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## Exploring the Experiences of High School Syrian Refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education and their Teachers in ELD Classrooms

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education

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## Abstract

Exploring the experiences of Syrian refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in English and Literacy Development (ELD) classrooms is an emergent topic of interest in the field of education in Canada. There is a need to understand the ways in which ELD teachers respond to the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity of Syrian refugee SIFEs and create learning opportunities for those students while supporting them emotionally, socially, and academically. Thus, the aim of this research was to explore the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. The research focused on exploring classroom practices and supportive pedagogies, specifically caring and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms in two secondary schools in Ontario. Social structures and power relationships reflected in ELD classrooms, in addition to resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT, were also examined. The major research question was *What is the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students with interrupted formal education and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario?* The theoretical framework adopted in this exploratory case study drew on critical theory, CRT, and Ethics of Care (EoC). The methods used included semi-structured interviews, documentation, and the researcher's reflective notes. The analysis revealed the complexity of the nature of Syrian refugee SIFEs' and their teachers' experiences in ELD classrooms and the nuances these experiences entail. There was evidence of caring and CRT practices enacted in ELD classrooms. That said, some of the ELD teachers' instructions still need to reflect their students' ages, academic levels, and core culture. Power and privileging such as power and hierarchical teacher-student relationships and the dominance of a Western curriculum canon were reflected in ELD classrooms. Resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT were also signaled. Key recommendations included embedding equality and diversity in the ELD curriculum and putting more emphasis on caring and CRT pedagogies. The practical and theoretical recommendations aim to disrupt deficient institutional and classroom practices and emphasize supportive pedagogies in ELD classrooms.

## Keywords

English Literacy Development (ELD), Syrian refugees, interrupted formal education, culturally responsive teaching (CRT), caring, critical theory (CT), social structures, supportive pedagogies, classroom practices

## Summary for Lay Audience

Exploring the experiences of Syrian refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in English and Literacy Development (ELD) classrooms is an emergent topic of interest in the field of education in Canada. There is a need to understand the ways in which ELD teachers respond to the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity of Syrian refugee SIFEs and create learning opportunities for those students while supporting them emotionally, socially and academically. Thus, the aim of this research was to explore the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. The research focused on exploring classroom practices and supportive pedagogies, specifically caring and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms in two secondary schools in Ontario. Social structures and power relationships reflected in ELD classrooms, in addition to resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT, were also examined. The major research question was *What is the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students with interrupted formal education and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario?* The theoretical framework adopted in this exploratory case study drew on critical theory as an overarching lens, CRT, and Ethics of Care (EoC). The methods used included semi-structured interviews, documentation, and the researcher's reflective notes. The analysis revealed the complexity of the nature of Syrian refugee SIFEs' and their teachers' experiences in ELD classrooms and the nuances these experiences entail. There was evidence of caring and CRT practices enacted in ELD classrooms. Power, privileging and resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT were also signaled. Key recommendations included embedding equality and diversity in the ELD curriculum and putting more emphasis on caring and CRT in ELD classrooms. This study contributes to the importance of considering the social, emotional, and academic adjustments and fund processes of Syrian SIFEs and allows a holistic view of this group of students that goes beyond academic achievement. The practical and theoretical recommendations aim to disrupt deficient institutional and classroom practices and emphasize supportive pedagogies in ELD classrooms.

## Acknowledgments

All praise is due to God the most Merciful who gave me the strength and the patience to complete this study.

I am heartily grateful to my supervisors, Dr. Immaculate Namukasa and Dr. Mi Song Kim whose encouragement, support, and guidance helped me reach this achievement. I am extremely grateful for Dr. Namukasa's mentorship, care, patient guidance, and advice during this study and every step of the PhD process. A special thanks goes out to Dr. Kim for her supervision, helpful feedback, care, and constant follow-up during this study.

I am also thankful to all my professors at Western University especially Dr. Rachel Heydon for her support during the PhD years. I would like to thank the thesis examiners for their time and their thoughtful questions and suggestions.

A special thank you is extended to all my participants who trusted me and generously shared with me their experiences, insights, and practices in the ELD classroom. I am fully indebted to you!

I would like to thank my colleagues at Western University especially Dr. Najmeh Keyhani and Sarah Halabi for their support and for making the PhD years less stressful and enjoyable.

I owe my greatest gratitude to my husband Nader and my children Joudi, Ibrahim, and Mohammad. To my family, especially Nisrine Barek and my brothers Akram Barek and Sadek Barek, thank you for your endless support, advice, and encouragements.

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

In the fall of 2015, Amani (pseudonym), a newly arrived Syrian refugee student, joined an elementary public school in Ontario after she had lived in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan before arriving in Canada. I had the opportunity to provide Amani with some assistance in English for a couple of weeks when I was volunteering as a teacher assistant at the school at that time. Knowing my Middle Eastern roots, the Grade 5 classroom teacher, Mrs. Smith (pseudonym), approached me seeking assistance in interpreting Amani's drawing relative to her home country. The task was for students to draw a picture that reminded them of their homeland. Amani relied on some of her Arab friends' translation to understand what the task was about and drew what she had in mind about Syria.

The drawing by Amani needed viewer discretion, so to speak. Red was the dominant color in the picture. There were severed body limbs (e.g., arms), hurt people laying on the ground and dead birds in her drawing. The teacher found this to be shocking. In a following conversation with the teacher, Mrs. Smith mentioned that the school administration had provided her with some information about Amani's background; however, she shared with me that she was not fully aware of the severity of the war in Syria and the conditions Amani and children like her might have endured. Also, Mrs. Smith disclosed to me that she has minimal exposure to such situations.

At all times, Amani's friends who are Arabic speakers volunteered to translate for her, and they were the link between Amani and the teacher. There were times during the day where Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFEs), like Amani, would be withdrawn from their regular classrooms to join English and Literacy Development (ELD) classes tailored to their differentiated levels in academic subjects and language proficiency. Amani later confided in me that although she felt a sense of belonging in the ELD classroom community, she did not like being withdrawn from her regular classroom because for her it inferred inferiority. Besides that, Amani also shared that she missed

important subjects, which again prevented her from learning valuable lessons and led to further academic delay. In the classroom, the teacher continued to teach regular lessons as usual. Based on the conversation with Mrs. Smith, and as literature suggests (Gay, 2002b), it is likely that Mrs. Smith had difficulty creating adequate learning opportunities for Amani, given that Amani was an ELD student whose first language and culture were distant from English and the Canadian culture. On top of that, Amani struggled with challenges due to having recently experienced war as a child in her originating country and her interrupted formal education.

The literature states that, like Amani, refugees coming to Canada from war-torn countries, such as Syria, face various challenges which are intertwined and diverse in nature. As much as the situation is challenging for refugee students, it is also challenging for teachers whose responsibility is to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2015). Teaching refugee SIFEs necessitates cultural sensitivity (Gay, 2002, 2018), authentic care (Gay, 2018; Noddings, 1992), sufficient knowledge about refugees' backgrounds and experiences (Gagné et al., 2017, 2018; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), and ways to create learning opportunities for them (Clark, 2017; Gay, 2018; Hamilton, Anderson, Frater-Mathieson, Loewen & Moore, 2000). Educators can be overwhelmed because of the increasing number of, what have been referred to as, refugee SIFEs in the classroom (Dufresne, 2016), and what this entails in terms of teachers' preparedness to assist all students and create learning opportunities for them.

## 1.1 Background

The war in Syria started in 2011 and the ongoing military conflict has displaced more than 4.8 million people according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2016). According to the same report, more than 2.5 million people are under the age of 18. The Syrian refugee crisis is considered "one of the worst humanitarian crises in modern history" (Omer, 2015, para.2) and the consequences for the education of Syrian children and youth in host countries are still little-known due to the recentness of the situation.

The gravity of the Syrian refugee crisis has led the Liberal Government under the leadership of the Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to resettle nearly 60,000 Syrian refugees since 2015 (Government of Canada, 2019). This happened in the midst of an international, specifically American and European, floundering with the Syrian refugee crisis. While the United States President Trump was heading towards building walls and banning Muslim immigration to the US, the Liberal government in Canada took an opposite direction and welcomed Syrian refugees. This is not new to Canada as, over the years, Canada has been welcoming refugees from various backgrounds (Discover Canada, 2012) and actively providing support for them for centuries. Canada's history in helping refugees dates back to 1776 when the country welcomed 3000 Black loyalists who fled the oppression of the revolution in America and sought refuge in Canada (Discover Canada, 2012). Nonetheless, according to Statistics Canada (2016) the increase in immigration following the Syrian crisis was record breaking for the country, which had not welcomed such large numbers of immigrants and refugees in a single annual period since 1910. Further, the countries of origin of immigrants and refugees has changed over time. The literature suggests that in the first 60 years of the 20th century, immigrants and refugees to Canada were mostly European, while in the last few years Middle Eastern and specifically Syrian refugees have outnumbered immigrants and refugees from other nationalities (Statistics Canada, 2016). Add to that, Canada, relying on the UNHCR to lead the Syrian refugee selection process, has received the poorest and most economically vulnerable families, but also the least educated who were in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey (Mackinnon, 2017). Many of their children have experienced interruption of their formal education for years.

Syrian refugees arriving in Canada have been resettled in all the provinces/territories, however, with different ratios. In addition to Quebec and British Columbia, Ontario hosts most of the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in Canada (Perry et al., 2017) and has welcomed the highest number of Syrian refugees in the country, 19815 Syrian refugees as of April 30, 2019, which is equivalent to 44.46 % of the total of Syrian refugees settled in Canada since 2015 (IRCC, 2019). Wakerell-Cruz (2019) from *The Post Millennial* reported that in 2016, 44% of Syrian refugees were under the age of 15, whereas this number was 31% for refugees from other countries. Most of them have experienced war

in Syria, lived in refugee camps, and have had interrupted formal education (Hadfield et al., 2017). There is approximately 23% of Syrian refugee children and youth in Ontario with no education at all, while 57% do not have secondary education, and the majority speak Arabic as their primary language (Godin, English, Ochocka, & Janzen, 2017).

Previous literature on refugee students with interrupted formal education has reported that the number of refugee SIFEs is increasing in Canadian schools (Khan, 2012; Miles & McKenna, 2016). With the arrival of Syrian refugee students in Canada, this number has increased even more. Refugee SIFEs are a subgroup of the larger group of refugee students with specific histories and needs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015) and thus require ongoing support. Molnar (2017) asserted that the logistics of providing education, among other services, for large numbers of Syrian refugee students in a short period of time may prove difficult in the months and years to come. Thus, more resources are needed (Molnar, 2017) and efforts to provide adequate educational support for Syrian children and youth should not wane (Mackinnon, 2017).

While the Syrian refugee population in Canada includes people of all ages and different academic levels and backgrounds, this study looks only at high school Syrian refugee SIFEs attending (or who have previously attended) ELD classrooms in Ontario with ages between 14 and 22 years old. I intend to examine the experiences of, and supports for, Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms. I will study the ways in which teachers incorporate supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive instructions into their practices and work around constraints to create learning opportunities<sup>1</sup> for this group of students. This study considers the social, emotional, and academic adjustment and fund processes of Syrian SIFEs and allows a holistic view of this group of students that goes beyond academic achievement (Brubacher, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008; Pugh, Every, & Hattam, 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> Crabbe (2003) defines learning opportunities as the means to achieve certain results. According to him, curriculum is “an organization of learning opportunities, or means, for achieving certain outcomes” (p. 18). He adds “an opportunity for L2 learning, might be defined as access to any activity that is likely to lead to an increase in language knowledge or skill. It may be the opportunity to negotiate meaning in a discussion, to read and derive meaning from a printed text, to explore a pattern in language usage, or to get direct feedback on one’s own use of language” (p.18).



## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The increase in numbers of and educational needs of refugee children and youth with interrupted formal education in Canadian classrooms (Hadfield, Ostrowski, & Ungar, 2017; Khan, 2012; Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2017) started to raise concerns regarding the preparedness of Canadian schools and teachers to receive those students and create supportive learning opportunities for them (Clark, 2017; Dufresne, 2015). Janet Dench, executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) posited that the Canadian education system has not figured out yet how to support Syrian refugee teens attending secondary schools in Canada (Chignall, 2016). Similar concerns were expressed in the US and Europe. Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) asserted that “it is difficult to predict the specific educational needs of Syrian refugee children after resettlement in the United States and Europe” (p. 10). Furthermore, and in line with the above, Amin (2018) argued that Syrian refugee children continue to be at disadvantage after arriving in Canada because of challenges related to integration, literacy and language proficiency. Amin (2018) and Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) mentioned that during the first couple of years, it is likely that most Syrian refugee children will encounter barriers to educational success in their new homes.

While the classroom remains the primary venue through which students learn (Wenglinsky, 2001) and while teachers’ roles remain decisive in promoting students’ wellbeing, academic success, and integration into the class community (Cummins, 2001; Gagné et al., 2017), the literature suggests that should educational institutions fail to address the educational needs of Syrian refugee students, there will be a big cost to society (Sirin, Plass, Homer, Vatanartiran & Tsai, 2018). Most previous literature on the experiences of refugee students in Canadian classrooms has revealed that teachers were ill-prepared to identify the needs of their refugee students (Yau, 1996; Yu, 2012). Since the experiences and educational needs of refugee SIFEs are still unpredictable (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015) and more complex<sup>2</sup> than those of other refugees or culturally and

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<sup>2</sup> According to DeCapua (2016) and DeCapua and Marshall (2015), the needs of refugee SIFEs are more complex than other refugee or CLD learners, that if we consider the intersection of interruption of formal education or no formal education—as is the case of the student participants in this study—with the harm caused by those students’ war

linguistically diverse students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015), it became timely and urgent to learn more about the nature of the experiences of newly arrived Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in Canadian classrooms, specifically in Ontario, home to the largest number of Syrian refugees in the country.

### 1.3 Gap

He et al. (2008) stated that there is a large body of literature on immigrants, refugees, and minority students of color; however, not as many studies focus on those students' classroom experiences. In Canada, and due to the recent government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees, exploring the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms is still an emergent topic in the field of education (Clark, 2017). Clark (2017) and Stewart et al. (2019) asserted that there is a gap in the literature about the nature of the experiences of and pedagogical supports for Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Canada. Further, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2016) and Gagné et al. (2018) posited that language and literacy development programming and supports remain key areas that continue to require ongoing attention, especially after the increase in the number of SIFEs in public schools in Canada and Ontario specifically.

As far as I am aware, and until the time this literature review was conducted, no research has been found that examined the classroom experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in English Literacy Development (ELD) classrooms in Canada, and in Ontario particularly, in the light of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and care pedagogies. Some of the studies I have drawn on in this research were conducted in Canada and others were carried out in the United States. Only a few studies (Clark, 2017; Gagné et al., 2017, 2018; Ghosh, 2019; Godin et al., 2017) have explored the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and/or their teachers in Canadian schools. Nevertheless, Clark

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experiences, possible loss of family members, life in/and mobility between refugee camps in different countries, cultural dissonance in schools. All these factors intersect and affect the educational experiences of refugee SIFEs and make them more complex than those of other refugees and CLD learners.

(2017) focused on the experiences of elementary school teachers without referring to the experiences of Syrian refugee students. Gagné et al.'s (2018) study was still in its initial stage at the time of this literature review. The study focused on the educational integration of Syrian refugee children at school, in the family, and community based on K-12 educators' perspectives on how refugee students navigate their multiple worlds. It does not, however, detail the classroom practices of these students in ELD classrooms, nor does it include students' perspectives. It is, nonetheless, important to consider students' perspectives - in addition to teachers' views - and study their experiences in classroom settings as they are the main focus of the educational enterprise. Recognizing students' voices is a way to acknowledge their agency and their rights to act upon their education (Barek, Namukasa, & White, 2020). Gagné et al.'s study (2017) addressed teaching about refugees in teacher education programs in Ontario while using a CRT approach. That said, their research was conducted at a postsecondary setting and did not portray the classroom experiences of Syrian refugee students and their teachers in ELD classrooms. Godin et al.'s report (2017) explored with Syrian refugee youth in Ontario the solutions for the challenges that concerned them the most. The report focused mainly on the barriers that Syrian refugee youth encounter at school, in the community, and at home and proposed solutions to address those barriers based solely on students' feedback. That said, the authors did not consider the voices of ELD teachers in their study, nor did they examine the classroom practices created with/for those students in ELD classrooms. Another study (Khan, 2012) conducted in Manitoba explored the experiences of two teachers in promoting meaningful experiences for English Language Learners (ELLs) with Interrupted Formal Education (IFE). Khan's study was conducted prior to the influx of Syrian refugees, and thus, did not involve Syrian refugee students. Another study I have drawn on was conducted by Hos (2012) in the United States. This study addressed the experiences of high school refugee SIFEs in the United States and drew on culturally responsive and care pedagogies. However, this study was conducted before the influx of Syrian refugees and did not involve Syrian refugee students. Furthermore, none of these studies solely focused on high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their ELD teachers' classroom experiences in ELD classrooms, nor did they link the ELD classrooms to the broader society in which they operate. I build on these studies by

raising both the voices of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. By doing so, I hope to contribute to the conversation in the literature by exploring the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in classroom settings and suggest recommendations based on data collected from students, teachers and stakeholders. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario.

## 1.4 Research Questions

Woods (2009) has mentioned that the role of educational institutions for refugee students with limited prior schooling is threefold: (a) to afford access to quality learning and teaching, (b) to enhance citizenship, and (c) to respond to mental and health issues of the students. This study acknowledges the socio-cultural and psychological factors affecting the education of Syrian refugee SIFEs and refers to them only when they interfere with and affect students' classroom experiences. That said, this study focuses on exploring the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms, particularly the practices and pedagogies enacted in the classroom in light of Critical Theory (CT), Ethics of Care (EoC), and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT).

The major research question is identified below.

What is the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students with interrupted formal education and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario?

Based on the literature, my personal experiences and interests, the sub research questions are:

- (a) What practices and pedagogies are enacted in ELD classrooms?
- (b) What social structures and power relationships are reflected in ELD classrooms?
- (c) What are the resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms?

One should note Kliebard's (1975) claim that the idea of experience is subjective and vague. To alleviate ambiguity, I draw on Dewey's (1938 as in Connelly, 2008) definition

of experience because it serves my purpose in this research and makes sense for the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs. For Dewey, experience is embodied in culture; it has temporal and existential dimensions. The temporal dimension means that every experience encompasses an aspect of the past, present and future. The existential dimension suggests that experiences happen in a social and personal dimension.

## 1.5 Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. Exploring the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms will highlight teaching and learning experiences, resources, and constraints to supportive pedagogies such as caring and CRT practices, ways in which knowledge is created and validated and ways in which identities are collectively negotiated in the classroom. Syrian refugee SIFEs have endured war, were exposed to trauma and violence, have interrupted formal education and lack literacy skills in their native language and in English at the time they joined schools in Canada (Clark, 2017; Gagné et al., 2018; Hadfield et al., 2017). If not well addressed, these factors combined may increase the vulnerability of this group of students, harm their mental health (Hadfield et al., 2017), hinder their integration into Canadian society and challenge their wellbeing and academic success (Gay, 2000, 2010; Hadfield et al., 2017; Hos, 2012), which in turn would be a challenge to their families, communities and Canadian society at large.

This study stresses the importance of considering the social, emotional and academic adjustment and fund processes of Syrian SIFEs and allows a more holistic view of this group of students that goes beyond academic achievement (Brubacher, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008; Pugh, Every, & Hattam, 2012). Syrian refugee SIFEs will have a say about their education in this research. Also, this study gives voice to ELD teachers and offers them an opportunity to reflect on and make meaning of their experiences in ELD classrooms, allowing room for agency (Priestley. M, personal communication, March 30, 2017). Furthermore, this study will provide stakeholders with data about the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms, voiced by the students and the teachers themselves. Findings will allow

stakeholders and policy makers to consider the voices of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers when planning future policy implementation in ELD classrooms. Stakeholders, teachers, and practitioners will be given recommendations to promote more supportive pedagogies ensuring that Syrian refugee SIFEs are provided with equitable opportunities to thrive in Canadian classrooms, adjust, and integrate smoothly into the society while navigating their multiple cultures and identities, “adding economically and socially to the country in years to come” (Hadfield et al., 2017, p. 198). Further, it is important for school boards to document best practices and diverse creative ways in which teachers and schools turn challenges faced by Syrian refugee students into opportunities for individual students, their educators, and families (Damjanovic, 2016). Without such research, policy remains uninformed about the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms and the impact of supportive pedagogies on those students’ academic success and wellbeing would also remain unknown.

## 1.6 Theoretical Overview

Through the theoretical lens of CT (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Giroux, 1983), CRT (Gay, 2000, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995), and EoC (Noddings, 1992, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999), this study explores the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. These perspectives reflect an understanding of knowledge as culturally, socially and politically constructed, coexisting with power imbalances, where minority cultures are marginalized due to the predominance of a dominant culture (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2001; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1995; Paraskeva, 2016). Equally important are the methodologies that CT, CRT, and EoC bring to academic inquiry. These theories accommodate qualitative methods such as case studies to illustrate the experiences of minority and marginalized populations.

## 1.7 Terms and Terminology

Before moving further, I will define the terminology I use throughout this study. The literature identifies students who study English as a second language through different terminology: English Language Learners (ELL), Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) learners, English as Second Language (ESL) learners, English Literacy

Development (ELD) students, and English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners. ESL and ELD are official Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) categories.

Freeman et al. (2002) stated that newcomer students from refugee backgrounds are described in the literature with terms conveying negative connotations such as pre-literate, under-schooled, late-entrant, limited-English proficient, and late-emergent readers. Refugee SIFEs are a subcategory of CLD and a subgroup of refugee students and immigrants with whom they have some characteristics in common. Throughout this research, I will use CLD to refer to students who study English as a second language because it renders explicit the students' culture, first language and resources (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). Furthermore, contrary to the negative connotations that refer to refugee students from a deficit perspective, I will utilize *refugee SIFE* because it is comprehensive, it brings out the characteristics of this group of students and does not convey a negative aspect.

Due to their unique and distinct backgrounds, refugee SIFEs do not all share identical needs, nor do they require similar support; thus, they cope differently with services provided at school (Gagné et al., 2017, 2018; Hamilton et al., 2000). Therefore, this research acknowledges the individual yet unique characteristics of each and every single student (Gagné et al., 2018; Gichuru, 2013) who will be participating in this study. Moreover, Connelly (2008) asserts that conducting studies with individuals of a specific cultural or ethnic group, with the aim of enhancing understanding of this group's experiences, supposes that there is an expectation of generalization of the findings to other members of the same group. While this research reflects an attempt to enhance my understanding of the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and ELD teachers who will be participating in this study, the scope of diversity emphasizes the importance of being cautious of generalizations (He et al., 2008).

## 1.8 Organization of the Dissertation

In this chapter I have contextualized my research questions.

The major research question is:

What is the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students with interrupted formal education and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario?

Based on the literature, my personal experiences and interests, the sub research questions are:

- (a) What practices and pedagogies are enacted in ELD classrooms?
- (b) What social structures and power relationships are reflected in ELD classrooms?
- (c) What are the resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms?

This chapter is an introduction that identifies the research questions, statement of the problem, gap, purpose, and significance of the study, and a brief overview of the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature that relates to Syrian refugee students and their teachers in ELD classrooms. Chapter 3 describes the theoretical foundation of the study. Chapter 4 displays the qualitative methodology and methods used in this study. Chapter 5 describes the major findings on teachers' experiences related to the research questions. Chapter 6 outlines the major findings on students' experiences related to the research questions and corroborates the analysis of teachers' experiences from Chapter 5. Chapter 7 discusses the findings. Chapter 8 concludes with a recapitulation of the findings, study limitations, and recommendations.



## Chapter 2

### 2 Literature Review

This study aims to explore the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. In particular, it focuses on Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers' classroom practices in ELD classes, challenges and opportunities, student-teacher relationships, and the pedagogies used in ELD classrooms to create learning opportunities for those students.

To situate the study in the literature, a thematic literature review was conducted. Sources were grouped, organized, and discussed in terms of the themes that have emerged from the literature. As such, this chapter starts with an overview, after which it outlines the challenges that refugee SIFEs encounter in resettlement countries. Such challenges include the challenge of learning a second language, social challenges, and mental health issues. The rationale behind starting with the challenges is that teaching refugee SIFEs is challenging. Then, this chapter details the classroom experiences of refugee students and their teachers in resettlement countries. Further, it provides an overview of ELD programs and curricula in Ontario and offers a thorough review of classroom practices and supportive pedagogies aimed at supporting refugee students including SIFEs. In addition, this chapter reviews the roles of refugee students' teachers, teachers' perceptions, and the interrelation of student-teacher relationships, knowledge, identity and power. The chapter ends with a summary.

These sections highlight the complex circumstances and experiences that refugee youth encounter during their pre, post and migration journeys, and the ways in which these experiences affect and shape their education in a diverse, multicultural yet mostly White society (DeCapua et al., 2007; Hamilton et al., 2000) like Canadian society.

## 2.1 Overview

This chapter reports on Canadian and international research related to the classroom experiences of refugee students and their teachers with a focus on Syrian refugee SIFEs in Canadian schools and classroom contexts.

Because little is known about the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Canada, this chapter refers to the very few studies about the classroom experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and teachers in Canada (Clark, 2017; Gagné et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019; Godin et al., 2017; Stewart et al., 2019); literature about classroom and school experiences of other refugee students in Canadian classrooms (e.g., Brewer & McCabe, 2014; Khan, 2012; Mackay & Tavares, 2005; Perry, Yee, Mazabel, Lisaingo, & Määttä, 2017; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Yau, 1995; Yu, 2012), and school and classroom experiences of immigrants, refugees, and minority students in Canada and North America (e.g., DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; He et al., 2008; Hos, 2012; Roy & Roxas, 2011) because the correspondent bodies of literature often overlap.

