country" (Due & Riggs, 2016, p.191). The child participants in this study developed supportive and trusting relationships with their teachers. Teachers were perceived as sources of social, emotional, and academic support by the participants and helped to positively shape the child participants' experiences at school. In addition, the child participants indicated that they liked their teachers and often sought out their teachers' attention and affirmation. Such findings are not uncommon in the research literature. For example, young refugee children resettled in Australia viewed their teachers positively, liked their teachers, enjoyed spending time with them, and looked forward to seeing them outside of the classroom at lunch or recess (Due & Riggs, 2016). These children

indicated that seeing their teachers made them feel safe and happy. In de Heer and colleagues (2016) study of resettled newcomer children, children expressed that they felt supported by their teachers and reported seeking help from their teachers as needed. It appeared that the child participants in this study had a secure attachment to their teachers, in which they perceived their teachers as a safe and secure base from which they could explore the outside world (i.e. the school surroundings) and return to for support as needed (Bowlby, 1988). It has been suggested that when students feel safe and cared for, there is a higher likelihood that they will develop positive relationships with their teachers and peers (Baak, 2016). These positive relationships lead to a positive classroom culture, resulting in improved learning environments. According to the ADAPT model, one of the major disruptions caused by mass violence and displacement is the resulting impact on survivors' relationships (Silove, 2005). Refugees often experience multiple separations and losses, both actual and symbolic. As such, the attachments that refugee children develop with their teachers and peers at school are particularly important in the aftermath of trauma.

An issue that often comes up in the relevant literature but was not particularly salient in this study, is concerns regarding teachers' levels of preparedness to work with refugee students. Teachers have frequently reported feeling ill-equipped to teach diverse students, especially those who have been traumatized and have had little formal education (Due & Riggs, 2016). These challenges may translate into difficulties in developing relationships with refugee students, which may ultimately impact the level of care these students receive at school. Interestingly, the teachers in this study did not voice any such concerns. As discussed before, refugee students with limited English abilities are often disproportionately referred for cognitive assessments to identify the presence of a learning disorder (Allen & Franklin, 2002; Kaplan et al., 2016).

However, the teachers in this study demonstrated an understanding of the vast impact of language on child participants' social, emotional, and academic adjustment and were not quick to link children's difficulties with the presence of a disorder. It is important to note that while the teachers were very attuned to how language influenced child participants' adjustment experiences, it is not clear whether they were aware of other psychosocial circumstances in the children's home lives, which may have been affecting their school-related adjustment. For instance, Haya's teacher noted that she had little information regarding Haya's home life and Maryam's teacher reported that she did not know what language Maryam spoke at home. Therefore, this research suggests that even teachers, who are well attuned and cognizant of their students' school experience and needs, may require assistance with learning about their children's life context (including pre-migration experiences). The RAISED between Cultures model suggests that it is important for educators and practitioners to "consider a more holistic understanding of children's play, behaviour, learning and development outcomes based on their social, cultural, and migration experiences" (Georgis et al., 2017, p.11). Specifically, it is important for teachers to be aware of the cultural influences impacting refugee children, acknowledge children's pre-migration experiences, and identify the post-migration barriers faced by newcomer families, which ultimately impact children's quality of school experiences (Georgis et al., 2017).

Family. Family, particularly the immediate family, "is the most intimate and often the only microsystem for refugee children when they arrive in Canada" (Lee, 2016, p.9). Much of the research discusses the role of parents in refugee children's school adjustment; however, there appears to be little research exploring the significance of sibling relationships. As the findings from this study indicated, siblings can be important sources of social, emotional, and academic

support within young refugee children's microsystem. This is especially the case when siblings attend the same school, such as for Haya and Maryam. When refugee children enter a new school where they do not know anyone, the presence of a sibling can be highly comforting and reassuring. In these situations, siblings can rely on one another for company and have a familiar figure they can lean on. For instance, before Maryam became friends with any of her classmates, she sought out the company of her sister during recess. This is of particular importance, as many young refugees have experienced considerable trauma associated with losses and separations from family members (Fazel & Stein, 2002).

Loss of important relationships. The loss of important relationships also appeared to impact children's experiences. As demonstrated in Haya's case where she was separated from her cousins back home, a significant loss for refugees resettling in their host country is leaving behind close family members in their country of origin or in refugee camps (Ayoub, 2014). As a result, children may display immense concern and worry about the safety of relatives and friends back home. Research has demonstrated that refugee children separated from relatives during displacement are at risk of poor mental health (Hjern, Angel, & Jeppson, 1998), which in turn may negatively impact children's ability to effectively function at school. Thus, it is critical for service-providers to pay attention to such risk factors and how they may ultimately impact children's adjustment at school.

The loss of significant relationships, whether it may involve leaving behind family members upon entering one's host country or losing friends as a result of switching schools or classes, presents a threat to the adaptive system of bonds and attachments. Initial adaptive responses to such threats may include arousal, separation anxiety, and grief, while prolonged grief and depression are maladaptive responses (Silove, 2005). It is important that teachers, other

school personnel, and mental health practitioners are aware of the distinction between these adaptive and maladaptive responses in order to ensure that refugee children are provided with appropriate supports and resources.

Initial Frustrations, Anxieties, and Fears

There were several notable issues that emerged from the findings, which led to frustration, anxiety, and fear among the child participants. Firstly, as discussed in the *Role of Language* theme earlier, child participants experienced a range of frustrations and challenges in relation to the language barrier, which is a common finding among the research literature. Another potentially anxiety-provoking situation was going outdoors in the cold weather, which was something that Haya and her siblings initially avoided. Haya's teacher suspected that this was because Haya and her siblings just came from a warn-torn country where there were frequent bombings and going outside was extremely dangerous. This type of persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma is a common presenting symptom of PTSD and the relevant research has shown strong support for the presence of PTSD symptomology in refugee children living in resettlement countries (e.g. Fazel & Stein, 2002; Gandham, Gunasekera, Isaacs, Maycock, & Britton, 2017; Henley & Robinson, 2011). For the child participants in this study, it cannot be determined whether they actually presented with PTSD symptoms without any formal evidence-based testing. However, it is critical for service-providers, including teachers and mental health practitioners, to have an understanding of these symptoms and pay attention to the different ways previous trauma can impact refugee children's behaviour and functioning.

