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Abstract: Recent focus on the 'early years' has meant increased attention to children's early learning experiences. An emerging pressure exists for parents to develop their children's preparedness for school, pursuant to research emphasising the importance of 'school readiness' as a buffer against future academic, social, and mental health problems. The perspectives of parents, influenced by social and cultural factors, are often central to how well children are prepared for the transition to school. For refugee parents, children's successful schooling has been identified as both a general aspiration, and a pathway, for children's integration; however, little is known about their experiences in relation to preparing their children for school. The purpose of the present study was to explore the meanings African refugee mothers ascribe to their children's school readiness, using an interpretive phenomenology methodology. A focus group and in-depth interviews with a total of 8 Burundi refugee mothers, as well as playgroup staff and a kindergarten teacher, showed a range of concerns about school readiness different to those experienced by mainstream parents and parents from different cultures. In the context of these described difficulties, the meaning of assistance provided by a supported playgroup was also discussed.

Keywords: Supported Playgroups, School Readiness, Kindergarten, Refugee, Parents

Introduction

In Australia, there is emerging pressure for parents to build their children's preparedness for their overall transition into formal education, often termed children's 'school readiness'. A child's preparedness for school is informed by considerations of their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, and it is seen as an essential buffer against future academic, social, and mental health issues (Farrar, Goldfield, and Moore 2007). School 'unreadiness' is particularly costly for children and society, and evidence suggests that investment in the early years is cost-effective, resulting in many long-term benefits (Mustard 2008; Mustard and Young 2007). Acknowledging children's successful transitions to school as influential in shaping their lifelong learning experiences, the Australian Government has stressed the importance of this 'readiness' as part of a broader focus on the early years (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian 2004; Sorin and Markotsis 2008).

Australian Government literature emphasises that school readiness is a shared responsibility – a product of the relationships and interactions of children with their families and social environments – and has recently drawn attention to school readiness issues in 'at risk' populations (Dockett, Perry, and Kearney 2010; McTurk et al. 2011). Refugees encounter a range of difficulties in their attempts to resettle and acculturate in their new societies (Murray, Davidson, and Schweitzer 2008). Given the aims of refugee parents to provide a better life for their children (Renzaho and Vignjevic 2011), parenting and providing education for them have been identified as strong priorities for many refugee families in Australia (Sidu and Taylor 2009). To date, however, although research on mainstream, ethnic, and migrant populations provides some insight into how preparing children for school may be concerning for refugees, there are minimal studies examining the unique context and experiences of this specific population. That is, little attention has been paid to the school readiness experiences of refugee families – an at risk population. The purpose of the present study is to address this current paucity in the literature by considering the meaning African refugee mothers ascribe to their experiences of

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their children's school readiness. In this context, the study also aims to explore the meaning of assistance provided by a supported playgroup.

Refugee Parents' Experiences of Their Children's Schooling

Children's education is a strong priority for many refugee parents (Sidhu and Taylor 2009) and school is often viewed as an opportunity to learn about, and participate in, their new communities (Tadesse, Hoot, and Watson-Thompson 2009). Although it is a positive experience for some, many encounter significant challenges when children begin formal education (Atwell, Gifford, and McDonald-Wilmsen 2009; Lewig, Arney, and Salveron 2010; McBrien 2011; Tadesse, Selamawit, and Watson-Thompson 2009; Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse 2009). Sudanese parents have considered education to be a means through which children may adequately take care of their families in future; however they have further expressed difficulties in regard to assistance with school work, due to poor English and reading skills (Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse 2009). Tadesse, Selamawit, and Watson-Thompson (2009) found disparities in views of early education between African refugee mothers and school teachers, whereby the mothers disagreed with teachers' strong emphasis on play, preferring the teaching of academic skills. Furthermore, parents perceived the role of teachers as instructional and authoritative, and felt they were influenced by low expectations, racial stereotypes, and a lack of understanding of the cultures of the families (Tadesse, Selamawit, and Watson-Thompson 2009).