The review of the literature shows that language and academic challenges, along with social challenges and mental health issues, are interconnected factors in the classroom context and play a role in the ways in which refugee SIFEs respond to the learning opportunities created for them (Gagné et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019; Hadfield et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2000). The review of the literature also reveals that only a few studies have outlined the successes of Syrian refugee SIFEs (e.g., Ghosh et al., 2019; Godin et al., 2017) or reported on how supportive pedagogies such as caring and CRT (Gagné et al., 2017) could be enacted in the classroom context specifically in Ontario. Most studies portraying the experiences of refugee SIFEs have mainly focused on barriers and challenges including the challenge of learning a second language, psychological challenges and mental health issues as well as other socio-economic challenges (e.g., Hadfield et al., 2017; Kirova, 2019; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

## 2.2 The Challenge of Learning a Second Language

Language proficiency is one of the major challenges facing most refugee students in settlement countries (Cummins, 2000; Gagné et al., 2017; Gagné et al., 2018; Gay, 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019; Hamilton et al., 2000; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Yau, 1995). Refugee SIFEs' challenges and needs are more complex than those of other refugees or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) learners (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015; Ghosh et al., 2019). Thus, the challenge of learning a second language becomes more acute for refugee SIFEs in secondary schools because of their age, lack of L1 literacy skills (for some), interruption of education, and possible social and psychological struggles.

Cummins (2000, 2001) and Cummins et al. (2012) affirmed that students' development and maintenance of L1 literacy skills promote the acquisition of literacy skills in L2. Thus, second language acquisition poses a critical challenge for refugee SIFEs who in some cases lack L1 literacy skills. What is more is that in secondary school and higher education, students ought to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in order to thrive and graduate. Nonetheless, according to Cummins (2000), second language learners need as much as five to seven years to acquire Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency compared to Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which they can acquire in a relatively short time. This explains the reason why access to higher education is often a concern for high school refugee students (Hek, 2005) and that 82% of young refugee students consider learning English to be their primary goal (Stanley, 2001).

A recent study by Gagné et al. (2018) in Toronto elementary and secondary schools revealed that 82% of teacher participants indicated that Syrian refugee students in their schools have experienced interrupted formal education while 38% agreed or strongly agreed that the Syrian SIFEs they teach struggle to learn English. Similarly, according to Chignall (2016), it is hard for high school refugee SIFEs "to catch up on language skills and adapt to a new education system" (para. 22) in resettlement countries.

Along with the challenge of learning a second language for academic purposes, there are other language-linked concerns for refugee students, such as the lack of confidence with respect to reading and writing, use of correct vocabulary in social interactions (Bemak &

Greenberg, 1994; Gagné et al., 2018; Hamilton et al., 2000; Stewart, 2012), and difficulty expressing themselves and communicating with peers (Stewart et al., 2019). Such factors may harm refugee SIFEs' wellbeing and hinder their acquisition of literacy skills in L2 (Cummins, 2000), academic success and integration into the classroom community and later into society.

## 2.3 Social Factors and Challenges

Social and demographic factors intersect and affect the academic achievement and the integration of Syrian refugee youth into Canadian classrooms.

Along with the challenge of learning a foreign language, there are other language-linked concerns for refugees that decrease their academic engagement and social integration. Various studies (e.g., Gagné et al., 2018; Griva & Chostelidou, 2014) have reported on refugees and CLD learners' concerns of being humiliated and ridiculed in social interactions. Furthermore, the literature suggests that refugee youth are likely to be exposed to discrimination, marginalization (Hamilton et al., 2000; Stewart, 2012) and pathologizing (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008) because of their lack of L2, among other reasons. Poor second language skills have also been reported to contribute to feelings of isolation and depression (Bemak & Greenberg, 1994).

According to Gagné et al. (2018), students' backgrounds, geographies, socio-economic levels, and sponsorship admission categories<sup>3</sup> may have a direct effect on Syrian refugee SIFEs' academic performance.

Schools and neighborhoods' linguistic profiles also play a role in L2 learning and academic performance. Findings from Gagné et al. (2018) revealed that a high concentration/density of Arabic-speaking students in some schools and Syrian refugee families in some neighborhoods were deterring factors for L2 learning, according to Syrian refugee SIFEs. In line with the above, Godin and colleagues (2017) confirmed that

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<sup>3</sup> Government assisted refugee, privately sponsored refugee, person sponsored under a joint assistant sponsorship program.

in their study, Syrian refugees explicitly stated a preference for peers and neighbors to be Canadians in order for them to practice and strengthen their L2 English skills.

Gagné et al. (2018) confirmed that some Syrian refugee children and youth who enjoyed a strong support system at home and in the community have succeeded academically. Nonetheless, others are still “struggling with integration, academics and dealing with authority” (p. 59).

Along with social challenges and the challenge of learning a new language, war-affected refugees may face psychological and mental health problems (Hadfield et al., 2017).

## 2.4 Mental Health Challenges

Many factors intersect and affect the ways in which refugee children and youth cope with psychological issues and mental health struggles in resettlement countries. These factors include prearrival and post arrival experiences, family, school, peers, community, and social factors (Hadfield et. al, 2017; Hamilton et al., 2000) which all have direct effects on the ways in which refugee SIFEs progress at school and later in their personal and social lives. According to the literature, most refugee children and adolescents have experienced violence, trauma, prior interruption of schooling, life in transition camps, and loss of supportive family members (DeCapua et al., 2007; Gagné et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019; Hadfield et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2000). In an attempt to find the best way to promote young refugees’ wellbeing in Canada, Hadfield et al. (2017) sought to understand the ways in which trauma related to the pre and post migration journeys of Syrian refugee children and youth affect their integration into Canadian society. To do so, the authors drew on a large body of literature to describe the interplay of diverse factors affecting the mental health of Syrian refugee youth and their integration into Canadian society. Those factors included mental health difficulties and symptoms, importance of prearrival factors, and the effect of post arrival factors.

According to Hadfield et al. (2017) and Tousignant et al. (1999), refugee children in general tend to experience higher levels of mental health difficulties than native children in resettlement countries. Hadfield and colleagues asserted that Syrian refugee children

presented symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, psychosomatic symptoms, sleep disturbance, aggression, and short attention span. Aligning with the above, Gagné et al. (2018) revealed that large numbers of Syrian refugee students in their study experienced negative emotions such as anger, breakdowns, and emotional outbursts which hindered their learning, given the lack of mental health support for them. Yau (1995) explained that refugee SIFEs, especially those who lived in transition camps for many years or who originated from rural areas where formal education was lacking, manifested inexplicable behaviors. Thus, knowledge of prearrival mental health issues is key in teaching refugee SIFEs (Hadfield et al., 2017).

Prearrival traumatic experiences that Syrian refugees have reported included torture, violence, murder of family members, separation from family, personal injury, and living in refugee camps (Hadfield et al., 2017). Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) found that Syrian refugee children and youth are at risk of psychological trauma, and that Syrian refugee boys were more likely to exhibit anger and aggression in their drawings than girls by depicting tears and guns and other violent instruments. According to Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015), these experiences affect Syrian refugees' mental health and cause posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Further, Hadfield et al. (2017) posited that post arrival factors are considered critical to either ameliorating or aggravating the symptoms/effects of prearrival trauma.

Syrian refugee children and youth's postmigration experiences can potentially be stressful and disorienting. Ghosh et al. (2019) stated that refugees from the Middle East are culturally very different from White Canadians. In Canada, Syrian refugee children and youth are exposed to a new culture, alphabet, traditions, languages, laws, and principal religion (Hadfield et al., 2017). The review of the literature by Hadfield et al. (2017) revealed that teachers and peers play a notable role in walking refugee children through the new school routines, culture, and environment. According to the authors, peer relationships are crucial in promoting the mental health and wellbeing of refugee children. Nonetheless, it might be challenging for Syrian refugee SIFEs to engage in friendships with their Canadian peers due to sociolinguistic barriers, racism, mental health issues, and social impairment (Hadfield et al., 2017; Kirova, 2019). That said, post

settlement efforts at school, family, and society at large can be deployed to improve the mental health of refugees, minimize the trauma, and facilitate their integration into their new society (Hadfield et al., 2017; Montgomery & Foldspang, 2008). Aligning with Hadfield et al. (2017) and Montgomery and Foldspang's (2008) claims, Beiser et al. (1989) asserted that a sense of identity and belongingness is key to moderating depression.

Communication is key in Syrian refugee SIFEs' journeys of healing and learning (Gagné et al., 2018). That being said, according to Gagné et al. (2018), with students' and parents' lack of English language proficiency, and most teachers and other stakeholders lack of knowledge of Arabic, most of the time communication breaks down and educational needs among others go unnoticed, unmet or are misinterpreted as problematic behaviors that call for correction. While prearrival factors cannot be mitigated, post arrival factors are critical to either ameliorating or aggravating the effects of prearrival trauma (Hadfield et al., 2017). Hadfield et al. (2017) acknowledged that Canada cannot reverse the prearrival trauma and interruption of education that Syrian children and youth were exposed to; however, policies and programs can be implemented to facilitate adaptation. Further, Fazel, Garcia, and Stein (2016) and Hadfield et al. (2017) asserted that positive schooling experiences in settlement countries can protect refugee children and youth while negative school experiences can worsen mental health problems.

## 2.5 Classroom Experiences of Refugee Students in Resettlement Countries

The first wave of Syrian refugees that Canada received in 2015/2016 graduated in June 2019 (Ghosh, 2019; Reith, 2019). This process of education has not been without controversy. The literature (e.g., Ghosh, 2019; Godin et al., 2017; Reith, 2019) has described refugee youth's high academic expectations upon their arrival in resettlement countries, their sense of gratefulness, academic successes, but also and mostly the challenges they face in schools. Those challenges include cultural dissonance, marginalization, and racism; struggles following routines; and risk of school dropout.

A recent report by Godin et al. (2017) explored the experiences of Syrian refugee students in Canada through a community-based approach. The authors outlined students' high expectations regarding academic achievements, professional prospects, career goals, language learning, and integration. Some participants in this study asserted that their English language has improved since their arrival in Canada, that they feel comfortable in attending the ESL/ELD classrooms, that teachers and school administrators treat them nicely, and that they want to befriend their Canadian peers. That said, many Syrian refugee youths in this study reported frustration because learning English is taking longer than they had expected.

Teacher participants in Gagné et al.'s study (2018) noted that students from Syria are very happy and grateful to be in Canadian schools. They confirmed that many of them are making progress while some "are experiencing a great deal of success with near to grade-level math" (p. 59).

School and classroom contexts (e.g., welcoming/non-welcoming classroom environment; caring/uncaring teacher-student relationships) play a potent role in shaping students' experiences. While there was some positive feedback regarding school and classroom experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs in Canada, the literature also described the different ways in which the dreams and aspirations of those students were hindered by intentional or unintentional defective practices and attitudes such as marginalization, racism, shyness, and struggles with classroom routines, all those in addition to and contributing to school dropout.

**Marginalization, racism, and cultural dissonance at school.** In her study *Refugee Students in Toronto Schools*, Yau (1995) stated that refugee students in her study "have found their teachers to be indifferent, uninterested, uncaring, and distant" (p. 11).

Godin et al. (2017) noted that Syrian refugee SIFEs struggled with cultural differences and experienced difficulties in practicing their faith at school. Those students "voiced concerns that Canadians have misunderstandings about their culture and Islam" (p. 14), specifically for female Syrian refugees wearing Hijab (veil).



Based on a large body of work, Hadfield et al. (2017) showed that many refugee youths have reported being bullied by peers at school because of their racialized and alienated status, which has resulted in their low self-esteem.

Further, Brewer and McCabe (2014) in their book *Immigration and Refugee Students in Canada* shared refugee parents' stories about their children experiencing cultural dissonance, language challenges, and racism at school. Throughout the book, the authors demonstrated that refugee students' experiences in Canada are affected by the "ongoing legacies of colonialism, capitalism, and racism" (p.2). The authors put forth that it is likely the attitudes of teachers toward refugee students, the lack of preparedness and unawareness about ways to support such students in the classroom, and poor inclusion practices that have led to students' isolation and marginalization in Canadian classrooms.

Findings from the above studies confirmed those by Boyson and Short, (2003), Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney (2009), Hamilton et al. (2000), DeCapua (2016), DeCapua and Marshall (2015) and Humpage (1998). Boyson and Short, (2003), Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney (2009) and Hamilton et al. (2000) asserted that refugee students might feel disconnected to a sense of community within the schools in which they have been enrolled, due to prior violent experiences in their home countries. Similarly, DeCapua (2016) and DeCapua and Marshall (2015) found that many of the refugee SIFEs face cultural dissonance in schools. This, according to the authors, is reflected in students' lack of understanding of the expectations, ways of thinking and learning, and discourse styles in US educational institutions, thus leading to their complex feelings of confusion and alienation. Likewise, a study by Humpage (1998) explored the experiences of Somali refugee students in US secondary schools. The results indicated that high school Somali refugee students struggled to adapt to the commonly expected methods by which learning and constructing knowledge occur and were alienated and disenfranchised because of their low socioeconomic status as refugees. As such, refugee students are potentially at risk for developing oppositional cultural identities (Ogbu, 1995a; Ogbu, 1995b) or negative acculturation attitudes (Berry, 1988).

**Struggles with classroom routines.** Yau (1995), Gagné et al. (2017), Gagné et al. (2018), Godin et al. (2017), Ghosh et al. (2019), and Hos (2012) found that refugee SIFEs struggled with adapting to classroom routines. For instance, Yau (1995) posited that refugee students in her study were not familiar with classroom discipline, nor were they used to staying seated indoors for two or three hours consecutively. The author added that refugee students had short attention spans and a hard time following regular school routines or knowing what to do in the classroom. This finding corroborates Hos' (2012) study about the experiences of refugee SIFEs in an urban secondary school newcomer program. Hos concluded that refugee students in her study were unable to follow classroom routines and showed uncertainty about how to behave and participate in the classroom.

**Academic dropout.** Blanchet-Cohen et al. (2017) and Ghosh et al. (2019) reported that refugee youths' educational experiences and life circumstances contribute to school dropout. As such, refugee SIFEs who are forced to work to support their families face a higher risk of dropout to join the work force. The challenges for these students to succeed are greater than other refugee or mainstream students (Ghosh et al., 2019; Kanu, 2008; Mackay & Tavares, 2005). Nonetheless, according to Ghosh et al. (2019), while some Syrian refugee SIFEs have already dropped out from secondary schools in Canada, others have risen to the challenge. In this context, teachers' roles are essential in the education of refugee students. That said, the experiences of teachers of refugee students in resettlement countries are not in any sense less challenging than the experiences of their students (Clark, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Gagné et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019; Hos, 2012; Khan, 2012; Skidmore, 2016).

## 2.6 Classroom Experiences of Teachers of Refugee Students in Resettlement Countries

This section outlines the experiences of teachers of refugee students in resettlement countries, namely, experiences related to lack of information about refugee students, teachers' lack of preparedness to teach refugee students and SIFEs, and successful experiences.

He et al. (2008) advanced the idea that cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversities, juxtaposed with educators' context based-knowledge about students' backgrounds, have emerged as one of the urgent challenges facing 21st century educators, making it burdensome to create supportive classroom practices and learning opportunities for refugee students (Gay, 2000, 2010; Hos, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

According to Gay (2018), teachers cannot teach those whom they do not know. As such, teachers need to know basic information about Syrian refugee SIFEs enrolled in their classrooms. However, according to a Government of Canada website (2017), stakeholders and teachers of Syrian refugee students were not provided with sufficient information about the needs of government-sponsored refugees, nor were the teachers prepared to deal with refugee students' mental health issues. Teachers' lack of information about Syrian refugee SIFEs' pre, post and refugee journeys resulted in their being unable to understand their experiences, empathize with them, care for them, and create adequate learning opportunities with/for them (Gay, 2018).

The literature suggests that there is a need to improve supports for refugee SIFEs in resettlement countries to match refugee students' varied needs and experiences (Clark, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2007; Hos, 2012; Kovinthan, 2016; Melo, 2012). Researchers such as Clark (2017), DeCapua and Marshall (2015), Gagné et al. (2018), Ghosh et al. (2019), Hos (2012), Khan (2012), and Skidmore (2016) stated that many ESL, ELD and mainstream teachers find it difficult to teach refugee SIFEs. Gay (2002a), Meka (2015), Vavrus (2008) and Yau (1995) explained that this is due, amongst various considerations, to teachers' lack of professional training, awareness and expertise, and possibly negative attitudes and misconceptions about refugee students.

In line with the above, the extant studies from Canada outlining the experiences of refugee students and their teachers in Canadian classrooms revealed that teachers are ill-prepared to identify the needs of their refugee students (e.g., Clark, 2017; Ghosh et al., 2019; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Yau, 1995; Yu, 2012). These studies showed that teachers in general are not trained to culturally interact with this group of students, adapt their curricula to accommodate their needs (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Yau, 1995; Yu,

2012), or differentiate them from other immigrants (Kovinthan, 2016; Yau, 1995; Yu, 2012). Thus, the recent literature (e.g., Clark, 2017; Gagné et al., 2017) has emphasized the need for Canadian teachers to be better equipped to create learning opportunities for Syrian refugee SIFEs.

In her study about the experiences of Canadian teachers supporting the transition of Syrian SIFEs to elementary classrooms in Canada, Clark (2017) asked a fundamental question: “are we ready?” The study’s findings suggest that the support of newly arrived Syrian refugee elementary students depends on those students’ prior educational and non-educational experiences, teachers’ abilities to build positive relationships with students and teachers’ preparedness and knowledge about ELL pedagogy. That said, the challenge gains complexity with high school students (Gagné et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019). Educators in Gagné et al.’s study (2018) explained:

The greatest challenge is working with older students who are returning to a formal school environment after years of interruptions. Their need for these students to learn how to learn in a formal context with attendance, communication and homework expectations is part of the teaching job that they report they were not prepared for. (p. 56)

In addition, teachers in Gagné et al.’s (2018) study reported that they “felt powerless, stressed and fatigued during these past couple of years” (p. 60) because they had neither been trained to support Syrian refugee youths with interrupted formal education nor prepared to deal with students’ traumatic symptoms. Therefore, according to the authors, Syrian refugee SIFEs were often considered unruly and rude.

Those teachers’ statements unveiled the complexity of the classroom experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in Canadian classrooms. Based on the literature (Clark, 2017; Gagné et al., 2018; Godin et al., 2017), students’ psychological challenges, interruption of education, and behavioral issues, in addition to the teachers’ lack of preparedness and lack of resources, translated into disproportionate and inadequate learning opportunities for Syrian refugee SIFEs, misinterpretation of students’ behaviors, and stressful and uncertain scenarios for teachers.

Nonetheless, despite the challenges outlined above, the literature also revealed successful experiences of teachers of refugee students that are worth highlighting and building upon. For instance, Gagné et al. (2018) noted that teachers, regardless of their struggles, are still trying to find a way to modify school programs to create learning opportunities for Syrian refugee SIFEs and engage them more successfully in classroom practices. Similarly, Professor Charles E. Pascal from the Ontario Institute for Studies and Education (OISE) asserted that many teachers and schools are prepared to deal with CLD students, including refugees, to help them reach their highest potential (Damjanovic, 2016). Additionally, according to Reith (2019), the first cohort of Syrian refugee youth have made it through secondary school in Canada because their teachers avoided conversations about their traumatic war experiences, provided understanding and time, and fostered relationships. Moreover, findings from Ghosh et al. (2019) on creating a space for refugee students in Canadian schools showed that school staff in suburbs and small towns made refugee students feel welcomed. In addition, Gagné et al. (2017), Gagné et al. (2018), and Ghosh et al. (2019) described a Manitoba school's successful experience in catering to Syrian refugee SIFEs while integrating them into the school community. These findings from Canadian classrooms and schools corroborate He et al.'s (2008) and Hos' (2012) claims that there are schools and teachers that meet the educational needs of minority students and help them reach their highest potential. Nevertheless, while some schools and teachers seemed prepared to accommodate refugee students' needs, Professor Pascal from OISE claimed that this is not a universal reality across Ontario (Damjanovic, 2016). Thus, provincial programs and curricula developed specifically for refugee SIFEs are an asset to the academic success of those students. Also, professional development sessions, workshops, and training opportunities provided for ELD teachers with the aim of better accommodating the needs of refugee SIFEs cannot be overemphasized.

## 2.7 Programs and Curricula for Refugee SIFEs in Ontario

Khan (2012) and DeCapua and Marshall (2015) claimed that, while refugee SIFEs pose significant challenges for Canadian teachers, the struggles these students face in integrating into their new educational environment and succeeding academically are far more complex. To address the learning and teaching opportunities and challenges of

refugee SIFEs and their ELD teachers, the Ontario Ministry of Education developed the ELD programs and curricula, and amended the teacher education policy, requiring additional curricular and practical teacher experiences related to ELLs. Nonetheless, Brubacher (2011) critiqued the *Practical Guide for Ontario Educators Grades 3 – 12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) and the policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) based on the discrepancies between what those documents describe and recommend, and what students experience in the classroom.

### **ELD programs**

The Ontario Ministry of Education developed four main documents for high school ESL and ELD aiming to respond to CLD students' and SIFEs' needs and interests: *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12 English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development*, 1999 (revised in 2007); *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling – A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators Grades 3 – 12*, 2008; *English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services – Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*, 2007; and *STEP Steps to English Proficiency a Guide for Users* (2015).

*The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12 English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development*, 2007 includes goals of ESL and ELD curricula, programs to support English language learners, overviews of ESL and ELD programs, assessments and evaluations, considerations of program planning, and course descriptions. All the ESL and ELD courses for Grades 9 to 12 are outlined in this document. Both ESL and ELD include five courses. While ESL is based on students' levels of English proficiency, ELD is based on students' English proficiency and levels of literacy development. ESL students can be placed at different levels depending on their prior experiences in English, while ELD students may be placed in different ELD levels based on their knowledge of English, first language literacy skills and previous educational experiences (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 2007). Students in ELD programs are often segregated for a long part of the day from their mainstream peers in the hopes of effectively working on their English language, improving their literacy skills, and

accelerating their learning (Cummins et al., 2015; Gagné et al., 2018). The content of both ELD and ESL courses is organized into four interrelated areas of learning: Listening and Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Sociocultural Competence Media Literacy. The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (2007) mentions that effective instructional activities must blend expectations from the four areas in order to provide CLD students with meaningful learning experiences.

*Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling – A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators Grades 3 – 12, 2008*, examines profiles of ELD students, their experiences in the classroom, teaching and assessment strategies, various program delivery models, and means to support ELD students' transitions into mainstream classes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Also, it develops profiles for different types of ELD students based on their prior experiences, and provides educators with information regarding the students' social, emotional, and academic adjustment processes, pushing them towards a more holistic view of the student that surmounts academic achievement (Brubacher, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2008).

The Practical Guide for Ontario Educators Grades 3 – 12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) defines the needs of SIFEs as follows:

Students need to have their identity and culture affirmed as a starting point for further learning. They need to see the connections between who they are, what they value, and what they are learning in school in order to make sense of the learning and integrate it into their whole being ... Students need appropriate and timely manner intervention, which includes an accelerated program to bridge the gaps created by missed educational opportunities. (p. 35)

The Practical Guide for Ontario Educators Grades 3 – 12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) conceptualizes the support that teachers should provide for SIFEs as follows:

- provide a consistent, safe place in which to learn, with clear parameters, where values of equity and inclusion are evident and demonstrated.
- ensure that learning environments reflect the diversity of the learners, so that all students can see themselves represented in their classrooms.
- recognize that the learner's needs go beyond academic needs.

- learn about geographical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of students through reading, settlement resources, and positive, informal interactions with students.
- confer with other subject teachers to monitor progress, share information and ideas, and ensure appropriate degrees of challenge for students.
- establish peer buddy groups, perhaps related to first language, and monitor relationships to ensure that the relationships are beneficial for all. (p. 11)

The policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) delineates definitions and goals for ELD and ESL programs, elements of the policy and services, including initial assessments and evaluations, participation in high-stakes provincial tests, graduation requirements, discontinuance of ESL/ELD support, allotment of resources, professional development, and training and teachers' qualifications.

The Ontario Ministry of education developed the *Steps to English Proficiency a Guide for Users* (2015). STEP is a language assessment framework used in ESL and ELD classrooms with different criteria. ESL/ELD teachers and mainstream teachers can use STEP to assess students' language proficiency and record students' progress in language learning. According to the STEP guide, "in-depth knowledge of the students' profiles will support programming and decisions. Teachers need to be aware of the students' strengths and lived experiences and use these assets to build literacy skills" (p. 17).

In her study *Education and the Unschooled Student: Teachers' Discourses on Teaching Elementary School English Literacy Development Students*, Brubacher (2011) described the contradiction in the policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) and the Practical Guide for Ontario Educators Grades 3 – 12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) given the "suggested inclusion of students' prior experiences and home languages, and the need for ELD students to assimilate to formal schooling norms as opposed to schooling changing to meet the needs of ELD students" (Brubacher, 2011, pp. 70-71). In her analysis of these two documents, Brubacher (2011) demonstrated that they both promote the use of L1 as a bridge to new and fruitful learning within English-speaking schools. However, neither mentions access to bilingual schools in immigrants' L1 (2011).



Furthermore, the author claimed that the policy document encourages newcomers to become more Canadian by “learning the standardized English taught in schools” (p. 73).

Brubacher’s claim intersects with Cummins’ (2000, 2001) comments about multilingualism in Canada, and Bourdieu’s (2001) notion of reproduction of hegemony through official languages. Cummins (2000), comparing linguistic opportunities in the United States and Canada, posited:

Certainly, there is far more imagination at work in promoting linguistic enrichment in education for non-dominant groups in the United States than is evident in its northern neighbour which, behind the facade of its prized ‘Canadian mosaic’, has largely constricted its educational imagination to providing for the linguistic interests of its two dominant Anglophone and francophone groups. (Theory as dialogue, loc 161)

Applying Bourdieu’s (2001) notion of hegemony created and maintained by official languages to the Canadian context, Brubacher (2011) concluded that students whose first language is neither English nor French should conform to Canada’s official languages’ rules, and structures, while at the same time access to resources in their first language is limited.

Brubacher (2011) found that the way the policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) defines CLD learners distinguishes them from native speakers based on linguistic and cultural differences. As such, it frames their cultures and languages as distinct, transforms them to the racial other (Lee, 1996 as in He et al., 2008), and thus reproduces imbalances in power wherein dominant groups can easily coerce those in subordinate communities (Brubacher, 2011).