Being outside of one's comfort zone related to an unfamiliarity with school activities and routines, was also found to be a source of frustration and anxiety. Comparably, in Janjusevic's

(2010) review of immigrant and refugee students in the classroom and school, "feeling lost in the midst of unfamiliar people, culture, [and] language" (p.58) was identified as a challenge faced by refugee students. In order to deal with this challenge, Janjusevic (2010) suggests that educators apply strategies such as, providing learning materials in the home language, learning about the child's background, creating peer support programs, including a cross-cultural component in lessons, and creating opportunities for parental involvement.

Finally, concerns about children's safety was another source of fear. Specifically, both Maryam and her mother feared that Maryam would get kidnapped, as they had heard a story about such incidents occurring in Canada. Similar findings have also been documented in the research literature. For instance, Somali refugee children attending Canadian elementary schools reported feeling unsafe at times and expressed worries about being robbed or kidnapped (Ayoub, 2014). Additionally, in a study exploring the fears and coping strategies of refugee children seeking asylum in the United States, "lack of safety" emerged as one of the most frequent fear themes (Leppma & Szente, 2014). This is an important point to consider, as refugees flee their home countries to escape dangerous circumstances and regain a sense of safety. However, if they continue to feel unsafe in countries of resettlement, this can ultimately pose challenges to their social, emotional, and academic adjustment.

When considering the ADAPT system, it is important to recognize that threats to the adaptive system of safety are a common collective experience in communities exposed to mass trauma. Therefore, as found in this study, whole families oftentimes have concerns with safety, not just children. Teachers, counsellors, and other service-providers must be aware of this collective perspective on trauma and how it plays out in refugee children's lives.

Children's Unique Strategies for Adapting in School

It is critical that the individuals in refugee children's support network recognize and understand the coping strategies employed by these children as they adjust to their new environment (Leppma & Szente, 2014). Furthermore, it has been recommended that mental health practitioners explore refugee children's coping strategies in order to further develop their strengths and resilience (Lustig et al., 2004). However, there is limited research exploring refugee children's coping strategies. Coping has been defined as an individual's "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources" (Kocijan-Hercigonja, Rijavec, Marusic, & Hercigonja, 1998, p.45). Coping serves two primary functions: regulating stressful emotions (i.e. emotion-focused coping) and modifying the person-setting relation causing the distress (i.e. problem-focused coping) (Kocijan-Hercigonja et al., 1998).

The refugee children in this study used several different coping strategies to deal with the challenges that arose in the early phases of their school-related adjustment. These strategies included reaching out for support, drawing as a means of coping with difficult emotions, using observational and mimicking skills to learn what to do in unknown situations, avoidance, and cheating. Reaching out for support, using observational skills, and cheating are examples of problem-focused coping and the use of drawing and avoidance are forms of emotion-focused coping. Leppma and Szente (2014) conducted a qualitative study in which they explored the fears and coping strategies of resettled refugee children between the ages of six years to 13 years from the countries of Haiti, Sudan, Cuba, Venezuela, and Vietnam. Several of the common coping strategies used by the children in their sample overlapped with the strategies identified in this study. These strategies were leaving (e.g. running away or going somewhere else when

facing distress), prevention (e.g. staying away from a fearful object), and asking for help. This suggests that the coping strategies identified in this study may not only be unique to Syrian refugee children and further research is required.

Ayers, Sandler, West, and Roosa (1996) developed a four-factor model of coping based on an analysis of children's responses to a dispositional measure of coping, as well as a situation-specific measure of coping. The four factors of coping style identified were: active, avoidant, distraction, and support seeking (Ayers et al., 1996; Program for Prevention Research, 1999). The strategies of cheating and using observational skills employed by the participants in this study are active coping strategies and the strategy of avoidance can be classified as avoidant. Lastly, drawing is a distraction strategy and the act of reaching out is a support seeking coping strategy. While this model was developed with children who were in the fourth through sixth grade (Ayers et al., 1996), the findings from this study present preliminary support for the applicability of the four-factor model with younger children.

It is worth noting that while the coping strategies used by the child participants were divided into adaptive and maladaptive categories in the findings chapter of this document, this distinction is not static and can vary depending on the setting the child is in. For instance, cheating may have been a temporarily adaptive coping strategy when Maryam attended school in her country of first asylum (i.e. Jordan), where the school environment was much stricter and more severe forms of punishment may have been employed in response to poor academic performance. The research literature has demonstrated that corporal punishment is still widely used in schools across Jordan and low attainment is one of the most prominent factors leading teachers to use violence in the classroom setting (Khateeb, 2015). Additionally, the ADAPT model posits that avoidance is an adaptive response to threats to safety, particularly if there is a

possibility that the danger will reoccur (Silove, 1998), again demonstrating the impact of circumstances on determining whether a response is adaptive or maladaptive in nature. Moreover, using observational skills to copy others' actions in unknown situations may seem adaptive initially, but also has the potential to be damaging in some situations. In a case study of a resettled Kosovan refugee child attending primary school in the United Kingdom, the researchers found that when the child appeared to follow classroom instructions, he was actually observing the behaviour of his peers and imitating them (Bash & Zezlina-Phillips, 2006). Through this mimicking strategy, the child was able to mask his lack of language abilities and perform the task at hand. As a result, when the child did not follow directions, the school staff perceived this as conscious disobedience or naughty behaviour.

