

The Impact of One School Community on Female Refugee Adolescents and their Sense of Belonging

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Ethics Statement

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Abstract

Education is believed to play an essential role in creating a sense of belonging amongst adolescents from refugee backgrounds. This narrative inquiry study sets out to better understand the influence one Canadian school community plays in seven female adolescent students' sense of belonging. Data were collected over a five-month period through two sets of interviews, observations and an art project.

Findings indicate that a sense of belonging is best fostered by positive teacher-student and peer relationships, the opportunity for youth to get involved in positive ways within their school community, and through the availability and accessibility of support services. Sense of belonging was inhibited by language and cultural barriers, as well as limited availability of support services. The female experience was further challenged by familial responsibilities which limited opportunities to participate in the wider school community.

Keywords: refugees; education; females; students; belonging; narrative inquiry

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the millions of forcibly displaced children and families around the world. May the future be better.

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List of Acronyms

ELL	English Language Learner
SOBIS	Sense of Belonging in Schools
MCW	Multicultural Worker
SWIS	Settlement Workers in Schools
WC	Welcome Centre

Chapter 1. Introduction

*“I long, as does every human being, to be at home
wherever I find myself.”
Maya Angelou (1993)*

Ordinary children are sometimes caught in extraordinary circumstances. The lives of students from refugee backgrounds are complex, gripping, inspiring, sad, frightening, and tragic, but they are also full of love and hope. If there can be a hero emerging from war and conflict, it would be the untold and often silenced victims, the displaced, the forced migrants, the innocent whose only crime was being in the wrong place at the wrong time. They are those who survived and hopefully will thrive, despite the circumstances they have been confronted with, and who will dedicate their lives to being better than what they were taught and what they experienced. The stories in this study are those of seven heroines, female adolescents—all refugees—who are working hard, with gratitude, humility and determination, to make their lives meaningful and peaceful, for themselves and their loved ones. To do this, requires extraordinary mental, emotional, and physical strength and endurance. These students share their experiences and stories in their quest for belonging and of their lives as adolescents, as young women, as artists, as athletes, as designers, as comedians, as dancers, as chefs, as caregivers, and as students coming from refugee backgrounds.

1.1. My Background

It is human nature to not just want, but to need to belong within a group, or a community where one can be oneself and feel fully accepted, embraced and supported by members of that group. My interest in the refugee student population at Royal Secondary School comes from my own experience as a secondary teacher, as a social justice advocate and as having been the child of immigrants growing up in the same city as these students. While the secondary school I attended was in a different part of the city, had a higher socio-economic level and had fewer English Language Learner (ELL) students, it was equally as culturally diverse. My parents are both immigrants from very different backgrounds. My father escaped the very real and disastrous after-effects of Nazi-invaded Netherlands, and my mother came to Canada in search of an opportunity to live as an independent woman, outside the confines of a patriarchal society, which

permeated through dictator-controlled Tunisia. The common language my parents spoke was “broken” English and the common religion they practiced was their version of “how to be a good person.” My parents were proud to be Canadian, living in a country that represented opportunity and freedom for all. They were so proud that they changed their names to become more “Canadian;” they taught us English, at the expense of learning their native languages of Dutch, French and Arabic; and we celebrated “Canadian” traditions such as Christmas and Easter, instead of traditional celebrations such as St. Nikolas and Eid. We participated in “Canadian” activities, such as ice hockey and skiing, and we were proud to be Canadians.

My sense of belonging in Canadian society came from my athletic and academic communities, where I felt supported. My brothers and parents adapted in different ways. Yet, I often felt that there were aspects of my heritage that I was immensely curious about, but that did not fit into this “Canadian” version of myself. Subsequently, there were large parts of Canadian life with which I did not identify. It has only been as I have grown older that I have come to understand that while my parents did everything they could to become “Canadian” and help us fit into the mould of their idea of what a “Canadian” was, they, especially in their aging years, have a deep-rooted sense of loss for the family, culture and heritage that they gave up in doing so. As a result, they often find moments of not belonging in this country, in which they have spent more than three-quarters of their lives. From my family experience, it is a fine balance, maintaining a sense of cultural identity while settling into a new culture and searching for a sense of belonging. To add to the complexity, there are more expectations placed on the immigrant, refugee and first-generation females, who often bare more familial responsibility than their male counterparts (Qin-Hilliard, 2003).

While acknowledging that I am not a person of colour, and that I do maintain the privilege of having white skin and speaking native English, I approached this study understanding the limits of not having an emic perspective. I am not an adolescent, I am not from a refugee background, and I have not experienced war nor have I been forced to leave my family, friends and home behind. But I do understand the challenges of being a foreigner, having lived in foreign countries for extended periods of time as an adult, and I also understand the challenge in trying to develop a sense of belonging within a new culture and community. From this perspective, I began the study.

1.2. History of Students from Refugee Backgrounds in Schools

“If we are to reach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real way against war, we shall have to begin with the children.”
Mahatma Gandhi (1957)

There are over 22.5 million refugees worldwide today, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2015) has specifically identified refugee children, those under the age of 18 years, as a group worthy of specific consideration. Due to the unique cognitive, social and emotional needs of developing children, and their language and cultural barriers, the UNCRC recommends that countries make special provisions for refugee student populations.

Students from refugee backgrounds are further challenged with integrating into school systems, where they may be bullied by their peers who lack understanding and empathy of their situations (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). Yet, belonging is a fundamental human need that individuals desire to form social relationships (Anderman, 2002). Deprivation of belonging leads to negative outcomes, including emotional distress and increased health problems (Anderman, 2002). This is especially problematic for adolescents from refugee backgrounds who are already struggling with adversity.

Education plays an essential role in creating a sense of belonging and preserving hope amongst adolescents from refugee backgrounds (Hoot, 2011). Students' sense of belonging is determined by their level of attachment to their school, their compliance with school rules and expectations, their involvement in academics and extracurricular activities, and their belief in the values of their school (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007). A strong sense of belonging is related to positive academic, behavioural and psychological outcomes, including improved self-efficacy, motivation and reduced social-emotional distress (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007).

1.3. Research Questions

This study sets out to investigate the impact school communities play on adolescents from refugee backgrounds' sense of belonging. This included: (1) an examination of students from refugee backgrounds sense of belonging and school settlement experience at one secondary school; and (2) how one school community

contributes to the settlement and belonging experiences of adolescents from refugee backgrounds.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Do adolescent students from refugee backgrounds experience a sense of belonging in school (SOBIS) and if so, what does it mean for them to have a sense of belonging?
2. What role do relationships play in refugee students developing a sense of belonging in schools (SOBIS)?
3. What factors at the Royal Secondary School and in the Study School District impact these students' from refugee backgrounds sense of belonging? (E.g. availability of support services, accessibility of extra-curricular activities etc.)

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Canada has been a sanctuary for refugees from as far back as the American Revolutionary War in 1776 (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996). From Irish famine refugees, to the Doukhobors fleeing religious persecution, to thousands of refugees seeking asylum based on religious, political, national or social group (e.g. gender or sexual orientation) persecution, Canada continues to welcome thousands of refugees every year (Government of Canada, 2017). The refugee experience of hardship, difficulty, and sometimes trauma, may continue upon reaching host countries where adolescent students in school continue to be confronted with extreme poverty, discrimination, racism, community-based (and sometimes domestic) violence, as well as mental health challenges. A recent study done on Syrian refugees welcomed by Germany shows that refugees display “mental health problems because of trauma suffered in war or during their dangerous escapes...[and] more than half had become victims of violence, often torture, themselves,” (Immigrant Service Society of BC, 2017a). Yet, despite these enormous setbacks, adolescents from refugee backgrounds display a strong desire to fit in, be academically successful, and contribute positively to their new countries (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015).

Unfortunately, much of the existing literature available on the topic of refugee settlement combines refugees into a homogenous group having experienced violence, war, natural disaster or persecution in the same way, and the popular discourse on refugees acts to stigmatize them into a group of victims of trauma and in need of saving (The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2015). Prior studies also fail to address their school experiences, particularly at the secondary level (ages 13-18 years old) and in the Canadian context. It is important to recognize the vast differences within the refugee experience, which significantly impacts their settlement into Canadian life. There is a large disparity amongst adolescents from refugee backgrounds in their ability to adjust to a new culture and society (Stermac, Elgie, Clarke & Dunlap, 2012). Those who were born and grew up in refugee camps have significantly more trouble adjusting to structured, formalized education, than those whose education was interrupted by the outbreak of war (Stermac et al., 2012). Subsequently, the ability of a student from a refugee background to find a sense of belonging within their new school is influenced by a multitude of factors, including how easily these students are able to integrate into their

new school community, whether they feel accepted by their teachers and peers, and how well the wider school community is able to support them and their families.

Students from refugee backgrounds are often confronted with language barriers that delay and sometimes inhibit them from forming strong social relationships with teachers and peers. Poverty contributes to social isolation, peer rejection and higher school drop-out rates. Mental health challenges can also interfere with cognitive and psychosocial functioning, thereby interfering with higher academic performances (Chiu, Chow, McBride & Mol, 2015). While there are various organizations, such as community groups, churches and sports teams that can provide students with a sense of belonging, schools are situated in a unique position as they have the most access to students (Chiu et al., 2015). Subsequently, schools are the most influential service systems for adolescents from refugee backgrounds. A strong sense of belonging in school can strengthen internal protective factors, by encouraging intrinsic motivation, fostering optimism about individual abilities, promoting positive attitudes towards school, and strengthening resilience and perseverance in the face of challenges (Chiu et al., 2015; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Developing a sense of belonging in schools has shown to mitigate some effects of poverty and mental health challenges by promoting physical and psychological health and well-being, decreasing illicit drug use, decreasing levels of depression and, in some studies, even mitigating the impacts of post-traumatic stress (Chiu et al., 2015; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). If a strong sense of belonging and community can be fostered for students from refugee backgrounds, many of the aforementioned risks can be minimized, allowing these students a chance to achieve higher levels of life satisfaction (Chiu et al., 2015; Drury & Williams, 2012).

2.1. Understanding Sense of Belonging for Adolescents from Refugee Backgrounds

To feel a sense of belonging in school (SOBIS) is to feel connected to a particular group; however, just how this connection occurs is debated. Libbey (2007) explains that SOBIS is fostered when students feel that they are a part of their school community and experience happiness in coming to school. Libbey (2007) further explains that students who feel that their teachers care about them and treat them fairly,

as well as feel a positive connection to both teachers and their peers, experience a high degree of SOBIS. Similarly, Hattie and Anderman (2013) argue that a student's sense of belonging is embedded within strong student-teacher relationships. In addition to strong student-teacher relationships, Allen and Bowles (2012) suggest that students' sense of belonging also allows them to feel safe in their school environment with the knowledge that they will be helped by individuals who set high expectations for their learning, development, and academic achievement. This requires that students feel bonded to their overall school community, feel comfortable in the school environment, feel that the school climate is accepting, and feel a sense of personal territory within which they belong (Allen & Bowles, 2012). Kia-Keating and Ellis's (2007) student-centered framework suggests that sense of belonging is determined by a student's level of attachment to their school, their compliance with school rules, their involvement in the school community and their belief in the school values.

This study was built from Chiu et al.'s (2015) understanding of sense of belonging which was developed from a multivariate analysis of survey and test data of over 193,000 adolescents across 41 countries. Chiu et al. found that sense of belonging in schools was fostered when students felt supported by their teachers and their classrooms had structure, expectations and discipline embedded within that structure (2015). Chiu also ascertained that school cultures that were more egalitarian, as oppose to hierarchical, were more supportive of students generally and particularly of low socio-economic students, which includes many students from refugee backgrounds (Chiu et al., 2015). In addition, a stronger sense of belonging was found amongst adolescents who had more books at home, and who practiced peaceful communication at home (Chiu et al., 2015). Finally, sense of belonging was strong amongst adolescents who had high levels of individual self-efficacy and self concept, as well as who had peers from a high socio-economic background (Chiu et al., 2015).

While it is essential to keep in mind that students from refugee backgrounds may be strong and resilient, often arriving at their host countries with hope and optimism for the future, over time, this can wear away, as the daily challenges they are confronted with at school further isolate them and weaken their sense of belonging, self-concept and sense of self (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007). In a 32-year longitudinal study conducted in New Zealand (Olsson, McGee, Nada-Raja, & Williams, 2013), the quality of one's social connectedness during adolescence was found to be the strongest predictor

of well-being in adulthood, an even stronger predictor than academic achievement. Therefore, schools that can foster a sense of belonging in students from refugee backgrounds may be able to mitigate many of these negative outcomes.

2.2. The Role of Relationships in Sense of Belonging

“No one is born hating another person...People learn to hate. They can be taught to love. For love comes more naturally to the heart.”
Nelson Mandela (1995)

2.2.1. Teacher-Student Relationships

Positive teacher-student relationships in adolescence can improve student motivation and interest in class and school, can strengthen academic achievement, and can improve feelings of belonging in school, with students feeling they are better supported and cared for in their learning environment (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Hoot, 2011; Wentzel, 1998). Perceived support from teachers can encourage students to pursue goals, behave pro-socially and responsibly, decrease deviant behaviour, and strengthen intrinsic assets, such as resiliency and self-efficacy (Bandura, 2011; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Hoot, 2011; Wentzel, 1998).

However, these relationships take time to form and are particularly difficult to maintain when students transition from elementary to secondary school (Hoot, 2011). During this often-uncertain time, teacher-student relationships degrade as the student leaves behind the support of their elementary teacher and moves into a new, larger, often overwhelming secondary school environment with multiple teachers with whom they have limited contact (Hoot, 2011). Many secondary students perceive their new teachers as no longer caring about them once they enter secondary school and the social and emotional support that their elementary teachers provided disappears (Wentzel, 1998). Subsequently, students often experience an increase in negative attitudes and a decline in motivation (Hoot, 2011). Negative attitudes and a decline in motivation may develop in similar ways for students from refugee backgrounds who develop a close bond with their first ELL teacher. This teacher often acts as a mainstay of support for both the student and their family, in addition to being the student’s teacher. When the student is transitioned into classes outside of ELL, this relationship changes and students may begin to feel distant from their primary supportive adult relationships,

as they are now confronted with the often-overwhelming larger school environment of multiple classes, teachers and new peers.

This experience of being detached from relationships may be compounded for adolescents from refugee backgrounds. Many have moved multiple times, and settling into a community with foreign values and a different language makes building relationships with teachers difficult. Furthermore, teachers may not know how to interact with these students, may not fully appreciate and understand the situation from which these students come, and as a result, may shy away from initiating relationships with them. To compound these challenges is the fact that adolescents are in the midst of change and transition in their own development (Wentzel, 1998). The growing psychological and emotional independence from adults that they seek can further push them away from the support and guidance of their families (Wentzel, 1998). At this stage, parental guidance becomes less important and there is a growing need to obtain guidance from others, such as peers and alternative role models like teachers (Wentzel, 1998). Furthermore, if parents are struggling with mental health concerns resulting from exposure to, and sometimes direct involvement in, violence and war then the high expectations and guidance that they may have once provided for their child may decrease. In these cases, their children may look elsewhere for direction and support.

Unfortunately, the capacity of schools to generate positive teacher-student relationships can be limited. There is high turnover in the teaching profession, and this is due to various reasons including fluctuating government funding, resulting in job cuts, as well as stressful teaching environments with highly demanding workloads effecting teacher retention (Tierney, 2015; Wang, Hall & Rahimi, 2015). This is problematic for teacher-student relationships as the most vulnerable students require teacher consistency and the need to be consistently available (Tierney, 2015; Wang et al., 2015). This is particularly true for adolescents from refugee backgrounds who may not be exposed to a diversity of teachers because of the limited types of classes their English language levels enable them to participate in. Therefore, the few bonds they have made with teachers are particularly valuable to them.

2.2.2. Peer Relationships

Similar to the importance of strong teacher-student relationships, peer-to-peer relationships are also very important to a student's sense of belonging. Students from refugee backgrounds are often confronted with bullying, teasing and social isolation (Carter, 1998). Conflict resolution becomes a challenge due to miscommunication, lack of language fluency, differing cultural identities, gender and perceived power differences, exacerbating in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination amongst groups of students in school (Carter, 1998; Hymel & Bonanno, 2014). Power differences have the possibility of leading to heightened aggression and violence in both male and female students (Carter, 1998). This contributes to social isolation and negatively impacts students' sense of belonging at school.

As adolescents develop, they spend more time with their peers, become more independent from parents, and seek less adult interaction (Brown & Larson, 2009). This can develop tension within families, as values, beliefs, and cultural identities begin to shift, and as adolescents begin to place a higher value on the expectations and opinions of their peers (Brown & Larson, 2009). Subsequently, adolescents' attitudes, choices of activities and emotional well-being are closely linked to that of their peer groups (Brown & Larson, 2009). Social acceptance becomes increasingly important during the adolescent years and hierarchies begin to emerge within peer systems (Brown & Larson, 2009). Group socialization theory discusses the concepts of in/out groups, and suggest that individuals are more likely to form relationships with others based on similarities, including race, culture, gender or religion (Harris, 1995; Rutland, Hitti, Mulvey, Abrams & Killen, 2015). Those who do not identify psychologically with the in-group, may struggle to find their own group to belong to, potentially winding up in a group with which they do not identify or where they feel pressured to conform (Harris, 1995). In high school, friendships are formed based on perceived similarities but change frequently and are often linked to perceived status and popularity (Brown & Larson, 2009). Students from refugee backgrounds who are trying to fit into their new school may not readily share the same values and interests as their new Canadian-born peers, have language barriers, and may show overt signs of poverty. This may place them in the "outgroup," and increase bullying, teasing and general social isolation (Rutland et al., 2015). Social rejection and victimization by peers has been shown to contribute to a host

of negative outcomes, including mental health problems (internalizing difficulties such as depression and anxiety and externalizing difficulties such as aggression), unemployment, delinquency and criminality, suicide, poor academic performance, and greater likelihood of dropping out of school (Hymel & Bonanno, 2014).

Phelan, Davidson and Cao (1991) suggest that students who feel most supported and adjusted are those for which there are strong interrelationships between family, peer and schools. However, the poverty faced by students from many refugee backgrounds may result in these students having shame and guilt about their homes and their families, which results in them not inviting friends over, thus limiting their interactions with their peers. While Phelan et al. (1991) indicate that two-parent families are the most supportive structure, students from refugee backgrounds often have disjointed and broken families, whether due to migration, overseas work, death or other circumstances. Phelan et al. (1991) also noted that unfortunately, students who come from “well-supported” backgrounds are also the same students who are most likely to isolate other students who are unlike them. They suggest that such students are limited and bound by the, “congruency of their world” (p.228), which results in them being uninterested in getting to know, work with, or interact with students who are unlike themselves. Phelan (1991) argues that students whose worlds are “congruent” generally come from families that provide strong support, are in the mid-to-high socio-economic bracket, and also have multiple friends and close relationships with a few key peers. It is these students, Phelan argues, who are less interested in interacting with students unlike themselves, so as to preserve the harmonious world in which they exist (1991). There is a feeling amongst these students that to interact and befriend others unlike themselves (e.g. students from refugee backgrounds), may risk disrupting their comfortable reality (Phelan, 1991).

In 2013 the Adolescent Health Study conducted by the McCreary Centre Society indicated that 78% of males and 72% of female adolescent students in British Columbia reported to have strong family relationships (2013). The same study reported that 82% of males and 85% of Canadian-born females had at least three, if not more, close friends at school or in their immediate neighborhood. Students from

refugee backgrounds are new to their community and their schools, have not had time to make close friendships and are more likely to have disjointed families as a result of migration and war (Immigrant Service Society of BC, 2017a). Parents from refugee backgrounds are less likely to be able to provide the same familial support due to the increased prevalence of mental health problems and their low socio-economic level, which may require parents to work longer and more disjointed hours (Immigrant Service Society of BC, 2017a). As a result, students from refugee backgrounds may find it more difficult to make friends with their Canadian-born peers, who, as Phelan et al. argued, may feel as though they already have sufficient support in their lives, to risk disrupting this by befriending others unlike themselves.

The formation of positive student relationships may also be influenced by gender. Qin-Hilliard (2003) examined gender differences regarding how adolescents from immigrant backgrounds adapt to their new schools, finding that males experienced a higher degree of assimilation into the prevailing culture, because they are typically given more freedom away from home, spend more time on the street or working, and have more opportunities and exposure to the dominant culture. Conversely, females tend to be more strictly monitored by their parents, have more responsibilities at home and are limited to accessing the opportunities available within the dominant culture (Qin-Hilliard, 2003). While male adolescents may integrate more quickly into their new communities, by making more friends, they also tend to demonstrate higher risk-taking behaviours and have increased involvement in illicit and illegal activities (Qin-Hilliard, 2003). Females, on the other hand, appear to benefit from a cultural “shield of ethnicity” (p.106), which limits their exposure to the often-negative urban environment in which they live (Qin-Hilliard, 2003). As a result, female adolescents from immigrant backgrounds have demonstrated higher academic achievements and healthier lifestyles than their male counterparts.