Further, in her analysis of the practical guide (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008), Brubacher (2011) pointed out that the guide consistently identifies the deficient experiences of students in ELD classes, sometimes reproducing “discourses on Canada as a saving nation” (p. 75). Connelly (2008) confirmed that in this context teachers’ discourses show that they define their roles as helping others while maintaining the polarization of themselves as Canadian teachers on one side and CLD students in need of help on the other side. These findings are consistent with Tyyskä et al.’s (2017) analysis about the Syrian refugee crisis’ coverage by Canadian media during a period of nine

months. The analysis showed that Canadian media portrayed Canadians as saviors, positive, and generous to Syrian refugees who were portrayed as “lacking agency, vulnerable, and needy amidst challenges” (Tyyskä et al., 2017, p. 4). This way of describing Syrian refugees may affect teachers’ perceptions about this group of people and shape the learning opportunities and classroom practices ELD teachers create for/with them (Roy & Roxas, 2011).

With respect to assessment/evaluation of CLD students, Gay (2018) asserted that “curricular forms and resources other than textbooks have powerful (and sometimes constraining) consequences for CRT” (p. 154) implying that, among others, inadequate assessment tools for minority students can hinder those students’ academic progress. The author posited that prominent amongst those curricular forms are “recent emphasis on achievement standards and standardized testing” (p. 154). Standardization in education, according to the author, is the use of the same testing measures for all students, regardless of any conditions, to evaluate mastery of content and determine performance standards. Gay (2018) posited that “despite the pressures of standards and increasing standardization in assessing students’ achievement, the best pedagogical response for ethnically diverse students is not to concede to them” (p. 160). Kincheloe (2016) also commented that such standardization is irrespective of minority students’ needs or the differences between students, school settings and contexts, and thus, has a detrimental effect on students’ education.

Further, in July 2020, the Ontario Minister of Education (S. Lecce) called academic streaming in Ontario “systematic, racist and discriminatory practice” (Katsarov, 2020, para 3) and decided to end the discriminatory practice of academic streaming in grade 9: “Teachers and students deserve an education system that is inclusive, accountable and transparent, and one that by design, is set up to fully and equally empower all children to achieve their potential” (para 6). Lecce’s decision was well-received by scholars, teachers, students and advocacy groups in the province (Katsarov, 2020) and is considered a step forward towards change in Ontario education.

### **Education policy amendment**

Ontario was the first province in Canada to amend its teacher education policy in 2013 considering CLD's related curricular and practical experiences (Gagné et al., 2018). However, this policy (Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs, 2014) was only implemented in 2016, one to two years following the arrival of the Syrian refugees and their families in Canada. Since then, most faculties of education in Ontario have developed a new 36-hour course on supporting CLD students in the province (Gagné et al., 2018). According to Gagné et al. (2018), this policy allows pre-service teachers to reflect on their assumptions regarding refugee students. It also gives them the opportunity to advocate for those students through teacher education programs and courses that better highlight the intersecting factors that affect the journey of refugee students at school and across their multiple worlds (Gagné et al., 2017).

### **Training and professional development**

To navigate their roles effectively, teachers teaching refugee SIFEs must be provided with adequate training and sufficient information about their students (e.g., pre-immigration experiences, previous academic achievement, culture, needs, interests). Ghosh et al. (2019) stated that there are professional development opportunities for teachers in secondary schools in Ontario where school administrators and ELD/ESL coordinators collaborate to help teachers to become more attuned to how refugee SIFEs experience school and learning to better accommodate their needs. Findings from Gagné et al. (2017) and Gagné et al. (2018) revealed that educators would benefit from PD opportunities and training to learn more about the ways in which trauma impacts learning. That said, Gagné et al. (2018) confirmed that there is a pressing need to provide ongoing trainings for practicing teachers who are presently in direct contact with refugee SIFEs, claiming that this remains a common concern for educators and curriculum leaders in Canada. The ELD programs and curricula and PD are the main resources to support the education of refugee SIFEs. The ways in which those curricular and professional development are translated into practice depend greatly on teachers' pedagogies and practices enacted in the classroom.

## 2.8 Tailored Pedagogies and Classroom Practices Supporting Refugee SIFEs

The literature suggests some pedagogies and practices that are better suited to supporting the transitions of refugee students (e.g., Hope, 2008; Hos, 2012; Kagan, 1995; Kovinthan, 2016) such as Syrian refugee SIFEs (e.g., Gagné et al., 2017; Gagné et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019) into classrooms in resettlement countries.

For instance, Kovinthan (2016) asserted that refugee-related issues can be integrated within classroom activities. This, according to the author, can normalize and validate refugee students' experiences. In her article *Learning and Teaching with Loss: Meeting the Needs of Refugee Children through Narrative Inquiry*, Kovinthan described a classroom discussion about war-related issues and forced migration that involved all the students in her classroom and resulted in normalizing and validating one of her refugee student's experiences.

Hope (2008) suggested storytelling as an ideal means to share experiences and challenge stereotypes about refugee students in classroom settings. The author added that children's literature and stories about refugee-related experiences can validate refugee students' identities and, if well managed, can have a therapeutic effect.

According to Kagan (1995), cooperative learning is amongst the classroom practices that have the greatest potential to enhance the language learning and experiences of refugee students in classroom settings.

Hos (2012) suggested creating group work activities during which refugee SIFEs can engage in real life discussions in the classroom. According to the author, these activities help students to become independent learners, work collaboratively with peers and establish caring relationships with others. Such classroom environment allows refugee SIFEs to adjust rapidly and make a smooth transition into the school.

In his study about refugee students in English literacy programs in Ontario, Ibrahim (2011) suggested creating leadership opportunities for upper grade CLD learners.

According to him, an inclusive environment and leadership opportunities could provide CLD students with a welcoming and safe space in which they can integrate and succeed.

Educators from Gagné et al.'s (2018) study found that their Syrian refugee SIFEs enjoyed presenting simple projects and that they loved reading books to their peers in Arabic.

Gagné et al. (2017), Gagné et al. (2018), and Ghosh et al. (2019) have illustrated the success of the government of Manitoba in welcoming Syrian refugee students into a middle school in Winnipeg where teachers were well prepared and equipped to cater to Syrian refugee students. Both teachers and administrators were successful in creating a safe environment for all students where students could feel safe and connected.

According to the authors, the reason for their success is partly due to the leadership of the school and the principal who is himself a former refugee. Further, the authors described resources for supportive pedagogies that were provided by the government. Those resources included, for instance, *Life after War: Education as a Healing Process for Refugee and War-Affected Children* (Government of Manitoba, 2012) specifically tailored to the strengths and needs of refugee students, and *Building Hope and War Affected Children: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Gagné et al., 2017; Gagné et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019; Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2015). Those documents and others were provided to in-service and preservice teachers to discuss, analyze and reflect upon as a strategy to prepare those teachers to support students from refugee backgrounds, considering their specific characteristics and needs (Gagné et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2019).

Likewise, in Ontario, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) developed the Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP). LEAP is a special accelerated program for immigrant and refugee students who have had limited access to formal schooling before arriving in Canada and who lack literacy, mathematics and study skills (TDSB, n.d.). LEAP<sup>4</sup> is offered in 40 elementary schools and 13 secondary schools across Toronto and

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<sup>4</sup> Example of LEAP study unit: *LEAP Go Green Unit: Let's Reduce our Ecological Footprint* is a unit developed by LEAP teachers and field tested in LEAP classrooms. Modules of this unit can be used with varying age students in

targets students aged 11 to 18. It gives those students a chance to upgrade their English language literacy and mathematics skills enabling them to participate fully in their classes (TDSB, n.d.).

Pedagogies and classroom practices tailored for refugee SIFEs were also at the heart of some teacher education programs in Canada after the influx of Syrian refugees. Gagné et al. (2017) provided an example of such pedagogies and practices in a teacher education program where teacher educators and teacher candidates modelled supportive pedagogies allowing for teacher candidates to experience them before having to actually implement them in the future in their classrooms. Most noteworthy was that CRT and caring were amongst the supportive pedagogies modelled by teacher educators and teacher candidates and proved to be successful and effective in teaching war affected refugee students.

## 2.9 Caring and Culturally Responsive Pedagogies and Classroom Environment

*Culturally responsive pedagogy “teaches to and through the strengths” of CLD students (Gay, 2000, p. 29)*

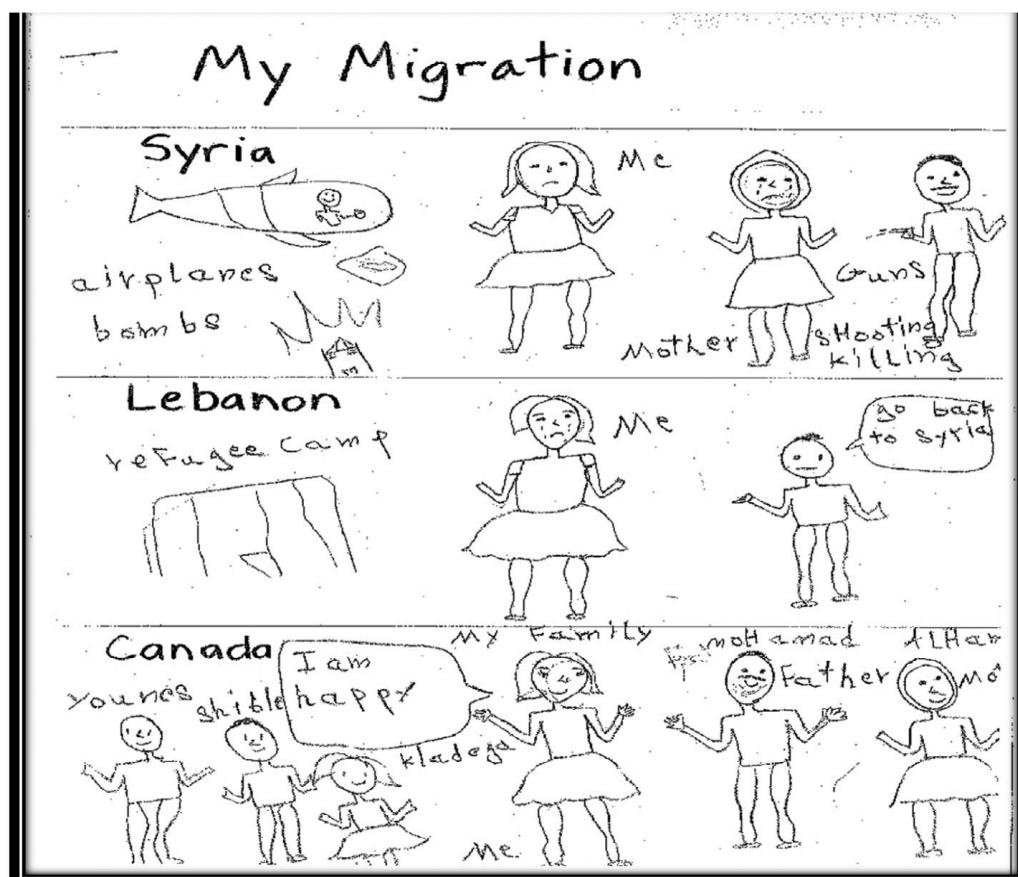
*“Caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity” (Gay, 2002b, p. 109)*

*Culturally responsive caring places “teachers in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (Gay, 2000, p. 52).*

In Gagné et al.’s (2017) study, Paula Markus, an ESL/ELD program coordinator with the TDSB, affirmed that “an expert and caring teacher can support a newly arrived refugee

student in producing a powerful and potentially healing text” (p. 438) such as the one pictured below (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Drawing by One Syrian Refugee Newcomer**



*Note.* Drawing by one Syrian refugee newcomer in a Canadian elementary school classroom. Adapted from Gagné et al. (2017, p. 438).

Caring and CRT pedagogies are intimately related (Gay, 2018). Gay (2002b) stated that teachers must show genuine interest and authentic care for ethnically diverse students and their accomplishments, and hold high expectations regarding their academic progress. Gay (2002b, 2018) considered caring to be the ideological grounding of CRT; together they form what she called culturally responsive caring or culturally sensitive caring, a necessary condition for the establishment of a culturally responsive learning climate. Further, Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that regardless of race or ethnicity, teachers of minority students need to demonstrate caring and cultural

responsiveness to meet their students' sociocultural and emotional needs and interests and implement classroom practices that best suit those students' abilities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

Also, Gay (2000) posited that learning should be a joyous, exciting journey, where all students can feel valuable, emotionally safe, and supported in a discrimination-free space. The author compared caring classroom climates to tough love between parents and their children. Through this comparison, Gay (2002a, 2002b) refers to caring teachers' diligence and creativity in supporting their minority students and developing ethical non-violative relationships (Heydon & Wang, 2006) with them while ensuring they cause no harm to them (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008).

Another dimension of caring that teachers can assume is modeling with their students a small-scale example of how members of a class community care for one another by co-creating and engaging in activities that improve the life of that other (Noddings, 1984, 2003).

From this perspective, Michael Apple (2014) cited "caring and connectedness, a sense of mutuality, trust and respect, and a freedom to challenge others, as well as commitment to challenge the existing politics of official knowledge whenever and wherever it is repressive" (p. 166), as the central principles of community within which an ethical approach to education might blossom.

Furthermore, on the ethical role of teachers and their responsibilities towards creating culturally responsive classroom climates for students, Nieto (2004) argued that educators have the potential to bend the rules and choose to confront the unjust sociopolitical and sociocultural realities in which their students live. The author described the primary role of educators as "to interrupt the cycle of inequality and oppression" (p. xxii). According to the author, educators can best do that "by teaching well and with heart and soul" (p. xxii).

Nevertheless, obstacles towards creating caring and culturally responsive classroom environments remain. Classroom community building seems to be challenging given its



context of social injustice and alienation of minorities, including refugees (Kozol, 2005; Nieto, 2004). Teachers might find it challenging to create a warm and welcoming environment for refugee students considering the lack of funding for appropriate resources and absence of professional development and training (Roy & Roxas, 2011). Also, obstacles to CRT, according to Gay (2002a) include teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards refugee students and their expectations of CLD learners. Gay (2002a) posited that "the more variance that there is between students' cultural, racial, ethnic, and intellectual characteristics and the normative standards of schools, the greater are the chances their school achievement will be compromised by low or negative teacher expectations" (p. 614). In this context, teachers of refugee SIFEs can play an important role in minimizing the constraints to caring and CRT practices.

## 2.10 Roles of Teachers of Refugee Students

The literature has reported that teachers of refugee students play a notable role in walking refugee students through the new school routines, culture and environment (Hadfield et al., 2017), helping them to build bridges between cultures (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Teachers' roles also consist of enacting supportive practices and learning opportunities that respond to refugees' experiences, needs, and aspirations, and create a welcoming and safe classroom environment for them (Clark, 2017; Damjanovic, 2016; Hadfield et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2000). The literature suggests the use of supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive teaching (Gagné et al., 2017; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999) that are better suited to supporting the transition of refugee students into welcoming and safe classroom environments in settlement countries (Damjanovic, 2016; Ibrahim, 2012). Such supportive pedagogies enhance refugee students' wellbeing and academic accomplishments (Gay, 2000, 2010; Hos, 2012; Noddings, 2003), and promote teachers' critical self-reflections and agency (Gay, 2010).

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Towards Equity and Inclusivity in Ontario Schools* (2013) document states that it is the educator's role to picture how their students know themselves and others, build on students' funds of knowledge, and aid them in building bridges between cultures. Educators are also called to reflect on their teaching practices

(Gay, 2000, 2010; Dei & Rummens, 2010) and their position in the “social, historical and political context through questioning their own attitudes, behaviours and beliefs” (Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Towards Equity and Inclusivity in Ontario Schools, 2013, p.4). Ghosh et al.’s (2019) and Gagné et al.’s (2017) recommendations to teachers of Syrian refugee SIFEs align with the above-mentioned statements.

Further, teachers of refugee SIFEs’ roles in secondary schools extend to include teaching the basic classroom skills that ought to be covered in early elementary school years (Gagné et al., 2018; Yau, 1995). Students’ lack of those basic skills, added to teachers’ limited knowledge about refugee SIFEs’ prior experiences (Gagné et al., 2018), may affect the ways in which teachers of refugee SIFEs perceive their students’ abilities.

## 2.11 Perceptions of Teachers of Refugee Students

Teachers’ perceptions about their students are rather significant because how educators view their students’ abilities, cultures, identities and L1, shape their interactions with them and impact the creation of learning opportunities and negotiation of identities in the classroom (Cummins, 2001). The literature shows recurrent themes related to teachers’ perceptions about refugee and minority students. Those themes include deficit discourses; lack of motivation, attitude, and appropriate behaviors; pathologizing, disability, and underachievement (Brewer, 2016; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Gay, 2010; Heydon & Iannacci, 2008; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

Findings from Gagné et al.’s (2018) study revealed that teachers’ limited knowledge about refugee students’ backgrounds and pre-immigration experiences (e.g., academic experiences, war, trauma) affected their perceptions about this group of students. As such, the authors asserted that some teachers appeared to react negatively to Syrian refugee students’ attitudes and behaviors. They saw those students as less well-behaved, non-compliant and as having no respect for authority, and they attributed this to the students’ lack of understanding of the value of education.

Further, Gagné et al. (2017) suggested that teachers’ perceptions about refugee students may be affected by teachers’ own backgrounds and prior assumptions. Thus, it is critical

for teachers to question their prior assumptions about refugees and refugee education, to be considerate, and to seek to be well informed about the backgrounds and experiences of refugee children and youth before judging refugee students' behaviors.

In addition, there are prevailing tendencies in education that assume that students' abilities in one area of performance or in an academic subject are the same for other areas (Gagné et al., 2018). Consequently, high achievers in science for instance, are expected to achieve well in math, civics, etc. Following the same logic, low achievers in language learning, for instance, are expected to have poor performance in math, science, history etc. Similarly, Gay (2018) posited that CLD students' limited English skills are often "associated with low intellectual abilities" (p. 17). Further, Gay (2002a), Heydon and Iannacci (2008), and Brewer (2016) asserted that, in some cases, teachers confuse diversity with disability and that some CLD students are mistakenly labeled as disabled or underachievers because of language barriers and cultural mismatches between the home and the school dominant cultural standards.

The literature also suggests that teachers of refugee students often care about them and want them to succeed (Noddings, 1984; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). However, according to Roy and Roxas (2011), teachers' effectiveness might, sometimes, be hindered by deficit-based perceptions about minority students' capabilities, leading to deficit-based decisions mirroring broader social aggressions rooted in interracial interactions. Those deficit-based perceptions are usually held by the social majority. They include intentional and unintentional discriminatory deficit discourses and practices that perpetuate stereotypes about minority groups (Roxas & Roy, 2011).

Drawing on Roy and Roxas (2011), and DeCuire and Dixson (2004), deficit discourses and practices of teachers and schools are in many instances "grounded in and supported by notions of meritocracy, perceived attitudes of motivation, a perceived lack of value in education, and biased testing practices" (Roy & Roxas, 2011, p. 521).

These factors have been found to lead to poor communication between students and teachers. As a consequence, refugee students may perceive that they are receiving an overall deficient educational experience, hindering their academic success (Capstick &

Delaney, 2016; Kanu, 2008; Stodoldky & Grossman, 2000). Thus, Ghosh et al. (2019) stressed the need for teachers to focus on refugee students' strengths rather than seeing them as victims. Aligning with Ghosh et al. (2019), Brewer (2016) posited that it is important to look at refugee students from an asset perspective rather than from a deficit perspective. According to Brewer (2016) and Ghosh et al. (2019) positive and asset perspectives towards refugee students limit the possibilities of students' marginalization in the classroom.

## 2.12 Teacher-Student Relationships, Knowledge, Identity and Power

The literature review shows that, in Canada, teachers are predominantly monolingual middle-class Euro-Canadians and belong to the dominant culture (Lowenstein, 2009; Spanierman et al., 2011). Dei et al. (2001) confirmed that belonging to the White middle-class gives individuals within this class privileges that other members associated with a lower social status may lack. As such, Cummins (2000) warned:

In cities, such as Toronto, Canada, where at least 60% of the student body does not fit this generic stereotype, the failure to ensure that all teachers are prepared to teach all students (particularly the non-white, non-middle-class, multilingual mainstream) represents a sociological phenomenon that can be analyzed only in terms of the persistence of coercive relations of power hiding behind meaningless multicultural rhetoric. (Theory as dialogue, loc 233)

When it comes to Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in Canadian schools, Skidmore (2016) claimed that in addition to pre and postmigration challenges, Syrian refugee students may confront racism and xenophobia at school. Xenophobic discourses form the primary means through which oppressive and coercive relations of power are acted out in the classroom (Cummins, 2000).

In line with the above, Gagné et al. (2018) posited that “refugee children and youth face unique experiences of discrimination and that systemic bias, practices and processes in schools often result in differential treatment of these racialized and marginalized children and youth” (p. 68). The authors contended that even within schools known to be supportive of Syrian refugee students and responsive to their particular experiences, there may be instructors who would be unwilling to modify the curriculum or their practices to

accommodate those students so they can reach their potentials. Gagné et al. (2018) asserted that teachers have a remarkable impact on the lives of students, and that teacher-student relationships are key to the educational integration of Syrian refugee SIFEs and “to their ability to navigate across their multiple worlds with ease” (p. 68). The authors confirmed that “as refugee students navigate through the school system, spend time in community settings and at home, their relationships with peers and other adults including educators can either hinder or enhance their transitions from one world to another” (p. 66). According to the authors, strong teacher-student relationships can “ensure the smooth transition of children across their multiple worlds” (Gagné et al., 2017, p. 435).

Similarly, Bartell (2011) posited that constructive teacher-student relationships have implications for equity. Based on a body of literature, the author noted that teachers’ decisions on whether to engage or not in a teacher-student relationship are determined by various factors (Davis, 2001) such as the likelihood of the student to succeed, the pre-conceived perceptions and beliefs about students’ capabilities, and the ways in which teachers envision their roles (Stipek, Givvin, Salmon & Macgyvers, 2001). As such, learning opportunities offered to CLD students, such as feedback and evaluations of performance, are impacted by teachers’ beliefs (Bartell, 2011). According to Bartell (2011), teachers are more likely to give attention to students they consider to be better achievers, provide constructive feedback to them and value their responses. Contrarily, teachers are more likely to expect “poor performance from students for whom they hold low expectations” (Bartell, 2011, p. 51). Further, according to Spindler & Spindler (1982) teachers are more likely to prefer students with whom they share some characteristics such as racial, ethnic, linguistic, and social class.

According to Cummins (2000) and Dei and Rummens (2010), teacher-student relationships define the ways in which knowledge is created and validated, and the ways in which identities and cultures are negotiated in the classroom. Cummins (2000) suggested that students in subordinated social categories are either invigorated or weakened academically because of their interactions with teachers in the classroom. The author added that these interactions determine the success or failure of the students. In line with Cummins’ claims, Dei and Rummens (2010) asserted that teachers have the

ultimate power in excluding or including refugee students by acknowledging or disregarding their linguistic, cultural, and ethnic experiences and needs through the learning opportunities and practices they create. Thus, the nature of teacher-student interactions and relationships affect students' academic achievements, wellbeing, and identity formation. Cummins (2001) reflected on the process of negotiating identities in the classroom. He explained:

This process of negotiating identities can never be fully controlled by forces outside of the teacher-student relationship itself. Thus, educators individually and collectively have the unique potential to work toward the creation of contexts of empowerment. Within these interpersonal spaces where identities are negotiated, students and educators together can generate power that challenges structures of inequity in small but significant ways. (p 653)

Cummins (2011) added that “the ways in which identities are negotiated in these interactions can be understood only in relation to patterns of historical and current power relations in the broader society” (Theory of dialogue, loc 212).

In this context of power imbalances, taking into consideration the ethical aspects of teacher-student relationships, Canadian teachers are called to reflect critically on the situation at hand, modify their approaches and pedagogies (if needed), and act as agents of social change to challenge and adjust systemic inequities (Gagné et al., 2017).

## 2.13 Summary

This literature review shed light on the classroom experiences of refugee students and their teachers in resettlement countries, specifically in Ontario, Canada along with the challenges and opportunities. It also discussed ELD programs and curricula, supportive pedagogies, roles of teachers of refugee SIFEs, perceptions of teachers of refugee SIFEs and the interrelation of teacher-student relationships, knowledge, identity and power.

This chapter revealed the dearth of research related to the nuances and complexities (e.g., content and knowledge processes, attitudes, interactions of both teachers and students, affect/care, social integration norms, culture, and structures in the classrooms that affect students' abilities and achievement) of classroom experiences and practices of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms, and thus, emphasized the need to

explore those experiences from the perspectives of students and teachers. Further, the literature identified the needs of refugee SIFEs as being more complex than other refugees or CLD learners (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Ghosh, 2019). It also suggested that teachers' misconceptions about refugee students, their lack of knowledge related to students' backgrounds, and unawareness of effective strategies hinder their abilities to respond effectively to those students' needs (Brubacher, 2011; Clark, 2017; Dufresne, 2015; Gichuru, 2013; Khan, 2012; MacLeod, 2016; Musara, 2013; Yau, 1995; Yu, 2012), care for them (Gay, 2018; Noddings, 1992), and create culturally responsive learning opportunities for them (Hos, 2012; Khan, 2012; Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2017; Yau, 1995; Yu, 2012). Scholars such as Gagné et al. (2018), Hek (2005) and Stanley (2001) agreed that learning a second language, acquiring a high school diploma, access to postsecondary education and integration are at the top of the priorities and concerns of refugee students in resettlement countries. Additionally, researchers (e.g., Gay, 2018) have also acknowledged the importance of caring teacher-student relationships and CRT classroom practices in enhancing the holistic student experience. In spite of the difficulties, Hadfield et al. (2017) posited that Syrian refugee children and youth are expected to cope with resources provided to them by family, community, school, teachers, and peers, and thrive in Canada "adding both economically and socially to the country in the years to come" (p. 198).