Parental Involvement in the Schooling Process

This theme explored the linkages between parent participants and schools (i.e. the mesosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Understanding the relationship between parents and schools is imperative, as the interactions between these microsystems help shape children's developmental and adjustment experiences. For the most part, the parents in this study appeared to have limited involvement in their children's schooling process, as they lacked in-depth information about their children's school experiences and the Canadian schooling system. Further, communication with school staff was restricted, due to language barriers. These findings are consistent with the research literature. For example, newcomer parents resettled in Canada reported confusion regarding the school system and curriculum (Li, Doyle, Lymburner, & Ghadi, 2016). In another study, Syrian refugee parents resettled in the United Kingdom expressed a lack of understanding regarding the education system (Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017). Additionally, a number of studies have shown that a lack of language proficiency in refugee parents presents

major barriers for communication between parents and teachers (e.g. Ennab, 2017; Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017; Nagasa, 2014; Rah, Choi, & Nguyen, 2009; Tadesse, 2014). Similar to the parents in this study, other newcomer parents have also expressed a desire to learn more about how their children are doing at school (e.g. Li et al., 2016).

This theme also highlighted the importance of bilingual school-home liaison workers in facilitating refugee parents' involvement in the schooling process. These figures may serve a variety of purposes including, assisting with communication between refugee parents and schools, teaching parents about the Canadian school system, and relaying important messages to parents. To illustrate, Khalid's teacher described an incident where Khalid's parents were hesitant to send him on field trips, as they did not understand their purpose and assumed attendance was not mandatory. It was through the support of the school's success coach, who spoke Arabic and acted as a liaison, that she was ultimately able to communicate the educational value of attending fieldtrips. Haya's mother also touched on the usefulness of having bilingual staff at Haya's school and noted that she approached an Arabic-speaking school administrator whenever she wanted to learn more about how Haya was doing at school. The relevant literature has stressed the importance establishing connections between early socialization environments (Georgis et al., 2017; Kirova et al., 2017) through such bilingual liaisons or mediators who can open up communication between schools, refugee students, and their parents (Hamilton, 2004). Hamilton (2004) suggests that these individuals must have a detailed understanding of "both the culture of the school and that of the refugee family and child, [and] can act as brokers to develop good communication channels between the child, school, and parents" (p.89). Rah and colleagues (2009) study with school practitioners working with Hmong refugee students provides empirical support for the creation of bilingual liaison positions in schools. Each of the

schools visited by the researchers had at least one Hmong bilingual liaison who acted as a "bridge for parents to reach into the school community" (Rah et al., 2009, p.357) and were the core personnel resources for refugee children and their families. The researchers argue that a liaison is a vital position through which refugee families' needs are identified and cultural conflicts are resolved.

Though the parent participants' level of engagement in their children's schooling was generally limited, this study did find support for the notion that parental involvement can have a positive impact on refugee children's school-related adjustment. As Khalid's teacher indicated, Khalid made considerable progress in his academics over the course of the year and she attributed this in part to his parents' working with him on his schoolwork at home. This is congruent with the literature, which suggests that parents' involvement in their children's education has a positive impact on children's academic outcomes (Hamilton, 2004).

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study have significant implications for educators and other service-providers working with newly arrived refugee children, such as counsellors and in-school settlement workers.

1. **Provide language support.** Language-related challenges were consistently reported as one of the primary barriers to child participants' social, emotional, and academic adjustment. Thus, it is imperative that language supports are in place to assist refugee children in overcoming such barriers. One way of providing language support is through targeted one-on-one or small group language training in which children work with language specialists (e.g. ELL teachers or speech language pathologists) to develop their English skills. In these groups, language specialists can focus on children's specific problem areas and provide them with relevant

support, which may not be possible in a large classroom setting. Ongoing collaboration between language specialists and children's teachers is essential to ensure consistency and continuity of care.

Particularly for younger children, providing opportunities for play (both in classroom and counselling settings) is highly important for developing language skills. Play time is a time where children can feel comfortable enough to practice their language skills without fear of judgment. Through play, children are able to attach meaning to words and develop their vocabulary (Oddo & Castleberry, 2013). Adults can help facilitate children's language acquisition during play by modelling language. This may involve verbally describing what the child is doing, adding words to children's short phrases, and modeling correct grammatical structures (Oddo & Castleberry, 2013).

Incorporating elements of newcomer children's first language in teaching or counselling settings may also be beneficial in developing children's English language abilities. It has been suggested that literacy skills transfer from one's first language to second language (Shin, 2010). Instructional programs that permit newcomer children to master their first language to high levels of proficiency whilst learning English have been found to be more effective than English-only programming (Shin, 2010). Thus, "reinforcing children's conceptual base in the native language provides a foundation for long-term growth in English academic skills" (Shin, 2010, p. 14). For Syrian refugee children specifically, it may be useful for service providers to provide resources in Arabic. For instance, service providers can share Arabic picture books and games with children. In addition, items in the classroom or therapy room can be labelled in English and Arabic so that children can begin to establish connections between the two languages and develop their vocabulary. It is worth noting that the Syrian refugee community is unique

compared to other refugee groups, as they are already a large ethnocultural group in Edmonton, as well as in the other Canadian cities that received them within the last two years. Consequently, they are generally well-resourced in terms of maintaining their first language. However, it is still useful to for teachers and other service-providers to reinforce the importance of retaining the first language while supporting and teaching English language development. Additionally, when considering counselling with these populations, being able to express oneself is essential to the process; therefore, providing language translation resources is of utmost importance.

