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The Use of Social and Cultural Capital as Refugee Mothers Transition Their Children to Ontario Education

Courtney A. Brewer
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Rezai-Rashti, Goli
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in Education

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Abstract

This study focused on Syrian refugee mothers’ experiences in transitioning their children to new school systems in Ontario, Canada. In 2015, the Canadian government committed to resettling 25000 Syrian refugees and processing higher numbers of refugee claims in the years following. Despite the increased number of refugees in Canada, there has been limited attention to perspectives of mothers in relation to transitioning children to the Canadian education system (Brewer, 2016). As well, the intersection at which all aspects of this study are situated in—refugees, motherhood, school transitions, and social and cultural capital—lacked scholarly attention. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1990) theory of social and cultural capital and Griffith and Smith’s (2005) theory of mothering for schooling, this study investigated the experiences that refugee mothers had with transitioning their children to school while taking into account the broader landscape of resettlement in Canada. This study used critical ethnography (Madison, 2005) to interrupt dominant discourses in the research process by empowering participants and using research in a way that benefits those who are “othered.” Data was gathered from interviews with refugee mothers, community personnel, and settlement personnel. As well, document analysis and observational notes were collected from an Ontario Early Years Centre program intended for refugee parents who were transitioning their children to school. Findings related to refugee mothers revealed that their experiences in transitioning their children to school were tied up in their gender, race, social class, and refugee status and were influenced by the social and cultural capital they each possessed. Furthermore, the findings in this study revealed inequities in refugee resettlement as they relate to national, provincial, and local policies. Findings suggest that educational policy
pertaining to refugees would benefit from being mindful of the complexity in the relationship between social capital, cultural capital, gender, and refugee experience.

*Keywords*: refugee; mother; school transition; Bourdieu; mothering for schooling; social capital; cultural capital; educational policy; Ontario
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Dedication

To my family: you were the reason I kept going.

To the refugees who settle in Canada: you are the reason I will keep going.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of refugee mothers as they transitioned their children to new school systems in Ontario, Canada. By investigating the experiences of refugee mothers and the perceptions of community workers interacting with refugee mothers, it was hoped that the study’s findings would provide further insights for policy development and services dedicated to refugees. Refugee mothers must deal with the emotional turmoil of resettling from turbulent situations as well as managing documentation, and potentially learning a new language, which makes the transition-to-school process more difficult for both themselves and their children.

Conceptualizing Transitions to School

It is necessary to differentiate between school readiness and transitioning to school, as each process offers a different approach in terms of determining who decides the school preparation activities that take place. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999) explained that conceptualizing the home-to-school or preschool-to-school transition process involves parents, schools, teachers, and the wider community working together to support children’s welfare before, during, and after their time at school. To contrast, traditional conceptions of school readiness or school preparedness are narrower and suggest that the child, with guidance from the family, should come into an established system where parents are obligated to take up preparing efforts as dictated by the school. Griffith and Smith (2005) demonstrate that the activities required to transition children to school are gendered activities in the realm of femininity and therefore taken up by mothers. In short, mothers perform the unpaid and unrecognized work that underpins their children’s transition to and participation in schools.
Because the transition process is gendered and typically taken up by mothers, and the focus of this study is on refugee mothers, it is necessary to capture this process from a perspective that recognizes insiders’ views. Iannacci (2008) notes that school systems typically pathologize culturally and linguistically diverse parents, leading to constructions based on deficits and inabilities. Similarly, Brewer (2016) suggests that policy related to refugee students typically frames refugees based on what they lack, rather than on their strengths. In response, this research study uses an assets- and strengths-based approach by relying on social and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) to identify how refugee mothers actively transition their children to school. Social capital refers to the networks of people whom refugee mothers rely on and who contribute to the school transition process, and cultural capital refers to the knowledge of and participation in dominant culture such as language fluency, educational attainment, and understanding differences in esteem among various Canadian norms and customs. Furthermore, this study highlights the gendered process of transitioning children to school through the mothering-for-schooling framework (Griffith & Smith, 2005).

**Gaps in the Literature**

The current literature is fragmented because it only addresses parts of what this study aims to uncover. Further studies are needed that describe how refugee mothers experience transitioning their children to school from a perspective that recognizes social and cultural capital. The intersection at which all of these concepts meet (being a refugee in Canada, being a mother, and transitioning children to school, framed from a social theory and mothering for schooling perspective) is where I situate my study in order to better inform policy and practice for Ontario’s education system.
Research Questions

The central research question for this study is: What are the experiences of Syrian refugee mothers transitioning their children to school? To respond to this broad question, I have developed several sub-questions as a guide to explore the theory and data that form this study:

- What are the perspectives of refugee mothers regarding transitioning their children to school?
- What are the perspectives of community representatives who interact with refugee mothers transitioning their children to school?
- In what ways does the community support or restrict refugee mothers’ assets when transitioning their children to school?
- How can the experiences of refugee mothers transitioning their children to school inform and improve educational policy?

Research Context: Who Are Refugee Women?

Before deconstructing the current research context, theory, and literature for the purposes of this study, it is helpful to focus on conceptualizations of refugee women. I first draw from Ng and Ramirez’s (1983) study of the social construct of the “immigrant” woman in policy and organizational discourses. Although refugee women have different migration experiences, Ng and Ramirez’s research provide some entry points for thinking about the social location of refugee women and how such labels of difference are socially constructed. Since refugee women are described in this study, it is important to keep the socially constructed nature of such migration labels in mind. This study’s conceptualization of refugee women also draws from Crenshaw’s (1991) approach to the social location of marginalized populations from an intersectional stance. Crenshaw’s
work is centered on women of colour and other points of intersection including language marginalization, poverty, cultural norms of patriarchy, and family cohesion. Although Crenshaw’s work does not focus on refugees specifically, it suggests the importance of devoting attention to intersectionality within participants’ lives with implications for the women who took part in this research. Specifically, this study focused on refugee women, the extent to which their socially constructed identity as “refugees” intersected with their social location as “mothers,” and how they negotiated the reality of shouldering the gendered responsibility of ensuring their children’s positive transition to school.

**Research Context: Syrian Crisis**

In 2011, unrest corresponding to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad sparked demonstrations and protests calling for democratic reform. Syrians were critical of high unemployment rates and lack of democratic participation. The BBC reports that over half of all Syrians have been displaced since the conflict began, including 6.6 million Syrians who were internally displaced and 5.5 million Syrians who were refugees, the majority of whom went to Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, while the rest resettled to Europe and North America (“Why Is There a War,” 2018).

**Research Context: Government Changes to Canada’s Refugee System**

Canada is viewed as a humanitarian country that provides safety and security to those fleeing disaster and human rights violations. What is missing from this conceptualization is that Canada’s history of immigration policy has been developed in response to fears of racially and culturally diverse populations entering the country (Canadiana.ca, 2005). Canada’s more open stance towards immigration came in 1967 with the introduction of the point system, although prejudice and discrimination still characterized much of the activity surrounding entry rights for immigrants. In 2001, the
Immigration and Refugee Protection Act replaced previous acts and became law in 2002, restricting entrance for immigrants who were deemed as being likely to require various forms of social assistance. Under the Conservative Party leadership, a series of bills were passed between 2006 and 2015 that restricted the flow of refugees to Canada and ushered a culture that encouraged refugees to be viewed with suspicion and as likely to abuse Canada’s social welfare systems. These bills—Bill C-11: The Balanced Refugee Reform Act; Bill C-31: Protecting Canada’s Immigration System; Bill C-24: Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act; and Bill C-51: The Anti-Terrorism Act—were heavily criticized by the Canadian Bar Association (2010, 2014, 2015) and the Canadian Council for Refugees (2012) for being broad in scope, stripping people of their rights (including the right to a fair hearing), and granting unsupervised power to various law enforcement and investigation agencies and departments.

The many recent changes to Canada’s immigration system have left refugees more vulnerable and unable to access decreased resources, and have contributed to a climate of suspicion and mistrust regarding refugees. These changes came at a time when conflict and human rights violations were rapidly increasing internationally. In particular, the conflict in Syria gained national (and international) attention in 2015 when a photograph of the body of Alan Kurdi—a Syrian boy who had died while fleeing the war with his family—washed up on a shoreline was made public. Although Canadian citizens responded by calling for an increase in aid and in the number of refugees accepted into Canada, this sentiment was expressed only after the implementation of major restrictive changes to the refugee system.

In October 2015, the Conservative Party of Canada lost the federal election and was replaced by the Liberal Party in a majority government. The Liberal Party pledged to
make Canada’s immigrant and refugee system more accepting, to increase the intake of refugees in Canada, and to review controversial bills targeted at refugees. The Liberal government began its plans for reform by renaming “Citizenship and Immigration Canada” to “Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada” (Government of Canada, 2017a).

The proposed plan by the Liberal government was to take in 25,000 Syrian refugees from Syria and Iraq by the end of 2015 (in addition to regular intake from other countries) and to speed up processing time to resettle refugees as quickly as possible. With resettlement agencies in place, community interest in private sponsorship re-ignited, and a precedent for successful settlement set, Canada continued to see an increase in refugee arrivals that mirrored intake efforts from before 2012 when major restrictions became visible. While Canada resettled refugees from the Syrian crisis, refugees from other areas of the world continued to enter Canada through private sponsorship and personal claims made after their arrival (Immigration Partnership [name of city], 2016).

**Implications for Ontario’s School System and Educational Policy**

Refugee mothers were transitioning their children to school in Ontario at a time when federal policy, legislation, and media rhetoric about refugees was steeped in hostility. A transition from a Conservative to a Liberal government led to increased positive political rhetoric and practice surrounding refugees. However, the previous legislation targeting refugees had not been repealed, and global conflict, religious and cultural differences, and the financial implications of supporting refugees were all widely and negatively portrayed in the media.

As refugee mothers negotiate this paradox of hostility and welcoming, they also negotiate their role in transitioning their children to school in a system that claims to
value the roles that parents assume. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) has a formal commitment to engaging parents in schools and recognizes that marginalized parents need to be included in decisions and activities that take place within and for their local school. Outside of formal school-dictated activities, there is little recognition for the work that mothers (especially refugee mothers) do to transition their children to Ontario schools. This study thus explores the undocumented and non-formalized ways that refugee mothers transition their children to school, relying on social and cultural capital as a way to capture this process.

**Research Context: Researcher’s Positionality Within the Study**

I situate myself in this study as an outsider eager to gain an understanding of the insider perspectives of refugee mothers. I have developed a strong commitment to social justice through various community and scholarly activities focused on identifying and deconstructing forms of power and oppression, including my own. I have lived in the same region of southern Ontario for my entire life, and have grown up in a middle/working class family\(^1\) environment in which major disruptions to family life were uncommon. I am a White, English speaking, educated female who identifies as a woman, and I have benefitted from these privileges in ways that I am working to understand. I grew up in a city in southern Ontario where immigration has always been high compared to other similar-sized cities in the region, and where there are a variety of languages, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, religions, and lifestyles.

My approach to research is shaped by the subjective-interpretive frameworks

\(^1\) Nobody in my family had a postsecondary education until my mother returned to school to receive a certificate to be a personal support worker; my parents owned their own house and had savings for their retirement, but we were not able to be frivolous with money and acquiring luxury items was not an option given our economic situation.
outlined by Burrell and Morgan (1979) who note “the interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience” (p. 28). Burrell and Morgan further note that within the interpretive paradigm, information is gathered and interpreted with the participant, rather than coming from the sole perspective of the researcher, although the perspectives that I bring to the research in terms of how I construct, conduct, and reflect on the study are likely to be implicated. In order to interpret data with the participants in this study, I probed for deeper understandings when I was unsure of a statement made in the interview process and I provided opportunities for member checking.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study used two central theoretical frameworks to understand how refugee mothers transition their children to school: (a) Bourdieu’s (1986) and Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) theories of social and cultural capital and (b) Griffith and Smith’s (2005) theory of mothering for schooling. Based on my philosophical beliefs as well as the purpose of this study, Bourdieu (1986), as well as Griffith and Smith (2005), offered the most comprehensive theoretical frameworks through which to address my research questions. Specifically, Bourdieu’s theories were a useful framework for my study in terms of understanding how refugee mothers transition their children to school and what makes these transitions more or less successful. Griffith and Smith’s theory provided the foundation for studying mothers at the individual level and helped to elaborate on the actual work that mothers did to assist their children in being successful in school.
Bourdieu’s Concepts

In what follows, I provide a comprehensive outline of Bourdieu’s concepts to the extent that it informed my study. Specifically, the concepts of the field, habitus, and symbolic violence are intertwined in this study and will therefore be explained in more detail. Understanding these concepts helped provide a base for the complexities related to how refugee mothers transition their children to school. These concepts ground the research and demonstrate how difficult it can be for an outsider to navigate an education system that may be culturally and institutionally unfamiliar to them.

The field. According to Bourdieu’s theory, the field encompasses the various locations and settings that one interacts in, and the norms associated with each setting. These norms may be formal or informal, explicit or implicit. It is important to understand Bourdieu’s concept of field because it can help to explain how social capital can be developed or stagnated based on the norms that people establish in given settings. In relation to the forms of capital, Bourdieu (1984) acknowledges that “there are thus as many fields as there are fields of stylistic possibles [sic]” (p. 227). Bourdieu explains that the perceived possibilities that a member of a marginalized group (a lower economic class in Bourdieu’s study) may have are much higher than the actual possibilities because habitus is so strong that it passes unacknowledged because other excuses and explanations are offered instead. A person will experience and exist in several fields that all interact in various ways. There are no formal boundaries or prescribed ways in which people must act and interact, but a process of classification takes place regardless and social statuses are created and ordered hierarchically.

Habitus. Within Bourdieu’s theories about society, habitus is prominently featured in terms of how societal values of the dominant class get reproduced. Within a
given field, groups of people behave and interact in predictable ways given their status in each field and given the interactions that take place between various fields. Bourdieu (1977) states that habitus involves “systems of durable, transposable dispositions” (p. 95). Habitus leads to social reproduction because it provides the very gestures and interactions, although implicit, that privilege some and exclude others: “The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 468). Furthermore, habitus dictates how individuals and groups of people act and interact which, according to Bourdieu’s (1984) theory, can implicate marginalized populations in their own marginalization.

**Symbolic violence.** Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) work also focuses on symbolic violence and how individuals become victims of this violence based on their field, habitus, and the acquisition of various forms of capital. Symbolic violence is the power (manifested as norms and values) that dominant groups of people in society impose on “othered” groups in ways that make such power seem acceptable and a natural. The threat of symbolic violence is that it appears to the wider society as a legitimate form of authority and societal organization because it takes place and is perpetuated through the school. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explain how the perception of the school as a legitimate authority allows the institutionalized school system to “secure a monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence” (p. 6). Within the context of this study, it is important to understand the depth at which symbolic violence permeates society. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that because this violence is perpetuated through the school system it is invisible, so a sense of legitimacy is given to values and actions of those who are privileged. This legitimacy allows symbolic violence to persist. The school
categorizes students through acts of reproduction, grants credentials to those who fit in with the dominant discourse that the school demands, and refuses credentials to those who do not uphold the dominant discourses. For parents experiencing marginalization, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) suggest that the ability to enter into the education system and not feel the effects of such violence is rare. For example, the school maintains the use of academic language regardless of what the parents are comfortable with; the school maintains an air of prestige that can distance parents from feeling comfortable in the actual building, and schools are facilitated by people who were privileged enough to be best-served by schools.

**Cultural Capital**

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) suggest that cultural capital is fostered in the school system, which is used as a field for reproducing the dominant class while excluding others. To illustrate their point, the authors devote a chapter of their book *Reproduction* to the concept of cultural capital as it relates to the modes of communication used in educational settings. Bourdieu and Passeron note that the academic world employs language as a way to categorize (and in many instances, ostracize) students. Bourdieu’s differentiation of classes is largely based on the workplace, where there is a division between those who own businesses and those who work for the business (with a spectrum operating in between the owners and labourers, such as managers). With modern phenomenon such as the working poor and a labour force built on temporary and contract work, Bourdieu’s use of the term “class” remains useful in understanding the potential lifestyle of those in certain labour divisions, and the associated lifestyles that accompany such divisions. Academic language is matched towards the upper classes so that as students progress in the education system, they must
become increasingly familiar with the language of the upper class. Students who were raised in working-class families do not see themselves reflected in the language being used and may not be able to participate as easily in the elitist academic forms of communication. Academic institutions rely on the dominant language to govern the majority of academic activity. Tests are read individually and responded to in writing, assignments are typically in the form of an essay, and class interaction requires listening to a teacher or professor speak, and taking whatever notes one deems relevant—or whatever notes one is realistically able to manage (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This suggests that having command of the dominant language is considered to be a form of cultural capital, specifically one that is essential to academic advancement. Using Bourdieu and Passeron’s understanding of cultural capital in academic settings, it becomes clear that refugee mothers are required to have command of the dominant language in order to successfully transition their children to school.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explain that norms are developed and reproduced in society through the education system, which benefits the dominant class and oppresses others. For example, with regards to cultural capital, a dominant language is valued and language skills such as reading and writing in that dominant language are given priority over other skills. Therefore, those who speak the dominant language are at a greater advantage in school and in society. The relationship between cultural capital and educational capital is interdependent and conversion can occur in a variety of ways. The education system values cultural capital; however, as Bourdieu (1986) notes, it does not teach cultural capital (although those with higher cultural capital have a better chance of succeeding in school). In addition to understanding the dominant language, cultural capital is often inherited through taste for cultural objects and the mannerisms that make
one appear cultured: “The emphasis on manners . . . enables seniority within a class to be made on the basis of the hierarchy within the class; it also gives the recognized possessors of the legitimate manner an absolute, arbitrary power to recognize or exclude” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 95). Bourdieu explains that even if one attempts to acquire cultural capital rather than inherit it, the small distinctions in mannerisms, confidence and fluency with language, and a general disinterest for the novel that would otherwise excite a person of a class other than the dominant, are used to oppress some while privileging others.

**Social Capital**

The term *social capital* gained popularity and recognition in studies of sociology in the mid 1980s; however, its use and general understanding has developed in various contexts since then. Bourdieu (1986) used the term to describe how social networks contribute to one’s place in a social class system, which can work for or against perpetuating inequalities. Bourdieu (1986) explains that the more social connections one has, the more capital is gained by being able to call upon a social connection for assistance in some regard or another. Furthermore, the amount of social capital one has depends on the size of one’s network and the strength of that network in terms of possessing other forms of capital (social, cultural, or economic). If individuals are part of a network rich in cultural capital, the strength of their social network increases. As well, by being associated with a social network, one accumulates norms that are consistent with that social network, making such a person more desirable to be called upon by other members of that social network. With social capital, one does not need to be able to care for every aspect of one’s life, but rather, people who have social capital can call on others for tasks they are personally unable to perform, and can be called upon by others to perform tasks to assist those who are unable to do so themselves.
Gaining access to social capital requires one to be part of a social network and this association is not a given, nor is it necessarily inherited. Bourdieu (1986) argues that individuals must invest time and energy into fostering their network, while he also acknowledges that through the process of reproduction, connections may exist despite an intention to earn them. For example, one may work diligently at securing a space in a social network but for any variety of reasons (low cultural capital expressed by speaking with a marginalizing accent, for example), the investment may not work. Furthermore, social networks have boundaries that contribute to the network’s identity and so members need to be sure that any new members entering the network do not reduce the value of the network. When new people enter networks, the networks become vulnerable to redefinition, which may be beneficial or harmful depending on who has entered and how well they have been accepted. It should be noted that one who has high amounts of social capital does not necessarily have to be well connected to a large number of people, but rather, rely on a large number of people knowing whom he/she is (preferably those high in various forms of capital, especially social capital). Being known (in a positive way) by others adds to one’s credit and can be useful in navigating upward trajectories in life.

With an understanding of Bourdieu’s theory in place, it is necessary to explore the roles that mothers play in the school transition process. Bourdieu’s theory does not adequately capture the experiences of women, and so work by Griffith and Smith (2005) will address this gap.

**Mothering for Schooling**

Another major theory that informed my study was mothering for schooling (Griffith & Smith, 2005). Because my research study was located at the level of the mother with regards to school transitions for refugees, understanding the complexities of
the mother’s role in any given school-related endeavour was important.

Although this theory does not relate specifically to Bourdieu’s work nor offer a critique of his early concepts, I drew parallels between *Mothering for Schooling* and other concepts and critiques of Bourdieu’s work (e.g., Lareau & Weininger, 2003, 2004). As well, it became clear that Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) ideas about reproduction in education were very much implicated in the discussion of mothers and schooling. Griffith and Smith’ (2005) *Mothering for Schooling* offered a unique perspective on the work that mothers do to assist the schools that their children attend. Instead of viewing this type of work in terms of how it promotes academic and social well-being for their child specifically, Griffith and Smith (2005) suggest that the work mothers do should be viewed in terms of how it can lessen the workload assumed by schools. The work mothers do to assist their child with schooling is unpaid and various expectations for mothers are imposed by schools and exist regardless of the circumstances of each mother, which may make it more or less difficult to engage in such work.

The data used in *Mothering for Schooling* were gathered in the 1980s in Canada. Two Canadian cities were used because of their similar demographics, although data collection in one city was cut short despite the richness of the data being collected. Two areas in each city (uptown and downtown) were relied on to show differences and potential similarities between neighbourhoods of varying socioeconomic statuses. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with parents and to a lesser extent, with teachers and school administrators.

Griffith and Smith (2005) explain the mothering discourse and note the idea of the mother being fully responsible for the academic success of her children regardless of circumstances. As well, the “quality” of a child in school is seen as a direct reflection of the quality of the mother. According to Griffith and Smith (2005), this is still largely how
society views mothering and schooling—the mother is responsible for ensuring that her child behaves well in school and achieves high academic success. Any deviation from this is seen as a result of defective mothering. Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) concept of reproduction in the school system highlights how this notion of being a “defective” mother can be reproduced and taken for granted as a norm. When considering the disparity between those who are rich and those who are poor in cultural capital, refugee mothers may be at an even greater disadvantage in terms of transitioning their children to school in a way that appears “sufficient” to those who are dominant in the school context.

Griffith and Smith (2005) maintain that mothers are put in a difficult situation whereby their skills are relied on, and yet undervalued. Their contributions are essential, and yet mothers have no say in the type of work they are expected to do. Even though the roles that mothers take on in relation to their child’s education take place within their own home, the institution of the school dictates and reinforces how mothers “ought” to engage with their children in this private sphere: “Whereas formerly, as we have seen, women might have learned mothering in a family tradition or community from older women, the mothering discourse sets up the professionals as authorities” (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 39). According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), since these professional authorities are typically of the dominant class both in the school system and the wider society, the manner in which refugee mothers are deemed appropriate to transition their children to school may conflict with the manner in which the school authorities deem appropriate.

As well, schools benefit through unpaid educational work that mothers engage in. The complementary schoolwork that parents do typically contributes to how the school is able to operate. If parents (typically mothers) are able to spend time helping their children with school-related activities such as homework or extra help in a given subject, the
school can use its resources for other things. If parents are unable or unwilling to provide this unpaid work for their children, the school does not benefit and must “catch up” students who have fallen behind or who have come to school with less school-valued knowledge and fewer school-valued skills (which are both considered to be “capital” according to Bourdieu) than other children in the class. In terms of the mothering work done with regards to complementary educational work, Griffith and Smith (2005) note through the categorization of their study participants, mothers who are stay-at-home housewives are in a better position to do these kinds of school-related activities.

Additionally, these mothers typically see such activities as important to the development and success of their child. Mothers who engaged in complementary educational work did so in one of four ways with regards to how the work took place after school: educational work as a priority, diversified routines, flexible, and not strongly school oriented (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 88). These categories allowed Griffith and Smith to recognize many kinds of work that were done as well as how this work was carried out to serve the desires of the local school. Although the researchers looked at mothers from different socioeconomic backgrounds, it appears reasonable that some refugee mothers may be in similar situations of being more or less able to help their children with schoolwork. Of particular concern however, is that in many cases, refugee mothers attempt to work with their children in a system for which they may have little experience. Subjects may include content that is specific to the Ontario context, or phrasing that is difficult to understand. In this regard, the workload of refugee mothers would be increased even further since they need to gain their own familiarity with the school expectations before devoting their time and energy to helping their children.

Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) work on how schools reproduce norms fit well
within the contexts of this study. The school and those who set the rules and norms in the schools are members of the dominant class, and those who are marginalized from rule-setting activity are the Others—in this case, the mothers. As well, the dominant class in the school context benefits greatly from the inconvenience (and at times suffering) of the Other. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) note, “academic hierarchies, whether of degrees and diplomas or establishments and disciplines, always owe something to the social hierarchies which they tend to re-produce (in both senses)” (p. 152). As this study will demonstrate, refugee mothers experienced social hierarchies outside of the academic world while they transitioned their children to a school system with similar hierarchies. The role of cultural capital was instrumental in determining where mothers were within these social hierarchies with regards to academic success for their children and wider social acceptance as mothers beyond the school context.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Summary**

Through a deeper exploration of Bourdieu’s social theory as it relates to refugee mothers transitioning their children to school, a more thorough knowledge base has been developed from which to approach my research. Bourdieu’s social theory provided suitable definitions when referencing social and cultural capital, as well as other prominent concepts. Where Bourdieu’s theory was limited (primarily around the contributions of women), the work of Griffith and Smith (2005) was useful for filling the gaps. Furthermore, Griffith and Smith bridged the fields of home and school to allow for the complexities of school transitions to be showcased. Bourdieu’s social theory combined with mothering for schooling was useful in helping to achieve my research goals of better understanding the experiences of refugee mothers transitioning their children to school in Ontario.
Scope

This study explored how refugee mothers experienced the school transition process for their children. I interviewed key stakeholders outside of the academic/school context to gain insider perspectives on what transitioning to a new school system actually entails. In this particular study, refugee mothers’ voices were featured prominently while community agencies and settlement organizations lent a supporting voice for contextual purposes. A final element in the scope of this study was related to family structure. Although family dynamics were important to acknowledge during my data analysis, my intent was not to focus on internal family networks or on the roles of fathers in the school transition process. I borrowed my rationale for this from Griffith and Smith (2005) and from Reay (1998), as described in the review of literature.

Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter described the research question: What are the experiences of Syrian refugee mothers transitioning their children to school in Ontario? The chapter conceptualized transitions to school and explained the research context in terms of who refugee women are, the Syrian refugee crisis that the participants in this study experienced, Canada’s refugee policy and political climate, and my positionality situated in this study. The chapter also described Bourdieu’s (1986) and Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) concepts of the field, habitus, symbolic violence, cultural capital, and social capital as well as Griffith and Smith’s (2005) work on mothering for schooling. These theoretical concepts are used to ground this study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review draws attention to research regarding refugee mothers and their experiences as they transitioned their children to school in Ontario. To begin, I provide a brief overview of useful discourses surrounding vulnerable populations because refugee women can be categorized as such. This is followed by a brief overview of the refugee entrance programs in Canada. The review then highlights the complexities in conceptualizing refugee women, the tendencies to essentialize refugee women, and the interactions that refugee mothers have with schools.

To conduct this review of literature, I used Western University’s library database search. I used keywords such as refugee, refugee mother, school transitions, refugees in Canada, and refugee resettlement. I selected peer-reviewed articles, books, and (un)published thesis dissertations based first on the relevance suggested by the document title, and then based on the relevance provided in the abstracts. Through reading the first collection of documents, I compiled a list of further readings, usually based on the text and reference lists of various articles. Furthermore, in consultation with various experts in the field (including my dissertation supervisor), I added readings throughout this process. As new questions arose, or gaps appeared in my review, I continued to seek out additional resources. This review is based on the collection of research that I found which was deemed relevant (based on my understanding of the topic, on consultation with experts, and on current literature). Because the topic of this study was complex and interrelated, finding research that addressed refugee mothers transitioning their children to school in Ontario using a social and cultural capital theoretical framework was not possible.
Instead, I examined research on the existing fragmented components related to my specific topic to help build a foundation for deeper understanding.

**Discourses Surrounding Research of Vulnerable Populations**

Among studies of vulnerable populations such as refugees, it is necessary to distinguish the active–passive dichotomy used to construct portrayals of such populations. Having higher levels of social capital allows refugees to be agents of their own lives and to tap into their own resources to serve their own needs and the needs of others. For example, refugee mothers likely have experiences with school systems in their former country of residence and can use these experiences to help their children and other local children thrive in school. As well, through their social connections, refugee mothers may be able to access (or provide access to) things like transportation, household resources, and advice on interacting with schools and school personnel. Community programs and assistance agencies, including schools, often do not recognize these abilities and opt instead to “fix” refugees who are depicted as helpless and destitute (Gerwirtz, Dickson, Power, Halpin, & Whitty, 2005). Gerwirtz et al. (2005) and Lamba and Krahn (2003) explain that it is important for agencies and those who work with refugee populations as well as other socially excluded populations to recognize the skills and abilities that individuals have rather than using a deficit model that assumes a responsibility to intervene.

Underlying deficit models is the understanding that refugees are not capable of managing their own lives in a new society. Instead, an empowerment model that recognizes refugees’ various “funds” needs to be used. Gerwirtz et al. (2005) found that policy and political rhetoric surrounding outreach to parents uses a deficit model, constructing socially excluded parents as helpless while ignoring their already-present
social capital. Conversely, the authors analyzed various community programs and found that practitioners typically construct socially excluded parents as having agency and funds of capital necessary to assist their children in school and that the parents who were taking part in these programs perceived that the program facilitators took this stance. Lamba and Krahn (2003) note further that the role that many community agencies play in offering assistance to refugee populations may be minimal compared to the role that family ties play in terms of actual gains made by the refugee family. This provides more impetus to continue studying social and cultural capital in refugee families and to ensure that future studies use an asset model rather than a deficit model.

**Refugees in Canada**

Under the Conservative government (2006–2015), Canada resettled approximately 10,000 refugees each year which was roughly 10% of all refugees who enter into resettlement programs with countries around the world. This is not to suggest that there were only 100,000 refugees worldwide (there is an estimated 16.7 million refugees worldwide, previous to the Syrian crisis) but rather that countries with resettlement programs prior to the Syrian crisis resettled 100,000 refugees annually as a whole (Government of Canada, 2012). Canada has a long history of resettling refugees, although its historical policies in relation to immigration are fraught with racism, fear, and exclusionary tactics (Canadiana.ca, 2005). In 2015, with the introduction of a Liberal government, major changes to immigration began to take place, beginning with resettling 25,000 refugees from the Syrian Crisis (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016). At the time of this study, annual resettlement targets for refugees had not been set under the Liberal government; however, in 2016 the federal government announced that it would resettle an additional 10,500 Government Assisted Refugees from the Syrian crisis.
Refugees are people who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution, and who are therefore unable to return home. Many refugees come from war-torn countries and have seen unthinkable horrors.

A refugee is different from an immigrant, in that an immigrant is a person who chooses to settle permanently in another country. Refugees are forced to flee. (Government of Canada, 2017b paras. 1–2)

The Government of Canada explains that refugees can make claims under two programs, one from inside Canada which is known as an “Asylum Claim” and falls under the “In-Canada Asylum Program” (Government of Canada, 2017b), and one from outside of Canada which falls under the “Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program” (Government of Canada, 2017b).

The government has three methods to facilitate all of the refugee resettlement efforts that it takes on. These include Government-Assisted Refugee Resettlement, Privately Sponsored Refugee Resettlement, and Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program Refugee Resettlement.

In the government-sponsored resettlement method, the Canadian government chooses refugees based on an interview, a medical examination, and a security and criminality examination (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014b). Refugees who are selected to come to Canada are provided with pre-departure information if possible, a scheduled travel itinerary and travel documents if necessary, and assistance in working with immigration officials. The costs of the flight and the medical examinations can be provided via a loan and payment installments of this loan begin 12 months after receiving
the loan (Government of Canada, 2018a). While in Canada, the government also provides financial support for day-to-day living for up to 1 year depending on individual circumstances. The financial support given to each individual or family is based on the social assistance levels in given areas across the country. Upon arrival to Canada, refugees are provided with clothing, food, and temporary shelter until they find more permanent housing. There are also community agencies and social services to assist refugees in navigating everyday life in Canada.

The privately sponsored refugee resettlement method begins the same way as the government-sponsored method. Refugee claimants who are selected must undergo a medical, criminal, and security examination as well as an interview before they can be accepted as refugees to Canada. If selected and accepted, refugees will have travel arranged on their behalf and may receive pre-departure information such as orientation meetings related to what to expect in Canada. The difference in the privately sponsored method is that a private sponsor meets the refugee(s) at the airport and is legally committed to supporting the refugee(s) for 1 year. This support includes everything that the government would typically provide such as funding for housing and bills, clothing, food, and access to shelter upon arrival and if needed, arrangements for more permanent housing accommodations. The private sponsors typically also help with resettlement assistance by helping refugees to navigate everyday life in Canada, to register for appropriate education, to select doctors, and to apply for government documents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014c).

The Blended Visa Office-Referred program combines the support of the government and private sponsors. Again, the initial steps of coming to Canada are the same as the government sponsored and the private sponsored methods. A private sponsor
meets the refugee(s) at the airport and provides the social support necessary for resettling in Canada for 1 year. This support includes housing arrangements, food and clothing, and assistance navigating everyday life in Canada. In terms of financial support, in the blended method, the government provides 6 months of social assistance payments and the private sponsor provides an additional 6 months of financial assistance.

In all cases, refugees with successful claims are given permanent resident status so they can work, attend school, and will not have to leave Canada. When refugees have been in Canada for a minimum of 3 years, they can apply to become Canadian citizens.

The documents that are provided for refugees by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (known as Citizenship and Immigration Canada at the time this study was developed) outline how resettlement works and describe brief aspects of Canadian society. Repeatedly mentioned in several sections in these documents is the reminder that refugees who are able to work should begin to look for work, recognize that their social assistance will expire, and take opportunities to learn an official language to make finding a job easier (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). Another theme throughout these documents is that support is available and that refugees should talk to people such as their sponsors or people nearby (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014b) in the case of government sponsored refugees who do not have an individual sponsor. The documents also explain that several community organizations and services are available to provide assistance. This demonstrates that the recognition of social networks is present from the government’s perspective in relation to successful resettlement in Canada. Although not explicitly stated, refugees are told that they need to take it upon themselves to integrate into mainstream society and build the connections
that are necessary to sustain life in Canada. What is not mentioned is how to foster such connections, beyond simply talking to people.

**Refugee Resettlement: Local Contexts**

This study featured refugee mothers that were from Syria and came to a city in southern Ontario as part of the national Syrian refugee resettlement effort. Therefore, it was important to understand the provincial and local landscape in terms of numbers of refugees resettled. In 2012, Ontario had 49,009 refugee claimants, not all of whom were successfully determined to be refugees based on the national intake numbers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013). The number of refugees in Ontario has not been consistent, and under the former Conservative government, the number of claimants and determinations significantly decreased (which had more to do with government intake policies than a global need for safety and resettlement). Regardless of any decline in numbers, Ontario consistently managed roughly half of all claims and resettlements in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013).

In response to the Syrian refugee crisis, Canada committed to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015 and early 2016 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016). As of January 29, 2017 (the last date that statistics were collected and reported on), 1,629 Syrian refugees (government assisted, BVOR, privately sponsored, and privately sponsored that were in inventory) had resettled in the region that this study took place (or were in queue to be resettled) (Government of Canada, 2018b). Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada resettled 40,081 Syrian refugees in total as of January 29, 2017 (Government of Canada, 2018b). As a result, many of the women featured in this study had similar resettlement experiences. It is important to understand, however, that the refugees who arrived to the area where this study took place, are a mix of government-
and privately sponsored refugees and so the access to social support varied depending on what method of entering Canada each refugee participated in. In addition to the Syrian refugee resettlement, the local area continued to resettle refugees from other countries (Immigration Partnership, 2016) at the time of this study, however only refugees from Syria are featured in this study.

**Refugee Women**

Because this study focused on refugee mothers, it is necessary to describe the gendered nature of being a refugee and the global calls to attend to this gendered experience. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1990) recognized the need for more attention to be paid to refugee women. The UNHCR developed a policy on refugee women, which was submitted in 1990, although several recommendations regarding refugee women had been previously adopted between 1985 and 1989. The policy suggested that initiatives for women take place using an integrated approach, although programs and projects could also focus on women specifically. The document also recognized the intersectionality of refugee women’s lives and the need to move beyond labeling refugee women in relation to a man (e.g., wife, daughter, mother) so that refugee women could be better recognized in the social, economic, and political world.

A number of studies were conducted using the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women as a reference point to spark research and to critique the progress of the UNHCR document as a policy and as a framework for studies involving women. In 2003, Fagen (2003) looked at two evaluation reports regarding refugee women to determine areas of strength and areas for improvement surrounding the protection of refugee women. One of
the reports that was reviewed was a UNHCR commissioned report and the other was a report conducted by Canada and the United States:

At the same time, the Governments of the United States and Canada contracted the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children to work in cooperation with UNHCR to assess the progress and consequences for women over the decade since the Guidelines for the Protection of Refugee Women were adopted in 1991. (Women’s Commission, 2002, as cited in Fagen, 2003, p. 75)

Fagen noted that although several improvements were recognized in the reports, such as legal support for women, social and physical protection are still needed, as well as improvements to the legal protection that was taking place.

With regard to social protection, Fagen (2003) recognized the unique situation that refugees in refugee camps experienced whereby typical and useful social support that comes from networks of friends, family, and community members (which we may refer to as social capital but which is not acknowledged as such in Fagen’s work) were not always accessible due to the uprooting and displacement of people during times of conflict. There was (and still is) a tendency to ignore the need for social structures to be built:

Social protection depends on the ability to effectively engage, or even to create, latent social systems and networks. Analyzing the resources and gaps in the social networks of a refugee community is vital to identifying and responding to protection risks and violations. (Fagen, 2003, p. 79)

Although Fagen spoke specifically about refugee women in refugee camps, I extend this advice to the resettlement process as the act of settling allows a measure of stability in which old connections can be re-sought and new connections can be built. Fagen (2003) noted another difficult aspect to building in protective measures for women in refugee
camps had to do with the way that emergencies are conceptualized within the UNHCR:

Despite collective wisdom to the contrary, humanitarian staff often claim that their first priority in emergencies must be to assure everyone’s survival and basic needs, the idea being that ‘special needs’ of the women and children will receive attention when the emergency phase has passed. (pp. 81-82)

Furthermore,

As the research confirmed, abuses are most likely to occur in the emergency stages of refugee flight and refugee camp organization. It is precisely during emergencies that separated children and single women are most vulnerable to military recruitment or sexual exploitation. (Fagen, 2003, p. 82)

A refugee population comprised of more than 80% women, who remain vulnerable even as a population majority, is not sustainable. Instead, Fagen (2003) suggested that the system needs to be changed altogether: “We suggest two related issues that warrant serious attention: first, improving cooperation and collaboration across organizational divisions both in Headquarters and in the field; second, improving lines of accountability and clarifying lines of responsibility” (p. 83). Building and relying on social networks was cited as a “priority” (Fagen, 2003, p. 85) within refugee camps to achieve the goals of improving accountability and responsibility so that refugee women could experience safer living conditions under the care of the UNHCR.