## Chapter 3

### 3 Theoretical Framework

In this study I draw on the theoretical lens of critical theory (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Giroux, 1983), CRT (Gay, 2000, 2002a, 2010, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), and EoC (Noddings, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999) to explore the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. These perspectives reflect an understanding of knowledge as culturally, socially, and politically constructed, coexisting within power imbalances, where minority cultures have been marginalized due to the predominance of a dominant culture (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2001; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1995; Paraskeva, 2016).

The first section of this chapter looks at Critical Theory (CT). CT provides the framework to reflect on the conditions offered for refugee SIFEs to participate in the co-construction of knowledge with their teachers and peers, negotiate their identities, navigate power relationships, and share their cultures in educational settings. According to Fantini and Weinstein (1969), “schools have been found reluctant ... to meet the children in their home territory” (p.6). From 1969, or maybe even before and until the present time, arguments have been established that schools in Western countries are failing disadvantaged students and calls have been made for education structures that are more appropriate for this student population (Paraskeva, 2016).

The second section of this chapter looks at EoC. Noddings (1984, 2003) argues that caring ought to be at the center of the educational system. The EoC theory through Noddings’ (1992) four moral educational modes provides the framework to explore, reflect on, and analyze the ways in which teachers of Syrian refugee SIFEs care and express care for their students in ELD classrooms.

The third section of this chapter looks at CRT theory. CRT theory provides the framework for examining the ways in which teachers integrate CRT practices throughout the ELD curriculum. The framework uses components of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Instruction adopted from Gay (2010).



The fourth section introduces a combined theoretical framework that positions CT, EoC, and CRT in a complementary way. The chapter ends with a brief summary.

### 3.1 Critical Theory

Critical theory conceived under the umbrella of the transformative paradigm provides a framework that helps to conceptualize the ways in which knowledge is created in the ELD classroom and under what conditions.

Eisner (1992) defined critical theory as “an approach to the study of schools and society that has as its main function the revelation of the tacit values that underlie the enterprise” (p. 314). He posited that critical theorists are “concerned with raising the consciousness of unsuspecting parents, students, and educators to the insidious and subtle ways in which an unequal and often unjust social order reproduces itself through the schools” (p. 314). Historically, critical theory dates back to the early 1920s. In the 1960s, critical theorists, such as Pinar, Apple, and Giroux, responded to social movements renouncing social inequalities in the United States. Those critical theorists among others have engaged in addressing a global reality jammed with poverty and inequality given the curriculum’s lack of relevance, the dominance of one Western curricular canon, and the schools’ alienation of minority students, as a leitmotif in the struggle for a more just society (Paraskeva, 2016). Their focus was on how school curricula, specifically hidden curricula, preserve and reproduce social stratification (Pinar, 1995). Paraskeva (2016) argues that “what is at stake, and always has been is knowledge (selected, diffused and evaluated)” (p. 15). In this sense, Critical theory examines how social inequalities are created and reproduced by highlighting relationships between knowledge, power, and schooling (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1992). Teachers have the power to value or undermine students’ knowledge and prior experiences. By doing so, they contribute in part and through educational institutions to the preservation and reproduction of a certain social order (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1992). Freire (2000) confirmed that dominance is retained by those “who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p.72). Freire’s (2000) ‘banking concept’ reveals how teachers are considered the ones possessing the knowledge, and how their roles consist of passing this knowledge on to students while disregarding those students’ prior experiences.

Stressing the same point, Giroux (1995) and Cummins (2001) argued that knowledge in schools is generated through inclusion and exclusion, and that knowledge of marginalized groups is usually undermined. In line with the above, Said (2003) explained the ways in which knowledge is produced in the light of the Occident/Orient dichotomy. A key to Said's 'Orientalism' is how knowledge is produced in light of the Occident/Orient polarity, where the Occident/West has produced its superior identity and culture through the invention of the Orient/East as its antithesis. The experiences of students from Arab backgrounds in Canadian classrooms gain interest in this context. Thus, it is important to look at the experiences and classroom practices of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their ELD teachers to examine how knowledge is created and whose knowledge is particularly validated. Critical Theory helps to uncover the ways in which Syrian refugee students are treated in mainstream schools, the circumstances under which learning opportunities are created for them, and the nature of power relationships that are reflected in the ELD classroom. Adherents of this theory are committed to understanding and challenging the relations of power that underlie the day-to-day communication between members of mainstream society (e.g., teachers, school administrators) and minorities.

Apple (2012), Giroux (2003), and Cummins (2000, 2011) asserted that education is neither neutral nor isolated from the politics and power of the broader society, rather it is political and designed to support and advance the interests of privileged groups in power. Apple (1996) and Giroux (2011) emphasized the role of rational educators and encourage them to be mindful of societal power dynamics as they relate to curricula practices. In order to interrogate curricula practices, Apple (2000) invited educators to seek responses to the following questions: what counts as legitimate knowledge? What knowledge is of most worth? Whose knowledge is of most worth? Further, Giroux (2003) and Apple (2004) argued that students learn, act, reflect, and construct knowledge on historically, politically, socially, and culturally relevant experiences. Thus, when these students feel that they are cared for, their cultures and languages have been integrated into the classroom practices, valued, and appreciated, they feel supported. Such practices tend to be more personally meaningful to them, interesting, and easily grasped (Gay, 2002b, 2018).

## 3.2 Ethics of Care

*Caring teachers expect (highly), relate (genuinely), and facilitate (relentlessly)*

(Gay, 2018, p. 57)

The EoC framework provides constructs for understanding the nature of teacher-student relationships in the classroom.

Noddings (1984) built on, modified, and expanded the work of Carol Gilligan, a care theory pioneer, and applied it to education (Bartell, 2011). An ethics of care in education emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between the teacher, the ‘one caring’, and the student, the ‘one cared for’, based on mutual respect, dialogue free of preconceived assumptions, investment in action, and knowledge of the other (Noddings, 1984, p. 30).

EoC theory considers developing caring teacher-student relationships as being essential to supporting students’ achievements (Noddings, 1992). Noddings (1984, 2003) highlighted that for the caring relationship to occur, there should be a shift from a focus on the educator to a focus on the student. Teachers dedicated to an ethics of care should have a sustained interest in the students’ welfare, work closely with them and adjust their instructions according to the best needs and interests of the learners. The caring educator ought to engage students in classroom activities that best suit their potentials and the students need to be responsive to the educator’s efforts (Noddings, 2003). Noddings (2003) distinguished between caring *for* and caring *about*. According to Noddings, caring about is characterized by some distance and is directed to the public realm. It also encompasses feelings such as empathy and sympathy, which the author considers the foundation for people’s sense of justice and an essential condition under which caring for can develop. Caring for is an attempt to respond to and accommodate the needs of the cared-for in a face-to-face interaction situation (Noddings, 1984, 2003). Noddings’ theory of EoC involves two areas of caring: *aesthetic* caring (caring about ideas and things) and *authentic* caring (caring for individuals). While aesthetic caring conveys the teacher’s professional role, such as teaching the content and delivering organized instructions, authentic caring addresses the teacher’s investment in the students themselves and stresses involvement in their personal lives apart from the curriculum (Noddings, 1984).

Valenzuela (1999) and Gay (2018) argued that educators may enact well-intentioned aesthetic caring, but nonetheless, this would still be considered insufficient for bringing about the change required in educational curricula, programs, and processes to act against academic inequities among CLD students because it lacks action towards changing the disadvantaged conditions of minority students. Likewise, Gay (2018) asserted that, whereas caring for or authentic caring goes beyond emotional attachment and feelings of sympathy, good intentions are essential and feelings remain important in pushing students to achieve academically. The author posited that most educators agree that caring is essential to working effectively with students, and thus teachers are called to characterize it in practice. In the same vein, Noddings (2013) commented on the relation between ethics and aesthetics, warning against losing “the ethical in the aesthetic” (p.22). The author believes that caring is the foundation of ethics and wonders about the ways in which caring may be “enhanced, distorted or diminished by the aesthetic” (p.21).

Noddings (1992) determined four means for achieving caring in educational settings: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. See Table 1 for a brief description of the four means for caring in educational settings.

**Modeling** means that teachers model and show in their behavior what it means to care (Noddings, 1992). In other words, they apply caring in their actions rather than just talking about it.

**Dialogue** refers to the engagement of teachers and students in reciprocal communication. For the dialogue to establish care, it should be free of preconceived assumptions and set the groundwork for trusting relationships between students and teachers (Noddings, 1992). A reciprocal dialogue requires “listening, a genuine respect for the partner in dialogue and a mutual commitment to inform, learn, and make decisions” (Noddings, 2006, p. 80). Also, Dialogue serves to demonstrate care by encouraging critical thinking and providing flexible yet challenging content (Hos, 2012; Noddings, 2003).

**Practice** involves providing students with opportunities for peer interactions and enactment of caring relationships with each other and with their teachers (Noddings,

1992). The quality of the interactions is considered as important as the academic outcomes.

**Confirmation** implies emboldening the strengths of the students and the good in them (Noddings, 1992). To do so, teachers need to know their students well and develop relationships with them based on trust. Noddings (1992) claimed that via confirmation, teachers encourage and shape the personalities of their students by assisting in the construction of their self-ideals.

**Table 1. Ethics of Care Four Moral Educational Modes**

Components	Brief Description
Modeling Dialogue	Exemplifying care <i>for</i> the students Establishing dialogue Free of preconceived assumptions, based on listening, genuine respect, and critical thinking
Practice	Enacting mutual authentic care interactions between students, students and teachers
Confirmation	Encouraging students, celebrating their strengths, and assisting them to construct their self-ideal

Source: *Adapted from Noddings (1992).*

With respect to this study, Noddings' (1992) EoC four moral educational modes delimit the nature of ELD teachers' and Syrian refugee SIFEs' relationships and interactions in the ELD classroom setting. Syrian refugee SIFEs are in dire need of care during the process of adaptation to the Canadian education system (Clark, 2017; Ghosh et al., 2019). Those who might not be familiar with the Canadian way of schooling would benefit from classroom practices implemented by caring ELD teachers who would model caring behaviors to students, listen to their concerns, engage them, and engage with them in mutually respectful dialogue. In addition, ELD teachers can exhibit care in practice by providing opportunities to discuss real life issues related to their students and by organizing group work activities through which students interact, cooperate with, and

encourage each other. Through confirmation, ELD teachers can build on their students' strengths and encourage them to comfortably engage and participate in the classroom. This creates a safe, reassuring classroom environment where students' cultural and ethnic identities are strengthened and confirmed. Also, in such classroom environments, students can interact with their peers and teachers respectfully, be who they are, and work at their own pace without being judged on the basis of linguistic, academic, religious or cultural traits. Ghosh et al. (2019) referred to Noddings' ethics of care and asserted that "care and compassionate relationships among students, teachers and community" (p. 116) were at the base of a successful experience in welcoming and catering for Syrian refugee SIFEs in a middle school in Manitoba. In brief, ELD teachers' approach to caring provides an insight into their support of Syrian refugee SIFEs' social, emotional, and academic needs in the ELD classroom (Gagné et al., 2017).

For teachers to establish genuine caring relationships with refugee students and create learning opportunities for them, they need first to become familiar with their students' cultural backgrounds and previous experiences to engage them in learning (Valenzuela, 1999). Bartell (2011) stated that caring teachers reject deficit-based perspectives and embrace instead asset-oriented perspectives based on the belief that CLD students are capable or have the ability to be capable learners. Thus, to limit perceiving refugee and CLD students from a deficit perspective, which might be a product of the broader society, teachers need to be open to questioning their preconceived assumptions and knowledge about refugees and CLD students' cultures, backgrounds, and experiences (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Hos, 2012). That said, Noddings (1992) posited that it is difficult to know others, their cultures, needs, and desires, especially when the partners in the relationship are two groups hierarchically segregated, one holding the power while the other is historically dominated. Bartell (2011) asserted that in this context CRT pedagogy reflects on teacher-student caring relationships and provides models of classroom practices for teachers to successfully address CLD students' various educational and cultural needs.

### 3.3 Culturally Responsive Teaching

CRT provides the framework to examine the ways in which ELD teachers enact (or do not enact) cultural responsiveness throughout the curriculum and create (or do not create) culturally responsive learning opportunities for Syrian refugee SIFEs.

CRT was originally proposed by Gay (2000) to address the sustained academic struggles of African American students in the United States and, since, has expanded to address the academic challenges and struggles of other marginalized populations (Gay, 2002, 2010). Gay (2018) stressed that “Culturally responsive teaching and learning are necessary and worthy pursuits” (2018, p. xxi). According to the author, CRT theory is based on a major assertion that cultural diversity is a strength, not a weakness.

Vavrus (2008) has defined CRT as an educational reform rooted in civil rights movements and the inception of multicultural education. The author (2008) posited:

CRT is best understood as a response to traditional curricular and instructional methods that have often been ineffective for students of color, immigrant children, and students from lower socioeconomic families. CRT calls attention to schooling norms where White middle-class values and expectations are privileged while other cultural, racial, and economic histories and community backgrounds are overlooked or degenerated. (p. 519)

Also, Ladson-Billings (1994) has defined *Culturally Relevant Teaching* as an educational model that integrates students’ wealth of knowledge and previous experiences into the curriculum and classroom practices. CRT is a student-centered pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, academically, socially, psychologically, emotionally, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It honors the cultural backgrounds of marginalized and minoritized students (Vavrus, 2008) and uses their cultural knowledge and prior educational experiences as a ‘*conduit*’ to promote the teaching-learning process (Gay, 2000). “It is fundamentally about the academic success of students of color” (Bartell, 2011, p.57), and it is based on the belief that when “academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (Gay, 2002, p. 106)

Gay (2018) contended that ethnicity and culture are “the *foundational anchors* of all other behaviors” (p. 10). She described the ways in which characteristics of the cultures of diverse ethnic groups are manifested in their expressive behaviors (e.g., speaking, learning, thinking) and are influenced by various mitigating variables (e.g., education, social class, gender, immigration). The relationships between culture and ethnicity, expressive behaviors, and mitigating variables are dynamic and dialectic. According to the author, the differences between students and schools’ cultural systems interfere with CLD students’ academic achievements. Gay (2002) used CRT pedagogies to bridge the inconsistencies between students’ home and school cultures and allow teachers to incorporate CLD students’ cultural values and experiences into the curriculum. Further, CRT is meant to preserve students’ home cultures and rise above the deficient effect of the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Thus, it is important that teachers understand cultural intersections and discontinuities and bridge the gaps among the cultural systems of schools and CLD students. Gay (2018) posited that “congruency between how the education process is ordered and delivered, and the cultural frames of reference of diverse students, will improve school achievement for students of color” (p. 12).

Gay (2018) further explained that “if education is, and it should be, devoted to teaching the whole child” (p.15), learning experiences, assessments, and achieving outcomes of CLD students ought to include and focus on aspects of social, cultural, moral, political, and personal development. As such, standardized test scores and cognitive performances alone fail to be adequate indicators of these students’ academic achievements.

Gay (2010, 2018) proposed five basic components of CRT: (a) cultural diversity knowledge base, (b) ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content, (c) culturally responsive caring, (d) culture and communication in the classroom, and (e) ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. See Table 2 for a brief description of the basics of CRT.



**Table 2. Components of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Instruction**

Component	Brief Description
Cultural Diversity Knowledge Base	Informing about the students' backgrounds, cultures, and prior experiences
Ethnic and Culturally Diverse Curriculum Content	Making curriculum content accessible to students by connecting it to their lives outside of school
Culturally Responsive Caring Culture and Communication in the Classroom	Caring <i>for</i> instead of <i>about</i> Students Understanding, accepting and respecting students' cultural communication styles
Ethnic Diversity in the delivery of instruction or Cultural Congruity in Teaching and Learning	Conveying knowledge through students' learning styles

Source: *Adapted from Gay (2010).*

### **Cultural diversity knowledge base (CRT # 1)**

Gay (2010, 2018) believes that teachers cannot teach those they do not know. Therefore, the first step towards teaching CLD students is to learn about students' backgrounds, cultures, prior experiences, and needs. According to Gay (2018), once teachers possess this knowledge, they ought to integrate it throughout the curriculum and instruction to create culturally responsive learning opportunities for their CLD students.

### **Ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content (CRT # 2)**

Ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content means that the curriculum "needs to be diversified (in form and substance) to reflect and maximize the knowledge, perspectives, experiences, and learning of students from different ethnic, racial, and social groups" (Gay, 2018, p. 196). Thus, cultures, histories, contributions, and heritages of different CLD groups are key to CRT, and their integration into the curriculum plays a pivotal role in improving academic outcomes of marginalized CLD students (Gay, 2018). Further, Gay (2018) asserted that "the most common source of curriculum content used in

classrooms is textbooks. Therefore, the quality of textbooks is an important factor in student achievement and culturally responsive teaching” (p. 143).

### **Culturally responsive caring (CRT # 3)**

Gay (2018) contended that caring teachers “expect (highly), relate (genuinely), and facilitate (relentlessly)” (p. 57). The author introduced the concept of culturally responsive caring as a fundamental part of the education process that focuses on caring for instead of caring about the wellbeing and academic success of CLD students. Caring about is related to attitude, while caring for is related to practice and action. These two aspects of caring are interrelated. According to Gay (2018), “while caring about conveys feelings of concern for one’s state of being, caring for is active engagement in doing something to positively affect it. Thus, it encompasses a combination of concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action” (p. 58).

### **Culture and communication in the classroom (CRT # 4)**

Good communication is the ultimate test (Gay, 2018). It is dynamic in nature, and thus teachers of CLD learners “need to continually monitor their communication habits” (Gay, 2018, p.140) while learning about their students. Gay suggested strategies to help convey culture and communication in the classroom. Those strategies include listening actively to and observing CLD students; employing various modes of communication in teaching; using books, movies, articles, films, and resources from the internet about different cultures and groups; and approaching interactions and conversations with the students and their parents with cultural humility and self-reflection.

### **Ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction or cultural congruity in teaching and learning (CRT # 5)**

To enact cultural responsiveness and respond to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction in the classroom, teachers need, among other things, to learn how their CLD students learn (Gay, 2018). This includes teachers knowing about students’ learning styles, ways of thinking, remembering, perceiving and problem solving. Teachers then ought to match their teaching styles to the learning styles of their students while self-

reflecting on their teaching to avoid previous assumptions (Gay, 2018). Further, culturally responsive teachers need to be aware of ways of using *cultural scaffolding* (Gay, 2002b, p. 109), that is to bridge, contextualize and integrate ethnically diverse students' cultures and experiences in classroom practices. According to Gay (2018), including cultural diversity content in curriculum and classroom instructions improves CLD's interest in academic subjects and motivation for learning while bridging gaps among home and school cultures. Consequently, academic learning and school subjects become more relevant. Gay (1975) suggested:

Ethnic materials should be used to teach such fundamental skills as reading, writing, and reasoning. Students can learn reading skills using materials written by and about Blacks, Mexican Americans, Italian Americans, and Jewish Americans as well as they can from reading "Dick and Jane". Ethnic literature ... can be used to teach plot, climax, metaphor, grammatical structure, and symbolism as well as anything written by Anglo Americans ... ethnic literacy, reflective self-analysis, decision making, and social activism ... are as essential for living in a culturally and ethnically pluralistic society as are knowing how to read and having a salable skill ... Ethnic content serves the purpose of bringing academic tasks from the realm of the alien and the abstract into the experiential frames of reference of ethnically different youth. (p. 179-181)

Gay (2018) gave an example in the study of math concepts and operations (e.g., pattern, statistics, and calculations). The author suggested that those concepts can be associated with concepts in everyday life and can engage students in exploring economic trends, consumer habits architecture, and population distributions of diverse ethnic groups.

With respect to this study, teachers would start first by knowing who and what they are teaching. Then, they would use cultural scaffolding to integrate Syrian refugee SIFEs' prior knowledge, culture, and language throughout the ELD curriculum while showing respect and care for those students' cultural communication styles and considering their learning styles in the delivery of instructions. Ladson-Billings (1994) and Bartell (2011) contended that caring and culturally responsive teachers educate their students about injustices in their world, prepare them to think critically about those injustices, and teach students how to identify them and act against them. Ladson-Billings (1995), in her article *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, illustrated an example that combines cultural responsiveness and authentic caring. In this article, teacher participants shared

that they cared for their African American students. They demonstrated caring towards them by expressing their concerns for the implications of their ways of teaching on their students' lives, the wellbeing of the community, and the unjust social order. They felt that promoting their students' academic success and helping them be "culturally competent and socio-politically critical" (p. 477) are their main responsibilities. As such, the way those teachers have perceived their roles in preparing their students to confront undemocratic and unfair social structures while thriving academically and being culturally competent sets an example for genuine caring and cultural responsiveness from a critical perspective.

### 3.4 Combined Theoretical Framework

CT, EoC, and CRT provide the framework for data analysis. Both these theories and the literature will help in interpreting the data. Critical theory, conceived under the umbrella of the transformative paradigm, provides a critical lens pointing to inequality in selecting, evaluating, and disseminating knowledge (Paraskeva, 2016). EoC considers ethical and moral aspects of teacher-student relationships (Noddings, 2003). CRT considers issues of culture, race, and power in the education of CLD learners (Bartell, 2011; Gay, 2018). EoC and CRT create means and conditions under which CLD students can flourish. They provide insight into how authentic caring teacher-student relationships and culturally responsive practices enhance students' learning in a safe classroom environment. Such classroom environments help refugee SIFEs to adjust to the Canadian school system and reach their potentials without sacrificing what defines them: their L1, unique identities, and cultural heritage (Cummins, Mirza & Stille, 2012). These theories introduce a change in the mutual dialogue between educators and students and in the ways in which teachers teach and perceive refugee SIFEs so as to better reflect on their own prior assumptions and perceive the wealth of knowledge, skills, cultures, and identities refugee SIFEs bring to the classroom. Thus, CT, EoC, and CRT combined offer possibilities for social change. In respect to this study, CT exposes, critiques, and challenges unjust classroom practices, whereas EoC and CRT bring about information on supportive pedagogies aimed at bettering the conditions for Syrian refugee SIFEs by reversing the effects of unjust practices in ELD classrooms.

### 3.5 Summary

This chapter maps the theoretical framework of the study based on CT, EoC, and CRT. These theories were found to be complementary. The combined theoretical framework enables the mise en place of a framework for the analysis of the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms, challenges, opportunities, and mutual relationships.

Madison (2012) argued, “We often rely on theory to interpret or illuminate a social phenomenon. However, though, theory may guide and inspire us in composing a lay summary, designing interview questions, or coding data, it is not theory but a methodological process that directs the completion of the task” (p. 12). The theoretical framework of this study enables the selection of methodology and methods that would allow a deeper understanding of the nature of students’ and teachers’ experiences from various angles. As such, theories were used to design the interview protocol, select documents and artifacts, and analyze the findings. The theoretical framework and methodological process of this study complement each other and lead towards a holistic view of the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the research methodology and methods. I start by detailing the study's qualitative case study approach followed by the positionality of the researcher. Then, I describe the research design, data collection, and data analysis methods. After, I delineate the study boundaries and recruitment processes. Finally, I wrap up this chapter with an overview on ethical consideration and a brief chapter summary.

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. The overarching question guiding this study is: What is the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students with interrupted formal education and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario?

The specific research questions are:

- (a) What practices and pedagogies are enacted in ELD classrooms?
- (b) What social structures and power relationships are reflected in ELD classrooms?
- (c) What are the resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms?

This study is an explorative qualitative case study. The study gathers multiple data sources including in-depth semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugee SIFEs, ELD teachers and other stakeholders, documents and artifacts collected from teachers and students, and the researcher's reflective notes.

#### 4.1 Qualitative Research Design

I used a qualitative methodology because it fulfills the purpose of my research. A qualitative approach endorses an interpretive practice that makes the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Also, it enables me to explore the nature of the experiences of my participants (i.e., ELD teachers, Syrian refugee SIFEs) from the perspectives of the

teachers, the students and other stakeholders directly involved in the education of refugee SIFEs in classroom settings. These perspectives enable me to make sense of, and interpret, these experiences in terms of the meanings the participants bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

A qualitative research process, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), encompasses three interrelated generic activities that go by various labels such as, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. A multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas or frameworks (theory-ontology) that defines a set of questions (epistemology) that puzzle him/her which leads the researcher to investigate them in specific ways (methodology, analysis) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.28).

Race, culture, and language are dynamics of the ELD classroom. These dynamics make a real difference in terms of how knowledge is constructed and produced in classroom settings. According to Apple (1982, 2012), Giroux (2011), and Mertens (2012), knowledge is created and produced within contexts of power and privilege. This research examines ways in which particular constructions of reality are privileged over others (Romm, 2015) and the ways in which those privileges (also read as imbalances) shape the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in the ELD classroom.

## 4.2 Qualitative Case Study

Creswell (2014) defined case studies as a design of inquiry through which the inquirer develops a thick description and “an in-depth analysis of a case often a program event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p. 14) followed by analysis of the data for themes or issues (Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1994). In a case study, the researcher illustrates the problem, identifies means to resolve it, and then sheds light on future needed studies.

Patton (2002) stated that “well-constructed case studies are holistic and context sensitive” (p. 447), and it is expected that researchers capture the complexity and nuances of each single case by looking for the details of interaction within its context (Stake, 1995). Yin (2012) differentiated between three types of case studies: exploratory, explanatory, and

descriptive. According to Yin (2012) and Stake (1995), time and activity bound the cases, and researchers collect information employing a variety of data collection procedures over a certain period of time. Bounding the case gives me the opportunity to conduct an in-depth inquiry (Stakes, 1995) of the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms.

Stake (2005) posited that “for a qualitative research community, case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts” (p. 444). Thus, the researcher ought to consider the case study’s social, political, cultural, and physical contexts. This research is an exploratory single case study; it explores the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. Exploratory cases are considered as an overture to social research (Tellis, 1997). This kind of naturalistic inquiry is rooted in real holistic contexts (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Exploratory cases recognize and adapt the uniqueness and complexity of a situation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007), lead to action, and solicit understanding of social phenomena in the social context of participants’ perspectives and experiences. Also, they utilize research methods that are adaptable, and open to contextual interpretation (Merriam, 1998). I used in-depth semi-structured interviews, documents and artefacts, and researchers’ reflective notes. Such methods permit consideration of how subjective interpretations are affected and wrapped up in the socio-political context (Carspecken, 1996).