2. **Create a safe and welcoming school environment.** The child participants in this study faced a number of initial frustrations, anxieties, and fears. In order to address some of these challenges, service-providers must strive to create a safe, welcoming, and comfortable school environment for newcomer refugee students. Strategies for creating this type of an environment include incorporating elements of newcomer refugee students' culture into lessons and projects, which may increase children's comfort levels at school. In addition, expressing an interest in learning about refugee students culture and background may lead children to feel included and valued. Another strategy for service-providers to establish a welcoming and safe school environment is learning some words or phrases in refugee children's first language to enhance early communication (CMAS, 2015). Of particular importance are greetings, "yes/no", calming words, and "bathroom". Learning words or phrases that help children to communicate their physical needs are essential in making children feel cared for and comfortable (CMAS, 2015). It may also be useful for service-providers to actively help students become familiarized with the school environment and classroom routines. Strategies for doing so include providing students with a map and tour of the school and school grounds (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015), introducing students to relevant school staff (e.g. recess supervisors and administrative

staff), and explicitly teaching classroom rules and expectations. Lastly, the creation of a quiet area (CMAS, 2015), or "safe space" in the school or classroom for refugee students to visit if they are feeling overwhelmed or uncomfortable is recommended. In this area, culturally and developmentally appropriate books, games, and resources can be provided for students to use as they wish.

3. **Enhance peer support.** Consistent with the existing research literature, the findings from this study suggest that child participants' peer groups played a pivotal role in their school-related adjustment and were sources of social, emotional, and academic support. As such, it is worthwhile for service-providers to focus on strengthening relationships between refugee children and their peers and build on the supportive nature of these relationships. Establishing peer support groups in which students can assist newcomer children with navigating the new school environment, learning school and classroom routines, and completing academic tasks may be particularly helpful. Involvement in such groups allows newcomer children to get to know their peers on a deeper level and develop meaningful friendships. Another suggestion for enhancing peer support is pairing up each newcomer student with a buddy (i.e. another student in the classroom who is familiar with the school system and can serve as a role model) who they can reach out to for support as needed. For those newcomer students will little to no formal school experience, seating them beside their buddies can help them learn how to conduct themselves in the classroom (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015). Furthermore, Arabic-speaking students can play a special role in helping newcomer Syrian refugee children transition into the new school environment. Providing these children with mentorship and leadership opportunities in which they can act as translators and cultural brokers is highly recommended (Nofal, 2017).

4. **Build on children's coping strategies.** The child participants in this study appeared to use a variety of coping strategies to deal with challenging situations. While some of these coping strategies were adaptive, others appeared to be maladaptive. As a result, it is important for teachers and counsellors to help newcomer refugee children identify the coping strategies they use and understand how the strategies they employ are adaptive or maladaptive depending on the setting. Research has suggested that refugee children use less coping behaviours than other children and their coping behaviours are less effective (Kocijan-Hercigonja et al., 1998). Therefore, there is a need for service-providers to teach refugee children effective and developmentally appropriate coping skills, which can ultimately foster resilience among this population (Leppma & Szente, 2014). It has been found that the coping strategies of developing social supports and seeking spiritual support moderate the impact of trauma exposure in war-affected children (Thabet, Abdulla, & Vostanis, 2013). Consequently, it may be valuable for service-providers to introduce and build on such strategies when working with newcomer Syrian refugee children. The use of hands-on tools, such as labeled pictures and videos, may be an effective means for teaching children of early childhood age about various coping strategies and serves to mitigate language-related barriers.

5. **Establish school-home liaison positions.** Another recommendation that emerges from this study is creating school-home liaison positions who serve as a bridge between the home and early learning environments (Georgis et al., 2017) and consequently strengthen this mesosystem. Given the large number of Syrian refugee children entering the Canadian school system, it is worthwhile for schools to hire Arabic-speaking liaisons who are familiar with Syrian customs and beliefs. These individuals would then be able to assist with communication between families and schools and help families understand how the Canadian schooling system works.

They would also be a point of contact for parents and students if they had questions or concerns and were unable to communicate their needs to school staff due to language or cultural barriers. Cultural brokers who are already working with newcomer refugee families, such as the cultural broker in this study, may also be able to serve as a mediator between families and schools (Yohani, 2013). Cultural brokers would be particularly suited for this role, as they already have a detailed understanding of children's home life and psychosocial circumstances. These individuals would have the required skill set for this role, as cultural brokering is "the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or persons of different cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change" (Jezewski, 1990, p.497).

6. **Promote collaboration between teachers and counsellors.** As the findings from this study indicate, schooling plays a significant role in lives of refugee children. Given that schools are one of the primary and most influential systems that refugee children enter upon resettlement (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007), it is critical that counsellors working with young refugees learn about their clients' school-related adjustment in order to best support them and implement effective interventions. As teachers directly engage with refugee students on a daily basis, they can provide counsellors with valuable insight into refugee children's experiences at school. Additionally, counsellors can serve as consultants and educate teachers on how to sensitively approach children from trauma backgrounds. Counsellors can also assist teachers in learning how to identify risk factors in traumatized children, as well as teach them about presenting symptoms for common mental health problems in refugee children, such as PTSD. It may also be useful for counsellors to help teachers recognize cultural differences in the presentation of symptoms. For example, in Ozer and colleagues (2013) study with Syrian refugee children residing in Turkey, the most frequently endorsed item on the depression scale was

related to bodily complaints. The authors reported that the children may have expressed their psychological distress in bodily terms since mental health problems are not commonly discussed in their culture and they may thus lack the appropriate vocabulary to communicate their feelings. Furthermore, counsellors can help teachers apply culturally appropriate interventions and strategies to support refugee students experiencing difficulties with adjustment at school. For instance, Haya's teacher discussed how Haya often experienced anxiety, which typically manifested as grumpiness and irritability. In such situations, teachers can greatly benefit from consultation with therapists in which they can learn about strategies (e.g. breathing exercises, guided imagery, etc.) to help children deal with anxiety or other psychosocial issues they may experience.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study had several limitations, which must be addressed. Firstly, as this study used a qualitative focused ethnography methodology, there were a limited number of participants and the findings cannot be generalized to other settings. Further research in this area using quantitative research designs and larger sample sizes would be useful for generalizability of results. Secondly, participants were recruited solely through the Edmonton Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative. For future research, it is important to also gather the perspectives of newcomer refugee families who do not have access to formal immigrant and refugee serving agencies. Next, although the *Role of Language in Adjustment* emerged as a major finding, there was little exploration around the role of child participants' first language in their school adjustment, which is an area worth exploring in future studies. Moreover, data collection began up to a year after participating families had arrived in Canada. As a result, some of the initial challenges that the child participants may have encountered when they first entered the school