Following work by Fagen (2003), Buscher (2010) described the progress and stagnation of policy and practice directed at refugee women. Buscher’s article followed the milestones arranged by the United Nations between 1990 and 2010, recognizing several changes that have been made with good intention, and several issues that still existed for refugee women. The article also compiled information from the academic field
and other studies that have been done regarding United Nations policy and practice. It is important to note that the concerns offered in this article were based on refugees in refugee camps and situations of displacement rather than refugees who have sought asylum or were in the resettlement process. Nevertheless, this information is important to know when considering the experiences of refugee women prior to resettlement.


The three organizational objectives on refugee women outlined in that Policy were: to provide protection appropriate to their specific needs; to identify appropriate durable solutions; and to provide assistance which shall encourage the realization of their full potential and encourage their participation in preparing for a durable solution. (p. 5)

The first recognized area of concern was reproductive health, including health services that were strengthened with UN efforts and gender-based violence, which continue to be prevalent. The next listed area of concern was women’s participation, which described the need for women to be active in policy related to women, as well as the need for women to comprise an equal representation in the governance of various committees and leadership organizations including food distribution. Following this was gender-based violence, which described several advances that were made, but also described how the policies were typically based on women specifically, and left out issues relating to the full spectrum of gender identification and sexual orientations. Furthermore, sexual exploitation and abuse was listed as a concern as the report acknowledged that “not only was sexual exploitation widespread, but it was also perpetrated by aid workers, peacekeepers, and community leaders, with humanitarian workers trading food and relief
items for sexual favours, and teachers exploiting children in exchange for passing grades” (Buscher, 2010, p. 13). Improving in this area would require better reporting schemes. Finally, *engaging men* was cited as the last area of concern, with Buscher citing several conclusions related to the need to educate men and get them involved in reducing gender-based violence and understanding that benefits for women equate to benefits for all.

Buscher (2010) noted that although several commissions have been developed and a lot of consultation has taken place to produce policy related to refugee women, the intended practices have not followed suit: “We do not understand, however, how this knowledge translates into practice. Knowledge acquisition has led and is leading to attitudinal shifts, but behavioural change as reflected by changes in practice has been harder to substantiate and achieve” (p. 15). One way that Buscher (2010) has suggested that change should take place is through prevention strategies rather than reactive strategies. To do this, equality for women on a societal level must emerge: “Working towards the achievement of gender equality and promoting equal access and benefits in everything the humanitarian community undertakes will do more for refugee women’s protection than the innumerable women-focused programs and policies designed and implemented” (Buscher, 2010, p. 18). Buscher’s article was important in understanding the unequal starting point affecting female refugees before and after resettlement. Further, Buscher showed that although policy was in place to support and empower female refugees, the reality was (and still is) that many women go on as refugees without feeling the positive impacts of any meaningful change.

Lovell, Tran, and Nguyen (1987) described a mode of intervention that was useful for the successful resettlement of Southeast Asian refugee women whereby refugee women held powerful positions in their resettlement program. Although the article was
written before the UN had begun to take refugee women’s issues seriously through policy, many of the points made are still relevant today, demonstrating a slow uptake of practice. Lovell et al. noted that “An analytic perspective that focuses on how the pressures on women differ from those on men is less helpful than an interactional point of view” (p. 319). Furthermore, with regard to family structure, Lovell et al. explained that imposing beliefs about the Standard North American Family and other western-middle class-manufactured norms, services, and supports, was ineffective:

Given the emphasis in American culture on independence from the family and equal rights for women, it is possible for Americans to minimize the crucial role of the extended family among Southeast Asians as an ongoing source of social and emotional aid. (pp. 321-322)

It was difficult to ascertain whether or not Lovell et al. were operating from a deficit or asset model because on one hand, there was respect for the values and norms held by Southeast Asian refugee women, but on the other hand, the programming being studied was targeted at “fixing” the issues that face refugee women. Where the distinction was made clear however, was in how the programming was run.

Contrary to many social service programs that place refugee women as those in need and the North American service providers as those in the know and able to provide based on needs that they decide, Lovell et al.’s study explained that in its programming, refugee women had to hold top positions so that refugee women’s needs could truly be understood and addressed. Here, a method of empowerment was used for authentic purposes and aligned with the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women. Lovell et al. (1987) concluded by acknowledging that when working with marginalized groups of people such as refugee women, it was important to become aware of one’s own biases and assumptions
about the world and about how the world ought to function, even when the intentions were for marginalized groups to become empowered. In imposing one’s own definition of empowerment on another, the very basis of empowerment becomes contaminated. As this study of Syrian refugee mothers aims to explore mothers’ experiences transitioning their children to school, the history of the UN’s recognition of the gendered aspect of being a refugee was considered. Furthermore, this lens of understanding was useful for exploring literature surrounding refugee women and refugee mothers.

**Constructing Refugee Women’s Identities**

Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Khanlou, and Moussa’s (2008) edited work titled *Not Born a Refugee Woman: Contesting Identities, Rethinking Practices* shed some light on what it truly means to be a refugee woman and how the refugee process is gendered. Their work, which was infused with Canadian contexts and understandings of refugees, brought forth ideas of identity, sound research approaches, and implications for policy and programming. In their introduction, Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al. noted that women who are refugees are depicted as victims, which limits their capacity to take on important decision-making and leadership roles. The editors also described the potentially harmful outcomes of placing women refugees into this passive category:

- women refugees often have to re-live the horrors of their experience and, such retelling, at its worst, constitutes a form of a voyeurism. Listeners as well do not know how to respond;
- it tends to evoke pity and pathologizes the tellers’ countries of origin as horrifically misogynist and patriarchal societies, and as a consequence it racializes identities and violence as culture-specific;
- there is also a tendency to portray women as unable to survive and cope in hostile
environments and even to adapt to new situations. Therefore, other (benevolent) people and countries have to rescue them from their situation. (Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al., 2008, pp. 5-6)

In a chapter of “Not Born a Refugee Woman” (2008) Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008) advocates for a dialogical approach to understanding refugee women and recognized (through dialogism) that identity is an ever-changing process that goes beyond an individual or a seemingly homogenous group of people to include decision-makers and the most privileged and controlling in society, as well as the various changing contexts that refugees are in and are moving through. Hajdukowski-Ahmed explains that in dialogism, seemingly conflicting issues and standpoints do not have to be battled out until one is victorious, but rather that dialogism refers to the point at which opposing or competing notions meet. In understanding refugee women, it therefore is important to note that a refugee woman can be both in transition and settled, both progressive and oppressed, and any other combination of ways of being that one can imagine. Despite the richness that dialogism brings to understanding refugee women, the need to gain protection can lead refugee women to have to conform to a narrow version of themselves. Hajdukowski-Ahmed refers to this as “strategic essentialism” whereby refugees relay only very essential, and often stereotypical, information about their identity and their need to flee their home country. Refugee identities are complex; however, refugees find themselves having to mask the complexities of their personal situations in order to gain safety and security.

**Essentializing Refugee Mothers**

In understanding the current literature about refugee women’s identities, it became necessary to provide an understanding of identity more specific to being a mother who
was a refugee, since this study focused on mothers. Dorothy Smith (1993) discussed the standard North American family (SNAF) discourse and how it is prevalent throughout society and throughout research. This discourse assumes that the male-headed household consisting of a father, mother, and their children, is the typical family and that all other forms of family are seen as “defective.” As well, the typical point of reference begins with the SNAF and all other family types are made based on this “foundational” understanding. Smith explains how this is problematic in many ways. For example, many families do not conform to this so-called norm that has been established and so they find themselves on the fringes of what society targets. As well, because ways of determining true family and household structures (such as census forms) consider the SNAF as the norm, the forms that seek clarification are limited to only understanding SNAF types and minor variations. Therefore, even when intentions are made to break down the understood norm of the SNAF, dominant norms impede such efforts.

Smith (1993) further explains that because this idea is so ingrained in one’s schema, even when researchers are aware and implicated in variations of family and household structure, they still return to the SNAF as their point of reference, making policy that follows, subject to the same narrow considerations. Smith’s work was important to the study of refugee mothers because the SNAF discourse permeated the refugee resettlement processes as it did most other institutional interactions in North America. This makes it difficult for anyone who is not part of the SNAF norm to find the refuge they are looking for in a safe way that still honours their true being and family structure. As well, when looking at programming and policy targeted to refugee mothers, this norm was used. Even more entrenched in this issue were the very discourses explored
in this study such as social and cultural capital, which Smith (1993) made specific reference to:

The discourse on mothering that has flourished in North America since the 1920s is SNAF ordered; so also is the complementary discourse on the family of professional educators; sociological research in education such as James Coleman’s (Coleman et al., 1966), is also through and through SNAF structured. (p. 55)

At times in this research, it was necessary to refer to the SNAF as it appropriately described some participants, and may be embedded into policy, practice, and rhetoric in the future. It was also necessary to attempt to break out of the norm of using SNAF as a reference point, as it was confining and at times inappropriate when describing participants and their families.

In addition to placing women within the SNAF discourse, there is also a tendency to essentialize the role of mothers and disregard the other markers of identity that a mother may claim. For example, Sriskandarajah (2014) relied on critical discourse analysis to review newspaper articles from three major Canadian newspapers regarding Tamil refugees. Sriskandarajah searched for articles that contained the keyword “Tamil” and noticed that whenever newspapers referred to female Tamil refugees, it was done in the context of their domestic abilities, whereas references to male Tamil refugees typically corresponded to their potential as a national threat, even if the male was caring for a child as a single parent. Sriskandarajah noted that “These women are nameless, subjectless, identified only though their maternal relations. These constructions of them as simply mothers position these women within socially acceptable notions of femininity and domesticity” (p. 925). With regard to transitioning children to school, Griffith and
Smith (2005) argued that this is a typical reality, and Sriskandarajah showed how this narrow view of women is still perpetuated through the media.

Despite this stereotypical perpetuation, Vervliet, De Mol, Broekaert, and Derluyn (2014) found that refugee mothers in their study identified as mothers first and foremost and used the identification as a refugee as a secondary title. This self-identification as a mother became problematic, however, because the policy that they engaged with essentialized them as refugees first and mothers in a secondary way. The data collected in Vervliet et al.’s study was gathered through a multiple case study methodology with 20 refugee mothers living in Belgium. Although the context was very different in Belgium than in Ontario, Canada with regard to refugee policy and services, the intersectionality of refugee mothers (being both woman, mother, and refugee) needs to be recognized. When considering Vervliet et al.’s (2014) work in relation to this study, it was useful to turn to the authors’ explanation that “being a refugee within the context of the current Belgian migration policy seriously constrains their well-being and their agency, as it impacts significantly on the choices they are able to make in their lives, and especially their choices as mothers” (p. 2036). Furthermore, the authors explained that “As a consequence, migration policies need to give space to mothers’ different identities, and particularly to consider the impact of mothers’ refugee/migration status (and the thereto related residence status) on their experience of mother-hood and parenting” (Vervliet et al., 2014, pp. 2037-2038). The authors also noted the stifling effect that policy-imposed versus self-imposed identification can have on refugee mothers.

Epp’s (2004) work highlighted a central problem with essentializing refugee women by noting that refugees were historically seen as most valuable for their contributions to the workforce as labourers and income-earners. Epp used the migration
and refugee story of her mother-in-law to draw comparisons between current trajectories of refugee women in Canada and to suggest that the way in which refugee contributions were rhetoricized was problematic and limiting. Epp described how her mother-in-law’s emigration to Canada as a Ukranian and Mennonite refugee in the 1930s and role as a “woman-without-a-man” took on the domestic sphere and the working world. Similarly, many refugee women today arrive in Canada as women without men and experience similar role necessities. Epp described how current conceptions of what makes for “valuable” refugees are largely tied to economic stability. What Epp noticed as problematic in this conception was that much of the contributions that women refugees make to Canadian society, regardless of economic contribution, is not recognized:

These women without men could be called innovators, but not in the economic and technological sense that is often used to characterize desirable immigrants today. These refugee immigrants made a positive economic contribution, but even more importantly, brought their social and psychological qualities and skills to bear on Canadian life. (p. 47)

The essentializing of refugee women as simply mothers or simply refugees leaves them vulnerable to deficit understandings of what refugee mothers are capable of and how refugee mothers navigate their resettlement. Again, the image of dependency was evoked and the role of agency was neglected. Taking an intersectional approach to research about refugee mothers was necessary in moving beyond such basic, and therefore ignorant, views of refugee mothers.

**Mothers Interacting With Schools**

While investigating how refugee mothers transition their children to school, it was helpful to explore literature about how mothers interact with schools and how schools
interact with mothers. These activities vary depending on the social location of the mother in question. For example, class is heavily implicated into the ways that school interactions play out for mothers, as is gender, the values of the school, and ethnocultural background.

As previously noted, Griffith and Smith (2005) highlighted the typically unrecognized work that mothers do to prepare their children for school each day and maintain their child’s ability to continue to attend school in such a way that is accepted by the school and school authorities. For example, mothers take on the burden of ensuring their children are fed, have a suitable lunch for school each day, help their child meet the homework expectations set forth by the classroom teacher, and ensure that their children are dropped off at and picked up from school at an appropriate time. All of these activities are typically coordinated and often carried out by mothers. Furthermore, mothers have no say in what these activities are and when they take place. Rather, the school or school board decides start and end times, late policies, lunch policies, and homework policies. To implicate mothers further, any deviation in the child’s behaviour or preparedness is seen as a defection of mothering ability. The school functions according to mothers’ abilities to coordinate such efforts on the school’s behalf, so in cases where mothers conform to the expectations of the school, the school benefits, and in cases where mothers refuse to comply, schools must use time and resources to accommodate each child.

Griffith and Smith (2005) drew contrasts between the “mothering for schooling” work that working-class and middle-class mothers did. They determined that middle-class mothers had resources to delegate some of the work associated with schooling to others that they could afford to pay. For example, hiring babysitters allowed mothers more time to work outside the home and to be free from some of the constraints that having a child
in school caused, such as needing to work around a strict schedule that did not match well with the labour force.

This division of class was elaborated further by Diane Reay (1998). Reay asserted that class is a very recognizable aspect to differences in how children fare in school and in how parents are able to interact with schools. Reay (1998) drew heavily on the work of Bourdieu and his concepts of cultural capital and habitus: “Habitus is primarily a method of analyzing the dominance of dominant groups in society and the subordination of subordinate groups” (p. 33). Reay conducted extensive research in England in the 1990s and found many differences that are difficult to notice in society without the deep probing that she did in her fieldwork. Reay used the terms “working class” and “middle class” to differentiate between socioeconomic statuses held by her participants. Those in the “working class” typically did not own property, worked jobs that paid an hourly wage and had little opportunity for advancement, and may have needed government financial assistance. In contrast, the “middle class” owned houses, had stable jobs that typically paid a salary, and had disposable income that could be used for luxury goods, and personal services such as housekeepers or private tutors. Although it was helpful to understand various class differences, it was important to keep in mind that understanding refugees as part of a specific class based on characteristics such as those listed above was not appropriate for every participant in this study (see Chapter 5, Theme 3). Refugees arrive from emergency situations and so they may live in transitional housing, rely on government assistance for their first year of resettling, and may not have the language skills or equivalency certificates necessary to enter the workforce right away regardless of their past employment experience. Refugees may appear to belong to the working class when they first arrive to Canada, but it is important to note that their personal
circumstances prior to seeking refuge can help them move through social classes at varying speeds.

Furthermore, Reay (1998) found that the term “parental involvement” is typically inaccurate for the circumstances that she observed, similar to what Griffith and Smith (2005) noticed. In her fieldwork, Reay observed that the majority of the “schooling work” was conducted by mothers:

The resulting omission of any clear articulation of the place of gender within home-school relationships masks a number of important issues. First, it serves to hide from the reader’s view inequalities operating within parenting relationships. Secondly, it results in privileging of “the male” in the text. Usage of the term “parent” without any qualification as to which parent, acts as an invitation; it leaves open the possibility of parental involvement. Its consequences are the inclusion of fathers in an area which, in reality, many have left to their children’s mother. (p. 10)

When Reay interviewed mothers, they made reference to the help their partners provided but upon further probing, it became clear that fathers took on the role of “helper” when asked and mothers, rather than fathers, typically coordinated this effort. This meant that in order to get the father to be involved, more work had to be done on the part of the mother. As well, in middle-class families, fathers were more likely to be considered “involved” because they participated in highly visible school activities that took place outside of the home. Fathers who engaged in these activities were still not taking an active or involved role in the schooling work done in the home. When it came to interacting with teachers or other school staff to advocate on behalf of their children, fathers from middle-class families were often seen as an asset in negotiations and their
concerns were seen as valid by the school teachers and administration. This translated to meaningful changes for the children of these fathers such as more one-on-one instruction or placement in special programs. In contrast, working-class fathers were seen as “wild” if they attended the school to advocate on behalf of their child and their concerns were often dismissed.

This lack of being heard was also evident among working-class mothers. Reay (1998) noted that mothers from differing social backgrounds had different feelings and approaches to school. Mothers from middle-class backgrounds had a good relationship with their school as children and maintained those feelings as they raised their own children. Mothers from working-class backgrounds tended to have negative relationships with school when they were children: “Words such as ‘horror,’ ‘humiliating,’ ‘horrible,’ ‘like a nightmare,’ ‘terrible time,’ ‘petrified,’ and ‘terrified’ suffuse working-class women’s accounts” (Reay, 1998, p. 51). This negative relationship led to silencing when their children needed parental advocacy.

In addition to the school experiences that mothers had based on their social class differences, Reay (1998) also detailed the differences in school experiences for the children in her study. She noted that children from both working-class and middle-class backgrounds were relatively happy at school; however, the children from the middle-class backgrounds were held to higher standards in school and were working at a higher academic level even when children from both social class backgrounds were in the same grade. With regard to institutional habitus, Reay stated: “a complex mix of curriculum offer, teaching practices and what the children bring with them to the classroom—made it possible for happiness to go hand-in-hand with high achievement. In Milder [a school with a lower socioeconomic status], the same ingredients resulted in markedly lower
standards” (p. 68). All mothers in Reay’s (1998) study were attempting to help their children with school so that their children would fare well academically. For working-class mothers, this meant spending time with their children doing homework, reading, and practicing math facts, while also ensuring that their children got to school on time and were picked up at the end of the day. For middle-class mothers, this meant spending time working on homework which was sometimes handled by a tutor, and having their children participate in a variety of time-consuming extracurricular activities, while also having their children prepared for school each day. Regardless, it was clear that the outcomes for middle-class children would be much greater than for working-class children. Reay (1998) commented on the efforts of working-class mothers to allocate time and energy into their children’s education: “first, it was not invested with the certainty of the middle-class women’s interventions; secondly, it was not underpinned by financial resources; and thirdly, it was conducted in a process uninformed by knowledge of just how uneven the playing field actually was” (p. 70). This uneven playing field was a prominent feature in Reay’s work, and yet it was not completely visible to any of the participants, including the teachers.

Reay (1998) devoted a section of her research to the unique experiences of migrant mothers. She explained that despite having a lot of cultural capital, finding oneself in a new country can render such capital as useless. Being a migrant mother was not a prominent feature of Reay’s research; however, many comparisons could be drawn through understanding the processes of “Othering” based on country of origin, “race” (placed in quotation marks by Reay, 1998), social class background, gender, and a variety of other markers of “difference.” For example, one participant in Reay’s (1998) research explained that when she was in her teen years, she moved to Britain as a student but had
to deal with what the participant termed “middle-class racism” (p. 53) whereby she meant that people around her would “patronize” (p. 53) and treat her as if she knew nothing of the ways of the society she was living in. This was important to consider when working with refugee mothers, as previously stated with regards to using an asset versus deficit approach. Reay (1998) was highly critical of parental involvement in any case, noting: “the whole discourse of parental involvement assumes that teachers must teach parents (almost always mothers) how to prepare and help their children in the right ways” (p. 119).

De Gioia’s (2014) research on the challenges that immigrant and refugee parents face when transitioning to childcare took up the concerns posed by Reay (1998) by recommending that early learning centres build partnerships with parents and include them in decision-making, program planning, and general conversations. McBrien (2011) was also critical of narrow understandings of parent involvement, explaining that across three ethnocultural groups of parents (families from Somalia, Iran, and Vietnam), all parents had high expectations for their children. These high expectations existed regardless of their perceived role of involvement in the school and regardless of their views of how effective schools in their new country (the United States) were, which varied by ethnocultural group. To suggest that parents are not concerned about the well-being of their children without the school’s call to action is short-sighted, and yet is the basis for parent involvement initiatives.

Conclusions and Areas of Further Study

Based on the literature reviewed in this study, it is clear that research and policy have come a long way in terms of recognizing the unique and often exceptionally vulnerable position that refugee women are in, and this vulnerability exists during distressing times in their home country, when seeking safety, and during resettlement.
The literature has also shown that the lives of refugee women should be viewed through intersectional lens to avoid reducing all refugee women to one specific archetype. Refugee women are integral to their family units and play a key role in helping their children to transition to a new school system. This review of literature was integral to studying how refugee mothers transition their children to school in a new society, as it covered several different aspects of such a complex process.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter brought together the current and seminal literature associated with refugee mothers transitioning their children to school in Ontario. As previously noted, the converging point where all aspects of this specific research topic meet was void of current meaningful literature based on ethnographic research. The literature existed in isolation but by bringing various sources together in dialogue, it was possible to build an understanding of refugee mothers and their interactions with school.

In particular, this chapter described Canadian policy related to refugees including a history of policies that were exclusionary as well as a shift in political responses to refugees which came about with the 2015 federal election. Under the Liberal government (elected in 2015), a welcoming attitude towards refugees was enthusiastically promoted and resettlement efforts for Syrian refugees to Canada was vastly increased. As well, the local context for this study saw a quick increase in refugees and mobilized its various resources to accommodate the large number of people they needed to serve. After building an understanding of the national and local climates that Syrian refugees experienced, this review focused on building an understanding of the gendered aspects of being a refugee women and the intricacies of such. This chapter noted the tendency to essentialize refugee mothers and described some of the reasons why such essentialization
is common. This chapter also described how mothers interact with schools and how their role within schools is tied up in their social class, gender, race, and status as a refugee. Regardless of any obstacles faced, Griffith and Smith (2005) asserted that mothers are still expected to do the mothering work needed to ensure their children are well-behaved and academically successful in schools.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The primary research question in this study was: What are the experiences of refugee mothers transitioning their children to school? To answer this question, the following sub-questions were used to garner important details related to transitioning children to school in Ontario:

- What are the perspectives of refugee mothers regarding transitioning their children to school?
- What are the perspectives of community representatives who interact with refugee mothers transitioning their children to school?
- In what ways does the community support or restrict the assets that refugee mothers bring to transitioning their children to school?
- How can the experiences of refugee mothers transitioning their children to school inform and improve educational policy?

I used critical ethnography as a qualitative approach to answer these research questions.

**Critical Ethnography**

Stinnett (2012) notes that critical ethnography focuses on “ethically portraying the ethnographic Other in part by foregrounding the politically, socially, and culturally situated position of the researcher” (p. 130). Critical ethnography takes the central ideas of traditional ethnography and attempts to interrupt current discourses and move research from a descriptive to an active endeavour where change can be fostered and the “Other” can experience emancipation to a certain extent (Adkins & Gunzenhauser, 1999).

According to Wolcott (2008), ethnography requires extended time spent with a culture-sharing group in order to gain an understanding of interactions within this group. Wolcott
(2010) also notes that “we conduct our studies in order to examine how others manage the organization of their lives. It is our way of examining human potential” (pp. 89-90).

The culture-sharing group in this study was refugee mothers from Syria who transitioned their children to school. The study site began at an Early Years Centre where the majority of data from refugee mothers was collected; however, deeper exploration took me beyond the centre into the wider community. Wolcott (2008, 2010) cautions about ethnography being the study of “The Other,” noting that ethnography grew out of colonial roots and has maintained tendencies of giving voices or studying down. Angrosino (2005) holds the same concern and provides more depth on this issue, explaining that early uses of ethnography oppressed various groups of people, especially during colonial endeavours where cultural ritual was misinterpreted and exoticized.

Before explaining how critical ethnography worked within this study, I find it important to mention that Dorothy Smith’s work criticized critical ethnography for claiming to attempt to break down barriers that inhibit social justice while disseminating findings and literature in inaccessible ways that prevent many scholars, and especially the participants of the studies themselves, from being able to understand what has been written (Smith, 2005). To remedy this, I relied on D. Soyini Madison’s (2005) *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, which Madison wrote in an accessible manner that highlighted the nuances of critical ethnography. This allowed me (and other researchers) to gain an informed understanding of critical ethnography without being sidetracked by unnecessarily complex language. I used Madison’s (2005) work to inform my own understanding of critical ethnography and also as an example of how to disseminate information in an accessible way. Madison’s work did not provide me with a clear guideline on how much time I needed to spend in the field in order to qualify my
research as “critical ethnography” and so I aimed to immerse myself in the Starting School in Canada program and in the lives of refugee mothers for as long as was practical, ethical, and meaningful. With regard to the Starting School in Canada program, I was limited by the duration of the program and the parameters set forth by the program coordinators. With regard to refugee mothers, I was mindful of their time and how the mothering discourse suggested that they would be managing many coordination efforts for their families. Through my research, I sought to promote meaningful change in society. I sought to interrupt current taken-for-granted assumptions that refugees are in need of intervention while preparing children for school and that non-refugees should be the only ones constructing an understanding of refugee needs.

Further, I sought to highlight the voices of refugee mothers and include their perspectives in the policy and activity surrounding school transitions. Madison (2005) explains that

the critical ethnographer contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice. The often quoted “Knowledge is power” reflects how narrow perception, limited modes of understanding, and uncritical thinking diminish the capacity to envision alternative life possibilities; domestication will prohibit new forms of addressing conflict, and it will dishonor the foreign and the different.

(pp. 5-6)

Since my objective in this research was to foster change in this world, critical ethnography was important in driving this goal. Critical ethnography typically works with and for “Others” and in this case, the “Other” is refugee mothers.

In using critical ethnography, I made myself present and known in my own research, as there was no way to escape any interactions I engaged in that could have
altered the way that the ethnography unfolded (Stinnett, 2012). When engaging in critical ethnography, it was important to be upfront and open about my worldview, biases, and subjectivity rather than attempting to create a false security of objectivity; however, this does not mean that I routinely inserted myself into the data. My aim was to maintain realist tales as much as possible (Van Maanen, 1988). Researchers using critical ethnography see themselves as contributors to the research rather than the directors with predetermined plans and roles for participants (Stinnett, 2012). Still, Madison (2006) notes that stating one’s biases and acknowledging a subjective stance is not enough: “instead, we are critical and self-reflexive of how we think about our positionality and the implications of our thoughts and judgments” (p. 322). Adkins and Gunzenhauser (1999) also took the idea of self-reflexivity further, noting that an overemphasis on declaring reflexivity can hinder the action and emancipatory purposes that underpin the very reason for conducting critical ethnography: “reflexivity remains useful only insofar as it continues to serve as a vehicle for the larger aims of transactionality and political impact” (p. 73).

**Gaining Entry: Initial Interviews**

I used a few different approaches to gain entry and access to the various participants in this study. I had a relationship with an Early Years Centre (EYC) through a previous research study that I had conducted. I emailed a contact from the EYC who provided me with information about upcoming programming at the centre. This program was initially titled “Together for a Better Start” and was then renamed “Starting School in Canada.” The program was a joint initiative between the EYC and the local YMCA Immigrant Services. After learning about the program, I contacted the director of the centre and the lead contact from the YMCA via email and requested a meeting to discuss the possibility of doing research. I relied on the email script created for and approved by
Western University’s ethical review board. In my email, I also attached confirmation of my ethical approval and an outline of what the study entailed. I was invited to a meeting with stakeholders from the EYC and the YMCA. After thoroughly discussing the research study, the potential implications for program facilitators and program participants, and the outputs that the study could generate, the stakeholders agreed to go forward with the research study. The stakeholders suggested that I wait until the second week that the program was running before speaking with the program participants about my study. This delay in my arrival was meant to allow the participants some time to get comfortable with the program and the program facilitators. I arranged interpreters for my first day at the program and was provided with a short amount of time to speak to the group about my study. I explained that I would observe the program, I would not take notes about specific participants, and near the end of the program’s duration, I would invite refugee mothers to participate in an interview. I also used this opportunity to hand out flyers about the study. One program participant was very eager to join the study and wanted to be interviewed right away. I explained that we needed to wait until later on in the program but I suspect her enthusiasm was helpful in encouraging other participants to join the study.

As the program was in its final 2 weeks, I invited refugee mothers and the program facilitators to participate in my study. Both facilitators and all participants who met the study criteria agreed to participate, however one person rescinded her participation prior to her scheduled interview. In the final week of the program, I invited other stakeholders in the program to participate in my study and all who were invited agreed. One stakeholder rescinded participation after the interview had been conducted.
In order to gain entry to settlement service personnel in the wider community, I relied on my contacts from a local community group aimed at taking up concerns related to immigrant and refugee populations. Though I was previously the co-chair of this community group, I stepped down from this position prior to conducting research. I emailed members of the group whom I knew worked as settlement service personnel and they agreed to be interviewed after reviewing my ethical approval and the study summary. My contacts also voluntarily provided me with other contacts that they thought would be beneficial to the study. While I refused to collect names or contact information for these suggested participants, I did look up the agencies online and contacted them using publicly available contact information. Each time I emailed a new contact, I relied on the email script that had been approved by Western University’s ethical review board.

**Gaining Entry: Secondary Interviews**

After reviewing the data I had collected about refugee mothers, it became clear that more follow-up questions needed to be asked and a wider selection of refugee mothers needed to be sought out. By only interviewing refugee women who attended the Starting School in Canada program, voices of mothers who did not access such a program were missing. As well, I had several questions about the experiences outside of the program which I was eager to learn about from the mothers whom I initially spoke with. After consulting with the Western University Ethics Review Board and submitting more information regarding my motives for expanding my participant pool, I was granted permission to interview some of the women a second time and to invite other refugee mothers from the community to participate.

Four of the women whom I initially interviewed had maintained their contact information and were willing to meet with me again. They also provided contact
information for other mothers who they thought would be willing to being part of my study. Furthermore, the translator with whom I was working acted as a gatekeeper to the Syrian refugee community and helped to facilitate some other meetings. In my second round of interviews, I was able to gain deeper insight into the forms of capital that refugee mothers possessed and accessed when transitioning their children to school. The second round of interviews provided greater depth in relation to the goals of this study.

To maintain consistency in my analysis and to ensure I was meeting the goals of my study, I only used interview and note-taking data from the participants who participated in the second round of interviews. If a refugee mother had participated in both the first and second round, I maintained all of her data, but if a mother from the Starting School in Canada program did not have contact information for me to follow up with her, I removed her from the data set. Therefore, mothers featured in this study who were part of the Starting School in Canada program were interviewed twice.

**Ethnographic Immersion**

After my initial introduction to the Starting School in Canada program, I began immersing myself in the program every day that it ran. I used this time to attempt to experience the program as the mothers did, and I collected observation notes and built rapport (Wolcott, 2008) with the participants and with the program facilitators. I also used this time to collect any documents such as calendars, newsletters, and information brochures that were made available to the program participants. It was obvious that I held an insider stance in the world of education and in the world of being settled in Canada—I knew the songs that the facilitators were teaching, I spoke the dominant language, and based on the agreement made with the program coordinators, at times I assisted the facilitators.
Nonetheless, despite being well aware of Canadian geography and how to speak English, I attempted to immerse myself in the participants’ world by fully participating in the program as they did. I sat in the chairs that were arranged in the program room as the mothers and other participants did and in doing this, I joined the mothers to a certain degree in being vulnerable. It was awkward to get up in the middle of the program to get a snack as we were instructed to do; I felt all eyes on me as I engaged in the welcoming ritual, I was concerned that my nametag would not show well enough for people to read, and although I spoke English, I wanted desperately to communicate with the women in the program. I used a translator on my phone to keep basic conversations going and the women in the program did the same. Before attending the program each day, I worried about what I would wear. I was acting as a participant researcher in a program where many of the participants dressed modestly despite it being a hot summer. The participants from Syria had long dresses and pants, long sleeved coats over their clothes, and wore hijabs. I wanted my personality to show but I also wanted to fit in with the participants. I did my best to straddle these competing ideals and wondered if perhaps the women I was participating with each day felt similar feelings. As the program continued, the men in the group had stopped coming and the women in the program had shaped the way the program looked and felt. Not all of the friendships that were formed in the group continued outside of the program, but a sense of unity existed in the time and space that the Starting School in Canada program provided. Although I was only with the women for a short time, I felt connected to them and I felt that I had gained insight into what it meant to take steps towards transitioning children to school.

When I met with refugee mothers for the second round of interviews, I had similar feelings. I was meeting participants in their homes and I wanted to ensure that I was as
respected and well-received as possible. Working with a translator helped to make my entry and immersion much smoother. The translator I selected was the same translator that the EYC used. He was well-known to mothers and their families as he had provided translation for many of the Syrian families upon arriving to the region. He was also recommended by the EYC staff because he translated without adding in his own opinions (which had happened several times with other translators, according to several people who worked at the EYC). The translator was familiar with cultural norms and he brokered any disconnects that existed. For example, we were routinely offered coffee as a beverage when we visited refugee mothers and I do not enjoy drinking coffee, nor could I drink it as I was pregnant at the time many of the interviews took place. The translator knew right away to politely inform the participants (and often their entire families) that I was unable to drink the coffee but that I was very grateful for the offer. The participants seemed to feel at ease with the translator around and after interviews ended, they would often have side conversations. Being in refugee mothers’ homes allowed me to build a greater understanding of the types of capital that each had access to. For example, I knew each neighbourhood that the mothers lived in and I could also get a sense of their economic situation based on the type of housing and the way their homes were furnished. Furthermore, being in the refugee mothers’ homes allowed the participants to show me photographs they had and to introduce me to their husbands and children.

**Ethnographic Limitations**

I was bound by the Starting School in Canada program structure in terms of my duration of time spent with the women in this study. As well, based on the ethical clearance that I had secured, I was bound by the timing of the program with regards to my ability to collect data and engage in immersion. As I participated in the program, I
identified all of the coordinating efforts made with regard to participating in a program meant to prepare mothers to do a good job of committing themselves and their time to participating as a parent in the school context. I would see mothers gathered at the bus stop waiting for their bus ride home. As I interviewed some of these women in their own homes, I realized how far and inconvenient such travel must be. One situation that stands out in my mind that demonstrates the work the women did merely to participate was on the last day of the program. There was a voluntary potluck and participants were told several times that they were not required to bring food but they were welcome to do so if they wished. I felt like I should bring something and given that it was a particularly busy time for me, I simply cut up a watermelon rather than cooking or baking something. My contribution was minimal compared to what others brought and the time that they must have spent preparing for the day while also caring for their families (another responsibility I did not share at the time of this study). Capturing such preparatory efforts by being able to observe refugee mothers in their own homes and other settings that they used to engage in the transition to school process would have been useful in forming a more complete understanding of the work they do. Where my observations were limited, I sought out the expertise of key informants who had extensive experience working with refugee mothers for the specific purpose of transitioning their children to school and for more general resettlement purposes. These key informants, community program and settlement service personnel, helped to bridge some of the gaps that remained in my immersive experience.

After the program had ended, I returned to interview some of the mothers who had provided their contact information. They suggested other mothers for me to meet, as did the translator I was working with. Based on these recommendations, I gathered more
voices and voices beyond the Starting School in Canada program. I met with women in their homes, with their babies and children around, and under the timing and scheduling that they suggested. One limitation that arose several times in my second round of interviews—likely because I did not have the same rapport with these women compared to those with whom I had interacted more during the Starting School in Canada Program—was a resistance to being audio recorded. The women were delighted to share their stories, and they went into greater depth than many of the women at the EYC; however, they were much more comfortable with me taking written notes than with being recorded. The mothers seemed to divulge more information when I put my recorder away and pulled out my notebook to write notes as quickly as they and the translator could speak. To ensure that my notes and margin notes were reflective of the conversations I had with the mothers, I wrote a summary of the notes as soon as I returned from the interview. This way, information did not get lost, I knew what my notes were referring to, and I did not mix up stories that each woman told.

**Ethical Implications and Consent**

This project utilized the ethical standards set forth by the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [Tri-Council], 2010) and was assessed using Western University’s Ethics Review Board.

**Voluntary Consent**

In maintaining the standards for conducting ethical research, I ensured that all consent to participate in this research study was provided on a voluntary basis. According to the Tri-Council (2010), voluntary consent consists of the following: “a) Consent shall
be given voluntarily; b) Consent can be withdrawn at any time; c) If a participant withdraws consent, the participant can also request the withdrawal of their data or human biological materials” (p. 28). In ensuring voluntary consent, I refrained from any activities that would lead to “undue influence” (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 28), and although I noted potential for a “nurturing relationship” (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 28) to develop during my research study, this did not take place.

**Informed Consent**

To ensure informed consent, I used the criteria for providing informed consent which is listed in section 3.2 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Tri-Council, 2010). I informed potential participants that their participation was voluntary, that potential risks could have arisen due to participation such as recalling difficult or traumatic events (although this was unlikely and not expected based on the questions I was asking), and that their identity would be protected in all published or disseminated works. As well, I provided my contact information so that potential participants were able to ask questions regarding their participation in the study. I also hired a recognized translator to help conduct interviews in this study based on a need for communicating effectively with participants and based on the ethics policy that states: “when language barriers necessitate the assistance of an intermediary for communication between the research team and participants, the researcher should select an intermediary who has the necessary language skills to ensure effective communication” (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 32). When the translator was present, I applied the same level of confidentiality standards (see Tri-Council, 2010, p. 58, section 5.1) to the situation. I hired a translator from a local multicultural centre because all interpreters from this centre are trained in being culturally sensitive and maintaining the
highest levels of confidentiality possible. The multicultural centre never discloses personal information and has a vested interest in the well-being of vulnerable community members (KWMC, n.d.). I also allowed participants to bring their own interpreter if they wanted to, as I foresaw cases where participants might be more comfortable relying on the interpretations of a friend or family member, although this did not end up happening in my study.

**Setting**

I selected southern Ontario, as my location for data collection. Ontario consistently resettles over half of all refugees arriving to Canada and consistently leads provinces in private sponsorship. As of December 2016, approximately 4,600 school-aged children had been resettled and enrolled in school in Ontario. At the time that data were collected for this study, there was no policy documentation specifically related to refugees or their families in Ontario schools (Brewer, 2014, 2016). Within southern Ontario, I selected a second-tier city (approximately 200,000 residents) that is culturally and linguistically diverse and has many services and agencies set up to assist in the resettlement process for newcomers, including refugees in some specific circumstances. A variety of other citizen-run organizations are also prominent in the community and many organizations are available to serve specific cultural groups.