### 4.3 Unit of analysis – The Case

Patton (2002) stated that the study design outlines the study unit (also referred to as the unit of analysis). Cases or units of analysis can be individuals, groups, programs, cultures, organizations, critical incidents, or anything that can be defined as a unique, specific, bounded system (Patton, 2002). Based on this study’s research questions, the unit of analysis is the critical incident of *group experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms*. Those experiences include ELD classroom practices and pedagogies, enablers and constraints to supportive pedagogies, and teacher-student relationships. Further, the case of this research is bounded in its specific context, which is the ELD classroom.



## 4.4 Positionality of the Researcher

This research gave voice to the participants as they were able to talk about their classroom experiences and stories. I used, as Madison (2012) suggested, all resources, privileges, and skills available to “resist domestication” (p. 6) of Syrian refugee SIFEs’ and ELD teachers’ voices and brought to light participants’ voices and experiences whose stories might otherwise stay restrained or out of reach. The author added that this is how researchers contribute to “emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice” (p. 6) by finding ways to “represent ‘others’ and their world for just purposes” (p. 15).

For me, highlighting the research participants’ experiences and transferring their voices is not enough. I addressed resources and constraints to supportive pedagogies, showcased improved experiences and best practices, and developed a positive agenda that articulates means to improve Syrian refugee SIFEs and ELD teachers’ classroom teaching and learning experiences in ELD classrooms in Ontario.

In this research, I stand between the second and the third stance that Carspecken (1996) – drawing on Michelle Fine (1994) – articulated in his book *Critical Ethnography in Education Research a Theoretical and Practical Guide*. The second stance – voices – enables researchers to reveal in their texts the “voices of discarded others who offer daily or local meanings, which seemingly contrast with or interrupt hegemonic discourses or practices” (1996, p. x). Voices and experiences of the other are considered vehicles for social representation. The third stance – activism – permits the researcher to “unearth, disrupt, and transform existing ideological and/or institutional arrangements” (Fine, 1994, p.17). In the second stance, the researcher’s self /positionality is often unarticulated, while in the third stance, the researcher’s political and epistemological positions are fully articulated, and researchers look more like political actors and interrogative beings than researchers (p. xi).

Madison (2012) confirmed that positionality is important because it allows us to acknowledge our biases, power, and privileges while renouncing power structures that our subjects encounter on day to day basis. Some scholars explain it as a process that permits researchers to turn back on themselves and question their positions of authority,

paradigm, ethics, and moral responsibility in relation with interpretation and representation.

Patton (2002) asserted that while science and quantitative methods accord great value to objectivity; qualitative methods which are “the antithesis of scientific enquiry” (p. 572), become inevitably subjective. Madison (2012) warned that subjectivity is not to be confused with positionality. Positionality encompasses subjectivity. On the field, we are subjects interacting and in dialogue with others. Positionality allows us to understand “how our subjectivity in relation to others informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of others” (p. 10). In other words, it makes it possible to understand how knowledge is produced intersubjectively.

I understand that how I perceive the world around me is shaped by my cultural belonging, Arabic Middle Eastern roots, previous and ongoing experiences, academic community and so forth and that my interaction with others in the field of research reflect my values, beliefs and the way I see and act within the world that surrounds me.

## 4.5 The Research and the Researcher

The desire to conduct a research study with Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms is informed in part by my cultural belonging, my experiences of war and immigration, and the teaching profession. My native roots, Canadian belonging, value orientations, and career choice give me a unique opportunity to contribute to the scholarly discourse about Syrian refugee students and their teachers in Canadian public schools.

I empathize with Syrian refugees as I believe in the human rights of fellow Middle Eastern Arabs. As an educator, I believe in equity in education and the right of everyone to wellbeing. I hope for quality education for every child and youth regardless of their race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and cultural belonging. Education settings should be welcoming, caring, and set in culturally responsive environments. Furthermore, I experienced war in Lebanon. My experiences of war and migration are in various ways similar to Syrian refugees’ experiences. I share with Syrian refugees resettled in Canada a common status of being a cultural, ethnic, and linguistic minority. English is neither my

first nor my second language. When I first settled in Ontario, I struggled with learning a new language, integrating into a new society, understanding a new culture, and experiencing belonging without losing my sense of identity. Yet the immigration experiences of Syrian refugees are also different. I acknowledge that Syrian refugees' pre, post, and migration experiences are unique to them. I have experienced war and displacement but was fortunate not to lose any of my loved ones or family to war. I did not live in refugee camps as some Syrian refugee children and youth did before migrating to Canada.

Further, as an educator in a public school in Canada with experience in teaching in multicultural environments since 1999 (5 years in Canada), I empathize with teachers of refugee students. I acknowledge the efforts teachers of refugee students deploy to create learning opportunities for their students and facilitate their integration as well as the challenges they encounter in light of ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural mismatches (Clark, 2017; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

As a result of my experience as an immigrant and an educator, I am connected to both the Syrian refugees and to their teachers, and I feel an obligation towards Syrian refugee children and youth. For me, contributing to the education of Syrian refugees is not a choice; it is rather a personal need (Carspecken, 1996). I am concerned about social equity and distribution of power in relation to race, ethnicity, language, and culture. I feel compelled to conduct a study that gives Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers voice into their classroom experiences and allows them to have their say regarding challenges, resources, and constraints. As such, I foresee my work as directed towards positive social change (Carspecken, 1996; Thomas, 1993).

In the past five years, I had the opportunity to volunteer in public schools in Ontario and to provide support for Syrian refugee SIFEs and their educators when working within a not for profit organization that caters to refugee children and youth in Lebanon. These opportunities opened my eyes to challenges that Syrian refugee students, as a cultural, ethnic, and linguistic minority, face when attending schools in settlement countries. They have also given me perspective on the challenges that teachers encounter in order to

accommodate the needs of refugee students and to create learning opportunities for them. These challenges motivated me to explore the nature of the experiences of refugee students and their teachers in ELD classrooms.

## 4.6 Research Design

In this section, I describe the methods that provided insight into the nature of the complex experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms. These methods helped me answer the research questions. Similar to Madison's (2012) descriptions, circumstances changed when I entered the field, but I was flexible, and I adapted and responded to emergent situations as they unfolded as suggested by Carspecken (1996) and Thomas (1993). The emergent situations included for instance the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result face-to-face interviews were not possible and were replaced by responding to the interview questions in the form of an open survey as per the participants' preference.

### 4.6.1 Data collection schedule and phases

Data was collected from September 30, 2019 through June 30, 2020. Exploring a complex social context such as a classroom context required the use of several methods of data collection.

### 4.6.2 In-depth semi structured interviews

I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2014) and used open-ended questions to gather data. Semi structured interviews, according to Carspecken (1996) is the ideal type of qualitative interviews. An advantage of this instrument is that it allowed me to have control over the questions (Creswell, 2014) and at the same time permitted high flexibility throughout the interview process (Carspecken, 1996).

Interviewer and interviewee engage in mutual partnership and dialogue while they construct and share memory, experience, and meaning together (Madison, 2012). The face-to-face option made it possible to capture details related to gestures, behavior, and personality of the participants. However, face-to-face interviews were not applicable after the COVID-19 pandemic. Three teachers preferred to respond to the interview questions

in writing, in the form of an open survey. Also, one student did not consent to audio recording, so I took notes at the time of the interview. Interviews with teachers and stakeholders were conducted in English. Interviews with students were conducted in Arabic upon the students' request.

Letters of information and consent forms were provided to all respondents (see Appendices D, E, F and G). The study had two sets of interview protocol: teachers' interview protocol (see Appendix H) and students' interview protocol (see Appendix I), in addition to an informal discussion guide for stakeholders (see Appendix J). The teachers' interview protocol and the informal discussion guide for stakeholders consisted of 11 questions each, while the students' interview protocol consisted of 8 questions. The teachers' interview protocol and the informal discussion guide for stakeholders and correspondent letters of information and consents (LOI/C) were in English; the students' interview protocol and correspondent (LOI/C) were provided in English and Arabic.

The teachers' interview protocol included questions related to demographic and background information (Question 1 to 3), experiences (Question 4), support (Question 5), challenges (Question 6), classroom practices (Question 7), curricula, pedagogy, and resources (Question 8). The students' interview protocol included questions related to students' educational experiences in previous countries (Question 1), educational experiences in Canada (Question 2), educational aspirations (Question 3), experiences in ELD classrooms (Question 4), relation between ELD classroom experiences and other experiences, background and family life (Question 5), tailored pedagogies, classroom practices, and curricula (Question 6). Remaining questions in both interview protocols asked about suggestions and recommendations to advance more meaningful learning for Syrian refugee SIFEs.

The responses of the student, teacher, and stakeholder participants that were pertinent to the research questions are presented. Pseudonyms were given to the study participants and schools.

According to Creswell (2014), the number of participants a researcher should interview depends on the qualitative design employed. I examined my participants' experiences

with numerous artifacts, interviews, and the researcher's reflective notes. I interviewed 10 high school Syrian refugee SIFEs, 5 ELD teachers, 1 ESL teacher, and 1 Support Worker in Schools (SWIS). Also, I conducted informal discussions with school administrators and SIFEs' subject teachers. I used an interview protocol as a guide during the interview process (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2014). Follow-up interviews were conducted with some teacher and student participants to seek more details, expand on emergent themes and ideas, and to give the participants the opportunity to comment on the study findings.

#### 4.6.3 Document data

I collected documents such as students' works and teachers' notes with consent of the participants. I considered alternative methods of data collection suggested by Creswell (2014), such as artifacts including teacher resource documents, learning worksheets, and samples of writing. With these documents in hand, I was able to understand the classroom practices and experiences of the study participants from different angles.

#### 4.6.4 Researcher's reflective notes

I took field notes in the form of an ongoing journal and memo writing (Flick, 2009) at the time of the interviews and immediately afterwards. This allowed me to write "reflective commentaries on some aspect of the data, as a basis for deeper analysis" (Flick, 2009, p.360).

### 4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis (see Figure 2) and data collection are simultaneous processes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I analyzed data from interview responses, artifact and document data, and the researcher's reflective notes. I reviewed data in a consistent manner and interpreted and coded them continuously. Also, I added, described, and interpreted emerging themes. Only relevant information to the research questions was sorted (Creswell, 2014). Hand coding was convenient (Carspecken, 1996) because it allowed me to repeatedly read and scrutinize my primary records. Low level coding, high level coding, and themes were generated.

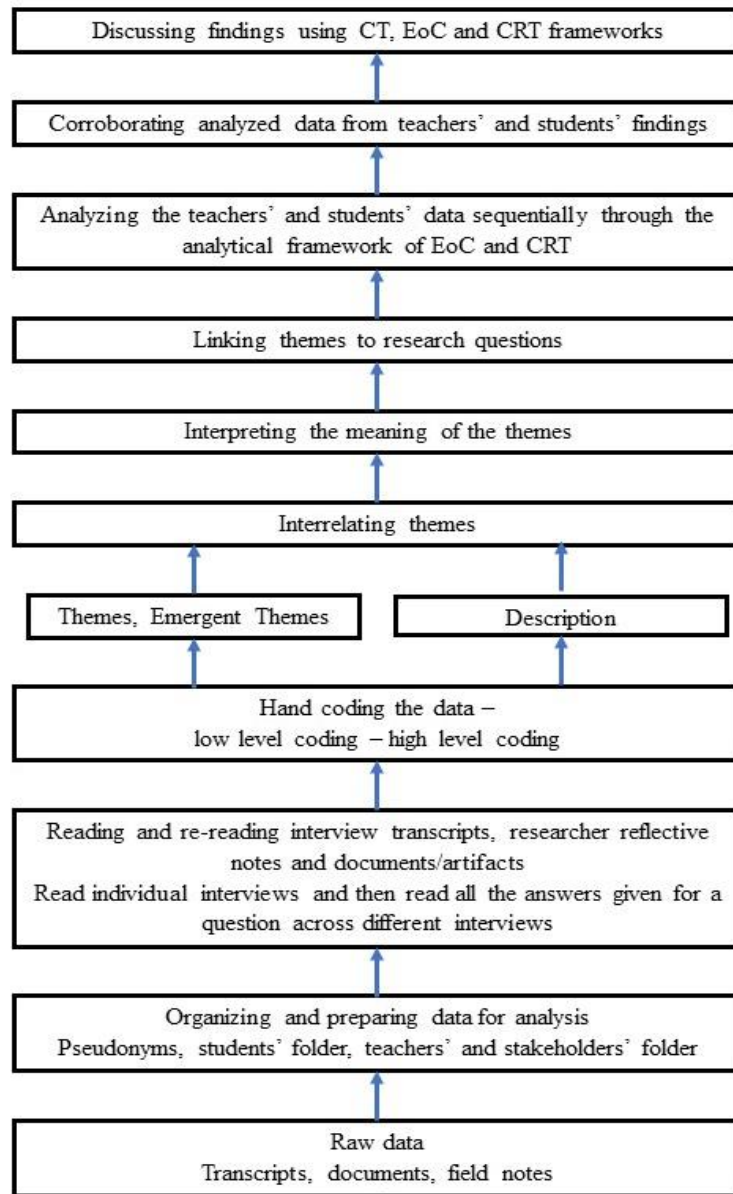
High level coding depends on a high level of abstraction, while low level coding is concerned with concrete ideas (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2014). I analyzed data inductively from the bottom up to establish a set of themes, then deductively to determine if additional information is needed or if more evidence was found to support existing themes (Creswell, 2014). Data was analyzed by matching and comparing data from field notes, interviews with teachers and students, and documents.

Per Madison's (2012) suggestion, I used theory in my analysis. In the analysis of the data for RQ 1, I employed Noddings' (1992) four moral educational modes and Gay's (2010) five components of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Instruction. In analyzing the data for RQ 2, I used CT. Using theory helped to direct attention towards the complexity of the nature of the study participants' experiences; highlighted the interconnectedness of knowledge, power, culture, language, identity, care, and students' experiences of classroom practices and curriculum; and provided insight and articulated ambiguities operating beneath appearance. This has been accomplished by linking my research findings to the socio-political context. I scanned the implicit values and theories implicated in the experiences of the study participants, and I explained the findings by reference to the broader sociopolitical system. The aim of data analysis was to gain insight into the nature of Syrian refugee SIFEs and ELD teachers' experiences, and the ways in which classroom practices, supportive pedagogies, and teacher-student relationships *are* enacted and the ways in which they *could be* carried out.

## 4.8 Reporting the Findings

I reported final findings descriptively (Creswell, 2014). Thick description was the means for communicating a holistic image (Creswell, 2014). I reported the findings from teachers' data and students' data in two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) which made it easier to corroborate analyzed data at a later stage. The Discussion chapter was a construction of the study participants' experiences, the meanings they attach to those experiences, and my attempt to make meaning of what happens in the classroom by linking the findings to the socio-political context. Final analysis drew upon "associated segments of interview transcripts" (Carspecken, 1996, p.163).

**Figure 2. Data Analysis Process**



## 4.9 Bounding the Study

As Creswell (2014) suggests, I selected participants and sites purposefully. Patton (2002) wrote that “purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p.230). This allowed me to have insight on the complex experiences of the study participants, understand their experiences, acquire in-depth learning about “issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton,



2002, p. 230), and answer the research questions. I applied Miles and Huberman's (1994) four aspects of sampling parameters in discussing study sites and participants.

### **Setting**

The setting of this study was ELD classrooms in two urban secondary schools in a mid-size Canadian city in Southwestern Ontario with high numbers of Syrian refugee SIFEs.

### **Actors, Research participants and recruitment criteria**

The study participants included ELD teachers, other school stakeholders working directly with Syrian refugee SIFEs, and high school Syrian refugee SIFEs. Students and teachers had to meet certain criteria to contribute to this study. The inclusion criteria can be described as follows:

For students (see Table 3)

- Age: participants' age ranged from 14-22
- Nationality and citizenship status: Syrian refugees – Syrian refugees with PR status – Canadian citizens with refugee background from Syria
- Previous education: students should have experienced interruption in their formal education
- Education at the time of data collection: students should be enrolled in an ELD class at the time of the study or have been previously enrolled in ELD programs in Ontario.

For teachers (see Table 4)

- Teachers should be teaching ELD classes during the time span of the study or had previously taught ELD classes with Syrian refugee SIFEs enrolled in those classes.

For stakeholders

- This includes ESL teachers and SWIS workers who are directly involved with the education of Syrian refugee SIFEs in school settings in Ontario.

## Events

The practices and activities of ELD teachers and Syrian refugee SIFEs in ELD classrooms, cultural and caring experiences associated with classroom practices, enablers and constraints, and teacher-student relationships paired with those experiences as articulated by the research participants were the objects of inquiry.

## Study Processes

The study processes included exploring the nature of classroom practices and supportive pedagogies specifically caring and CRT as enacted in ELD classrooms in two secondary schools in Ontario, describing teaching and learning practices, enablers and constraints, and examining teacher-student relationships.

**Table 3. Student-Participants' Demographics**

Pseudonym	Age	Current Grade	Current school	Education in Syria
Hala	16	11	Edugates SS	Grade 4/5
Maryam	19	12	Edugates SS	Grade 4
Sama	18	12	Edugates SS	Grade 4
Dunia	15	10	Edugates SS	Grade 6
Ameera	21	13	Edugates SS	Grade 8
Tala	16	11	Edugates SS	Grade 4
Sarah	16	9	Highway SS	none
Rami	22	11	Highway SS	Grade 8

Mortada	18	11	Highway SS	Grade 10
Seif	20	12	Highway SS	Grade 10
			Adult education	

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The sample of the students included female and male participants from two secondary schools in Ontario. Their ages ranged between 16 and 22 years old. They are all Syrian refugee youths who have experienced interruption of their formal education. At the time of the interview, student participants were attending a high school in Ontario, Grades 9 to 13. All student-participants either have attended or were attending ELD programs at the time of the interview. While some of them were still in ELD classes at the time of the interview, others completed ELD and were transferred to ESL, Academic English, or Adult and Continuing Education Schools. Students' interruption of formal education ranged between two to six years. One student (Sarah) did not attend school at all until she arrived in Canada. Resettlement countries before arriving to Canada varied between Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Germany. Student-participants arrived in Canada between 2015 and 2018.

### **Students' Profiles**

Students' profiles include demographic and background information, and refugee trajectory. Pseudonyms were used for purposes of guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality.

Hala goes to Edugates Secondary School. She is in Grade 11. She is 16 years old, turning 17. Hala was in Grade 4 when the war started. Hala's family fled the war to Lebanon, went back to Syria, then to Jordan before travelling to Canada as Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR). Hala did not attend school in resettlement countries.

Maryam was only 10 years old when she left Syria. She was in Grade 4. Maryam's family fled the war to Jordan where Maryam and her siblings tried to have some informal education; however, they experienced racism in Jordan (*"we experienced racism in schools in Jordan and we weren't allowed to go to public schools because of our refugee status"*). Maryam and her siblings could not get any formal education in Jordan because

of their refugee status. Now Maryam goes to Edugates SS where she is still attending ELD classes. Recently Maryam changed her school due to bullying.

Sama goes to Edugates SS. She was 15/16 years old when her family arrived in Canada. She is currently in Grade 12 and she is 18 years old. Sama is still taking ELD classes. Sama left Syria to seek refuge in Lebanon when she was in Grade 4. She did not attend school in Lebanon because her parents were not able to afford the tuition fees. Sama was out of school for five to six years.

Dunia finished Grade 6 in Damascus in a private school. Dunia and her family travelled to Lebanon during the war, then back to Syria, travelled to Turkey and from there to Canada. Dunia's previous education was mostly in Arabic. Dunia started as an ELD student and now she is in ESL.

Ameera is 21 years old. She is in Grade 13 at Edugates SS and she has been in Canada for two and a half years. Although she is registered in Grade 13, Ameera is still taking Grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 courses. She attended ELD classes when she first arrived in Canada and now, she is in ESL. Ameera left Syria when she was still in Grade 8 and so her formal education was interrupted for 5 years. Ameera and her family fled Syria to Jordan where they lived in a refugee camp.

Tala goes to Edugates SS. She is in Grade 11. She is 16 and a half years old. Tala wasn't sure if she completed Grade 4 or 5 in Syria. Just after the war started, her family decided to go to Lebanon where they lived in a refugee camp there, but she did not receive any formal or informal education in Lebanon, nor in Jordan where she headed with her family before travelling to Canada.

Sarah did not attend school in Syria. After the war, her family crossed the border to Lebanon. In Lebanon, she went to school for a couple of months, but she said that she did not learn anything. Now she goes to Highway SS and she is in Grade 9. She is currently still taking ELD courses.

Mortada goes to Highway SS. He is in Grade 11. When he arrived in Canada, he started as an ELD student. His family travelled from Syria to Saudi Arabia and then to Canada. In Syria and Saudi Arabia, he learned mostly in Arabic.

Rami goes to Highway SS. He studied in Syria from Grades 1 to 8 and fled the war with his family to Jordan in 2013 where he studied Grades 9 and 10 mostly in Arabic. Then, he travelled to Germany and this is where his education was interrupted for two and a half years due to linguistic barriers. When he arrived in Canada, Rami was almost 20 years old but academically he was still in Grade 11. Now Rami goes to high school and works to support his family.

Seif went to Highway SS where he attended ELD and ESL courses. Now he is taking Grade 12 courses at an adult and continuing education school. He studied until Grade 10 in Syria. Seif and his family fled the war in Syria to Lebanon, went back to Syria and then travelled to Canada. In Lebanon, Seif needed to work to support his family and because of that he was out of school for two years. In Lebanon, Seif attended a private school when his father was employed and studied there for less than a year. Currently, Seif studies and works to support his family.

**Table 4. Teacher-Participants and Other Stakeholders' Demographics**

Pseudonym	School	Role
Suzan	Edugates SS	ELD Teacher
Lynn	Edugates SS	ELD Teacher
Cynthia	Edugates SS	ELD Teacher
Rina	Edugates SS	SWIS
Jennifer	Highway SS	ELD Teacher
Jasmine	Highway SS	ESL Teacher
Mark	Highway SS	ELD Teacher

The sample of the teachers and stakeholders included female and male participants: five ELD teachers, an ESL teacher and a SWIS worker. Teacher participants are not necessarily the teachers of the student participants. Teacher participants had different academic backgrounds. At the time of the interview, they were all teaching/working with high school Syrian refugee SIFEs.

### **Teachers' and Stakeholders' Profiles**

ELD Teachers' and stakeholders' profiles include demographic and background information, history, cultural and educational background related to teaching or working with refugee SIFEs. Pseudonyms have been used for purposes of guaranteeing anonymity.

Suzan is a current ELD teacher at Edugates SS. She has a Bachelor of Arts in History and a Bachelor of Education (BEd) in teacher education. She taught ESL abroad for a couple of years. Suzan asserted that there is one thing that made her more empathetic towards her refugee SIFEs and it is knowing her father's experience as an immigrant.

Lynn is an ELD teacher at Edugates SS. She completed Teachers College for high school at a university in Ontario. She has an Additional Qualification (AQ) in ESL. Lynn mentioned that her background in teaching has mostly been in special education, and that when she started teaching, it was by chance that she was hired for ELD for her first contract line; she said that she loves it. Lynn grew up as a child of immigrant parents. Lynn witnessed as a kid her father struggling to navigate through the Canadian education system.

Cynthia is an ELD teacher at Edugates SS. She has a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Education and has attended couple of AQ courses. She started as a tutor, taught in elementary schools and adult schools, then started teaching ELD and has been doing so since. English is not Cynthia's first language nor her second language. She started to learn English in Grade 6. Cynthia also speaks Arabic.

Jennifer is an ELD and ESL teacher at Highway SS. She completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees in English Language and Literature and then she completed a

Bachelor of Education at a university in Ontario. Jennifer taught ESL in another country for a while before teaching ELD. In Canada, Jennifer taught primarily high school ESL students and a large portion of her students “*have been Syrian refugees or students who have had gaps in their education.*” Some of Jennifer’s life experiences, she said, such as having many friends who immigrated to Canada as refugees when they were children, have helped her to understand, celebrate, and engage with the diversity of experiences found in her classrooms.

Mark is an ELD teacher at Highway SS. He has extensive experience in teaching ESL and ELD students. He is specialized in Intermediate and Senior (IS) History and ESL. Mark has many additional qualification courses and is a Tribes<sup>5</sup> certified teacher. At the time of the study, he had been teaching ELD for many years. During those years, Mark taught ELD students from different countries and various backgrounds, but recently his ELD students have been predominantly from Syria.

Jasmine, a former refugee from the Middle East, is an ESL teacher at Highway SS. She specializes in History and ESL. Jasmine has extensive experience in teaching newcomer and refugee SIFEs, especially those who have experienced interruption of formal education from two to six years. Apart from her job as a teacher, Jasmine said that she had also been heavily involved with community work related to settlement of newcomers to Canada, settlement workers in schools and in libraries, and local agencies that provide support to newcomers. Jasmine also attended some ESL classes upon her arrival in Canada three decades ago and thus according to her, she is fully aware of the sensitivity and needs of refugee students.

Rina is a Settlement Worker in Schools (SWIS). She works at Edugates SS. Rina’s main responsibility is to follow a co-ordinated case management approach in providing direct service work to newcomer students and their families at secondary schools. Rina’s duties,

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<sup>5</sup> “Tribes is a process that fosters the development of collaborative and academic skills by creating a caring environment and delivering curriculum content in an active and student centered manner...The Tribes process includes numerous teaching strategies...these strategies help teachers to build group inclusion and deliver rigorous curriculum in all areas” (Educational Facilitators, n.d.)

as stated by her, include contributing to the wellbeing of newcomer youth through addressing needs, facilitating access to programs and eliminating barriers to participation; facilitating access to school activities, committees, councils; empowering youth through identifying strengths, building on their resilience and coping strategies to ensure optimal adaptation; and addressing socioemotional needs of newcomer youth in one-on-one sessions as well as in group activities.