system may have been missed. Language barriers presented another limitation to this study. Rather than hiring an external interpreter, the cultural broker fulfilled this role during interviews with parents and children. As the cultural broker was not formally trained in this area, some subtleties in communication may have been missed (Okraku, 2017). However, the participating families already had an established trusting relationship with the cultural broker, which likely played a role in their comfort levels and willingness to share their stories. Additionally, the cultural broker also had a Syrian background, which was helpful in understanding cultural nuances and expressions. As such, for future research, it is important that interpreters have an understanding of the cultural background of participants, are able to develop an atmosphere of safety and trust, and are skillful in picking up on subtle cues in communication. Another limitation is that the teachers who participated in this study may have already been keenly aware of and interested in newcomers' needs and experiences in schools, leading to a willingness to be involved in the study. In other words, there may have been a self-selection bias and therefore the results may have been influenced by this. Finally, the research sample did not include any of the child participants' fathers. This was simply by coincidence and was not an intentional choice made during the recruitment process. However, in terms of future research, more studies exploring refugee fathers' perspectives on their children's school adjustment are needed.

Conclusion

This study aimed to gather an in-depth understanding of the social, emotional, and academic adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children between the ages of five years to eight years within the school context. The findings from this study shed light on the role of language in adjustment, attitudes towards education, relational factors impacting adjustment, and parental involvement. In addition, the findings highlighted the initial frustrations and

anxieties experienced by child participants, the unique coping strategies they employed to deal with adjustment-related challenges, and the impact of children's personal qualities on their adjustment experiences. This chapter sought to situate the findings within the relevant empirical research, as well as outline implications for service-providers, limitations, and future research directions.

It is my hope that this study provides a basis for future research studies exploring the school experiences of young Syrian refugee children and those from other cross-cultural groups. Moreover, I hope this study will enable service-providers working with young Syrian refugee children to gain greater insight into these children's initial school-related experiences and use this knowledge to improve the quality of services and programming available for this population.

Final Reflections

This research journey was incredibly fulfilling on a personal and academic level. Over the course of this process, I gained deep insight into the lives of my participants and also learned about myself as a researcher and individual. Before meeting my participants and commencing data collection, I had a slight sense of overconfidence given that I had previously worked with young children in various capacities (e.g. as a student teacher), and was convinced that working with this age group would be fairly straightforward. I assumed that I would immediately develop a strong rapport with the children and that it would not take much time for them to warm up to me. However, I quickly realized that this was not the case. It was evident that the child participants were initially quite shy around me and they typically did not acknowledge me during the observations. As a researcher, this was an incredibly humbling experience. While it is important to be aware of one's strengths as a researcher, it is also important to be modest and open to whatever the research process may bring.

Another important lesson that I gained from this study was the importance of having flexible timelines. As the families in this study had recently arrived in Canada and were in the process of resettling, they often had other appointments or commitments, which took priority. As a result, there were times when participants had to postpone or reschedule interviews. Balancing my personal schedule, along with the schedules of the cultural broker and participating families frequently presented challenges. Thus, it is essential that researchers are able to adapt accordingly when working with newly arrived populations.

Over the course of this thesis, I also had to learn to juggle multiple hats. My background as a teacher, counsellor, and researcher all impacted my research decisions and how I interpreted the data. Specifically, I found that my background in the education system provided me with a strong foundation and understanding of how the school system works. Moreover, it prepared me for working with parents, children, and teachers. On the other hand, my clinical background initially presented some challenges during data collection. During my first few observations, I realized that I was quite focused on symptomology and diagnosis. For instance, my understanding of PTSD led me to unintentionally search for the presence of related symptoms in the child participants. As I recorded my reflections of observational experiences in my memos, I became aware of my biases and kept an open mind moving forward. Apart from this, it is important to note that my counselling background was also beneficial to the research process. For example, my communication skills helped me to effectively conduct and navigate interviews with participants. I was able to gather a sense of participants' comfort levels during interviews and understood when it was appropriate to continue asking about a certain topic and when it was appropriate to move on.

Finally, it was a privilege to meet and learn from each one of the participants in this study. In particular, I was deeply moved by the resilient nature of the mothers and children. Despite experiencing such difficult and traumatic events, their welcoming nature, strength, and drive to succeed was incredibly inspiring both personally and academically. I am immensely grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from the families and teachers in this study and share their stories.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Raabia Ghazyani and I am a graduate student in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Alberta. For my Masters thesis, I will be exploring the social, emotional, and academic adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children between the ages of 5 years and 8 years, under the supervision of Dr. Sophie Yohani. It is my hope that the findings from this study will help teachers, counsellors, and other helping professionals to provide higher quality and culturally appropriate services for diverse populations.

I would like to invite you and your child to participate in this study. If you consent to participate, I will set up interviews with you, your child, and your child's teacher in which I will talk to each of you about your child's school-related experiences since entering Canada, as well as relevant challenges and opportunities. All interviews will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you and will last approximately 45 minutes. I will also gather data through observations at your child's school to learn more about his or her day-to-day experiences in the classroom.

If you are interested in being a part of this study, your contact information will be forwarded to me and I will contact you thereafter. I will then arrange to meet with you and your child to discuss the study in further detail and you can then determine whether you and your child would like to participate in this project. If you decide to participate, you will be given a formal consent form to sign. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and will not have any impact on your child's academic career. In addition, the option of using an Arabic-speaking interpreter is available if you prefer.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Sophie Yohani at (780) 492-1164.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (780) 902-2660 or raabia@ualberta.ca.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Raabia Ghazyani

Please circle one of the following:

Yes, my contact information can be released to Ms. Raabia Ghazyani.
No, my contact information cannot be released.
Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email Address: _____

Appendix B

Pre-Screening Questionnaire

1) Are you and your family of refugee status? If so, please specify whether you are classified as a Government-Assisted Refugee, Blended-Visa Office-Referred Refugee, or a Privately-Sponsored Refugee. *(Individuals must be of refugee status to be eligible to participate in the study)*

2) When did you arrive in Canada? *(Participants are eligible to participate in the study if they arrived in Canada within the past year)*

5) How old is your child? *(Must be between the ages of 5-8 years to meet the eligibility criteria)*

6) Is he or she currently enrolled in a school within the Edmonton Public School Board or Catholic School Board?