Yet, a study conducted by Liljeberg, Eklund, Fritz and Klinteberg (2011) examined gender differences in school bonding through a questionnaire given to 353 males and 435 females aged 14-16 years old. They concluded that interpersonal connections to teachers and peers in which adolescents felt supported and understood were of primary importance, for decreasing delinquency and increasing academic achievement, social development and school adjustment. This was true for all adolescents, regardless of gender. This suggests that strong teacher-student and peer

relationships may be able to mitigate some of the negative influences that adolescents from refugee backgrounds face in finding a sense of belonging.

Positive teacher-student and peer-peer relationships act as important social models for both male and female adolescents from refugee backgrounds. Positive social persuasion provides students from refugee backgrounds with external encouragement to believe in themselves; this is particularly important when it comes from the adults and peers with whom they most regularly interact (Bandura, 2011). According to Bandura (2011) a positive social model is an individual who has some similar characteristics as the adolescent and has demonstrated success in their life. Students from refugee backgrounds should have opportunities to interact with positive social models, people who reflect aspects of themselves and whose success will strengthen their own efforts and self-beliefs (Bandura, 2011). Yancey et al. (2002) notes that positive social models can prevent adolescents from internalizing negative images of their group as portrayed by the dominant culture and in the media. They explain that social models can strengthen pride in adolescents, by demonstrating how someone with a shared background can achieve success and can also strengthen psychosocial characteristics, conveying that individuals from the same cultural and religious background, or socioeconomic status can prosper in their new communities as well.

Conversely, if no positive social models are accessible, adolescents from refugee backgrounds may begin to feel that they are incapable of achieving success in their new lives, which may decrease their academic motivation and increase their risk-taking behaviour as an alternative. The extent to which these external assets are available to students from refugee backgrounds largely depends on the community and the school in which they are emerged and the perceived (and real) support that is available to them through teacher-student and peer relationships.

2.2.3. Sense of Belonging and the School System

There are multiple factors within the schools and the wider school community that impact students from refugee backgrounds' sense of belonging. Within schools, teachers, counsellors, youth workers and safe school police liaison officers work to help

integrate and support vulnerable students in regards to their academics and their socio-emotional well-being. Working closely with schools, but in the wider school community, Welcome Centers provide Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) and Multicultural Workers (MCWs), who help support newcomer students and their families. Given the high demand placed on these services, just how effective these resources are in supporting students from refugee backgrounds has yet to be fully studied.

There are many programs both within the schools and within the wider school community that aim to build upon the strengths and skills of students from refugee backgrounds. Often run by youth workers, settlement workers or multicultural workers, these programs focus on providing students with opportunities to contribute positively to their community, and in this way, are particularly useful for contributing to a sense of belonging (Search Institute, 2015). These programs provide opportunities for youth to make decisions in their communities and engage in positive social change. Programs in which these adolescents are able to help others are especially helpful in reducing stigma that refugees are the “other,” who are subjects of trauma and dependent on the support and charity of others to be successful (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) studied 76 Somali refugee adolescents aged 12-19 years old in Boston, Massachusetts and Portland, Maine. Amongst the participants were 41 male and 35 female students with an average length of time since resettlement of 6.4 years. They discovered that more than one quarter of the variation in self-efficacy was a direct result of a student’s sense of belonging in school and that students who felt more attached to, and involved in, their schools felt that they had a purpose, a place, and could contribute in valuable ways to their school community. Further, they had increased levels of self-efficacy over those who did not feel they had the opportunities to participate in this way. Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) found that sense of belonging was fostered by clubs, events and programs, which enabled students to use their leadership skills and positively contribute to their community. In the Canadian context, these opportunities are often facilitated by non-profit organizations who work hard at making these activities available and accessible to students. Unfortunately, multiple factors, including transportation costs and safety, may inhibit participation.

Schools and classrooms that best support student learning have teachers and relevant school staff who hold high expectations for student learning, while recognizing

and working within realistic limits, such as English language levels (Chiu et al. 2015; McBrien, 2005). These teachers and staff are available to help students when needed and are thought by students to go above and beyond their everyday roles, in order to help them achieve success (Cassidy, 2005). Similarly, schools and classrooms that are able to provide additional resources to help students find success in their learning, such as afterschool homework clubs, individualized attention from learning support teachers, or peer tutors, also contribute to creating supportive learning environments for students from refugee backgrounds (Chiu et al. 2015; McBrien, 2005). Finally, teachers and school personnel who treat students with care, and in a way, that is perceived as fair by students, which includes dialogue with the students in a way that demonstrates genuine care and attention, are considered to be more supportive to student learning (McBrien, 2005; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Students from refugee backgrounds need to learn in an environment of care and support, which reinforces that the school community wants to help support their development and genuinely cares about their well-being (Cassidy, 2005; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

In data collected through questionnaires of 167 ethnically diverse 6th to 8th grade American students, it was discovered that students showed more interest in class when they felt supported by their teacher, and felt that the boundaries and rules were clear (Wentzel, 1998). These students were also more likely to adhere to classroom rules and norms, demonstrate longer commitment to pursuing goals and pursue more socially responsible goals when they felt that high expectations were set for them (Wentzel, 1998).

The availability of support compared to student need at Royal Secondary School is highly disproportionate. For instance, there is one counsellor for every 379.5 students at Royal Secondary School, which significantly impacts the social-emotional support available. Similarly, there is one Safe-School police liaison assigned to Royal Secondary School (per 1, 518 students). Subsequently, the impact that the one Safe-School police liaison has on students from refugee backgrounds is relatively unknown due to the minimal-to-no contact that study participants had with him. Yet, it is particularly important for these students to build trusting relationships with such support services. Students from refugee backgrounds specifically, may have mental health challenges, as a result of exposure to war, which requires counselling support. Also, they may be distrustful of police and authority (Behnia, 1996; Machel, 1996). This may be because of their

experiences during conflict and war, when the collapse of political authority and the rule of law may have resulted in distrust between civilians and police (Behnia, 1996; Machel, 1996). Subsequently, it is even more important for these students to build a trusting relationship with the Safe-School police liaison, in order to help them feel safe and supported in their school and community, knowing that help is available, and trustworthy, if needed.

2.3. Summary

A sense of belonging in schools is created for students when they are connected to a group, comfortable at school, supported by teachers, accepted by peers, active in the school community through clubs, events and programming, have opportunities to develop strengths and talents, and are provided with opportunities to use their own knowledge and skills to positively contribute to the community.

Much of the research available on developing a sense of belonging amongst refugee youth has been written from a homogenous perspective and American or Australian context. There is a need to study the refugee students' sense of belonging within the Canadian context. Furthermore, there is a need to examine the perspectives of female adolescents from refugee backgrounds who may carry more of the responsibility and stress from family poverty, language barriers, mental health challenges and more. By better understanding the impact that protective factors such as internal assets of resilience and self-efficacy, teacher and peer relationships, and school system structures have on the fostering of sense of belonging amongst adolescents from refugee backgrounds, we can better support these students and their families upon arrival to their host countries, specifically Canada. Better support would increase positive pro-social outcomes and decrease negative well-being outcomes for these students and their families.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This study uses narrative inquiry to describe the lives, experiences and stories of adolescent females from refugee backgrounds at one secondary school in British Columbia, Canada. Narrative inquiry was chosen because it allows the study participants to explain their unique experiences, that are both individually and socially constructed (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Allowing study participants to speak for themselves and individually construct their own stories enabled them to attribute meaning to situations and experiences through their own lens (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Through their stories, the stories shared by their teachers and those that emerged through observation of the school community, socially constructed stories were created. These stories conveyed how the diversity of the participants experiences generated different types of knowledge about sense of belonging. In analyzing these stories, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the significance that the school community plays in creating sense of belonging in the lives of these student participants.

Prior to beginning this study, I took on a new role at Royal Secondary School. as a Learning Support Teacher specializing in Social Studies. This role allowed me to actively engage with the study participants on a daily basis. The participants would often seek my help for a variety of needs, including homework help, job application assistance, or general advice. In this role as Learning Support Teacher, I observed the participants daily, as I was assigned to their classrooms to provide general learning support. Combined with being a soccer coach (of which two of the participants played on my team), and the sponsor teacher of the Global Friendship Society (of which all of the participants attended with varying levels of commitment throughout the year), I actively observed and interacted with the participants in a variety of settings. These observations were recorded weekly in a field note journal in an attempt to better understand how sense of belonging was experienced by students from refugee backgrounds in their school community.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is qualitative in nature and based in narrative inquiry. Narratives occur within specific sociocultural and historical-political climates, which influence the identity

that participants choose to exert (Creswell, 2013). The sociocultural climate, or the beliefs, customs, practices and behaviours, in which the study participants operated changed frequently as they navigated their own sociocultural environments, as influenced by their traditional family values, attitudes and religious beliefs, along with the new Western sociocultural climate in which they found themselves. During the time that the study was conducted, the historical-political climate was one of distrust and uncertainty towards people from refugee backgrounds. The world was experiencing unprecedented refugee migration rates, largely impacted by the Syrian war, which forced 4.8 million people to flee the country and internally displaced another 6 million people (United Nations, 2016). Biased media coverage largely contributed to spreading public distrust of refugees, by portraying them as violent and potential terrorist threats (Saeed, 2007). This had a particularly significant influence on spreading Islamophobia, or prejudice against refugees who practice the Islamic faith (Saeed, 2007). Four (of the seven) study participants identified as being Muslim. As a result, the participants were operating in a historical-political climate of uncertainty, distrust and often prejudice towards people of refugee backgrounds. This study aimed to examine the participants' sense of belonging through their own stories and with the understanding that identity is fluid and constantly changing.

This study also used a strength-based approach that focused on the capacity, skills and potential of the participants in the school community. I approached the study and analysis from the perspective that the participants are resourceful and resilient, have hope and optimism for the future, value their education and want to find a sense of belonging in their new school communities (Ungar, 2015). These students continue to face on-going challenges and barriers in order to achieve belonging in their new countries of resettlement, including but not limited to language barriers, poverty, potential mental and physical health challenges. This study aimed to acknowledge the resiliency that these students employ in the face of the persistent and daily systemic barriers that they face, while recognizing that the challenges they encountered through their refugee experience of forced migration, do not end upon arrival to their new country of resettlement, but rather persist in new, everyday challenges. Yet, despite these daily obstacles, these students continue to maintain a resilient, positive, hopeful and optimistic outlook for the future.

3.1.1. Participant Profiles

Student participants were chosen through a selective or purposive sampling process, which narrows down the participants to a select group of people who fit a particular profile (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). This selection process was necessary to ensure access to the specific population that I wanted to study. In consultation with the English Language Learner teachers, I selected participants who were female, from refugee backgrounds, have been in Canada two years or less and who maintained a working knowledge of the English language.

Females were chosen as focal participants in this study because female adolescents from refugee backgrounds often have different experiences both during conflict and post-conflict than their male counterparts. During times of conflict, female and male children and adolescents who are directly involved in the conflict (often through deliberate strategic targeting), have many different experiences, ranging from sexual violence, to economic exploitation, to forced recruitment as combatants (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2000). As refugees in post-conflict situations, the differences in experiences continues. As noted in the literature review discussion, females are more strictly monitored by their parents, have more familial responsibilities and as a result their exposure to the often-negative urban environment in which they are relocated to is more limited than compared to their male counter-parts (Qin-Hilliard, 2003). While this is not a comparative study of males and females, the study uses narrative inquiry to focus specifically on female adolescents and to give voice to their unique experiences.

The female adolescent participants participated in two interviews and three art sessions to create their own scrapbooks for the study. I also conducted a series of field study observations over a period of five-months on the participants, both in their classrooms and in the wider school community. The interviews were conducted individually and in the privacy of empty classrooms. They were audio recorded and then transcribed. Two English Language Learner (ELL) teachers were also interviewed as I felt that their constant involvement both in the school lives and the family lives of the participants could provide additional unique insight. The observations were conducted in and around the school community, including in classrooms, at sporting events and during club times. They were documented in field note journals. The art projects were

conducted in small group art sessions in private classrooms in which the participants worked at the same time to create their scrapbooks. The art work was photographed, and later analyzed, to be potentially used as supporting data.

Table 3.1. provides a brief, general overview of the study participants who will be further discussed in the findings. I selected pseudonyms for all study participants, teachers, support workers, school names and the community, to ensure the anonymity and privacy of the study participants.

Table 3-1. Students from Refugee Background Participant Overview

Name / Role	Region of Origin	Countries lived in prior to Canada	Languages Spoken	Religion (See caption below)	Family Size & Composition	Parental Education Level	Generations of Displacement
Jamilah,- 17 yrs, Gr. 10	African	Three countries.	Four	Moderate	Five children, mother/father married	Parents have some secondary education	Internal country conflict has impacted Jamilah's family for two generations. Jamilah is the first generation to have been forcibly displaced out of the country. Resettlement was always to urban centers; family & student did not live in a refugee camp.
Iris - 19 yrs, Gr. 12	African	Three countries.	Three	Dedicated	Five children, lives with sister, father in Canada, no mother	Dad has minimal secondary education	Civil conflict has impacted Iris's home country for three generations. Iris is the second generation to be forcibly displaced - the first to leave the continent. Resettlement was always to urban centers; family & student did not live in a refugee camp.
Vania - 16 yrs, Gr. 10	African	Three	Five	Moderate	Nine children, lives with mother, father not in Canada	Mom has basic primary education	Vania's family has been impacted by conflict for three generations. She is the second generation to be forcibly displaced - the first to leave the continent. Resettlement within Africa was to a refugee camp, which Vania and her family lived in for three years.

Name / Role	Region of Origin	Countries lived in prior to Canada	Languages Spoken	Religion (See caption below)	Family Size & Composition	Parental Education Level	Generations of Displacement
Habiba – 19 yrs, Gr. 12 & Hada - 16 yrs, Gr. 10 (Sisters)	African	Three	Three	Moderate - Dedicated	Five children, lives with mother & grandmother, father not in Canada	Mom has less than primary education	Internal country conflict has impacted Habiba and Hada's family for two generations. The sisters are the second generation to have been forcibly displaced - the first generation to be displaced off of the continent. Resettlement was always to urban centers; family & student did not live in a refugee camp.
Hadarah - 18 yrs, Gr. 11 & Qabila – 16 yrs, Gr 10 (Sisters)	Middle Eastern	Two	Four	Dedicated	Eight children, mother/father married	Dad has advanced post-secondary medical education, Mom has no formal education	Hadarah and Qabila's family are the third generations to be impacted by conflict. They are the second generation to be forcibly displaced – the first generation to be displaced off of the continent. Resettlement was always to urban centers; family & student did not live in a refugee camp.

Religion Scale:

*Moderate – those who identify as a certain religion, but attend their place of worship on average 1-2x per month, and are flexible in following the religious rules.

*Dedicated – those who identify as a certain religion, attend their place of worship once per week (or more), and are dedicated to strictly adhering to their religious guidelines (e.g. specific dress, behaviour and/or food consumption rules).

3.2. Research Design & Methods

This study collected data from student participants and ELL teacher interviews, classroom and school community observations, as well as a scrapbooking art project. Students were interviewed to allow them the opportunity to explain their stories in their own voices. ELL teachers were interviewed to better understand the influence of the

classroom community on the student participants' experiences of belonging. Observations were conducted to better understand the influence of the school community on students' sense of belonging. The scrapbooking art project was facilitated to allow the students another venue through which to express their stories, if verbal expression (due to possible language barriers), posed a challenge for them.

Interviews were semi-structured and were guided by a set of general questions related to the study's core sense of belonging questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This allowed for flexibility in the interviewing process. The semi-structured nature of the questions allowed me as the researcher, the opportunity to ask follow-up and probing questions when necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Two sets of interviews were conducted. During the first round, all interviews were one-on-one. During the second round, I interviewed sets of sisters together, and the remaining participants one-on-one. Interviewing sets of sisters together allowed me to compare and contrast their attitudes and understandings of shared experiences. Once the interviews had been transcribed, participants were asked to review the transcriptions and the comments made on their interviews, in the hope that their input would strengthen the validity of the findings and that they would fill in any gaps and/or correct any mistaken ideas that had been made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Observations allowed me to record first-hand accounts of participant experiences in their classrooms, in the wider school community (e.g. school performances and events), at relevant meetings, on the sports-field and at club gatherings. Observations also allowed me to observe the students in a variety of school community settings. Field notes were recorded from these observations in my field note journal in which I used description, quotations and comments to describe situations.

The art projects were scrapbooks that the student participants made as a way to further contribute their thoughts, feelings and attitudes, but in a non-verbal way, given that English was not their primary language. These projects were intended to help me uncover meaning, develop deeper understanding and discover insight into their experiences of belonging (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.2.1. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection commenced upon approval of Simon Fraser University and the Study School District's ethics committees. Initially I had intended to administer a sense of belonging questionnaire adapted from a study done in another Canadian school district. However, the Study School District was very strict about the type of language that could be used in such a questionnaire and unfortunately a mutually agreed upon questionnaire could not be found. The sense of belonging evaluation was subsequently discarded, and the data collection focused on the interviews, observations and the scrapbooking art project.

I began the study by first meeting with the two ELL teachers over a lunch hour to explain to them the purpose of the study and offer them consent forms to participate in the interviews. I chose to interview two ELL teachers whom I felt could provide unique insight into the participants' sense of belonging based on their classroom observations. We then scheduled individual interview dates over future lunch hours.

Next, I invited the students to participate. I first handed them mini-invitations when I saw them in the hallways and in their classrooms. The invitations were vague, but invited them to participate in a special project that they would get more information about over a lunch-hour meeting. The six students I invited showed up to the lunch-hour meeting a few days later, and as a group I began to explain to them the study. However, throughout my explanation another curious student kept popping her head outside one of the main windows of the classroom, curious to know what we were doing. While I had initially decided to not invite this particular student, because she was known to be absent frequently and less reliable, she did meet the participant selection criteria as earlier outlined, and because she was so eager to participate, I invited her to join. I also felt that if she was able to commit to the study, her insights may be particularly valuable, as a student who was eager to be involved in the school community, but not always dependable, for reasons yet to be understood. Furthermore, amongst the study participants I deliberately sought out to invite sisters. I felt that inviting sets of sisters to participate in the study would add an extra dimension of complexity. The differences in their perspectives on situations that they both experienced, would provide more diverse ways to understand such situations, and may elicit more insight into how individual

beliefs and attitudes contribute to perceived sense of belonging. Our group of six was now seven, and included two sets of sisters.

I continued the lunch meeting by detailing the time commitment of the two-lunch hour one-on-one interviews, a series of observations, and three lunch hour scrapbooking sessions, which would be required from the students. I further tried to build a safe environment in the meeting, hoping that this would enable the students to ask authentic questions and voice genuine concerns as they arose. I followed the direction of Clandinin & Connelly (1996) who argue that for participants to be empowered to participate meaningfully and genuinely a relationship of connectedness should be established with the researcher. Therefore, I shared some stories of myself, my family, my experiences and my interest in doing this study with the participants. This resulted in an exchange of amusing personal stories in which all the participants laughed and exchanged anecdotes, creating a more comfortable and relaxed atmosphere.

Following Elliott's (2005) recommendation, I handed out consent forms written in everyday English to ensure that the student participants understood the expectations of the study. We then read through the forms together, which I facilitated deliberately to ensure that any questions or concerns that arose would be answered. I also sent home a copy of the parental consent forms to be signed by their parents. Despite having secured the service of translators prior to the study, the students assured me that their parents would be able to read and understand the consent forms, and that translators were not needed. The student participants did, however, express concern that they were being labelled as "refugees" in this study, and this upset them because they did not want the label to define who they were. I tried to reassure the students that they were part of a community in which they held valuable knowledge and expertise that could help other newcomers to Canada and to Royal Secondary School have a better experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The importance of not homogenizing adolescents from refugee backgrounds into one group, but rather acknowledging their individuality outside of the label of "refugee" is reinforced by the United Nations Emergency Children's Fund report titled "Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict," (2000). This report conveys that it is important that adolescents from refugee backgrounds be encouraged and enabled to develop outside the confines of their negative lived experiences.

Observations

The observations began as soon as the ethics approval was granted and the consent forms were signed and returned. I set up a schedule to observe the students in their particular classes and activities. Four of the students were in classes that I assisted in as a Learning Support Teacher, which enabled me to observe them more frequently. Most afternoons I would take five to ten minutes to write down my observational notes about the interactions I had with the students from the day. This field note journal was kept in a password protected folder, on my personal, password protected computer, which was stored in a locked cabinet.