**Participants**

I selected three distinct yet interconnected groups of participants: (a) refugee mothers, (b) refugee settlement service representatives, and (c) program personnel from the EYC. Pseudonyms are used throughout protect participant anonymity.

**Refugee Mothers**

I selected refugee mothers as a group as opposed to refugee parents as a whole
because mothers were more likely to be an accessible population and more likely to be charged with the task of transitioning their children to school (Griffith & Smith, 2005), as was the case with my previous research (Brewer & McCabe, 2014). Lamba (2003) also explains that female refugees are more likely to remain in caregiver roles due to their closer proximity with family members as part of their social networks, which suggests that a majority of refugee mothers would take on the leadership role of transitioning their children to school. Furthermore, a study by Chui (2011) on behalf of Statistics Canada noted that female immigrants were more likely than male immigrants to lack employment, which also suggests that females are more likely to be in caregiver roles including the role of preparing their children for school. It is important to note that this gender disparity statistic was based on immigrants in general rather than being specific to refugees. My criteria for participation was that participants were mothers in Canada who self-identified as refugees (being in Canada no more than 5 years) and had children entering or recently entered into publicly funded schools (within the 24 months previous from when data were first collected). All refugee mothers in this study ended up being from Syria, and so my work became focused more specifically on Syrian refugee mothers rather than refugees as a general population. See Table 1.

**Community Program Personnel**

Because I used the Starting School in Canada program as the initial backdrop for this study, I interviewed those who were associated with the program to gain a better understanding of the development and progression of social and cultural capital within refugee mothers that takes place outside the school setting. These people included the program facilitators, the director of the EYC, the settlement services supervisor at the YMCA who helped to coordinate the Starting School in Canada program, and one of the
guest presenters for the program who also worked at the EYC as an Early Childhood Educator. These people were able to offer insight into how the program was developed, how it had changed over the years, the program goals, methods of outreach, and other information pertinent to a deeper understanding of how refugee mothers transition their children to school. See Table 2.

Table 1

*Syrian Refugee Mother Participant Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type of refugee status / arrival to Canada</th>
<th>Social class background pre- and post-settlement</th>
<th>Number and ages of children</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Work situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>Government sponsored</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: working class (rental and borrowing money). She described life as “comfortable”</td>
<td>3 children</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Learn English Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-settlement: on social assistance, lived in low-income area, moved to city centre in rental high rise</td>
<td>Daughter in Grade 1; oldest son in Senior Kindergarten (year 2); youngest son in Junior Kindergarten (year 1).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadidi</td>
<td>Government sponsored</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: wealthy</td>
<td>5 children</td>
<td>University (incomplete but with a plan to finish)</td>
<td>Housewife / former student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-settlement: financial instability, low income</td>
<td>3 daughters, married and living in various countries; 2 sons, 1 in Austria attempting to enter Canada and 1 in Canada, living with parents and attending secondary school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hala Sham</td>
<td>Government sponsored</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: middle class (had everything they wanted and needed)</td>
<td>5 children &amp; pregnant with twins)</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-settlement: low income (rental house in area experiencing revitalization efforts)</td>
<td>Children in daycare, Kindergarten, and grades 3, 5, and 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Plans to open restaurant with husband when children are older and money has been saved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (cont’d)

**Syrian Refugee Mother Participant Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type of refugee status / arrival to Canada</th>
<th>Social class background pre- and post-settlement</th>
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<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Work situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>Privately sponsored</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: wealthy class (business owners and described life as ‘luxurious’) Post-settlement: middle class (rental in a middle/high income area with housing stability)</td>
<td>3 children Kindergarten, grades 5 and 8</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Part-time work cooking for a catering restaurant (inside the home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layail</td>
<td>BVOR*</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: lower/middle income (difficult keeping work, needs were met) Post-settlement: lower income (rental in a lower income area experiencing a revitalization, house minimally furnished)</td>
<td>6 kids 2 in regular secondary, 2 in special needs secondary, 1 in elementary, 1 baby</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Learn English Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariam</td>
<td>Government sponsored</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: Low/middle income (did not own land, needs and wants were met) Post-settlement: low-income (high-rise rental in city centre)</td>
<td>4 children 3 school aged (daughter in grade 1), 1 baby</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>English classes Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehang</td>
<td>BVOR*</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: middle/high income (nice apartment in nice area) Post-settlement: low/middle income: rental house in area experiencing revitalization, combined income with working-aged children</td>
<td>7 children Daughter in Holland (married); sons 25, 22, 15, and 10 years old; daughters 12 years and 1 year old</td>
<td>Grade 6 + 3 years of fashion design school</td>
<td>Previously ran a bridal fashions business, currently a housewife; plans to restart business when time frees up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rimas</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: low-middle income (comfortable yet modest life) Post-settlement: low-middle income (lives in a high-rise rental in city centre, owns a car, plans to move into a townhouse and achieve a middle-class life)</td>
<td>3 children Daughter in grade 1; son in Kindergarten; baby daughter (5 months)</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Currently a housewife; plans to work after learning English (unsure of career path)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (cont’d)

*Syrian Refugee Mother Participant Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type of refugee status / arrival to Canada</th>
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<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Work situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warda</td>
<td>BVOR*</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: middle income Post-settlement: low-income (high-rise rental in city centre)</td>
<td>1 daughter (secondary school)</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Housewife Learning English Desires to be a custodian or an aid to a doctor; unsure of education needed to do so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeam</td>
<td>Government sponsored</td>
<td>Pre-settlement: middle-income (comfortable but not an extravagant life) Post-settlement: low income (low-income rental housing in rental neighbourhoods, phone cut off due to inability to pay bills)</td>
<td>3 children Daughter in Kindergarten (year 2); son in Kindergarten (year 1); baby is 1.5 years old</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*BVOR = Blended Visa Office Referred resettlement program.*

Table 2

*Community Program Personnel Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Position/affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>Starting School in Canada facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Starting School in Canada facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>YMCA settlement services supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>Early childhood educator; guest presenter for Starting School in Canada program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlene</td>
<td>Executive director of the EYC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Refugee Settlement Service Representatives

A variety of organizations in the region where I conducted my research help to resettle refugees. Each organization had a different approach to resettlement (some resettled only UN-sanctioned refugees, others only resettled refugee claimants making a claim in Canada) so that expertise on the intricacies associated with each type of refugee claim could be utilized in the most effective way possible. I interviewed representatives from two major resettlement agencies in the region: Canadian Lutheran World Relief, which sponsors UN sanctioned refugees (Canadian Lutheran World Relief, 2015), and SponsorNow (a pseudonym). I was unable to interview a representative from the local Reception House which houses and resettles government sponsored refugees. In addition to interviewing representatives from sponsoring agencies, I was able to interview a representative from Supporting Syrians (a pseudonym), an organization that provides social and emotional support for Syrian immigrants, and a representative from the local Immigration Partnership. I intended to interview a maximum of five settlement service representatives and I ended up with four participants. See Table 3.

Table 3
Refugee Settlement Services Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Position/affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Canadian Lutheran World Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Undisclosed (SponsorNow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Undisclosed (Supporting Syrians)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina</td>
<td>Manager of Immigration Partnership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Starting School in Canada Program Overview

In order to explain the Starting School in Canada Program, it is first necessary to describe the Ontario Early Years Centre that the program took place in. The EYC is situated in an old school that was shut down and reconfigured. The old school is two levels. The second level of the building operates as an English language school for adults and the main level operates as a large Early Years Centre. The centre hosts many programs throughout each day. Some programs are daily and others are weekly. As well, some programs operate for only a few weeks at a time while others take place throughout the entire year. Outside the EYC, there is a fenced in playground with a small climbing structure and a shed that holds riding toys and other outdoor play equipment. When you enter the EYC, there is a reception desk where all visitors need to sign in. The receptionists are up-to-date on all activities at the centre and can recommend information to parents who are new to the centre based on the ages and needs of the children in a given family. If a parent is unsure of where to go for a program or if it is their first time at the EYC, the receptionist will show the parents around. Along the hallway, there are mats set out for strollers to be parked. There is a gymnasium filled with riding toys and a variety of small climbing structures placed on colourful mats. They gymnasium is typically open for free play and so it is fairly loud with small children running and playing. Occasionally there are activities in the gymnasium but even during these activities, many of the children play on the play structures and tumble around on the mats. Since the building used to be a school, several classrooms have been converted into program rooms. Some program rooms have been created based on the age of the children that are intended to play in each room (infants, toddlers, and preschoolers) while others are for various uses such as the kitchen and a sensory room. There are also a variety of smaller meeting rooms with tables and chairs often arranged in a circle (but clearly able
to be moved as the people using each room see fit). A library is available as a quiet place to read to children, a place to gain access to various parenting and educational resources, and a place for children to borrow various toys for a week at a time. The centre is always busy with families (typically women and their children) attending various programs at the centre or bringing their children in for free play in the gym or library. The families attending the program represent a variety of different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some families have just one child with them while others have several.

The Starting School in Canada program operated as a partnership program between the YMCA and an Ontario EYC (other sites for the program also existed but were not included in this study). The program operated 3 days per week for 5 weeks and was roughly 2 hours in duration (this timing differed from the program brochure but was altered to meet the needs of participants). Starting School in Canada was facilitated by two volunteers. In the case of this particular study, both volunteers had a background in teaching English (one facilitator taught English to children in elementary schools and the other taught English to adults who were new to Canada). As well, a school settlement worker both coordinated and attended the program with participants. The program was open to parents (and their children) who were sending their children to school for the first time in Canada or who had already sent their children to school but were looking for more information about schools in Canada. Before the program began each day, parents who had young children could take their children to one of the age-appropriate child program rooms where an early childhood educator provided care and rich learning experiences for the children. Parents then entered their program room which was typically set up with chairs arranged in a semi-circle around an open space facing a whiteboard. Healthy snacks and water were set out on a table along one wall of the room. The
program began with an English conversation circle where the facilitator engaged participants in songs and activities to develop language skills. After the English Conversation Circle, the facilitator focused on teaching a topic about Canada. Once per week, a guest facilitator taught the group about a specific topic. When the program first started, there was a predetermined snack break after the English Conversation Circle but it was not being used so instead, facilitators changed the program so that participants were free to take snacks whenever they wanted to.

**Welcoming Ritual**

When participants joined the Starting School in Canada program or a guest facilitator arrived to present information to the group, the program facilitator conducted a welcoming ritual. This ritual began on the first day of the program and included the majority of participants in the program. Some participants were added to the program later and so the ritual continued with each of them as they joined the program. In the ritual, the facilitator asked for participants’ names, birthday, most comfortable language, country of origin, and date of arrival in Canada. This information was recorded on a chart that remained posted at the front of the room. As well, a sticker was added to a large map of the world to indicate where the person had arrived from. The facilitator gave each participant time to fully explain themselves during this ritual. In situations where more than one person from the same family was in the program, each individual person had the opportunity to share information about themselves despite repetition.

**English Conversation Circle**

Most of the songs and activities were simple ones that children would likely learn at school or other child-based settings. As well, many of the songs and activities could be used in any language. This allowed the facilitators to teach in English while also honouring the languages that participants were more familiar with. For example, the
facilitator used the song “Head and Shoulders” to teach vocabulary related to parts of the body and then asked some participants to teach the song to the group in one of their familiar languages.

**Learning Topics and Guest Facilitators**

When the English Conversation Circle was complete each day, the facilitator typically taught about a topic of interest related to resettlement or transitioning children to school. These topics included information about Canada, activities using music, and teaching through games. The topics and activities that the facilitator planned were flexible in case the structure of the day needed to change. At least once per week, a guest facilitator was arranged to provide information to parents after the English Conversation Circle. These guests were a mixture of people who ran other programs at the EYC or the YMCA, as well as those who worked in the community such as a community dental hygienist, community literacy teachers, and people from various organizations that might serve parents who were new to the country.

**Data Collection**

Using a critical ethnographic approach (with an emphasis on interviews) to understand the experiences of refugee mothers as they transitioned their children to school in Ontario was useful in achieving my research goal related to informing policy about refugee students. Because there was sparse recognition of refugees by the Ontario Ministry of Education (Brewer, 2014; Ratković et al., 2017), accessing the refugee population helped to highlight potential areas for the Ministry of Education to focus on. As well, information from refugee mothers could be used to assist in beginning appropriate conversations between all stakeholders involved in school transitions such as settlement agencies, schools, and families.
Observations

I joined the Starting School in Canada program in the second week of its operation. This start time was mutually decided between myself and the program stakeholders as it allowed the group of parents to become familiar with one another and with the program and program personnel before having to think about being in a research study. The program ran for 3 days each week for 5 weeks. As part of my goal to immerse myself in this program, I acted as a participant observer and engaged in the program while relying on interviews to better understand the everyday activities of refugee mothers from their own perspective. In order to collect meaningful observations, I engaged in the program as a participant much as possible. I sang songs that were part of the English Conversation Circle portion of the program, participated in rituals, and did most of the same activities that the parents did. At times, my role as a participant observer was blurred because I also engaged in activities such as escorting families to dental screenings, setting up the video projector, and hanging charts on the wall, to assist the program staff in running the program. To collect observational notes without being invasive to the program or the program participants, I wrote detailed notes as soon as I returned home from the program rather than taking notes during the program. I found that participating in various program activities with the refugee parents allowed me to write richer descriptions of daily events at the program and analyze my findings from a more informed perspective.

Document Collection

As I engaged in the Starting School in Canada program as a participant observer, I collected any documentation that was made available to the program participants. The documents that I was able to collect and analyze included:
• The Early Years Centre website: This website states the EYC’s mission statement and offers a description of the centre. The homepage offers the hours that the centre is open and a link to the program calendar. There is a calendar for programs that take place “on-site” and a calendar for programs that take place at “off-site” locations. The calendar lists each program and then below the calendar is a description of the program and the ages of children that each program is intended for. The website also has a menu containing pages titled *Who We Are; What We Do; What You Need to Know; How You Can Help; Volunteering; How to Find Us;* and *Resources*. The website is fairly “text-heavy” and all of the content is written in English.

• A pamphlet entitled “Starting School in Canada” written by the YMCA and the EYC: This pamphlet was distributed to settlement workers and potential participants prior to when the Starting School in Canada program began. This pamphlet described the program as “A program for newcomer families with children 3-6 years old”. It had an image of bus routes and a map to help potential participants access the EYC. The pamphlet also stated “children explore and play to learn with other children and educators to help them get ready to start school in Canada” and “parents will attend English Conversation Circles and learn about school expectations, positive parenting, literacy, health and nutrition.”

• A pamphlet entitled “How to Build a Healthy Preschooler (3-5 years)”: This pamphlet was created by the local public health unit and was not discussed at the Starting School in Canada program in any great length, although it was distributed at the program. This pamphlet included a list of healthy eating information based
on each letter of the alphabet (26 total pieces of information). There was also a section entitled “What should my preschooler have each day?” which gives a chart that shows the food group, age, and what one serving looks like.

Furthermore, the pamphlet includes, tips for feeding preschoolers, a sample meal plan, “good to know” information about drinking water and breastfeeding, and “good to know” information about physical activity for children. Finally, there are links to EatRight Ontario, books, websites, and a referral to contact the local public health association.

• A pamphlet entitled “Preschool Cooking Ideas: Recipes requiring mixing, plastic knives, and no heat”: This pamphlet was created by the local public health unit and was distributed to parents at the Starting School in Canada program but was not discussed during the program.

• An information paper entitled “Good Sources of Calcium”: This document was adapted from a neighbouring public health unit and distributed by the local public health unit. It was given to parents during a session about dental health (run by a guest speaker that was a local dental hygienist at the community health centre) but was not discussed with the parents. This document displays 16 pictures of foods that have a lot of calcium in them and explains that calcium is needed for healthy bones and teeth, normal blood pressure, muscles, the heart, and nerves. This document also contains a chart with common foods from various food groups and a listing of how much calcium they have per serving.

• A small “coupon-sized” information ticket advertising EatRight Ontario: This document was provided during the dental health information session at the
Starting School in Canada program. The ticket states that “Dietitians are standing by for your call” and provides a link to EatRight Ontario so parents can access information about feeding their children.

I had expected to obtain more documentation as the program ran, however the facilitators informed me that they use as few paper copies as possible in order to provide a more activity-based approach to learning English during their English Conversation Circle portion of the program.

**Interviews with Refugee Mothers**

I conducted interviews with refugee mothers on two separate occasions (July and August of 2016 and then again from September to November of 2017). Initially, I interviewed refugee mothers in dyads when possible and one-on-one when it was more convenient for the participant to do so. I provided the option for an interpreter to be present for the interviews however, in some of the initial interviews, participants preferred to be interviewed in English. Although this may have limited the depth of these initial interviews, it was important to me that I honour the requests of the participants. I intended to interview a maximum of 30 refugee mothers, however, given the specificity of my criteria for participation, I was initially able to interview seven refugee mothers. I did not initially intend to narrow the population of potential participants to a group of refugee mothers who had arrived from one specific region, arrived under one specific event or disaster, or arrived under one specific resettlement program. Rather, because of the ever-changing context of refugee resettlement, I interviewed anyone who met the participation criteria in my first round of interviews. This included four participants from Syria, one participant from Honduras, and two participants from Eretria. In most cases, I audio-recorded the interviews, however, two of the seven participants preferred that I take
notes on the interview rather than audio recording it. I transcribed the interviews (and typed the notes in cases where I did not audio record the interview) as soon as possible after conducting the interview so that I could submit a typed copy to the refugee mother participants the next time we saw each other at the EYC. In transcribing the interviews as soon as possible, I was able to bring paper copies to give to the refugee mother participants at the EYC so they could further review the content and suggest any changes as needed. When I submitted paper copies of each mother’s transcript, I also provided them with my contact information and the steps to take in order to request further changes or to withdraw parts of the whole of the transcript if desired.

After a second review of the collection of transcripts from my interviews with refugee mothers, I decided, in consultation with my supervisor, that more information and depth was needed. I also decided that I needed to hear voices of mothers who had not participated in formal programming to transition their children to school so I could better understand their experiences. I returned to the mothers that had maintained the same contact information and invited them to participate in a follow up interview, which they all agreed to. I suggested a variety of settings but they were all most comfortable in their own homes with their family members present. As it turned out, the only mothers who had maintained their initial contact information were the four mothers from Syria. After my second interviews with four refugee mothers from my initial sample of participants, I asked the mothers if they knew of anyone else that would be willing to speak with me. They were all eager to phone friends and make arrangements for more interviews. As well, the translator I was using had many contacts in the community and was eager to provide assistance in arranging more interviews with mothers who met the criteria for the study. All of the mothers who joined the study in my second round of interviews were
refugees from Syria. They all preferred to be interviewed in their own homes with their family members around. Again, I audio-recorded interviews when possible, and in situations where the mothers did not want to be audio-recorded, I took detailed notes as they spoke. I ended up with 10 Syrian refugee mother participants in total. Four of the mothers were from the original Starting School in Canada program and six had not participated in that specific program.

**Interviews With Community-Based Program Personnel**

I focused on program personnel associated with the Starting School in Canada program in order to add cohesiveness to my data collection. There were several people associated with the program from both partnering agencies (the EYC and the YMCA). I had intended to interview a maximum of five community program personnel and I ended up interviewing five people. I interviewed the director of the EYC, the program facilitators, the lead contact for the YMCA (which is partnered with the EYC to run the program), and a guest presenter who also works at the EYC. I conducted one-on-one interviews at a location and time that was convenient for the program personnel. I transcribed the interviews within a week of conducting them, and returned copies to each participant using their preferred method of contact. I included a typed note to each participant offering my contact information and explaining that they may review the transcript and submit any requested changes or withdrawal of information to me at their convenience. All interviews were conducted in English and so there was no need for a translator to be present at any of the community program personnel interviews.

**Interviews With Settlement Service Personnel**

I conducted one-on-one interviews with settlement service personnel to provide information about the community context that refugee mothers were in. I contacted
settlement service personnel using publicly available contact information. I intended to interview a maximum of five settlement service personnel and I ended up interviewing four people in this participant category. I interviewed settlement service personnel at times and locations that were convenient for them (in all cases, this was at their place of employment) and I had permission to audio record each interview. After transcribing the interviews within a week of conducting them, I sent copies to each participant using their preferred contact method. I included a typed note to each participant offering my contact information and explaining that they may review the transcript and submit any requested changes or withdrawal of information to me at their convenience.

Data Analysis

When all interviews were transcribed, I began to look for emergent themes. I compared salient themes related to access and use of social and cultural capital in school transitions to understanding the school transition process for refugee mothers. I explored the role of social and cultural capital as refugee mothers transitioned their children to school, as well as how this was fostered (or not) in programming and services that refugee mothers accessed during resettlement. I also explored how settlement personnel viewed fostering social and cultural capital as part of the resettlement process.

In order to arrive at themes, I used the coding techniques provided by Punch (2009) and Wolcott (2008, 2010) where small units of meaning are collapsed into larger ideas, which develop themes to provide an understanding of the “culture” that I was exploring. To do this, I engaged in Punch’s (2009) process of summarizing, documenting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing.

Summarizing, Documenting, and Organizing Interviews

I began by analyzing transcripts for the interviews that I conducted with refugee
mothers, followed by community program personnel, and then settlement service
personnel. I read through the set of interviews three times and added summary notes in
the margins to help capture the overall ideas that were being presented. As I did this, I
noticed similar ideas but I did not focus on similarities at that point. Instead, I kept a
document on my computer with ideas, questions, and potential similarities that I thought
of as I summarized so I could refer back to it later on if needed. I did not want my desire
for similarities across the data to skew the reality of what I was reading. This form of
documenting allowed me to keep focused on the information that was specifically in the
transcripts. After I summarized the transcripts in text, I copied the summary notes into a
chart that listed the participant pseudonym, the summary notes, and more thoughts and
ideas that I had as I read through the notes. By consolidating the data this way, I was able
to see key ideas much more quickly across participant sources and data sources. At this
point, I stopped analyzing the data for a particular participant group, and moved onto the
next, repeating the same process.

**Summarizing, Documenting, and Organizing Observations**

To analyze my observations, I completed a process similar to the interview
analysis. The observations were easier to manage because there was only one source of
information whereas the participant interviews involved many sources of information. I
read through the observation notes three times and then I wrote summary notes in the text
of the observations. As I thought of ideas and questions related to codes or potential
themes, I wrote them down in a text document to return to the ideas later so I could focus
on summarizing the observations without distraction.

**Summarizing, Documenting, and Organizing Documents**

After analyzing my observations, I reviewed all of the documents that I had
collected throughout my time in the Starting School in Canada program. These documents included pamphlets, program calendars, website content, and anything that was distributed to refugee mothers during the Starting School in Canada program. I labeled each document using sticky notes so that I could refer back to them easily. I read through the set of documents three times and then I made summary notes about each document. I also added thoughts and ideas to the text document that I had been using throughout the analysis process.

**Analyzing and Synthesizing the Data**

When I had finished summarizing, documenting, and organizing my data, I added another layer of organization before repeating the process. I made a chart that listed the codes and short notes for each data source and participant source (refugee mother interviews, community program personnel interviews, settlement service personnel interviews, observations, and documentation). This allowed me to see all of my data at a glance and to lay out my codes so that they could be analyzed and synthesized. I read this chart three times to familiarize myself with its content. I then made a new document in which I listed each data source in a heading, and went through the chart, source by source, and wrote down a summary of what I read in the chart. In many cases, the same ideas were being repeated within one data source so I used this opportunity to eliminate duplication and combine ideas that were similar. I now had a list of codes that represented the data I had collected which was organized by data source. I read through this list several times and documented ideas I had about the codes. As I read the list, some main ideas stood out to me, and so I noted these main ideas at the top of the document. I suspected that these ideas could be the themes that best described the data I had collected.
Arriving at Themes

To determine whether or not themes were present, I highlighted each idea in a separate colour. I then highlighted my list of codes according to the theme that I suspected was being represented. This gave me a clear visual of what my data collection contained. I had to refine the language that I used in each theme as I engaged in this process because in some situations, the ideas that I wanted to represent were being represented in the data but the language to describe these ideas was not always consistent. I reviewed the themes again and made adjustments to the location of various codes within various themes. I still found myself unable to label each theme succinctly, and so I maintained a long name for the theme until I was able to better articulate what the theme represented.

Revisiting Themes and Revisiting Data

As previously noted, after arriving at themes, I consulted with my supervisor. We agreed that although the themes worked to help explain the information I had collected, the themes pertaining to the refugee mothers lacked the depth they needed to provide meaningful insights related to social and cultural capital because the questions I had asked did not adequately look into the history that each mother carried with her. The superficial nature of the data that were collected made the study tidy and organized, but it lacked meaning, usefulness, and ultimately, it did a disservice to the very voices I sought to highlight. After thorough consultation with my supervisor and the Research Ethics Board at Western University, and further consideration of the theoretical literature that underpins this entire study, I decided to maintain the themes I had noticed across my data pertaining to community program personnel and settlement service personnel. I also decided to approach interviews with refugee mothers from a new perspective that was better informed.
Second Analysis for Refugee Mother Interviews

In my second approach to analyzing refugee mother interviews, I read transcripts, interview notes, and summaries several times. Again, I used Punch’s (2009) process of summarizing, documenting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing; however, I used a more intense and theoretically informed approach that was specific to working with marginalized groups from a Bourdieuan perspective. I first determined an initial meaning based on my interpretation of the conversations I had with refugee mothers, using theoretical lenses established by Bourdieu and by Griffith and Smith. In recognizing that I cannot “forget” or “unlearn” the theory that underpins this study, habitus is threaded throughout what I noticed as I read the data and coded it. As Nash (1999) explains,

According to Bourdieu, practices are generated by a certain habitus (this is a matter of definition) and, therefore, all practices give evidence of the structures of the habitus that generate them, and it follows that the methodological problem for a researcher working with the concept of habitus is to analyse social practices in such a way that the principles of the generative habitus are disclosed. (p. 178)

Further reflection of my analysis procedures showed that my understanding of habitus helped to inform the types of questions I asked mothers and the ways in which I asked them. For example, in assuming the merits of habitus in this study, I asked refugee mothers about their own aspirations for themselves and for their children. I asked them about the types of living conditions they were accustomed to and made notes about their current housing arrangements. In this sense, I used habitus as method. Jean Anyon (2009) explained the importance of working with theory throughout a research study and not merely describing an event that took place and then labeling it with a theory after, or negating the theory altogether:
Every datum embodies and encodes—and is therefore understood through—theory laden explanations. One does not go into the field to “see” —one goes to “look” for various sorts of patterns and themes. Theory—acknowledged or not—dictates what kinds of patterns one finds. And any explanation, no matter how small, involves a theory waiting to be explicated. When we “understand” or try to explain an observed event or recorded interview, we are calling on theories, large or small. (p. 4)

I did not experience a problem of analyzing “social practices in such a way that the principles of the generative habitus are disclosed” (Nash, 1999, p. 178) but rather I used my understanding of habitus at every stage of the research process and so having the principles of habitus disclosed was assumed from the outset. My intention was rather to explore what habitus looked like and how it functioned within each individual whom I interviewed and then to ascertain whether or not there were common elements of such habitus experienced by the niche population of Syrian refugee mothers transitioning their children to school in southern Ontario at a time when refugee immigration was fairly well-received by the wider public. As Anyon (2009) notes, “we assume one cannot understand or explain x by merely describing x. One must look exogenously at non-x—particularly the context and social forces in which the object of study is embedded” (p. 2). Approaching my research study with habitus in mind and steeping my study in theory at all stages allowed me to gain a better understanding of the context and social forces at play that contributed to refugee mothers’ various approaches in transitioning their children to school.

Knowledge Dissemination

Madison (2005) explains that there is no formal outline of what carrying out critical ethnography should entail but suggested that many forms of doing this include
filmmaking, monograph writing, making policy recommendations, and authoring books, among others. My own intention for this research is to inform policy and write research articles to reach the academic community so that administrators and policy makers can interact with refugee parents in ways that are informed and that honour the funds of knowledge that these parents have. I also intend to host a public forum targeted at school boards where members of the wider refugee community will be able to see the results of this research. Madison (2005) emphasized the need to honour the research process by respecting the methods, ethics, and delivery of findings associated with critical ethnography so that power imbalances are not further perpetuated through the act of research that was supposed to be emancipatory. As Madison (2005) explains, “we must still be accountable for the consequences of our representations and the implications of our message—because they matter” (p. 5). All efforts will be made to ensure that this study honours the responsibility that comes with using critical ethnography, including working closely with refugee mothers and ensuring that writing and forms of dissemination are accessible to all, including the participants. For example, I will aim to host a public forum where members of the refugee community and those that work in resettlement will be able to hear about the findings of this study.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the methodological approaches that were taken to understand the experiences of refugee mothers transitioning their children to school. In particular, this chapter described the critical ethnographic approach (Madison, 2005; Wolcott, 2008, 2010) that aims to *hear* voices of marginalized populations (rather than to *give* voice) and to ensure that the populations being served by the research will be able to access the research. This chapter also outlined the research setting and the participants who were featured in this study. As well, the chapter described the data collection methods, which included
interviews, observations, and document collection. Finally, the chapter described analysis procedures as outlined by Punch (2009) and Wolcott (2008, 2010).
CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY PROGRAM PERSONNEL AND SETTLEMENT SERVICE PERSONNEL PERSPECTIVES

Findings and Discussion

This chapter describes the findings related to data collected from community program personnel and settlement service personnel. Findings that are described in this chapter have been put into dialogue with theory offered by Bourdieu (1990) and Griffith and Smith (2005).

Five themes have emerged that explain how refugee mothers experience transitioning their children to school using social and cultural capital from the perspective of those who work with refugee mothers:

1. Sustainability in social connections
2. Sustainability in school transitions
3. Expectations and realities
4. Responsive approaches in programming
5. Assets-based approach in working with refugee mothers

These themes work together to highlight how social and cultural capital are present and useful as refugee mothers transition their children to school from the perspectives of program personnel who interact with refugee mothers directly and settlement personnel who put policy into practice on a larger scale.

Theme 1: Sustainability in Social Connections

Sustainability in social connections refers to social connections being ongoing, authentic, and coming from many sources. To better understand how sustainability in social connections worked to explain how refugee mothers transitioned their children to school using social and cultural capital, it was useful to look at the salient codes that
formed this theme. Table 4 summarizes the codes pertaining to each data source (interview participants are separated by participant group in this case) that made up the theme of sustainability in social connections. I highlighted the data that these codes refer to demonstrate the depth of this theme. I showcased community program personnel perspectives and then settlement service personnel. I inserted observational notes and documentation that spoke to sustainability in social connections in the section pertaining to community program personnel because they all took place in the context of the Starting School in Canada program.

Table 4

*Codes in “Sustainability in Social Connections” (by Data Source)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Interviews with community based program personnel| – Referrals to other supports and programming  
– Social connections built based on programming, children, and individual and group personalities, (it is both intentional and organic)  
– Sustainability for social connections built into programs  
– Social connections are a spiral process: inform through outreach, uptake of parents, reinforcement amongst staff and other community members, more uptake of parents, more connections made |
| Observations                                     | – Welcoming atmosphere, intentionally fostering social connections  
Participants are welcoming and social  
– Referral to other programs  
– Canadian culture and English language taught |
| Documents                                        | – Canadian culture and English language taught  
– Referrals to other programs and services  
– Program intentionally fosters social connections |
Table 4 (cont’d)

*Codes in “Sustainability in Social Connections” (by Data Source)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Interviews with settlement service personnel | – Connections need to be made with people outside of one’s culture group, reduce co-dependency, sustainable standard of living  
– Social connections come from many sources: children encourage social connections, intentional programming, organic connections  
– Important to learn about Canada and learn English (to get access to services, social connections, and children)  
– Time of year has impact on how connected people can be (summer is hard) |

**Documentation, Observations, and Community Program Personnel Perspectives**

The documentation (pamphlets, website information) collected that pertained to the Starting School in Canada program acknowledged the importance of learning the dominant language and culture in order to successfully connect with a new society. The documentation also explained that taking part in the Starting School in Canada program was a good way to connect with others, including school settlement workers that broker contact between refugee families and the wider community of supports such as accessing schools. As well, the documentation offers links to accessing other services in the community and at the EYC so that connections and socializing could take place beyond the Starting School in Canada program. In addition to the documentation speaking to sustaining social connections, observational notes that provided thick description from the program also indicated that the program was welcoming, which promoted social connections. For example, there was a welcoming ritual built into the beginning of the program each day, the facilitators referred to each participant by their name, and staff would routinely meet with parents one-on-one in the hallway to discuss issues that a
parent had brought up such as questions about other programs or referrals to community resources. Further, the participants themselves were welcoming and social which provided a foundation for the program to operate on. Again, sustainability in social connections was routinely fostered through program staff referring refugee mothers to other various programs. Lastly, the English conversation circle provided opportunities for refugee mothers to learn English and to learn about Canadian culture. This was important in refugee mothers feeling confident in initiating social contacts.

Community program personnel who worked with the Starting School in Canada program were asked about fostering social connections. They noted that although there was a direct effort to promote social connections, connections were also developed in organic ways due to the nature of the programs:

I don’t think these ladies here knew one another until they arrived in this program. Which is great. And now, there seems to be friendships being struck. And we’ve noticed that in the past. They meet here, uh, there’s a bit of fellowship during our snack time, or during our play time outside. A lot of them, after the program is over, will just head to the playground and play in that fenced-in area with their kids. And interact. And then, that’s what we want. Right? We want that community to evolve of people that are new here. (Adele, community program personnel)

Bourdieu (1986) noted that “the existence of a network of connections is not a natural given, or even a social given” (p. 22) and so although relationships may have formed within and outside of the Starting School in Canada group, their natural existence was not necessarily so natural. Rather, Bourdieu (1986) continued to explain that social capital “is a product of an endless effort at institution” (p. 22). The institutions that the mothers in
the study were products of outside of the program itself included various resettlement policies, community housing, and sponsorship support, among others. Each of these had worked to bring mothers together in this specific program for a specific reason and one of many outcomes of these institutional practices was the possibility (but not guarantee) of a social network being formed.

Another facilitator for the Starting School in Canada program spoke about the challenges that refugee mothers face in getting involved in programs that could provide social connections. She also commented on the benefits of connecting when those challenges were overcome:

There are lots of programs that people can attend like this one and then the language classes that they take. As long as they aren’t isolated, they have opportunities to get out and make friends. I’ve seen situations, we had one here, where the husband has to accompany the wife anywhere she wants to go. And here this year, he decided he didn’t want to go to the program so she didn’t get to go either. For some of them, life here can be really isolating if they never get to get out of their house but if they do get out of their house, they have opportunities to meet lots of people through their language classes and programs like this that the Y runs. Also, when they come here to the Early Years Centre, they can just come and everyone is welcome. There’s no difference based on money or anything like that so that’s a way people can interact too. (Lynn, community program personnel)

The barriers that some refugee women might face in attending programs that foster social capital exist because educational institutions continue to reproduce norms that the dominant groups in society value. Erel (2010) provided commentary and research to
suggest that “migrants exercise agency by creating new forms of migration-specific cultural capital” (p. 643). Essentially, when migrants transitioned from one place to another, they accessed the forms of capital that they possessed at the time, and when necessary, converted these forms of capital to valued forms of capital based on the values of the settling country. As the excerpt above noted, there was a concerted effort to reduce barriers by making people feel welcome in programs such as the Starting School in Canada program. Erel went on to say that Bourdieu’s theory “engages with how economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital interact” (p. 646). It seemed that refugee mothers’ quests to transition children to school while also building social capital interacted (for better and for worse) with the symbolic capital maintained at times by men in society (their husbands) and the capital maintained by institutions that refugee mothers were part of or affected by.

From a program policy standpoint, program stakeholders explained the intentional aspect of providing space and opportunity for refugee mothers to build social connections. This intentionality was fostered at the federal level through funding policies and made its way to the local level through the way that programs were designed and marketed:

It’s huge, for the YMCA [referring to building social connections] and for our funder actually. ... So, both the Y, and if you look at the advertisements that the Y across Canada has, it’s all about community building, it’s all about belonging, and helping people find their place and confidence. ... Apart from that, our funder provides us funding with several outcomes that we have to achieve. And part of those outcomes includes running programs that provide people with a sense of belonging, that they feel comfortable, they know where to go for information, that
they’re making connections and networking, that they’re, that they understand community services, that they’re familiar with what’s available, resources for themselves. (Amy, community program personnel)

This effort to welcome and connect people, mandated through funding, advertising, and setting out specific achievement outcomes, encouraged forming large networks that refugee mothers could access. Bourdieu (1986) noted that “the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize” (p. 21). Refugee mothers who participated in the Starting School in Canada program had access to the capital within each participant that they connected with (if they formed a connection), the capital within the program facilitators (if they accessed it during the program), the capital within the YMCA settlement services, and the capital within any other service or network that they connected with. In requiring programming to facilitate networking and gain “competencies,” the networks that were formed by and with program participants could become more robust and richer in capital over time and as membership increased.

In addition to funding and mandates for promoting networking, facilitators for the Starting School in Canada program were chosen specifically for their ability to help program participants connect while also being open and supportive. These facilitators were supported by a settlement worker that bridged the participant families with the program to ensure that participant needs were met as the program took place:

I think her facilitation ability, it gets people to shed their inhibitions and they feel very comfortable very fast. So, it’s such a fast program that you really need someone to have that ability. So that, A, that’s intentional. We have to find someone like (name of facilitator). B, (name of settlement worker) is there. She
makes sure she really connects with parents. She’s really attentive, she supports
them if they have reservations about the program, she’s there to ease their anxiety.
So she really tries to help them emotionally arrive at the program and is there to, if
there are challenges or problems or issues, you know, if people are triggered or
there’s something that comes up, she will be there to support that. (Amy,
community program personnel)

Furthermore, the director of the EYC also spoke about the culture that was fostered at the EYC which worked to support social connections between staff and families and from a family-to-family level:

It’s a culture. It’s a culture that’s been forming over many many years and we’ve just been carrying it on. Mainly, I think by creating a welcoming atmosphere, a nonjudgmental atmosphere. By supporting leadership within the participants that are coming here, so participants can become very attached to coming to [the EYC]. For many of them, this is their extended family. I don’t know, it is intentional in that we recognize that, and we develop that. ... And it just happens.