7) How long were you living in Syria before having to escape the conflict? *(Participants must have been living in Syria for a minimum of ten years prior to the conflict)*

If participant meets the above criteria, ask the following:

1) What language would you be comfortable being interviewed in?

2) If not English, ask, "Would you be comfortable having an interpreter *(name language)* present for assistance in the interview?"

3) Would you be willing to give me consent to contact and interview your child's teacher as part of this study?

Please note: Explain that eligibility for the study would depend on meeting the above criteria <u>and</u> having a teacher agree to participate in the study.

Appendix C

Information Letter

Study Title: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

Research Investigator:
Raabia Ghazyani, M.Ed student
Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
E-mail: raabia@ualberta.ca Phone: (780) 902-2660

Supervisor:
Sophie Yohani, PhD., RPsych
Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
E-mail: sophie.yohani@ualberta.ca Phone: (780) 492-1164

Background and Purpose
My name is Raabia Ghazyani and I am a graduate student in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Alberta. For my Masters thesis, I am conducting a research study that will explore the adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children between the ages of 5 years and 8 years. Specifically, this study aims to explore how these children are adjusting emotionally, socially, and academically within the school environment during their early years or settlement in Canada. It is my hope that the findings from this study will help teachers, counsellors, and other helping professionals to provide higher quality and culturally appropriate services for diverse populations in school settings. You are being asked to participate in this study because you and your child resided in Syria and migrated to Canada within the past year as refugees. Further, your child is currently enrolled in the Edmonton Public or Edmonton Catholic school system.

Study Procedures
Data will be collected through individual interviews with you, your child, and your child's teacher in which I will talk to each of you about your child's overall school-related experience since entering Canada, as well as opportunities and challenges that your child may have encountered within the school setting. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will be held at a time and location that is convenient for you. You will be provided with $20 to reimburse any travel or parking costs incurred. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by myself. I will also gather information through thirty to sixty minutes long, monthly observations for a period of four months at your child's school to learn more about their day-to-day experiences in the classroom. I will then set up follow-up interviews with you and your child to discuss how your child's school-related experiences have changed since the initial interview. You will be given an opportunity to verify the information that I collect during the research process to ensure that it is accurate and provide any feedback. Once this study is completed, you will be provided with a copy of the final report.

Benefits

Although there are no direct benefits to the participants, findings from this study will lead to a deeper understanding of the resettlement experiences of refugee children in the early childhood age group. Further, they may help guide service-providers in developing effective school-based interventions for refugee students, training programs for teachers, and high quality counselling services for diverse populations. The results from this study, in which your or your child's identity will not be revealed, will also be published and presented at various conferences in order to help others gain a better understanding of how to support diverse and vulnerable populations.

Risks

Though the risks to participating in this study are minimal, memories of previous losses or trauma may be triggered during the interview process. To ensure that you are as comfortable as possible, you can choose not to answer questions that may lead to discomfort and you will also be provided with a list of support services that you can reach out to as needed.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and will not have any impact on your child's academic career. You are able to leave the study at any given point prior to August 31st, 2017. If you choose to leave the study, all information gathered from you will be discarded of in an ethically appropriate manner.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Research materials will be kept confidential and only my supervisor and I will have access to this information. Your names will be replaced with fake names in all transcripts, notes, and written documents and any identifying information that can be linked back to you will be removed before publishing findings from this study. Electronic data will be password-protected and all research materials will be stored in a locked cabinet in my supervisor's office at the University of Alberta for a minimum of five years. Thereafter, all data will be discarded of in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. If the need to include interpreters in the interview process arises, they will also be bound by these terms of confidentiality.

Further Information

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact myself at (780) 902-2660 or my supervisor, Dr. Sophie Yohani at (780) 492-1164. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix D

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

	Yes	No
I understand that I have been asked to be in a research study.	☐	☐
I understand that my child's teacher will be contacted to participate in this study and I give permission for the teacher to share information about my child's social, emotional, and academic adjustment in school.	☐	☐
I understand the objectives and procedure of this study.	☐	☐
I have read and understood the attached Information Sheet.	☐	☐
I understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study.	☐	☐
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.	☐	☐
I understand that I my child and I are free to leave this study at any point.	☐	☐
The issue of confidentiality has been explained to me.	☐	☐
This study been explained to me.	☐	☐

If "Yes", who explained this study to you?

_____

I give my consent for my child and myself to take part in this study *(circle one of the following):*

Yes No

Name of Parent (printed): _____

Name of Child (printed): _____

Signature of Parent: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

THE INFORMATION SHEET MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS CONSENT FORM AND A COPY GIVEN TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Appendix E

Assent Form

Title of Study: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

Principal Investigator(s): Raabia Ghazyani **Phone Number:** (780) 902-2660
Study Coordinator: Dr. Sophie Yohani **Phone Number:** (780) 492-1164

We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. A research study is a way to learn more about something. We would like to find out more about how children from Syria, like yourself, are becoming used to their new school. You are being asked to join the study because you and your family recently moved here from Syria and you are now going to school in Canada.

If you agree to join this study, you will be asked to draw a picture about school and answer some questions about your drawing. I will also come visit your school once a month to learn more about how you are becoming used to school.

When we talk about your drawing, you might remember some difficult times you experienced in Syria and difficulties that you might be having here at school. You can choose not to answer a question if any of the questions make you uncomfortable. We will also make sure you have support if you become upset at any time.