Throughout the observations I took on the roles of limited participant-observer, as well as teacher-as-researcher (Ahola & Lucas, 1981; Kennedy-Lewis, 2012). As a limited participant-observer, I was not a natural member of the group that I was studying, in particular I am not an adolescent from a refugee background. Although I did share in the experience of being female. I also participated indirectly in certain group aspects. In the classroom I was a teacher, on the soccer field I was the coach and in the Global Friendship Society club, I was the teacher-sponsor. While these roles allowed me direct observation of the participants activities, it still limited my access to the participants' lives outside of these realms, with their friends and families.

As teacher-as-researcher I had an enhanced rapport with participants, which provided deeper insights into the nuances of teacher/student behaviour (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012). In the role of Learning Support Teacher, I interacted with the participants daily in a variety of ways, whether it be by providing academic support, career guidance or general advice to them as needed. As I interacted with the participants in these differing ways as a teacher, I would often write in my field note journal about our interactions and thereby employ my role as researcher.

In both roles, as limited participant-observer and as teacher-as-researcher, I was at risk of being predisposed to making assumptions about teachers, students and the school that could potentially have limited my ability to examine diverse meanings of my interpretations of the data (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012). It also meant that I may be unconsciously reacting to organizational structures and creating and constructing a social reality through my interactions with my participants (Ahola & Lucas, 1981; Clandinin, 2006). Keeping this in mind, I frequently reflected in my field journal and in

this reflexive process, I tried to keep my subjective interpretations in-check throughout the observations.

In-class observations: Observations and subsequent field journals are necessary as the narrative researcher works closely with the participants in the classroom (Clandinin, 2006). To begin my observations I contacted three teachers, (electronically and then in-person), in whose classes I had hoped to conduct my observations. All three teachers, (two academic and one elective teacher), were willing to have me observe the students, including the two ELL teachers that would be participating in the study. In total, I had five classrooms to observe. I created a schedule upon which to structure my observations, and was aided in the fact that I was already in a few classes providing learning support to some of the study participants anyway. This enabled me to gain a stronger, more genuine sense of how the student participants interacted with other students in small group settings, partner projects and through other collaborative learning opportunities.

Table 3.2. shows the in-class observation schedule that I followed. Because of the rotating block order, periodic holidays and professional development days, the times and periods that I observed the participants in changed frequently. These observations were meant to assess the strengths of the student-teacher and peer relationships that participants were or were not forming. In these observations, I was looking for whether participants felt confident in asking their teacher questions, in voicing their opinions during classroom discussions, in seeking out their Canadian-born peers for advice, to partner on projects with or just generally to engage with in friendly ways.

Table 3-2. Student In-Class Observation Schedule

	Vick/Qabila	Hadarah	Habiba	Hada/Jamilah	Iris
Monday			Ms. M (C202)		
Tuesday		Mr. V (B118)			
Wednesday	Mr. W (A122)				
Thursday				Ms. P (C200)	
Friday					Mr. P (A119)

School Community Observations: I also observed the student participants in the wider school community. Four of the participants were members of a weekly club that I helped teacher-sponsor called the Global Friendship Society. The aim of this club was to

connect newcomer students with Canadian-born students and have them build friendships through a variety of activities including art projects, crafts and games. Furthermore, two of the student participants played on the soccer team, which I conveniently coached. This allowed me to further observe the participants while playing a team sport, and through this, gain a better understanding of their sense of belonging as determined by the strength of the relationships they were forming with their peers. I also attended a variety of school related events, including the school dance show and the school community fair. This enabled me to observe the participants engaging with their Canadian-born peers. The aim of these observations was to again assess the strength of the relationships that the participants were forming with their teachers and peers and also to better understand the participants involvement in the school community. The observations aimed to assess participants' perceived levels of acceptance within the larger school community as conveyed by the level of positive interaction with their Canadian-born peers and the types of opportunities (e.g. clubs, teams, and groups) that they were or were not involved in.

In my role as Learning Support Teacher, I was also able to attend community service providers meetings, meetings with multicultural and settlement workers, as well as school-based team meetings, which bring together the school psychologist, counsellors, administrators, teachers and sometimes social workers, to discuss the needs of specific students, some of which were the study participants. The meetings provided me observational information regarding how the teachers interact, address and deal with issues that arise in the school community regarding the study participants, and how well the service providers work together to address the challenges these students and their families are facing, both in the immediate and long term.

Interviews

The student participants were interviewed twice throughout the five-month observation period. Each interview was conducted in a private classroom, outside the earshot of other students and audio recorded, which enabled me to provide the participants with my full attention, as well as to also review the recordings post-interview and give consideration to pauses, intonation and laughter that I may have overlooked (Elliott, 2005). For both the student participant and teacher interviews, I used two recording devices in the form of a password protected Ipod and a password protected

Android cellphone, in case one recording device did not work properly. The recording devices were stored in my private locked cabinet for the rest of the school day. I then took the devices home and transcribed them on the same day. The recordings were erased immediately and wiped from both devices. The transcriptions remained on my password protected personal computer, in my home office, until they were printed out and put into the participants personal information folders.

Each student was interviewed individually using semi-structured, open ended questions (see Appendix A). I reinforced to students that they did not have to answer questions if they felt uncomfortable and that they could stop the interview at any time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). During the first round of interviews, I asked the students to fill out a sheet of paper that asked them to write down their names, birthdates, places of birth, native language, email address, family composition and religious background. This was intended to allow me to contact them if needed, but also to confirm that the information I had attained from discussions with them and their online school profiles, about who they were, was correct. I did notice that the school information regarding their place of birth, native language and name, often did not match with the information that they wrote down, which was puzzling. When the relevant participants were asked about this discrepancy, they shrugged it off as an administrative error. One participant however said that it was because “they” (meaning the administration and perhaps Western society) think that all African people are the same, speak the same language and come from the same country. This struck me as unfortunate and I could not help but think how this may have reinforced a feeling of non-belonging. Regardless, accurate information was verified and the second set of interviews ran much the same as the first except the questions focused on were themes that had emerged in my observations, with the intent of getting the participants perspective on the patterns that were emerging. The interviews lasted for 40-60 minutes.

Each interview was transcribed in a semi-true verbatim transcript in which every detail, including laughter and silence was recorded. Background noise was not recorded, as there were frequent interruptions by the school’s public announcement system that were irrelevant. However, it was necessary to transcribe the interviews in a semi-true verbatim transcript because the small utterances, verbal and non-verbal reactions, accents, grammatical errors, and repetitions for clarity of expression contributed to insight into the participant’s level of understanding, thought and thinking (Corners, 2015).

For instance, one participant had adopted an almost stereotypical Western American teenage accent, which she said she had picked up from watching American television. This conveyed her desire to fit into the mainstream cultural group to the extent that she was willing to adopt and indeed change her pattern of speech to do so. Another participant struggled to express herself, as noted by long silences, followed by frustrated exhalations and then disparaging comments such as “Argh, I do not know,” or “Humph, I cannot say it right.” These were important to consider in the data analysis. At the end of the interviews, I reminded the participants about the upcoming art project and thanked them for their participation.

Art Project

The art project scrapbook activity took place on three different official days over the lunch hour period. In a private classroom, I set up a wide variety of scrapbooking materials and supplies, including stickers, magazines, quotes, bubble letters, sparkly pens and so forth. I provided the participants some guiding questions which they could use to try and fill up their scrapbook if they did not know what to do. This rough guideline asked them to think about themselves and their world, reflecting on who they are and what they believe. It also encouraged them to think about their school experience, reflecting on their friends, classes and interest in learning. Lastly, the questions encouraged them to reflect on their school experience, their motivations and their dreams. The aim of these guidelines was to provide some structure to the scrapbooks and relate them to the guiding questions of the study. In hopes of strengthening the internal validity of the study, the art project allowed the participants, who are also English language learners, to show their ideas, thoughts and experiences in a way that did not rely primarily on words (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990).

The student participants came together on these three occasions to work on their individual scrapbooks. I tried to create a relaxed, fun and social environment. I provided lunchtime treats for the students, allowed them to play their favourite music off my computer and encouraged them to think about their interests, hobbies, and hopes for the future. The students agreed to let me photograph their scrapbooks, as many of them wanted to take the scrapbooks home to continue working on them. As I took photographs of the scrapbooks, I asked the students about the different images they were using and the art work they were creating. We discussed the meanings and ideas

behind their scrapbooks. Many interesting thoughts came out, such as an analysis and subsequent group discussion about the ethnicity of many of the models (e.g. the number of Caucasian models compared to Black models) and the activities they were engaged in (e.g. no females playing sports). I wrote about these conversations in my field note journal.

Field Journal

Throughout the data collection process, I maintained a detailed field note journal in which I wrote about the observations I made in the classrooms and school community. I wrote informal memos after my observations noting new questions I had (to help monitor my personal position), what I found surprising (to help monitor my bias), and what concerned me (to help monitor tensions that arose) (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 2006). While keeping in mind the study's core questions, I journaled about the key aspects of sense of belonging as outlined in the literature review, including teacher-student and peer relationships, level of student attachment to the school as demonstrated by their involvement in the school community and their beliefs in the school values; student participation in academic pursuits; and feelings of comfort and acceptance in the school environment.

Journaling is an active reconstruction of classroom and school community events that allows the narrative inquirer to continually be reflexive and reflective about their experiences and the stories being shared with them (Given, 2008). As a teacher in the school, I frequently engaged with students outside of the context of the study. The journal also provided an opportunity for me to record these interactions and analyze them in the context of the study. Table 3.3. illustrates how much time I spent with participants in the overall study.

Table 3-3. Data Collection Time Chart

Participants	Student Participants (x7)	Total
Number of recorded interviews	2 per participant x 7	14 meetings
Hours of recorded interviews	14 hours (+ 4 hours with ELL teachers)	18 hours total
Number of hours observing in school & school community (e.g. clubs, sports teams etc.)	x3hrs/week for five months	66 hours
Number of hours spent on art project	x1 hr/3 sessions	3 hours

3.2.2. Data Analysis

Data analysis involves collecting data, coding and organizing themes, creating categories, representing the data and forming an interpretation of them (Creswell, 2011, p. 179). My data analysis was structured around both open coding and axial coding. Open coding requires the researcher to label concepts and then create categories based on similarities amongst the concepts (Basit, 2003). Axial coding is a process which relates the concepts, and then the categories that emerge to each other through deductive thinking (Basit, 2003). Coding is a dynamic and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing that is important to make sense of the textual data (Basit, 2003). When coding, the researcher analyzes phenomena in order to find commonalities and differences, as well as patterns and structures (Basit, 2003).

In analyzing the data, I first compiled all the student data into folders labelled with the participants' pseudonyms. Each folder contained transcriptions of their interviews, observation notes (including ELL teacher comments) on the participant, and photographs of pages from their scrapbooks.

To begin the analysis, I applied the open coding concept to the first set of interviews and observations. I coded related quotes, comments, notes and stories. These codes were based on themes and patterns that emerged naturally. Throughout this process 42 codes emerged, which I then organized by related category (see appendix B). I kept notes about the data that did not fit into the first set of codes with the understanding that they may be relevant later in the study.

Once all the raw data had been collected from the first round of interviews, observations and art projects, I held a second scrapbooking session. During this time, I informally asked the participants about some of the themes that I saw emerging across all of the data. For instance, I asked the group what prevented them from joining more

school activities? They discussed a variety of factors including not feeling skilled enough to try-out for a certain team, not having the time to commit or not knowing when/where the clubs or teams were meeting. With this feedback, I adjusted the planned focus of the interviews, observation periods and third scrapbooking session to look for some of these patterns of behaviors and attitudes. I then commenced on the next round of observations, interviews and scrapbooking.

Upon completion of the second phase of data collection I coded the new quotes, comments, notes and stories and applied the categories that had emerged in the first round of data collection where relevant. I then created a new document with new categories based on the study's core questions. From this I commenced the process of axial coding in which I tried to relate the main codes to each other, and to the core questions being asked (Creswell, 2011, p.184). I used both the first and second round of data to sort into the core question categories. I now had the data divided into naturally emerging thematically based categories, core question categories and outliers, which were data that did not seem to fit in any category. Finally, I used large sheets of chart paper, to further sort and compare codes, categories and the core questions. The large chart paper allowed me to physically move the data around to more clearly structure and re-structure categories. Once the codes and categories were organized on the large chart paper, I took the pictures of the scrapbook images, which I had printed out and physically moved them around to best determine where they fit amongst the categories. The artwork however, proved to provide more valuable insight into the participants personalities, rather than into answering the core questions. Much of the art work was not usable because many of the doodles were of participant family names and native languages, and was information that could compromise participant anonymity. Yet, this information was interesting to note because it suggested that there were strong family, cultural and language connections that made up participant sense of personal identity. While the students were scrapbooking, I often asked them about the images they were using and what they were trying to communicate. I recorded the themes of these conversations in my observational field journal, which turned out to be more usable in answering the core questions of the study, than the art itself. I placed the notes from these scrapbooking conversations, along with the corresponding images, into relevant categories in an attempt to make better sense of them.

To ensure quality in narrative inquiry, it is important for the inquirer to adopt forms of reflection and reflexivity in which they acknowledge the perspectives and assumptions that they have (Marshall & Reason, 2008). To guard against my personal biases, I tried to ensure categories were supported by multiple pieces of data that shared similar themes, and were not just bits and pieces of information. I also constantly checked with the participants that their voices were being expressed accurately and that the analysis and theories I found emerging were consistent with their views and experiences. I did this by asking them to read over their interviews. I also asked them to explain certain art work they created and to expand upon certain situations I had observed in and around the school community.

3.2.3. Research Setting

Royal Secondary School is a large inter-city school located in a sub-urban neighbourhood in a large metropolitan community in British Columbia. The school, which is surrounded by open, green expanses of well-maintained city parks and a modern community center, suggests that it is a safe and welcoming neighbourhood. However, the student population intermixes with the reality of the poverty, substance abuse and criminal activity in the neighbourhood daily. Whether they walk by community members involved in the sex-trade, side step used needles and prophylactics littered on the grounds on their way into school, or are forced to participate in school-wide lockdowns because of crime occurring in the community, the reality of the wider community often seeps into the school's and the students' everyday lives. It is not uncommon to hear sirens whizzing by at all hours of the day, see elementary teachers teaching children how to identify drug paraphernalia on the playground and what to do when they see it (not touch it, have someone go and get an adult), or to see physical education classes doing a sweep of the community fields, to ensure that no student member of the soccer, rugby or ultimate frisbee team accidentally steps or slides into something that may cause illness or disease.

To diversify the student population, the school brought in two unique district programs, to encourage students from outside the neighbourhood to attend. These two programs are unique to have in a school, and have functioned well to diversify the student population. However, the exorbitant cost of living in other cities and communities in the province, has resulted in an influx of low-income families to this neighbourhood

and the school now finds itself far over capacity at 1518 students and growing, compared to its intended capacity of roughly 1200 students. Boasting the largest number of Aboriginal students, the second largest refugee student populations, and a rapidly growing ELL student population, of which there are over 54 different languages spoken at home, the school is rich with diversity. However, it also means that the school has used the maximum number of portables allowed in the district, and now must move one of the special learning programs to another location, to make room for more of the in-catchment student population (BC Ministry of Education, 2017). This will once again change the student dynamic. Yet, despite the challenges facing this school and its surrounding community, the student population is warm, friendly, respectful, curious and maintains a graduation rate of approximately 96% (BC Ministry of Education, 2017).

3.3. Positioning

Narrative inquiry requires that the researcher be aware of their positionality in the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Narrative inquiry lends itself to the possibility of researcher bias and subjectivity. While conducting this research, I was continually mindful of my bias as a teacher and as a Social Studies specialist. As a teacher, I have access to the private files of my participants, and as a Social Studies specialist, I have studied war, conflict and children's involvement in war quite extensively. Compounded by public media portrayals, I entered this research with pre-conceived assumptions about the experiences of my participants as refugees, and as struggling with personal challenges including domestic violence, disjointed families, poverty and mental health risks. By journaling my interactions and conversations with the students, I was able to reflect on my biases on the types of questions I asked and on my interactions with the participants.

I also aimed to employ what Ladkin refers to as "bracketing" or the ability to put aside one's preconceptions, expectations and culturally determined interpretations in order to best understand the phenomenon being studied (2005). Ladkin argues that the researcher should pay attention to noticing oneself attempting to "catch" how perceptions arise in the immediate experience, as well as account for their gender, ethnicity, and value systems which threaten to influence their interpretations of the findings (Ladkin, 2005). In acknowledging my bias, I must recognize that as a researcher, I am a first-generation Canadian whose family values include gender

equality, educational attainment and adherence to Canada's fundamental freedoms as expressed through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, such as freedom of thought, belief, and expression. As I proceeded with this study, I kept in mind that my preconceptions and expectations, particularly of religion, culture and gender roles, could influence my interpretation of the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours held by the study participants.

In addition, Creswell warns that the very presence of the researcher in the observations may impact the validity of the data obtained (2011). This became quite apparent at the start of the study where participants were hesitant to have me come in and observe them, because they did not want to be signaled out and identified as being different than their peers. However, by identifying myself as a Learning Support Teacher, and providing equal support to all students in the classes, I was able to blend into the class environment in my role as a teacher, minimizing my presence as a researcher.

3.4. Study Participants

Jamilah – Jamilah is a 17-year-old tenth grade student from a central African country that has experienced a long history of conflict, dating back to its colonial past (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2009). Since gaining independence, the citizens of this country have suffered immeasurably by being plagued by civil conflict, dictatorship, the mismanagement of natural resources and child soldiering (Hartung, 2000). Jamilah was born in the midst of a merciless war, which witnessed the murder of over five million people, as well as a blatant disregard of international norms and conventions regarding the protection of civilians and the involvement of children (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2009). Fortunately, Jamilah's two brothers, two sisters, mother and father, were moved to a neighbouring African country for safety, when she was a young child. There she and her siblings were able to attend a formalized school. Under the humanitarian and compassionate aid program, Jamilah and her family were able to relocate to Canada in 2015. Jamilah's parents were both indirectly impacted by their home countries civil wars which spanned more than two decades. This prolonged duration of exposure to war suggests a higher likelihood of mental health challenges. Whether Jamilah's parents experience these challenges is unknown. Regardless, the long lasting mental health impacts of the continued exposure to violence, war and instability have the potential to pose significant stress on families and specifically

daughters, who often are left with taking on more familial responsibilities (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007; Qin-Hilliard, 2003).

Yet, Jamilah has high hopes for her future, and speaks fondly of her dreams of becoming either a flight attendant or a surgeon. Jamilah has adopted a very modern style of dress, her thick, dark hair is plaited in a chic shoulder length cut, and her English accent largely mimics that of an American teenager from California, punctuated by “likes” and “so like ya”. She attributes her language development to her interest in popular culture, as expressed in her first interview when asked how she developed her language skills so quickly.

My English is good because I watch a lot of movies in English, and I love listening to music on my Ipod!

(Jamilah, Interview I, March 31·2017)

Additionally, Jamilah’s language skills evolved quickly as she engaged in activities with a wide variety of students outside the English Language Learner (ELL) classroom. Doing so enabled her to transition out of ELL into mainstream classes by her second semester at school, as opposed to the typical full year transition time. Jamilah has independently taken the initiative to join a variety of clubs, both inside and outside the school, as well as started working at a part-time job at a local restaurant, which has further sped up her language acquisition. Jamilah has embraced popular Western culture and the use of social media. Throughout her interviews, Jamilah repeatedly made reference to her use of trendy social media sites, her love of certain Westernized television programming and her interest in other cultures, specifically Asian culture.

Iris – Iris is a 19-year-old, grade 12 student with a sturdy build and a wide smile. Iris also comes from a central African country plagued by years of civil war, but lived a very transient life moving throughout various African countries with a family relative who travelled for business. For roughly fifteen years, Iris traveled with her relative and had minimal contact with her father. Her mother’s whereabouts during this time is unknown. When asked about her mother, Iris avoided eye contact and expressed that she did not want to discuss her mother. Not wanting to make Iris uncomfortable, I did not continue to ask questions. Iris also has multiple siblings, two of whom she now resides with here in Canada. Despite the minimal contact Iris had with her father growing up, he was the individual who brought her to Canada. However, upon arrival in Canada, her father

quickly proved unable or unwilling to take care of her and her siblings, as described by her ELL teacher.

I have met Iris's father, he did not speak English. Iris told me that her father is not involved in her life. He wouldn't come in [to the school] to talk about graduation and transitions. She re-asserted that her father is "not close to her" so I decided that because Iris is a big girl, she knows what's best for herself. So, we talked about graduation without him...but Iris has been struggling, and although it is better now that she's moved in with her sister, there were many problems with her father, so I connected her with the counsellor. She's on the lunch program and when there's a [free] clothing event, she goes to and gets whatever she needs.