It just happens and I’m not really sure how to distil it into a strategy, but it’s talking to parents, it’s asking parents their opinions, it’s sharing with parents, it’s getting, you know, just sitting and having a cup of coffee with parents, it’s making sure you remember their name, you remember little details, being responsive to what they are presenting to you. So you know, sometimes we’ll have a parent or a family who is maybe new to the area and they’re lonely and they’re isolated. We make sure, as best we can, that we have staff with the capacity to recognize that and to reach out. And I think mainly that’s easier to do because we have the
opportunity to build relationships with parents within parent groups, within the classroom, and just over time. (Charlene, community program personnel)

The decisions and work that went into promoting positive social opportunities for refugee mothers were referred to as “investment strategies” by Bourdieu (1986): “The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (p. 22). In this case, investment strategies were conscious and took place within the hiring process for program facilitators and throughout the interactions that facilitators had with refugee mothers. Investment strategies also included staff maintaining a welcoming and judgment-free atmosphere and connecting with parents to help them connect with others. De Gioia’s (2014) research related to immigrant and refugee mothers entering childcare explained that parents found challenges in working with the educators even though bilingual teachers were hired. De Gioia explains, “Educator attitudes, whilst identified as a challenge by the mothers, can also be a support for families in their transition when educators are open to listening and moving beyond judgement” (p. 8). The facilitators in this study seemed to be ideal with regard to being non-judgmental and open, although the facilitators in this study had a different role than those in De Gioia’s study. The facilitators in this study of Syrian refugee mothers worked in a setting that provided early childhood education and their demeanour and judgment-free attitudes worked to provide the support for families that De Gioia referred to and the investment strategies that Bourdieu referred to.

In addition to the work done specifically in the Starting School in Canada program, community program personnel described their efforts to sustain social networking beyond the program’s duration. One guest presenter explained that she
worked to foster ongoing social opportunities for refugee mothers by referring them to several other programs at the EYC:

I also like when they can access more than just one program, so I think it’s awesome when they know they can sign up for multiple things and they come continuously. And through that continual visit is when the support networks, the social connections, other groups they join that aren’t directly related to like the Starting School in Canada but when they join a different group, another group and make a social connection. (Kay, community program personnel)

The director of the EYC also commented on such intentional practices built in to sustain social relationships beyond the duration of a given program:

And we always make sure that there are opportunities for our staff to co-facilitate, or to build that relationship, so that when that class is finished, and the other agency has moved on, we’re still here to continue that relationship. And I, I think that is quite unique to this region. To not just [the EYC], but to this region. (Charlene, community program personnel)

The sustainability aspect of social capital was explicitly targeted by those who worked with the Starting School in Canada program through the use of referrals to other programs where more social capital could be developed. Bourdieu (1986) explains that “the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible (p. 22). By referring participants to other programs at the EYC, participants entered groups that were beneficial for them (as suggested by community program personnel) and were more likely to build solidarity with other members of the group. With all the benefits that could come from building social capital through program attendance at the EYC, it was important to recognize that engaging in
such group memberships in the context of school transitions constituted work, according to Griffith and Smith (2005). The benefits of refugees connecting with others was well documented in this study and in the literature grounding this study (i.e., Lamba & Krahn, 2003; Vesely, Ewaida, & Kearney, 2013) and so fostering it with such dedication among community program personnel made sense. It is necessary to acknowledge that building social capital requires time and effort on the part of the mother, regardless of the payoff.

Beyond prescribed and explicit efforts to foster social connections—and potentially social capital—the director of the EYC also commented on the benefits of building social interactions into the centre for the sake of interacting rather than as a by-product of participating in an educational program:

I don’t want to call it doing nothing. Parents can take the time to do what they need to do, to think, to sit, to talk, to connect with each other, is the big piece.

Again, going back to that idea that we facilitate parents connecting with each other. And that was a hard sell. You know, the funding for OEYCs [Ontario Early Years Centres] expect parents to be doing something all the time, to be learning all the time, to be participating in parenting education or with their child all the time. There is huge value in just sitting in a kitchen and talking to other parents.

(Charlene, community program personnel)

Here, the director of the EYC recognized the value in social relationships forming in more organic ways than through a formal program (although still within the institutional realms of resettlement and transitioning children to school). Charlene’s statement showed that she believed that refugee women (and all parents who entered the EYC) possessed knowledge and skills that were valuable and worthy of sharing with other parents, which Bourdieu referred to as investing “a specific competence” and which is necessary for a
social relationship to hold capital. Like Bourdieu, she also recognized that building social capital takes place in many forms and is a continual process: “the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 22). In addition to programming, the EYC continued its promotion of an “unceasing effort of sociability” by providing more informal times and spaces to foster connections between parents.

Settlement Service Personnel Perspectives

Moving to a broader perspective, settlement service personnel commented on refugee mothers building social connections. Within these interviews, settlement service personnel noted that it was important for refugee mothers to make connections beyond their cultural group and to reduce co-dependency on their sponsors so that their resettlement would be sustainable beyond their first year where a sponsor is available:

This English conversation has many Canadian volunteers. So it’s about one-on-one to encourage friendship between Canadians and Syrians. It’s all also about education, so the Canadian will learn about the Syrian culture, the challenges, they share experiences. At the same time, the Canadian teaches the new Syrian new resources, the school climate. It’s about teaching, it’s not just about the English piece. It’s about not to stay away from Canadians, we want you to interact and integrate and learn more about the Canadian society. ... It’s about helping people to feel that they belong to their new society. (Sarah, settlement service personnel)

Through such community programs, refugees could acquire cultural capital (in this context cultural capital referred to an understanding of “Canadian culture” and an understanding of the dominant language) as well as social capital. Although both refugees
and settled Canadians were gaining cultural information, the information related to Canadian society would hold power in this context and so the stakes were higher for refugees to learn about Canada than they would be for settled Canadians to learn about the home countries of refugees (although there is value in doing so that contributes to the co-created culture of the region). As Bourdieu (1986) explains, “The work of acquisition is work on oneself (self-improvement), an effort that presupposes a personal cost” (p. 18). Furthermore, in building social capital with refugees, the social network that the already-settled (and therefore powerful) was in, could change in definition and in the amount of capital it possessed:

Each member of the group is thus instituted as a custodian of the limits of the group: because the definition of the criteria of entry is at stake in each new entry, he can modify the group by modifying the limits of legitimate exchange through some form of misalliance. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 22)

In pairing refugees with settled Canadians, the local community as a “group” might be transformed as refugees became members and benefitted from the capital that the whole community possessed. This strategic pairing of refugees with settled Canadians should not be taken for granted as useful way to promote social capital, however. Strang and Ager (2010) explained that in building connections between bonded communities (refugees and those already settled), “the particular challenge is to involve members of the established community for whom ‘integration’ may not be a pressing concern” (p. 599). It is important to remember that the data for this study were collected at a time when enthusiasm for refugee resettlement was abundant and people were generally happy to give their time and energy to foster social and cultural capital within refugee populations in the region I was conducting research in. Had the dominant settled
population wanted to make their capital exclusive, opportunities for building connections would have been endangered.

The representatives from various settlement agencies also spoke about how social connections were formed for refugee mothers. In some cases, there were intentional efforts aimed at fostering social connections for refugee mothers and in other cases, such as after the announcement of the Syrian refugee resettlement effort, the connections stemmed from community enthusiasm:

I mean initially, when you don’t know anyone in the community, the sponsoring group becomes your lifeline. ... They [sponsors] encourage it [making friends beyond the sponsor group], especially if it means that there’s not going to be that co-dependency on them, they want to encourage them to make their own networks and find ways that they feel they belong and have a sense of other supports as opposed to just the sponsoring group. (Hannah, settlement service personnel)

The role of sponsors reaffirmed findings by Lamba and Krahn (2003) who noted that at the time their data was collected, 57% of adult refugees were still in contact with their sponsor, leading to the conclusion that these ties were likely very useful since they remained intact even after the sponsorship period ended, despite efforts for sustainability that were noted in this study of Syrian refugee mothers. Sponsors were also able to provide access to social and cultural capital. The sponsorship model embodied the definition of social capital, described by Bourdieu (1986) as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 21).

The durability of the sponsorship relationship was not guaranteed beyond 1 year in refugee resettlement, however, for at least the first year that privately sponsored
refugees were in Canada, they had access to the aggregate of the resources linked to their particular sponsor. In addition to private sponsors, general community members played a role in connecting refugees to other people and the resources held by those people. This was especially instrumental in supporting government assisted refugees who did not have private sponsors to provide one-on-one support and access to social capital:

And everybody was wanting to be involved and support in some way, including just lots of regular community members, Canadian, non-Canadian, Syrian, kind of everybody. You know? I’ve never seen a whole country kind of, come together to say this is our project! But that happened, and so with that big group of people that were down at that hotel, right away, the social interactions and the social connections just started to go and were being made all over the place, with other people living in the hotel, with people who had been living in the hotel and who had moved out, with community members who were just going down and showing up and saying like, “we want to help you.” (Sabrina, settlement service personnel)

Strang and Ager (2010) explain that “People do not safely wait ‘in limbo’ until a host nation decides whether or not to accept them—the processes of integration or alienation inexorably begin” (p. 595). In this case, the process of integration by forming social connections took place immediately within the local community.

One issue that was noted with regard to forming social connections with the wider community and connecting with their children was the need for refugee mothers to learn English and to learn about Canadian culture. The settlement service representatives explained that when the culture was understood, refugee mothers were better able to connect with their children who picked up on cultural influences easily. As well,
settlement service representatives described learning English as a link to being able to meet new people, to work, to navigate schools, and to connect with one’s children who, like learning culture quickly, picked up on the language quickly which could lead to a shift in power within the household:

We teach culture. Our focus is on culture, because we think there is a gap, after many years in the community, there will be a gap between the children and their parents. So they don’t enjoy the same music they don’t enjoy the same jokes and stuff like this. So we teach, we play games and in the school, it’s the same games that their parents used to play. So we teach them their parents’ culture. (Sarah, settlement service personnel)

And then I think, learning English is really the bridge to making friends with people that are not from your own community. (Maria, settlement service personnel)

As refugee mothers attempted to gain cultural capital (learning the language and culture in the area they were resettling in), their children, who typically learned the dominant culture quite easily, were also encouraged to engage with the Syrian culture. Bourdieu (1986) notes that “the initial accumulation of cultural capital, the precondition for the fast, easy accumulation of every kind of useful cultural capital, starts at the outset, without delay, without wasted time, only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital” (p. 19). The mothers in this study were not endowed with the strong cultural capital that Bourdieu refers to, and according to settlement service personnel, their children would begin the legacy of building recognized cultural capital in their new society. This reversal therefore disrupted the flow of inherited capital and illustrated to the mothers how quickly their previously held cultural capital was rendered
useless to those in their new communities. In order to re-establish their cultural capital, refugee mothers in this study (who did not speak English and did not resettle from a country with a culture similar to Canadian dominant culture) were encouraged to learn English as a way to connect with others and build social capital. Bourdieu (1986) acknowledged however that time was necessary in developing cultural capital: “the limiting case being full use of the time biologically available, with the maximum free time being harnessed to maximum cultural capital” (p. 19). The mothers in this study were starting over and had lost valuable and necessary time in building cultural capital that could benefit them in their new country.

Those who worked in settlement services also commented on the timing of arriving in Canada and how it could have an impact on a mother’s ability to form social connections. One interviewee commented on how it was important to foster connections quickly while another commented on how resettling in the summer was difficult because schools were not in session and so opportunities for refugee mothers to form social connections were limited:

As a settlement counsellor, you try to make those connections for them, because otherwise if you don’t make those connections soon, refugees can quickly become isolated and feel depressed and integration is just going to be that much harder. (Hannah, settlement service personnel)

Especially in the summer, people struggle with their children. They want them to go out but they don’t feel safe to leave them just hanging out without knowing where their children are. I think by September, when the children go back to school, the women will start to think about themselves and explore their
resources. But I don’t see it now. It’s too soon. (Sarah, settlement service personnel)

These comments spoke to the need to consider the timing aspect of forming social connections as well as the institutional power that steeped social capital formation for refugee mothers. Bourdieu (1986) explains that social connections that form social capital were “constituted once and for all by an initial act of institution” (p. 22). Mothers were very much embedded in institutions that subversively determined how social connections, and therefore the acquisition of social capital, were formed and the extent to which they were profitable. Resettlement agencies held the power that could be used to help mothers make social connections, as was the case in this study, but the power to do this still lied heavily within the settlement personnel rather than the mother. As well, refugees had no say in the time they arrived to their new country nor the time that school was in session for their children. Regardless of their intent, institutions and their institutional power worked to limit the extent that mothers could exercise their own agency in forming social capital.

**Theme 2: Sustainability in School Transitions**

As this study aimed to explore how refugee mothers experienced transitioning their children to school, it became clear that sustainability was built into the transition process. Community program personnel (working with the Starting School in Canada program) responded to this learning continuum by collaborating with other agencies to provide continual support for the mothers. Those who worked in settlement service agencies explained how the school transition process involves many people including sponsors, community program personnel, and settlement workers. Table 5 lists the codes that formed this theme.
Documentation, Observations, and Community Program Personnel Perspectives

While analyzing my observational notes from the Starting School in Canada program, I noticed three overall codes/subthemes that built the theme of sustainability in school transitions. With regards to the practical aspects of refugee mothers transitioning their children to school, the program offered some prescriptive advice to participants. For example, program participants received information about what to pack, how to dress children for the winter, and when to contact the school. As well, the program focused on building connections between the home and school by using play-based activities to disseminate information to parents in a way that is similar to what their children might experience in schools.

Table 5

*Codes in “Sustainability in School Transitions” (by Data Source)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with community based program personnel</td>
<td>– Programming and outreach is collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Strategies used for parents: Foster connections between home and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Referrals to other supports and programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Differences in transition needs: home country education versus Canadian education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Suggestion that program (SSIC) be offered more than once per year since transitions to school are ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>– Prescriptive when it comes to practical aspects of transition (what to pack, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Build connections between home and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Build connections between parent and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>– Partnership/collaboration to provide services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Connection between parent and child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Prescriptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Collaborative approach from stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (cont’d)

*Codes in “Sustainability in School Transitions” (by Data Source)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Interviews with settlement service personnel | – Transition influenced by differences in home country vs. Canada Community programming is collaborative  
– Transition to school uses multi-pronged approach (sponsors, settlement workers, ESL teachers, school board)  
– Settlement service personnel are responsive, flexible  
– Settlement worker is epicentre of school transitions (the transition process is not linear, it is ongoing, it is a process, difficult to do while also needing to resettle) |

A school settlement worker was always present at the program which provided a link between the program participants and the school. This allowed for sustainability in the school transition process because the program participants would be connected to a school settlement worker when school began. The program also built connections between refugee mothers and their children by giving parents ideas of how to play with their children in ways that promote literacy and numeracy. For example, one guest facilitator brought in household pantry items so parents could create simple patterns with the materials and then describe the pattern. With regard to the documents collected for this program, my analysis showed that there are partnerships and collaboration efforts in place to provide services to participants about transitioning to school. There was also a collaborative approach from the program stakeholders involved in funding, creating, and disseminating the Starting School in Canada program. The documents also spoke to the connection between parents and their children. Some aspects of the documents I analyzed
were prescriptive with regard to giving parents information about starting school but these were typically nutrition focused and came from a guest facilitator.

The views of community program personnel also worked to form the theme, *sustainability in school transitions*. Community program personnel spoke about how their programming and outreach is collaborative so that parents receive information from a variety of sources and can build links to various community resources as they become connected to them. By referring parents to new programs during the programs participants were already enrolled in, community program personnel were able to plan for sustainability in the school transition process.

The process needs to make sure that they know where those resources are. Because there’s lots of them [resources] in the area, there’s lots of opportunities, but it’s just whether the settlement worker is reaching out there and making sure they [mothers] are aware of it all. (Kay, community program personnel)

But the intentional piece has been working with organizations whose mandate is to reach newcomers. That’s been very intentional, I mean they have the expertise, they have the connections, we don’t do it on our own. We also make sure that we provide programming, when resources allow services, outreach, to areas in the community that have a high population of newcomers. Then, the other strategy within that is what kind of service, what kind of supports do we offer.

(Charlene, community program personnel)

The strength of social and cultural capital in the school transition process was illustrated in the voices of community program personnel. With regard to program personnel attempting to connect refugee mothers to a plethora of resources that may benefit them in transitioning their children to school, there was a clear attempt to assist
refugee mothers in building cultural capital related to understanding the culture and norms of schools in Canada. Bourdieu (1986) noted that accepting the presence of cultural capital helps to demonstrate the “unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success ... to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions” (p. 17). In this study, refugee status was used as a marker of class because both allowed for the effects of “othering” to be showcased.

The burden for knowing about where to access resources to build cultural capital has been shared amongst refugee mothers, settlement workers, and the community program personnel, although the consequences of accessing or failing to access resources would only be felt by the mother and her children. Again, echoing Griffith and Smith (2005), building cultural capital, as it was related to school transitions, was unpaid work that mothers were more or less expected to do. With regard to how institutions attempted to assist mothers in building cultural capital, the role of social capital became prominent once again. Agencies and institutions worked in partnerships with one another to pool their expertise and resources and so a social network of these agencies, and the people representing each, would be strong in capital. When one agency targets a refugee mother to offer support, they may be linked with other mothers who could benefit from their services. Conversely, when a refugee mother accesses support from one agency, the collaborative nature of the agencies is likely to link her to other resources that she may find work to build her cultural capital.

The community program personnel also worked to foster connections between home and school, and recognized the different needs of various families while they were transitioning their children to school:
Yes, so ... how I teach this is things they can do with their child at home in their first language. ... So simple vocabulary games, pictures, singing, movement, which is what they do in JK/SK, and grade 1, and also, in our school system, that’s how they teach second language, French. Their kids will be exposed to that.

(Adele, community program personnel)

Here, the Starting School in Canada program facilitator worked to help refugee mothers build cultural capital while also adding value to the cultural capital that they once held. By teaching refugee mothers some of the songs and activities that their children would likely learn in school, Adele brought the mothers deeper into the context of the school to include gaining capital that would help them relate with their children. As well, by teaching songs and activities that could be carried out in refugee mothers’ home languages, the facilitator showed a value for the culture that once held recognized capital for refugee mothers. Though home language activities might not carry value outside of the home, they worked to reduce the gap in cultural knowledge and experiences that settlement service personnel identified in this study.

In addition to discussing the ways that community program personnel reached out to refugee mothers to support them in building cultural capital for school transitions, many of the program personnel suggested that the Starting School in Canada program be offered more than one time each year to account for the ongoing nature of school transitions;

I hate the fact that we talk about transition to school in July. You know, transition to school starts straight away, there isn’t a time that transition to school starts. We need to build that over many years. So, I just wish there was ongoing supports like that. (Charlene, community program personnel).
This comment echoed advice given by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999), who explained the ongoing nature of school transitions and the need to begin early. It also spoke to the importance of the time requirements needed to build cultural capital, which Bourdieu (1986) acknowledged could lead to major discrepancies in one’s ability to gain the cultural capital necessary for school (and therefore societal) success: “it can immediately be seen that the link between economic and cultural capital is established through the mediation of the time needed for acquisition” (p. 19).

**Settlement Service Personnel Perspectives**

Settlement service personnel spoke about topics related to refugee mothers transitioning their children to school which highlighted the theme of sustainability in school transitions. Settlement service personnel talked about how the transition process for refugee mothers was different depending on the education system that the mother went through and was familiar with. For example, mothers who experienced living in urban areas were more likely to have had school experiences that were similar to what would be experienced in the Canadian school systems. Conversely, refugee mothers who had been educated in rural areas or had major gaps in their education were less likely to be able to use their experiences in transitioning their children to school:

And you’ll find that with most refugees, the more urban refugees will have that experience and the more rural refugees or refugees that have been in camps, they won’t have that experience. (Hannah, settlement service personnel)

I think for, for anybody, you know, for refugees or for newcomers you know who are coming to study for the first time here, the education systems are so different across countries. And so, and especially, with refugees that are coming out of situations of war with trauma, you know, the difficulty of their transition,
their arrival in Canada as a refugee, their, you know, everything they have to go through in reconciling what has happened in their past life and where they are now, getting settled in here and getting into school just makes that transition and functioning in an entirely new system and a new community very different than it does for other newcomers who have chosen, or their parents have at least chosen to come here and there’s been an intentional action to come here. (Sabrina, settlement service personnel)

These comments spoke to the need to consider refugee mothers on an individual level rather than as a whole group. Although there may have been commonalities among many refugees (arriving as part of the Syrian resettlement effort, resettling in a country they did not choose), the transfer of cultural capital from their pre-resettlement life to their post-resettlement life, however small, could have had an impact on the trajectory that they experienced when transitioning their children to school. Bourdieu (1986) explains that when looking at scholastic outcomes, cultural capital could help explain individual differences whereas former economic-based theories could only explain group similarities and differences:

But their measurement of the yield from scholastic investment takes account only of the *monetary* investments and profits, or those directly convertible into money, such as the costs of schooling and the cash equivalent of time devoted to study; they are unable to explain the different proportions of their resources which different agents or different social classes allocate to economic investment and cultural investment because they take systematic account of the structure of differential chances of profit which the various markets offer these agents or classes as a function of the volume and the composition of their assets. (p. 17)
The “markets” that refugee mothers were previously part of were all different and so depending on the cultural capital they gained and the transferability of such capital to the new market they had been resettled to, their accumulated cultural capital would have different values, different abilities to be passed down to their children, and would produce different trajectories as refugee mothers transitioned their children to school.

Like the community program personnel, settlement service personnel also spoke about the collaborative nature of programming related to transitioning children to school:

So within our partnership, we have a partner from one of the school boards that comes to our tables. ... And it’s good because it puts them at a table directly with the Reception House and some of the sponsorship agreement holders who are working with all of the private sponsorship groups where they can hear about the concerns directly that the organizations in the community have and they have been incredibly responsive. (Sabrina, settlement service personnel)

Furthermore, the transition to school involved many people in addition to the mother. Sponsors, settlement workers, English language teachers, and the school board all worked together. Finally, the role of school settlement workers was highlighted as key to a successful transition to school.

The school settlement counselor does do a lot of prep work with the family. So, they’ll explain, you know some of the things like extra-curricular activities, what kind of documents they need to provide to register the child, and they’ll actually go with the family to register the child. (Hannah, settlement service personnel)

In the wider community, collaborations existed in partnership with a representative from a local school board. Partnerships in agencies that served refugee families as they transitioned to school may have been useful in building social capital as well as cultural
capital. As collaborative efforts worked to enhance the cultural capital that refugee mothers had, the school still maintained the power in determining what counted as cultural capital and the extent to which mothers met the school’s demands. It seemed however that the power that schools maintained was being interrupted (perhaps only in a very minor sense) while refugee mothers were also being offered (perhaps only in a superficial sense) the cultural capital needed to succeed within the uneven field that schools had set up.

**Theme 3: Expectations and Realities**

The theme *expectations and realities* was present across both community and settlement service personnel interview sources but was not noted in collected documentation or observational notes taken at the Starting School in Canada program. This theme refers to the realities that many refugee mothers face when resettling and attempting to send their children to school in Canada. Community and settlement service personnel were in a unique situation to explain the discrepancies in expectations compared to eventual realities because they had worked with refugee families on a long-term basis and had noticed trends that were common to many families. See Table 6.
Table 6

*Codes in “Expectations and Realities” (by Data Source)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<td>Interviews with community based program personnel</td>
<td>– Concerns about gaps in parental education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Concerns related to trusting teachers, school administrators, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Concerns about practical aspects of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>No theme-related data present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>No theme-related data present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with settlement service personnel</td>
<td>– Need to bridge divide between parents and children (solved by learning English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Gap between parent and children</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Community Program Personnel Perspectives**

When community program personnel discussed the areas that refugee mothers had concerns regarding school transitions, they spoke in broad terms about the culture shock that may be associated with transitioning to school as well as the lack of trust that families may experience when interacting with new teachers and administrators who held authority and maintained power in an imbalanced relationship:

I do know that with the Syrian refugee families that we’re seeing this year, there are quite a few education gaps for some of the kids where families have been in camps for many years and so, they don’t know school, the structure is completely new for them, they might have kids that have never gone to school. So, I think the anxiety for them, leaving parents in the first place, it’s huge. I mean it’s huge anyways, but, it’s ten-fold for someone who’s been with their child 24/7 and in pretty serious conditions. Just the not knowing, not knowing what the trust. Like
how can we trust people we don’t know? You know? What are they going to teach my kids? (Amy, community program personnel)

Programs such as the Starting School in Canada program were developed to promote trust between refugee parents and schools, however, the school was not directly involved in this program. De Gioia (2014), who explored refugee transitions to early learning centres, explained that

Educators should consider spaces and opportunities for developing partnerships during this transition stage. Educators are encouraged to take time to hold conversations which provide possibilities for exploring together dominant and home culture and looking for chances to enable parents to feel empowered in their contributions, drawing on their own understandings of early childhood education and care for their child to further the conversation of expectations or negotiation within this new environment. (p. 9)

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), whose work predates De Gioia’s, were less optimistic about the underlying functions of schools and their interest in bridging gaps between, for example, educators and parents:

The relation [of the educational system] to culture it recognizes is fully mastered only when the culture it inculcates has been acquired by familiarization; it is also because the mode of inculcation that the system sets up remains, despite its relative autonomy, continuous with the mode of inculcation of legitimate culture for which the social conditions are only ever given to families whose culture is the culture of the dominant classes. (pp. 127-128)
Community program personnel had an understanding of the field that refugee mothers would be entering, as well as an understanding of the symbolic violence that refugee mothers were likely to face.

**Settlement Service Personnel Perspectives**

Settlement service personnel spoke about the family challenges that occurred when children transitioned to school in Canada. The main concern that settlement service personnel repeatedly expressed was the gap that formed between parents and their children when the children learned English more quickly than the parents:

> I think one of the challenges that comes about is because children learn the language so much more quickly than their parents, there’s almost this flip in roles, in the family. Because the child now speaks English, the child is having to speak for their parents a lot of time, and this creates tension within their relationship, where children can often undermine the authority of their parents because they have the power now, in a way. They can pick and choose what they want to communicate to their parents now based on what’s being told to them in a language that their parents don’t fully understand. (Maria, settlement service personnel)

This power imbalance and disconnect between parents and children was noted several times by settlement service personnel. Settlement service personnel had long-term experiences with refugee families and had developed an understanding of some of the realities that refugee families faced after the initial resettlement phase had ended. In understanding this within the theoretical framework proposed by Bourdieu, refugee children acquired cultural capital more quickly than their parents. This interrupted the
parents’ ability to engage in “the domestic transmission of cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 17). Refugee parents in general often felt the effects of marginalization not only in the wider community, but within their own family as well. Children learned English quickly often because of their extended time spent in English schools, which demonstrated yet another way that schools were reproducing the values of the dominant classes, (in this case, the English language) and therefore discredited the capital that refugee mothers once held. Additionally, regardless of the circumstances that took place within the family, such as an unexpected (and likely unwelcomed on the part of the parents) reversal in power between parents and children, Griffith and Smith (2005) asserted that mothers would be seen as defective if their children did not behave in accordance with what the school expected. For example, if children decided to take advantage of their ability to speak English and communicate false information, the blame for such action would be placed at least in part, on the refugee mother.

**Theme 4: Responsive Approaches in Programming**

The Starting School in Canada program was responsive to participant (refugee mothers’) needs. Those who worked with refugee mothers were in positions to teach and mentor mothers in a variety of capacities. When speaking with community and settlement personnel, it became clear that the way in which information is disseminated to refugee mothers is typically responsive in nature compared to being predetermined. There was a tendency of trying to determine what refugee mothers felt they needed rather than presuming and making assumptions about their transition experiences. See Table 7.
Table 7

*Codes in “Responsive Approaches in Programming” (by Data Source)*

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<thead>
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<td>Interviews with community based program personnel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Barriers reduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>- Flexible, responsive programming</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Barriers reduced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
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<td>- Barriers reduced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews with settlement service personnel</td>
<td>- Responsive programming</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Documentation, Observations, and Community Program Personnel Perspectives**

The observational notes taken during the Starting School in Canada program indicated that the program was implemented in a way that responded to the needs of program participants. The facilitators asked participants what they wanted to learn and what questions they had about starting school. As well, the structure of the program changed depending on the needs of the participant group. For example, when a mother joined the group late and had children that were too old to be in the children’s group but too young to stay at home alone, the facilitators set up chairs for the children and included them in the program as much as possible. Furthermore, the program was structured to reduce barriers to participation. For example, translators were provided during program workshops, bus tickets were available to anyone who needed them, and the timing of the program was flexible so that the content related to school transitions happened in the second half of the program each day in case participants arrived late. The collected
documentation also indicated steps being taken to reduce barriers. For example, in many instances, the documentation was translated into Arabic, maps and visuals were used for easier comprehension, and there were links to resources to assist with participating in the program.

These small acts of interrupting social inequalities that refugee mothers may face were necessary and important since, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), “the organization and functioning of the school system continuously and through multiple codes retranslate inequalities in social level to inequalities in academic level” (p. 158). Whether intended or not, the responsive approach that was used could alter the field that refugee mothers found themselves in, and therefore, alter the educational experiences that their children experienced. The structure of the Starting School in Canada program was designed to reduce the need for various forms of cultural capital (such as familiarity with the English language) and therefore, has leveled the field in some respects. Erel (2010) expanded on Bourdieu’s work in a study of Turkish and Kurdish migrant women in Britain and Germany, explaining that the full process of converting one’s cultural resources and capital was “bound up with wider historical, socio-political and institutional factors” (p. 654). Perhaps because this study took place at a time when the socio-political environment was enthusiastic towards refugees entering Canada, and the institutions that ran the Starting School in Canada program had a vested interest in including refugees in the school system, barriers to building cultural capital were minimized.

In addition to documentation and observations, community program personnel talked about how they worked to ensure that they were meeting the needs of program participants rather than arbitrarily deciding what these needs were without consultation.
As well, program personnel were flexible in how they planned and implemented programming so that the needs of the participants were accounted for:

And basically, the beauty of this is that you’re kind of free to make it your own and do things that you think will help the families. So, what I found this year was I really had to look at what I did in past years and make it simpler. And change things up even more quickly than I did in the past. (Adele, community program personnel)

Time is also something that has been changed to meet participants’ needs. When the program started, it was in the morning but people didn’t come. Now we offer it at 12:30 and people seem to come more. We also don’t schedule the workshops right away because even though we have a very western or European concept of time, many other cultures don’t. So instead of forcing it and getting upset with people who don’t come on time, we do the ECC [English conversation circle] first, we start right at 12:30, and then we do workshops and guest speakers later. (Lynn, community program personnel)

And that’s why interpretation is so important. Because really, we want the information, we want them to absorb the information and be able to ask the questions in their own language and feel comfortable, and that’s why, so the interpretation would come, our budget pays for the interpretation. (Amy, community program personnel)

In previous years, they were a preset list of topics. ... So this year, Starting School in Canada took an approach that we wanted to ask them. What do they want to know? (Kay, community program personnel)
Griffith and Smith (2005) described how when mothers did not conform to the rules and norms established by their children’s school, the school had to take on the burden of the work that mothers had left:

On the one hand, the school imposes its order on the routines of the household, just as does the scheduling of paid work. On the other, the school relies on the work and commitment of (primarily) women to sustain that order as a local practice. However, it is a local practice that is always at risk. (p. 63)

It seemed that this was true of community programming targeted at refugee families as well. The program had “imposed” routines that affected families attending the program such as the days and times that the program ran, however, the program also “relied” on the mothers in the program to maintain these impositions. The approach that the community program personnel associated with the Starting School in Canada program took was to reduce and alter impositions as much as possible by changing the topics being taught, the timing of the program, and the language that parts of the program were available in. Furthermore, in addition to the structure of the program shifting to respond to refugee mothers, the stance of the facilitators had shifted to be more responsive.

This was in contrast to what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) described: “language can ultimately cease to be an instrument of communication and serve instead as an instrument of incantation whose principal function is to attest and impose the pedagogic authority of the communication and the content communicated” (p. 110). Bourdieu and Passeron were speaking specifically about professors in esteemed academies; however, their understanding of authorities and the one-way transmission of authorized messages paralleled typical forms of education that anyone, including refugee parents, might receive. The facilitators of the Starting School in Canada program had deliberately
interrupted the “principal function ... to attest and impose ... pedagogic authority” by designing their curriculum in a responsive, (rather than prescriptive) manner.

Settlement Service Personnel Perspectives

Those who worked in the wider community in settlement services did not speak at length about their responsive approaches to working with refugee mothers, likely because they did not plan programming for refugee families. There was one interviewee however who spoke about how a group of women approached her organization to ask for assistance in building computer literacy skills:

A group of women came, like more than 15 or 30 to [name of agency]. They said “we are in a new society, we know that we cannot survive without having email addresses, and we have been in the refugee camp for 6 years, our skills with computers are almost zero, or we have some, can you help us?” Okay. So we did a computer course for women. (Sarah, settlement service personnel)

In having a responsive approach to refugee mothers, programming changed and shifted to better serve the refugee population. This excerpt exemplified a shift away from the “pedagogic authority” approach that Bourdieu and Passeron described, which was mentioned previously in community program personnel perspectives. It also exemplified the interaction between social and cultural capital in the wider community. Refugee women recognized a gap in their cultural capital (a lack of computer skills) and responded by mobilizing their social capital (within their personal network and within a formal institution within their community). As Erel (2010) explained that converting cultural capital was bound by politics and institutions, examples such as this call into question the direction of policy and practice. Refugee women, in this case, altered their resettled environment to meet their needs. The power to determine whether or not the
cultural capital these women were looking for would be offered, still remained with the settlement agency however.

**Theme 5: Assets-Based Approach in Working With Refugee Mothers**

The theme of *assets-based approach in working with refugee mothers* was noted in interviews with community program personnel, settlement personnel, observations of the Starting School in Canada program, and documentation collected from the Starting School in Canada program. In the case of the Starting School in Canada program, mothers were seen as having many strengths, being the first teacher to their children, and being capable of successfully transitioning their children to school. Beyond the Starting School in Canada program, those who work in resettlement services also spoke about the assets and agency that refugee mothers possess. See Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Codes in “Assets-Based Approach in Working With Refugee Mothers” (by Data Source)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with community based program personnel</td>
<td>- Parents seen from a strengths-based perspective, responsive programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>- Strengths-based approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>- Family focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Empowering for parents (asset/strengths-based approach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with settlement service personnel</td>
<td>- Parents/ families seen as investments/asset approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Documentation, Observations, and Community Program Personnel Perspectives

The observation notes from the Starting School in Canada program as well as the collected documents all showcased an assets-approach towards participants including refugee mothers. For example, program facilitators were very welcoming towards participants, every participant had an equal opportunity to contribute, and there was an appreciation for the journeys that the refugee mothers had taken. This appreciation was best seen in the welcoming ritual that the facilitators established where they added people’s names to a large map to show where they were from and then wrote down people’s birthdays and date of arrival in Canada on a chart. This ritual was conducted for each and every participant and guest facilitator regardless of immigrant or refugee status. It did not matter if participants took a long time to be able to articulate themselves in participating in this ritual, the facilitators were patient and enthusiastic to get to know a little bit about each participant and build a sense of community within the group.

There were also many references to parents being the first teacher for their children and to acknowledge the important role they played in their own children’s lives. Activities were designed so that parents could teach their own children about literacy and numeracy at home in their own language and the facilitators often asked participants to share versions of songs and activities in their own language. For example, one routine in the program was to sing the “head and shoulders” song to build basic vocabulary in English but the facilitators would also encourage participants to sing the song in their own language and the rest of the group would attempt to join in. This recognition of what mothers already knew and placing value on their role in the school transition process was woven throughout the entire program. Furthermore, the documentation collected during
the program focused on families as important players in the school transition process and used language that showcased the assets and strengths that parents had.

The facilitators in the Starting School in Canada program created an environment where mothers’ cultural capital was prominently valued. By acknowledging their histories, the countries they had arrived from, and the language they were comfortable with, the facilitators acknowledged and honoured the cultural capital that the mothers in this study held. As well, facilitators engaged in encouraging parents to transmit their cultural capital to their children, exemplifying that they considered parents capable of doing so and that they considered the cultural capital that parents had, to be of value.

Bourdieu (1986) explains however that:

> It follows that the transmission of cultural capital is no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital, and it therefore receives proportionally greater weight in the system of reproduction strategies, as the direct, visible forms of transmission tend to be more strongly censored and controlled. (p. 19)

Programs in which parents are valued for being teachers to their children are also implicated in perpetuating such covert functions of the school.

The program personnel who worked with the Starting School in Canada program viewed refugee mothers as being agents in their own lives and important contributors to the program. This was evident in how the program was facilitated and in how it was planned and designed. For example, the volunteers who were selected to facilitate the program were chosen for their ability to positively interact with program participants (refugee mothers). Furthermore, staff were trained to not give their own opinions to parents that they were working with but rather to give necessary information and encourage parents to make decisions for themselves based on their own situations. As
well, the culture and environment of the EYC was set up to promote recognition of the strengths that patrons had. The director of the EYC commented on how the centre used a peer to peer model where parents were connected with other parents to provide support to one another. The director noted that the staff at the EYC were best described as facilitators rather than experts and that learning happened from a peer to peer model rather than a top-down model. The director also commented on how recognizing the strengths and agency in parents had evolved over time:

We went through a time when we tried to be very intentional. If we saw a newcomer family, while their child was in the early learning program, just you know, sitting on a bench ... being very intentional and saying “come, I’m going to take you to a parenting program.” You know, there’s good ways to do that and not so good ways to do that, but we need to look at, do we need to do that? You know? Parents are capable. So there’s less intentional strategy as there is trying to read the temperature of the person, of the event, of the atmosphere in the centre.

(Charlene, community program personnel)

The director of the EYC spoke about a shift in practice related to “newcomer” families. Previous to this study, she explained how it was common practice to target newcomer families and take them to a parenting program without consulting them about their needs or preferences. It seemed that the community program personnel were awakened to Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) suggestion that “The unnatural idea of culture by birth presupposes and produces blindness to the functions of the educational institution which ensures the profitability of cultural capital and legitimates its transmission by dissimulating the fact that it performs this function” (p. 210). Furthermore, Heydon and Iannacci (2008) note that “the markers ‘ethnic minority’ and/or
‘linguistic minority’ have been prime targets for pathologizing practices” (p. 10). Heydon and Iannacci explain that pathologizing referred to “the processes by which persons belonging to a particular group are seen by a more powerful group as abnormal” (2008, p. 1) and note also that some type of intervention was usually seen as the way to deal with such abnormality. In recognizing the reproduction of pathologization within their institution (which was closely linked with serving schools by supporting families), the community program personnel at the EYC were able to correct their approach.