By hearing about your experience in school this year, we may learn something that will help other children who are also coming from Syria and are new to schools in Canada someday. This study will also help us learn about how children from other countries become used to schools in Canada.

You do not have to join this study. It is up to you. You can say okay now and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell us you want to stop. No one will be mad at you if you don't want to be in the study or if you join the study and change your mind later and stop.

Before you say **yes or no** to being in this study, we will answer any questions you have. If you join the study, you can ask questions at any time. Just tell the researcher that you have a question.

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Sophie Yohani at (780) 492-1164.

Please circle one of the following:

 Yes, I will be in this research study. **No**, I don't want to do this.

Child's name Date

Person obtaining Assent	Signature	Date

Verbal Assent:

I have discussed this research study with _____ using language which is understandable and appropriate for the participant. I believe that I have fully informed him/her of the nature of the study and its possible risks and benefits. I believe the participant understood this explanation and assent to participate in this study.

Person obtaining Assent	Signature	Date

Appendix F

INFORMATION LETTER

Study Title: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

Research Investigator:
Raabia Ghazyani, M.Ed student
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Supervisor:
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E-mail: sophie.yohani@ualberta.ca Phone: (780) 492-1164

Background and Purpose
My name is Raabia Ghazyani and I am a graduate student in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Alberta. For my Masters thesis, I am conducting a research study that will explore the adjustment experiences of newcomer Syrian refugee children between the ages of 5 years to 8 years. Specifically, this study aims to explore how these children are adjusting emotionally, socially, and academically within the school environment. It is my hope that the findings from this study will help teachers, counsellors, and other helping professionals to provide higher quality and culturally appropriate services for diverse populations. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are currently teaching a child who is eligible to participate in this study and you can provide valuable insight regarding this child's school-related adjustment experiences.

Study Procedures
Data will be collected through individual interviews with you, [Child's name], and [child's mother or father] in which I will talk to each of you about [Child's name's] initial school-related adjustment experiences in your classroom, as well as opportunities and challenges that he or she may have encountered within the school setting. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will be held at a time and location that is convenient for you. You will be provided with $20 to reimburse any travel or parking costs incurred. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by myself. I will also gather information through thirty to sixty minutes long monthly observations for a period of four months at your school to learn more about [Child's name's] day-to-day experiences in the classroom and gather relevant contextual information. We will then meet for a follow-up interview to discuss changes to [Child's name's] social, emotional, and academic adjustment since the initial interview. You will be given an opportunity to verify the information that I collect during the research process to ensure that it is accurate and provide any feedback. Once this study is completed, you will be provided with a copy of the final report.

Benefits
Though there are no direct benefits to the participants, findings from this study will lead to a deeper understanding of the resettlement experiences of refugee children in the early childhood age group. Further, the findings may guide school-based interventions for refugee students, training programs for teachers, and counselling services for vulnerable populations, leading to culturally appropriate and high-quality care. The results from this study, in which your of your child's identity will not be revealed, may also be published and presented at various conferences in order to help others gain a better understanding of how to support diverse populations.

Risks
There are no known risks to you as a participant in this study. If we learn about something during the research process which may impact your willingness to continue participating in the study, you will be informed immediately. Likewise, if you experience any emotional discomfort during this interview I will debrief this with you and ensure that you are provided with a list or resources for support.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are able to withdraw from the study at any given point prior to August 31st, 2017. If you choose to withdraw, the data that you provided will be discarded in an ethically appropriate manner.

Confidentiality & Anonymity
Research materials will be kept confidential and only my supervisor and I will have access to this information. Your names will be replaced with fake names in all transcripts, notes, and written documents and any identifying information that can be linked back to you will be removed before publishing findings from this study. Electronic data will be password-protected and encrypted. Further, all research materials will be stored in a locked cabinet in my supervisor's office at the University of Alberta for a minimum of five years. Thereafter, all data will be discarded of in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.

Further Information
If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact myself at (780) 902-2660 or my supervisor, Dr. Sophie Yohani at (780) 492-1164. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix G

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

	Yes	No
I understand that I have been asked to be in a research study.	☐	☐
I understand the objectives and procedure of this study.	☐	☐
I have read and understood the attached Information Sheet.	☐	☐
I understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study.	☐	☐
I understand that my student's parents have been contacted and have given permission for me to talk about the social, emotional, and academic adjustment of their child in school.	☐	☐
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.	☐	☐
I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time.	☐	☐
The issue of confidentiality has been explained to me.	☐	☐
This study been explained to me.	☐	☐

If "Yes", who explained this study to you?

_____

I give my consent to take part in this study *(circle one of the following):*

Yes No

Name of Participant (printed): _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

THE INFORMATION SHEET MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS CONSENT FORM AND A COPY GIVEN TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Appendix H

Interview Protocol for Parents
Study Title: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

Date & Time:
Location:
Interviewer Name:
Interviewee Name (use pseudonym):

- *Describe the following to participant: purpose of the study, data collection sources, how data will be used, measures used to protect confidentiality of participants, duration of interview.*
- *Explain the consent process and ask participant to read over and sign consent form.*
- *Turn on recording device.*

Demographics:

How old is your child?

Do you have other children? What are their ages?

How long did you live in Syria before the conflict?

What is your country of origin/ethnicity/religion/language?

Did you come to Canada directly from Syria or elsewhere?

Under which refugee category did you arrive (government sponsored/private sponsorship/blended)?

How long have you been living in Canada now?

Questions Relating to General Adjustment:

Please share with me your opinion of how your child has been doing since arriving in Edmonton.

What has been helpful for you and your child since arriving in Edmonton?

What challenges has your child experienced since moving to Edmonton?

Probe:

How has your child responded to these challenges?

How have you responded to these challenges?

What has helped?

How is your child doing in school?

Probe:

What are the indicators that your child is enjoying school?

What are the indicators that your child is struggling in school?

How has your child's overall adjustment been?

Questions Relating to Emotional Adjustment:

Can you share a specific school-related incident or story that would say how your child is doing emotionally?