(Maria Mojcik, Interview I, April 3, 2017)

Iris's ELL teacher suspects that her father used the family unification program as a loophole for bringing his children to Canada, although this is speculative. Alternatively, her father may have had good intentions, but may lack the skills, and struggles to manage poverty, low level English skills and mental health challenges to provide the support to his children that they need. There are many gaps in Iris's personal narrative, which is common amongst students from refugee backgrounds who either do not want to talk about traumatic events of the past or have sufficiently blocked certain memories as a natural coping mechanism (Alcock, 2003). The gaps leave many questions about Iris's history unanswerable. Iris shared that her siblings have different mothers, the common link being their father and upon arrival to Canada her younger sister was put into a Francophone school, while Iris was sent to Royal Secondary School. As neither child has a French background, it is unclear where the younger sister was living and why she was placed in this school. It is also common amongst families from refugee backgrounds who may have lived in the same neighbourhoods in their home country to informally adopt the children of neighbours and relatives, particularly if they were left orphaned by missing or murdered parents during the war (Papadopoulos, 2001). Furthermore, it is often more common to refer to cousins and close family friends as "brothers" or "sisters" in some cultures, when they may not be considered such by Western standards of blood lineage (Papadopoulos, 2001). It is possible, but unconfirmed, that Iris's younger sister is not blood related.

Housing instability, minimal parental support and poverty have played a significant role in Iris's life before and after her arrival in Canada. Yet, despite these

challenges, Iris expressed a desire to make friends and make good choices here in Canada.

I want to be friends with everyone...I'm a friendly person and I want to make everything possible to so I avoid making trouble. So, like everything I think will make me trouble, I just leave it, so everything is fine for me. [Laughs].

(Iris, Interview I, March 31, 2017)

Vania - Vania is a gregarious and outgoing 16-year-old grade 10 student, whose long braids frequently change colour and style, to match her hip outfits of ripped jeans and tank tops. Originally born in a mid-sized African country, Vania, her mother and her siblings moved to a neighbouring African country when she was a small child to evade the ongoing civil conflict in the region. Another former European colony, Vania's home country witnessed great conflict between rival warlords who struggled to establish control of the region during the 1990's when Vania's mother was growing up (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2017). American involvement and failed United Nations peacekeeping missions, sent the country into chaos, killing over half a million civilians (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2017). Throughout our interviews, Vania spoke candidly about her mother's experience growing up in war and conflict, the atrocities that she witnessed, and the upheaval she experienced. Being one of the youngest children in her family, Vania felt fortunate that she never experienced war directly, but she continues to endure the stress of having to help support her mother and family. The fond way that she speaks of her mother suggests a great respect for the sacrifices her mother made to keep her children safe during the war.

My mom was in the war, she told me the stories...like during the war, my mom told me he, her [wealthy] brother did not give her anything, like during the war he wouldn't help her. My mom like worked and worked in other people's houses in order to get food on the table for the kids...my dad was not even there...nobody helped her, but you know in war, they [the mothers] need help with all the children and stuff.

(Vania, Interview I, March 30, 2017)

When Vania, her mother and siblings arrived in the neighbouring African country, Vania lived and was educated in a refugee camp, which at the time was home to nearly half a million refugees and asylum seekers (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, 2017). Vania spent most of her life in the camp. Throughout my interactions with her, specifically in her Social Studies class, Vania happily recalled her experience in the grasslands of Africa, and seeing wild animals such as lions, gazelles and wild boars.

Vania conveys a sense of independence and a strong desire to fit in with the mainstream student population, as conveyed by her Westernized speech pattern and her modern dress. Amongst her ELL peers, Vania can be overheard being assertive and opinionated. However, amongst her Canadian peers, Vania's personality becomes more reserved and hesitant, as conveyed in her first interview.

I see how they [the other students] react [when we talk]. Their body and language and I can hear them talking [about us]...that's why I do not talk so much.

(Vania, Interview I, March 30, 2017)

There is an uncertainty regarding how Canadian born students interact with, and respond to, ELL students, as will be discussed further in the analysis. Despite this uncertainty, Vania continues to study hard and is an accomplished athlete, seeking out and joining school and community based soccer, volleyball and softball teams.

However, Vania's home-life, both in Africa and continuing here in Canada, has been tumultuous. Among the three brothers and six sisters she has, there are four different fathers, only one of whom has regular contact with the family. As dictated by the police, Vania's step-father, the father of one of her younger siblings, is banned from the home and seeing any children because of his alcohol addiction. Last year Vania's older brother was removed from the home for repeatedly beating both her mother and older sister, who frequently would come to school bruised and battered. When asked about her family, it is clear that Vania maintains respect for her mother, but a deep sense of anger towards the men in her life.

I would not talk to none of them [the men, dads and uncle] because my mom suffered to take care of me while they left me...like I'll forgive him [dad] for what he did to me, but I will not let him call me daughter because he did not show me the kind of dad he should be. You know how like dads stay with their kids and take care of them, they show them that they care and teach them, read them even a bedtime story...especially like when the war was going, like in [Africa] there were lots of little little kids and like they [the women] needed help to carry them during the war, you need help and stuff like that, but most [dads] just left...he's [the afore mentioned step-father] is not allowed in the house. He drinks alcohol and then like after he gets drunk he will make noise and beat people in the house and even like fight with my mom and stuff like that...

(Vania, Interview II, June 8, 2017)

This has been the first full year that the men in Vania's life, [father, step-fathers, brothers and uncles] have been completely removed from her home, at the intervention

of the school and the legal authorities. Without the constant violence, insecurity and fear that was rampant in the home last year, Vania seems to be thriving. She has taken the initiative to join a variety of clubs, sports teams and is studying hard to do well academically. Vania is strong-willed, which should contribute to her resiliency long-term.

Habiba & Hada – Habiba and Hada are 18 and 16-year-old grade 12 and 10 students, and sisters. They bear a striking resemblance to each other, both with large, dark, wide-set eyes and shy, hesitant smiles. Petite and soft spoken, the sisters diligently apply a full face of makeup each day, and wear modern, westernized clothing under their long hijabs. Habiba likes helping people, as expressed by her desire to become a nurse, and Hada likes dance, as expressed in her participation in the school dance team. The sisters were also born in an African country during a time of war, from which they moved to another African country and finally settled in a third African country. Here they were raised until they moved to Canada two years ago. In their third African country, they were not living in a refugee camp, but rather in the city. The details of their lives during this time are unclear. While the sisters identify as being religious, they do so liberally, making room for Western ideas, trends and practices as demonstrated when I congratulated Habiba on graduating high school and expressed surprise that she had removed her religious head-wear for the graduation celebrations.

Ya! Ya, sometimes if I do not wear it my mom gets mad at me because she says we're [religious] and we have to hide our hair. But for graduation, she said it was okay because everyone there is dressing nicely and then for me to wear a hijab, would not look nice, I would look different, so I took it off.

(Habiba, Interview I, June 7, 2017)

Habiba and Hada live with their mother, grandmother, and multiple siblings. They describe their mother as being modern and progressive in her thinking and values about women. Their mother and grandmother value girls' education, delaying the marriage age, and are opposed to arranged marriages. Habiba, in particular, expressed her happiness about these specific attitudes, as she conveyed that, back in Africa, her extended family would have already forced her into an arranged marriage, subsequently ending her education. The value that their mother and grandmother place on education and independence is highly valued and respected by the girls themselves.

Hadarah & Qabila – Hadarah and Qabila are two sisters, aged 18 and 16 years old from Asia. Although they were born in one Asian country, the sisters identify as being from a different Asian country. Currently, there are over 300 million undocumented refugees in the girls' native homeland (Plesch, 2017). Many of these migrants and refugees date back to the 1970's (Plesch, 2017), and they hold no nationality as their citizenship has not been legitimized by either their native or their later country of residence. Hadarah and Qabila speak candidly about their parents lives in Asia, and the terrible atrocities witnessed by their parents. Hadarah talks about her father forcing her mother to stay inside the house because of the crimes against women being committed in the community. As a result, Hadarah's mother never left the house in Asia and became fearful to leave the house in the next Asian country they relocated to. She spends most of her time, here in Canada, indoors, caring for her eight children. Throughout her interviews, Hadarah described her mother with some disappointment in her voice.

My dad helps us with everything, our mom doesn't do anything. She is "just" a housewife, she stays at home all the time. She's uneducated, so she doesn't know anything. But she does want to try and learn English.

(Hadarah, Interview I, March 29, 2017)

Hadarah and Qabila picked up nearly fluent English in less than one year following their arrival to Canada, which demonstrates their strong work ethic. Already in mainstream classes, the girls have been passing their academic courses, despite their seemingly low grades, which they expressed both disappointment and frustration in repeatedly throughout the year. For instance, I once found Hadarah crying in the hallway over the C+ that she had earned on a Science 11 exam. She was frustrated because she had worked so hard to study for the exam, but was not able to earn the A that she had desired. It was difficult to convey to her what an outstanding accomplishment a C+ was in a challenging academic course, given that she had only learned English in the past year. Her frustration stemmed from the discrepancy between her work ethic and the grade she received, which would potentially limit her opportunities to continue on to post-secondary in the future.

Education is highly valued in Hadarah and Qabila's family, as their father had been in the middle of his medical residency in their home country, and had invested years into his post-secondary education. The girls are very aware of the benefits of

education to their future success. As a result, they work hard, for themselves but also for their family, and specifically to make their father proud, as expressed by Qabila.

We work hard because our dad you know had a hard life, and we want to make sure he is comfortable.

(Qabila, Interview I, March 29, 2017)

Hadarah and Qabila ask many questions about life, conveying their innate curiosity, and frequently attend Homework Club to help them with their studies. Their innate curiosity, strong work ethic and positive attitudes are well recognized within the school community, as conveyed by ELL teacher Priya Singh.

That family is remarkable. The kids are so kind, especially with the life they've had to lead, and they are so respectful and hard working. I cannot believe how well they're doing in their courses, but really it comes down to their work ethic and the value that their family places on their education. I haven't met their parents, but they should be lovely.

(Priya Singh, Interview I, April 4, 2017)

School Community (Service Providers) – There are a variety of in-school and community based supports and resources accessible to students from refugee backgrounds. Combined, the resources work together to support the integration and settlement of students from refugee backgrounds into the school system. Despite the wide host of programs available, the ones that were of most relevance to the study participants are described in Table 3.4. and Table 3.5.

Table 3-4. In-School Supports

In-School Support	Type of Support	Service Offered	Contact with Participants
Teacher-Counsellors	Free in-school service. Accessible to all students.	Provide personal, social-emotional and academic support to students.	-Student seek out own counseling appointment. -Vania was only student who had contact with counselor, as arranged by a teacher due to domestic violence in her home. -Other participants had no in-school counselling contact.
Learning Support Teaching (LST)	Free in-school service. Accessible to all students between 8-4:30pm (most days).	Learning support center and in-class teachers who provide academic support to students who are struggling and/or have Individualized Educational Plans.	-Study participants were allocated LST support due to their ELL designations. -LST was most easily accessible to students if they chose to attend homework clubs during week. -Participants' LST attendance increased as the study progressed, although they often sought my help (as LST teacher) for non-academic advice (e.g. resume writing).
Safe School Police Liaisons (SSPL)	SSPL's enhance school safety through education and are present in the school a few times a month (although this is an irregular schedule and subject to change given need).	SSPL's aim to eliminate barriers between youth and police by delivering safety and crime prevention lessons to students and parents; counsel and talk informally with students; investigate offences and enforce laws in schools; and serve as a liaison between the school and the criminal justice system	-Study participants did not know there was a difference between a SSPL and a regular police officer visiting the school. -Participants had never been in contact with the SSPL. -Most common reasons for a SSPL to be at Royal Secondary School was in the capacity of law enforcement due to student criminal offenses.

Table 3-5. School Community Supports

Community-Based Support	Type of Support	Service Offered	Contact with Participants
Welcome Centre (WC)	Mandatory attendance. All newcomers to Study School District whose first language is not English must go through the Welcome Centre before enrolling in school.	Helps students and families integrate into the Study School District and the community by providing language assessments, connecting them to partnership programs, assigning them settlement & multicultural workers etc.	-All ELL newcomers to the Study School District must go through the Welcome Centre. -All newcomer ELL students meet each other, and are familiar with the resources available to them. -All study participants had attended the Study School District Welcome Centre (except for Jamilah who had attended the Welcome Centre in another city).
Multicultural Workers (MCW's)	Free-community resource. Available through the Study School District Welcome Centre. Must schedule an appointment.	MCW's come into the schools and act as a cultural and language bridge between students, their families and the schools. They are often of immigrant or refugee background themselves.	-Study participants interacted with MCW's who were called to the school at the request of ELL teachers to facilitate parent or family meetings -They are assigned to multiple schools, and are often difficult to schedule an appointment with (wait times throughout the duration of the study have ranged from two weeks to three months).
Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)	Free-community resource. Available through city programs but most often through the Settlement Workers in Schools program, which is connected to the Study School District.	SWIS are matched with families upon arrival to Canada. All students who are new to the Study School District must go through the Welcome Centre, where their families are set up with a SWIS worker, who helps them find housing, navigate the city and guide them through their settlement process.	-SWIS workers have immediate contact with participants and their families upon their first arrival to Canada. -Once the settlement process is underway, their presence declines, although the students/families know that they can contact them when needed. -SWIS workers try to guide families, while encouraging independence, and some families rely more on them than others.

3.5. Summary

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1999), identities have histories that take shape as life unfolds and are reflexive and responsive to the sociocultural and political-historical contexts of the time. Based on the life one leads and the situations in which one finds oneself, different aspects of individual identity can show up, be reshaped and take on new life in different settings. Identities are “composed, sustained and changed in different contexts and overtime,” (pg. 94) and they have origins that are not fixed and can change (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). The stories being shared throughout this narrative inquiry are those of changing identities and the discovery of the self, as the participants evolved and matured, as adolescents, as students, as young women and as

new Canadians. The stories they share link together different parts of their lives, public and private, and connect their pasts to their futures, shaping a story about who they are (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 5). As their stories of migration, settlement and school integration were told, my goal was to understand the participants' life experiences, from their perspectives, and to let their stories unfold organically.

Chapter 4. Research Findings

The research findings discussed below are organized according to the research questions set out at the start of the study. The findings explore sense of belonging in schools (SOBIS), the role that relationships play in SOBIS, and the impact of the school community on the development of SOBIS. Data collected from the interviews and via the observations were used to determine the following findings below. Unfortunately, data from the scrapbook art was omitted because the images that the students created and used in the scrapbooks reflected the study participants' personalities and did not contribute to answering the bigger study questions regarding belonging. Rather, the side conversations during the scrapbook sessions provided more insight into the participants' feelings of belonging, and were detailed in my field note journals. This information was used as supportive evidence in later parts of the findings.

4.1. Sense of Belonging in School

*“You forget that all the fruits belong to all and
that the land belongs to no one.”
Rousseau, J.J. (1968)*

A student's sense of belonging in school is developed in a variety of ways. Narrative data from interviews, observations, and field note journals, were collected regarding the study participants lived and told experiences in order to determine whether they felt a sense of belonging in their school. The narratives that were shared occurred within the context of a specific school community and were liable to temporal change as the participants discussed their experiences and lives in the past, present and future (Creswell, 2013). To determine what it meant to have a SOBIS, I developed a description of the essence of the experience of SOBIS for all the participants, which consisted of “what” and “how” study participants experienced SOBIS (Creswell, 2013).

Students from refugee backgrounds generally arrive at their new host communities with hope and optimism for their future (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). These students bring with them a strong sense of culture, identity, a desire to fit in, as well as a longing for community and the sense of belonging that they often had in their home countries (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2013). However, the persistent daily stressors that they face upon arrival in their new community and school, including social isolation, bullying,

family violence, hunger, housing instability and a lack of school connection, taken together, typically burdens a student more than the adversity of a single event, such as having witnessed a violent act during times of war (Drury & Richard, 2012; Ungar, 2015). These persistent daily struggles can cause on-going mental, emotional and physical stress in the lives of these students. However, much of this stress can be alleviated in students who feel close to, and part of, their school community, and feel as though they have a sense of personal territory to which they belong (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Libbey 2007). These students will have a stronger SOBIS than those who do not feel connected to their schools.

The major findings related to sense of belonging are described in brief here and are elaborated on in greater depth in subsequent pages. Students feel a sense of belonging in their school when they feel comfortable and accepted. SOBIS also occurs when students are involved in clubs or groups at school; when students feel that they are held to high expectations in their classrooms; when students feel that the rules in their school create a safe, organized and calm learning environment; and when students feel that they are treated fairly and are supported by their teachers, both academically and personally. SOBIS is developed further when students identify with, and place importance on, the schools' values. Furthermore, students who arrive at school with a general feeling of happiness, which is demonstrated by their curiosity, engagement and enthusiasm to learn, develop a strong sense of SOBIS.

4.1.1. School Belonging and Personal Territory

To feel part of a school community and to experience a sense of personal territory in which one belongs requires a connection Allen & Bowles, 2012; to a physical space within the school where one feels comfortable and accepted (Libbey 2007). For many of the students from refugee backgrounds, this place was identified as the English Language Learner (ELL) classroom. Upon walking into this classroom, one immediately feels a sense of a global learning community. While the classroom has no windows to capture direct sunlight, the walls are covered with colourful multicultural artwork, flags, maps, as well as cheerful artifacts celebrating traditions and festivals from around the world. Standing at the front entrance of this classroom, there are multiple large bookshelves to the right, overflowing with learning materials and resources. To the left is a round wooden table meant to encourage student group work and collaborative

learning. Behind the table is a series of three desk-top computers, and two microwaves, which help prepare the hot lunches served by the lunch program to low income students. The desks in the centre of the class are in a horseshoe shape, facing a teaching podium at the front. The white boards are covered with images of seasonal décor and a permanent homework chart. At the back of the room is another large round table for group work, and the ELL teachers' desks, which are piled high with unfinished paper work. The back wall of the classroom hosts a few large windows, which open to another make-shift room. This additional room is the ELL reception classroom, that was hastily erected the year prior to account for the influx of new students from Syrian refugee backgrounds who were arriving. The space was made by combining the teachers' offices, and tearing down a dividing wall. While it serves the purpose of a mini-classroom, it leaves the teachers no space to do their work, which is why this mini-classroom, as well as the ELL classroom, can often have the feeling of being cluttered and disorganized.

The ELL classroom was abuzz today during the lunch hour today. The Global Friendship Society which meets once a week on Thursdays in the Reception classroom had few participants because so many of the students were in the ELL classroom working on their homework. There seemed an almost frantic energy about how the students were getting homework help from each other, while quickly eating their lunches huddled around the round tables, cognizant of the rapidly ticking away lunch hour. The classroom, which is always open at lunch, unlike some other teachers' classes, provides ELL students a comfortable space to work or socialize with their ELL peers. No Canadian-born students spend time in this space.

(Field Journal, April 11, 2017)

The ELL students have a sense of territory in this space which is evident in the way they interact within it. They use the resources, including the computers and microwaves at their will, they do not need to ask permission, and they move about freely in the classroom. The comfort of this environment has been created by the deliberate efforts of the ELL teacher Maria, who through her willingness to help students and provide them with support, has fostered a caring and inviting classroom space. For many ELL students, the classroom is a place of comfort and belonging, as expressed by Habiba, Hadarah, and Iris when asked where they feel most comfortable in the school.

I go to Ms. M for everything, she's helpful. I'm always in her classroom.

(Habiba, Interview I, March 30, 2017)

I'm always in Ms. M's classroom, I just like it there.
(Hadarah, Interview I, March 30, 2017)

I go to Ms. M's class [laughs] I like it there...she herself will help you, she will come and ask what you're doing.
(Iris, Interview I, March 30, 2017)

However, for other newcomer students, the ELL classroom reminds the students that they are different from the other Royal Secondary School students and negatively conveys that they do not fit into the dominant school culture. It also suggests an identity shift from feeling like a newcomer to feeling like a member of the school community, and in that way engaging in more typical "Canadian-student" lunch hour activities.

At first, I liked to stay in the [ELL] classroom, in my experiences I was there in my first day or week, and I just stayed there. But now I go around everywhere...the den, or the library.
(Jamilah, Interview I, March 31, 2017)

I do not hang out in ELL anymore. I hang out in the den, where we eat lunch...[ummm hesitantly] ya I eat lunch with friends from lots of different countries.
(Vania, Interview I, March 30, 2017)

These comments suggest, that as the students spend a longer time in the school community, they make more attempts to fit into the dominant school culture. In doing so, they seek out opportunities and engage in behaviours that allow them to blend in more with the Canadian-born students, which includes eating lunch, studying and hanging out in the school's library and den, or school cafeteria. However, this does not necessarily mean that they develop a sense of belonging within the wider school community. Jamilah, Vania and Hada often sought help from Ms. M. or myself with a variety of school and work-related matters by coming into the ELL or Learning Support (LST) classrooms. In addition, Vania and Hada occasionally sought refuge in these rooms when they were having interpersonal conflicts with other students in the school. Subsequently, the ELL classroom acts to provide the physical space within the school where the participants felt a sense of personal territory, felt safe, and felt accepted by other newcomer students. This space provided SOBIS within the specific community of newcomers, but it did not convey a sense of belonging within the wider school community.