An Australian study by Atwell, Gifford, and McDonald-Wilmsen (2009) found that issues relating to culture and education were often raised by participants. Although education was valued by parents, they discussed difficulties with their inability to communicate effectively with teachers, leading to a sense of powerlessness and disadvantage. Furthermore, language difficulties were associated with low levels of confidence and maintaining authority as a parent, which elevated fear for the well-being and unity of the family. Parents explicitly feared a breakdown in traditional culture as their children became more exposed to new social and cultural norms at school, and they were anxious about the shame that would result if children were not raised according to what was deemed appropriate in their communities (Atwell, Gifford, and McDonald-Wilmsen 2009), a finding echoed by Lewig, Arney, and Salveron (2010). Moreover, parents reported a strong sense of isolation and diminished social support, and they were reluctant to access available parenting services due to language barriers and a lack of understanding of available agencies (Lewig, Arney, and Salveron 2010). Parental involvement in school was minimal, and the authors and mothers expressed the need for more opportunities for social gatherings, in order to establish important social connections that could assist them in their parenting role (Lewig, Arney, and Salveron 2010).

Parents' Experiences of Their Children's School Readiness

In the absence of Australian research, national and international studies in related areas can be used to provide some contextual background for the present study. In a qualitative study of 25 mainstream parents in the United States, Wesley and Buysse (2003) found that language, social, and emotional development were emphasised by parents in describing a school-ready child, while academic skills were de-emphasised. Parents were surprised at the schools' high expectations of children's academic achievement, and felt external pressures to ensure they could perform at a certain level at kindergarten entry (Wesley and Buysse 2003). It was suggested that changes in the school environment, including better communication between parents and staff, would increase social and cultural awareness, ensuring the needs of diverse families were met (Wesley and Buysse 2003). Through an Australian grounded theory study, Dockett and Perry (2004) found that parents emphasised the importance of children possessing certain self-help skills prior to starting kindergarten, such as the ability to dress themselves, and they expressed concerns over their children's adjustment to the new environment and routines of school. They

further desired for their children to 'fit in' with their peers. Parents experienced feelings of loss, as well as a sense of freedom, when their children began kindergarten, and were concerned about physical aspects of school, such as bullying, dress, food, and safety (Dockett and Perry 2004).

In a study of experiences of predominantly African-American mothers, McAllister et al. (2005) found that parents evaluated their children's school readiness in terms of practical aspects, such as organising backpacks, as well as academic ability, adherence to rules, and social and emotional skills. Parents encountered stressors in their children's transition to kindergarten, requiring adjustment to new daily routines, social environments, and changes to parent-child relationships (McAllister et al. 2005). Furthermore, school was perceived as a 'foreign' environment by parents, who voiced their concerns about racism, discrimination, and a lack of appreciation for differences between individual children and families (McAllister et al. 2005). It was found that, "parents indicated their need for social and emotional support to fulfill these new roles and described the informal family and community support systems on which they relied" (McAllister et al. 2005, 622), with the author concluding that social support was instrumental in buffering against the stresses experienced by parents.

The limited research on school readiness in migrant populations has highlighted cultural and linguistic difficulties. In a sample of Bangladeshi migrant mothers in Sydney, Sanagavarapu and Perry (2005) found that parents were anxious about their children's inability to speak proficient English, as well as their 'darker skin' – issues they believed could be a source of racism and discrimination. They also raised concerns that their children would lose traditional cultural and religious values as a result of exposure to Western culture. Sanagavarapu (2010) found that parents believed they had a significant role in preparing their children for school, and expressed concerns over loss of culture and issues with adjustment due to English difficulties once children began kindergarten. Parents also reported a lack of awareness of the schools' expectations and issues understanding written information, leading Sanagavarapu (2010) to suggest that migrant parents may be empowered through provision of linguistically appropriate information, as well as implementation of support and bilingual services for these families. Given migrant parents face additional concerns surrounding school readiness and transition in comparison to mainstream parents, it is suggested that refugee parents' experiences may be further exacerbated by pre- and post- migration difficulties (Fazel, Wheeler, and Danesh 2005; Gerritsen et al. 2006; Halcon et al. 2004; Hebbani, Obijio, and Bristed 2010; Khawaja et al. 2008; Milner and Khawaja 2010; Robertson et al. 2006; Scholte et al. 2004; Schweitzer, Greenslade, and Kagee 2007; Schweitzer et al. 2006; Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham 2009; Steel et al. 2002). Therefore further research is required in this area.