The Starting School in Canada facilitators also spoke about program participants from an assets-perspective:

I see someone like [participant’s name] that’s here, that, she’s really on the ball. And you can tell, she just needs to learn the language and she’ll be organizing women in her community. She’s a take-charge type. (Adele, community program personnel)

The facilitator from this excerpt did not see language barriers as a marker of pathology (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008) but rather as a barrier to being able to execute the full extent of her capital. Lareau and Weininger (2003) recognized this approach (and the reverse of such) in their review of literature about cultural capital in education and explained that there were studies where authors were expecting that those lower in power and privilege “accept given institutional standards as legitimate, and then seek methods for boosting parents’ and students’ compliance with them” (Lareau & Weininger, 2004, p. 124). The approach noted in this critical ethnography of Syrian refugee mothers, however, was that the educational context needed to change for parents and parents needed cultural capital not simply to conform to the demands of the education system but to interrupt power regimes to maximize the benefits that education could provide.
The facilitators were also aware of the difficulties that came with resettlement and used this understanding when planning for the program. For example, facilitators understood that although transitioning children to school was an important task, there were many other things that may be taking priority during early resettlement and that this was not an indication of refugee mothers not caring about their children:

You can imagine what it’s like to come to a new country with everything new.
And these people just came, so the first things to think about are food, clothing, housing, and just learning about Canada—the basics but it’s so much to take in.

(Lynn, community program personnel)

This understanding approach contrasts to what Griffith and Smith (2005) found regarding how teachers approached the contributions of parents in their classrooms: “teachers defined parental involvement in terms of classroom and school needs” (p. 108). There was no regard for the other activities that parents needed to devote time to, nor to the barriers that parents faced in providing academic support for their children. Conversely, the entire structure and approach of the facilitators in the Starting School in Canada program was designed to be understanding towards the barriers that parents faced. Further, these barriers were seen as separate from the person as a whole—they were purely situational rather than being part of the person and thus subjecting the person to potentially being seen deficit in some way. Bourdieu explained that society and schools were intertwined with schools reproducing the norms of the dominant in society and excluding those who did not fit with them. However, the Starting School in Canada program took place outside of the direct control of schools (although there were clear links between the two) and yet the reproductive nature of the program appeared to be
minimal. Instead, the program appeared to be a practical response to forms of reproduction in education.

A guest facilitator described the importance of giving refugee mothers the time they needed to explain themselves during discussions in the program when translators were not available. The facilitators saw the contributions that mothers made to the program as valuable and they worked to make space for those contributions to be visible:

But I also think just, facilitating a little bit and encouraging open sharing, or allowing them to, you know, they struggle sometimes with the English as well, So ... giving them time to explain themselves fully in programming. (Kay, community program personnel)

By releasing some of her own power within the context of helping refugee mothers transition their children to school, this guest facilitator provided opportunities for refugee mothers to fully participate in the Starting School in Canada program. The burden of full participation was held by the facilitator so that the benefits of the program could be realized by the mothers. Because the facilitator held such power however, she also had the power to reverse her decision and so the refugee mothers were at the mercy of her generosity. Further, the inclusion of parents who did not speak the dominant language was present in Starting School in Canada program which operated with consideration for, but independence from, actual schools.

**Settlement Service Personnel Perspectives**

Moving to the wider community beyond the Starting School in Canada program, settlement service personnel also viewed refugee mothers from an assets perspective. They commented on how they worked with sponsor groups to instill an understanding of refugee families as having agency and being capable of making their own decisions:
Sponsors are navigating the fact that they [sponsored refugee families] are their own family, they are independent, and your role as a sponsorship group is not to tell them what to do and to overpower them and to run their lives for that one year, but instead come alongside them and coach them on what it’s like to grocery shop, what it’s like to walk to the nearest bus station and take the bus route.

(Maria, settlement service personnel)

Settlement service personnel also spoke about how local citizens wanted to help with the resettlement effort in any way possible. Private sponsors wanted the refugee families they were supporting to do well in their new country. The assumption here was that it is still necessary to build capital, however the way in which this was approached is of concern to settlement services. Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008) explains the gravity of such an approach:

A significant form of “de-selfing” which refugee women face continually is their treatment as blank pages, as if they had no education, no occupation, or no life before, particularly when they interact with services, organizations, or institutions. In reality, uprooted women are anything but blank: their past and intense life experiences affect their identities every day. (p. 39)

Gerwirtz et al. (2005) described how, among those who worked with refugees, there was a sense of needing to fix them and a view that refugees were helpless and passive. In contrast, the findings in this study of Syrian refugee mothers showed that among those who interacted with refugees in the settlement sector and among those who helped to facilitate a smooth transition to school for refugee children, the general approach was that refugees are capable and valuable for what they can offer one another and for what they can offer their children. It was noted however that this approach in some cases was new
and intentional in response to recognizing that old approaches of targeting assumed refugee needs and responding without being asked to do so was not in the best interest of refugees. Because of this, many refugee sponsors kept in contact with their sponsored families after the sponsorship year ends:

I mean, they’re no longer legally responsible for them [after the sponsorship year has ended] but ... they’ve invested so much, you know they want to make sure this family succeeds. So even though it’s been over a year, they’re still checking in on them, still providing the necessary supports including emotional and you know, any sort of networking that needs to get done. (Hannah, settlement service personnel)

This compared well with research by Lamba and Krahn (2003) who found that “if refugees were linked with either a private sponsor or host volunteer on arrival, a majority found these network ties useful enough to maintain them beyond the initial stages of resettlement” (p. 348). It may be necessary and useful to build networks of social capital in order to feel acquainted with one’s new home, and, in the case of this study of Syrian refugee mothers, it may be useful to feel acquainted with the school transition process.

Still, Bourdieu (1986) claims that such social capital is not enough in and of itself:

This means that, although it is relatively irreducible to the economic and cultural capital possessed by a given agent, or even by the whole set of agents to whom he is connected, social capital is never completely independent of it because the exchanges institution mutual acknowledgement presuppose the reacknowledgement of a minimum of objective homogeneity, and because it exerts a multiplier effect of the capital he possesses in his own right. (p. 21)

One settlement service worker explained how in recognizing the value in refugee
families and deciding to provide support for them, there was a tendency for sponsors to become acutely aware of the social injustices that refugee families faced:

Because groups responded initially out of compassion, wanting to do something, responded for the very first time, not knowing at all what was to come, and not fully understanding the private sponsorship world. And so they embarked on this journey of learning and what I think is beautiful about private sponsorship is as you are encouraged and kind of, forced into becoming an expert about the reality of settlement services in your community, you very quickly realize a lot of the issues that exist around lack of housing, around the realities of the levels of Ontario Works and social welfare, what those levels are and you quickly learn about the reality of what some of the people in our own countries, the standard of living that they have here. And so, people are shocked when they begin to become aware of a lot of the social injustices that exist already. (Maria, settlement service personnel)

Ways of Othering were reproduced and persisted beyond initial resettlement. Even when individuals were able to arrive in a “safer” country as refugees rather than live in fear of persecution in their home country, they were still subjected to the symbolic violence from the powerful and privileged. This was manifested in the type of housing available to refugee families, which restricted them to certain neighbourhoods, and therefore certain schools. Within schools, the functions of social reproduction could thrive while being unrecognized:

To posit, at the outset, that “the educational system of a given society reflects that society’s social system” is summarily to reduce the academic institution to its generic function of “social control,” the common residue of all its specific
functions, and to make it impossible to perceive all that an educational system owes to its essential function, in particular its specific way of fulfilling its external functions in a given society at a given moment. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 190)

Perhaps because the agencies in this study were not directly linked to schools, or perhaps because the concealment aspect of social reproduction has infected this study, it appeared that those who worked in settlement services recognized the injustices faced by refugees even after resettlement and were working towards ways to reduce these injustices. The assets-approach within the settlement service community was especially promising because those who worked in settlement services interacted with many other stakeholders for a variety of purposes regarding the well-being of refugees. If the message that settlement service workers are disseminating is one of valuing the agency that refugees have, there is potential for recognizing the strengths that refugees have to permeate all aspects of refugee resettlement including transitioning children to school.

Conclusions

The findings in this chapter suggest that the process of refugee mothers transitioning their children to school is quite complex. Using social and cultural capital as a way to frame the school transition process allowed the strengths and agency that refugee mothers possess to exist at the forefront of the education field. Furthermore, using Griffith and Smith’s (2005) theory about mothering for schooling made it possible to conceptualize the gendered aspects of transitioning children to school and of resettlement in the broader sense.
Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the findings that came from interviews with community program personnel who worked at an early years centre and interviews with settlement service personnel in the wider community. It also featured findings from document collection and observations. The findings based on interviews with these stakeholders revealed five themes. Theme 1: Sustainability in Social Connections described the need for refugee mothers to build social connections in their communities. It also outlined how the EYC worked to foster social connections that could be sustainable. Theme 2: Sustainability in School Transitions detailed the need for education-related services to provide support to refugee mothers on an ongoing basis and to view the transition to school as a process rather than a one-time event. Theme 3: Expectations and Realities explained that the expectations refugee mothers and their families have upon arriving to Canada and upon entering their children in schools may be different than the realities they face. For example, power shifts in family dynamic can alter the way families function and the way that culture is maintained. Theme 4: Responsive Approaches in Programming described how the program featured in this study, which was aimed at helping newcomer parents transition their children to school in Canada, was enacted in a way that sought advice and questions from parents in order to structure programming. This chapter also described ways that the wider community of resettlement services sought to respond to the expressed needs of refugees rather than assume their needs. Theme 5: Assets-Based Approach in Working with Refugee Mothers described how the program personnel and the settlement service personnel viewed refugee mothers as agents in their own lives. The program facilitators aimed at teaching parents about starting school in Canada celebrated the funds of knowledge that refugee mothers brought to the program and resettlement personnel commented on their role in viewing mothers as competent and capable.
CHAPTER 5: REFUGEE MOTHER PERSPECTIVES

Findings and Discussion

This chapter describes the themes I arrived at after analyzing my data pertaining to refugee mothers. I first described my use of theory which steeped every encounter I had with this research study. I relied on explanations by Nash (1999) and Anyon (2008) to help rationalize my approach. I then focused on my overall findings from this study, beginning with describing a finding, and then placing that finding in dialogue with theory. Participant voices are showcased so readers can be as close to the original source of information as possible. In many cases, refugee mothers exercised their rights outlined in the ethical protocols that they signed and refused to be audio recorded. In these situations, I relied on summary notes that I took during our conversations together and on summations of these notes, which I wrote immediately upon returning from an interview. In all situations, I wrote an interview summary after immediately returning from each interview so that I could write down as much information as possible in a coherent manner. My summaries included all information from our conversations, as well as information that I added into my margin notes (such as encounters with children, observations about the mothers’ living situation, and my personal questions and ideas that had formed while talking with each participant). I added information about the source (interview or interview summary) after each excerpt in order to be clear about where I drew my findings from.

After analyzing the data provided by 10 Syrian refugee mothers, three overall themes emerged which work together to help explain how refugee mothers transition their children to school. These themes include mothering versus belonging, cultural capital and school engagement, and capital versus circumstance. I explained each theme in detail and
described the codes that form each theme. To interrogate my data, I showed how mothers
transitioned their children to school under the conditions associated with their social and
cultural capital. I assumed that the habitus mothers experienced was capable of being
transformative, and I explored situations where habitus appeared to be transformative
compared to it being confining. I expected to see habitus at play, visible in living conditions
and domestic practices (cooking, cleaning, raising children) but I was interested in seeing
how social and cultural capital were employed to transform a refugee mother and to place
her at the centre of her children’s education rather than on the sidelines.

Theme 1: Mothering Versus Belonging

The theme *mothering versus belonging* refers to mothers reconciling their role as
a mother with their desire to integrate and build a sense of belonging in their new country.
In some cases, the two concepts did not come into conflict with one another and mothers
were able to maintain their role as a mother while also establishing themselves as
individuals within the community. In other cases, mothers found their role as a mother to
be in direct opposition to their ability to form a sense of belonging within their
community; with all of the responsibilities they have in running their household and
caring for their children, they had little time left over to build social connections, learn
English, and think about themselves outside their role as a mother. Furthermore, there
were mothers who desired to build a sense of belonging and who had started to take steps
toward integrating into their communities such as taking English language classes, but the
onset of a new baby in their lives interrupted their progress and forced them back into a
more domestic role for a period of time. Regardless of the intensity that mothers ascribed
to their role and to their decisions surrounding how they attempted to belong in their new
community, they all put their children first when it came to preparing for and sending
their children to school. In many cases, even the decision to claim refugee status was related to their position as a mother and their desire for their children to have a high quality of life.

Using a Bourdieuan perspective in approaching the data I collected, I was able to better understand *mothering versus belonging* in a relational sense as James (2011) explains: “Bourdieu’s approach is sometimes described as ‘relational.’ What this means is that the study of the social world should be as much about the relationships between things (or people) as it is about the substance of the things or people themselves” (p. 3). In this sense, there was a relationship between motherhood and belonging in the community. Depending on the circumstances of the mothers in this study and the ways in which they viewed their roles, motherhood could be experienced as restricting or broadening one’s identity when it came to integrating into their new communities.

Furthermore, the stance that the mothers I interviewed took on their own roles as mothers and community members was determined by their habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus in this sense was connected to their social and economic backgrounds, their roles as mothers, and their ability to imagine new lives for themselves personally (rather than only for their children). Reay (2004) notes: “People’s relationships to dominant culture are conveyed in a range of activities, including eating, speaking and gesturing (Bourdieu, 1984). So the habitus as the social is inscribed in the body of the biological individual” (pp. 432-433). Mothers either transferred their previous roles from their lives prior to resettlement, shed their roles willingly in favour of a new experience, or, in an attempt to shed their role, experienced an interruption due to having a baby or encountering potential social contacts that conflicted with their values as a mother.
In an effort to transfer previous roles from their lives prior to resettlement, some mothers felt obligated to care for their families and some felt obligated to do this in a way that reduced the culture shock on their families in terms of the foods they prepared. Griffith and Smith’s (2005) work on the *mothering for schooling* discourse was important to consider here as they mentioned that the “quality” of a child is seen by society as a reflection of the quality of the mother. Regardless of whether or not the mothers in this study acknowledged it as such, their deep commitment to maintaining a peaceful life for their children was part of their habitus and part of the discourse that shaped their lives as mothers. They cared for their families regardless of the difficulty it brought to them personally in their roles as wife and mother: “and we have six kids, we have to cook for them and get everything ready for them—it’s hard” (Layail, interview). Rehang also felt compelled to run her house and cook from scratch so her family of seven children (two who were adult-aged) and a husband could have a life that was similar to what they had in Syria. Because many of the products from Syria were not available in Canada, however, Rehang made everything from scratch which took all of her time: “I don’t have even have single moment—I’m always busy you know in the kitchen. I wake up in the morning, I walk my kids to school and then I go to my school” (Rehang, interview). Rehang owned her own bridal business in her home country and felt a disconnect between the independence she used to have and the relegation to the domestic world she was experiencing in Canada. She felt that her intensely domestic role would only be temporary however, because her older children would eventually move out and her younger children would be in school. She maintained plans to open up her own business when the needs of her family subsided:

Cause after 5 years all the older ones they gonna have their own life you know?
They’re gonna get married you know. The younger ones they gonna pursue their study. And for me I’m gonna work at home so I can, you know, because I like it a lot. (Rehang, interview)

Rehang availed her whole self to the needs of her children and she recognized that her school-aged children were more demanding of her resources and time. Griffith and Smith (2005) explain that the ideas about what constitutes an adequate mother, at least in relation to how children are perceived within the context of a school, are dictated (covertly) by the school system that society takes for granted. Rehang, despite her desire for her own time, was implicated in making sure her children were well taken care of in terms of what they ate, what time they arrived in school, and what her personal education (learning English) said about her as a parent. She has lived a life where she had the freedom to run her own business and still parent her children, but in her new country and new neighbourhood, a combination of societal, school, and personal expectations for her children were forcing her to bracket her desires and save them for a time when the stakes for her children (their immediate wellbeing and education) would not be so high.

Some of the mothers did not hold onto traditional conceptions of motherhood and domesticity when it came to planning their futures in their new country. For example, Hala Sham, who has five young children (the oldest was in grade 6) and was pregnant with twins at the time of the interview explained:

First of all we need to get that citizenship—we’d like to get the citizenship then we can open our own business. ... When we gonna start to open a restaurant, we need a certain amount of money and he [referring to her husband] should have his own job first of all. (Hala Sham, interview).
Her plans for her future were not tied to her role as a mother even though her immediate situation of being pregnant with twins seemed to dictate otherwise. What Hala Sham did not talk about, and what Griffith and Smith would make note of as part of the *mothering for schooling* discourse, were the perceptions of others, particularly those at her children’s school, with regard to how she was choosing to parent her children. With five children in school and twins on the way, the school and those who work there were either benefitting from or filling gaps that they perceived existed with regard to how Hala Sham transitioned her children to school. Bourdieu’s work on the field was also noteworthy here, as Hala Sham’s “large” family, and the many other large families that entered schools in southern Ontario at the same time as she did when the refugee resettlement effort was rapidly increasing, would have altered the existing status quo of any given school that experienced an intake in students who are refugees. Class numbers would have had to be altered, extra resources would have needed to be brought in, and the school’s attempt (or lack thereof) to build a relationship with Hala Sham would have been based on pre-existing assumptions about what her family represented and what her role as a mother was contributing or subtracting from the school environment.

Warda, on the other hand, had only one child (entering secondary school) and was in a better position to build social connections because the demands she experienced as a mother were not as significant due to her small family size and due to the age of her daughter. Warda also planned to work outside of the home after she learned English, which would give her opportunities to feel more integrated into her community and which would provide her with more social opportunities. Summary notes from her interview state:

Warda has made friends with people in her apartment building as there are many Syrian families that live in the building. She has also made friends with a few
Canadian families but she finds it difficult to communicate because she does not speak much English yet. Nevertheless, she explained that she loves the Canadian families and they are very welcoming and helpful to her. ... Warda said that her first goal is to learn English (she is a level 2) and then she would like to be a custodian in a hospital or be some kind of aid to a doctor but she was unsure about the qualifications she would need to work with a doctor. (Warda, interview summary)

Even when mothers rejected their role of being fully consumed with raising their children, sometimes to the detriment of their own goals, they were taking a stance to break from their normal expected behaviours—that is, their habitus was being intentionally interrupted. Although this may have served as an emancipatory action, the consequences of such actions are likely to be identified by schools and school structures, and the responsibility for any shortcomings in a child’s school experience and success still remain with the mother whether she acknowledges or not. What is restricting for women here is that there is no right path to be a “good” mother. If women are giving themselves over to support every need of their child, they are seen as not integrating into the rest of society. If they pursue their interests and build social connections, they are seen as neglecting the needs of their children.

Other mothers who were interviewed experienced a disruption to their plans to build a sense of belonging in their community, particularly through learning English. For example, Layail was enrolled in language classes in an effort to join into her community more but had to suspend her studies after she became pregnant:

I just attended the first year and once I got pregnant I stopped going to school. ...

Once she like have daycare for her I will go. ... We need to learn the language like
well we need to learn to speak. (Layail, interview)

Summary notes from an interview with Mariam also revealed that she put her personal interests on pause for the time being in order to focus on her role as a mother:

When asked about what she wants to do in terms of her future, Mariam explained that she “is focused on right now,” which involves caring for her children and her new baby. When her baby is old enough to attend day care, she will go back to school to learn English and reevaluate her situation. She explained that she could never have imagined that her life would be like this and so worrying about what the next step will be is a removed question because life keeps changing. (Mariam, interview summary)

Hala Sham expressed negative feelings towards not being able to attend language classes due to her pregnancy in which she was carrying twins:

Because you know I got to stay at home I feel annoyed and upset. I used to go to school you know, now my husband can go to school. ... From being pregnant because you know I’m upset; I need to go outside. (Hala Sham, interview)

Hala Sham appeared to be conflicted as her role of being a mother was impeding on her ability to learn English and therefore, enter more fully into the community she lived in.

Returning to Reay’s (2004) understanding of habitus, examples of habitus being “inscribed” and “conveyed in a range of activities” were related to maintaining a sense of mothering by taking on time-consuming domestic activities. These activities included cooking all foods from scratch so they were similar to the foods the family ate in their home country, running the house in general, caring for children, and caring for husbands who had illnesses. Rehang explained that her time was completely monopolized with her
mothering work, even more so in Canada compared to her home country because she wanted the foods she fed to her family to be the same as what her family was used to:

And here in Canada you have to make everything like sweet cheese, yogurt. You have to make it yourself. In Syria we used to buy this bread you know but here we have to make it. The cheese is not tasty, sweet as well, lots of what you call it, umm, like it’s very sweet sugary like, and it’s very expensive. (Rehang, interview).

Hadidi, who was well-educated and had plans to continue to pursue her studies, was taking time to care for her husband: “and what makes it harder for me, my husband he has to go to the hospitals and even underwent a surgery here” (Hadidi, Interview).

Mothers’ time was divided and in many cases, their role as a mother superseded any new roles they were able to take on. This was not surprising, considering the mothering discourse which Griffith and Smith (2005) summarize: “In all its varieties, the mothering discourse has this in common—it requires the subordination of women’s unpaid labor [sic] and her conditions of her life to the ill-defined needs of her children’s development and of their schooling” (p. 39). In addition to the subordination of unpaid labour, there was an element of unrecognized individuality or multidimensionality that makes up a person’s essence of being. When some of the mothers in this study became mothers in a new country, they placed their role as mother above any other aspect of their being and they seem to have done so in a way that was accepted as normal.

In other circumstances, mothers managed to take part in “belonging–building” activities through attending language classes, making friends outside of their family, attending women’s groups, aspiring for a career, and working towards getting citizenship. These markers of cultural capital would allow for mothers to experience a sense of
belonging in the wider community, but they could come at the expense of self-identifying as the type of mother they wanted to be and at the expense of familiar cultural practices.

For example, Jana had children who were all school aged. She began her life in Canada feeling very isolated and only leaving the house to attend language classes and the Starting School in Canada program at the EYC. After a year of living in Canada, she had formed many social connections and was working for a catering company by cooking food in her home for special events. A summary of Jana’s interview read:

In her spare time she assists a local café by helping to cook for the café’s catering business. She got this job by eating out at the café and speaking with the owners about any possible opportunities. Although this work is not steady, and largely depends on the orders that the café places, it occupies quite a bit of her time. For example, on the day of the interview, she had already cooked for 7 hours. When asked about her plans for her future, she stated that she definitely plans on working but was unsure of what kind of job she would do. She explained that she needed to learn English first and when that was accomplished, she would begin to think more about what she could do on a more permanent basis. (Jana, interview summary)

Mariam was another example of a mother who worked to build social connections. Notes from her interview stated:

Since Mariam has arrived in Canada, she has made friends and exchanges visits with many of her friends. She did not know anyone at first when she arrived but after she began taking English classes, she connected with some people and they all visited one another after classes. As well, since she lives in a high-rise
apartment, it is easy for her to visit other Syrian families who also live in the building. (Mariam, interview summary)

Since the birth of her most recent baby however, Mariam had been feeling isolated and missed her time learning English where she was able to connect with people and work towards achieving her goals. Rimas took a unique approach to belonging-building. She and her husband decided to limit the number of children they were going to have in order to be able to afford the kind of life they imagined:

Rimas and her husband have plans to save their money and move into a town house. They would like a backyard so their children have space to move around. ... They believe that they are done having children. They explained that children cost money and they want to have enough money to live comfortably. (Rimas, interview summary)

Weeam explained that making friends was difficult as a mother because she needed to manage her personal expectations for raising her children with the different parenting styles that potential friends had, even when those friends shared the same religious and seemingly cultural background: “Yeah I got to know some people. But these people they have like different way of living you know? Their life, their culture you know? Their customs you know? Different from us. We are talking about the Arab people” (Weeam, interview). Hala Sham echoed these concerns. There is another Syrian family (besides Layail) who lived close by Hala Sham but she did not get along well with them. She explained that she was raising her children differently and she did not agree with many of her neighbours’ values: “there is a family here from Aleppo but we’re not getting along with each other” (Hala Sham, interview).

As Edgerton and Roberts (2014) explain,
Habitus is both a “structured structure” and a “structuring structure.” As the circumstances of one’s social origins—and associated life chances—tend to influence one’s perceptual and behavioral dispositions, so too do one’s consequent actions (practices) tend to contribute to the perpetuation or reinforcement of like circumstances and life chances. One’s practices or actions in a particular field are the interactive consequences of one’s habitus and capital within the dynamics of that field. (p. 198)

For example, Hadidi found it difficult to connect with other Syrian families when she was staying in transitional housing because she did not have much in common with them from a cultural capital perspective. I asked her why she did not believe she had much in common with people who were from the same country as her and she explained that there were differences between values in families who grew up in the city versus the countryside. She explained that in the city, it was common to pursue higher education and to have a more liberal approach to gender roles, whereas those who grew up in the countryside were raised to get a job early in life even if it meant forgoing an education that might provide for a more stable future later on in life. Hadidi stated:

The countryside they learn to get a job to work not to study. And they get married very early. The city, they prefer to study to learn. So like educated people non-educated people. It’s hard you know. Like if you want to convey a message to an uneducated person it’s different from educated—it’s gonna be hard for you to convey a message or really a message to an uneducated person. And like the financial situations in the cities is different from those in the countryside. So if I want to talk about something they won’t know what I’m talking about. (Hadidi, interview)
Hadidi was rich in cultural capital. She was well-educated, her husband was a surgeon and had owned his own practice, her children, except for the one who came to Canada with her, were all well-travelled and living in various places abroad. She showed me a wedding photo of one of her daughters who was posed against an expensive-looking car with her husband. The photograph was taken by a professional photographer and Hadidi explained that the reception was very tasteful and dignified. Other examples of Hadidi’s cultural capital included her expectations for hosting guests. She explained that in order for her to host friends and build connections with people that she would be comfortable with, she needed to be in a better financial situation:

Financially now I can’t, you know, friends—like the financial point of view it’s very hard. ... I’m talking frankly like obviously we have our own traditions like when we have friends they gonna visit me, I’m gonna offer them things you know ... so I can’t do that. (Hadidi, interview)

Her taste did not match with her economic situation; however, Hadidi viewed her lack of financial security as temporary. Mothers in this study seemed to attempt regaining aspects of their previous life back based on the capital they possessed and their place within and understanding of their field. If mothers were used to having money and freedom, they expected to regain their money and associated freedom after they arrived in Canada. Conversely, and more commonly, if the mothers had limited financial resources and power, they seemed complacent with what they had in Canada and did not appear to seek out a more prosperous lifestyle. Hadidi planned on continuing her studies and recreating a life that had some resemblance to what she was used to: “To adjust to like the conditions you know the circumstances ... and if I can study, pursue my studies, why not?” (Hadidi, interview).
Jana, who had begun working part time may have been interrupting the norms related to domestic life, however, she was perpetuating her norm of living a financially-comfortable life by bringing more income into her house and engaging in leisure middle-class activities such as visiting friends on weekend trips around the province. Some of the mothers experienced interrupting (rather than perpetuating) their circumstances and life chances in favour of building capital. The way in which they attempted such interruptions, however, was implicated in their habitus and tied to the capital they already possessed. Rimas’s decision to limit the number of children she was going to have was an example of such interruption, as was Hala Sham’s desire to open a restaurant in order to be independent by working outside the home, and her dissatisfaction with having to suspend her language classes due to her pregnancy.

When it came to preparing to send their children to school, the women who were interviewed in this study made decisions based on what they felt would be best for their children, even if it was not what they might personally choose for themselves. The first step in the process of sending their children to school in a new country and a new community was the decision to claim refugee status. Weeam explained: “I wanted a good life for my kids. I came for the sake of my kids. For their future” (Weeam, interview). A summary of a conversation with Warda revealed a similar approach: “Warda wanted her daughter to have a life that was better than her own so she and her family signed up to claim refugee status and were admitted to Canada through the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) program” (Warda, interview summary).

The habitus associated with motherhood was such a strong force that it sparked decisions to relocate entire families to unfamiliar countries and communities, to enter an unfamiliar culture, and to send their children to unfamiliar schools for several hours each
day. In placing Griffith and Smith’s (2005) theory on mothering for schooling in dialogue with Bourdieu’s work, it seemed that the motivation behind engaging in mothering for schooling (which in this study, involved intense coordination efforts on behalf of mothers) was tied to the habitus associated with being a mother. When it came to difficulties encountered in one’s home country, the mothers coordinated their families, relocated everyone (even after just giving birth in the case of Rehang), and then began coordinating efforts to effectively send their children to school. These efforts took place because as mothers, their role indicated that they seek out the best possible life for their children regardless of inconvenience or personal preferences. The coordinating efforts that mothers engaged in were also determined by what mothers felt would be best for their children. Learning English, for example, helped to increase belonging and helped to position mothers with more capital when they interacted with schools. Similarly, the decision to stay home and run the house rather than build a sense of belonging, was also tied to providing their children with a good quality of life so their children could be successful in their own lives.

Mothers in this study were caught in between negotiating their role as a mother and their role as an individual. Both roles were important when it came to transitioning their children to school, and both roles were adopted or abandoned for the same reason, which was the for benefit of their children. For example, some mothers were actively working towards learning English which would help them interact with their children’s teachers better. Other mothers found that their role of being a mother and getting their children ready for school each day while also running the house prevented them from learning English. Either way, they were bound by their desire to ensure their children were cared for. Mothers in this study existed in many circumstances (refugee
resettlement, school transitions, establishing a new identity, maintaining a former identity, etc.) which required a variety of responses. As Reay (2004) explains,

Individual histories therefore are vital to understanding the concept of habitus. Habituses are permeable and responsive to what is going on around them. Current circumstances are not just there to be acted upon, but are internalized and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socializations. (p. 434)

The current circumstances that refugee mothers were in were constantly under personal interrogation as the mothers did their best to create the life they thought was best for their families. They were always bound by who they were as they worked towards establishing new lives. The degree to which they experienced such binding to their past was what allowed some to build a sense of belonging better than others.

**Theme 2: Cultural Capital and School Engagement**

The theme cultural capital and school engagement referred to the interaction between cultural capital and a mother’s ability to transition her children to school. Some mothers made intentional attempts to transition their children to school by joining programs targeted at school readiness, while other mothers let the local school take the lead and responded to what the school seemed to be expecting. As the excerpts that help to illustrate this theme indicate, the ways that mothers interacted with the school and with the transition process was underpinned by the cultural capital that each mother held at the time. This theme included mentions of mothers’ own school experiences as such experiences could have had an impact on how mothers perceived schools and how they responded to the structures and demands that schools imposed (Reay, 2004). Finally, this theme addressed aspirations that mothers held for their children (and to an extent, the aspirations that they held for themselves), as aspirations informed plans and were
informed by experiences and personal understandings of realities and the limits each individual was subject to.

In approaching cultural capital and school engagement, I relied heavily on Reay’s (1998) interpretation of cultural capital as it is bestowed on some and developed in others through habitus and the field. Reay (1998) showed that mothers’ previous experiences and understandings of the educational system were tied with their current economic status and therefore, with their current abilities to successfully transition their children through school in her chapter entitled “Habitus as History: Mothers’ Own Educational Experiences” (p. 48). As Reay (1998) explains, “For women educated in countries other than Britain the resulting strangeness of their child’s educational experiences undermines the efficacy of their cultural capital” (p. 59). Reay’s study used economic class as a lens to view disparities in educational attainment which in some ways had connections with this current study. What was also important when framing the analysis of this theme was Reay’s secondary focus on migrant experiences. Reay notes that previous educational experiences held by mothers are shaped by and confined to their habitus, and ultimately have an impact on how their children will experience schooling. These pillars of understanding were useful in exploring the approaches that refugee mothers took while transitioning their children to school. It should be noted once again that the term “transition” is referring to the process whereby students prepare to enter schools and the activities and practices done to maintain a child’s time spent in schools. The transition process entails partnership and collaboration between the school, family, and community (although such a partnership is an ideal and not necessarily a common practice).

In an effort to prepare their children for school, some mothers took an active approach to school readiness by attending programs such as the Starting School in...
Canada program offered by the Ontario EYC and the YMCA. Lareau and Weininger (2003) note that “as a result of their location in the stratification system, students and their parents enter the educational system with dispositional skills and knowledge that differentially facilitate or impede their ability to conform to institutionalized expectations” (p. 588). The Ontario EYC and YMCA program worked to offer parents some of the knowledge that would assist them in understanding how the school system functioned while also attempting to empower them to see their role beyond “conforming to institutionalized expectations” (although the desire to conform was noted by most mothers). Reay (1998) noted that “Information about how the educational system operates is a vital component of cultural capital” (p. 143) and noted that mothers who were considered to be “low income” did not have the institutional knowledge or cultural capital that supported knowing about how schools operated.

Weeam commented:

It helped me, at least I got the environment, the atmosphere down, you know? . . . My kids now, they like to go to school and they spend, they enjoy their time with other kids. They started playing with other kids. In particular, they like going outside and they like to play with other kids. This has helped me a lot. (Weeam, interview)

Weeam’s previous experiences with school were based on a different school system and her own education was limited, as was the norm where she grew up. Now that she found herself in a new country with a new education system, she had a desire to learn about what to expect in schools and to prepare her children as much as she could. Weeam understood the need for cultural capital as it pertained to understanding the “environment” and the “atmosphere” of the school system her children would be entering.
into and recognized her limited capital in this area. Furthermore, Layail explained that prior to going to the EYC, she lacked information about the school system in Ontario: “No, we didn’t know it before, before we attended this centre, the early centre” (Layail, interview). Hala Sham also explained that her understanding of schools in Ontario came from the EYC and from a book she had about Canada: “Yeah, I used to go to school, and I have the guidebook about Canada. I have all the information. I used to go to school, and I have that red book about Canada” (Hala Sham, interview).

It was clear that the information some of the mothers received about attending school in Canada was prescribed and was transmitted from the perspective that the mothers are vessels hoping to be filled which again spoke to Lareau and Weininger’s (2003, 2004) idea of “conforming” to norms that are set by the powerful. Returning to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), these norms were legitimized by the powerful in society and work to exclude the marginalized. Based on observations from attending the program at the EYC, it was clear that the facilitators were trying to interrogate this philosophy by asking mothers what they wanted to learn, by assuming the mothers had valuable experiences in parenting, and by celebrating the experiences that mothers had with education, which could help inform their approach to sending their children to school. The mothers on the other hand, did not always see themselves as knowledgeable and they tended to accept the information they received at face value, even when they were being active in obtaining such information, which further exemplified Bourdieu and Passeron’s point. For example, Hala Sham was active in reading a book about schools in Canada, but did not make references to questioning norms or protesting the “authorities” that set the norms. Instead, she was happy to learn the rules so that she could fit into the system that already existed rather than disrupting it in any way.
Other active approaches to transitioning children to school included taking a tour of the school, talking with friends about school, and engaging in preparatory activities with children such as teaching them the alphabet. Fatima’s interview summary showed the ongoing nature of school transitions. With regards to taking active approaches, she described how she communicated with the school regularly:

Prior to attending the school, Fatima received an orientation about what to bring but she admits that she receives notes from the teachers every now and then explaining that something she packed for lunch is not allowed at school due to allergies. Since beginning this school, Fatima has met with her children’s teachers. She has been contacted because her daughter hit another child and she has met with her oldest son’s teacher because her son has a potential speech issue. The school is providing a referral to a speech and language pathologist to help solve his speech issues. The school also contacted Fatima to let her know that her youngest son fell one day and was hurt so she knew what to expect when she picked him up from school. Fatima is satisfied with the communication she receives about her children. (Fatima, interview summary)

Fatima expressed herself in terms of being more active in her children’s schooling but still did not make reference to questioning authority or interrupting norms. Fatima was active in her children’s schooling in part because the school had positioned her to act as such by contacting her and by requesting meetings. Fatima’s active approach was done from a response-perspective but still showed Fatima’s commitment to working with the school and taking opportunities to voice herself.

The field that Bourdieu described would still position this “active” approach as operating within the confines of what the powerful have already established as
acceptable. Bourdieu’s work used the university setting as an example of where such legitimization comes from, however, parallels between how a postsecondary student is able to interact with a professor and how a parent is able to interact with their child’s teacher were apparent. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) described the position of the teacher in this regard as “the legitimate transmitters or receivers of the pedagogic message” (p. 113). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) go on to explain that

Given that the informative efficiency of pedagogic communication is always a function of the receivers’ linguistic competence ... the unequal social-class distribution of educationally profitable linguistic capital constitutes one of the best-hidden mediations through which the relationship (grasped by our tests) between social origin and scholastic achievement is set up, although its weight as a factor varies according to the constellation of factors in which it belongs and, consequently, according to the type and level of education concerned. (pp. 115-116)

The previous school experiences that mothers had were also included in the theme of cultural capital and school engagement, because according to Reay (1998) they shaped the way that mothers approach school. Reay (1998), who worked from a Bourdieuan perspective, opened her chapter subtitled “Habitus as History: Mothers’ Own Educational Experiences” with the following:

The amount of cultural capital mothers are able to draw on in the present is not simply a consequence of their current situation. Women’s personal history and their educational experiences have an effect on their propensity for some types of action over others. There is a need to investigate women’s experience of education in the past in order to understand maternal activities in the present. In place of a
narrow focus on where people are located currently, habitus emphasizes the
importance of the social location people have come from, as well as highlighting
the social space they have moved through, in order to reach their current
position. (p. 48)

Most of the mothers in this study had limited schooling experiences. Nine mothers
had a grade 9 or lower education and one mother had an incomplete university education
(see Table 1: Syrian Refugee Mother Participant Information for details on the levels of
education held by each mother). Education is a marker of cultural capital, with those who
have more education possessing more cultural capital. Lareau and Weininger (2003)
commented on one of Bourdieu’s meanings of cultural capital: “[Bourdieu] did see a
congruity between the aptitudes rewarded by the school and the styles and tastes that
engender status group inclusion among members of the dominant class” (p. 579). Jæger
(2009) explained how the transmission of cultural capital was necessary to explore when
understanding cultural capital and its impact on children:

Parents must invest time and energy in making sure that their cultural capital is
transmitted to children. ... It is unclear from Bourdieu if children mainly acquire
cultural capital from parents passively via socialization (i.e., exposure to parents’
stock of objectified cultural capital) or actively via parents’ actions to transmit
cultural capital. (p. 1948)

Regardless, the capital that parents hold has an impact on how children are able to
navigate and succeed in the school system. Most of the mothers in this study went on to
become “housewives” (the term “housewife” was used by the participants and not
imposed by the researcher). They began helping to run their own family homes when they
completed their schooling and then transitioned to taking care of their own homes or the homes of their in-laws after they got married.

Bourdieu’s explanation of cultural capital, and the many interpretations and clarifications of cultural capital, contend that such limited educational background positioned the mothers in this study as low in cultural capital as far as educational credentials were concerned. Jana explained why many of the mothers had limited education, noting:

In the Arab countries, girls don’t get a choice. The father decides that they will get married young and they don’t go on with their education. There’s nothing to think about if you want to do more. The choice is not there so it’s not a decision to make. (Jana, interview)

Jana did not go on to explain the impact of limited education in a new society that does value educational credentials of women (although the merits of the equity surrounding the value of such credentials could be debated but are beyond the scope of this study).