4.1.2. School Belonging and Involvement

For students to feel a SOBIS they must also feel connected to a particular group, accepted in the school by their peers and teachers and feel a sense of involvement in the school community (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Chiu et al., 2015; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). Students from refugee backgrounds are not often involved, nor do they participate in the wider school community. The reasons for this vary, as expressed by Iris and Hadarah in the second round of interviews.

No, I do not participate in any clubs or groups [at school]...because most of them they need money. You have to pay. I like [the idea of the clubs] but I do not want to pay...ya, [also] I do not know when they [the clubs] are...I do like programs where we can sit and talk and listen to other girls' thoughts and stories though.
(Iris, Interview II, June 9, 2017)

No, I do not participate in any clubs, just the Global Friendship Society...but sometimes yes, I would like to be part of a club at school, yes. Yes, like a club where they have activities like games or knowledge...
(Hadarah, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

The reasons for not joining school clubs and getting involved in the school community varied, from not having the money to join them, to not knowing about when they were, to not being interested in the topics that the clubs offered. However, self-efficacy, the belief in one's own abilities to influence their environment in a desirable way (Bandura, 2011), also played a significant role in the willingness of the participants to become more involved in the school community. Participants who took the risk of trying new things, participated in activities in which there was a risk of failure, and sought out opportunities to join groups that engaged in pleasurable activities, were more involved in the school community and met more friends outside the ELL classroom. This is exemplified by Vania who discussed her passion for athletics and how she sought out ways to get involved in the school community via sports.

I'm on the school sports team, volleyball and soccer...I also play softball outside of the school. One day I went to the park just playing with my mom and my sister, and I saw people playing [softball] and I was like, "It is interesting," but I do not know who to ask. So, I went to the guy standing at the concession stand...he [was] the coach... and I was like "I want to play, who do I talk to?" He told me about another team...on the first day I did not even know how to throw a ball or catch a ball...then this girl from our school, she hit a popfly and I was trying to catch it and then it hit me right here (indicating chest bone) and it huuuurrrrrttt! ...I

got hit like two or three times and my mom told me to quit, but I thought, no, I'll just continue.

(Vania, Interview I, March 30, 2017)

Vania's story suggests that she has a curiosity to learn new things, the self-efficacy to seek out interesting opportunities, and an inner strength to persevere. Despite trying out against students who had much more experience playing volleyball, soccer and softball than her, Vania was determined and had a strong belief in her own abilities, suggesting a high level of self-efficacy. According to Allen and Bowles (2012), strong self-efficacy in one's life domain, such as athletics, can translate to other life domains, such as academics, influencing positive psychological functioning and well-being.

While Vania sought out new experiences based on her interests, Jamilah took advantage of the opportunities that were being presented to her through the school and the Welcome Centre. Jamilah joined the Connect to Homework club, that ran in the Royal Secondary School library and was a program in which older students tutored younger students. She also joined the MYCircle program, the Dance-Poetry club and the Voyages program, which were set up through the Welcome Centre for newcomers. When asked how she found out about these clubs and what made her want to join them, she responded.

You know the youth worker Samira? She posts new opportunities for what's happening on Facebook, so I just joined her Facebook group...I was not nervous. Then, I met more people and we joined more [programs together].

(Jamilah, Interview I, March 31, 2017)

Shortly after arriving to Canada, Jamilah met a youth worker at the Welcome Centre named Samira. Samira is young, hip and friendly. She was able to bond with Jamilah and encouraged her to get involved in the community. Jamilah continues to be actively involved in many of the programs offered in the community and is supported by her family who encourages her and enables her with the freedom to go out and explore the community.

Conversely, Hada and Habiba do not seem to have the same motivation to get involved in the school community. When asked why they were not going to try out for the dance team (their shared passion), they both nervously responded by saying that

they did not think they would make the team because of their low skill abilities, and therefore, did not bother to try out.

In my interview with the ELL teacher Maria, she mentioned that she often gets frustrated with both Habiba and Hada because they do not take initiative and seem to wait for opportunities to be “handed to them”. Where this attitude comes from is difficult to know. The girls have a large family, and they spend much of their spare time babysitting siblings. Also, nobody in the home works outside the home, and despite the modern Western clothing that the girls wear, they live in relative poverty and have been spoken to regarding their personal hygiene by multiple teachers. The daily stressors associated with poverty, can place a significant burden on a child that can negatively impact everything from their academic success, to their sense of self-efficacy, to their motivation, to their sense of self-concept (Fernando, Berger & Miller, 2010; Ungar, 2015). To what extent Habiba and Hada’s home situation and level of poverty is influencing their sense of belonging is unclear.

While the reasons for participating in the school and local community differ amongst the participants, it is clear that they all showed a keen interest in wanting to be part of a group, accepted in the school culture and feel a sense of involvement in the school community. While some went out and sought that connection, others had to be encouraged by a teacher or youth worker to get involved and still others, despite the opportunities that presented themselves, did not feel confident enough to risk getting involved. Yet, engaging in the school community, building an attachment to the school and feeling as though one has a place and can contribute in valuable ways is essential to developing a strong SOBIS (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Sneller, 2011). Indeed, Jamilah and Vania were the most involved with their school community, they had more Canadian-born friends, they spoke English more fluently, and they demonstrated happiness to be at school.

4.1.3. School Expectations, Rules and Fairness

Schools and classrooms where realistic but challenging expectations are set for all students, where school rules help structure safe and structured learning environments, and where students feel that they are treated fairly by their teachers, contribute to the development of a supportive school environment (Allen & Bowles,

2012; Chiu et al., 2015; Hattie & Anderman, 2013; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Search Institute, 2015). Even though the school rules are valued by students, they were often inconsistently applied throughout the classes, as conveyed by Qabila.

In school so many kids are not paying attention to what the teachers are saying...they are texting...if there are two friends sitting together, they do not pay attention to the teacher, they just like talk and nothing happens. I cannot hear the teacher talk. It is sooo annoying.

(Qabila, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

While sisters Qabila and Hadarah start by discussing the challenges in the classroom around student engagement, they continued to explain how they perceived there to be no consequences for lack of engagement and detailed how this can also distract others who are wanting to learn. They continued by discussing that they thought that many lessons were not well scaffolded (or taught, in their words). While the curriculum across disciplines is changing to incorporate more technology, how this technology is being implemented and expected to be used is inconsistent. This can be particularly overwhelming to ELL students who are now confronted both with vast quantities of new material that they do not yet have the research skills to sort through and reading material that is far beyond their reading level, both for their age and for their language abilities.

School is easier but more complicated here. If you want to get good marks you have to go to the Wikipedia or something, but it has a lot of information...you forget, and for me, I do not know most English, so it is hard to understand the main point. If you search on the internet you do not understand what is going on. Books are better than the internet, I can read and not just search and search.

(Qabila, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

Ya, ya. [In agreement with sister Qabila's statements]. It also takes a lot of time [to do research] it takes two days, but if you have a book you can get the exact thing in one hour.

(Hadarah, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

This also may be a product of teachers having too many demands placed on their workload. Instead of setting up lessons in which the websites have been visited and vetted for content, quality and appropriateness of reading level, students are too often encouraged to launch a broad search on a topic and are left to sort through the hundreds of sites that pop-up, some reliable, many not. This contributes to newcomer students feeling as though the assessment methods are unfair, both because they are not being taught the necessary skills to conduct their assignments according to the

teachers' expectations, but also because they often lack technological access in their homes, many not having computers or the Internet, to spend the extra time doing their assignments. As such, treating all students equally does not necessarily benefit newcomers, as it is not equitable for them. Being equitable and fair in this case, means providing newcomer students the appropriate tools and teaching them the relevant skills to achieve the desired results, of strong grades. Fairness conveys to newcomer students that they are valued by their community and their school (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Hattie & Anderman, 2013).

Furthermore, students from refugee backgrounds who feel that their teachers and school community hold high expectations of them, feel like they have value and support in their community and therefore feel a stronger sense of belonging (Ungar, 2015). While students from refugee backgrounds and their families often come to school with high hopes of doing well and an exceptionally strong work ethic, the reality of coming into a school system in which one lacks the dominant language of instruction, has had their own education interrupted--in some cases for multiple consecutive years--poses challenges to the student and the school community that are difficult to navigate (Ungar, 2015). First, despite their ages, many of the participants are put in lower grades due to significant gaps in their education. While this may provide them more opportunity to strengthen their language skills, it also places them in an environment with students that are sometimes two-to-four years younger than themselves. This further isolates them from their peer group, as they may feel as though they are at different maturity levels and lack commonalities with their younger peers, thus inhibiting the development of friendships. This was the case for Iris who was 19 years old when she entered Royal Secondary School and put in classes with students 14-16 years old, because of her language ability and the need to make up for missed course credits.

I do not make friends in my classes, just hi hi, but you know, they're young.
(Iris, Interview II, June 9, 2017)

Older students who enter the education system are often placed in the Adult Graduation program that does not earn them the Dogwood diploma that makes them eligible to apply to local colleges or universities. As a result, this program lacks the academic rigor that the Dogwood Diploma demands. Students from refugee backgrounds who are in the Adult Graduation program will often find themselves in courses to acquire course credits and not because of their own academic interests.

These courses, often lack the academic rigor that university preparation courses have. To some, this is confusing and implicitly conveys the school's belief that they are incapable of more rigorous studies, despite their own personal pride in their academic accomplishments and abilities. This is again conveyed by Iris who shared the sentiment she felt about not being encouraged to write her final exam.

...they said I do not need to do it [the final exam] because I'm on the Adult Graduation program, but I want to do it anyway...because I'm in school right? I cannot just go out without doing any exam. I also feel like I'm proud too, right? To write my last exam. Instead of just going out like that, I want to do it with others...it is a good challenge, I study for it every-day.

(Iris, Interview II, June 9, 2017)

For Iris, writing her last exam conveys her feeling of belonging to the school community and her connection to the identity of being a student and a high school graduate. To her, the exam commemorates her hard work, her struggle to learn English in a short period of time, and the proof that she was able to do it, despite the vast challenges she has had to overcome.

Conversely, for other students, the expectations set out for them in the school can be overwhelming, as they tirelessly work towards earning the top marks that they were once used to earning. Hadarah conveys this sentiment at her disappointment over a low grade.

I'm so mad! I worked so hard and I studied so much and I only got this bad mark, in Science, argh [defeatedly]...it is not fair. I work so hard studying, all day and all night...I'm so stupid.

(Hadarah, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

Like many students, Hadarah was frustrated because her hard work was not paying off in the letter grade that she knows university admissions require. Both Hadarah and her sister Qabila are extremely hard-working students, and their families maintain high expectations for them, but they also value learning for mastery and understanding. For instance, out of her own curiosity, Qabila took out multiple library books to teach herself about the history of conflict in the Middle East and in her native country. However, the reinforcement of academic success via grade point averages and letter grades conveys to students that grades and therefore intellect is fixed (Schinske & Tanner, 2013). As a result, the school system is functioning to actively alter student motivation from being intrinsically motivated, in which there is an inherent enjoyment and

satisfaction found in the learning process, to being extrinsically motivated for the performance based goals, of getting into university (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Students from refugee backgrounds are often particularly excited to return to school. They feel that they have lost their momentum and are “behind” their peers because of the interruption in their schooling (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015). But given that their education was often interrupted for long periods of time, compounded by the language barriers that they face, they are often studying well below grade level. The negative reinforcement of low grades, and being placed in classes with younger students, conveys to them that they are either too far behind to catch up, or are intellectually incapable. While supports such as the Learning Support Centre can help students from refugee backgrounds strengthen their academic skills, the time it takes teachers to work on assignments and teach underdeveloped skills with students individually means that not all students will get the support that they need.

In order for students from refugee backgrounds to develop a sense of belonging in their school and classroom they will need to feel that the classroom is a safe, calm and supportive learning environment, that there are high expectations placed on them, that there are supports in place to help them meet their own expectations, and that they are supported by and treated fairly by their teachers both in and outside the classroom (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Hattie & Anderman, 2013).

4.1.4. School Values and Happiness

Feeling happy, or demonstrating contentedness at school and believing in the school values are also an important part of SOBIS (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Libbey, 2007). While happiness can exhibit itself in many ways, it is believed to include love, hope, curiosity, gratitude, engagement and zest or enthusiasm (Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007). While the study participants frequently commented that they found school work stressful, all the participants had at least one, and often multiple, close family member(s) who were loving and supportive. They had hope for their futures in Canada, curiosity to learn, and gratitude for being in Canada and in a peaceful place, which were reinforced with stories throughout their interviews. Furthermore, both ELL teachers Maria and Priya separately indicated that they believed that the students from refugee backgrounds were happy to be at school as conveyed by

their positive attitudes in class, their engagement with peers in the hallways during breaks, the laughter and games they frequently witnessed and the lack of complaints they heard. This was further conveyed by Ms. Priya Singh in her interview.

I think they're very grateful to be here, I have noticed this a lot. I haven't heard them complain. Even coming from where they've come from, anything is better than that. Hardship is one thing, but I feel like they're very grateful as well.

(Priya, Interview I, April 4, 2017)

According to the ELL teachers, happiness in school is evident if the students are attending, doing their work, have a positive attitude and have a social group to connect with, even if it is composed of other newcomer students. The students confirmed that school was a general happy place for them to be as many of them expressed a keen interest in learning and explained that they enjoyed many of their classes, as conveyed by Hada and Qabila.

I'm going to be in gr 11 next year and I want to do all my classes. My favourites are Dance, Science and English.

(Hada, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

All four of them [classes] are my favourite classes, because I learn things ...and my friends are there.

(Qabila, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

These comments suggest that both the academic aspect of learning and the social aspect of friendship are important for students to be happy at school and feel a strong SOBIS.

The school values as laid out in the school handbook, which all students receive upon registering at Royal Secondary School, emphasize the importance of respecting oneself and others, the environment and the learning process. Whether students abide by and believe in these values further contributes to their SOBIS.

In discussing the school values and rules with the participants a few general themes arose in their feelings towards them. Jamilah conveyed that the school values kept people safe and were good to follow, while Hadarah and Qabila believed that the school values were essential to follow to benefit their learning. Habiba and Hada did not seem to know much about the school values, but agreed they sounded logical and useful. This was not surprising to me because throughout the course of the study, the

participants also talked about their religious faith, the values that Christianity and Islam teach, including the importance of respecting oneself and others. These specific values coincide seamlessly with the school values of respect oneself, others and the environment. Therefore, one reason that the participants' behaviours and attitudes may be aligned with the school values, is that they are related to the family and religious values that they already hold. However, it should be mentioned that there were families from refugee backgrounds who did not approve of certain school practices, such as having male teachers teach female physical education classes, or having their daughters even participate in physical education. The ELL teacher Maria noted that while these students and their families are rare examples, they often do not last long at the school, and cited several scenarios where these families withdrew their children from the school. Whether they were able to relocate their children to other public schools with more aligned values is unknown.

4.1.5. Summary

Students from refugee backgrounds develop SOBIS through their attachment to their school, community and their perceived acceptance within that community. While the participants were well supported and accepted in the ELL community, they struggled to find greater acceptance within the wider school community once they were integrated into the regular academic courses, despite their great desire to fit in. This was largely influenced by language barriers and the fact that other teachers and students struggled to communicate with, and relate to, them. As a result, the participants were largely ignored by other teachers and peers in the wider school community.

Furthermore, while the participants were excited to attend school, curious and engaged in their learning, they struggled with the expectations placed on them as held by their school community, families and by themselves. The school conveyed low academic expectations of the participants because of their low language levels and the large gaps that existed in their learning, as measured against the British Columbia Ministry of Education curriculum content. By not adapting or modifying assignments, teachers tried to teach students from refugee backgrounds in the same way as Canadian-born students. However, without more teacher and language support, students from refugee backgrounds struggled with the content and the

material in their courses, and felt too constricted by social pressures to advocate for themselves, such as by asking teachers questions or speaking up in class to clarify their understanding. Classrooms with poorly scaffolded lessons, weak behavioural management techniques and low student expectations left participants feeling unsupported by their teachers.

Yet, students from refugee backgrounds were grateful to be in Canada, to have the opportunity to attend school and found great comfort in befriending others who had shared similar refugee experiences. Newly arrived students from refugee backgrounds generally felt happy to be at school, with hope for their futures. Conversely, those who had settled in the school for a longer period of time, were struggling in their mainstream courses to make friends, earn good grades and often just to understand class instruction. Despite their effort to fit in and belong, these students faced many daily challenges, that threatened to erode their hope, decrease their motivation and weaken their sense of self overtime.

4.2. The Role Relationships Play in Sense of Belonging

*“Those who have a strong sense of love and belonging
have the courage to be imperfect.”
Brené Brown (2015)*

Positive teacher-student and peer-to-peer relationships play an important role in the students from refugee backgrounds developing SOBIS. Strong relationships can improve student motivation and interest in class and school: strengthening academic achievement; encouraging students to pursue goals and behave pro-socially and responsibly; and strengthening internal assets such as resiliency and self-efficacy (Bandura, 2011; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Hoot, 2011; Wentzel, 1998).

4.2.1. Teacher-Student Relationships

Strong teacher-student relationships are imperative to student development. Fundamentally, these relationships depend on consistency over time. Relationships that last throughout transitions, such as elementary to secondary school, from ELL to mainstream, from academic year to academic year, or from semester-to-semester are important for students to develop connections with their teachers (Wang, Hall & Rahimi,

2015). For students from refugee backgrounds, who have moved multiple times, entering a new community with constantly changing teachers further contributes to the inconsistency in their lives. It makes forming and maintain positive relationships with teachers more difficult, and it enhances anxiety as students are faced with a variety of personalities who they may feel lack empathy towards their situations. Often, students form close bonds with their ELL teacher, who they see most frequently. In the case of Royal Secondary School, the ELL teacher Maria had a permanent contract and had developed relationships with the students and their families over years in many cases, as siblings went through her courses. She also had formed close relationships with service workers and providers, which enabled her to best help the newcomer students access community resources and supports in a timely way.

Conversely, Priya, the other main ELL teacher who was relatively new to the school, also made a significant effort to provide support, care and develop strong relationships with the newcomer students. However, as she describes below, she lacked the background knowledge, history and trust that develops over time and is required to consistently strengthen the bond with the students and their families.

Getting to know the students' backgrounds and knowing they're refugees, I wanted to know more about them...I often wish I could just pick up the phone and call [parents] but we always need multicultural workers and sometimes it takes weeks for them to get back to me.

(Priya, Interview I, April 4, 2017)

Whereas Maria knows what to do in most situations, who to talk to and how to get in-touch with families, Priya was often left guessing and waiting on Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) or Multicultural Workers (MCWs) about what to do next. Maria also has the advantage of having taught siblings and other extended family members, which deepened her knowledge and understanding of the students' experiences. Overtime, the trust that Maria has built with students and their families, has allowed students to rely on her, for both in and out of school needs. Students, like Habiba, Jamilah and Iris, know that Maria will go the extra mile for them.

I always talk to [Maria] Ms. M for everything, she's very helpful.

(Habiba, personal communication, June 7, 2017)

If I have a problem, I talk to like...umm maybe like [Maria] Ms. M because like I have been with her for a long time since I have come here.

(Jamilah, personal communication, June 12, 2017)

If I have a problem I would not talk to other teachers, but I'll talk to [Maria] Ms. M and you...I like Ms. M. because she says, how are you? Where are you from?

(Iris, personal communication, June 9, 2017)

Hadarah and Qabila will be changing schools this upcoming September as they recently found a home in a different neighbourhood. When I asked them whether they had any concerns about the move, their main concern was whether the teachers would be supportive.

Ya, I'm worried. Will the teacher like me and help me? Like [Maria] Ms. M?

(Hadarah, personal communication, June 7, 2017)

If you go to a new place, you should have at least one person to guide you and show you the way things work, like [Maria] Ms. M.

(Qabila, personal communication, June 9, 2017)

The participants comments suggest that Maria (Ms. M.) is a trusted teacher that they can turn to and utilize for support. The trust she has built with the students has been developed both over time and through her taking a genuine interest in the students' personal lives. As such, Maria goes far and beyond the responsibilities of the typical teacher. Table 4-1. conveys the additional responsibilities that Maria takes on, in addition to her teaching load.

Table 4-1. Additional Teacher Responsibilities to Support Newcomer Students

Assistance to Students	Assistance to Families	Connections to the Community
Advocates to teachers on behalf of student learning needs.	Meets regularly with parents (outside of parent-teacher interviews or discussing problems).	Makes connections with SWIS, MCWs & students families.
Advocates to Ministry of Education to extend students in-school enrollment.	Invites families to school events – sets up events for them to attend.	Directs the action that needs to be taken by Social Workers, SWIS, school-psychologists etc. to best support students.
Helps students with homework outside of class hours.	Attends family events and cultural celebrations.	Physically accompanies new students to programs that are outside the school, often in different cities.
Connects students to counsellors & other in-school support.	Brings in personal items (e.g. plates/clothing) to support families in need.	Contacts Ministry of Child and Family Development if suspected abuse/neglect is occurring.