## 4.10 Recruitment Strategies

After obtaining the ethics approval for this study, I contacted the key study informants, who were a school support worker and a teacher working at a secondary school in Ontario with a high number of Syrian refugee SIFEs enrolled in ELD Classrooms. They forwarded recruitment information to potential student and teacher participants. Potential participants who were interested contacted the researcher directly. I used snowball sampling (Flick, 2013) to have reference to and recruit relevant potential study participants from the community. As such, participants from the community forwarded recruitment information to other potential participants who then contacted the researcher. Only participants who met the inclusion criteria participated in the study.

## 4.11 Trustworthiness

Carspecken (1996) noted that issues of research trustworthiness are ongoing throughout the study process. Data collection and data analysis ought to abide by certain quality criteria requirements. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) are necessary to establishing trustworthiness.

Credibility is demonstrated when a researcher explores and clearly identifies “a problem or describe[s] a setting, process, social group, or pattern of interaction” in depth (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 201). To ensure credibility, I employed the following strategies (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2014)

1. Triangulation of data: I collected data through various sources (Carspecken, 1996). This included document data, in-depth semi structured interviews and researcher’s reflective notes. According to Priestley (Priestley, M, personal



communication, March 30, 2017), the purpose of triangulation is to establish trustworthiness and to increase the richness of collected data. The classroom setting is a complex social space (Seidel, Stürmer, Blomberg, Kobarg, & Schwindt, 2011), and thus, when triangulating data, contradictions have emerged. These contradictions are opportunities that I highlighted, tried to understand and disclosed to the readers.

2. Member checking: I conducted member checks with teacher participants. I sent the interview transcripts to teacher participants who participated in face-to-face interviews and asked them to suggest changes. With students, the process was different because the interviews were conducted in Arabic and then translated and transcribed in English. After the face-to-face interviews, I went through key information with the students at the end of the interview process to clarify my understanding of the students' responses to the questions. Follow up interviews were also conducted with participants in the study, providing opportunity for them to comment on the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2014). Ongoing dialogue with my participants regarding my interpretations of the data equalized power relations (Carspecken, 1996) and ensured trustworthiness.

3. Long-term engagement: I used extended engagement (Carspecken, 1996) with participants to immerse myself in the field. I volunteered in public schools with large numbers of Syrian refugee students and I provided support to Syrian refugee SIFEs and their educators in informal education contexts.

I collected data until saturation.

4. Peer debriefing: I employed peer debriefing (with colleagues and the study supervisors) to check biases and missing information in analyzing the findings.

5. Clarification of bias: Critics might accuse researchers of projecting their own beliefs onto their participants (Carspecken, 1996). Thus, clarification of the researcher's positionality and bias has been crucial. I was aware of my part in the social context and so I always acknowledged my biases and influence on the

study. I reflected on how my personal, professional and cultural background might potentially have shaped my interpretations of reality (Creswell, 2014) and as such my awareness became part of the interpretive process (Carspecken, 1996).

Transferability is ensured when a researcher “argue[s] that findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 201). To ensure transferability, I provided a thick, rich, and detailed description of my findings as such to provide a plausible framework for comparison for anyone who is interested in transferability (Flick, 2013). In this study, generalization is not my aim.

Dependability is demonstrated when the study is thoroughly described as in such cases it is replicated and so should yield similar results. To ensure dependability (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), I provided a detailed account of the research focus, purpose, researcher’s role and positionality, basis of selection, and sites from which data were collected (Creswell, 2014). Also, I triangulated multiple sources of data (2014), reported in detail data collection and data analysis strategies and findings so that an accurate and reliable picture of the methods was provided. I analyzed negative cases (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2014), checked the transcripts to ensure that no mistakes were made, and ensured that there was no shift in the meaning assigned to the codes.

Confirmability indicates that the researcher should demonstrate that “the findings reflect the participants and the inquiry itself rather than a fabrication from the researchers’ biases or prejudices” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 201). To ensure confirmability, I situated my research and findings in the literature, and I reflected on my biases.

## 4.12 Ethical Considerations

The ethical responsibility of the researcher is to be aware of critical and various dimensions of multicultural diversity when conducting cross-cultural studies (Romm, 2015). First and foremost, research participants’ wellbeing, desires, needs, values and confidentiality were considered and respected (Romm, 2015).

I submitted an ethics application to the University of Western Ontario's Research Ethics Board (REB) and was granted approval to carry on with the study (see Appendix C). Then, I contacted the key informants in my study. To protect research participants, this study abided by all the ethical standards and protocols established by the University of Western Ontario's Research Ethics Board (REB) and the *Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct*. Consent forms were conceived per the ethical standards of the University of Western Ontario, and highlighted the purpose of the research, data collection process, use of data, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality and other deemed relevant information to ensure informed voluntary consent.

I made sure that my participants understood that participation in this research was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time and that data would be discarded from the study should they wish to decline (Tri-Council, 2014). Aligning with the REB processes, all participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity; all consent forms, audio records, interview notes and observation notes were filed and kept in a locked safe throughout this study. All files were collected, coded, analyzed and kept on a private computer protected by a password. When peer debriefing was used, no real names were revealed nor the real school sites. Through these processes, I maintained participants' identities as confidential. Participants will receive copies of final reports upon request.

#### 4.13 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined methodology and methods, research design, positionality of the researcher, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario public high schools. Recommendations included suggestions to educators and stakeholders towards more supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive classroom practices.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Research Findings – Teachers’ Experiences

This chapter and Chapter 6 outline the teachers’ experiences and the students’ experiences respectively. I analyzed the data from teachers and students sequentially and only corroborated them at a later stage of the study. Both sets of data were analyzed through the frameworks of CT (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Giroux, 1983), EoC (Noddings, 1992, 2003), and components of CRT and Instruction (Gay, 2010, 2018). In this chapter, I respond to all three research questions from the teachers’ perspectives. In Chapter 6, I respond to the research questions from the students’ perspectives. Each finding chapter is organized chronologically by research question. Both chapters describe the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms.

#### 5.1 Overview of Teaching Experiences

The ELD teachers, ESL teacher and SWIS worker participating in this study were involved directly in the education of Syrian refugee SIFEs in two secondary schools in Ontario. Terms that teachers have heard used when referring to curricular or content specific to the cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities, and interruption of students’ education were diverse. For instance, Cynthia shared that the terms she was aware of are “ELD, ESL, ELL, SIFE,” Mark mentioned “*differentiated instructions, assessment and language barriers,*” while Lynn said, “*equitable practices... differentiation.*” Teachers agreed that their postsecondary education at university and Teachers College did not prepare them to teach ELDs. Teachers at Edugates SS described explicitly the shortcomings of the ELD curriculum in addressing the needs and challenges of Syrian refugee SIFEs. Teachers at Highway SS indirectly highlighted those shortcomings by emphasizing the necessity of modification of curriculum content and expectations, differentiation of instructions, accommodations, and creation of new programs for Syrian refugee SIFEs who were not graduating, as Mark put it. Teacher participants said that they contributed to the creation of safe classroom environments for Syrian refugee SIFEs based on respect and trust. In addition, participants described varied resources and

constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT and highlighted successes in teaching and learning in the ELD classrooms. Despite all the constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT in ELD classrooms, and in line with research by Gay (2018), data from teacher interviews and the researcher's reflective notes revealed that all teacher participants were able to develop caring, non-hierarchical power relationships with Syrian refugee SIFEs, enact cultural responsiveness, maintain high expectations of their students, genuinely relate to them and facilitate their learning and development.

## 5.2 Practices and Pedagogies Enacted in ELD Classroom

In this section, I describe the findings that relate to RQ 1: what are the practices and pedagogies implemented in ELD classrooms? In the interview, I asked the teachers questions about their classroom practices (How do you incorporate classroom practices that are tailored to these students?) and curricula, pedagogies and resources used (What curricula, pedagogy, resources do you use or follow?). Themes from the data that helped answer RQ 1 are (a) ELD curricula and resources, (b) ELD classroom practices (including the newly implemented pilot *Guided Reading Program*), and (c) pedagogies implemented in the classroom. The following subsections are organized by the themes that have emerged from the data.

### 5.2.1 ELD curricula and resources

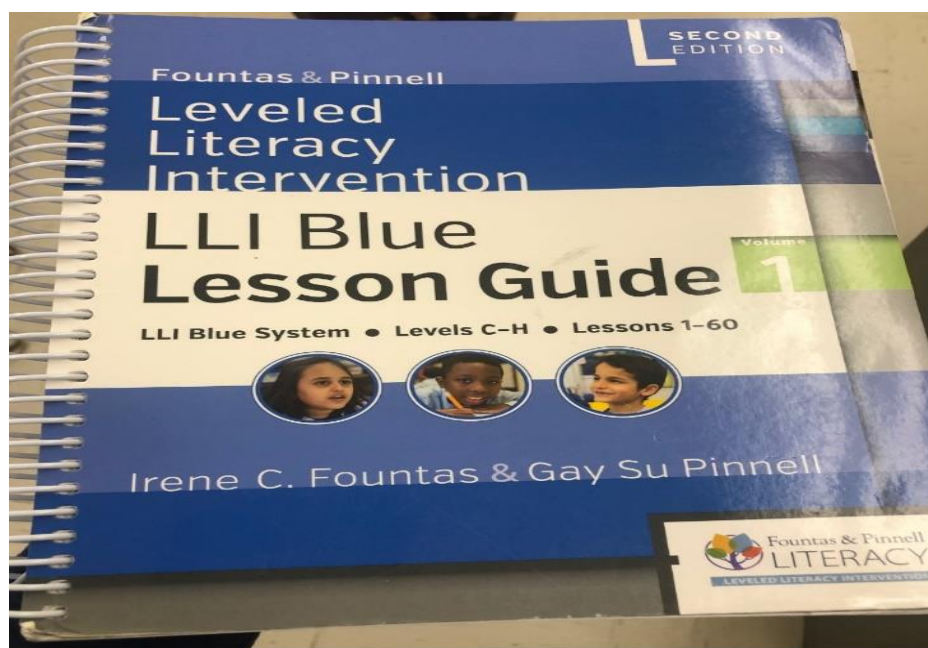
This subsection outlines what curricula and resources teacher participants used to teach Syrian refugee SIFEs. Findings revealed that the ELD programmatic curriculum does not represent Syrian refugee students' ethnic, linguistic, and cultural characteristics.

Answering the Question: Which of these [ELD] curricula reflect your students' culture, language, religions (and/or ethnicity), and interruptions? Teacher participants at Edugates SS said: "*Unfortunately it doesn't.*" While teachers at Edugates SS provided a direct and clear response to this question, teacher participants at Highway SS, given their experiences in ELD classrooms, revealed that they made major modifications to bridge the gaps between the programmatic curriculum and their students' needs.

At both schools, teachers used the ESL/ELD curriculum for Grades 9-12 and utilized modification and accommodation strategies to create learning opportunities that

responded to ELD students' academic and sociocultural needs and interests. Cynthia's (at Edugates SS) response to the question "What curricula, pedagogy, or resources do you use or follow?" was representative. She said: "*modified curriculum expectations in addition to various accommodations.*" Jennifer's and Jasmine's responses corroborate Cynthia's response. Both Jennifer and Jasmine explained that they blend and modify multiple resources and material, such as media resources, curricular documents and documentaries to create a curriculum content that represents their students' culture and needs. Suzan and Lynn used the ESL/ELD Ontario curriculum document, but they also used *Funtas & Pinnel Leveled Literacy Intervention – LLI Blue Lesson Guide* (Figure 3) as the foundation for their lesson planning. Those teachers explained that the LLI Blue Lesson Guide is adapted to the elementary expectations. Lynn and Suzan used this guide and modified the lessons according to the levels of their students and the expectations of the ELD curriculum. Mark did not provide a response to the aforementioned question, but rather, he focused more on classroom practices and pedagogies enacted in the ELD classroom than the curriculum itself.

**Figure 3. Funtas & Pinnel Leveled Literacy Intervention - LLI Blue Lesson Guide**



### 5.2.2 ELD classroom practices

This subsection provides insights into ELD classroom practices such as literacy, numeracy, group work, and basic behavioral skills that teacher participants described during the interview sessions and in the surveys. I accorded particular attention to a literacy program, the Guided Reading Program, that two teacher participants (Lynn and Suzan) described because first, this was the only literacy program that teacher participants implemented in ELD classrooms to address the gaps in students' literacy, and second, because this program was said to have positive outcomes and lots of advantages for students.

ELD teachers teach literacy and numeracy in the ELD classes. This study explored both literacy and numeracy practices in ELD classrooms, but with more emphasis on literacy and English language learning. According to teacher participants, in ELD classrooms, students work in groups most of the time, and teacher participants said students like it. Cynthia (Edugates SS) said: "*They are too much into group work*" and Jennifer (at Highway SS) posited: "*I ... make a literacy activity engaging enough that groups get competitive.*" Depending on the number of the students, some ELD classes have three adults (e.g., the ELD teacher, peer helpers and volunteers), while others have only two adults.

In addition to literacy and numeracy, ELD teachers teach basic classroom behavior knowledge and classroom routines. Nevertheless, teacher participants shared with me that high school teachers in general do not expect to teach classroom behavior knowledge and routines at secondary school, assuming that those basic practices or "*the house rules*" (as Suzan put it) are taught and assimilated by students in earlier elementary school years. The explanation that Cynthia provided is representative of other teachers' responses. Cynthia said:

*So, most of these kids haven't been to school, some of them had never attended school. We had kids who only knew how to write their names in Arabic. They did not even know how to write their last name in their first language. Some of them have been out of school for nearly 5 years because when the war started, they were moving from country to country where they weren't allowed to go to school because of their status, I guess so. It was a challenge just to teach them that they*

*need to come in on time, sit down, grab the pencil, the paper, be quiet in order to hear instructions. Teaching them the basics was a struggle, you think they need a day or two to learn it, like come in, open your book, and listen to your teacher for instructions ... It takes weeks and we started to understand why, and with time we started to realize that they have a lot more going on.*

Lynn, Cynthia, Suzan, and Jennifer particularly provided detailed descriptions of the ELD classroom practices. According to them, ELD students spend the first part of their day in ELD classrooms learning basic literacy (alphabet, syllables, reading, writing, phonics, weather, how to write a sentence, a paragraph, read a small story, recipes, etc.) and numeracy (numbers, counting, time, addition, subtraction, shapes etc.), each according to their own levels as described by the teachers. They also learn presentation skills (e.g., PowerPoint). Jennifer asserted that she breaks down lessons into 20-minute chunks and tries to integrate as many short audio or video clips into the lessons she teaches; this according to her has helped students stay focused. The second half of the day students take mainstream courses. The teacher participants mentioned specific classroom practices that are key for ELD students, among those: care, differentiation, enthusiasm, modification, and empathy. Those practices were said to be at the base of supportive pedagogies that teacher participants enacted in ELD classrooms.

### **The Guided Reading Program**

Suzan and Lynn implemented the Guided Reading Program in their ELD classrooms. This program was a pilot project for the school board. At the interview meeting, both teachers seemed very excited about the project and talked about it with lots of enthusiasm and pride. Lynn and Suzan noted that this program was adopted from elementary schools and adapted to the levels of ELD students and ELD curriculum expectations. According to the teachers, this program is incentive-based, and it builds on each student's individualized skills. Through this program, teachers teach ELD students to set goals and work towards achieving them. They also teach them ethics and give them the time needed to accomplish tasks and assignments, which reduces students' stress and improves their outcomes. Suzan and Lynn alternated in the description of the program and its many advantages. (For a detailed description of the Guided Reading Program, see Appendix A - Excerpt A).



### **Advantages of the Guided Reading Program**

The Guided Reading Program had many advantages according to Lynn and Suzan. Suzan and Lynn confirmed that it was tailored 100% for refugee SIFEs. They explained that this program, along with the class organization that it allowed, had lots of advantages for both teachers and students: the program was incentive-based, it allowed time for students to progress, helped students to set their own goals and work towards reaching them, helped them become familiar with daily classroom routines, gave them leadership roles, which boosted their confidence, and created a safe classroom environment for all students. Further, since the implementation of the program, Lynn and Suzan asserted that they felt less stressed because of all the benefits it provided to students. In addition, Suzan explained the incentive-based side of the program. She said: *“So you know if students may be stuck on E when they move to F for that first time it is a big celebration because they know that they have been stuck on that letter forever.”*

Further, Lynn and Suzan said that this program helped establish a routine in the classroom, and the routine is predictable and safe. Lynn explained that it created a safe, judgement-free environment for the students where even the shyest ones could express themselves and collaborate with others: *“it is that structure too, the routine what you do every single day: this is what we are doing; it is predictable and it is safe ...it allows you to hear the shyest students in the classroom too who are naturally shy when they speak.”* In addition, Suzan mentioned that with this class organization and lesson plan, *“the students know the routine more than the teacher usually does”* and this, according to her, puts them in leadership positions that build on their confidence in occasions, for instance, where the ELD teacher is replaced by a substitute teacher.

Add to that, the Guided Reading Program allowed more personalized practices and more time to grasp the ideas and concepts in a safe environment. Suzan said: *“I am willing to give them the time to work on those writing aspects....”* Cynthia also added that *“it makes a big difference to give them more time”*.

### 5.2.3 Pedagogies used in ELD classrooms

In analyzing the data, the focus was predominantly on caring and CRT pedagogies used in ELD classrooms. However, the nature of the semi-structured interview questions kept enough room for the teachers to share other pedagogies they have used in ELD classrooms, if applicable. ELD teacher participants did not name the pedagogies they used, but instead, they naturally described the ways in which they usually create classroom practices and learning opportunities for their ELD students, relate to them in ELD classrooms, and build relationships with them.

I employed Noddings' (1992) EoC four Moral Educational Modes to analyze data related to the ways in which ELD teachers include caring, if any, into their classroom practices and teacher-student relationships. I also employed Gay's (2010) five Components of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Instruction to report on how ELD teachers integrate Syrian refugee SIFEs' socio- cultural traits and academic needs and interests throughout the curriculum. Findings from teachers' interview data revealed that teacher participants used caring and CRT pedagogies in their ELD classrooms. Due to the abundance of examples, I have limited myself to representative, exemplar, different, and unique examples.

#### **Caring Pedagogy**

*“A student cannot learn from a teacher they don't like. This is especially true for these students. It is crucial to build a positive caring relationship and help them feel welcome, safe and cared for, before any curriculum expectations.” (Cynthia)*

The study's findings revealed that teacher participants built caring relationships with their Syrian refugee SIFEs. They all practiced aesthetic and authentic caring in their ELD classrooms, while some of them (particularly Lynn and Suzan) showed authentic care for their Syrian refugee SIFEs beyond the walls of the ELD classroom. Teacher participants modeled caring, conducted dialogues free of preconceived assumptions with their students, and encouraged their students through confirmation. When presenting the caring relationships by teachers, I used the perspective of the four Moral Educational Modes

(Noddings, 1992). Thus, this section is organized by those four Moral Educational Modes: modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation.

### **Modeling**

Modeling means that teachers care for the students, show them that they care, and apply caring into their actions (Noddings, 1992).

In the following example, Suzan modeled care for one of her students. She said:

*You know your children, you know when they are having an off [bad] day, you know how to talk with them, and with the students in our classroom we know when they are having a bad day, we know how to deal with them... One of my favorite students, not that I have one favorite student, I pushed him too far, and he stopped to talk to me for 2 weeks, and then I didn't stop.... I'll go up to him and ask, "how are you doing today?" and if he ignored me it was his choice, but I will still go up to him even though he was mad, he knew that I cared because I went to him every day.... They don't question that we care, they know.*

Suzan's experience with her student showed that she did not give a lecture about caring, but simply put caring into action.

Cynthia, for instance, makes sure that her students feel that they are valued. She said: "I get them to understand that they all have something to contribute to our discussions."

In the following example, Mark described how he approached the tardiness of one of his Syrian refugee SIFEs to ELD classes:

*I had a student who perpetually came late to class and did not see much regard in coming late every day. The student was 19 years old and did not seem to grasp the importance of coming on time. When in class, his production was inconsistent and did not show much initiative in terms of doing work at home. Instead of being confrontational with this student, I took them aside and explained how concerned I was that they were not progressing or showing care in the classroom when they came late. I expressed how I wanted them to do well so they could have a better future in the class. Upon showing this concern and going about it this way, the student began attending class on time and was much more productive. Having a caring adult was very important for this student to help them reach their potential.*

Mark's experience shows not only modeling care and practice of care but also sheds light on the ways in which he interacts and communicates with his students in ELD classrooms.

### **Dialogue**

Dialogue means that teachers engage with their students in a reciprocal communication based on respect and free of preconceived assumptions. Teachers at both schools described the ways in which they interact with their students and normalize mistakes to reduce judgement. Suzan, Jennifer, Mark, and Lynn gave examples showing how they establish such dialogues with their ELD students.

Suzan said: *"We are just ourselves...so the kids they really say... little things and we bring it out ... Those things are what show to the kids that we care and... I don't think anyone of them will question it. (see Appendix A - Excerpt B).*

Further, teacher participants mentioned normalizing mistakes as a way to reduce judgements. Mark mentioned that it is important *"having students more comfortable with expressing themselves and feeling comfortable to make mistakes."* In Suzan's, Jennifer's, and Lynn's ELD Classes, making mistakes was also normalized. Lynn asserted:

*We are very open about our mistakes because we are not grammar teachers to begin with, and I will be like "I don't know how to spell this, Miss Santa how do I spell this?" and they think it is funny because we show them that we are not perfect, we are vulnerable, we make mistakes and it is fine.*

This means as well, according to Suzan, *"if you ask for help, it is ok no one is going to judge you."* Suzan also commented *"they say stuff (words in Arabic) to me and I have to repeat back to them, and it is completely wrong and I am like 'oh...no' I can't do it I feel I am not saying it right."* Similarly, Jennifer said *"I apologize and change my approach if I have misrepresented or offended any learner. I frequently look for feedback."*

Such teacher-student interactions in an environment free of pre-conceived assumptions fosters mutual authentic caring practices between teachers and students and students themselves in ELD classrooms.

## Practice

Practice caring means to actively enact mutual authentic care interactions with teachers and peers. Teacher participants shared various examples in which they exemplified practice of care. This included teachers approaching issues at school with their students the way they do it at home with their own children and providing classroom practices that enable students to interact with, help, and support each other while caring for their peers and teachers.

Lynn and Suzan provided many examples of their trying to do the best for their students because they truly care for them and do their “*best to make them happy*,” as Suzan put it. Lynn and Suzan provided support when students had “*bad days*.” Suzan said: “*we talk ... with the students in our classroom we know when they are having a bad day, we know how to deal with them.*” Further, Suzan hinted that care ought to be mutual when she added, “*they [students] also know that it is a two-way street.*” Lynn agreed and added that when she experienced bad days, she was honest with her students because she thought that honesty is very important for better teacher-student communication and mutual caring. Lynn asserted:

*I find it is a much better to say ‘I am having a really bad day guys and you have tough days too and I want you to work with me [do the classroom activities while behaving well]a little bit’ and they will go ‘oh ok’ and for the most part they do and it is really sweet.*

Further, students were said also to engage in mutual caring relationships in ELD classrooms. Jennifer asserted that her students were “*open to make genuine connections with new students and teachers.*” In the line with Jennifer’s assertion, Cynthia, Lynn, and Suzan confirmed that Syrian refugee SIFEs were very accepting. Lynn and Suzan commented:

Lynn: *They have each other’s back*  
 Lynn and Suzan: *We have some students who have some exceptionalities whether it be sight or hearing or other disorders or illnesses, even stature*  
 Suzan: *and there is no judgement ... I found they are very accepting, and they are not afraid of things.*

Cynthia added that her Syrian refugee SIFEs “*are too much into group work, they are tribal.*” Confirming Cynthia’s statement, Suzan claimed that Syrian refugee SIFEs “*have*

*a very collectivist mentality they like to help each other which [the teachers] initially thought it was cheating.*” Lynn reflected on Suzan’s last statement. According to Lynn, the professional development sessions and training that teachers at Edugates SS participated in changed their mindsets towards the ways in which Syrian refugee SIFEs show care for each other. According to these teachers, this has helped them understand that what students were trying to do was not cheating but rather a need to help each other out and care for each other. Lynn commented: *“They grew up in a world where they help each other out, so it is not that they are cheating, they are helping each other, and we just have to teach them the right way to do it.”* Suzan mentioned that there was a need to shift language from “cheat” to “help.” Consequently, Suzan said that she established a dialogue with her students and explained to them that she understands their intentions as well as the motivations behind them helping each other out in the classroom.

### **Confirmation**

Confirmation means encouraging students, confirming their strengths, celebrating their accomplishments and assisting them in constructing their self-ideals. Teacher participants exemplified confirmation particularly through helping students’ reach their potentials and celebrate their academic progress.

Mark’s above-shared experience about the way he dealt with his student’s tardiness to the ELD classes resulted in the student’s increased academic productivity. Mark said that the presence of a caring teacher (talking about himself) helped the student to reach his potential.

Another way of enacting confirmation is through the celebration of students’ achievements. Lynn and Suzan shared that they took every opportunity to celebrate their students’ progress (*“you just did that!!!”* – Suzan) and made sure their students knew how they felt about their successes (see Appendix A - Excerpt C). Lynn posited:

*Even ELD A when they can go AAA, and then they say CAT, and we will be like “you just said CAT.”*

*I always tell my students when I see them “oh my Gosh I remember you two years ago, and look at you now, I hope I can see you in 10 years.” And we actually*

*hope that they will come back in 10 years. A lot of them would lose their accents by then because they were very young when they came... It is cool! I want to see and hear them in 15 years, they even couldn't say hi, couldn't spell hi when they arrived in Canada.*

Teacher participants stressed that caring and CRT pedagogies directly affect refugee SIFEs' wellbeing and create a classroom environment conducive for learning: "*when students know you care, understand and feel their needs*" (Jasmine), "*when they feel that they are safe, welcomed and cared for*" (Cynthia) in "*an environment built on trust*" (Mark), and "*when the consistency in routines and expectations are established, more meaningful learning can occur*" (Jennifer). "*They are then motivated to attend school and participate*" (Jasmine), and with the time, they "*feel more and more at home in their Canadian school*" (Jennifer).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The study's findings revealed that teacher participants infused CRT in the curriculum. They tried to be informed about their students' backgrounds and prior experiences and include them in the ELD curriculum content. They engaged in interpersonal caring relationships with their Syrian refugee SIFEs while showing care for the students' culture, language, religions, and experiences. Teacher participants scaffolded instructions and were able, to some extent, to bridge the gap between the cultural experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and the ELD curriculum content. They engaged in culturally responsive communications with their students and tried to understand students' communication styles and create for/with them instructions that matched students' learning styles.