Hadidi, who had a postsecondary education suggested otherwise, explaining that the limited education that mothers experienced, particularly mothers from Syria in this study, was due to the location they grew up in and the norms of rural regions compared to urban regions. The summary of her conversation stated:

[Hadidi] explained that most of the people she interacted with were from the countryside in Syria and did not have any similar experiences with her that she could relate to. They lacked education, their way of speaking was much different, and they raised their children with a different set of values. For example, she said that the main goal for those who grew up in the country is to get a job (in Syria and in Canada) and so they forgo studies to do this rather than taking their time,
studying, and securing a higher paying and more stable job in the future. (Hadidi, interview summary)

The importance and weight that Hadidi gave to getting a good education was implicated in her habitus. She mentioned: “yes, it’s like obligatory for us to study. Studying is an obligation. But for those who were in the villages or in the countryside you know farming and things like that they don’t pursue their studies” (Hadidi, interview transcript). Hadidi spoke fondly of education and had plans to return to her postsecondary studies. Her husband, who was an orthopedic surgeon, was very supportive of her pursuit of higher education, her children were all well-educated, and the concept of taking on studies beyond secondary school was viewed as an obvious and natural transition. Hadidi was in a very different situation compared to most other mothers in this study for reasons that included a higher former socioeconomic status as well as having all older children, only one of whom was in Canada and living with her.

De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp (2000) explored parental cultural capital in the Netherlands and found that parental education was a better predictor of a child’s educational success compared to the job success that a child’s father held, suggesting that Hadidi’s value for education, even if it meant delaying entry into the labour market, was important to uphold. De Graaf et al. also found that parental reading behaviour was a more important indicator of a child’s success in school compared to their participation in beaux arts. None of the mothers in this study explained that they engaged in personal reading to help transition their children to school, however, they did comment on activities that set their children up for seeing value in education such as attempting to help children with homework by using translation applications on their phones, telling their children that schooling was important, and having educational resources such as pencils
and paper in the home. For example:

During our interview, her daughter took a little notepad and began writing out the alphabet in bubble letters. Mariam also helps her children with adding numbers together. She explains how to do this in Arabic, and her daughter translates the Arabic instructions into English for her other children to practice. She has also posted a large paper on the wall with the English Alphabet typed out for her children to reference. (Mariam, interview summary)

[Jana’s] daughter pulled out her communication book and began printing her name. She asked for my name so she could copy it as well. (Jana, interview summary)

These “academic” behaviours were welcomed in the homes and indicated a value for education and an acceptance of learning regardless of language or maternal educational background. There were attempts to build cultural capital, in the form of educational credentials, within the children and all of the mothers in this study had a positive approach to their children being educated in Canada.

In addition to having varying educational backgrounds, the mothers in this study held varying aspirations for themselves after resettling to Canada. Some mothers who were formerly housewives had plans to learn English and work (either as a work-from-home business or employed outside of the home). Jana, for example, previously assisted her husband’s business before resettlement and since arriving to Canada had decided to pursue work by preparing food for a local restaurant that catered special events. As well, Rehang worked as the fashion designer in her family’s bridal dress business but found that since moving to Canada, her time was occupied too heavily by caring for her family and running her house so she was unable to pursue her career goals at the time of our
interview. Mariam and Weeam did not have plans to pursue paid employment as they were finding it difficult enough to learn English and care for their children and house.

Another approach to viewing one’s aspirations was that some mothers had an aspiration but not a clear idea of how their plans might work out. For example, Warda wanted to be a custodian in a medical facility or an aid to a doctor but was unsure of what the qualifications to be a doctor’s aid entailed. Similarly, Hala Sham wanted to open a restaurant with her husband. She understood that the financial investment needed would take some time to save up for. She was also not clear on the process she would need to follow to open such a business and so there was an element of vagueness to her plans.

Mothers’ aspirations for themselves was both a product of their previous experiences with education and the norms that were bestowed on women (particularly to become a housewife) and the field that they knew they were implicated in. Regardless of aspiration, the women in this study all acknowledged the need to learn English as a prerequisite for any type of future activity, even if their intent was to stay in the home. Again, the dominant focus on language, in this case, English, that Bourdieu discussed at length was also dominant in the lives of the refugee mothers in this study.

Along with describing their own personal aspirations, mothers were asked to describe their aspirations for their children. Most mothers had children who were a long way away from entering postsecondary education, although there were a few mothers in this study who had children who were in secondary school or who had already been of age to attend postsecondary school (most of Hadidi’s children had already attended postsecondary school and Rehang’s older children entered the workforce upon arriving to Canada rather than pursuing postsecondary education). Mothers varied in terms of having vague or clear aspirations for their children. Many mothers had fairly clear and specific
ideas about what they wanted for their children. For example, Mariam knew exactly what she wanted for each child, as did Rehang, Warda, Fatima, and Jana.

Mariam hopes her children are successful in school in Canada. She would like for her daughter to be a dentist and for her son to be a pilot. To ensure her children are doing well in school, Mariam attends parent-teacher interviews when they are scheduled. (Mariam, interview summary)

[Rehang’s son] is looking to be an architecture engineering you know it’s like that architect and he has this dream to be a singer as well. He has this hobby to be a singer. The sponsor [name of sponsor omitted] she takes him wherever, wherever she goes if there’s parties he sings there. (Rehang, interview)

Warda, her husband, and her daughter all agreed that being an Ophthalmologist would be a good career for her daughter because it requires a university degree and the Ophthalmologist that they go to seems to have a happy life. (Warda, interview summary)

[Fatima] hopes that her sacrifice will pay off and that her children will enter into professions that require a university education such as a doctor or a teacher. (Fatima, interview summary)

Jana wanted her children to have a good life with possibilities for higher education and choice in their future endeavours. ... Jana has high hopes for her children. She explained that despite her aspirations, it will be up to her children to decide what they want to do with their lives. She envisioned her oldest son becoming a computer engineer or electrical engineer and her middle son stated that he wanted to be a lawyer. Her daughter stated that she wanted to be a teacher. (Jana, interview summary)
In other cases, mothers were vaguer and did not have a clear idea of what they wanted for their children. In these cases, mothers typically stated that they wanted their children to pursue whatever the child wanted. Layail explained: “We hope that they succeed and they achieve what their goals like ... and everyone like achieve whatever he has in his own mind” (Layail, interview). As well, Hala Sham commented: “everyone has his own dream. I hope they can achieve it” (Hala Sham, interview transcript).

Furthermore, Rimas’ interview summary noted: “She wants her children to be happy in school and to pursue their interests after school in whatever area of study they find interesting” (Rimas, interview summary).

Bourdieu’s theory suggested that aspirations were an important part of habitus because they showed how people placed limits on themselves based on what the powerful in society have determined they deserve. Higher aspirations may indicate seeing beyond what the established norms are for refugees in Canada such as removing oneself from the education system as Bourdieu described extensively in his work on Reproduction in Education and Society. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explain:

Although the adherence individuals give to school hierarchies and to the scholastic cult of hierarchy is always related to the rank the School gives them in hierarchies, it depends primarily, on the one hand, on the value system they owe to their social class of origin (the value accorded to the School within this system being, itself, a function of the degree to which that class’s interests are linked to the School) and, on the other hand, on the degree to which their market value and social position depend on educational guarantees. This is why the school system is most successful in imposing recognition of the value of itself and its
classifications when its action is applied to social classes or class fractions who are unable to counterpose to it any rival principle of hierarchy. (p. 147)

One of the benefits of having clear aspirations is that they allow people to see themselves (or their children) participating in the school system on a long-term basis rather than buying into the idea of hierarchies and being out of place in their pursuits of education. Brantlinger (1985) describes differences in parental aspirations based on income level, noting that parents who had lower income levels tended to have lower expectations and aspirations for their children. Brantlinger’s work did not focus on the concept of aspirations being vague versus specific, but it did conclude that:

In order for low-income parents to take schools more seriously and to exert a greater effort to assure school success for their offspring, it is clear that both school and society need to undergo substantial changes. Not only must low-income people see the advantages of increased effort, but there must also be real advantages to taking school seriously. It may be that the middle class is the only class to benefit from education and thus to continue to believe that schools provide equal opportunity and have an impact on social mobility. The majority of low-income parents in this study felt the purpose of school was to teach basic skills so their children would become literate. Schools may have minimal expectations for low-income pupils, but low-income people also appear to have minimal expectations for schools. (p. 26)

Brantlinger’s work cited Bourdieu among other researchers who studied equity in education systems, and demonstrated the importance of people seeing themselves beyond what their “social class” or “income level” or any other marker of status might dictate based on taken-for-granted norms. All mothers in this study had positive ideals for their
children and they all spoke of education as a positive aspect of their child’s development and success in life. The mothers in this study were of course expressing their wishes for their children regardless of the circumstances they found themselves in and regardless of the field that they and their children were implicated in, however, high aspirations may have been a positive indication of a changing habitus among many of the mothers in this study.

The theme of cultural capital and school engagement offered insight into the cultural capital that the mothers in this study possessed and the cultural capital that they were positioned to build. By exploring the familiarity that mothers had with the educational system and the actions they took to transition their children to school, the educational backgrounds that mothers had, and the aspirations that they held for their children, an understanding of mothers’ cultural capital started to form. Of course, these indicators of cultural capital did not capture the entirety of what refugee mothers possessed, but they did offer an overview of how mothers’ capital was at play with regard to school interactions.

Theme 3: Capital Versus Circumstance

The final theme that emerged out of the data provided by refugee mothers was the theme of capital versus circumstance. This theme refers to various conditions that the participants experienced that could impede or facilitate social or cultural capital from growing or maintaining its value. Because of the unique subgroup that the participants in this study belonged to, many of the circumstances that they faced were related to being a refugee and their own personal migrant experiences. The codes that helped to build this theme included refugee mothers’ socioeconomic background, type of sponsorship, housing choices, and the family situations that refugee mothers were in with regard to
pregnancy and caring for newly born babies, as well as caring for husbands who had chronic illnesses. In exploring this theme, I attempted to make sense of the intricacies associated with each participant’s unique story without glossing over important considerations such as gender, ethnic identity (country of origin, race, religion, language), and socioeconomic status. For example, Griffith and Smith’s (2005) *Mothering for Schooling* was important in explaining some of the choices that mothers and their families made and how these choices had extenuating consequences (for better or worse) because of one’s position as a woman, wife, and mother.

As well, Bourdieu’s concept of the field was important in understanding how the distribution of resources for refugees may seem equal; however, several implicit differences in migration experience altered the outcomes for each family, and beyond the family units, there were still disparities due to being a woman. All of these considerations and explanations fed into one another when attempting to map out how social and cultural capital were created, transmitted, and experienced in markedly different ways, even among a social group that appeared to be quite homogenous (refugee mothers from Syria that typically have more than two children who resettled in southern Ontario). Most of the participants were even considered to be currently living in the same geographic area (downtown) but upon closer understanding, each individual neighbourhood within the downtown had its own socioeconomic identity. My personal knowledge of the downtown area in the city where this study took place was useful in adding a deeper understanding of each neighbourhood that participants resided in. I have lived in the city where this study took place for my entire life, and more specifically, I have lived in the downtown for over 5 years. This experience allowed me to provide some perspective on geographic
circumstances which could then be further understood within Bourdieu’s and others’ theoretical underpinnings and frameworks.

When exploring the theme of *capital versus circumstance*, several recurring ideas were clear. To add cohesiveness to understanding the various circumstances that refugee mothers found themselves in, I explained these findings based on one’s pre-migration story, the events that took place during migration and resettlement, and the decisions that were made and actions that were taken after an initial resettlement had occurred.

**Refugee Mothers’ Socioeconomic Background**

To begin, prior to migration, the women in this study came from somewhat varying circumstances. Although most of the women had similar educational backgrounds (grade 9 or lower), their socioeconomic standings were different. The financial circumstances that women found themselves in prior to resettlement appeared to have an effect on their migration journey and on how they experienced resettlement in Canada. Despite the refugee resettlement system being open and available to anybody who passes security clearances, regardless of their income, the stories that the refugee mothers shared demonstrated that there were clear advantages to having stable financial resources prior to resettlement. Even if everything was seized or left behind in order to flee, the “recovery” from resettlement was easier for those who were accustomed to having greater economic means. Because each mother’s story was unique, I explored this aspect of the theme *capital versus circumstance* on a participant-by-participant basis. This thoroughness best informed the overall theme and avoided placing the participants together in vague categories where key aspects of their financial capital could be glossed over. Davey (2009) offers a similar caution:

The middle/working class dichotomy offers an overly-simplistic account, capturing
those at both ends of the spectrum, but clearly failing to understand the lives of those in between. Furthermore, I maintain that to make use of occupational class labels takes much for granted, and offers the illusion of commonality where in fact there is great diversity. A Bourdieuan framework renders a more fluid and multidimensional working of class identities. (p. 283)

To begin, Hadidi’s story captured the starkest reality when it came to financial capital and the benefits of having a high income. Hadidi, who had a partial university degree and was married to a surgeon, was quite financially stable in Syria and found life in Canada, without such abundant financial resources, to be difficult: “Our life was very easy you know we’re very happy. Like when ISIS came they took the clinic, the vehicle, everything. Because any doctor who has a record, they can take all his finances, his properties, they can seize it” (Hadidi, interview). Hadidi’s son was planning on finding a part-time job to help with the family’s expenses and she had extended family who were helping to support her financially: “No I’m still borrowing money from my niece here and I’m trying to help everyone. My son is looking for a job, we hope that he might find one. He wants to study and to learn at the same time” (Hadidi, interview). Further, one of Hadidi’s sons who was not admitted to Canada as a refugee was planning on finding a way to join his family so he could help out financially: “like if we can bring that other son he is going to help me” (Hadidi, interview). Hadidi still found it difficult to adjust to the social implications of not having the income level she was accustomed to:

C: Do you hope to have close relationships with people or is there umm or are you happy with it just being more casual?

H: Yeah for sure but financially now I can’t you know friends—like the financial point of view it’s very hard
C: To have friends? Okay what makes it hard…the financial part?

H: I’m talking frankly like obviously we have our own traditions like when we have friends they gonna visit me, I’m gonna offer them things you know go for ...

C: Right, to host them?

H: So I can’t do that.

Jana also described her life as “luxurious” prior to resettlement: “Her husband’s father owned the factory and so they made a very comfortable living that Jana described as ‘luxurious.’ She had a comfortable house and a comfortable life” (Jana, interview summary). At the time of the interview, Jana lived a fairly middle-income life (owned a vehicle, rented a bungalow in an upper-middle income area). Jana spoke about how she was happy with how her life was going and how she liked the house she was in and the lifestyle she had developed. Purchasing a family vehicle gave her the opportunity to explore her neighbourhood more and allowed the family to take weekend trips out of town to visit friends.

Rehang described her socioeconomic status prior to resettlement as middle-upper-income and talked about how she had a very nice apartment in a good area. When conflict broke out in Syria and she had to move to Turkey, her financial status allowed her family to live in better accommodations compared to needing to live in a refugee camp:

C: Were you living in a camp in Turkey or did you have an apartment?

R: In houses we rented houses. No we didn’t stay in camp we don’t like to stay in camp. They asked us “do you prefer to stay in a camp?” No we didn’t stay in camp. No we are kind of people who like to work and to depend on ourselves in all circumstances.
C: Yeah so did it take a fair bit of money to live in an apartment ... in a house in a new country?

R: Yes. It’s very expensive and it was a nice apartment in a nice area.

Rehang attributed her success to hard work and made several references to her family preferring to depend on themselves. She did not position herself as someone who was simply grateful for what she was given or happy with remaining on social assistance. At the time of the interview, she was renting a house and because a few of her children were in their 20s and earned an income, her family found it manageable to accumulate financial stability and work towards owning their own house again which she had planned to do within a year’s time. Her only discontent was not running her own business as she did in Syria but she recognized that her time commitments to her family were temporary and that she would be able to return to fashion design and creation after she was more established in Canada.

Hala Sham revealed that her husband owned his own business:

H: We were very happy in our house but when the war started you know ...

C: Yeah things changed. What kind of house did you live in? What did you do?

H: Yeah my husband had his job and I used to raise the kids at home. He has his own job his business.

C: Oh okay, what was his business?

H: Like contractor, like building you know?

C: Building contractor?

H: Yeah.

Hala Sham described her house in Syria in a little more detail and demonstrated that having financial stability was integral to her ability to flee Syria:
H: In Syria its bigger and we have a new house and more beautiful nicer houses in Syria, yeah.

C: So then was it expensive having to move from Syria to Jordan?

H: You know like, they entered Jordan when they brought them the money they let them in.

Having the funds needed to bribe border guards and then resettle in Jordan was important for Hala Sham’s family. Acknowledging that the move was expensive and still being able to pay it off was an important indicator of her financial standing prior to resettlement.

After moving to Canada, Hala Sham lived in the same initial townhouse complex as Layail upon resettlement. The complex was in a pocket of the downtown that was undergoing revitalization but the actual housing was crowded and in more of a transitional area. After a year, she moved into a detached rental home in a different part of the downtown that was undergoing a major revitalization effort. It was close to schools and the turnover in the rental market was much lower compared to her previous housing arrangement.

Rimas lived a moderate life as well. Her interview summary stated:

She and her husband eventually rented their own house and lived a comfortable yet modest life together. They owned a car which was not common for most people in their area but it was necessary for their livelihood as her husband worked as a taxi driver while she took care of the house. (Rimas, interview summary)

Rimas and her family had to live in a refugee camp but were able to arrange to be sent to a neighbouring city so they could be close to their extended family. (If a refugee has family already resettled, efforts are typically made to locate the extended family nearby
as part of the “family reunification” strategy which is based on the premise that being close to family fosters the foundation for positive social capital growth and an overall more positive resettlement experience.) After a year, they relocated to be even closer to their family in the city where this study took place. Rimas’ financial situation has been maintained to some extent after resettlement:

Rimas and her husband have plans to save money and move into a town house. They would like a backyard so their children have space to move around. They have applied for subsidized housing to achieve this goal and are awaiting their paperwork. They have purchased a car since arriving to Canada and Rimas’s husband works as a driver for a ride-sharing company. They are very happy with their situation and explained that it is better here in Canada than it was in Syria. They have enough money for their car, their apartment, and even money to socialize. They were also approved for a credit card and so they have a security in their day to day spending. Rimas and her husband believe that they are done having children. They explained that children cost money and they want to have enough money to live comfortably. (Rimas, interview summary)

Rimas and her family did have to live in a refugee camp for three years, but the decision to do so was an active choice and it was based on increasing their family’s financial status:

Since her husband was a taxi driver, he was allowed to pass into Turkey for his job without any issue. Rimas and her daughter entered through an arranged smuggling across the border and eventually reunited with her husband and extended family. Her husband’s family rented a house in Turkey where everyone lived together. Here, Rimas gave birth to her second child, a son, who is now 5
years old. After living with extended family for a year in Turkey, Rimas’s husband needed to relocate closer to where he was working and since he was making regular taxi commutes between the refugee camp and the Turkish border, the family moved into the refugee camp for the next three years. (Rimas, interview summary)

After settling into Canada with her husband and children, Rimas had plans to move into a suburban neighbourhood and return to living the comfortable life that she and her husband had begun to establish for themselves.

The mothers who came from comfortable lifestyles in terms of their economic situation managed to maintain their financial standing to some extent after resettlement. Even Hadidi who was not satisfied with her current economic situation had plans to increase her family’s income in a fairly short amount of time. The rest of the participants came from middle and lower income situations (rented, worked jobs that were not stable, were able to meet their needs but not exceed them, had to live in a refugee camp when the conflict around Syria took place rather than being able to rent an apartment nearby).

Weeam commented on her life prior to resettlement and prior to the conflict: “Before the war but when the war erupted you know ... before the war my husband used to work like to do farming and like we lived a normal life in the country” (Weeam, interview). Weeam first resettled to a small apartment in a transitional neighbourhood. She had difficulties with her neighbours and although she lived close enough for her children to walk to school, the walk was on a busy street. After a year, Weeam had moved to a townhouse and although the specific complex she lived in had a reputation for being overcrowded and neglected in terms of building upkeep, the surrounding neighbourhood had more family-style housing where people owned homes and remained
in them for long periods of time. Weeam explained that although the move was welcomed, the increased expenses were difficult to manage: “First of all it was very hard for us to move but we felt comfortable because it’s wider it’s bigger and there is ... to have the hydro was very expensive there the bill and the hydro bill” (Weeam, interview). At the time of our interview, Weeam’s phone had been cut off because she was unable to pay her bill. She was exploring options to arrange for food and clothing donations to help her through until she could figure out a way to cover her expenses.

Layail described her life before the conflict as well, using the term “moderate living” (Layail, interview) to explain that her family’s needs were met but they did not live an extravagant life. She explained that when they moved to Lebanon, her husband would work and not be paid what was initially agreed upon and so the family rapidly lost money. A year after resettling in Canada, Layail had moved from a rented townhouse in a transitional part of the downtown core to a rented single family home in a neighbourhood that was undergoing revitalization. Her house was sparsely furnished (there was a small grill placed on the floor in the kitchen that one of her daughters was preparing food on) but it was more spacious than her previous residence and she was in a better neighbourhood.

Fatima, like many participants, described her life as “comfortable.” Fatima explained that her husband was a student in his first year of postsecondary school and that he sold scarves on the side to supplement their income while they were living in Syria. Fatima lived with her mother-in-law and her husband was usually away for months at a time because his school was three hours away from where he lived. When she and her husband decided to flee, they went to live in a refugee camp (another indicator of having a lower income level, based on what other participants have described). At the time of our
interview, Fatima lived in a high-rise rental apartment in the downtown core which was close to many amenities including her language classes. She and her husband had no plans to leave their apartment. She explained that although her life was not as comfortable in Canada compared to Syria before the war, it was worth the sacrifice for her children to grow up in a safer situation than they were previously in. Her interview summary described her decision to apply for refugee status:

When asked why she didn’t stay in Turkey with them, Fatima explained that she wanted her children to have a better life than her and her husband. In order to provide this for her children, she needed to sacrifice what was comfortable and familiar. (Fatima, interview summary)

Mariam also lived in the same downtown high-rise as Fatima and described her life before the war forced her to flee. Again, she described her previous lifestyle as “comfortable” although she and her husband did not own land and her husband’s job was at a clothing store:

After 3 months, they realized that their situation was not improving. Her siblings remained in Syria because they owned their own land and houses so there was an incentive for them to keep what they owned. Since Mariam and her husband did not own any land or housing, and since they lived in an area that they felt was becoming too dangerous, they decided to leave in pursuit of a safer life. (Mariam, interview summary)

Mariam and her family moved into a refugee camp and although this may have been an indication of having a lower income level, she was able to afford to hire a private tutor for her children so they could receive extra education while in the refugee camp. She explained that this was a common practice and that the price was fairly affordable.
Warda lived in the same downtown high-rise that many participants lived in. Her situation was unique in that she only had one daughter and her daughter was entering secondary school at the end of the school year. Again, like most participants, she described her life in Syria before the war as “comfortable” as she stayed home to raise her daughter while her husband worked for a shoe manufacturing company. Her financial status limited her family in terms of how they could seek safety when the war in Syria broke out:

When the war broke out in Syria, she and her family fled to Turkey to start a new life. Her in-laws and extended family moved into an apartment and Warda, her husband, and her daughter moved into a refugee camp because they could not afford the housing. (Warda, interview summary)

At the time of the interview, Warda’s husband was waiting to hear back about the success of a job interview that he had. Warda also had plans to work but was not sure what she would do specifically. She enjoyed her apartment but was on a list for subsidized housing and she explained that if she could find a suitable house through the subsidy program, she would move. Warda’s life was similar to what it was before she moved to Canada. She had enough money to meet her needs and she had some plans to enhance her income, but her plans did not seem to indicate an urgency in increasing her income level.

Within this small sample of refugee mothers, it appeared that those with financial stability prior to resettlement were able to preserve their financial situation upon resettlement or at least have clear arrangements to rapidly increase their wealth so they could return to an income status that was more familiar to them. They were also able to leverage their income to provide safer and more comfortable living conditions while they were undergoing the process to claim refugee status. Conversely, the women who were
accustomed to less economic stability experienced less economic stability after resettlement but did not seem upset by it. They were grateful for what they had and they were comfortable in maintaining their current financial situations. Bourdieu (1986) explained the relationship between economic capital and other forms of capital (social and cultural), noting that for any use to be made of either, both need to exist to an extent:

The real logic of the functioning of capital, the conversions from one type to another, and the law of conservation which governs them cannot be understood unless two opposing but equally partial views are superseded: on the one hand, economism [sic], which, on the grounds that every type of capital is reducible in the last analysis to economic capital, ignores what makes the specific efficacy of the other types of capital, and on the other hand, semilogism (nowadays represented by structuralism, symbolic interactionism, or ethnomethodology), which reduces social exchanges to phenomena of communication and ignores the brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics. (p. 24)

The field that women were in prior to migration was heavily connected to the economic conditions that the women experienced before the conflict in Syria began. It also reinforced habitus among each participant with regard to how they perceived their post-resettlement situation and their plans to remain living with the financial situation they were in or to work towards improving it.

**Housing Choices**

For the first year of resettlement, refugees were provided with either housing that they did not choose (as in the case of privately sponsored refugees) or were offered a selection of housing listings to choose from (as in the case of government-sponsored refugees). Either way, their choices for housing were fairly limited. Refugees were able to
arrange their own housing if they decided to, but amid all of the things they needed to do so quickly in their new country, many relied on the housing options that had already been vetted for them. After a year, the lease on their housing allowed them to renew if they and the landlord agreed to it, or move without any consequence. Quite a few of the participants in this study moved after a year, and their reasons were typically tied to increasing their ability to build social and cultural capital. All of the housing that the participants lived in were rentals and most of them could be considered to be “affordable housing” regardless of location.

As Reay (1998) explains, “Shifting understandings of social class from those rooted in location to encompass understandings embedded in activity reveal the crucial part mothers play in social-class reproduction” (p. 167). On one hand, the social class reproduction resulted in continued renting and only a few families had made gains in their employment opportunities and family income. On the other hand, there were non-monetary gains that were important to the participants in terms of enhancing their future prospects for their families. Many of the participants in this study lived in the same high-rise rental apartment in the downtown core and their reason for doing so was that it was within walking distance (less than a 5-minute walk, door to door) to their language classes. Being in the core also placed them close to public transit, settlement service agencies, and community and cultural events that often take place in the downtown park or outside of City Hall. Some of the participants were originally housed in this apartment, while others relocated to it after their first 12-month lease had expired. The excerpts that follow show how refugee mothers, along with their families, exercised agency in housing choice and worked within their field to make the most gains possible.
Rimas was originally placed in housing in a neighbouring city and was grateful for the apartment she was set up in, however, after a year, she and her husband decided to relocate to a downtown high-rise that several other Syrian refugee families lived in:

After a year had passed, the family relocated to a high-rise building in the downtown core of [name of city] where they could be close to their language school. Previously, they had to take a long bus ride to get to their language school and so their desire to learn English quickly, motivated their move. Rimas’s sister also moved into the building so her social support system remained intact. (Rimas, interview summary)

Warda’s family was originally resettled in a city that was roughly 6 hours from her current residence:

Warda’s husband was struggling to find a job in [name of city] and the family was finding the cold weather to be difficult to deal with. Upon learning that a close family friend (referred to as a “cousin” but not related by blood) was moving to [name of city], Warda and her family moved to [name of city] and live in a high-rise apartment building in the downtown core. They are walking distance to their ESL school, public transportation, and many amenities. ... Warda and her family found [name of city] to be welcoming and they found that they received more social support from community members compared to their time in [name of previous city]. (Warda, interview summary)

Hadidi was offered an apartment in the same building and appreciated that it was close to the hospital as her husband was ill and needed regular treatment. Her goal for her family, however, was to move someplace quieter:

C: You don’t want to stay here? Where would you like to be?
H: A quiet, a quiet place, a safer place. I haven’t known this area before. ... So when he goes out at night, I’m scared.

Weeam relocated as well. In her initial interview, she was having problems with her neighbours and she lived on a busy street, however she was close to language classes and the EYC. She relocated to a quieter neighbourhood and her new townhouse was a safer walk to her children’s new school. Conversely, Hala Sham did not have much control in her decision to move. She experienced a kitchen fire in her previous residence and after misunderstandings and issues with her insurance company, she was forced to leave and seek new housing: “It’s not better it’s more expensive here. But we were forced to leave- move out because we had some sort of fight with the landlord so we’re forced to move” (Hala Sham interview). When probed further, Hala Sham explained that the abrupt need to move was hard on her children too in terms of their social relationships and their experiences with transitioning to a new school:

Because they built their own friends there, they have their own friends there you know. And there they think that its discipline, like if someone like hits another one they complain or they gonna talk to him, they gonna limit that guy. But here they say “it’s okay, it’s okay”—they don’t care a lot. (Hala Sham, interview)

Layail, who originally lived near Hala Sham, moved into the same neighbourhood that Hala Sham relocated to when her lease expired. She explained that the house she was in at the time of the interview was nicer with bigger rooms and more affordable rent. She was happy with the move, but unlike Hala Sham, the decision to move was her own, and her family’s, as opposed to being forced to move abruptly without the time and mindset to choose a rental carefully.
In addition to those who chose to relocate (or were forced to relocate in the case of Hala Sham), some of the participants made the conscious effort to stay in their original housing arrangements. Jana lived in a nice house and her rent was frozen because her landlord was one of her resettlement sponsors. Similarly, Rehang’s interview summary described her contentedness with the housing she was originally provided with:

She loves her house and has no plans for leaving, as she explained that moving countries was enough work and stress, and so now that she has her house the way she likes it, she is staying. She said the only way she would move is if it would benefit her sons in their employment. (Rehang, interview summary)

Fatima’s initial housing situation (the downtown high-rise) was also preferable to her. Her interview summary read:

Fatima has made friends with six other families in her building and enjoys having people that she can connect with and communicate with. They discuss school for their children and their common experiences as refugees living in a new country.

(Fatima, interview summary)

Mariam was in a similar situation: “Mariam and her family moved into a high-rise apartment and have remained there ever since. They like the convenience of their location since it is close to language schools and other downtown amenities” (Mariam, interview summary).

Participants’ choice of housing was informed primarily by location to language classes, which was important in accessing cultural capital, and their closeness to other family and friends, which was necessary for building their social capital, particularly in the sense of bonding as Ager and Strang (2008) describe. Housing choice could be viewed as marker of exercising agency, which was important to acknowledge when
working with refugees and attempting to understand their experience. Returning to theoretical approaches in *Not Born a Refugee Woman*, Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al. explain:

The multiple strategies for agency employed by refugee women and their resilience are being explored and documented. In circumstances where refugee women’s personal narratives are heard without fear of their persecution, the generic category of the refugee woman begins to break down, and instead we hear voices of individual women who have hopes and fears for their welfare, and especially that of their families and their communities. We learn about the strategies utilized by women to maintain their sense of self identity and their pragmatism in planning for and carrying out the tasks of everyday life for their families. (p. 163)

The housing choices that most of the refugee mothers in this study made were a clear example of exercising their agency and working within their own *field of possibilities* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) to enhance their social and cultural goods. The mothers in this study were unable to have choice over certain aspects of their resettlement, such as the country they were sent to or the sponsorship program they were placed in, but they were able to leverage their housing arrangement to their advantage.

**Family Situation**

One aspect of life that affected refugee mothers on a day-to-day basis was their family situation, particularly as it pertained to having new babies and caring for sick husbands. Although the argument could be made that one does have control over becoming pregnant and giving birth to a baby, given the cultural and religious beliefs that the mothers in this study held, and the already-turbulent time that resettlement was, for
the intents of this study, I considered becoming pregnant to be a circumstance beyond which the participants had control over. In fact, only one participant mentioned a desire to limit the number of children she was going to have, while others spoke of a passive desire to stop having children but quickly offered an open stance towards the possibility if it was “meant to be.” In addition to having babies, there were some women who had husbands that were ill and needed frequent treatment at the local hospital or at hospitals out of town. The impact of all of this tended to be a lag in being able to learn English and a disruption to the time the women had to pursue other interests such as building social connections or seeking employment.

Hadidi explained that her husband, a former orthopaedic surgeon, was ill and that she was struggling to assist him. Her youngest son came to Canada with her and her older son was in Austria attempting to enter Canada. Her older son was originally denied entrance as a refugee since he was not in imminent danger so the family was trying to bring him to Canada through other immigration programs. If Hadidi’s older son could get permission to live in Canada, he would be able to help the family by working and contributing to the household income, and by taking his father to medical appointments and assisting in his care:

The Canadian government agreed to receive us so I came with my son. I tried to bring even my son with me to come here because even his dad is sick—my older son to help me with my husband who is sick but it was also hard here the government didn’t approve it. (Hadidi, interview transcript)

Hadidi had older children and in particular, she had a son who was willing to join the family in Canada to care for her husband since her youngest son needed to focus on his studies. However, since her older son had already moved away from the family before
Hadidi, her husband, and youngest son felt the need to claim refugee status, her older son was not able to enter Canada through the same channels at the time of our interview. Warda’s husband was also facing health issues, and recently, she became afflicted with diabetes which was difficult for her to manage:

Warda’s husband had health issues and so did she, but the health issues seemed manageable: Since arriving to Canada, she had been diagnosed with diabetes. Her husband has had diabetes for over 20 years now but adding her diagnosis into her daily life has made things more difficult. Warda takes care of the family and the apartment but finds herself more easily fatigued and worries that this might affect her ability to gain employment. (Warda, interview summary)

Warda explained that it was difficult for her to go to language classes because she was still trying to figure out what would work for her body and how to manage her medication and diet. Another aspect of managing health issues was that they required time to attend appointments and with that came a certain lack of flexibility since the appointments were booked on one’s behalf, regardless of whether or not the participant had language classes or job interviews. None of the mothers however, voiced complaints about the time constraints that medical appointments put on their family and they were all grateful to have the opportunity to receive healthcare. Weeam noted that Canada’s healthcare system was one of the attractive features of coming to Canada despite the difficulties of beginning the refugee resettlement process: “I wanted a good life for my kids. ... Also, my husband needs so many surgeries” (Weeam, Interview transcript). Still however, there was a time cost to consider and since the mothers tended to do the caring work and the mental planning to run their households (Griffith & Smith, 2005), their time became even more limited. Griffith and Smith (2005) devote an entire chapter to the
coordinating efforts that mothers partake in and explained that institutions such as schools function based on how well a mother can coordinate all other aspects of her and her family’s life in order to serve the scheduling needs of the school. I would add that language schools also benefit (or struggle) based on the coordinating efforts that women engage in.

In addition to being the ones who made up for lost time contributions to the family due to a partner being ill, mothers in this study also faced major time constraints due to pregnancy and childbirth. Some of the mothers in this study were ready to stop having children after their most recent pregnancy, and others did not mention a desire to stop having children but did talk about the challenges that having a new baby brought in terms of stalling language classes and increasing isolation.

Hala Sham had a house full of children when I interviewed her and then she announced that she was pregnant with twins:

H: To me, no more babies.
C: This one said no more babies? [referring to Hala Sham’s youngest daughter]
H: She knows she’s crazy cause she’s pregnant with two.
C: Oh this one because she’s the baby right now. And what do you think? Do you want more babies after the twins?
H: No that’s enough.
C: You’re done. No more babies?
H: Maybe one more. It’s up to God. (Hala Sham, interview transcript)

Hala Sham explained that she had to stop taking language classes with her pregnancy because being pregnant with twins proved to be difficult on her body, especially while still having to care for her other children.
Layail was in a similar situation where she needed to stop attending language classes due to pregnancy:

L: She’s talking now here, here, when she came here she started going to school—but when she got pregnant she stopped going.

C: Oh she had to stop; oh right, right. So what were you going to school for before you were pregnant?

L: To learn the language.

C: Learn the language ...

L: Year maybe she has to talk ...

C: How far did you come with your language classes?

L: I just attended the first year and once I got pregnant I stopped going to school

C: Oh and are you planning on going back? Or do you know when you might go back if you do?

L: Once I, once she like have daycare for her I will go.

C: Right.

L: We need to learn the language like well we need to learn to speak. She can get into daycare when she’s two. (Layail, Interview transcript)

Layail was invested in learning English but in order to attend classes, she needed childcare which was only offered when her child reached a certain age. Her impression was that her daughter needed to be two years old to qualify for a daycare spot which would put Layail 2 years in delay of learning English if she did not get pregnant in that time again. When speaking with some of the facilitators who worked in community programming for refugee women, I learned that there were extra barriers for refugee women when it came to needing childcare because there was only a given number of
spaces for children to be placed in. Furthermore, because many of the families being served by settlement services in the area were quite large (more than five children) and children were often aged very close together, finding care with enough spaces for an entire family often added to the difficulty of the task.