In addition to feeling well supported by their ELL teachers, the students also noted a few other teachers in the school with whom they had developed good relationships. Habiba failed a class first semester, and had frequent conflict with the teacher of that class. However, her new academic teacher, Ms. B, provided her the support she needed to be academically successful in the class the second time around. Habiba attributes her success to the “niceness” of her new teacher.

Ms. B is very nice. She’s different than the other one [first teacher]. She helps me a lot and answers my questions.

(Habiba, personal communication, June 7, 2017)

Similarly, Jamilah bonded well with her Math teacher, Ms. L, who shared personal stories, and went around the classroom asking students if they needed help and understood the assignments. While, Ms. L has a continuing contract, unfortunately Ms. B is a brand-new teacher and will not be returning to Royal Secondary School in the fall as her assignment will take her elsewhere, potentially breaking relationships with students who have come to rely on her because of her caring attitude and support.

As students continued to share their stories of teacher relationships a theme that consistently wove the stories together related to trust. Students who felt that they were well supported by their teacher and that their teacher was not going to embarrass them in front of their peers, seemed more willing to share their ideas, speak up and ask questions in class. Whereas students who were hesitant and did not want to talk in class noted that their teachers were nice enough, but they did not ask them if they needed help or if they understood the material.

Vania is outgoing and extroverted in her ELL classroom, but as I observe her behaviour in her Social Studies class, I’m surprised to see a completely different side to her. She is quiet and acts almost shy. She speaks with uncertainty and does her best to avoid sticking out to the other students, this includes rejecting my help when I come around to see how she’s doing with her assignment. Similarly, Qabila also refused my help today in-class, despite saying that she felt frustrated because she did not entirely understand what she was reading.

(Field Journal April 6, 2017)

This observation conveys that there is a disconnect between wanting and needing help, while not being identified as different or struggling in front of peers; a push-pull of factors, where they want teacher help because they want to do well

academically, but also, they do not want help because they want to fit in with the other students.

I have been in Vania and Qabila's Social Studies class for over a month now, and I'm teaching an interactive government simulation where the students are forced to work together and interact with others that they normally wouldn't talk to. I'm happy to see that Vania and Qabila are gaining more confidence in their voice. They are speaking up slightly more in-class, and frequently seek me out to help answer their questions. I asked Qabila why/how her attitude and confidence level in speaking up has changed. To my surprise, she said that she feels more confident to talk when I'm in the classroom because she knows that I will help her if she makes a mistake in what she's trying to convey.

(Field Journal April 26, 2017)

Strong teacher-student relationships also have the power to influence the identities that students chose to convey. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) state that a student can have multiple identities based on the life they lead, the situation that they find themselves in, and that their identities are composed, sustained and changed in different contexts. This is significant because it indicates that strong teacher-student relationships that last over time can promote positive self-concept and self-efficacy. Furthermore, teachers who initiate relationships because students are shy and uncertain, help them feel welcome and included in the classroom, which contributes to their sense of belonging (Wentzel, 1998).

Teachers who take a genuine interest in their students have a better appreciation, understanding and more empathetic approach to working with students from refugee backgrounds (Bandura, 2011; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Hoot, 2011; Wentzel, 1998). In classes where students from refugee backgrounds felt most supported, and were doing the best academically, they were supported by teachers who conveyed more sincere interest in students' holistic well-being. Students explained that teachers who inquired about how they were feeling, how their day was going, how their athletic event went, and other general personal interest questions, made them feel more comfortable and willing to ask questions. On the other hand, teachers who did not talk to their students on a personal level or share stories, were thought of as being less approachable.

I came into the Social Studies classroom late this afternoon, but immediately noticed that Vania was limping and walking strangely. I observed her movements

for a few moments and pointed it out to the other teacher in the classroom. He shrugged it off as a sports injury, but I watched her a bit more closely and noticed that her loose-fitting pants were taut around the leg, specifically the knee that she was trying to avoid putting pressure on. When a spare moment presented itself, I went over to her and asked what happened. In the course of our conversation I got a better look at the size of her knee, which was enormous and appeared to have something sticking out at a horizontally unnatural angle. She offered to show me the knee, but was not able to get her pants up high enough on her shin, because of the swelling. Seeing bulging white skin, I was quite shocked, selfishly hoping that I hadn't just seen bone. She needed medical attention immediately, so I told the other teacher I was taking her to the first aid attendant who would take her to the hospital. The other teacher, laughed and said it was probably just some swelling, shrugging off the potential severity of the injury. Two things surprised me in this situation. First, that the teacher had noticed the situation yet barely made an attempt to help the student who was clearly suffering in pain. This conveyed a lack of concern by this teacher. Secondly, it was not until I probed Vania about what happened (a softball injury), that she said anything. She never asked for help, never complained or whined, she did not even ask for ice for the swelling. In fact, what she was most upset by was that the other player hadn't apologized for the accident, nor did she come to see if Vania was okay. Vania was shocked by this behaviour and repeatedly conveyed how mean she felt the other girl was. This conveys an amazing sense of social justice, inner strength and personal integrity, with which Vania brings to other aspects of her life as well.

(Field Journal April 28, 2017)

In the end, Vania had to undergo multiple x-rays and scans. She was in a full leg cast, complete with crutches for a few weeks until the swelling decreased and it was determined that no surgery was required. Working in classrooms of thirty students with a large diversity of needs, from learning disabilities to language barriers can be overwhelming, even for the most seasoned teacher, but to employ common sense and empathy when working with students is a fundamental part of teaching, and unfortunately not always practiced. This experience conveyed to me that students often do not get the help that they need and deserve because of teachers lack of awareness in addressing situations appropriately and in this way they show a lack of empathy and care.

As adolescents grow and develop they strive to seek independence from their families and specifically their parents (Brown & Larson, 2009). Teachers are increasingly relied upon to provide guidance and direction to students. The teaching profession has become increasingly a combination of teaching academic skills and developmental skills to foster the growth of young adults who are academically, as well as social-emotionally, intelligent. If not by intuition, teachers often lack the training to implement the social-

emotional aspect of development and some even feel that it falls outside of their “job description”. However, strong teacher-student relationships depend on teachers who support their students from an academic, emotional, physical and mental aspect of development (Korthagen, 2004). When this occurs, students feel a greater sense of belonging within their classrooms and subsequently their schools.

4.2.2. Peer Relationships

Strong peer relationships are also essential for students from refugee backgrounds to experience a SOBIS. Social acceptance becomes increasingly important throughout adolescence generally as teens begin to place a higher value on the expectations and opinions of their peers (Brown & Larson, 2009). It is even more important to students from refugee backgrounds as they strive to feel accepted and a sense of belonging within their new country. However, despite the trend set by social media to ever increase the number of “friends” one has, the depth and quality of peer relationships is still highly valued, as conveyed by Iris.

I was only by myself at this school, I did not know anything... I did not make many friends here [at school]...not good friends that you can sit and talk to.
(Iris, Interview II, June 9, 2017)

Hadarah continues this sentiment by expressing that she did not make friends who were outside of the ELL classroom and that she wants to make Canadian-born friends, but finds it difficult because of the language and communication barriers. Vania supports this sentiment when expressing her desire to fit into the popular group in class.

...there’s lots of popular kids in that class...ya like you know Ali and Becky those two girls I feel comfortable with because they were encouraging, telling me you know, it is okay [to make mistakes when talking], but like the rest of the kids...they do not make fun of me...but they might not understand me.
(Vania, Interview II, June 8, 2017)

While the challenges that the participants have faced in developing close peer relationships with Canadian-born students largely include communicating across language and cultural barriers, there are many empathetic and kind students in the classes curious about, and wanting to learn more about, the students from refugee backgrounds, but who lack the environment in which to do it. Community building in classes is an essential element of creating a supportive and comfortable learning

environment for all students (Church, 2003). However, this requires a concerted teacher effort of having the students work in new and interactive ways to get to know each other. Qabila even advised what teachers should do to make future newcomers connect more with their peers.

...if newcomers come to the new school...we have to introduce them and get to know each-other and where we're from...when we can relate to each other we can, uh...like, trust each other.

(Qabila, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

Qabila, who speaks with wisdom and insight beyond her 16 years, touches upon a key aspect of trust building, that the “fear of the other” can be eliminated through communication and relationship building (Church, 2003). She continues to explain that teachers should try and have students sit beside new students, otherwise new friendships will not be made. Qabila makes an excellent point. Diversifying seating arrangements and student groupings is important for getting students to better know each other, enhancing their SOBIS.

Qabila and her sister Hadarah, were interviewed together for their second interview. During this joint interview, Qabila provided unique insight into her understanding of the history of the conflict in Afghanistan. Her main points were that there are many conflicts in Muslim countries today, citing Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine, but that the conflicts are not about religion, as the media erroneously suggests. Rather, she points out that the conflicts are about natural resources and the greed of a few people who prioritize their needs over the majority of the populations citizens, who end up “uneducated, because there is no school and no peace,” (Qabila, Interview II, June 7, 2017). The sisters continued to explain how the media negatively portrays Muslims as terrorists and, in this way, creates a stereotype that other students hear/read about, making them not want to become friends with these students.

...in the media like many bomb blasts happen or gun shots, like someone shoots someone and it says it was a Muslim who shot the people or uh...who drive the bomb into the people.

(Qabila, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

Ya, but like in Islam, there is no right to kill another person. If you kill another person it means like you kill the world, all the world of people, so you do not kill another person. I do not know why they are blaming Islam...ya I hate the media, I hate it.

(Hadarah, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

Ya, like what can we do to make them [Canadian-born students] our friends and to show them that we are not bad people?

(Qabila, Interview II, June 7, 2017)

Qabila and Hadarah, believe that their beliefs and values are misunderstood by their peers, as a direct result of how the media portrays Islam. They feel that this is one factor impacting their ability to make Canadian-born friends.

While the students from refugee backgrounds did not feel bullied or teased by others in their classes, they did express social isolation, that often the other students just did not talk to them or include them in group activities. Habiba expressed that in her Foods class, the kids in her group often just told her what to do without asking for her input, which she did not like and interpreted as being bossed around. Conversely, in Jamilah's Social Studies class, her peers would assign her tasks in group work, which she would do willingly, interpreting this as a sign of peer acceptance. These attitudes were impacted by the kind of work assigned to the students. Habiba was often asked to clean dishes or do work that she thought was menial, whereas Jamilah felt that she was making a more significant contribution to the groups' efforts by writing or taking notes.

4.2.3. Positive Social Models

“Everybody feels safe belonging not to the excluded minority but to the excluding majority. You think, Oh, I’m glad that’s not me...if you belong to the majority, you can avoid thinking about lots of troubling things.”

Haruki Murakam (2009)

Positive peer social models are individuals who share a similar connection with the students from refugee backgrounds and who have demonstrated success in their lives (Bandura, 2011). While students from refugee backgrounds felt the strongest relationships with their ELL peers, these relationships were also ones marked by unique challenges of their own. Many of the ELL students formed their friendships both in their living communities (government funded refugee housing complexes), and at the Welcome Centre, prior to starting Royal Secondary School. While beneficial to making them not feel so isolated, it also limited who they could form friendships with, which was challenging if their friends did not make good decisions and choices on their own (Ahn & Rodkin, 2014). While this was rare, there were a few friendships that included unhealthy elements. For instance, Vania and Hada's friendship was very much a follower-leader

type relationship. If Vania was upset, Hada received the brunt of her anger. If Vania wanted Hada to do something, she would do it. In fact, Vania often spoke for Hada, as well as over her, which I monitored throughout the observation period. Additionally, Hadarah noted that her “best-friend” Zepora, who was also an ELL student from Afghanistan, was unhelpful in class and in group work.

...like most people, like her [Zepora], they do things for their own advances...they are kind of mean, they just do things for their own selves because they want to have a better future and to know a lot more stuff than others, and to have more value than others in society.

(Hadarah, Interview II, June 7 2017)

Hadarah suggests that there is a level of individualism and competition amongst the ELL students. Through my observations, I often saw students working together on assignments in the ELL classroom. Hadarah however, indicates that some students feel that collaborative work will mean one person does better than the other, giving them an advantage. To avoid this advantage, some peers choose not to help others. The cause of this however, is difficult to determine and unclear. Yet, students who do not feel supported by their peers, but rather competitive with them, can result in academic underachievement and poorer school adjustment (Liljeberg et al., 2011).

First and second-generation immigrant students, as well as students who came to Canada as refugees many years ago, also have the ability to be positive social models. Royal Secondary School is very multiculturally diverse; there are students from Kenyan, Syrian, Afghanistani, Somalian, Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, and many more backgrounds. In some situations, one might assume that such students are the prime population for developing friendships with students from refugee backgrounds, helping them get acquainted with the new school system and generate an understanding of how to balance Canadian customs with traditional values. However, more often than not, this population seems to be at odds with the newcomer population. There seems to be a heightened sense of exclusion and bullying between these two populations. Students from refugee backgrounds often seek out friendships with these students, thinking that by highlighting their cultural similarities they can form new friendships. However, in an attempt to fit in with the dominant Canadian-student culture, first and second-generation students often want to downplay their cultural connections, and minimize bringing attention to their differences. These students often feel a stronger connection to Canada than their countries of ethnic origin, and may feel a sense of pride in highlighting their

“Canadian-ness” over their ethnic heritage (Carter, 1998). Having potentially experienced racism, bullying, exclusion and social isolation from their Canadian peers at some point, the first/second-generation students may be afraid and unwilling to risk being put in that situation again (Carter, 1998). A conflict between Vania and a first-generation African-Canadian student highlights this phenomenon.

She is not very nice. She talked about me with some people in the class and my friend told me. I went to tell the counsellor and my sister had to come to school and the counsellor told my sister who told my mom. My mom was maaaaaddd at me, but I told her that this girl is my enemy and she always does this and this to me. My mom understands me.

(Vania, Interview II, June 8 2017)

I stay out of it, but like the two [girls] were fighting and I said to them, why are you fighting you are of the same skin?

(Iris, Interview II, June 9 2017)

The student conflict that Vania and Iris are referring to was with a first-generation Canadian student of African background. This student caused multiple problems throughout the academic year within the ELL student community. She seemed to be almost curious about these students, as she kept trying to interfere in their lives, yet, did not want to be friends with them. In another example however, Hadarah and Qabila’s father did not want them participating in physical education class, until he saw the other female Muslim students participating. These students, although they did not form bonds of friendship with Hadarah and Qabila, did provide them some advice on how to participate in physical education class while also maintaining their cultural values and dress.

Strong peer friendships provide students a feeling of belonging and acceptance, and positive peer social models encourage students to make good decisions and can act to strengthen their own motivation, effort and sense of self-concept (Yancy et al., 2002).

4.2.4. Summary

Positive teacher-student and peer relationships are important for students from refugee backgrounds to feel a sense of acceptance and belonging in school. However, strong teacher-student relationships depend on trust building which occurs when students can depend on their teachers being available and present over time. It also requires the teacher to have a genuine and sincere interest in the student holistically--

from an intellectual, social, emotional, intellectual and physical perspective. Teachers are often the ones with whom students feel most comfortable talking to and who interact with students most frequently. Developing meaningful relationships with students strengthens the newcomers' confidence in class and makes them more likely to participate, as well as take risks such as to ask a question in class or show engagement in the learning activities. Similarly, positive peer relationships are important to encouraging students from refugee backgrounds to be themselves and still feel accepted in the dominant school culture. Students who feel more supported and better understood by their peers show increased academic achievement, social development, school adjustment and a greater sense of SOBIS (Liljeberg et al., 2011).

4.3. School Community and Sense of Belonging

“The best of community does give one a deep sense of belonging and well-being; and in that sense of community takes away loneliness.”
Henri Nouwen (1992)

The immediate school community provides Youth Workers, School Counsellors and Safe School Police Liaisons to support the needs of all students, including those from refugee backgrounds. The wider school community also has a variety of resources and services, specifically the Welcome Centre Support Workers (WCSW), Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), and Multicultural Workers (MCWs), who specifically address the concerns and needs of students from refugee backgrounds in schools.

Subsequently, the school community extends beyond teaching and learning the core academic skills in the classroom environment. The wider school community serves multiple functions, but in the case of contributing to sense of belonging amongst students from refugee backgrounds it needs to provide a support system that students can get advice from if they are being bullied or if they feel unsafe; it needs to provide students with useful roles in the school to provide service to others, placing value on their knowledge and skills; it needs to provide opportunities for youth to make decisions and engage in positive social change (Carter, 1998; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Search Institute, 2015; Sneller, 2011; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

The support that these resources provide for students from refugee backgrounds and the ways in which they are able to work together cohesively to provide that support are paramount to these students' settlement and their sense of belonging.

4.3.1. In-School Supports

Outside of the classroom, within the immediate school exists various resources that students from refugee backgrounds are encouraged to access. As previously introduced, youth workers, counsellors and safe schools police liaisons are available to students who want to get more involved in the school, need to talk about the challenges they may be facing, want academic guidance or may be feeling unsafe. Having trusted adults who can help students in these ways contributes to students' in-school involvement, social-emotional and academic success and feelings of safety (Search Institute, 2015; Sneller, 2011). These adults are essential to students feeling a strong sense of belonging within their school environment (Search Institute, 2015; Sneller, 2011).

Royal Secondary School has roughly 1,518 students, all of whom have access to the two youth workers (1 per 759 students), four school counsellors (1 per 379.5 students) and one safe school police liaison who is only available at the school periodically. As a result, access to these individuals is inconsistent at the best of times and the students in this study rarely made use of their services. Initially, none of the study participants connected with the youth workers. However, over the course of the year, and with my prompting, they became aware that the youth workers were hosting a girls-only sports session in the gymnasium on Fridays, but they were reluctant to go because they did not know anyone. I eventually accompanied a few of them to the first few gym sessions until they formed a relationship with the youth workers and other students attending and felt more confident going alone. This suggests that a supportive nudge in the right direction by a trusted adult can help empower students to join activities that may contribute positively to their SOBIS.

Counsellors' caseloads are based on the students' last names divided into four groupings. Jamilah and Hada never talk to their counsellor, Habiba and Iris do not even know who their counsellor is, Hadarah and Qabila know that their counsellor is male and feel that even if they had a problem they would talk to Ms. M before they spoke to him.

Although they said their counsellors' gender was irrelevant, the girls' father had already spoken to the school regarding who could teach them physical education (a woman only), and throughout the second interview, the girls spoke about their religious beliefs regarding how adult males and females should interact (not publicly, unless related). Subsequently, it is somewhat unclear why they would not talk to their counsellor. Vania is the only study participant who regularly sees and speaks to her counsellor. This is because the domestic violence that was occurring in Vania's home the past few years eventually led to intervention by the Ministry of Child and Family Services. From this, counselling was strongly recommended. Fortunately, Vania was able to develop a positive, trusting relationship with her counsellor, but her counsellor is switching school districts this year and it is uncertain if Vania will continue to access counselling support once the counsellor she knows and trusts leaves.

Finally, most of the study participants did not know what a Safe Schools Police Liaison (SSPL) was. They periodically had seen police officers in the school and frequently saw them in the surrounding community, but did not realize that they were assigned to our school and were supposed to act as resources to our students. Students from refugee backgrounds often are distrusting of police and authority. During conflict and war, the collapse of political authority and the rule of law, results in distrust between civilians and police (Behnia, 1996; Machel, 1996). Refugees who have experienced violence or abuse from law enforcement and children for whom the law failed to protect during times of war increases levels of discomfort and unease experienced by these children around law enforcement (Behnia, 1996). Yet, students from refugee backgrounds are known to have a strong moral sense of right/wrong and of social justice (Ungar, 2015). Building relationships with the SSPLs could help them to rebuild the trust once lost and ease their discomfort with the legal system. Much like the other service providers, SSPLs share their time between multiple schools, and in high-need communities, where Royal Secondary School is located, they are frequently stretched for time. But if they were able to start to build relationships with students, particularly those from refugee backgrounds, through programming, workshops, or simply just introducing themselves and engaging in conversation, then they may be able to capitalize on the strong sense of justice that many of these students come to their new schools with. In doing so, these students may end up feeling a stronger sense of

security, safety and support in their school community, significantly contributing to their SOBIS.