Research Aims

In extending the work above, this study aimed to explore parents' experiences prior, and subsequent to, children starting kindergarten, providing insight into school readiness and broader transition experiences. The research question was: "What meaning do African refugee mothers in a supported playgroup ascribe to their experiences of children's school readiness and transitions to kindergarten?"

Research Design

Methodology

Interpretive phenomenology, based on a social constructionist epistemology, was suitable to the research question, as a key assumption of this epistemology is that an individual's understanding of aspects in their environment is socially constructed, and the meanings of experiences are heavily influenced by social context (Gergen 1985). This methodology is phenomenological in that it aims to examine human experience, and focuses on one's descriptions, perceptions, and

explanations of phenomena, such as school readiness (Smith and Osborn 2008; Spielberg 1982). The mothers were considered the 'experts' on the subject in describing personal interpretations of their experiences. The analysis was supported by hermeneutic principles, suggesting meaning is inextricably influenced by the participants' own experiences and contexts (Gadamer 1975; Heidegger 1962), and a symbolic interactionist position, suggesting women will create shared meanings through interaction with others in their environment (Patton 2002; Smith and Osborn 2008). These frameworks were important, as the aims of the study centred on how women ascribe meaning to school readiness from within a supported playgroup environment. The methodology guided the following methods.

Participants

Refugee populations are typically difficult to access due to a host of logistical, social, cultural, and political factors, thus a pragmatic approach to sampling was necessarily employed (Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson 2011). A purposive sample of eight informants was recruited from a pool of mothers attending 'It Takes a Village' [ITaV] supported playgroup. The program is available for parents and their children aged between 0 and 5 years, and can be attended during children's first year of kindergarten. Furthermore, ITaV is predominantly attended by migrant and humanitarian entrant families who are newly arrived in Australia. ITaV staff recruited available participants at the playgroup due to the strong connections they maintained with the African refugee mothers, and their ability to translate information.

Selected mothers were all refugees originating from war-torn Burundi in East Africa, and shared collectivist cultural factors and common experiences in relation to their histories of living in, and escaping, conditions of extreme civil conflict in their homeland (Bundervoet, Verwimp, and Akresh 2009). Informants had lived in Australia for 18 months to 7 years, and spoke minimal English. Six of the eight women had never participated in formal education, while two had completed seven years of school prior to migrating to Australia. Duration of playgroup attendance varied from 4 months to 5 years, and each mother had two to six children. All informants had at least one child who had begun kindergarten in Australia, some had a second child who had begun kindergarten in Australia, and others had a second child who was starting school the following year.

Five of the eight women were involved in the initial focus group, and four of these women subsequently volunteered to participate in individual interviews. An additional three mothers who could not attend the focus group, but also wanted to be involved in the study, were interviewed. Two ITaV staff members and a kindergarten teacher were also interviewed to validate the women's experiences and gain methodological triangulation and interpretive rigour by enhancing the richness and credibility of interpretations of the mothers' experiences (Creswell and Miller 2000; Kitto, Chesters, and Gbrich 2008). The focus group was first conducted to build rapport with the women and explore their experiences in a highly supportive environment. Considering the vulnerability of the mothers in the present study, the playgroup's bilingual cultural worker, who was known by the women, was involved to create a sense of comfort as participants shared their personal experiences. This also helped in establishing a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants. While focus group discussion provided a general depiction of the collective experiences of the women, interviews allowed for more flexibility in pursuing diverging ideas in more depth.

Materials

Separate information letters describing the research, as well as sets of interview questions, were employed for the mothers, playgroup staff, and kindergarten teacher. In line with interpretive phenomenology, focus group and interview questions were largely open-ended in order to gain in-depth responses and not lead the participants to respond in a certain way. The focus group and

interview protocols were also checked with playgroup staff to ensure questions were culturally appropriate, non-invasive, and unlikely to cause any distress for the women.

Procedures

A meeting between the researcher, supervisor, and playgroup staff was arranged in which the staff expressed their support for the project, and commitment to assisting the researcher as needed. After receiving approval from the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee, the researcher attended three weekly playgroup sessions as a volunteer for the primary purpose of building trust and rapport with the African refugee women, crucial to conducting ethical research on refugee populations (Halabi 2005; Spring et al. 2003). A secondary aim of the researcher's visits was to observe, and take notes on, the ITaV program, in order to better understand the context of the women's playgroup experiences. Here, the cultural worker explained the purpose of the research to the women, and provided opportunities to ask any questions.