Bourdieu’s understanding of the field was important here, because the field of resettlement, although meant to be available for all, was designed by the powerful and the privileged without all of the foresight necessary to be fully serving the people it was aiming to serve. Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) ideas about self-exclusion in education were also useful, although the language classes are a different context than the French academic system that Bourdieu’s work initially focused on. Still however, the ideas were relevant and helped to illustrate how self-exclusion was an illusion:

As soon as one observes that most of those excluded from studying at the various levels of education eliminate themselves before being examined, and that the proportion of those whose elimination is thus masked by the selection overtly carried out differs according to social class. In every country, the inequities between the classes are incomparably greater when measured by the probabilities of candidature (calculated on the bases of the proportion of children in each social class who reach a given educational level, after equivalent previous achievement) than when measured by the probabilities of passing. Thus, previous performances being equal, pupils of working-class origin are more likely to “eliminate themselves” from secondary education by declining it than to eliminate themselves once they have entered, and a fortiori more likely not to enter than to be eliminated from it by the explicit sanction of examination failure. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 153)
Based on the difficulties that came with running a household and caring for young babies, combined with the field set in such a way that required mothers to be away from classes for the first year of their baby’s life due to childcare restrictions (based on information shared by mothers, not by the actual services), it seemed reasonable that a form of exclusion (masked as “self”-exclusion) was probable. Being forced out of language classes to care for a new baby was also linked to isolation for one participant:

Mariam recently gave birth to her fourth child which has meant that she cannot attend language classes until her daughter is old enough to attend child care. With her other children all in school, she finds her time away from her other children to be long and her days to be isolating. She wants to hire a private tutor to learn English while she is at home tending to her baby and she is also considering organizing an English language learning group within her apartment building so others in the building with babies can connect and learn together. She is currently at Level 1 in English and does not want to fall behind after being away so long to be with her baby. (Mariam, interview summary)

Mariam had plans to interrupt her isolation and work on learning the language, but of course, doing so would require her own financial resources and the time necessary to arrange language classes. Regardless of having a new baby, the value placed on learning language was still very high and the intent to start classes as soon as possible was present in most women in this study. If exclusion did take place however, the field only became more isolating and limited as mothers would not have the skills they would need to engage in the wider society and in the workforce should they decide to enter it. Rehang, on the other hand, did attend language classes while also caring for her family and household. Rather than isolation, she described feeling overwhelmed with the
expectations that were placed on her and she lamented for the life she had where she had
time to be creative and do things other than run the house. She had her most recent baby
only two weeks before arriving in Canada and since then, her baby was old enough to
attend daycare while her other children attended school:

R: [Holding a picture of her family on the day they arrived in Canada] She’s 2 weeks [referring to her daughter].
C: She was 2 weeks old when you came to Canada? Wow! Wow. So when did you have all your kids? Were your first two in Syria?
R: All of them in Syria except [name of baby] in Turkey.
C: So [name of baby] is from Turkey. Okay and so you travelled right after you had a baby? How was that?
R: We are used to hard work you know? Hard times and hard work we are used to. ... So I’m not, I don’t have even have single moment, I’m always busy you know in the kitchen. I wake up in the morning, I walk my kids to school and then I go to my school.
C: Okay language school?
R: Yes. And I take [name of daughter] with me to the guardian ... the uh ...
C: Daycare?
R: Daycare and they arrive at 12 then I start doing, and then I have things for pursuing, I don’t have one moment. This is my life here. It’s very hard. My life is very hard here in Canada. But in Syria it was very comfortable. (Rehang, interview transcript)

On top of running her house with a young baby and attending language classes, Rehang was also implicated in her husband’s and daughter’s health issues:
It took us a year you know to do the registration and to be interviewed. We came here just for the sake of my husband to get treated because he is sick and also my little daughter she has disease in her liver. (Rehang, Interview transcript)

Rehang’s life was completely different in Canada compared to what she experienced in Syria. Her sense of self and her sense of purpose were put on hold while she worked to transition herself and each member of her family into their new lives. Rehang was working to build cultural capital by attending language classes, however, the habitus associated with being a woman, a wife, and a mother, was limiting and confined her to the domestic realm anytime she was not in language classes. In order to build more social capital in the wider community, Rehang would need to interrupt the field she was implicated in which she did not see happening for a while.

The theme capital versus circumstance illustrated that although mothers came to Canada with varying amounts of capital that could contribute to having a smoother or more difficult transition to their new country, there were also many situations that were beyond their control that played a role in how mothers experience their transition to a new country and in their abilities to grow their social and cultural capital. The circumstances that women found themselves in which impeded their ability to take or continue language classes was a gendered experience and, based on other research studies (specifically exploring Karen refugee women learning a new language), it was a typical experience. Specifically, Watkins, Razee, and Richters (2012) conducted a study in Australia and noted:

In what appears to be something of a catch-22, women required English language to interact effectively with services and thus be successful in their activities as individuals, mothers, wives and carers, but these responsibilities meant they were
unable to devote adequate time to education. (p. 132)

Griffith and Smith’s (2005) discussion about the mothering discourse helped to explain why mothers engaged in such confining work and Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and field helped explain why such work was taken for granted and not necessarily challenged when programming was created to serve mothers undergoing resettlement. Furthermore, the system under which refugees arrived appeared to offer different trajectories in how easy or difficult resettlement and access to resources could be. According to interviews with settlement personnel, at the time of this study, Canada was one of the only countries that had private sponsorship programs for refugees. The differences in the programs seemed to offer differences in the amount of social contacts, financial resources (in the form of home furnishings, access to food and clothing, and discounts on rent), and even cultural capital when considering that building social networks exposes one to more cultural capital-building opportunities).

Erel (2010) provides important commentary on Bourdieu’s ideas of forms of capital, focused on the idea of “human cultural capital” as proposed by Nee and Sanders (2001). Erel (2010) explains that human cultural capital was intended to objectively view the forms of capital possessed by migrants and incorporated forms of social mobility into this understanding. Erel notes, however, that “It neglects that measures of cultural capital are shaped by policy constructions of national economic interests, and protectionist professional policies. More generally these approaches are limited by their reliance on ‘methodological nationalism’” (2010, p. 646). The capital that refugees brought with them (their educational and economic backgrounds) was also implicated in their acquisition of capital after resettlement. Those who were financially well-off prior to resettlement tended to expect to be better off after resettlement and took methodical
approaches to enhance their financial situations. The connections between types of capital and the circumstances under which forms of capital were carried over, developed, accessed, used, and passed down were difficult to pull apart but worthy of exploration, as this study aimed to do from a Bourdieuan perspective. Erel (2010) made a similar observation:

Social capital is important for understanding the ways in which individuals are positioned in fields. Yet Bourdieu’s theory enables a thicker description as it engages with how economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital interact. It also enables a deeper description by differentiating between different states of institutionalized, embodied and symbolic capital. (pp. 646-647)

The women in this study all shared a common life event (being a Syrian mother and needing to claim refugee status which brought them to Canada), however, their experiences of how this event played out and would continue to play out was heavily linked to how their forms of capital were interacting and the social field and institutionalized conditions under which such interactions took place. The decisions refugee mothers made and the intentions they had were important to successful resettlement experiences, but at the same time, such decisions and intentions were limited.

**Chapter Summary**

After analysing data provided by refugee mothers, three themes emerged which included *mothering versus belonging, cultural capital and school engagement*, and *capital versus circumstance*. These themes were explored using a Bourdieuan perspective and where a gendered approach to exploration was required, I turned to work by Griffith and Smith (2005) and Reay (1998). The themes that emerged from the
discussions I had with refugee mothers worked together to help explain the wider context that refugee mothers were in while they were working to transition their children to school. Using rich interviews and deep exploration, it became clear that the process of sending children to school in a new country was implicated in an intricate social field where forms of capital converged and worked to make the process more or less difficult. When combining the information provided by refugee mothers with the information gathered from attending the EYC transition to school program and speaking with program personnel, it became clear that knowing about schools in a new society was only a small fraction of the transition to school process. Mothers’ own social connections, commitments to motherhood and wifehood, interactions between home and the school, personal educational background and aspirations, personal and family accumulations of capital, and life circumstances were all at work as mothers sent their children off to a new school to learn and hopefully thrive in their new country. Understanding at the very least that there is more to school transitions than feeding information to mothers about what schools expect was an important step in policy aimed at successful school transitions. Furthermore, understanding the heavily gendered experience that school transitions are part of was important in addressing gaps that could contribute to refugee families being inadequately served by their communities and schools.
CHAPTER 6: INEQUITIES IN THE FIELD

Findings and Discussion

This chapter first introduces the social and political climate that existed when data collection for this study first began. Next, the chapter explains how being a “refugee” in Canada did not entitle each member of that group to the same or, at times, even similar experiences. The policy underlying Canada’s refugee resettlement program and which was underlying local service interactions with refugees was fraught with disparities. These disparities were not intentional, as they allowed for greater numbers of refugees to be resettled and they allowed for the local community to positively interact with many of the families that were resettled. However, these advantages nonetheless, were associated with an uneven field that was noticed by those that worked closely with refugees. It should be noted that the Syrian refugee mothers featured in this study did not explicitly acknowledge the inequities that this chapter discusses. Their implication in their own situations, as well as their funds of capital, contributed to a general acceptance of the “status quo”. When placing some of the comments made by the mothers within the context of what community and settlement personnel noted, the inequities that refugee mothers face, become more obvious.

Social and Political Context

This research took place at a unique time in Canada’s commitment to resettling refugees. During the planning stage for this research study, the Canadian government had changed from the Conservative party to the Liberal party. Shortly before the election took place, a photo of a young refugee boy drowned in water after fleeing Syria with his family had surfaced in the media. This photo sparked national conversations about Canada’s role in humanitarian efforts and the social climate surrounding support for
refugee resettlement grew drastically. As the social climate began to empathize with refugees, specifically Syrian refugees, the Liberal party was elected and part of the Liberal party’s platform was a promise to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees who were in crisis by the end of 2015 and then continue with increased resettlement thereafter. In addition to government sponsorship, private and blended visa office referred sponsorship increased drastically and aided in the effort to quickly resettle families:

We went from working with eight sponsorship groups to sponsor about 56 refugees in any given year, to now working with over 220 sponsorship groups. And we’ve had close to 600 arrivals since April of last year [across Ontario]. So that all happened after the photo of Alan Kurdi surfaced in the media in September of 2015. (Maria, settlement service personnel)

The resettlement effort began in November 2015 and data collection for this study began in July 2016 when major resettlement efforts were still taking place and sponsoring agencies were shifting focus from getting refugees housed in Canada to engaging in the resettlement process and helping refugee families establish new lives in their new country. A second round of interviews with refugee mothers took place in November 2017 after many had already settled and begun to establish themselves in their new communities. By this time, the social and political climate had slowed its enthusiasm for new refugee sponsorship and the focus was more about following success stories of refugees who had resettled in various communities. For example, news stories would occasionally write a piece about a refugee that successfully started a business or a family that was experiencing success despite refusing government financial support (see for example, Craigie, 2017; Sharkey & Bueckert, 2016). Of course, these stories were not indicative of what many were experiencing, but they were positive in nature and in high
contrast to the rhetoric coming out of the United States at the time, which was undergoing its own election fueled by immigration as a main topic.

**Inequities in Sponsorship Programs**

Those who worked in settlement services commented on how there were significant differences in the types of programs that refugees were sponsored through. The consensus among all interviewees was that refugees arriving under a private sponsorship program or through the blended visa office referred program (which provides a sponsoring group for social support and part of the financial support) had a much easier time with their resettlement compared to those that arrive as government assisted refugees:

So it’s really amazing for private sponsorship, the support that privately sponsored refugees receive, whereas government sponsored refugees, their settlement is the responsibility of reception centres across Canada. And so, those are reception centres that are funded by the government to provide settlement support. So usually it’s one case worker who’s assigned to 35, 50 plus families to help with that orientation. And as you can imagine, it’s not as personal, they don’t get to build that same relationship and have access to that network within the community as quickly as a privately sponsored family would. So what we’ve seen time and time again, is the rate of successful integration in terms of people

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2 Although it was the consensus within this study that privately sponsored refugees had an easier time with resettlement, received more tangible support such as house furnishings, and had better social support, this was reflective of the current state of refugees in a small area in southern Ontario. Informal conversations with refugees from other resettlement efforts have explained the opposite situation. This disconnect suggests caution in generalizing the experiences of refugees while respecting the voices that are present in this current study.
becoming self-reliant more quickly, people finding jobs more quickly, people feeling a greater sense of independence comes a lot more quickly through private sponsorship than it would through other avenues that other refugees arrive to Canada. (Maria, settlement service personnel)

This concern about types of sponsorship programs was also expressed in terms of the impact it had on refugees within their own cultural and ethnic group. One settlement service worker talked about the tension that began to form when refugees saw economic and social advantages that some refugees had compared to others:

The private, most of them are well educated and they pay the money. The government has nothing to do with them, nothing. They brought their money we hold the money, and the government, and we divide it for 12 months and we give them a cheque. They know that the government for this refugee gets money for 12 months, and they don’t [inaudible]. Most importantly, the group sponsors, either churches or Mosques, those are the luckiest, very lucky, because aside of the financial support from the government, they have another financial support from their groups and they have somebody to drive them, to take care of them, to visit, to take them to the community events, they have friends, always. (Sarah, settlement service personnel)

Beyond tensions among refugees resettled from similar areas, in this case through the Syrian resettlement effort, there were concerns about the reception that refugees from other areas of the world received:

There’s definitely been a focus on the Syrian resettlement. And that’s been driven nationally, that’s the messaging, right? “We are resettling Syrian refugees” and no byline, that you know, there’s also, there have always been refugees coming to
Canada and they continue to come from other countries too. And so this big up
swelling of communities wanting to engage with refugees has been really focused
on the Syrians and it has caused problems. And it has made people who come
from other countries as refugees feel like, “what about us? We’ve had the same
experiences, we have the same needs, we need the same supports,” but I think that
organizations in this community have been very good and we always try to
reinforce the message that there are Syrians and there are this other group of
refugees that come from other countries who also need the same supports.

(Sabrina, settlement service personnel)

In a caution about how refugees (specifically women refugees) were commonly
represented, Loughry (2008) explains that “refugee populations have most often been
seen as homogenous groups” (p. 166). Lennette and Boddy (2013) also explain that “The
‘refugee’ term often overlooks distinctive stories and circumstances beyond preconceived
classifications, meaning that women's social worlds can be examined out of context” (p.
73). Settlement service personnel showed how cultural background could have an effect
on how refugees were welcomed through policy, and that even when cultural
backgrounds were the same, socioeconomic trajectories could still differ depending on
the method of entry that a refugee used. Furthermore, within this study, building an
understanding of variances in social and cultural capital, as well as gender and
motherhood broke down assumptions about who refugees were. Yet, the united aspect of
refugees, besides forced migration, was still their bestowed status of “Other.”

Refugee mothers also provided details which showed the disparities that refugees
experienced based on the program they arrived under. Nobody in this study complained
about the program through which they were admitted to Canada. However, those who
arrived as part of a private or blended program made statements indicating how their transition to Canada was positive and that they felt supported in many aspects of life. Bourdieu’s concept of social capital was heavily implicated here because the main difference in each sponsorship program was the level of social support and social contact (not financial support) that each participant received. It should be noted however that private sponsors were not limited in how much money or resources they were allowed to offer a refugee family; they were simply bound to offering a minimum financial contribution. Therefore, private sponsors could offer more to their sponsored family than what a government-sponsored refugee might receive.

I did not probe or ask direct questions about the mothers’ (and their family’s) sponsorship beyond the actual program they were sponsored under due to the ethical implications associated with refugee-status maintenance. In many cases, the participants offered information about their sponsorship status or gave information that offered a clearer understanding of the challenges or benefits of each sponsorship type without me asking any direct questions. See Table 9.

Table 9

*Participant Refugee Sponsorship Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of sponsorship</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Fatima, Hadidi, Hala Sham, Mariam, Weeam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR)</td>
<td>Layail, Rehang, Warda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Jana, Rimas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To begin, Fatima, Hadidi, Hala Sham, Mariam, and Weeam were all sponsored by the government. This means that they were placed into initial transitional housing when they arrived. In the city where this study took place, such housing constituted a building in the downtown park area known as Reception House; however, because so many refugees arrived so quickly, an overflow housing arrangement was made at a local hotel that became very well known as the place where all the refugees are staying (see Monteiro, 2016). When more permanent arrangements could be made, the government-sponsored refugees were placed into more permanent housing for full lease term of 1 year. Hadidi explained that she struggled while living in the large hotel as she did not have much in common with the people around her. She commented that she did not form close relationships with the people in the hotel: “because how are they going to see each other every day, just say ‘hi.’ Yeah because of the difference in education you know- the level of education is different than me and the others” (Hadidi, interview transcript).

Furthermore, because Hadidi was sponsored by the government, she stated that she was not able to sponsor her other son to come to Canada to help with the family finances. Her understanding was that she would need to explore other options for his arrival to Canada as the government aspect of her sponsorship forfeited her ability to become a private sponsor.

Weeam was also a government-sponsored refugee and although she was fairly satisfied with her life after a year of living in Canada, her initial months were very difficult and isolated. She explained that she had tried to reach out to other women to make friends but nobody would respond to her and that she missed her family very much:

I abruptly, I found myself alone ... I tried to make friends with other parents, but I didn’t succeed in that. I gave them my phone numbers, I invited them to my house
but no one came. ... I felt very lonely. ... There is no one. I’m very annoyed here. There is no one I can complain to, talk to. This has an impact on me, and this is what cause the miscarriage that I had. ... They tried to find a psychiatrist for me. I’m very annoyed. I cry all the time. I go outside and still I’m not feeling comfortable. (Weeam, interview transcript)

Any assistance that Weeam or Hadidi would receive in terms of social support (beyond the friends that they made themselves which were hard for both women to find) would come from a caseworker. As interviews with resettlement service personnel indicated, the caseloads for each caseworker were high and did not allow for much in the way of unstructured social time where conversation and healing could take place. Hala Sham was lucky in the sense that she made friends with Layail and they both lived (and relocated) very close to one another. There was a need for building social connections beyond one’s cultural group so that the mothers could feel comfortable in their new country and could feel like a member of their new communities. Hala Sham explained that although her and Layail’s friendship has been positive for their sense of feeling at ease in their new neighbourhood, it was a bit of a hindrance in getting out and building new connections: “Because of this, we won’t be able to learn English because we speak Arabic. We should like, interact or sit with the Canadians here so that we can speak English” (Hala Sham, interview transcript).

The mothers who were privately sponsored or who were part of the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) program received a community of support upon arrival and even though the obligation for sponsoring citizens to provide social support was only for one year, the connections that are often made and the benefits from each connection can often surpass a year. For example, when I interviewed Layail after she had been in Canada for
over a year, a member of her sponsorship team was visiting. Jana was privately sponsored and had a smooth and sustainable resettlement experience. Her sponsors owned a nice house in a good neighbourhood that they offered to Jana for a low monthly rental rate. The private sponsors also froze the rent on the house after the lease had expired so Jana’s family could remain living there without having to increase their rental payments every year. Anytime Jana needed something, she could contact one of the members of her sponsoring team members and felt confident that they would assist her. Rehang did not know she was privately sponsored until she arrived in Canada:

We were surprised that the sponsors, not the government [referring to private sponsors] …we thought we were sponsored by the government. . . so they [private sponsors] were holding like papers slogan-sign at the airport “the family of Mohammed come to us.” They were . . . coming in the airport. They have pictures of us. (Rehang, interview)

Rimas’s situation shows how the stability that having a private sponsor brought, enabled her family to build even stronger relationships in their community by reconnecting with their cousin:

Rimas’s family ended up being privately sponsored and sent to live in [name of neighbouring city]. When they arrived in Canada, they were surrounded by their sponsors and offered assistance in every aspect of their life. They lived with sponsors for a week until an apartment was arranged for them. When they moved into their apartment, they were in stable enough of a living situation to be able to open their home to their cousin who also lived in the area. (Rimas, interview summary)
Rimas’s sponsors helped with transitioning her children to school and with every other aspect of life that she needed support in. After a year of living in a neighbouring city, Rimas moved to an apartment building in the city where this research took place where she would be even closer to family and ended up helping her sister move into the same apartment building. Her ability to build and sustain social connections was facilitated in part by the social support she initially received.

Ager and Strang (2008) described different types of integration that refugees experienced including *bonding* (building connections with other refugees or people from similar backgrounds), *bridging* (building connections with the wider community which helps in feeling a sense of belonging), and *linking* (building connections with social services and community groups). Elliot and Yusuf (2014) refer to these integration styles as forms of social capital because they involved building social networks and activating each network for a particular purpose. The bridging capital that private and blended sponsorship provides helped make the transition to living in a new society, a smooth one. This disparity in how refugees experienced transitioning to a new country had a major impact on the field that each participant was implicated in. Anheier, Gerhards, and Romo (1995) make a distinction in fields in a study of cultural fields in literary work:

> Of particular importance for cultural fields is the distinction between the field of restricted cultural production and the field of large-scale cultural production. Both fields differ to the extent to which economic and non-economic capital forms become dominant. The field of restricted production is relatively autonomous from market consideration. (p. 863)

Anheier et al. (1995) go on to note however that “any cultural product is ... a manifestation of economic and noneconomic capital” (p. 864) as the two are typically
linked. For example, the field, for those who had private sponsors, meant that their experiences in Canada were filled with social support, one-on-one assistance when needed (as opposed to needing to make an appointment with a case worker) and social connections with Canadians who had a vested interest (financially and symbolically) in their success in Canada. Along with the social benefits that privately sponsored refugees received (noneconomic goods, as Anheier et al. refer to), they were also offered economic advantages that arose out of these connections. For example, Jana received a competitive price on her rent and her landlord (who was also a member of her sponsorship team) held her rent at the same rate each year. Layail had a member of her sponsorship team visiting after she had just had a baby which gave her the opportunity to get information and social support as she cared for her growing family.

Sponsors are already cultural insiders, fluent in the dominant language, rich in resources, and wanting success for the families they support. As the settlement service personnel interviews showed, they help with everything from teaching the family how to use the utilities in their residence, to helping families begin language classes, gain employment, transition to school, and successfully participate in day-to-day living. When these “cultural products” (language, education, an understanding of the society and “rules of the game”) are enthusiastically provided, there are economic gains to be made as a result (getting a stable job, having the skills to negotiate a suitable price on housing rentals). This was in sharp contrast to the government-sponsored refugees who were provided with a case-worker and some brief orientation sessions about Canada. For those who were placed in the overflow hotel to reside for a few months, there were opportunities to build bonding connections with other refugee families; however, as
Hadidi noted, differences in personal backgrounds and values did not always make this possible.

Lamba and Krahn (2003) explored social capital and networks in Canadian refugees at a time when a hosting program was still being funded. The hosting program matched a government-sponsored refugee with a member of the community to help provide the social support aspect of the resettlement experience that private- and blended-sponsored refugees receive: “if refugees were linked with either a private sponsor or host volunteer on arrival, a majority found these network ties useful enough to maintain them beyond the initial stages of resettlement” (Lamba & Krahn, 2003, p. 348). At the time that this research was conducted, the hosting programs were not being funded by the federal government, although there was talk in local area of starting a volunteer-based program without funding. None of the government-sponsored refugees in this study spoke about a social connection with any Canadian or about any benefits that they received from being connected to anyone that was already living in Canada when they arrived. Similar to findings by Lamba and Krahn (2003), the benefits of social connections were far-reaching. Because such stark differences seemed to exist between refugees based on the way in which they were sponsored, it is important to always acknowledge that the field each refugee is implicated in is not always equal, even when it appears that their trajectory and reasons for resettlement are similar.

**Inequities in Timing and Age**

In addition to the type of program through which refugees entered Canada, the ages of children when they arrived to Canada could have an impact on their ability to successfully transition to school:
And I know, from the work with our partners at reception house, for those children that have been out of school for a number of years, or rather youth maybe, those kids kind of 12 and over, [school personnel] have real serious concerns. ... I think those who come younger have an easier transition, and better pathways for their future, and so I know for that particular, you know the older youth, really concerned about I think a gap in the system about what outcomes are really going to come for those kids. (Sabrina, settlement service personnel)

To add to the complexity of this issue, age and timing combined together to promote or mitigate successful school and family transitions on a financial level. Hadidi, who was a government-sponsored refugee, found out first hand that her son’s age put her family into a more difficult financial situation. Hadidi’s son experienced two years of interrupted schooling while the family was obtaining refugee status. Her son was 16 when he arrived in Canada (he was 18 at the time of the interview) and needed to be enrolled in secondary school when he arrived. He could not begin school for 3 months after resettling because there was a backlog with living in transitional housing at a local hotel in terms of organizing the transition to school and all of the paperwork that needed to go with it. The timing of when school started for each refugee family was largely based on the local region that a family was resettled to and although the local public board did attempt to expedite the process, Hadidi was initially resettled to a different city and her son did not benefit from this expedited process.

Furthermore, because Hadidi’s son was a full-time secondary student who needed to catch up on his studies, his ability to contribute to the family finances was limited, yet necessary. Hadidi’s husband had a chronic illness and was therefore unable to work; since Hadidi’s son had recently turned 18 while living in Canada, Hadidi no longer received the
social assistance for having a dependent child, even though his interrupted schooling was the reason for his dependency. Her son had a part-time job at the time of our interview and his income helped to support his family. However, Hadidi’s concern was that her son’s time spent earning money would compromise the time that he needed to focus on his studies.

It was also important to consider that resettlement typically takes place on an ongoing basis throughout the year and depending on the timing of arrival, one refugee mother may have a vastly different experience in transitioning her children to school compared with another mother. Regardless of structural considerations that may have enhanced or limited a mother’s ability to successfully transition her children to school, Griffith and Smith (2005) note that “the mothering discourse, the discourse that constitutes mothers as subjects within educational institutions, orients the work that they do and subordinates us appropriately to the authority of educational experts” (p. 124) and does so with little consideration for the different situations that mothers find themselves in. Furthermore, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) note,

It is always at the cost of expenditure or wasted time that the educational system legitimizes the transmission of power from one generation to another by concealing the relationship between the social starting point and the social point of arrival of the educational trajectory, thanks to what is, ultimately, merely a certification effect made possible by the ostentatious and sometimes hyperbolic length of apprenticeship. (p. 209)

These starting points, whether referring to resettlement trajectories or transmitted cultural capital, warrant more consideration in how the school transition process is constructed.
Inequities in Resettlement Location

Those who worked in resettlement noted that there are differences in the access to education that children have depending on where they were resettled. The refugee mothers in this study ended up in a city that is considered to be a second tier city for resettlement as it had over 200,000 residents at the time that this study was conducted and it housed many settlement services. There were a variety of language schools for adults that were located on bus routes and placed in high-density neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the headquarters for many resettlement agencies (provincial and national agencies), including the ones featured in this study, were located in the region. When increased numbers of refugees arrived in Canada, smaller cities and more rural areas took them in, often through private and blended sponsorship groups. The intent was to provide a safe and welcoming place for refugee families to live in; however, the reality of resettling people to places that did not have an established history of working with refugees was that the essential services that refugees relied on were not always available. In some cases, the communities were understanding and responded to these discrepancies accordingly, and in other cases, the resources were simply not in place when a refugee family depended on them:

But I would say across the board, a lot of the rural communities have less access to the ESL or language assessment tools to get kids effectively enrolled in schools that provide the ESL support for the newcomers. But then there are other rural communities that literally, sponsorship has really transformed the DNA of their community, so they’ve gotten the municipality to fund ESL classes because of the number of newcomers they’ve sponsored to their area,
and so, municipalities have stepped up in that way and provided that. (Maria, settlement service personnel)

Elliot and Yusuf (2014) explain the need for refugees (in New Zealand) to be placed in areas where they could build upon their social networks in a variety of capacities to promote social capital development. Elliot and Yusuf relied on theories that described bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, and noted the importance of each in the refugee resettlement process. Their study concluded that “At a fundamental level, refugees need access to services, respect for their rights, and engagement in [New Zealand] society” (Elliot & Yusuf, 2014, p.109). It makes sense, based on this conclusion, that refugees in Canada would require the same in terms of promoting positive social capital growth and maintenance, however, depending on where refugees are resettled, having access to services and opportunities for engagement in their local society may not be feasible.

Conclusions

The policy that guided the resettlement process demonstrated the non-neutral field that refugee mothers found themselves (and their children) in. Federal sponsorship programs, the timing that resettlement took place in interaction with local school authorities, the age of children in interaction with federal social assistance funding, and the location that refugees were resettled to, all contributed to how refugees experienced resettlement and the transition to school for their children. Refugees’ access to the capital needed to succeed in their new world was bound up in policy and taken-for-granted norms that were created, established, and maintained by the privileged. It is unlikely that malicious intent was at play; however, those in positions to affect change by interrogating norms and pushing for reform had not done so and did not experience any personal
negative consequences for their complacency. When refugees are constructed in the media, in politics, in academia, and in everyday life, there is a tendency to see them all as one group. Indeed, we have begun to move away from seeing refugees as the same as immigrants in general, but the data in this study, and the theory that underpins these data, demonstrated the urgency in seeing beyond the label of refugee. It is important to understand that refugee experiences are different and the tendency to make generalizations is done so with a taken-for-granted understanding that the comparisons are equal and that the circumstances of each person are—and have been—equal, which, as data from this study reinforced, is rarely the case.

The refugee mothers in this study did not speak about attempting to disrupt the inequities that they faced and this may be in part due to the capital they possessed. As this study used critical ethnography to gather data, the information described in this particular chapter will be presented to refugee communities and allies in hopes of beginning a process of addressing the inequities mentioned.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the unequal field that refugee resettlement in Canada is implicated in. Using a Bourdieuan perspective, it explained how the type of sponsorship program that a refugee is resettled within can position some families to be in a better situation in terms of social contacts and economic capital while others do not receive such benefits. There are also inequities regarding the timing that refugees resettle to Canada and the age at which their children resettle. For example, resettling during the school year allows children to start school right away and allows parents to take language classes right away. Furthermore, if children resettle when they are past the age of 18, their parents do not receive government funding associated with having dependent children
even if their children are still in school due to educational interruptions from conflict in their home country. Last, there are inequities in resettlement location. Those who resettle in high-density areas often receive benefits associated with those areas having services in place to serve refugees. As well, living in close proximity to these services can position some refugees to have better chances at making social contacts, better chances at being able to attend language school, and better chances at feeling a sense of belonging in their community.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Study Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the significance of social and cultural capital as refugee mothers transitioned their children to school in Ontario, Canada. The research questions that guided this study were:

- What are the perspectives of refugee mothers regarding transitioning their children to school?
- What are the perspectives of community representatives who interact with refugee mothers transitioning their children to school?
- In what ways does the community support or restrict the assets that refugee mothers bring to transitioning their children to school?
- How can the experiences of refugee mothers transitioning their children to school inform and improve educational policy?

This study was grounded in theory proposed by Bourdieu (and Bourdieu and Passeron) that focused on the reproductive nature of the education system whereby those who experience privilege are best served by the school system and those who experience oppression have their social standing reinforced by the school system. Through symbolic violence, the oppressed experience habitus whereby their oppression appears to be legitimate and based on circumstance and merit rather than the underworking of an oppressive system—the field of education—designed to maintain power for the powerful. Griffith and Smith (2005) added to the theory informing this study by suggesting that mothers do work for the school that is dictated by the school and serves the interests of the school.
To better understand how refugee mothers used social and cultural capital as they transitioned their children to school, this study employed a critical ethnography. The site for launching this research was a program called Starting School in Canada that aimed to help prepare newcomer families for transitioning their children to school. This program took place at an Ontario EYC and was run in partnership between the centre and the YMCA Immigrant Services. Data for this study were gathered through observational notes from the program, document analysis using collected brochures and newsletters from the program, and interviews. The interviews gathered perspectives from resettlement personnel within the wider community, staff and volunteers from the EYC, and refugee mothers. Initially, only refugee mothers from the Starting School in Canada program were interviewed; however, in order to gain deeper insights into the realities of resettlement and school transitions, interviews with refugee mothers were repeated the following year with the addition of refugee mothers that had not participated in the Starting School in Canada program.

**Summary of Findings**

After reviewing the transcribed and summary data from this study using analysis methods proposed by Punch (2009), three major themes emerged from the perspectives of refugee mothers. These themes included:

- Mothering versus belonging
- Cultural capital and school engagement
- Capital versus circumstance

These three themes were interrelated and tended to intersect at various points when capital, motherhood, and experiences as a refugee converged in the accounts that the
refugee mothers provided. Participants’ identities were tied up in their culture, their previous experiences with school, their role as a wife and mother, and their time spent as a refugee. All of these markers of identity came together when decisions about and approaches to transitioning their children to school took place. Essentially, each participant’s role as a mother was limiting, at least at times, in being able to build social capital, her amount of cultural capital was often limiting when interacting with schools from a place of power, and her ability to access old and acquire new forms of social and cultural capital were the products of policy and circumstance that she had little control over. Regardless of having little control in the policy that dictated much of the life trajectory they experienced in their new communities, refugee mothers lived with the associated consequences of policy and circumstance, for better or for worse.

Interviews with settlement service personnel, community program personnel, as well as observational data and document analysis also helped to explain the roles of social and cultural capital as refugee mothers transitioned their children to school. Five themes emerged within these data:

- Sustainability in social connections
- Sustainability in school transitions
- Expectations and realities
- Responsive approaches in programming
- Assets-based approach in working with refugee mothers

These themes worked together to build an understanding of how refugee mothers experienced transitioning their children to school and showed the intricacies of such an ongoing process. It was helpful to have several perspectives represented across data
sources because it allowed for gaps in understanding and disconnects between participant groups to be highlighted. Again, the themes showcased how transitions to school did not operate in isolation but rather were experienced in an ongoing way and influenced by policy, resources, and the way in which those in power chose to use their power in their roles when working with and for refugee families.

With an understanding of themes used to describe how refugee mothers experienced transitioning their children to school, it became possible to answer each research question that initially guided this study.

**What Are the Perspectives of Refugee Mothers Regarding Transitioning Their Children to School?**

The mothers in this study all saw education to be valuable and important for their children, regardless of their own, often limited, experiences with the education system in their country of origin. Refugee mothers wanted their children to do well in school and as mothers, they were working to achieve a balance between appeasing any requests that the school had, and voicing their concerns for any issues their children were experiencing. Mothers’ power in being heard by schools or in feeling confident enough to voice an opinion was tied to her cultural capital in terms of feeling comfortable with the school staff and environment. Some of the mothers had attended formal programs to prepare themselves and their children for school and other mothers had worked with their settlement worker or sponsor to learn about schools. What this study revealed about attempting to answer a question regarding mothers’ “perspectives” was that although mothers all wanted the same things for their children when it came to education, the path that each mother was on in her ability to provide an ideal education for her children was underpinned by her social and cultural capital as well as the policy that surrounded
refugee resettlement on a federal, provincial, and local level. The notion of agency was initially taken for granted when this study was being formed, and after better understanding the wider context of refugee resettlement, schools as non-neutral territory, and motherhood in all its stages, it became clear that refugee mothers were working within a social field that they did not create. They were expected to engage in the school transition process just as any other mother would, but the fields they were in provided many ways to stagnate the process. This was not to say that emancipation could not (and will not) take place, but rather that the realities of being a mother (physical limitations associated with pregnancy, time away from learning a new language associated with giving birth and needing childcare, the time needed to pack appropriate lunches that the school accepts, the time needed to prepare children for school and get them to and from school each day, the time needed to assist children with their homework which is in a different language than their own, etc.) can make it quite difficult to be all of the things a mother is expected to be in order to support her children as they entered a new school system.

To simply answer the initial question—what are the perspectives of refugee mothers regarding transitioning their children to school?—this study showed that refugee mothers’ perspectives are positive, grounded in a desire for their children’s success, and based on their own personal understandings of the education system. After hearing the perspectives of refugee mothers as they transitioned their children to school, a more appropriate question, and one that this study ended up answering in an effort to learn about perspectives, would be: What are the realities of refugee mothers regarding transitioning their children to school?
**Conceptualizing/Understanding the School Transition Process From the Mothers’ Perspectives**

In order to conceptualize the school transition process from refugee mothers’ perspectives, one first has to be willing to look at the wider context of refugee mothers and return to the mothers’ own experiences with schools. The school transition process did not happen as an isolated event whereby all mothers could take a variety of steps and her ability to complete each step would result in a smooth or difficult transition. Instead, the mothers’ own education, their socioeconomic status, and their journeys as a refugee must also be adamantly taken into account. Furthermore, the social and political context that refugee mothers entered into upon arrival to their new communities was also inextricably linked to the school transition process, as it had an effect on how their social and cultural capital could be accessed, increased, or discounted.

In this particular study, refugee mothers tended to have limited education, limited financial resources, and turbulent reasons for leaving their country. Added to this, the refugee sponsorship program in Canada provided different amounts of resources and social support for different refugees depending on what type of sponsorship they arrived under, and each local school board had their own process for admitting students into schools. The field that refugee mothers were in was connected to their habitus which was connected to their ability to interact with schools in ways that would promote success for their children. Griffith and Smith (2005) explain that mothers are expected to do the work that will make a school’s job of educating children easier, her success as a mother will be determined by the behaviour that her children display in school, and that none of the extenuating circumstances that mothers face (level of income, being a refugee, having many children to care for) are taken into account as legitimate reasons for a mother not
being able to meet the standards and rules that a school has set. Like Bourdieu and Griffith and Smith detail, this study showed not only that refugee mothers were operating in a system set forth by those in power to maintain the status quo, but this study also showed just how intricate the field was and how many elements were at play to influence what initially seemed like a very linear process.

**What Are the Perspectives of Community Representatives Who Interact With Refugee Mothers Transitioning Their Children to School?**

Those who worked with refugee mothers in this study included community program personnel (those who worked directly with the Starting School in Canada program) and settlement service personnel (those who worked indirectly with the general refugee population through various settlement agencies). These representatives had a vested interest in supporting refugees in various capacities, however, in many ways, those interviewed held power and privilege especially in contrast to the populations they were serving. In spite of this power and privilege, a common theme throughout the interviews with community program and settlement personnel was that they saw their role as supportive rather than all-knowing. A responsive approach was used with regard to planning and implementing programming and policy for refugees transitioning to a new school system. This approach allowed for refugee voices to be heard and respected, and also made space for those who worked with refugees to acknowledge existing power imbalances and to set their own power aside for the benefit of the population they were serving. For example, in the Starting School in Canada program, facilitators changed their curriculum based on the language levels in the group and asked participants what they wanted to learn so they could plan to meet those goals throughout the program.
As well, community program and settlement service personnel were able to offer complementary information to the perspectives that refugee mothers shared and in some cases, this information highlighted a disconnect in understandings of the transition to school process. For example, those who worked in settlement services explained that when children enter school, they learn the dominant language and culture more quickly than their parents which often led to a power reversal within the family and could be difficult for families to endure and navigate. A balance of providing information from an expert perspective while also making space to learn and then disseminate new information that refugee families saw as valuable was common across agencies and stakeholders that worked with refugees.

**Conceptualizing/Understanding the School Transition Process From the Program Personnel Perspective**

The themes that emerged in this study that helped explain how refugee mothers transition their children to school from the perspective of the community program personnel (those who worked with the Starting School in Canada program) were *sustainability in social connections, sustainability in school transitions, expectations and realities, responsive approaches in programming, and assets-based approach in working with refugee mothers*. From a community program personnel perspective, the themes that helped explain the school transition process for refugee mothers fed into one another rather than being mutually exclusive. Those who worked for the Starting School in Canada program were acutely aware of the need for sustainability in both social connections and school transitions for all of their participants. Sustainability was intentionally built into the program, the environment that the program took place in, and the way in which the program was delivered. Program staff and volunteers strategically
marketed other programs and opportunities to connect with other parents and resources during the Starting School in Canada program to keep participants (refugee mothers) in contact with the EYC. In recognizing the ongoing nature of school transitions and the difficulties that newcomer (refugee) mothers faced after their initial resettlement period, those who worked with the Starting School in Canada program wanted to prevent unnecessary hardship and so they encouraged successful resettlement as much as possible. The Starting School in Canada personnel had insights into some of the realities that refugee mothers might face after resettling to Canada. For example, those working in the Starting School in Canada program suggested that it may be difficult for refugee parents to have their voices heard in schools and that parents may find that their children behave in ways that are not in line with their family values. Furthermore, to diminish the mismatch between actual needs and perceived needs in programming, those who worked for the Starting School in Canada program used a responsive approach which meant that they had to set aside their knowledge, biases, and previous experiences in some cases, to provide information and access to resources based on what the participants requested. Maintaining this responsive approach may have been part of what encouraged an environment where refugee mothers were viewed from an assets perspective rather than a deficit perspective. Those associated with the Starting School in Canada program made an intentional effort to empower participants who were engaging in transitioning children to school.