4.3.2. School Community Supports

The School District Welcome Centre (WC) is a place that all newcomer ELL students must attend before transitioning into school. This is the only specific school-connected WC of its kind in British Columbia. The WC is located in a non-descript building complex off of a busy highway. Upon entering the center one feels as though they are waiting in a doctor's office. Grey walls and plastic chairs line the entrance, and a large welcome desk sits at the front. As with many other places of business in this neighbourhood, bars line the windows of the waiting room, preventing break-ins after hours. As one explores past the waiting room there are multiple, simple, grey classrooms which suggest a rather uninspiring learning environment. Despite the lackluster aesthetic appeal of the center, the staff are warm and welcoming, they speak over 25 languages, and their easy to use website is available to be translated in over 160 languages. The goal of the centre is to support students and their families with the transition into the school system and the community (Immigrant Service Society of BC, 2017b). This is done through school orientations, language assessments, and by connecting families from refugee backgrounds to additional partnership programs in the community (Immigrant Service Society of BC, 2017b). The centre serves to orient students to the Canadian school system, explaining common rules, expectations, policies and procedures of the schools they will be attending. At the WC many students meet each other and form their initial bonds. Hada and Vania, who are best friends, met at the WC. They later discovered that they lived in the same housing complex. While this was temporary, because Hada's family soon moved, meeting in the WC allowed the girls to form a friendship that has supported them through their transition from the WC into the school system.

It was not easy making friends, Vania is my best friend. We met at the Welcome Centre. My other friends are just like 'hi, hi,' not like Vania.

(Hada, Interview II, June 7 2017)

The WC allows the students to make supportive friendships that arise out of shared experiences. However, for some, particularly the ones on the boundaries of adolescence and adulthood, such as Iris who was 19 during this study, the experience of

being welcomed to Canada with many younger students, contributes to the feeling of not belonging.

I was talking to Iris about graduation today, and asked her if she went to her graduation party. She explained that she did not because she chose to go to Calgary for a church retreat with her youth group. She has bonded most closely with youth in her church group, and hasn't made strong friendships here at school. She once mentioned that she had met people at the WC but that a few of them did not go to the same school, and that the relationships were superficial. Iris is a deep thinker and values the ability to talk and share her feelings in a deep and meaningful way with others.

(Field Journal June 26, 2017)

Surprisingly, when asked about the WC, Jamilah, Vania and Hada explained that they did not find it all that helpful. Although they were put in classrooms with roughly the same age group, they thought that the lessons, which explained rules and school structure, as well as tested language fluency, were boring. However, the WC also serves an important function for families, as it connects them with supports in their immediate community, specifically Settlement Workers in Schools and Multicultural Workers.

The WC was such a good idea because it makes the newcomers lives to Canada and B.C. so much easier and more manageable, because they know who to talk with and then that person will refer them to whoever they need to be connected with.

(Maria, Interview I, April 3, 2017)

4.3.3. Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) and Multicultural Workers (MCW)

Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) and Multicultural Workers (MCW) are individuals who are often from culturally similar backgrounds as the newcomers and who function to help families and students integrate into the community and school system. SWIS workers provide the initial welcome and orientation for students and their families. They also provide settlement counseling, facilitate workshops to enhance families' understandings of Canadian culture, and refer and connect families to school and community programs, services and resources (Surrey School District, 2017b). MCW's are more connected to the school system. They provide school-specific orientations, assist with communication between home and school on an on-going basis, facilitate cross-cultural understandings for families and school staff, and provide information about the British Columbia education system and school culture for students and families

(Surrey School District, 2017b). The significance of both of these services is the availability and the continuation of, support that they provide students and their families, as well as the community based programs that they connect them with, long after they students have left the WC. Maria conveys their significance.

...these programs and the people that run them are such great supporters of our students...because they [the students] go outside of...their comfort zone, because they have to go to places that are not at school and meet new people.
(Maria, Interview I, April 3 2017)

The extent to which these resources are used after the initial introduction to the community is dependent on the students and their families' willingness to access and accept the support. For instance, while Iris and Vania's families continue to make good use of the MCW's who helped them find housing, jobs and connected them with essential services such as medical and safety services, Hadarah and Qabila's family became quickly frustrated with their MCW and refused his help. Hadarah and Qabila's family were placed in a home and community in which they felt unsafe. The father was very unhappy with the living situation and largely blamed the MCW for his role in finding them the accommodation. As a result, when it was time to move because their lease was up, the father, despite having significant trouble finding affordable accommodations for a family of ten people on his own, refused help from the MCW.

Qabila, Hadarah and their brother Abdul mentioned that their father is struggling to find housing and has a looming deadline of July 1st to do so. They mentioned that their father looks gaunt and that their relatives said that the they do not recognize him as he looks so stressed out and unhealthy. I'm trying to connect them with an organization that will help to support them in finding housing, but the overpriced housing and limited rental market is really not helping. Housing instability is extremely stressful for all involved, and the kids are clearly worried and anxious as they see their father struggle to provide for them. I will have to ask around the school community and see what can be done.
(Field Journal, May 15, 2017)

I put together some housing and job search resources for Hadarah and Qabila to help their father find work and housing. However, a few weeks later when I followed up with the girls, they had said that their father had no interest in the resources that I had provided. I was slightly surprised by this, and the girls were not able to explain why he rejected the resources. I then personally called the MCW that the family has used in the past, and waited for him to return my call, hoping that he could connect with the father. It took two weeks and another reminder to the MCW to come and speak to Hadarah and

Qabila. He eventually came in June and sat the students down to discuss the situation. They seemed happy to see him and were very willing to sit and talk with him. A few days later I asked how the meeting went and Hadarah told me that their father was not going to accept the MCW's help, but provided no explanation why. I found this strange, and felt that there was more to the story that I did not know, in terms of the father-MCW relationship. Hadarah did not seem to have more information. Sometimes however, cultural clashes and hierarchical structures that are brought to Canada from home-countries complicate relationships, although it is uncertain if this was the case for Hadarah's father. Fortunately, a week later, with the help of their local Mosque, they found a home to move into. It was in a safer community, in a cleaner neighbourhood, but it meant that the students would have to move schools, which they felt okay with doing, although it may challenge them with having to start the settlement process over again.

A resource of particular support for students was the MYCircle program, the primary program offered through the WC that all the study participants attended. Run through the Immigrant Service Society of British Columbia, the program provides an 80-hour long training session designed to help newcomer youth deal with stress and build their confidence to become more involved in their community (Immigrant Service Society of BC, 2017a). Building on the skills, knowledge and strengths of the past participants, the program encourages them to become future leaders of upcoming programs and even pays them to do so (Immigrant Service Society of BC, 2017). Despite this opportunity, only Jamilah followed up on this offer. One of the barriers to attending this program is that it changes locations throughout the metropolitan region in order to provide access and services to as many newcomer youth as possible. Maria, the ELL teacher, initially took the students to the program in a neighbouring city, showing them how to use public transit and how to be safe walking in the community; however, as the program changed locations, and the days got shorter with less daylight, many of the parents felt it was unsafe to allow their daughters out, alone, in a different city, after daylight. The odd hours that many of the parents work, and the demands of large families with many children, meant that they were unable to pick up/drop off the girls from such programs. Hadarah and Qabila explained their interest in continuing the programs, but the challenges they faced in doing so.

When the MYCircle program finished I got a certificate. I like it, we did games and activities like peer supporting and how to become a facilitator and

leadership...I want to go to the other program [at the Vancouver Immigrant Service Society] but they [my parents] are not allowing me because it is very far from our home...my dad is not allowing me. Even I cannot go with [my brother] because it is too far from home.

(Hadarah, Interview II, June 7 2017)

Hadarah's experience speaks to both the practical issues associated with the supports that the newcomers receive, such as transportation, and also to the gender experiences that Qin-Hilliard (2003) touches upon in explaining that female adolescents are more strictly monitored by their parents, and are unable to take advantage of all the opportunities available with to them. While this may limit their exposure to some of the negative urban environmental influences that may exist, it also restricts them from fully participating in the community (Qin-Hilliard, 2003). Subsequently, Qin-Hilliard argues that male adolescents have been shown to have a higher degree of assimilation to the prevailing culture because they have more exposure to, and opportunities in, the community. Yet, the degree to which this influences a sense of belonging is unclear. As noted by Qin-Hilliard, if female students are thought to be "protected by a shield of ethnicity" (page 106) resulting in higher academic achievements and healthier lifestyles, two prerequisites for healthy development, but their male counterparts are more involved in their communities, does one supersede the other in contributing positively to a sense of belonging?

Additional challenges posed by the SWIS and MCW's is their availability. According to population census data from 2016-17 there are over 163 languages spoken in the Study School District with approximately 11% of newcomers amongst the 72,000 students (Surrey School District, 2017a). Both ELL teachers expressed their frustration with accessing the supports that they need, most often in the form of MCW's.

There are many challenges [with the availability of services] we see them right now. For example, the refugees from Syria, we have so many but we do not have enough MCW workers to support them... we have two Arabic speaking MCW workers for the whole school district! They hired more settlement workers for those families, but we need an Arabic speaking person a few times a week [here at school]...Amira* is one [MCW] who is assigned to [another] Secondary School because their community of Arabic speaking kids is huge over there too, but our school is one that she's also supposed to be supporting, she's supposed to be here every Friday, but she is never here, never. I do not blame her, because there's so much work to do, but this is just the beginning.

(Maria, Interview I, April 3 2017)

Priya reinforces this sentiment by explaining how the length of time it takes to connect with a MCW often inhibits positive relationship building and communication with students and families.

I wish we had a multicultural worker in the school who was always around. With all the new funding, they're hiring all these new teachers and that's great, but it would help to bring in more people from the district, like the WC, or another Arabic...or even another language speaking MCW worker. Right now if there is an issue, it is resolved much slower because of the waiting time of having to get a MCW in. Even with speaking to administration or counselling we need translators present before we can have the dialogue to get to the point of a situation. It would make a huge difference to have someone here fulltime.

(Priya, Interview I, April 4 2017)

As the teachers share their concerns, it occurs to me that translators may be able to fulfill the needs that teachers and schools have in needing to communicate primarily. While more skilled workers, such as MCW would be ideal, translators that were available by phone even, to translate in a meeting, might improve the speed and ability of schools to communicate with students and families, especially in situations that require immediate attention. Subsequently, when the SWIS workers and MCW's are available, they provide strong student and family support, so long as the students/families are willing to access and use their support. While practical issues, like availability and transportation exist, the WC plays an important role in linking newcomer students and families with the community, thus strengthening their sense of belonging and providing opportunities to contribute to their new schools and communities.

4.3.4. Summary

The services available to support students from refugee backgrounds in the immediate and wider school community are well-intentioned. When students and families utilize these services, they can serve as excellent resources to help orient and connect newcomers to their schools and communities. However, the overwhelming amount of support required by the families of refugee backgrounds in the community surrounding Royal Secondary School, is only expected to grow as global conflicts continue to displace millions of people annually. This is in addition to the thousands of families around the world who are on the waitlist to get into Canada, sometimes waiting up to ten years before their file is considered (Immigrant and Refugee Board of Canada,

2017). The services that are in place simply are not extensive enough to address the growing demand for them.

Chapter 5. Discussion

Sense of belonging in schools is important to fostering positive academic, behavioral and psychological outcomes, as well as general long-term well-being in adolescents (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007). This study examined three fundamental questions. First, the study analyzed what it meant for female adolescent students from refugee backgrounds to experience a sense of belonging in their school (SOBIS). Second, it explored the impact of teacher and peer relationships on student sense of belonging; and third it sought to answer how the services available in the school system influenced student sense of belonging. Below is the discussion divided by the core questions and a synthesis of the key outcomes.

5.1. Adolescents from Refugee Backgrounds Sense of Belonging in Schools

Students from refugee backgrounds develop a SOBIS through their attachment to the school community and the perception of acceptance that they feel within this community (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007). This study found that students from refugee backgrounds felt acceptance amongst their peers from refugee backgrounds, who had similar stories of migration, upheaval and displacement, but more importantly perhaps, had the same desires and goals to make friendships, develop a community and find academic success. These friendships, even if not deeply meaningful, provided support and comfort to students from refugee backgrounds, and reinforced that their experiences were shared by others. These friendships provided a place of acceptance, and the ELL classroom and teacher, provided a feeling of belonging upon initially arriving to their new school. However, as students stayed longer at their new school, they began to seek out other ways to fit into the dominant school culture by looking outside the confines of the ELL classroom and into the wider school community.

Unfortunately, acceptance and belonging within the wider school community was difficult to achieve for the study participants. Few of the participants joined school clubs or teams. The three main reasons for this were the high costs associated with joining these groups; the times in which the groups were offered conflicted with familial responsibilities; and many of the students did not feel empowered enough to seek out

information regarding these clubs, resulting in missed club meetings, avoidance of team try-outs and general non-participation. While students from refugee backgrounds who joined teams and clubs were more likely to make Canadian-born friends or acquaintances, these relationships were felt to be superficial that did not form stronger more meaningful connections and did not extend outside the classroom or wider school community. Subsequently, students from refugee backgrounds often felt disconnected from their Canadian-born peers, who they felt largely ignored them. Study participants believed that this had more to do with language and cultural barriers, than with malicious or bullying behaviours. This was particularly true for the participants of Muslim background who wore hijabs and traditional clothing. They often felt that others, students and many teachers alike, had preconceived ideas about them, their beliefs and their values, and did not make an effort to get to know them on an individual level.

SOBIS is also fostered when students experience happiness in coming to school (Libbey, 2007). All seven of the study participants expressed gratitude, and happiness to be at school. They all entered into their new school excited to be given the opportunity to learn in a peaceful and safe environment. However, over time, this enthusiasm tended to erode, in varying degrees. Despite studying and working hard, many students were not earning high grades. The study found that the students attributed this to their slow language acquisition, unequitable teaching and assessment practices that presumed they had both access to and knowledge of how to use various learning tools, (such as technology), as well as varying degrees of positive relationships with teachers and support service providers. Furthermore, SOBIS requires a feeling of fairness in school and the study found that the students from refugee backgrounds were treated equally to their Canadian-born counterparts, but were not being treated equitably. This meant that study participants were not getting any individual accommodations to make up for their gaps in knowledge or understanding to help them be better able to complete their assignments. Rather, the study participants had the same expectations placed on them as their Canadian-born counterparts by their teachers. When they were asked to complete the same assignments as their peers, they felt that they had to put in a much larger and more time-consuming effort, because they first needed to learn the skills required to do the assignment and then apply these new skills to complete their work. Rather than being treated equally, students from refugee backgrounds need to be treated equitably by being provided the skills, tools and supports to meet their specific

needs. Despite their determination and motivation to do well academically, study participants felt frustrated at feeling like they were always trying to catch up. These feelings of frustration, disappointment and unfairness over teaching practices and assessments detracted from their enthusiasm and general happiness to be at school.

5.2. What role do relationships play in refugee students developing SOBIS?

Students from refugee backgrounds SOBIS was also strengthened by strong and positive relationships with teachers from whom they perceived a genuine sense of support and care (Demagnet & Van Houtte, 2012; Hattie & Anderman, 2013; Hoot, 2011; Wentzel, 1998). Study participants explained that teachers who asked them about their day, inquired if they looked unwell or simply greeted them upon arriving to class, were “nicer” than other teachers. “Nicer” teachers were perceived as being easier to talk to, kinder and more accepting. The study found that in classrooms where the students perceived their teacher as being kind and helpful, the study participants were better able to self-advocate and seek out help when they needed it in their learning. Their sense of belonging was developed as being part of a learning community, in which questions were encouraged and mistakes inevitable, as opposed to being the one isolated student who did not understand the lesson. These students did better academically in supportive teachers’ classes. Unfortunately, the study participants identified on average only three teachers (of the eight-to-ten they may learn from in any given year), with whom they felt a supportive relationship. These teachers were generally the LST, ELL and one or two other specific teachers in the entire school, which the study participants identified as being supportive.

Adolescents’ attitudes, choices of activities and emotional well-being are closely linked to that of their peer groups, and sense of belonging largely depends on the acceptance attained by peer groups (Brown & Larson, 2009). The study participants from families that provided the most support and encouragement for them to explore their new communities, most notably Vania, Jamilah and Iris, were more involved in the school and wider community, and generally had more friends and acquaintances outside the ELL classroom. Furthermore, their level of English was stronger than that of their newcomer peers, which can be attributed to more time spent with native

English speakers through the clubs, teams, organizations and jobs in which they participated. The study also conveyed that students felt that their Canadian-born peers largely ignored them in class discussions, in group work and in the hallways. They believed this to be related to their language abilities and the fact that their peers had difficulty understanding them. As a result, study participants were more reluctant to speak up in class and often withheld their opinions for fear of their peers whispering about them, even if only to clarify what they had to say.

5.3. Factors that influence SOBIS amongst Students from Refugee Backgrounds both in School and in the School Community

There are many services available both in the school and the wider school community for students and their families from refugee backgrounds. However, there is a high demand for these services that will continue to grow as Canada accepts more refugees and immigrants. The ability of these service to fulfill their roles is significantly reduced by the immense demands placed on them. There are simply not enough SWIS, MCWs, counsellors etc. to support the number of people who require their services. As a result, the issues that students and families from refugee backgrounds come to these providers with may not get completely resolved, or they may “fall through the cracks,” letting them linger for prolonged periods of time. This places ongoing demands on these services for work only partially completed or support only partially fulfilled. Most of the study participants’ families do take advantage of the services provided, and it is only the minority who fail to use the support services available. However, parents who lack skills training, language abilities and may be suffering from mental health challenges, as an after-effect of war, struggle to support their families, both financially and social-emotionally. This stress is carried largely by the children who come to school requiring support for everything from lunch programs, to clothing, to help with hygiene, to counselling. This places greater demands on school systems, which are often unprepared and ill equipped to offer this kind of support. The poverty and on-going daily challenges that students from refugee backgrounds experience at home, results in students who are frequently stressed out and worried at school, which further interferes with their cognitive abilities to perform well academically.

Yet, there are times when supports are available, and students still choose not to access them. A few of the study participants claimed not to access these supports, such as counselling, because they did not know who/what they were. However, this does not entirely explain their behaviour. For instance, Iris claimed to not know who her counsellor was and when she was experiencing housing instability and parental neglect, turned to her ELL teacher for support instead. Maria, the ELL teacher, informed me that she had connected Iris to the counsellors and youth workers, yet Iris claimed not to know who they were. This may be a result of Iris not feeling comfortable talking to these support workers, with whom she lacks a trusting relationship, or it may be because students are afraid to talk to these support workers, for fear that their personal situations will be made worse or their family will be split up. This conveys a lack of trust in the support services available and an unclear understanding of the ways in which they can help. High counsellor turn-over is also very common given the complex demographics and high demands of particular schools, such as Royal Secondary School. For some of the more accessible services to be used by the students, more trusting relationships will need to be built. This is a vast challenge given the high number of students needing these services and the few service providers available.

Chapter 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

*“You cannot build a society purely on interests,
you need a sense of belonging.”
Valery Giscard d’Estaing (1977)*

Throughout this study, several key themes continually reemerged. First, subject specialist teachers outside of ELL and LST rarely took the time to get to know refugee students or treat them as distinct individuals. This was conveyed by the perceived lack of concern that students from refugee backgrounds felt by these teachers when they were requiring either academic support because of low grades, or personal support because of personal injury, illness or family problems. Many teachers tended to homogenize students from refugee backgrounds into one group, compared to the teachers whose job it was to work with them specifically. While there are many reasons why this may be, the inclusive nature of the education system in British Columbia, combined with the lack of regulations around classroom size and composition, and provincial government funding cuts to support special needs students in schools (at the time this study was conducted), has created complex classrooms in which teachers are left to address a large variety of needs, which they may be unable or unequipped to fully support. As a result, teachers may homogenize students from refugee backgrounds as being one group with the same needs, failing to provide them with the specialized attention required to address them individually.

In addition, the struggles that students from refugee backgrounds face upon arriving in their new host communities do not end upon arrival. These students and their families face poverty, language barriers, and limited job opportunities, while confronting mental health challenges that may require on-going medical attention and support. Subsequently, the children in these families (such as the study participants) are left to help support their families in a variety of ways, from child-care, to part-time jobs, to social-emotional support. These additional responsibilities, which are disproportionately held by female children, prevent and limit their opportunities to access the programs and services in their schools that help create a sense of belonging in their new communities.

While working to support their families both at home and outside the home, the participants demonstrated high levels of motivation to do well academically. There was a

distinct understanding of the value and importance of education. Education was believed to be valuable and necessary for achieving a fulfilling and happy life.

Furthermore, while the school district and the Ministry of Education has made some effort to provide supports, such as the Welcome Centre and Settlement Workers in Schools, for students from refugee backgrounds, there are simply not enough supports for the amount of need that exists. Rather, students are left to their own devices to determine if and how they can best use the existing resources to help themselves. Similarly, teachers are left to their own devices to determine how these resources can support them in their teaching of students from refugee backgrounds. Publicly funded schools have limited resources and the needs of students from refugee backgrounds are not prioritized. Educational policies aim to treat all students equally, while ignoring their distinct needs and failing to provide equitable services to better support students from refugee backgrounds.

In addition, the experiences and knowledge of students who were previously refugees, have not been used in the school system as a means to help support newcomer students. Students who previously arrived in the school as refugees have language skills and settlement experience that could prove beneficial to helping foster SOBIS amongst newcomer students. Similarly, little is being done to incorporate Canadian-born students in the experiences of newcomer students. Incorporating both previous refugees and Canadian-born students in the newcomer experience as peer buddies or mentors could provide an opportunity to help develop more meaningful connections amongst peers, contributing to SOBIS. It could also act as a learning opportunity for all students to better understand each other and potentially breakdown stereotypes and stigmas that may exist.