The focus group and interviews with the mothers took place at the ITaV playgroup site, as this location was suggested to be the most comfortable and convenient for the refugee women and staff. The playgroup was safe and familiar to them, and their children could be supervised by playgroup employees during data collection. Upon completion of the focus group, the women were thanked for their participation and verbally invited to partake in an additional interview at a later date. The focus group discussion continued for approximately 60 minutes and interviews ran for approximately 40 minutes. The cultural worker remained present throughout.

Analysis

Data analysis for the present study was loosely based on Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2008) steps of interpretive phenomenological analysis. Analysis of the data was a recursive and inductive process. First, the focus group and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Analysis was initially conducted on the focus group, and subsequently, the individual interviews. The primary researcher read and re-read observational notes and interview transcripts to familiarise herself with the text and gain an overall 'feel' of the data, as suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2008). The researcher then highlighted and made detailed notes on key words, sentences, and statements that reflected the experiences and ascribed meanings of these for each of the African women. Utilising these exploratory notes, emergent themes were subsequently developed by identifying patterns, connections, and deviations across the data, and pertinent quotes as potential prototypical statements were extracted from the transcripts to illustrate and support interpretations. Possible connections between themes were then explored. Final interpretations of the data were checked with the researcher's journal notes as a means of methodological triangulation to further validate interpretations of the women's experiences and ascribed meanings (Kitto, Chesters, and Gbrich 2008).

Findings and Interpretations

Five major themes were identified: meaning of school readiness; preparing for school; mothers' experiences of children's transitions to kindergarten; perceived supports; playgroup support. Within these themes, a number of sub-themes emerged. In this paper, findings will be discussed in relation to the first two themes and sub-themes (see Table 1), focusing predominantly on the experiences of the women prior to their children starting school. Relevant quotes from the focus group and interviews will be included to support findings and interpretations, alongside existing literature.

Table 1: Themes and Sub-Themes of African Refugee Mothers' Experiences of their Children's School Readiness and Transitions to Kindergarten

Themes	Sub-themes
Meaning of School Readiness	Value of Education Awareness of School Readiness Evaluations of Child's School Readiness
Preparing for School	Cultural Concerns Meaning of Playgroup Assistance

Meaning of School Readiness

Three key sub-themes were identified in regards to the overall meaning of school readiness for the refugee women: 1) the value of education 2) whether the mothers were aware of what it means to be school-ready, and 3) the basis on which they made their evaluations of their children's preparedness for starting kindergarten. Impacting on the overall meaning of school readiness was the women's own prior education experiences.

Value of Education

For the mothers, the meaning of school readiness depended on how they valued education generally, including its role in shaping future outcomes.

> It is important because, when I see the children are studying, it's very important to me and them as well. So in the future, they may have good life if they start first. So if they have a good life, I may have a good life as well... So I think it's important for them – to see them get ready for school, I think it's very important.

Education was found to be valued by both educated and uneducated mothers in the sample, as a means of bringing future well-being and prosperity for the wider family. This value of education for the mothers was further supported by playgroup staff and the kindergarten teacher. One staff member reported:

> Education and making sure that the kids are going to school are really important, and [the mothers] make sure that that happens.

This finding converges with previous research by Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse (2009), and Atwell, Gifford, and McDonald-Wilmsen (2009) which has also highlighted the importance of education for migrant and refugee populations.

For the mothers who had completed schooling prior to migration, the importance of education for their children was discussed in relation to their own past experiences. These women had completed several years of school in refugee camps prior to relocating to Australia, and they acknowledged the high value placed on education by their families of origin. These women discussed in detail, the value of preparing children for kindergarten as a means of promoting academic success at school.

> ...we value education more than anything, so for them - I do some - like with my daughter now, I do some ABC with her, I do some writing. I want her, when she get [to school], then she can write.

Their context meant they naturally wanted to begin preparing their child for school.

Uneducated mothers also valued education; however they revealed motivational factors that were focused on their child, rather than schooling in general. These women, having never attended school, talked about this as a contributing factor to the difficulties they were facing in Australia.