To present the CRT practices by teacher participants, I used the perspective of the five Components of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Instruction (Gay, 2010). Thus, this section is organized according to those five components: CRT # 1 Cultural diversity knowledge base, CRT # 2 ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content, CRT # 3 culturally responsive caring, CRT # 4 culture and communication in the classroom, and CRT # 5 ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction or cultural congruity in teaching and learning.

## **CRT # 1 Cultural diversity knowledge base**

This subsection reports on the importance of knowing the students, their culture, prior experiences (e.g., experiences of war, academic experience), and backgrounds to be able to create learning opportunities for them. It also informs on the different ways in which teacher participants learned about their Syrian refugee SIFEs given the minimal information provided to them and to the school board.

Teachers shared that they wanted to learn more about their students so they would be able to teach them. Jennifer (Highway SS) conveyed that:

*The first few weeks ... should be full of conversations and observations so that my planning can be based on the learners I have, not necessarily lessons I've taught in the past. I try to familiarize myself with the processes my students face when they move to Canada and join the educational system. The more I know about their journeys and challenges, the better I'm able to tailor my teaching and approach to their needs.*

Lynn, Suzan, Cynthia, and Rina (SWIS worker) asserted that the school did not provide sufficient information about Syrian refugee SIFEs' background and experiences because it did not have it. So, teachers at Edugates SS (Lynn, Suzan and Cynthia) said that they were left with minimal options: rely on the news and social media; learn about the students' prior experiences from the students themselves; or speculate about the educational levels, needs, and supports needed for those students.

For Lynn, Suzan and Cynthia, the stories of war, displacement, and killing broadcast on the news and social media about the Syrian refugee crisis were emotionally difficult to follow and had discouraged them from seeking information about the students' experiences. Thus, they relied on whatever information that the students themselves, the school or the school board had provided. Suzan was emotional when she commented on the news and information from social media channels that related to her students, *"I chose to ignore it on purpose because I know that there is so many problems in the world... that I cannot do anything about [knowing that] was so frustrating."* Similarly, Cynthia said: *"I actually try to ignore the news because there are things we couldn't handle seeing and hearing and I felt bad about it because I wasn't in the know about the details."* Lynn agreed with Cynthia's and Suzan's comments. Contrarily, Jasmine



followed the news about war torn countries with a different perspective, *“I keep a close eye on the current war situations and have an understanding of the students’ needs.”*

Teacher participants shared that when Syrian refugee SIFEs were first enrolled at Edugates SS, they showed a need to share their stories. The teachers assumed that the reason behind students’ openness was that the students felt safe in the classroom environment that they tried to create for those students. That said, teacher participants asserted that their relationships with the Syrian refugee SIFEs and their daily interactions with them have given them the opportunity to learn more about those students, their experiences, language, and backgrounds. For instance, Mark’s long experience in teaching a large group of refugee SIFEs from diverse backgrounds (e.g., Iraq, Nepal, Afghanistan), in addition to his daily interaction with Syrian refugee SIFEs, gave him insights into the experiences that Syrian refugees might have undergone. Further, Suzan said: *“It is crazy how well even though they can’t speak English very well we know more about these students than we know about the academics students [students who we have taught academic subjects] that we’ve ever taught.”* Teachers from both schools relied primarily on their daily interactions with the students to learn more about them and tailor their pedagogies accordingly.

## **CRT #2 Ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content**

This subsection describes the ways in which teachers integrated the experiences, knowledge and culture of their Syrian refugee SIFEs in the curriculum content despite the lack of relevance of the ELD programmatic curriculum.

Although Cynthia, Suzan and Lynn confirmed that the ELD programmatic curriculum did not reflect any of Syrian refugee SIFEs’ culture, language, identities, and religions, they tried on their part to link the stories they worked on in the classroom to the lives of their students, when applicable. Lynn and Suzan said:

*In the book there are fables and maybe we can say it is something similar from your country... like the cried wolf, they knew that story, and the tortious and the hare too ...so those are stories they know from a TV program this is what I keep hearing “Miss we watched this, it is a kids tv program”*

Suzan confirmed that teaching Syrian refugee SIFEs the lessons that go along with the fables and seeing that they had that understanding from their first language and could apply it in English settings, helped them understand what they were reading. Lynn and Suzan said that they asked their ELD students questions such as *“do you have a personal story, what does this remind you of?”*, *“does this relate to you in anyway?”* Suzan asserted that sometimes they naturally make a personal connection to the story. Both teachers affirmed that connection is key for understanding. (see Appendix A - Excerpt D).

Lynn and Suzan shared with me that sometimes they changed the names of the stories' main characters to reflect the names of the students, their religions, and language. Lynn said: *“we change the names from Sally to Ahmed and Mohammed too and we try to do a balance as well, it is like ok this is an English name and just so you can hear English names and with the worksheet though [we'll use] Ahmed, Mohammed etc.”*

Cynthia shared that she involved *“heritage, pictures and first language when applicable.”* Further, Cynthia, Jennifer, and Lynn organized classroom activities in which they connected the lessons to Syrian refugee SIFEs' cultural characteristics. For instance, Cynthia said:

*When designing a culturally responsive lesson I invite students to make a ppt [PowerPoint] presentation about themselves and what they are proud of ... bringing in different foods and cultural outfits and music to their presentations ... Looking up pictures and maps from their cities back home and involving it in discussions ... we focused on positive images from days they were proud of and were so happy to talk about and excited to show me which cities they are from.*

Further, Jennifer mentioned that she often planned her course content with a focus on culturally significant topics to her students. She said:

*For instance, we may read and discuss articles related to Mecca, Eid etc. I look for documentaries and other media which reflect some of what my students experience in Canada. For instance, “14 and Muslim,” a CBC documentary about adapting to Canadian schools and deciding between public and religious education.*

Jennifer contended that such material helped students engage authentically in texts and sparked genuine discussions in her classes.

In addition, Lynn described a culturally responsive recipe-related activity that she organized for and with her ELD students, affirming that she wanted them to embrace their language and culture. Lynn said: “*We want them to embrace it... because we never want them to lose their language, we don’t want them to lose their culture.*” (see Appendix A - Excerpt E).

Suzan agreed with Lynn and confirmed that she wanted her students to embrace their language. She said: “*we want them to embrace it.*”

### **CRT # 3 Culturally Responsive Caring**

This section outlines teacher participants’ authentic caring for their Syrian refugee SIFEs and how this reflected on their implementation of CRT. Also, it highlights teachers’ perceptions about their Syrian refugee SIFEs and the ways in which some of them advocated for their students.

The Guided Reading Program tailored specifically for ELD students and the ESL/ELD co-op program implemented by Mark, in addition to other teacher participants’ culturally responsive practices outlined above, revealed teachers’ authentic caring for their Syrian refugee SIFEs. As such, teachers’ actions – at the time of implementation of these programs and practices and not at the time they first started to teach ELD – were driven by their empathy (e.g., “*we have empathy [for our students]*” - Lynn), knowledge about who they are teaching (e.g., “*we know more about these students than we know about the academics students that we’ve ever taught*” --Suzan), what they are teaching (e.g., tailored programs), caring relationships with their students (e.g., “*I care*” - Jasmine) and high expectations (e.g., “*we have expectations...we see successes and we see them from day one*” - Lynn). Those practices translated into unequivocal advocacy (e.g., “*I am an ally when needed*” - Jennifer), endless efforts and authentic commitment to ensure learning happens (e.g., through differentiation, modification).

Further, Mark showed culturally responsive caring when he noticed that most of his Syrian refugee SIFEs were working while still at school. As such he chose to base his practices on those students' skills and helped to create the ELD/ESL co-op program in cooperation with the school board. This co-op program yielded excellent progress especially for Mark's older students (17 and above). Mark posited: *"Early on, I realized that many of these students were not graduating and in turn needed some type of skills as they entered the workforce. As such I helped created an ELD/ESL co-op program."*

Teachers' perceptions and beliefs about their SIFEs impact their expectations and affect their classroom interactions and the learning opportunities they create for and with those students. Despite the academic challenges that Syrian refugee SIFEs face in ELD classrooms, some teachers said they still believe that most of these students are high achievers. For instance, Lynn talked on behalf of Suzan and herself:

*We see the successes and we see them from day one and we see them 2 years later that's currently us right now, we see our kids from what they were in the old system...they are everyday teenagers...in the classroom seeing them as who they are at base value, helping each other and working at this level. It is so cool to see.*

Further, Jennifer engaged in self-monitoring and self-reflection when she was teaching ELD students. She asserted that her experience with ELDs and refugee SIFEs taught her to question her assumptions about these students' needs:

*From experience, I've learned not to take any education background for granted (for instance, using a dictionary, pencil, locker) since some students have not had access to the most basic of educational resources or experiences ... Each year I am learning more about how I can best serve these students. I try to remember all that I don't know about each student – the trauma and disruptions many of my students face, the day-to-day frustrations and challenges, the homesickness etc.*

Also, Lynn and Suzan, experienced and practiced other forms of culturally responsive caring that go beyond the walls of the ELD classroom to advocate for Syrian refugee SIFEs in the mainstream when needed. As such, they intentionally, directly and indirectly, fought negative stereotypes about Syrian refugee SIFEs. Suzan and Lynn said that they provided help to mainstream teachers who experienced difficulty creating learning opportunities for Syrian refugee SIFEs and misinterpreted those students' behaviors in mainstream classrooms. As a result, Lynn and Suzan advocated for their

students by highlighting students' strengths and correcting negative stereotypes. Lynn said:

*That's what we do. We try to advocate ... because there can be negative stereotypes and we always...try to bring it in and be like "yeah you have him he can be really difficult... he is really a good kid, give him a chance but he cannot sound out CAT yet that's probably why he has been acting as such in your class." We try to humanize [the difficulties faced by the students] because everyone is a human.*

Suzan hoped that other teachers

*can see... that students aren't troublemakers, they are either bored or they don't understand what is happening and they only need a caring adult to help them and understand that they are worth it.... A lot of the problems with the students are based on that the fact that they are not understanding. But it is not the teacher's fault. There is a lot going on ... you have students who are at university level and, in the same class, students who are working at a kindergarten level. They are trying to work out their classroom at the best of their abilities. So, it is not the teachers' fault by any means they are trying the best they can, but also these students are not bad students.*

Suzan asserted that she hopes that as soon as mainstream teachers start to understand that Syrian refugee SIFEs are assigned mainstream courses that do not reflect their levels in literacy and/or numeracy, the lenses through which they perceive those students would change.

#### **CRT # 4 Culture and communication in the classroom**

In this section, teacher participants established communication with their Syrian refugee SIFEs while exemplifying cultural awareness. Responding to the interview question: How do you, if applicable, enact cultural responsiveness (or, other similar curricular) in ELD classroom? Jennifer said:

*Listening, letting students express their ideas and tell their stories. Apologize and change my approach if I have misrepresented or offended any learner. I frequently look for feedback, even just in the body language and responses of my learners. I try to be as considerate and responsive in my teaching and planning as possible because these students, more than those with uninterrupted educational backgrounds, require additional planning and support.*

Additionally, given all the learning difficulties Syrian refugee SIFEs face in ELD classrooms, Cynthia found that the message was hard to get through using English only. Thus, she conveyed that ELD teachers at Edugates SS “*use all kinds of ways including pictures, sign language, acting and translations to get the kids to understand the content.*” This example corroborates Jennifer’s above example about including culturally responsive material such as documentaries and media that reflect students’ backgrounds and culture. According to Jennifer, integrating culturally responsive material to the curriculum resulted in heightened engagement in classroom practices and sparked genuine discussions in the classroom.

Noteworthy, Lynn and Suzan said that they “*are ... learning to be culturally aware*” and explained that it does not make sense to ask students about topics or knowledge that they are not expected to know or does not relate to their prior experiences (e.g., tell about Canadian winter time and about experience in the snow while they have never seen snow before).

Furthermore, teacher participants confirmed that they respected and took into consideration students’ backgrounds, religion, and culture when they designed lessons. For instance, Suzan and Lynn said they paid special attention towards what words to use. Those teachers asserted that they knew that their students originated from conservative families; thus, they tried to use words and expressions that students were familiar with and that did not create cultural misunderstanding. Suzan said: “*those are things we have to think about with our students because some of our students come from very conservative homes.*” Lynn and Suzan’s experiences resonate with Jennifer’s above comments about apologizing and changing approaches in case she accidentally offended a student. Also, Lynn’s cultural awareness went beyond the ELD classroom. She shared her experience in an interview meeting with her Syrian refugee SIFEs’ parents, in which she showed understanding, acceptance, and respect towards their beliefs, religious obligations, and traditions. Lynn posited:

*In the parent teachers interviews some of the parents/fathers won’t shake my hand because I am female, I am like ohh I get it oh this is what that means got you. And I am accepting that, there is nothing wrong with that I mean it is just what it is and even showing the parents too that “oh yeah I get it.”*

In this section about culture and communication in the classroom, the teachers described various ways to convey learning while understanding accepting and respecting students' cultural communication styles.

### **CRT #5 ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction or cultural congruity in teaching and learning**

This section outlines teachers' attempts to understand their students' learning styles and create learning opportunities accordingly in the following ways: First, Jennifer recognized the importance of acknowledging, celebrating, and intentionally planning for the specific and unique contexts of Syrian refugee SIFEs in order to implement learning opportunities relevant to those students. According to her, this meant that she did not necessarily base her practices on lessons she had already planned and taught in the past: Jennifer asserted: *“I constantly reimagine lessons so that they are more culturally relevant and applicable to my ELD learners.”* Students' learning styles framed what and how Jennifer can teach in ELD classrooms. She added:

*My most recent group of ELDs ended up loving the idea of spelling bees so much that we made them a weekly occurrence. To many secondary students, this activity would be viewed as juvenile – something only done in elementary school. But because my learners have so many gaps in their educational experiences and they are new to learning English in a structured way, such an activity can be deeply rewarding and enjoyable. This is particularly true when students' interest dictates whether or not I use this approach and how often.*

Second, Mark posited that he followed a *“differentiated and tiered type pedagogy when teaching Syrian SIFEs”* especially because, according to him, those students had different strengths and weaknesses: some might have gaps in writing while others have gaps in reading. So, he said that he tailored his lessons to help close those gaps. He added that he constantly adapted his strategy to help reach the students he was teaching.

Third, Cynthia said that she tried to engage her students *“no matter what their levels are, and taking into consideration their different learning styles and intelligence.”*

Fourth, Cynthia, Suzan, and Lynn posited that Syrian refugee SIFEs are tribal<sup>6</sup> and that they have very collective mentalities. This is how they learn according to those teacher participants. It would be perfect if ELD teachers' teaching styles matched the learning styles of their ELD students. This specific aspect applied to Mark from Highway SS. Mark was a "*Tribes certified teacher*," and a major premise of practice, according to him, was helping to build community in the classroom. "*It helps provide a voice for all students regardless of their level. Doing at least one of these [tribal] activities on a daily basis can really help engage the students while focusing on strengthening their oral, reading and writing proficiency,*" said Mark. This example illuminates the ways in which teachers can match their teaching styles to their students' learning styles while working on their literacy skills.

Fifth, most ELD teacher participants indicated the use of Arabic language with Syrian refugee SIFEs in ELD classrooms. According to the teachers, they did that following a need to convey a message to the students who, without the translation, would not understand what the teacher said. Also, some teachers used Arabic translations as a way to match their teaching styles to students' preferred modes of remembering because they believed this will help their students better understand the lesson. Suzan said:

*The other thing that we are doing and I learned that it does work, we would have the vocabulary list from the books...and ...we would write those words in English and we tell them to translate them into Arabic. And, then they [use the word in] a sentence.*

While this worked well for some students, Suzan asserted that it did not work as well for others. Consequently, she modified the instructions accordingly. (see Appendix A - Excerpt F).

The classroom practices and examples provided in this section showed teacher participants' enactment of caring and CRT pedagogies in ELD classrooms in spite of

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<sup>6</sup> Tribal is used here to say that students learn more when they work in group and combine efforts to accomplish a common task rather than work individually.



ELD curriculum's lack of relevance, social structures, and power relationships that hindered Syrian refugee SIFEs' academic development and wellbeing.

### 5.3 Social Structures and Power Relationships Reflected in ELD Classrooms

This section highlights the nature of teacher-student relationships, the shortcomings of the high school education system in Ontario in responding to the needs of Syrian refugee SIFEs, and the divides that teacher participants believed exist at school and in society.

Findings from teachers' interviews and the researcher's reflective notes revealed that teacher participants developed constructive teacher-student relationships in ELD classrooms. There were no indicators of teacher-student power relationships. Rather, teacher participants described caring, non-hierarchical teacher-student relationships with their Syrian refugee SIFEs.

While teachers engaged in caring and non-power relationships with their students, they said that they still had high expectations for them and that there were still consequences for students' behaviors and academic carelessness. Those expectations and consequences were normalized by the teachers, not from a power standpoint, but rather from a carer - cared for standpoint to bring the best of their Syrian refugee SIFEs.

I divided this section into two sub-sections: (a) shortcomings of the high school education system in Ontario in responding to the needs of Syrian refugee SIFEs and (b) divides at school and in society

#### **(a) Shortcomings of the high school education system in Ontario in responding to the needs of Syrian refugee SIFEs**

Along with the ELD curriculum's lack of relevance and unpreparedness of ELD teachers to teach ELD, Lynn, Cynthia, Suzan, Rina (SWIS), and Mark's experiences with Syrian refugee SIFEs in ELD classrooms showed that the system is not meant for this group of students to succeed.

In this regard, Cynthia said: *“the system doesn’t work and is not meant for them [Syrian refugee SIFEs] to psychologically succeed.”* Confirming the latter statement, Mark mentioned that he helped create the ELD/ESL co-op program after he realized early on *“that many of those students were not graduating and in turn they needed some type of skills as they entered the workforce.”* Rina, a SWIS worker at Edugates SS, also mentioned that most of the Syrian refugee SIFEs who were enrolled in 2016 at Edugates SS quit school or went to adult ESL. Rina asserted:

*The first wave of Syrian GARs arrived at [Edugates SS] in 2016. The majority have been placed in ELD classes ... the majority of the youth who enrolled during the first wave, dropped out or were advised to go to adult ESL if they were over 18.*

The way Syrian refugee SIFEs were streamed also showed a lack of responsiveness to these students’ prior experiences and knowledge. Lynn and Suzan confirmed that Syrian refugee SIFEs were not streamed properly. Lynn said:

*You have kids that if their education wasn’t interrupted because of war they would’ve been in academic going into college or university and then we have workplace and in out of the 28 students, I have that mix. But they aren’t being streamed that way and they are all in one class....*

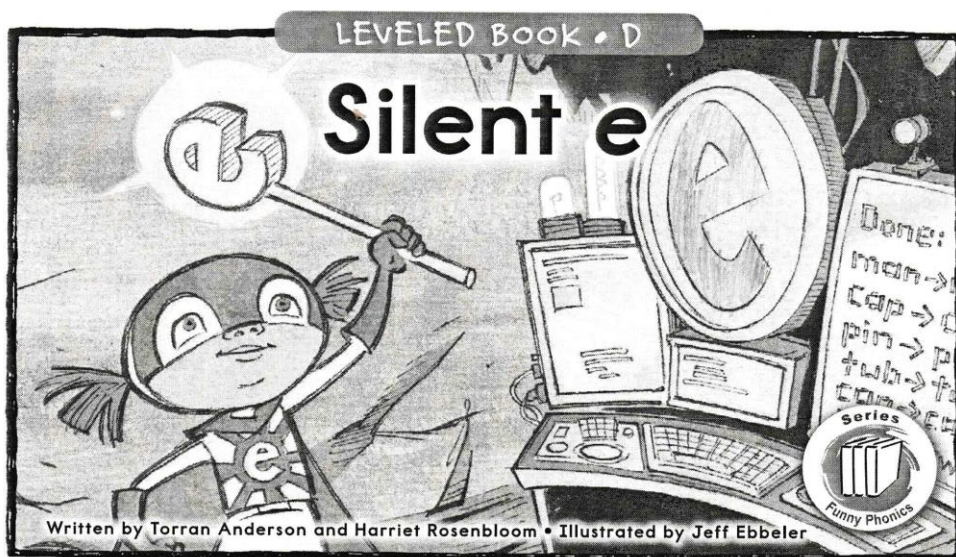
When it comes to evaluation, Lynn and Suzan shared that they found it unfair to teach ELD students elementary school content courses (Figure 4), expect them to academically perform at the secondary level, and assess them accordingly. Suzan said:

*In elementary school...it is more in the skills-based side. So, I think of our students, we are teaching them at an elementary level. I find it so unfair to say like you are at 45 [45%] because you are unable to do all this, but look at all the things you are doing and you are doing that well to build up here. So, the board will not take away the numbers but for the ELD students 45 for example is so disappointing and it just sets them back a lot more than pushes them forward.*

In addition, commenting on academic expectations for Syrian refugee SIFEs, Jennifer mentioned that *“expectations need to be broken down and modelled, not expected from the start as they are in mainstream classes.”* Lynn claimed that the school board mainly considered statistics and numbers. Thus, seeing Syrian refugee SIFEs taking a long time to adjust to the Canadian education system’s requirements and expectations, the school board suggested that it *“would rather produce graduating diploma students,”* hinting

towards focusing more on ESL over the ELD programs. Critiquing the board’s decisions and acknowledging that Syrian refugee SIFEs can achieve academic success, Lynn and Suzan embraced the Guided Reading Program as a kind of response to the board’s suggestion and as a way to provide the students with “*certain criteria to move up*” (Suzan). Nevertheless, those teachers realized that this criteria will require a lengthy process that will have to be balanced with other responsibilities. Cynthia confided in me that, recently, she was getting a push back because a lot of students were repeating.

**Figure 4. Leveled Book – Silent e**



Those shortcomings push Syrian refugee SIFEs out of the academic stream and play a role in deepening the already existing gap between themselves, as minority non-White students, and White mainstream students at school and in society.

#### **(b) Divide at school and in society**

Three teacher participants Lynn, Suzan, and Jasmine particularly described a divide at school and in society between minority and majority population groups.

When asked to describe their primary roles as teachers of Syrian refugee SIFEs, all teacher participants and the SWIS worker highlighted that one of their roles was to support and help Syrian refugee SIFEs integrate into the larger school community and

Canadian society. Suzan defined her role as “*the person to go to if having issues with other teachers... and helping them navigate this world, that they have this culture.*” Lynn defined her role in teaching Syrian SIFEs as giving them good examples about Canadians. She said: “*we hope that they see that’s what Canadians could be like, this is what we are.*” Particularly, those two teachers (Suzan and Lynn) emphasized the need for Syrian refugee SIFEs to know how to navigate the Canadian school system and culture and work around people’s diverse perceptions. As such, Suzan identified two kinds of Canadians, those who would show acceptance and respect for minorities and others who would not. Suzan shared how she prepared her students to face peoples’ perceptions about them. She said:

*Because not all Canadians are going to have the same mentality as us and that’s ok...but, ... there is also a lot of Canadians to find that help people and who want to help you and they care, and when you find it enjoy it and embrace it ... It really doesn’t matter where you’re going in the world, it doesn’t matter where you go, you are going to run into issues where people don’t necessarily like you and it doesn’t matter. You know what your background is, you will just find people who don’t like you and you need to find out how to handle it.*

Lynn and Suzan provided support to Syrian refugee SIFEs and taught them to channel their energy in beneficial ways. They commented:

*We do talk to them and tell them that “we are here for you guys,” “you will have bad experiences with racism, ... but this is anywhere ... and you will have to know how to navigate this...we want them to know that there are people like us who care, but not everybody so they don’t channel that energy on them.*

Suzan also posited:

*We are doing our best to create a safe environment for them but at the same time too, the world around them may not be that safe or as accepting and [we want to] give them a zone ... where they can calm, relax and just breathe.*

In line with the latter, Jasmine confirmed that one of Syrian refugee SIFEs’ weaknesses was “*being accepted into the Canadian society.*” Even though all teacher participants identified themselves as people who care (“*people like us who care*” - Lynn) or people who share Syrian refugee SIFEs’ minority status (“*I care...I can relate to their needs*”- Jasmine), Lynn and Suzan affirmed that this was not always the case with other ELD teachers, mainstream teachers, or other teachers in the board. Further, Lynn and Suzan

believed that there is a divide between mainstream teachers and ESL/ELD teachers. They said:

*Lynn: If you ask other teachers in the board, they wouldn't know what ELD is, we didn't know what ELD was until we started. It really is a minority (us) teachers that we know this*

*Suzan: and that we have patience*

*Lynn: and even with the school, you have some mainstream teachers versus the ESL/ELD teachers. There is still within the school a divide.*

Particularly, study participants at Edugates SS explained that the divide at school and in Canadian society in addition to the shortcomings of the high school education system in Ontario will hinder Syrian refugee SIFEs' academic achievement and wellbeing.

Nevertheless, teacher participants described resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT in ELD classrooms and reported successes that are worthwhile highlighting and building upon.

## 5.4 Resources and Constraints to Caring and CRT

Teacher participants spoke of resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms. Those resources and constraints correspond in nature to the supports and challenges that ELD teachers and Syrian refugee SIFEs encounter in ELD classrooms and which make the implementation of CRT and caring practices either smooth and fast, or slow and time consuming.

### **Resources to caring and culturally responsive teaching**

ELD teachers said that they were grateful for the support they got from the school administration, the board, the government, and other teachers at school. Without those resources, the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms would have been very challenging.