The gendered experience of the study participants also provides valuable insight. The study participants from refugee backgrounds were female, and their gender, regardless of ethnic background, religion or age, influenced their families' expectations of them. Every participant was expected to provide some degree of child care at home for younger siblings. Similarly, every participant was expected to contribute to the household through cleaning, cooking and other domestic responsibilities. While many Canadian-born children are also expected to contribute to their family household through domestic responsibilities, amongst study participants, these responsibilities often

interfered with their abilities to get their homework finished in a timely way or to participate in extra-curricular activities. Sisters Qabila and Hadarah mentioned that during times when they were studying for exams, they were still required to contribute to the household chores, while their 17-year-old brother was allowed to study, freeing him of domestic responsibilities (Interview II, June 7, 2017). This also extended to attending homework club afterschool, where Qabila and Hadarah's brother would be allowed to stay longer to get help with an assignment or test, but the girls would be required to leave if the brother was finished his work, even if they were not (Field note journal, April 26, 2017). The school made no accommodations, such as extra time or additional supports, regarding the extra responsibilities experienced by female students from refugee backgrounds, leaving them to prioritize and navigate their academic and familial responsibilities to the best of their abilities.

Three study-participants (Jamilah, Vania and Hada) remarked that the community-based resources, such as those provided by the Welcome Centre (WC) were boring and unhelpful. This surprised me, specifically because Jamilah would later go on to join many community groups run through the WC. Similarly, Vania and her family would later become quite reliant on Settlement Worker support. There seemed to be a disconnect between what the students thought about these supports and how useful they actually were to their families. Why this is, is unclear. However, it does suggest that these supports provide some value to the families in the long term, but may not be exactly the type of support that the students feel is needed for them in the early stages of their arrival.

Finally, despite the on-going challenges and stress experienced by students from refugee backgrounds, they continued to maintain a persistent and resilient attitude, well into their settlement. Months after they had arrived, they continued to express interest in connecting more with their peers and their teachers, and conveyed a continued motivation to achieve high academic grades. Study participants achieved a sense of belonging amongst their ELL peers and within their newcomer friendship groups, but not within their wider school community. This is largely what I expected. As a teacher, a coach and a club sponsor in the school, I maintain a largely active role in the school community and prior to this study, I rarely saw or interacted with students from refugee backgrounds outside of my own classroom. When I did see newcomer students

interacting with Canadian-born students, it was often in a purposeful way, for example, to finish a group project that they were assigned by a teacher.

In the secondary setting, sense of belonging is not so straightforward for newcomer or Canadian-born students alike either. Constantly shifting and changing senses of identity and self-concept amongst all adolescents, convey that many students in the secondary school settings, whether newcomer or Canadian-born, do not feel a strong connection to, or belonging in, their high school generally (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 94). Adolescence poses developmental and social challenges regardless of background, ethnicity and personality. Future studies that compare the level of sense of belonging amongst Canadian-born students to the level of sense of belonging experienced by students from refugee backgrounds would provide greater insight into our general understanding of adolescent students' SOBIS.

Connecting and Acceptance: Whether students from refugee backgrounds develop a sense of belonging in school depends on how connected and accepted they feel in their school. This is conveyed by how welcoming the school is to them as demonstrated by the closeness of the relationships they form with their teachers and peers, and the supports that are available to help them achieve success in their school. The daily stressors that continue in the lives of students from refugee backgrounds after their arrival to their new country are persistent. Poverty, low language skills, disjointed families, and mental health concerns, all contribute to poor academic achievement and social isolation, requiring students from refugee backgrounds to have a great deal of stamina and endurance to persevere. While getting involved and actively contributing to the school and community environment are proactive measures that students from refugee backgrounds can take to start to build trusting relationships with teachers and peers, females are further challenged with gendered expectations in their homes that may pose barriers to their school and community participation.

Absent Students: There is also a subset of the refugee student population that has not been discussed thus far in this study. Every year there are students from refugee backgrounds who arrive at Royal Secondary School and leave within weeks or a few short months thereafter. These students and families do not connect to the values and practices of the dominant school culture. This can mean various things. In some circumstances, the students' families are strict and do not allow their daughters to

participate in certain classes or interact with their male peers. In other cases, students simply stop attending school. It is unclear why this might be. Furthermore, when teachers or administrators call home to determine why these students have missed so many days of school, or periods of class, these students will frequently explain that they are working in part-time and sometimes fulltime jobs, which they prioritize over school. More research into this group is required to better understand whether work is prioritized because it is thought to be more immediately valuable to the families or whether it is prioritized because education is not valued generally or some combination of these or other factors.

Continued Challenges: The challenges faced by students and families of refugee backgrounds do not stop upon their arrival in their host country, and Canada is no exception. The study participants made frequent comments throughout the interviews and in the scrapbooking activities about the high cost of living in Canada, including the cost of food, transportation and housing (Field Note Journal, May 15, 2017). Addressing ways to better support families financially as well as providing them with skills and language training, would enable parents to better care for their children and alleviate much of the stress on their children. Furthermore, while I had anticipated that the students from refugee backgrounds would have disjointed families with parents and siblings missing as casualties of war, I was surprised to learn how many of their families had multiple siblings from different fathers and mothers. This was the case for five of the seven participants. More research into why this is may provide unique insight into the deeper family dynamics influencing some of these students' lives.

Connecting to the Literature: This study supports existing literature that conveys the hardship experienced by students from refugee backgrounds does not end upon arrival in their host country, but rather continues as they face daily challenges associated with poverty, mental health and language barriers (Government of Canada, 2017). Despite that the UNHCR (2015) recommends countries make special provisions for students from refugee backgrounds and in doing so, avoid homogenizing them as a unified group, schools and educational policies do homogenize students from refugee backgrounds, aiming to treat them equally to their Canadian-born peers, as oppose to equitably, which would better suit their unique needs. Similarly, Chiu et al. (2015) argued that schools that were more egalitarian in nature better supported SOBIS. However, the

study conveyed that egalitarianism did not provide the specific attention required to support the unique needs of individual students from refugee backgrounds.

Much of the existing literature emphasized the importance of supportive teacher-student relationships for students from refugee backgrounds (Hattie & Anderman, 2013; Libbey, 2007; Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991). This was highlighted in the study. Students who felt that they had more supportive relationships with their teachers tended to do better in their courses and felt a greater SOBIS. Unfortunately, study participants felt that only a few of their teachers provided this type of support. Accordingly, Taylor and Sidhu (2012) argued that students also required their teachers to treat them fairly in order to feel SOBIS. Study participants cited that being treated equally by their teachers was sometimes unfair because it presumed that they had the skills/knowledge of their peers, but they did not. Similarly, the importance of supportive peer relationships was also highlighted as being necessary for the development of SOBIS (Brown & Larson, 2009; Carter, 1998). Unfortunately, study participants did feel socially isolated from their peers, who they felt largely ignored them, both in class and outside. This is consistent with the literature conveying that these students typically felt lower SOBIS. Finally, Qin-Hilliard (2003) argued that gendered expectations may limit female students' exposure to the dominant culture. This was proven true in the study as well. Being female meant that the students had many familial responsibilities which prohibited them from joining clubs, teams and programs that ran after school. The timing of these clubs negatively affected the development of their SOBIS; as Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) notes, it is through these clubs, teams and programs that students start to build relationships with others and begin to feel a deeper sense of belonging in their new communities.

Working Together to Create Belonging: This study conveyed that students from refugee backgrounds are not just an addition to the school, but rather are a part of the school community. Yet, to truly feel a sense of belonging within a school community, efforts should be made, both by the schools and communities, as well as by the newcomers themselves. Students from refugee backgrounds were genuinely happy to arrive at Royal Secondary School, excited to commence their learning, or pick up where they left off in their academic studies. The study participants showed great determination and effort in their learning, and conveyed a strong sense of hope that their Canadian education could help improve the lives of themselves and their families. The stronger relationships they were able to develop with their teachers and peers, the greater sense

of belonging they felt. However, barriers posed by language skills, poverty, mental health and gendered expectations, were a constant source of challenge in their lives.

6.1. Study Significance

Schools and communities that are able to foster a positive sense of belonging amongst students from refugee backgrounds increase their pro-social outcomes and decrease their negative well-being outcomes. The positive academic, behavioural and psychological outcomes of students who feel a strong sense of SOBIS, results in improved self-efficacy, motivation and reduced social-emotional distress (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007).

However, in order for this to occur, skills and language training, affordable housing, increased minimum wages to reflect the cost of living and affordable day-care, is required to better support families and subsequently students from refugee backgrounds. Rudyard Griffiths, co-founder of the Dominion Institute argues that Canada does not spend enough money on language services and skills accreditation and on training for newcomers (Grubel & Grady, 2011). Griffiths argues that the Canadian government could significantly reduce the costs to taxpayers of paying for social services and welfare programs of newcomers, if they were to put in place the proper training and resources to better support these families upon arrival to Canada (Grubel & Grady, 2011).

6.2. Study Limitations

Sample size. The sample size of the population being researched refers to the number of participants used in the study (Labaree, 2009). This study explored the experiences of seven female students from refugee backgrounds who were all from the same school. This study was therefore limited to understanding the experiences of these seven participants, all from the same school community and from a female perspective. Interviewing siblings together was valuable in allowing for the emergence of different responses and interpretations to similar events and situations. It highlighted how specific individual differences impacted perspectives, attitudes and beliefs. However, using more participants from a wider range of schools and communities, and from different genders,

would have potentially yielded different results. As such, this study is not generalizable, but rather very specific to the experiences of the participants.

Reliability of data. The reliability of data acquired through interview questions was influenced by whether the study participants were able to honestly share their stories (Labaree, 2009). Throughout the interviews, there were sensitive topics that were not discussed with the participants due to their serious nature. This included discussing the daily impact of mental health challenges, such as depression, stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic distress disorder, on the students and families' health and well-being. Students may have been reluctant to talk about these more personal issues for reasons ranging from shame, to fear of re-traumatization. As the study participants were minors, and the risk of raising potentially re-traumatizing situations was high, it was unethical to address these topics. Future studies conducted with the support of clinical psychologists, may be able to better understand the role that these health challenges play in how well these students are able to form relationships that contribute to positive SOBIS.

Self-reported data. Self-reported data is data that is collected and told through interviews and stories (Labaree, 2009). Self-reported data has the potential of employing selective memory and attribution bias. Selective memory is when individuals may be unable to recall certain memories accurately (Natale & Hantas, 1982). Study participants who may have been suffering from mental health challenges, such as depression or anxiety, may employ selective memory when describing past events (Creswell, 2011; Natale & Hantas, 1982). This may be done as a natural protective measure to prevent re-traumatization (Natale & Hantas, 1982).

Similarly, attribution bias is when individuals attribute positive outcomes of an event to their own actions, and negative outcomes to the actions of others (Lee, Hallahan & Herzog, 1996). It is believed that attribution bias is a cognitive function related to information processing (Lee et al., 1996). Depression, stress, anxiety and nutrition all play a role in cognitive function and subsequently can influence information processing (Lee et al., 1996). Students from refugee backgrounds are more likely to be impacted by one or more of these factors, which may then influence their self-reported data (Lee et al., 1996). Without the help of a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist, this study was unable to assess the mental health of the participants. Subsequently, this study was unable to determine to what extent selective memory or attribution bias may

have been used in the self-reported data. Future studies which assess the influence of these factors on cognitive functioning would strengthen the validity of the self-reported data collected.

Longitudinal effects. Longitudinal effects are limited by the time frame in which the study is conducted (Labaree, 2009). This study was conducted over a five-month period, and therefore was unable to account for changes in sense of belonging amongst the participants in the long term. Building strong and trustworthy relationships, for instance, often take years to develop and a future study that followed these students into young adulthood would better determine if and how their sense of belonging was influenced by school communities and for how long these outcomes lasted.

Cultural bias. Cultural bias refers to when a person or thing is viewed in a consistently inaccurate way (Labaree, 2009). People from refugee backgrounds are frequently portrayed in the media in negative ways. While I attempted to limit my exposure to negative media coverage, it was not always possible to do so, as the study was conducted during a time period when the world experienced the largest refugee migration since the Second World War (United Nations, 2016). To avoid perpetuating media conveyed bias, I listened closely to the participants' stories and recorded their perspectives in the field notes journal. I often asked participants about global issues, informally in-class. As a Learning Support teacher (with a specialization in Social Studies), I was able to do this easily. I then critically and consciously asked myself, how the participants' experiences and opinions differed from the stories portrayed in the media. This helped me to reflect on any bias I may have, as a result of media influence.

Fluency in language. Fluency in language was also a limitation (Labaree, 2009). The students frequently expressed frustration during interviews in being unable to express themselves as clearly as they would like. This also made me question if they were fully understanding the questions I was asking. Using translators to help facilitate the interviews risked the possibilities of losing the authentic voices of the students. Subsequently, student experiences, thoughts and feelings, may not have been fully expressed. Future studies in which the researcher is able to conduct the study in the students' first language, would allow more detailed and accurate information to emerge.

6.3. Recommendations

The study conveys that educators should make a stronger effort to build relationships with students from refugee backgrounds. It also conveys that administrators should acknowledge that students from refugee backgrounds need to be treated equitably, and that this means providing educators the support and resources to do so. Furthermore, schools that use the skills and knowledge of previous refugees and Canadian-born students in new and innovative ways, can help to create a climate of acceptance amongst newcomer students in schools. In addition, policy makers should consider the need for more supports for newcomer populations. As Canada continues to welcome immigrants, refugees and others to our schools and communities, we should also ensure that there are adequate supports to help these students and their families develop a sense of belonging and in this way positively contribute to their long-term psychosocial, emotional, and physical health and well-being.

Future studies would benefit from examining the provision of more equitable support for students from refugee backgrounds. Many students stated that they felt treated unfairly because they believed themselves to be working equally as hard or harder than their peers, yet their grades were not reflective of their efforts. A future study which examines how to provide equal access to opportunities, such as post-secondary, while recognizing practical limitations such as language barriers and knowledge gaps (from interrupted educations), is required to help students feel that their new society is supportive and a fair one that they want to positively contribute to.

Furthermore, studies that apply existing literature on media literacy and the impact of the media on the formation of ideas and behaviours by both students and teachers in schools, is required to better understand stereotypes and attitudes of discrimination that students from refugee backgrounds are facing upon entering the school system, and the impact of this on sense of belonging.

Finally, schools and students from refugee backgrounds would benefit from studies that approach class composition and learning needs in new and creative ways, particularly in a climate of uncertainty and continually fluctuating government funding, priorities and interests in public education. The inclusive classroom model is only as effective as there are supports to run it.

6.4. Conclusion

“You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals. To that end, each of us should work for their own improvement and, at the same time, share a general responsibility for all humanity, our particular duty being to aid those to whom we think we can be most useful.”
Marie Curie (1923)

It is human nature to not just want, but to need to belong to a group, or a community where one can be themselves and feel fully accepted, embraced and supported by members of that group. But what are the implications for only feeling a partial sense of belonging? Only feeling like you belong in certain places? Only feeling that certain people or types of people accept you for who you are, and only at certain times? Belonging is temporal and spatial, context dependent and influenced by history, culture and socio-political factors.

While this study has indicated simple changes that can be made within the existing school and community structure to help increase sense of belonging amongst students from refugee backgrounds, poverty places severe limits on what can be accomplished through school efforts to help support students from refugee backgrounds (Berliner, 2005), and the brunt of this impact continues to be disproportionately felt by females. Refugees are ordinary people, who have been met with extraordinary circumstances. They are capable of enhancing and strengthening the social fabric of our society, and as we continue to welcome thousands of people from refugee backgrounds to Canada annually, we should commit to helping support them upon arrival and throughout the settlement process, both for their well-being and for that of our society. Without love and compassion for our fellow beings, humanity cannot survive – Dalai Lama (2001).

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

Student Questions – Interview I March 2017

Sense of Belonging

1. What clubs, events or celebrations do you participate in at school?
2. When do you feel comfortable expressing your opinions in class? When do you not feel comfortable speaking up in class?
3. What are some of the rules at this school? Are they the same as at your old school? Explain. Do you think students follow the school rules at this school? Why or why not?

Relationship with Teachers

1. Are your teachers helpful in class? Why or why not?
2. Do you and your teachers talk about your personal life? Life outside of school?
3. If you need help/advice, is there a teacher you can talk to?
4. Other than teachers, who do you talk to if you need help with something? (E.g. Counsellor or settlement worker)

Relationship with Peers

1. Describe your friends. Where did you meet them and where are they from?
2. How do your friends support each other when you have problems in school or outside of school? Explain.
3. Do you ever get in conflict with friends? Over what?

Self-Efficacy

1. How would you describe your work ethic in school? E.g. are you a hard worker?
2. What do you like about school and what do you wish you could be studying more of?
3. What do you do when you have a problem in a class, for instance, if you do not understand the directions of an assignment?

Is there anything else you would like to comment on or think is important for me to know?

Student Questions – Interviews II June 2017

Sense of Belonging

1. What were the best parts of your school year? Highlights? Lowlights?
2. Have you joined any clubs/teams? Are there any clubs/teams you want to join next year? OR How did X club/team go this year?
3. What about the community and the school do you like? Dislike?
4. What are your hopes for next year?

Relationship with Teachers

1. Describe a memorable adult from this year – someone you really liked or disliked and explain why.
2. Explain one thing, can be something your learned or something your participated in that sticks out to you from this school year?
3. Do you feel like you did well in school? Why or why not? What might you change for next year?

Relationship with Peers

1. Has your friend group changed this year? Did you make/lose any friends? Explain how.
2. What does your family think about education? Is it as important as other things, for example work or family responsibilities?
3. In your classes, did you interact and work with other students that you did not know? If yes, did you ask them to work together or were you assigned? If no, why not?
4. Are you happy to be a Surrey school student? Why or why not?

Is there anything else you would like to comment on or think is important for me to know?

Teacher Questions – Interview April 2017

Sense of Belonging

1. Do you feel that you are able to tell when a student is being excluded in class activities or group work? How?
2. How do you try to build a sense of community in your classroom? In what way do you try to do this?
3. Can students in your class express their opinions and have others listen to them?

Self-Efficacy

1. If a student has a problem, do they talk to you about it?
2. Are your students motivated to do well in their classes? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel that the students/parents value education?

Relationship with Students

1. How do you take an interest in the personal lives of your students? E.g. Would you be able to tell me about their family dynamic?
2. Do you ask students about their personal lives? Their school work outside of your class?
3. If I asked the students right now, would they tell me their teachers are mean or nice? Why do you think this?

Relationship with Colleagues & Other Service Providers

1. Do you think the service providers support the students from refugee backgrounds in a cohesive and effective way? (E.g. settlement workers, youth worker, counsellor, safe school police liaison etc.)
2. Which service do you think the students access most (outside of teachers)?
3. Are you in contact with the other service providers about the needs of the students frequently? Why or why not?

Feeling of being at school

1. Are your students happy to come to school?
2. Do you think your students are connected to others outside of their classroom, such as mainstream students? Do they participate in clubs, teams etc.?
3. What are some rules or boundaries that may be new to your students?

Is there anything else you would like to comment on or think is important for me to know?

Appendix B. Coding Categories

School & Sense of Belonging	School Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a wide group of friends • Feeling like you fit in with the other students • Being able to talk to the other students without fear of being teased or outcast • Having high expectations of self • Being comfortable in classroom/school • Feeling supported by peers/teachers • Feeling comfortable to ask questions • Developing a relationship with teachers • Feeling pride in accomplishments • Having a place to go where you feel comfortable • Enjoying school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to access supportive adults • Being able to talk to a trusting teacher • Being encouraged to do well academically • Having high expectations of self by others • Being included in school wide activities • Living in a community that feels safe • Being encouraged to be actively involved in the community
Relationships	Teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family who is open minded and flexible; cohesive family units; progressive mindsets about girls and their rights • Friends who are accepting of differences & work collaboratively • Church who provides community opportunities • Sports teams who are supportive and provide social outlet • Teachers who listen and help • Having someone to talk to when you encounter a problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing students chance to speak • Having students work together • Encouraging sense of community in class • Having rules and expectations in classes • Classes that are structured and easy to follow
Internal self-efficacy	Services

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being motivated to join club or find work without friends • Being motivated to work hard and study • Stepping out of comfort zone to ask questions & connect with peers • Resiliency – trying again after failing • Pursuing interests, even if doing so independently without help from others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services fulfill multiple functions • Services sometimes duplicate efforts • Services are effective when accessible • There are not enough services for the amount of need that exists • Access to services depends on availability and family willingness
Outliers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-attending students • Siblings who were frequently in-trouble (at school or with law) • History of domestic violence in the home between parents 	