> I always question myself, if my parents take me to school when I was little, if it would be better for me, because now, I have children, I have house, stuff for the house – so many things to worry, and maybe if I goes to school nothing goes like this... I told my husband, I did not go to school, so [child's name] has to go to school...

For these mothers, their lack of schooling was a negative experience, and thus they had strong desires for their own children to be educated.

Awareness of School Readiness

Although the educated women indicated some prior knowledge of school readiness and its importance, they talked about how their understanding of this was developed through their experiences at playgroup. For example, one of the educated mothers described how, through the playgroup, she had learnt additional ways that she could prepare her child for school, such as teaching them how to follow routines, and reading stories together at home.

For the uneducated women, they reported having little knowledge of schooling processes and expectations in Australia prior to their involvement in the ITaV program. Only subsequent to starting at the playgroup could they reflect on, and confidently evaluate, their children's readiness for starting school. One woman reported:

> Now I know...by the time he started kindy I think he was ready. I knew he was ready.

ITaV staff supported this shift in the women's understanding of school readiness, attributable to the playgroup:

> I think there's been a shift from prior to, and when they start, coming to the playgroup. Umm... they perhaps wouldn't start with such a strong awareness and understanding of school readiness...and what has been nice is to see that change over time... I think through the playgroup, we've been able to open their eyes up to this whole world of play that the children can engage in, and how beneficial that can be in preparing them for school... and the parents are becoming more aware of the importance of school readiness.

Interestingly, through their awareness of school readiness and its importance, the uneducated mothers experienced increased conflict in wanting to be more involved in preparing their children for school, but feeling like they did not have the personal abilities and resources to do so. In particular, they felt that they did not have the knowledge or experience to help children develop the academic skills which they now believed were important in making a child school-ready.

> I myself as a mother, I've never went to school. How can someone expect me to make my child ready for school, because I don't really even know how to be ready to go to school...I don't even know how to hold pen!

The mothers had become more aware of the importance of school readiness, but now realised that they lacked confidence in their personal ability to facilitate this. Thus they talked about largely relying on the support of the playgroup in facilitating children's preparedness for kindergarten.

> There's no way I can help him and teach him to be ready for school, so that's why I come to the playgroup. I know they can help get him ready for school.

Evaluation of Child's School Readiness

The women showed their understanding of being 'school ready' by evaluating differences in readiness between those of their children who had attended playgroup, and those who had not.

> For [daughter's name], she didn't know what was going on around her, but for [son's name], he's been coming to the playgroup since he was a baby, and so he knows what is expected – he know to sit, listen to story, he has to share everything – everything belong to every child, not just him. So, that's why it's different.

They described playgroup as a causal factor in their children's readiness. One woman suggested that those of her children who had not attended playgroup did not participate in school-like activities that would prepare them for school.

> I don't think she was ready, because she don't know what was going on around her. I don't think she was ready because we not read anything and we not going anywhere for activities or doing anything like that.

Conversely, the mothers talked about those of their children who had attended the playgroup as ready for starting school, emphasising children's academic skills, such as their ability to count, as strong indicators of their readiness. Refugee parents in Tadesse, Hoot, and Watson-Thompson's (2009) study also emphasised the importance of young children's academic ability. However this differed from the perspectives of mainstream parents in Wesley and Buysse's (2003) study, who de-emphasised the importance of these skills in describing a child who was ready for school. This highlights social and cultural diversity in the way the concept of school readiness is perceived. Additional measures of readiness described by the women included children's proficiency in speaking English, interest in going to school, children's confidence, the ability to follow instructions, and children's willingness to share with others.

Preparing for School

Reflecting on their experiences prior to their children starting school, the women spoke about their concerns surrounding the cultural differences between Australia and their homeland. The mothers also talked about the meaning of playgroup assistance at this time. These two sub-themes are discussed below.

Cultural Concerns

The women talked about the concerns they experienced prior to the start of school in relation to culture. They feared that their children would adopt Australian norms that may be considered offensive in the family's culture of origin. Practical aspects of preparing children for school were discussed in this context. For example, one mother explained her discomfort in organising uniforms for her daughter, with the short length of the skirt. She considered this particularly offensive, in line with her cultural values in which a more conservative manner of dress is typically endorsed. She was concerned that through exposure to Australian culture at school, her daughter would become comfortable dressing in this way.