What sorts of emotions does your child display when working on school-related activities or discussing school at home?

Have you noticed any changes in your child's emotional adjustment since starting school?

Probe:

What have you noticed?

How is this different from your child's typical way of being?

Are there any other incidents you would like to comment on in regards to your child's emotional adjustment?

In your opinion, what seems to be your child's main challenge causing your child's XX (describe the type of emotional difficulty raised by parent) while in school?

In your opinion, what seems to be helping your child as they struggle with XX (describe the type of emotional difficulty raised by parent) while in school?

Questions Relating to Social Adjustment:

Can you share a specific school-related incident or story that would say how your child is doing socially?

Probe:

What happened during the incident?

What did your child do?

Who else was present with your child?

Are there any other incidents you would like to comment on in regards to your child's social adjustment at school?

Tell me about your child's relationship with his or her peers at school and at home.

How does your child interact with others (siblings/relatives/community members/teachers)?

Probe:

Tell me more about what you observe in your child's interactions with this person/these people?

Are your child's interactions with others typical for children their age in your cultural/religious context?

In your opinion, what seems to be your child's main challenge (if any) causing your child's social difficulties while in school?

In your opinion, what seems to be helping your child with their social adjustment while in school?

Questions Relating to Academic Adjustment:

Can you share a specific school-related incident that would say how your child is doing academically?

Can you share a specific incident at home that would say how your child is doing academically?

How has your child been doing in his or her studies?

What has been your child's biggest challenge academically?

What has been helping your child with his or her academic adjustment?

How important are academics to you and your child?

Are there any other incidents you would like to comment on in regards to your child' academic adjustment?

**Use clarifying and elaborating probes as needed. E.g. "Tell me more."*

Interview Protocol for Teachers
Study Title: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

Date & Time:
Location:
Interviewer Name:
Interviewee Name (use pseudonym):
Grade teaching:
Number of years teaching Grade XX:

- *Describe the following to participant: purpose of the study, data collection sources, how data will be used, measures used to protect confidentiality of participants, duration of interview.*
- *Explain the consent process and ask participant to read over and sign consent form.*
- *Turn on recording device.*

Questions Relating to General Adjustment:

How has [child's name] been doing since arriving in Edmonton?

How is [child's name] in doing in your class?

From your perspective, how has [child's] overall adjustment been?

Questions Relating to Emotional Adjustment:

Can you share a specific incident that would say how [child's name] is doing emotionally in school?

In your classroom?

What sorts of emotions does [child's name] usually display in the classroom?

What sorts of emotions does [child's name] usually display when working on school-related tasks?

Are there any other incidents you would like to comment on in regards to [child's] emotional adjustment?

What, if any, would you say is [child's name] main emotional difficulty(ies) at school right now?

Probe:

In your opinion, what is causing these difficulties?

What would you say are the main emotional supports for [child's name] at school right now?

Questions Relating to Social Adjustment:

Can you share a specific incident that would say how [child's name] is doing socially in school? In your classroom?

Tell me about [child's] relationship with [his or her] peers.

Tell me about [child's] relationship with you.

How does [child's name] interact with others (e.g. peers, staff members, etc.) at school?

Are there any other incidents you would like to comment on in regards to [child's] social adjustment?

What, if any, would you say is [child's name] main social difficulty(ies) at school right now?

Probe:

In your opinion, what is causing these difficulties?

What would you say are the main emotional supports for [child's name] at school right now?

Questions Relating to Academic Adjustment:

Can you share a specific incident that would say how [child's name] is doing academically?

How has [child] been doing in his or her studies?

What has been [child's] biggest challenge academically?

What has been helping [child's name] with his or her academic adjustment?

Are there any other incidents you would like to comment on in regards to [child's] academic adjustment?

**Use clarifying and elaborating probes as needed. E.g. "Tell me more."*

Appendix I

Interview Protocol for Child Participants
Study Title: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

Date & Time:
Location:
Interviewer Name:
Interviewee Name (use pseudonym):

- *Describe the following to participant and the parent/guardian present: purpose of the study, data collection sources, how data will be used, measures used to protect confidentiality of participants, duration of interview.*
- *Explain the consent process to both participant and parent/guardian present. Ask parent/guardian to read over and sign consent documentation.*
- *Note: Use child-friendly language!*
- *Turn on recording device.*

***Ask**:*

I would like for you to draw a picture and I will ask you some questions about your drawing. This is not for marks and I am not here to judge your drawing skills. I just want to learn about how you have been doing at school. Do you have any questions?

Can you draw a picture of you doing something at school?

After child has drawn the picture, ask the following questions:

Tell me about this picture.

What's going on in the drawing?

Who is in it?

Probe about the people in the picture:

What is your relationship with the people in the picture?

Do you get along with them?

What do they like/dislike about them?

How are the people feeling in this picture?

How are you feeling in this picture?

What does this picture have to do with school?

Is school important to you?

What are your favourite subjects?

What subjects do you struggle with?

Who helps you when you need help with school work? At school? At home?

Does doing well in school matter to you?

What did you feel when you drew this?

What have you felt since coming to Canada?

Probe:

If having difficulty describing emotions, ask: Since coming to this school have you ever felt sad/lonely/happy/upset? If so, tell me about what happened?

What do you like most about your new school?

What would you like to change about your new school?

If you had three wishes for yourself, what would they be?

**Use clarifying and elaborating probes throughout to gather more detail. E.g. "Tell me more about that." "What do you mean?"*

Appendix J

Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of Newcomer Syrian Refugee Children Within the School Context

I, _____, the interpreter have been hired to translate Arabic/English communication between the interviewer and participants.

I agree to:

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher*.

2. keep all research information in any form or format secure while it is in my possession.

3. return all research information in any form or format to the *Researcher* when I have completed the research tasks.

_____	_____	_____
(Print Name)	(Signature)	(Date)

Researcher

_____	_____	_____
(Print Name)	(Signature)	(Date)

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-261