In applying Bourdieu’s concepts to how community program personnel were implicated in school transitions for refugee families, there was a recognition of the value of social and cultural capital. The field however, was protected in the sense that the EYC was a place where refugee mothers who may be low in one or both forms of capital could
still be active, engaged, and welcomed. The staff at the EYC was multilingual; there were several instances where translators were arranged for participants in the Starting School in Canada program, and a welcoming atmosphere was perpetuated by staff and volunteers. It is possible that symbolic violence may have been limited within the EYC environment, but that when refugee mothers start to experience transitioning their children to school, the inequities of the education field could become more evident. Because sustainability was evident however, refugee mothers were encouraged to return to the EYC as needed. *Responsive approaches in programming* and *assets-based approaches in working with refugee mothers* also showed an intentional attempt at interrupting forms of symbolic violence and leveling out the dominant-othered dynamic that was typically recognized in the field of education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

With this interruption of power in mind, habitus was deeply entrenched in the field of education and could have been at play in perpetuating norms and dominance beneath what data from this study could detect. In exploring the role that community programme personnel played in refugee mothers transitioning their children to school, *mothering for schooling* was also useful. There was an understanding that refugee mothers were capable and valuable in the school transition process. On one hand, the Starting School in Canada program encouraged participants do this unpaid and prescribed work effectively. On the other hand, by providing language support and empowering participants, the program also (likely unintentionally) gave refugee mothers some of the skills they needed to question and potentially interrupt the taken-for-granted work that mothers do for schools.
Conceptualizing/Understanding the School Transition Process From the Settlement Services Perspective

The themes in this study pertaining to settlement services personnel included: *sustainability in social connections, sustainability in school transitions, expectations and realities, responsive approaches in programming, and assets-based approach in working with refugee mothers*. Those who worked in settlement services were able to provide a broader perspective that included issues in the wider community which had an impact on successful transitions to school. Settlement service personnel recognized the need for social connections that were ongoing as well as the need for ongoing support in transitioning children to school. For example, settlement service personnel noted that school settlement workers took on a lot of the work that went into bridging connections between families and schools. As well, they explained that after the initial resettlement period, conflict between parents and children could take place because children often gained cultural capital more quickly than their parents which causes reversals in family power dynamics.

Settlement service personnel also spoke about the community resources available to refugee mothers and described how the programs and resources that were available had developed in response to the needs expressed by refugee populations such as a need for computer literacy skills. Those in settlement services understood refugee mothers (and newcomer populations as a whole) from an assets perspective and urged others, including refugee sponsors, to do the same. Settlement service personnel had long term experience in seeing the practical aspects of resettlement that could have an impact on how difficult transitioning children to school was. They brought an understanding of the differences between those refugee mothers who grew up in urban areas compared to rural areas, and
described how some mothers had experienced interrupted schooling which could make it more difficult to adequately prepare their children for school.

Settlement service personnel highlighted many of Bourdieu’s ideas regarding social reproduction and social theory. For example, they recognized the need for social and cultural capital while acknowledging the difficulties in building both. Because refugee families often rushed to gain employment, they did not always develop the language skills they need to build sustainable social connections which are important in long term resettlement success, including interacting with schools. As well, in not gaining English language skills, refugee families often faced internal conflict. The school in this case, provided access to cultural capital for children but if mothers did not take up learning English, their isolation and disconnect with schools could intensify. Settlement service personnel advocated for refugees to feel empowered in various fields (school, community, family) but acknowledged many of the social injustices that made this difficult. Settlement service personnel worked outside of the safe haven that the community program personnel provided and were acutely aware of the difficulties that refugee families faced on an ongoing basis (during and after resettlement). They understood the symbolic violence that refugees experience but tended to see joining the norms of the dominant culture as the way to mitigate this violence rather than completely disrupting these norms. This speaks to the role of habitus within refugees and within those who worked on behalf of refugees.

**In What Ways Does the Community Support or Restrict the Assets That Refugee Mothers Bring to Transitioning Their Children to School?**

This study revealed that community program and settlement service personnel viewed refugee mothers from an assets perspective. In some cases, arriving at this view was implicit and in other cases, it was explicit. For example, the director of the EYC
acknowledged that previously, it was common practice to seek mothers out who might benefit from a program offered by the centre, but such approach had since changed in order to recognize that the mother may not be in need and is capable of determining whether or not she wants to participate in a program. Furthermore, when mothers (and all caregivers) attended programming, it became common practice for facilitators to ask participants about their needs rather than to assume them. This removed some of the power that facilitators had previously held and placed that power within the participants. It is difficult to determine whether or not this assets-based approach was an attempt to dismantle Bourdieu’s theory about reproducing the norms and values of the dominant class, or if habitus and symbolic violence were so entrenched in the fields of education, resettlement, and community based social services that it truly was operating beneath anyone’s conscious. The very fact that such programming exists perpetuates the roles of the school as static and the mothers as needing to conform to whatever the school mandates, however, the severity of such a power imbalance seemed to be intentionally decreasing within this study.

**How Can the Experiences of Refugee Mothers Transitioning Their Children to School Inform And Improve Educational Policy?**

The experiences of refugee mothers (and those who worked with refugee mothers) highlighted the progress that has been made and the progress that still needs to be made in acknowledging and responding to how transitions to school take place. Returning to Bourdieu’s theory about social reproduction and Griffith and Smith’s theory about mothering for schooling, it became clear that there is no easy solution to improving educational policy, as the transition process is underpinned by refugee mothers’ previous life experiences that contribute to her funds of social and cultural capital as well as the
federal refugee resettlement program and political climate which influence her ability to access and utilize such capital. Nevertheless, policy makers in education are invited to work and communicate beyond the education system in order to enact meaningful change.

To begin, school policy makers and those who enact policy need to recognize that even when several refugees arrive as part of one major resettlement effort, as was the case with the participants in this study who were all Syrian refugees, the circumstances that each refugee brings varies from person to person. Refugees come with different levels of education, different amounts of money, and different values for their families. Although policy does typically need to respond to people on a group level and not an individual level, policies need to be specific in their scope and need to explain their intent at the outset so that sweeping generalizations about the groups they are aiming to serve are not perpetuated.

Secondly, school policy makers need to be willing to attempt to understand the current policies that affect resettlement and the political climate that refugees are entering under. This study took place at a time when the national political climate had shifted to become welcoming and positive regarding refugee resettlement, but this is not always the case and policies and national interests are vulnerable to rapid change. As well, at the time this study was conducted, different sponsorship programs were in place which propelled some refugees into better circumstances regarding their social capital and the financial and material resources they had.

Furthermore, as this study focused specifically on refugee mothers, it is worth policy makers considering that school transitions are often gendered experiences and beyond mothers transitioning their children to school, there is a host of other gendered
activities that mothers are likely to be engaged in. Recognizing that time is a resource many refugee mothers have in limited supply is important when enacting policy that places demands on mothers’ time. Furthermore, the cultural capital that mothers in this study had, particularly their education level, was linked to their gender. Building an awareness that mothers are charged with doing the labour of school transitions while also facing added difficulties because of their gender is necessary in dismantling the tradition of blaming mothers for any shortcomings their children experience in schools.

Finally, encouraging opportunities for hearing the voices of refugee mothers is important. Refugee mothers are operating under the conditions of many powerful systems and they experience consequences, for better or worse, of each system that they have limited power in. If a policy that affects refugee mothers is going to be made, refugee mothers need to be consulted and the power imbalance needs to shift to promote successful conversation.

**Areas Where Change Is Needed**

Areas in the school transition process that could be altered, based on the experiences of refugee mothers and the supplementary information offered by community program and settlement service personnel were related to reducing barriers, the timing of programming, and the opportunities for social connections.

Refugee mothers needed to build cultural capital by first learning the common language in the region they settled in. In this case, the dominant language was English. Refugee mothers were eager to learn the language and saw it as essential in connecting with other mothers to learn about school-related information. While attempting to gain such cultural capital in the form of language, refugee mothers also needed to gain cultural capital in the form of knowing how schools run and how to promote an interest in
education within the household. The Starting School in Canada program recognized this and built in an English conversation circle to assist mothers in learning English. The program personnel also hired translators for workshops so that the mothers could fully participate. In some instances, translators were not available for every language that was represented or for every workshop that was offered. Because the translators played an important role in how the Starting School in Canada program was able to connect with refugee parents, funding for translators needs to remain a priority. Other programming created to provide outreach to refugee families regarding school transitions should also consider language translators as a necessity and provide adequate funding to hire such services.

The timing of the Starting School in Canada program had been altered over several years to best meet the needs of the participants. The time of the year that the program took place however, had remained in the summer months. This was a very practical time of the year to offer such a program and it allowed for parents to attend since language classes were not available to them over the summer months. Because the transition to school is not a one-time event however, it is suggested that programming take place more than one time per year. This would also help to account for refugees arriving at various times throughout the year. If the program were also to be offered during the school year, the sustainability aspect of school transitions could be better responded to as refugee mothers could bring questions and concerns that they may have to the program and receive information and support right away. Furthermore, many of the women that did not participate in the Starting School in Canada program had children that were in secondary school. As previously noted, the transition to secondary school can be even more difficult for students and the educational outcomes for refugee students
starting school in Canada in higher grades tend to be reduced. Having a program targeted at families with older children would perhaps be useful in mitigating against some of the difficulties that refugee students in secondary school face.

The desire for social connections in the school transition process, the resettlement process, and motherhood at every stage, was common among all refugee mothers. The mothers wanted authentic, long-lasting social connections to interact with regarding their resettlement and their journeys of transitioning their children to school. The Starting School in Canada program provided some time for participants to connect with one another, however, the strongest social connection was seen in a pair of women who were already neighbours. The Starting School in Canada program and the EYC as well as the YMCA in general promote opportunities for social connections to form and it is suggested that any other program attempting to assist families in transitioning to school build similar opportunities into their programming. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that motherhood tends to be an isolating experience, particularly for those that recently had a baby and were feeling confined to their homes. Programming and policy can work to reduce barriers to socialization that mothers of infants experience.

**Areas Where Progress Was Evident**

Based on interview data with community program and settlement service personnel, it appeared that a shift had occurred in how refugee mothers were viewed. This shift has moved from a deficit approach by viewing refugee mothers as needing to be helped, to viewing them as active agents in their lives and in their families’ lives. This shift has altered the way in which refugee mothers were referred to programming, the way in which programming took place, and the actual information offered in programming.
A shift in how social time was viewed had also begun to take place. By providing opportunities for refugee mothers to interact with one another and build their networks of social capital, refugee mothers would have access to more peer-to-peer information about school transitions and would also have sources of support in mitigating against isolation and missing their home countries.

**Study Significance**

This study is significant in that it provides further insights into how refugee mothers engaged in transitioning their children to school from the perspectives of refugee mothers and those who worked closely with them. Information from this study can be used to inform policy and to interrupt the power dynamic that exist between schools and mothers as noted by Griffith and Smith (2005) in *Mothering for Schooling* and exemplified through the data that this study provided. The intersection of research on refugee mothers, transitioning children to school, and the use of social and cultural capital in this process was previously void and so researchers and policy makers were required to fit together fragmented pieces of information if they wanted to incorporate such information into policy. This void has been filled and has been done so with consideration given to the very voices that would be affected by changes in policy: refugee mothers.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

Findings and conclusions from this study suggest that when developing policy or implementing practice related to refugee mothers transitioning their children to school, it is important to be mindful of the relationship between social and cultural capital, gender, and migration experience. These aspects of one’s life took place well before the mothers in this study transitioned their children to school, and the effects of each will last through the entire transition process. Working to support refugee mothers as meaningful
contributors to the school system means that school stakeholders need to work beyond the school environment and need to work in dialogue with other stakeholders that understand the field many refugee mothers are implicated in. Recognizing that habitus is at play when mothers make decisions about how to best support their children is key in guiding policy that is constructive and uses an assets-based approach.

Furthermore, it is necessary for policy makers to consider sustainability as an important aspect to the school transition process. Specifically, programming developed to help with the transition to school process should take place beyond a child entering formal schooling, either through referrals to other programs or through prolonging programming to address the expressed needs of mothers. As well, sustainability should be considered with regard to forming and fostering social connections. These connections are useful to mothers in both the resettlement process and the transition to school process. Time, space, and resources could be allocated to encouraging friendships to form in such a way that they can be maintained outside of formal programming.

This study approached learning about refugee mothers by listening to refugee mothers and considering their perspectives before considering the perspectives of stakeholders and those that worked with refugee mothers. It follows, then, that policy based on this research should take the same approach. Refugee mothers are in the best position to speak about their own experience and their insights are the most useful in informing any sort of associated policy or practice that might affect them. Policy makers are encouraged to maintain this understanding and practice as they work with refugee mothers.
**Study Limitations**

This study captured a moment in time and is therefore not meant to be generalized. This study occurred shortly after a shift in federal government leadership brought quick changes to immigration policy, when increased numbers of refugees arrived as part of the “Syrian refugee crisis,” and when increased numbers of Canadians who had never interacted with resettlement felt compelled to provide time, energy, and resources to assist in the resettlement effort. Although it is likely that the need for refugee sponsors and resettlement efforts will continue and perhaps increase, the quick and stark shift in government policy and rhetoric followed by an immediate enthusiastic response to supporting refugees, was unique.

Furthermore, this study took place in one specific area in Ontario and focused on one specific program aimed at helping newcomer parents transition their children to school in Canada. Given this context, the findings in this study are limited in their ability to be generalized to all programming that serves refugee families. Furthermore, findings could be vastly different depending on the geographic location that refugee mothers resettle to and that associated services are located in. For example, refugee mothers in rural areas may experience fewer services and fewer people to connect with. Refugee mothers in different provinces may have different experiences with schools since educational policy takes place at the provincial level and differs from province to province (for a detailed account of educational policy related to refugees on a province-by-province basis, see Ratković et al., 2017).

Finally, there are limitations to this study with regards to how many of the refugee mothers were recruited. Initially, all refugee mothers were part of the Starting School in Canada program, but after deciding that other voices needed to be heard, recruitment
came from some of the initial refugee mothers from the program who contacted their friends. As a result, many of the participants lived in the same apartment building. Furthermore, there was only one refugee mother that had a high level of education (a partial university degree). This may be indicative of the greater population of refugee women from Syria, or it may be indicative of interviewing only a small selection of women.

**Implications for Future Research**

It would be useful to repeat this study at other similar locations across time to see if there are regional differences in how refugee mothers experience transitioning their children to school. This could also provide an opportunity for agencies and programs that work with refugee mothers as they transition their children to school to engage in dialogue about best practices.

As well, it would be useful to follow up with the same participant groups each year for five years in order to add longitudinal data to this study. By doing follow-up interviews, I would be able to see if the mothers increased their social and cultural capital as well as the influence that any change (or lack thereof) in capital had on their experiences with having their children in Ontario schools.

Finally, it would be useful to interview school settlement workers as a distinct participant group. Although this study was open to school settlement workers (who would have been categorized as community program personnel), no settlement workers agreed to have their data analyzed for this specific study. As noted by several participants in this study, the school settlement worker plays an important and valued role in brokering the transition to school process for families, schools, and community organizations.
References


Brewer, C.A., & McCabe, M. (2014). Immigrant mothers’ use of a discussion group in becoming school ready. In C. A. Brewer & M. McCabe (Eds.), *Immigrant and refugee students in Canada* (pp. 54-64) Edmonton, AB: Brush Education.


Appendix A: Ethical Approvals

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Profs. Goli Rezai-Raahi
Department & Institution: Education/Faculty of Education, Western University

NMREB File Number: 108122
Study Title: The use of Social and Cultural Capital as Refugee Mothers Transition Their Children to Ontario Education

NMREB Initial Approval Date: July 11, 2016
NMREB Expiry Date: July 11, 2017

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Name</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Version Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Western University Protocol</td>
<td>Received July 4, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Confidentiality agreement</td>
<td>2016/06/22</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>Debriefing letter</td>
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<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Interview topics - Received July 4, 2016</td>
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<td>Letter of Information &amp; Consent</td>
<td>Programme Personnel</td>
<td>2016/06/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment Items</td>
<td>Recruitment poster for refugee mothers - Received July 4, 2016</td>
<td>2016/06/22</td>
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<td>In-person recruitment script for refugee mothers</td>
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<td>Recruitment Items</td>
<td>Telephone script for programme personnel</td>
<td>2016/07/11</td>
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The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCP52), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 108122.

Ethics Officer: Erika Basile Nicole Kaniki Grace Kelly Katelyn Harris Vikki Tran Karen Gopaul

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., Rm. 5150
London, ON, Canada N6G 1C9 t. 519.661.3036 f. 519.850.2466 www.uwo.ca/research/ethics
Dear Prof. Goli Rezai-Rashti,

The Western University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the application. This study, including all currently approved documents, has been re-approved until the expiry date noted above.

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Daniel Wyzynski, Research Ethics Coordinator, on behalf of Prof. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).
PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ABOUT REFUGEE MOTHERS

You are invited to take part in a study about refugee mothers who are preparing their children for school, who meet the following criteria:

- Must be a refugee (arrived to Canada within the past 5 years)
- Must be a mother
- Must have a child attending school or getting ready to attend school

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to: participate in an interview for 30–45 and reviewing the interview for 15 minutes

Your participation would involve 2 sessions,
(participating in an interview for 30–45 and reviewing the interview for 15 minutes)

Translation services, bus passes, parking fees, and childcare expenses will be covered if needed

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
Courtney A. Brewer
Western University, Faculty of Education
In-class recruitment verbal script (Modified to be in-person verbal script)

Hello, my name is Courtney Brewer and I am a 4th year graduate year student in the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am studying how refugee mothers transition their children to school in Ontario and am recruiting participants who meet the following inclusion criteria:
- Is a refugee mother who has been in Canada for no more than five years
- Is attending a community program about school in Ontario for their child/children
- Has at least one child attending school or getting ready to attend school in Ontario.

This research will hopefully lead to recommendations to policy makers about school readiness programs and best practice for school boards.

If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview (either one-on-one or with another person depending on your preference) and review the interview transcript. Translators will be provided if you need them.

The session(s) should take approximately 45 minutes to one hour of your time.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at the information provided or come to the front lobby at the end of the programme.

Thank you.
Email Script for Recruitment (Early Years Centre)

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research

Hello,

You are being invited to participate in and help recruit for a study that Courtney A. Brewer is conducting because you are a key stakeholder in the refugee community. Goli Rezai-Rashti, a professor at Western University, is supervising this research study. This study is about how refugee mothers prepare and transition their children to school. Briefly, participating in the study involves allowing me to observe your programme for no longer than two months and participating in a one-on-one interview at a location that is convenient for you. Helping to recruit for this study involves allowing one researcher to advertise the study to refugee mothers at the end of one of your programme sessions, allowing me to interact with potential participants to recruit them for this study during break times (so long as my interactions are not intrusive or making anyone feel uncomfortable), posting an information poster in your programme area (if possible), and handing out information posters to potential participants (if possible). There is no compensation being offered for participating in this study.

I will be sending out a reminder email about this study two more times (one reminder a week from today and one reminder two weeks from today).

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive more information regarding the letter of information (attached to this email) about this study please contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Thank you,

Goli Rezai-Rashti
Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Research Contact:  Courtney A. Brewer

Faculty of Education, Western University
Email Script for Recruitment (Settlement Agencies)

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research

Hello,

You are being invited to participate in a study that **Courtney A. Brewer** is conducting because you are a key stakeholder in refugee resettlement. Goli Rezai-Rashti, a professor at Western University, is supervising this research study. This study is about how refugee mothers prepare and transition their children to school. Briefly, the study involves participating in a one-on-one interview at a location that is convenient for you. There is no compensation being offered for participating in this study.

I will be sending out a reminder email about this study two more times (one reminder a week from today and one reminder two weeks from today).

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive more information regarding the letter of information (attached to this email) about this study please contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Thank you,

Goli Rezai-Rashti
Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

grezaira@uwo.ca
1-519-661-2111 x88659

Research Contact:  Courtney A. Brewer

Faculty of Education, Western University
Telephone Script (Early Years Centre)

(To be used when the contact information is publicly available)

Hello, may I please speak with [insert the name of the potential participant here].

*If the potential participant is not home, ask if there is a better time to call. Do not leave a message as it may be a confidential matter you are calling about that may not be apparent to you*

*If they are home, continue with the conversation*

Hi, this is Courtney Brewer calling from the office of Goli Rezai-Rashti at Western University. I am calling today to ask if you are interested in a research study we are conducting. The study is being conducted by myself, Courtney Brewer and will look at how refugee mothers prepare and transition their children for school. The study will be used to provide recommendations to policy makers about school readiness programs and best practice for school boards. Participating in this study entails allowing me to advertise my study during one of your programme sessions, allowing me to interact with participants during break times to recruit more participants (so long as my interactions are not intrusive to the programme or making anyone feel uncomfortable), allowing me to observe your program and participating in a one-on-one interview with me. Would you be interested in receiving a copy of the letter of information and consent about this study?

*If no, thank them for their time and say good-bye*

*If yes, arrange a time to drop off a letter or arrange contact information to mail or email a copy of the letter*

Do you have any questions?
[Answer any questions they may have]

Do you agree to participate in this study?

*If yes, make arrangements to meet to begin observations and interviews*

*If no, thank them for their time and say good-bye*
Telephone Script (Settlement Agencies)

(To be used when the contact information is publicly available)

Hello, may I please speak with [insert the name of the potential participant here].

*If the potential participant is not home, ask if there is a better time to call. Do not leave a message as it may be a confidential matter you are calling about that may not be apparent to you*

*If they are home, continue with the conversation*

Hi, this is Courtney Brewer calling from the office of Goli Rezai-Rashti at Western University. I am calling today to ask if you are interested in a research study we are conducting. The study is being conducted by myself, Courtney Brewer and will look at how refugee mothers prepare and transition their children for school. The study will be used to provide recommendations to policy makers about school readiness programs and best practice for school boards. Participating in this study entails participating in a one-on-one interview with me. Would you be interested in receiving a copy of the letter of information and consent about this study?

*If no, thank them for their time and say good-bye*

*If yes, arrange a time to drop off a letter or arrange contact information to mail or email a copy of the letter*

Do you have any questions? [Answer any questions they may have]

Do you agree to participate in this study?

*If yes, make arrangements to meet to begin observations and interviews

*If no, thank them for their time and say good-bye
Appendix C: Letters of Information and Consent

Western

Letter of Information: Early Years Centre

Project Information
Project Title: The use of Social and Cultural Capital as Refugee Mothers Transition Their Children to Ontario Education
Principal Investigator: Goli Rezai Rashti
Main contact: Courtney A. Brewer

You are invited to participate in a study that Courtney A. Brewer is conducting. Goli Rezai-Rashti, a professor at Western University, is supervising this research study. This study is about how refugee mothers prepare and transition their children to school. You are being invited because you may be in close contact with refugee mothers through your employment position and your insights into how refugee mothers transition their children to school in Ontario are very valuable.

This study is being done to learn about ways that refugee mothers transition their children to school in Ontario. This study will explore how social relationships and interactions are related to transitioning children to school.

Study Procedures
The length that you are being invited to participate for is 1.5 hours of direct contact over the course of 3 sessions plus time spent allowing me observe your program/service and time spent helping to advertise this study to other potential participants. The first formal session involves 30 minutes orienting me to your program service so that I may engage in observing. The second session involves participating in a one-on-one interview for 30-45 minutes. The second session involves reviewing your interview for 15 minutes. This study will take place at your program/service location however, the interview and interview review component of this study may take place at a location and time that is convenient for you. Translation services will be provided for you if you require them. The interview in this study will ask questions about your experience working with refugee mothers who have transitioned their children to school in Ontario.

If you consent, this interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. If you do not consent to audio recording, the researcher will take notes during the interview instead (notes will not include identifiable information). Please note that audio recording is optional.

Possible Risks and Harms
There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study beyond what you would encounter in everyday life. If you have experienced discomfort as a result of participating in this study, you are free to access counseling services. One local counseling provider is:

Page 1 of 4 Version Date: 06/22/2016
If you are unable to pay for counseling services or you do not have benefits that cover counseling costs, K-W Counselling Services has subsidies available.

You are not obligated to tell anyone, including the researchers, that you have accessed counseling services.

Possible Benefits
You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include developing recommendations about how schools work with refugee mothers and how schools could acknowledge what refugee mothers do outside of formal programming to transition their children to school.

Confidentiality and Security
The researchers will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of 5 years. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your study file. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you provide consent, the name of your place of employment (program/service) will be used in this study and dissemination of study results. You are free to prohibit this consent.

Any translators used during your interview and transcribers used for all interviews will have access to your data. Translators and interpreters have all signed a confidentiality agreement to help protect the security of your information.

You have the option to provide consent for the researcher to use direct quotes from your interview. If you provide this consent, direct quotes may be used in publications about this research study.

Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project in which we may be required to report by law, we have a duty to report.

Compensation
There is no compensation being offered for this study, however, if you require public transportation or vehicle parking to participate in this study, or if you require childcare to participate in this study, we will make arrangements to cover these expenses.

Voluntary Nature of the Study
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to leave this study, you may contact either of the researchers through phone or email. There are no consequences if you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you, or your program/service. If you wish to have your information removed please let one of the researchers know.
You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form

**Method of Contact**

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Courtney Brewer or contact Goli Rezai-Rashti at grezaira@uwo.ca or phone 1-519-661-2111 x88659.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics or contact the supervisor of this study, please email Goli Rezai-Rashti at grezaira@uwo.ca or phone 1-519-661-2111 x88659.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
Consent Form

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of personal, identifiable quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research that are related to my place of employment (naming your program/service)

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

Was the participant assisted during the consent process?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If YES, please check the relevant box and complete the signature space below:

☐ The person signing below acted as a translator for the participant during the consent process and attests that the study as set out in this form was accurately translated and has had any questions answered

Print Name of Translator

Signature

Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)

Language

Print Name of Participant

Signature

Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)

Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature

Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)
Letter of Information: Settlement Agencies

Project Information
Project Title: The use of Social and Cultural Capital as Refugee Mothers Transition Their Children to Ontario Education
Principal Investigator: Goli Rezai Rashti, grezaira@uwo.ca
Main contact: Courtney A. Brewer, cbrewer4@uwo.ca

You are invited to participate in a study that Courtney A. Brewer is conducting. Goli Rezai Rashti, a professor at Western University, is supervising this research study. This study is about how refugee mothers prepare and transition their children to school. You are being invited because you may be in close contact with refugee mothers through your employment position and your insights into how refugee mothers transition their children to school in Ontario are very valuable.

This study is being done to learn about ways that refugee mothers transition their children to school in Ontario. This study will explore how social relationships and interactions are related to transitioning children to school.

Study Procedures
The length of total time that you are being invited to participate in is one hour over the course of two sessions. The first session involves participating in a one-on-one interview for 30-45 minutes. The second session involves reviewing your interview for 15 minutes. This study will take place at a location and time that is convenient for you. Translation services will be provided for you if you require them. The interview in this study will ask questions about your experience working with refugee mothers who have transitioned their children to school in Ontario.

If you consent, this interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. If you do not consent to audio recording, the researcher will take notes during the interview instead (notes will not include identifiable information). Please note that audio recording is optional.

Possible Risks and Harms
There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study beyond what you would encounter in everyday life.

If you have experienced discomfort as a result of participating in this study, you are free to access counseling services. One local counseling provider is:

K-W Counselling Services
480 Charles St E, Kitchener, ON N2G 4K5
www.kwcounselling.com
(519) 884-0000

If you are unable to pay for counseling services or you do not have benefits that cover counselling services has subsidies available.
You are not obligated to tell anyone, including the researchers, that you have accessed counselling services.

Possible Benefits
You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include developing recommendations about how schools work with refugee mothers and how schools could acknowledge what refugee mothers do outside of formal programming to transition their children to school.

Confidentiality and Security
The researchers will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of 5 years. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your study file. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you provide consent, the name of your place of employment (program/service) will be used in this study and dissemination of study results. You are free to prohibit this consent.

Any translators used during your interview and transcribers used for all interviews will have access to your data. Translators and interpreters have all signed a confidentiality agreement to help protect the security of your information.

You have the option to provide consent for the researcher to use direct quotes from your interview. If you provide this consent, direct quotes may be used in publications about this research study.

Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project in which we may be required to report by law, we have a duty to report.

Compensation
There is no compensation being offered for this study, however, if you require public transportation or vehicle parking to participate in this study, or if you require childcare to participate in this study, we will make arrangements to cover these expenses.

Voluntary Nature of the Study
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to leave this study, you may contact either of the researchers through phone or email. There are no consequences if you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you, or your program/service. If you wish to have your information removed please let one of the researchers know.

You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form

Method of Contact
If you have any questions about this study, please contact Courtney Brewer at [email protected] If you have questions or concerns that you would like to direct to the supervisor of this study, please email Goli Rezai-Rashti at grezaira@uwo.ca or phone [1-519-661-2111 x88659]. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics at (519) 661-3036, email: ethics@uwo.ca.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
**Consent Form**

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of personal, identifiable quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research that are related to my place of employment (naming your program/service)

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

Was the participant assisted during the consent process?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If YES, please check the relevant box and complete the signature space below:

☐ The person signing below acted as a translator for the participant during the consent process and attests that the study as set out in this form was accurately translated and has had any questions answered

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Letter of Information: Refugee Mothers

Project Information
Project Title: The use of Social and Cultural Capital as Refugee Mothers Transition Their Children to Ontario Education
Principal Investigator: Goli Rezai Rashti, grezaira@uwo.ca
Main contact: Courtney A. Brewer, cbrewer4@uwo.ca

You are invited to participate in a study that Courtney A. Brewer is conducting. Goli Rezai Rashti, a professor at Western University, is supervising this research study. This study is about how refugee mothers prepare and transition their children to school. You are being invited because you are a refugee mother and your insights into transitioning your children to school in Ontario are very valuable.

This study is being done to learn about ways that refugee mothers transition their children to school in Ontario. This study will explore how social relationships and interactions are related to transitioning children to school.

Study Procedures
The length that you are being invited to participate for is 30–60 minutes over the course of 2 sessions. The first session involves participating in a one-on-one interview for 1 hour and the second session involves reviewing your interview for 15 minutes. This study will take place at a location and time that is convenient for you. Translation services will be provided for you if you require them. The interview in this study will ask questions about your experience as a refugee and mother, and about your experiences transitioning your child/children to school in Ontario.

If you consent, this interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. If you do not consent to audio recording, the researcher will take notes during the interview instead (notes will not include identifiable information). Please note that audio recording is optional.

Possible Risks and Harms
There are no risks or harms associated with this study that are beyond what you may encounter in everyday life.
If you have experienced discomfort as a result of participating in this study, you are free to access counseling services. One local counseling provider is:

K-W Counselling Services
480 Charles St E, Kitchener, ON N2G 4K5
www.kwcounselling.com
(519) 884-0000

If you are unable to pay for counseling services or you do not have benefits that cover counselling costs, K-W Counselling Services has subsidies available.

You are not obligated to tell anyone, including the researchers, that you have accessed counselling services.

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Possible Benefits
You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include developing recommendations about how schools work with refugee mothers and how schools could acknowledge what refugee mothers do outside of formal programming to transition their children to school.

Confidentiality and Security
The researchers will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of 5 years. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your study file. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used.

Any translators used during your interview and transcribers used for all interviews will have access to your data. Translators and interpreters have all signed a confidentiality agreement to help protect the security of your information.

You have the option to provide consent for the researcher to use direct quotes from your interview. If you provide this consent, direct quotes may be used in publications about this research study.

Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

You will not be asked any questions about your legal refugee status or citizenship, or any questions about your personal information.

While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project in which we may be required to report by law, we have a duty to report.

Compensation
There is no compensation being offered for this study, however, if you require public transportation or vehicle parking to participate in this study, or if you require childcare to participate in this study, we will make arrangements to cover these expenses.

Voluntary Nature of the Study
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to leave this study, you may contact either of the researchers through phone or email. There are no consequences if you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed please let one of the researchers know.

You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form

Method of Contact
If you have any questions about this study, please contact Courtney Brewer at [redacted] or email cbrewer4@uwo.ca. If you have questions or concerns that you would like to direct to the supervisor of this study, please email Goli Rezai-Rashti at [redacted] or phone 1-519-661-2111 x88659.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics at (519) 661-3036, email: ethics@uwo.ca.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
Consent Form

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

Was the participant assisted during the consent process?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If YES, please check the relevant box and complete the signature space below:

☐ The person signing below acted as a translator for the participant during the consent process and attests that the study as set out in this form was accurately translated and has had any questions answered

Print Name of Translator ___________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)

Language ___________________________

Print Name of Participant ___________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)

Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent ___________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)
Confidentiality Agreement

I understand confidential information will be made known to me as (please check all that apply):

[ ] an interpreter
[ ] transcriber
[ ] audio assistant
[ ] video assistant
[ ] research assistant
[ ] other (please specify) __________________________________________

for a study being conducted Courtney Brewer and supervised by Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti of the Faculty of Education Western University. I agree to keep all information collected during this study confidential, and will not reveal by speaking, communicating or transmitting this information in written, electronic (disks, tapes, transcripts, email) or any other manner to anyone outside the research team.

Name of Participant: __________________________ (please print)
Signature of Participant: ________________________
Date: __________________________

Name of Person Obtaining Consent: __________________________ (please print)
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: ________________________
Date: __________________________

Version Date: 06/22/2016
Appendix E: Debriefing Letter

DEBRIEFING FORM

The use of Social and Cultural Capital as Refugee Mothers Transition Their Children to Ontario Education

Principal Investigator: Goli Rezai Rashti, grezaira@uwo.ca, 519-661-2111
Main contact: Courtney A. Brewer, cbrewer4@uwo.ca, 519-404-2362

Thank you for your participation in this study. The purpose of this study was to learn about ways that refugee mothers transition their children to school in Ontario. This study explored how social relationships and interactions are related to transitioning children to school. This study was carried out by interviewing people who may have insight into the process of being a refugee while transitioning a child to school.

If you have experienced discomfort as a result of participating in this study, you are free to access counseling services. One local counseling provider is:

K-W Counselling Services
480 Charles St E, Kitchener, ON N2G 4K5
www.kwcounselling.com
(519) 884-0000

If you are unable to pay for counseling services or you do not have benefits that cover counseling costs, Services has subsidies available.

You are not obligated to tell anyone, including the researchers, that you have accessed counseling services.

If you would like to leave this study, you may contact either of the researchers through phone or email. There are no consequences if you choose to leave the study. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed please let one of the researchers know in person or by phoning or emailing them.

The researchers will not maintain contact with you as a research participant after you have reviewed your interview. If you would like to be updated on information about the study and dissemination of results, you are free to contact the researchers.

Thank you,

Courtney Brewer and Goli Rezai-Rashti

Version Date: 06/22/2016
Appendix F: Interview Guides

Interview Topics: Refugee Mothers (First Round of Interviews)

*Please avoid giving any personal identifying information (names, birthdates, addresses, etc).

- Please tell me when you came to Canada.
- How many children do you have?
- Please tell me about your transition and resettlement to Canada.
- What concerns did you have about your child(ren) starting school in Canada?
- What were you confident about with regard to your child(ren) starting school in Canada?
- How did you learn about Canada’s school system?
- Who do you talk to about issues related to your child(ren) at school?
- How helpful has it been to talk with other people you know about getting your children ready for school?
- How helpful has it been to attend a program to learn about getting your children ready for school?
Interview Guide: Refugee Mothers (Second Round of Interviews)

Information about their children
Ages, grades, aspirations

What was life like before you came here?
Can you remind me what country you came from?
Were you in a refugee camp? What was the education like?
Please tell me about your own education in your home country- Did you go to University? Tell me about the education system in your country? Is it different?
Please tell me about what your life was like before you moved here Did you work? If yes, what were you doing?
What did your husband do?

What has life been like since you arrived to Canada?
What are your aspirations? Are you interested to work here? Are you working here in Canada? What sorts of job you are looking for? Are you learning English? If yes, where do you go for that?

What was it like to send your children to school here?
Please tell me what it was like to send your child to school for the first time What are your worries? Do you communicate with teachers? Principals? Is your child happy in school?
Were you surprised by anything when you sent your child to school?
How is your child doing with their English?
Please tell me how you feel now that your child has been in school for a while

What are your experiences making friends and connecting with others in Canada?
Do you have friends that you can talk to about your child’s school?
Where did you meet your friends?
Please tell me about any experiences where your friends helped you with learning about schools in Canada.
Have you needed to rely on your friends to help you with your child and sending them to school?
Interview Topics: Stakeholders (Program personnel and settlement service providers)

*Please avoid giving any personal identifying information (names, birthdates, addresses, etc).

- Please tell me about the work that this particular program/agency does in response to refugee mothers transitioning their children to school.

- From where did the information that guides your program/agency come?

- What are the main concerns that refugee families have about getting their children ready for school?

- In what ways do you see refugee mothers supported by the local community as they transition their children to school?

- In what ways do you see refugee mothers using their own resources and social interactions to transition their children to school?

- In what ways do you see the community fostering social connections for refugee mothers?
Curriculum Vitae

Courtney Anne Brewer

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Western University, Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies: Faculty of Education, 2018 (Dissertation: “The role of social and cultural capital as refugee mothers transition their children to school in Ontario”)

M.Ed., Nipissing University, Schulich School of Education, School of Graduate Studies, 2012 (Thesis: “The impact of an in-school parent discussion group on mothers’ perceptions of school readiness”)

B.Ed., Nipissing University, Schulich School of Education, 2010

B.A., Wilfrid Laurier University, Contemporary Studies, 2010

SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

2016-2017 Western University Faculty of Education, Western Graduate Research Scholarship

2016 Western University School of Graduate Studies, Doctoral Excellence in Research Award

2014 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Joseph-Armand Bombardier award

2011 Talon Research Scholarship

2011 NUFA Student Opportunity Award

2010 Ontario Graduate Scholarship

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

2011–present Teacher: [name of city] Catholic District School Board

2013–2016 Research Assistant: Western University

2012–016 Instructor: Nipissing University (Developmental Psychology for Educators; Curriculum Methods; Sociology for Educators II: Social Issues in Education)

2010–2016 Research Assistant: Nipissing University
SAMPLE OF RELATED PUBLICATIONS


PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Ontario College of Teachers (OCT)

Canadian Journal of New Scholars in Education (CJNSE/RCJCÉ)

Canadian Society for Studies in Education (CSSE)

Comparative and International Education Society of Canada (CIESC)

*Includes special interest group: Citizenship Education Research Network (CERN)*

Canadian Committee for Graduate Students in Education (CCGSE)