> I mean, that's another cultural thing that we just, you know, don't fit in doing that... And then you don't want to – you know, because if I start dressing her like that, then she's

> going to feel more comfortable dressing like that, and we have cultural things and all that.

There was fear attributed to getting children ready for school whereby the women were concerned that they would be reprimanded by others in their community if children were not raised according to what was considered culturally acceptable.

> And I would be blamed. They would blame me for that. Because for us, the child doesn't just belong to you, it belongs to the whole family, especially if it's a daughter. So you have to be very careful. She belongs to the father's family, so if anything happens, they'll – they'll blame me for it.

This woman talked about her great sense of responsibility to her husband's family in raising her daughter according to traditional values, and her desire to evade chastisement from them. Findings in the present study are similar to existing research on migrants (Sanagavarapu 2010; Sanagavarapu and Perry 2005) which found that these parents were concerned over children losing their original culture upon exposure to Western values in the school environment. Additionally, refugee parents in Atwell, Gifford, and McDonald-Wilmsen's (2009) study also feared shame from extended family if children were not raised in line with traditional values.

Meaning of Playgroup Assistance

Talking about their concerns of not being able to adequately prepare their children for school, the women discussed the importance of playgroup assistance in the pre-school period. Similar to Jackson's (2011) study, the mothers perceived the playgroup to have a dual function in assisting both their children and themselves prior to starting kindergarten.

> Playgroup help myself, and my child as well.

By helping prepare children for kindergarten, the playgroup was found to benefit the mothers. For the uneducated women, who felt that their lack of education hindered them from making a significant contribution to preparing their children for school, the playgroup was particularly significant in the pre-school period. One mother described the playgroup as an available resource which she utilised at this time.

> And...if I can't help [my child], I just ask the playgroup staff – "what do you think [son's name] needs to know before he start kindy?" She tell me and she help me.

The women valued the practical assistance provided by playgroup staff prior to their children starting school. Their support here helped to alleviate feelings of inadequacy, by empowering the women to feel they could make a meaningful contribution to preparing their children for school.

> I didn't know anything, so the playgroup staff has helped me feel I can make her ready for school.

The mothers described how the practical and emotional support they received in the pre-school period continued when their children began kindergarten.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African refugee mothers in relation to their children's school readiness and transitions to kindergarten amongst attendees of a supported playgroup. While reporting on two themes only, this paper highlights some conflicts

and tensions the mothers experienced in regard to their children starting school. The present study helps to address the paucity in current literature examining the experiences of this population in relation to children's school readiness and transitions to school. It further highlights how experiences are shaped by contextual factors, such as being from a collectivist culture, and provides support for further examination of the specific parenting experiences of refugee populations in which values and norms are suggested to be vastly different to those endorsed in Australia (McLaughlin and Guilfoyle, in press; Schweitzer et al. 2006).

While it was beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive examination of the specific ways in which supported playgroups can assist refugee mothers, the paper highlights the meaning of playgroup support in the context of their described difficulties. Working within a hermeneutic and interactionist framework, we found when women described their experiences of school readiness and preparing children for school, they referred to the support provided by their playgroup context, and revealed shared meanings developed through interaction with others in their playgroup environment. The current study therefore demonstrates the importance of playgroups supporting refugee mothers as they navigate parenting issues in relation to their children's school readiness and transitions to kindergarten. This is particularly important, considering the lack of current evidence supporting government policy in this area. Recent research (Boddy and Cartmel 2011; Jackson 2011; La Rosa and Guilfoyle 2013; Targowska et al. 2011) emphasises the benefits of supported playgroups for children as well as parents, highlighting that such groups can increase the social, emotional, and academic skills of children at a critical stage in their development, and can help meet the emotional and practical needs of refugee families. Our findings on how one playgroup was central in contributing to successful transitions to school give support to these ideas.

Overall, the present study has begun to 'give voice' to the school readiness experiences of an extremely vulnerable and marginalised group in Australian society. However, further research is essential in building a stronger evidence base to better understand refugee mothers' experiences of their children's school readiness, and the full meaning of these experiences. It is important that researchers continue to consider refugees' parenting experiences from their own perspectives (McAllister et al. 2005). This will provide opportunities for policy developers to listen to, and learn from, the 'voices' of such groups in developing culturally sensitive and effective means of supporting them in our community.

Acknowledgement

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