**Support from administration:** ELD teachers at Edugates SS and at Highway SS showed explicit gratitude to their school administrations. At Edugates SS, the teachers said, the Principal and VP supported the teachers, believed in what they were doing and fought to provide them with the resources and funds needed to succeed in their duties. The resources and funds were said to include kits for ELD classrooms, funds to recruit

support staff/teacher assistants and the like. Suzan mentioned that the resources even included a kit<sup>7</sup> for the Guided Reading Program that costs thousands of dollars. Also, Cynthia said: *“they [Principal and VP] ... fought to make sure we have the support needed in our class and the “extra hands to help in the classroom.”*

In line with the above, Mark explained that the school administration at Highway SS had always been *“open to trying new ways of helping our ELD students – this can range from supporting PD opportunities to helping create new classes to help close educational gaps with [the] students.”*

Suzan emphasized the need for support, *“If you take that support from us we are back to ground zero.”* The teachers clearly stated that they could not run the ELD program without the support of assistants, peer helpers, administration, and school board.

**Support from the school board:** This included the support of coordinators responsible for helping ESL/ELD programs at various schools in the board, resources such as kits to implement the Guided Reading Program, and *“coaching and PD opportunities for interested teachers”* (Mark).

**Support from the government through the UPHS<sup>8</sup> funding:** Resources from the government included the allocation of Urban and Priority High School (UPHS) funding for ELD classes in selected secondary schools in Ontario.

Lynn and Suzan confirmed that to run the program, extra staff were needed and the UPHS funding made it possible to recruit more staff to help in ELD classrooms (see

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<sup>7</sup> Suzan explained that the kit costs an average of \$3500 and that she believed that the school principal had paid for it. Suzan said: *“the administration has given us the support and the resources that we have and I don’t know if he [the principal] did it out of pocket I kind of feel like he did ... he bought us a whole kit that is like a three to four thousand dollar kit, and he said: don’t worry about it I got it covered like I don’t know if this is through the school because funds are pretty hard to come by”*.

<sup>8</sup> The purpose of the UPHS funding was to provide additional help for selected high schools in urban neighborhoods facing challenges such as poverty, lack of resources, and student achievement related issues (Government of Canada, 2008).

Appendix A - Excerpt G). Lynn asserted that she had three adults in her class who were UPHS funded.

That said, Lynn, Suzan, Cynthia, and Jennifer confirmed that they “*are getting lots of support, but more support is needed,*” as Suzan put it. Lynn also commented on Suzan’s claim: “*we got it because we were loud and we advocated for it. If we were not, there would be a huge complacency within the school.*”

**PD sessions and experience:** PD sessions and conferences provide learning opportunities that otherwise would remain unknown to teachers. Jennifer emphasized the importance of “*PD sessions regarding starting up new ESL classes and how to create an inviting classroom for diverse learners.*” Mark mentioned that he attended several PD sessions which included Literacy and Numeracy, PD at One World language assessment<sup>9</sup>, PD sessions for ELLs at a faculty of education, OISE (which according to Mark helped him see a broader scope of strategies that could reach ELD students). Further, he highlighted the importance of PD sessions on mental health with emphasis on caring teaching to provide resources supporting the implementation of caring and CRT practices. Although the teachers acknowledged the importance of those sessions, many of them put more emphasis on PD through their own experience and practice when it came to teaching ELDs. For instance, Cynthia said:

*I like what the board is doing; they are trying to help us but we all know that what we study or what we discuss is not always applicable and some of it is theoretical. And [it is] from experience [that] we learned so much more.*

**Teachers’ collaboration:** The collaboration between ELD teachers at school (as well as across schools and school boards) appeared to help to multiply the efforts, identify creative ways to teach ELD students and share successes and failures. A case in point is the collaboration between Lynn and Suzan towards the implementation of the Guided Reading Program. The collaboration between Lynn, Suzan, and Cynthia and mainstream school teachers is another example. Such teacher collaboration provides significant resources for the implementation of caring and CRT practices, not only in ELD

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<sup>9</sup> The One World Language assessment assesses all 4 language skill areas: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing.

classrooms but also in mainstream classes and whole school interactions which the Syrian refugee SIFEs are part of.

**Appropriate programs for students:** Lynn and Suzan shared that the new Guided Reading Program has helped reduce the amount of stress they were experiencing in ELD classrooms before the implementation of the program. Suzan reflected: *“Some days I go home I would be like ... I don’t want to talk to anybody for an hour... I just need to go for a run ... I need to be by myself”*. Lynn agreed with Suzan, she asserted: *“Sometimes, ... We have to look out for ourselves.”* Suzan continued: *“With this program [the Guided Reading Program] it is becoming a whole lot less of having to do that.”* This Guided Reading Program appeared to reduce the stress for the teachers and enabled them to have quality time to establish caring relationships with their students in ELD classrooms.

**Caring teacher-student relationships:** The findings from the teachers’ interview data suggested that teacher participants developed caring relationships with their students based on mutual understanding, honesty, respect and authentic care. For instance, Lynn and Suzan repeatedly used expressions such as “my kids,” “my child,” and “my children” to refer to their Syrian refugee SIFEs. Lynn and Suzan shared that they faced many challenges in ELD classrooms and worked around surfacing circumstances with Syrian refugee SIFEs such as “students having bad days,” “fights,” and “breakdowns” the same way they would deal with those issues with children in a home setting. Jasmine asserted that she had unique relationships with her students. Mark’s dialogue with his student about the latter’s tardiness to ELD classes showed a caring relationship. Cynthia’s and Jennifer’s endless efforts to create supportive learning opportunities for their students showed that they cared for them and maintained caring relationships with them.

**Sympathy, patience, empathy and enthusiasm:** The findings from the teachers’ interviews and the researcher’s reflective notes revealed that all teacher participants and the SWIS worker shared experiences in ELD classrooms that show evidence of sympathy, patience, and empathy. All participants showed sympathy for the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs. Some teachers (Lynn, Cynthia, Suzan, Jasmine) – or teachers’ relatives – had language learning related struggles and therefore were empathetic towards



those students' academic experiences. For instance, Lynn's opening line in every ELD class was: *"I cried in the [language] school, I could not learn it and still can't...so I empathize with these kids."* Furthermore, they all showed patience while looking for resources and ways to create learning opportunities for their students using many modification and differentiation strategies. In addition, Lynn, Suzan and Jasmine said that enthusiasm is key in teaching Syrian refugee SIFEs. Participants' sympathy, patience, empathy, and enthusiasm were reported as supporting factors in the implementation of caring and CRT practices.

**Social workers and other specialized services:** Social workers play a leading role in the integration of Syrian refugee SIFEs into school communities. Rina, a social worker at Edugates SS, confirmed that *"the integration process of Syrian GAR youth is very challenging, and it will certainly take a lot of support, resources and follow up to ensure that their adaptation and settlement process is smooth."* In this sense, Rina's role was to assist Syrian refugee SIFEs and respond to their challenges and needs. As such, she supported them socially by *"enhanc[ing] cultural connections, promot[ing] community engagement and support[ing] integration through promoting social inclusion;"* academically by *"sharing youth needs and concerns with teachers and administration at school level, advocate[ing] on their behalf and mak[ing] suggestions"*; and emotionally by *"provid[ing] a culturally competent service, greet[ing] with a smile, listen[ing] with empathy, be[ing] mindful of the challenges (visible/invisible), withhold[ing] judgement, build[ing] on individual strengths and interests, and establish[ing] personal connections."* Rina was the advocacy connection, when needed, between the students, their parents, their teachers, and the administration at Edugates SS. As such, the role she said she played was seen to facilitate the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms; she did this indirectly by providing social, academic, and emotional support to Syrian refugee SIFEs. This also provided support to ELD teachers to implement more informed practices in ELD classrooms.

**Syrian refugee SIFEs' strengths, resilience and hands-on learning:** Teacher interviews showed that resilience is the biggest strength of Syrian refugee SIFEs. ELD teachers affirmed that without the resilience of the students, the sense of community they

created in ELD classrooms and their desire to succeed, they would not be able to implement supportive pedagogies. For instance, Jasmine said *“they have the ability to adjust, accept and move on. Especially the young ones.”* That said, Mark added that one strength that particularly stands out with Syrian refugees would have to be their strengths in hands-on learning.

**Safe classroom environment:** Teacher participants emphasized the importance of a safe classroom environment built on respect and trust. All teachers said that they respected their Syrian refugee SIFEs and ensured that the classroom remained a friendly space free of stress. Jennifer, Cynthia, and Jasmine mentioned that they did not include upsetting materials, such as war pictures, in their teaching. Cynthia said: *“of course we had to enter a date prior to the war start[ing] so we do not end up seeing war images, we focused on positive images....”* Also, Jennifer commented:

*I try to make my classrooms as open and friendly as possible so that students know I am an ally when needed. I structure my lessons so as not to contain graphic or upsetting materials, even if such films or articles may be commonly used in mainstream high school classes.*

Such safe classroom environments are conducive to teaching and learning.

**Intersection of teachers’ and students’ ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and languages:** The findings from the teachers’ interviews revealed that sharing students’ cultural characteristics, particularly L1, is a resource for the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms. Cynthia, Jasmine and Rina shared cultural traits with the Syrian refugee SIFEs. Jasmine mentioned:

*I am at an advantage because I speak their language, they have a connection with me and I can relate to their needs. This is unique and special because of the unique relationship, students tend to attend class more often. They are motivated and see me as a role model. I appreciate it so much and know that they do too.*

In line with the above, Cynthia said:

*If a teacher speaks the refugees’ first language, there is a great advantage of getting the translations more efficiently when needed, especially when the situation needs understanding and is not just about learning the language, or in cases of fights and misunderstandings [when the situation involves].*

Nevertheless, Cynthia affirmed that sharing the SIFEs' L1 can also detract from progress. She posited: *"It is also a disadvantage sometimes. They will learn more content with the teacher who speaks their first language. They will learn more oral language with a teacher who doesn't speak their first language."* Cynthia asserted that ELD students, including Syrian refugee SIFEs, would benefit from teachers who share their cultural backgrounds and language and from other teachers who do not have this privilege.

While there were various resources for the implementation of caring and CRT in ELD classrooms, constraints remain a barrier to the full implementation of those supportive pedagogies.

### **Constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices**

I have grouped the constraints to the implementation of Caring and CRT practices into three sub-sections (a) institutional constraints, (b) constraints related to teachers, and (c) constraints related to students.

#### (a) Institutional constraints

**Lack of relevance of the ELD programmatic curriculum:** One of the major resources for the implementation of CRT practices is culturally responsive curriculum content. Teacher participants' experiences revealed that curricula that fail to reflect some or any of the students' cultures, identities, backgrounds, and languages are considered a major constraint to the implementation of supportive pedagogies such as CRT. Teacher participants noted that the ELD programmatic curriculum did not reflect any of the Syrian refugee students' cultural background. Also, students' prior educational experiences were not considered given the lack of sufficient information in this regard. As such, some teacher participants reported that students constantly regrettably compared what would be their educational path in Syria had there been no war with what they have in Canada. Suzan shared an example of a student of hers who was admitted into a Nursing degree program in Syria, but now he was back to grade 9 and struggling with learning a new language.

**Lack of information about Syrian refugee students:** The lack of pre-immigration information about the Syrian refugee SIFEs remains a concern for ELD teachers and slows the process of getting to know the students well and planning appropriate learning opportunities for them, let alone appropriate caring and CRT practices. Cynthia claimed, *“we had students with different issues from mental health to all kinds of physical health, most with nothing on file for them.”* Lynn confirmed Cynthia’s claim saying that *“there aren’t any diagnostics for ELD students to determine whether it is trauma that is stopping them from learning, or it is a learning disability that is stopping them from learning, and we weren’t sure and still aren’t.”*

Despite all the efforts teacher participants put into modifying instructional practices to reach every Syrian refugee SIFE in their classrooms, there were still barriers towards accessing each and every one of them. According to the teachers, this might have been due to learning disability issues. That said, Suzan mentioned that learning disability tests cannot be done until the students are able to communicate fluently in English. Thus, ELD teachers found themselves in a vicious circle where students were not developing, and teachers could not identify the issues limiting students’ learning because of the language barriers.

**Cuts to the education system:** Other institutional challenges were caused by the cuts to Ontario’s education system as expressed implicitly by Suzan:

*There was a moment where we were told that we’ll lose the support in the classroom...we can’t do this ...knowing that there was a possibility that people were shutting the door on these students. I don’t think I could stand by and watch that happen...those students might think that we don’t care but we just need that support in the classroom to make them successful.*

Lynn and Suzan confirmed that the support for those students is vital.

(b) Constraints related to teachers

Teacher-related constraints mentioned by participants involved teachers’ personal and professional struggles, and psychological challenges that affected their abilities to implement caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms. Such challenges included teachers’ education; teaching ESL vs ELD; challenges related to teaching beginner

language skills, such as the challenge to teach beginner level phonics for instance as Lynn asserted; language barriers related to teachers' limited or lack of understanding of Arabic; and the lack of support from colleagues, parents, and leadership in some cases.

**Teachers' education:** Teacher participants confirmed that their university courses, teacher education, or prior personal teaching experiences did not prepare them to teach refugee SIFEs. When they first were assigned to teach ELD, teacher participants shared that they were confused, but they said that teaching Syrian refugee SIFEs turned out to be very rewarding. Suzan posited:

*We can all agree that while we were at Teachers College taking our ESL we had no idea that there is this special section of ESL which is called ELD... I was ignorant, when I came into this secondary school, I knew that there were refugee students here, but I didn't know how interrupted their education was. I had no knowledge about what I am getting myself into ... Teachers College did not prepare me [to teach ELD].*

Similarly, Mark asserted: *"Initially, I didn't have the slightest clue of what ELD meant or that there were sheltered courses for our English Language Learners."* Nevertheless, *"It is deeply rewarding and motivating to teach these students,"* said Jennifer.

**Confusing ELD and ESL:** Teachers at Edugates SS posited that there was some confusion in the education arena between ESL and ELD. Cynthia shared that with the arrival of refugee SIFEs, ELD teachers tried to teach ELD students using the same instructions they used with ESL students; however, this did not work. Cynthia said:

*When we got ELD students, and tried to teach them like the ESL kids, we found out that we had to make huge modifications and provide more accommodations... I was given work that was made or prepared for ESL students and some of it was for ELD students. But these kids have a lot going on and their language was so low and .... they were so different so everything I had planned; it wouldn't work and I had to adapt it and modify it in class.*

Lynn and Suzan agreed with Cynthia's assertion.

**Difficulty teaching beginning level courses and creating learning opportunities for ELD students:** Teacher participants' educational backgrounds were identified as not preparing them to teach basic literacy and numeracy in secondary school such as beginner level phonics. For instance, Lynn claimed: *"the beginning stage at phonics, this*

*was a real challenge for me how to teach them, I've never taught that before, I am a secondary teacher and my assumption is my students can read."*

**Teachers' language barrier:** Language is not only a barrier for students, as the Arabic language also *"becomes a barrier"* (Suzan) for ELD teachers especially if the majority of the students in an ELD classroom speak Arabic. *"It becomes hard for the teacher to know what is going on if a conversation is happening... it is very very challenging,"* said Cynthia. Further, Lynn acknowledged that as teachers, they might have a gap in their understanding and that they might be misinterpreting some of what their understanding is because they do not know the common language of the student group.

**High levels of stress:** Constraints to CRT and caring pedagogies are that teachers might sometimes experience high levels of stress as a result of their professional lives. *"We can have also exhausting days ourselves; you know we are humans as well,"* said Lynn. Further, Cynthia shared that she was taking lots of stress home because of the personal and war stories shared by her students. In addition, teachers at Edugates SS said they witnessed mental breakdowns, anxiety attacks and other health issues related to trauma, such as seizures, among students.

In addition to institutional constraints and constraints related to teachers, there are constraints related to students that make it more difficult for ELD teachers to implement caring and CRT pedagogy in the classroom.

(c) Constraints related to students

Language barriers, limited attention span related issues and difficulty following simple classroom instructions and routines by refugee SIFEs were said to pose challenges to caring and CRT.

**Language barrier:** According to the teachers, language barrier is a major challenge for Syrian refugee SIFEs. Rina, Cynthia, Lynn, and Suzan posited that Syrian refugee SIFEs were not able to understand what exactly was going on in school. It was difficult to give most students instructions in any language as they struggled to follow instructions even in their first language and explanations about paperwork to them took a long time. Further,

because some of the Syrian refugee SIFEs might lack L1 and/or L2 literacy skills, time to grasp new concepts and ideas becomes another challenge for them. It might take them longer than other students to understand and apply a concept. Lynn said: *“it does take them a significantly long time to apply new concepts.”* Jennifer mentioned that it can be difficult to convince those students with lack of literacy to leave their friend groups with whom they speak the same language and engage in conversation in English with mainstream students.

**Attention span related issues and difficulty following the classroom routines:** Syrian refugee SIFEs had a difficult time focusing and following the classroom routines according to their teachers, *“they were still learning to be students regardless of the language,”* said Lynn. Teaching them the basics was another challenge according to Jennifer, Cynthia, Jasmine, and Rina. Remaining seated, not speaking while others are speaking, taking turns, and other basic classroom social norms were a constant focus of instruction in ELD classroom environments.

Other constraints included getting the students to feel more comfortable with expressing themselves, even when making mistakes, and students’ quickly losing motivation due to the curriculum content that does not reflect students’ prior experiences; *“for instance some may have been working in construction and have had their own business. Now they are in a classroom learning the alphabet and the [names of] colors. It’s quite a challenge for the ones 18 and over,”* said Jasmine.

Amidst all the challenges and constraints, teacher participants said they learned to manage and reduce their stress. They learned to work around the obstacles that come along with teaching refugee SIFEs. They said they worked hard to create productive and supportive learning opportunities for refugee SIFEs. For instance, Cynthia shared that she *“managed with a lot of hours of hard work and daily reflection. It was definitely challenging but watching them learn the language is very rewarding”* (see Appendix A - Excerpt H)

In spite of the constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices, teacher participants identified some progress and described successes in ELD classrooms.

## 5.5 Progress and Successes

Despite the challenges and constraints, teacher participants explained that they started to “*have better handling*” (Suzan) at the time of the study. The implementation of the Guided Reading Program was reported to have had many advantages as described earlier by Lynn and Suzan and agreed to by Cynthia, and it was already proving its efficacy and success.

Further, one of the major challenges that teachers said they encountered was that refugee SIFEs were taking a considerably longer time to grasp concepts taught to them. Nevertheless, Lynn commented on this saying that “*it is happening faster now, and we are very patient for it to happen.*”

On behavioral aspects, student-to-student fights have decreased significantly. Lynn said: “*we still have fights now but rarely... now we see how the school is adapting well, now teachers are becoming calmer and ... we are a bit more prepared.*” With the Guided Reading Program in place, attendance increased, and students’ behaviors improved. Also, Jennifer confirmed that she had seen great improvement in students’ “*personal responsibility and organization*” when she had the opportunity to teach the same students for consecutive years or semesters.

In addition, teacher participants observed that most of the students were showing some progress. For instance, Cynthia said: “*There [was] a group that after 3 years managed to make it to grade 11 and 12 and they are doing really well. Some of those kids are doing better than the mainstream kids.*” Similarly, Mark posited that the ELD/ESL Co-op program was a great success.

On a more personal level, teacher participants shared that teaching Syrian refugee SIFEs has made them better people in the following ways: They have become more understanding, patient, and able to differentiate their instructions. They have also become advocates of Syrian refugee SIFEs, were able to see students as having base value, reject stereotypes, and reflect on their own prior assumptions. This, they said, translated into



suitable teaching practices. Suzan and Lynn said: *“they [the students] taught us more than anything...on what really matters”* (see Appendix A - Excerpt I).

These successes and progress are worthwhile building on to foster the academic achievement and wellbeing of Syrian refugee SIFEs.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter shed lights on the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario from the perspectives of the teacher participants. To analyze students' and teachers' experiences of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms as described by the students and the teachers themselves, I employed Noddings' (1992) four Moral Educational Modes, and I also used CT (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Giroux, 1983), and Gay's (2010) five Components of CRT and Instruction. This chapter is organized given the responses to the three research questions.

This chapter started by describing adequate level classroom practices tailored to the needs of Syrian refugee SIFEs, such as the Guided Reading Program, which showed its efficacy, caring and culturally responsive pedagogies, and good teacher-student relationships. Then, the chapter described the shortcomings of the high school education system in Ontario in responding to the needs of Syrian refugee SIFEs, divides at schools and in Canadian society, and resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms. The chapter ended with a section detailing the progress and successes in ELD classrooms.

## Chapter 6

### 6 Research Findings – Students’ Experiences

This chapter outlines the students’ experiences. Student participants included 10 Syrian refugee SIFEs from two secondary schools in Ontario (Edugates SS and Highway SS). The students’ set of data was analyzed through the frameworks of CT (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Giroux, 1983), four Moral Educational Modes (Noddings, 1992) and the five Components of CRT and Instruction (Gay, 2010). This chapter is organized chronologically by research questions and it has five sections. It starts with an overview on students’ educational experiences, then the three following sections answer the three research questions. The chapter ends with a summary.

#### 6.1 Overview on Educational Experiences

This study seeks to explore the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms. That said, the experiences of those students in ELD classrooms and their responses to the learning opportunities created for/with them are affected by their educational experiences in their country of origin and in resettlement countries.

All 10 student participants in this study are Syrian refugee SIFEs. Most of them have had some education in Syria before arriving in Canada. According to the students, in Syria all the subjects were taught in Arabic except for one English language course, which students start to take in upper elementary grades. Ameera described what she learned in English classes in Syria, “*they teach us only the basics*” like colors, numbers, days of the week, and alphabet.

The students found that the Canadian education system is very different than what they had experienced in their home country, “*I felt everything is different the education system is different, the language also which is a key and it is a primordial issue...*,” said Sama. Nonetheless, when asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 – with 5 being really like, 4 somewhat like, 3 neither like or dislike, 2 do not like, and 1 strongly dislike – how they like to go to school, 40% of the students shared that they really like to go to school, 40%

said that they neither like or dislike to go to school, 10% answered that they somewhat like to go to school, and 10 % chose strongly dislike.

About the education in Syria, Ameera posited that “[*physical punishment*] existed ... as a way... if you misbehave, but if you were working as you should they would be really nice to you, and they teach well.” Most students found the mathematics and science units that they learned in Syria are more advanced at a grade level than in Canada. For instance, Seif posited, “*what I am taking in math in grade 12 I already took in grade 10 in Syria.*” However, this does not apply to English because in Syria only one English language course was taught in upper elementary grades.

The students were also asked to share pleasant and unpleasant experiences they had at school in Canada. Students linked their pleasant experiences at the school level to the following aspects: mainstream teachers’ support and care, culturally responsive practices in mainstream classes and school in general, and response to students’ challenges and academic needs. For instance, Sama asserted:

*There is a teacher who tells us that as soon as we are trying and working hard, he will be pushing us further, helping us and supporting us. He says, “I will make sure you pass the course ... as soon as you work hard, I will help you but if you don’t work I cannot help.” I feel that he cares.*

Maryam, in describing her experience with her Geography teacher, mentioned, “*The geography teacher gives us more time to do tasks and assignments, he really cares for us ... he wants all the students to pass the course.*”

The students linked their unpleasant experiences at the school level to peers’ bullying, following school rule-related challenges, attending classes with younger students, teachers and administrators’ care practices, and failure to accommodate students’ cultural, religious, and academic needs. For instance, Maryam shared her experience in the Gym class. She said:

*As a Muslim ... I cannot just lay on the ground where all boys are staring at me. I asked to drop the [*physical education*] course because once ... I was supposed to do the activity with a male partner... the boy was holding my hands and staring at me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. After that, I didn’t want to do Gym anymore and I dropped the course. Because all the unpleasant experiences, I tried*

*... to quit school...The school administration and Gym teacher didn't take my religious background and restrictions into consideration.... this was the worst educational experience I have ever had.*

Seif also shared his experience in Mathematics classes. He said:

*I was set to take Grade 9 math and I was 19 years old ...I had to take math with grade 9 students for two years. I felt I was disengaged from learning ... a 20-year-old taking classes with 14 and 15-year-old students is not really a pleasant experience.*

He added:

*It was the school guidance counselor's choices of courses that negatively affected me. It was her fault, she assigned me courses that I didn't like, I didn't need...and I really didn't want to take. I had to take Gym, music and even guitar courses. What shall I do with guitar lessons? How does this help me?... this affected me negatively ... I lost a whole year... if instead of going to high school, I went to the adult continuing school... I would've graduated by now.*

Students' answers to the questions What courses/subjects are you doing well in? What courses/subjects you are not doing quite well in? Why? And, What classes do you like the most? showed that courses/subjects that students liked the most are the ones they are doing well in (9 out of 10 students). Eight out of ten students said that the courses that they do not like are the ones they are not doing quite well in. There were two major reasons behind liking the courses. The first reason was caring teachers and culturally responsive teachers' practices. For instance, Tala posited that ELD (English) is her favorite course. She said, *"we laugh in the English class... we communicate well with the teacher. When we are happy, the teacher is also happy."* Also, Maryam said *"I love math and the teacher is the reason... I like my math teacher a lot. I was always good in math ... my math teacher is very nice... sometimes he uses some words in Arabic to make us feel at home."* The second reason was the subject being easy for the students. For instance, 7 out of 10 student participants said that they found math easy. Amira affirmed, *"math is easy because it doesn't need high proficiency in English – English language is difficult."* Dunia also provided reasons for finding math an easy subject. She mentioned *"because if you follow with the teacher when you do the work it is just easy; you should know the formula and you keep going."* On the same point, Seif also commented, *"what I am taking in math in grade 12 I already took in grade 10 in Syria. So those subjects [to*

say mathematics and science in general] *are really easy.*” Similarly, the students provided two reasons for disliking the courses. The first reason was the subject being difficult for the students. For instance, Dunia provided a reason for disliking the English course; she said, *“sometimes my writing is not that good and that’s what affects my marks.”* The second reason was teachers’ uncaring practices and non-culturally responsive attitudes and practices. For instance, Sarah described her experience with her civics (Middle Eastern) teacher as follows:

*I don’t know all the words in English, and when I want to express myself, sometimes, I found it difficult to say it all in English, so I say some words in Arabic. The civics teacher told me that if I don’t know how to say it all in English to go back to my seat and stay seated, but I want to express myself.*

All students agreed that “English is key” to their OSSLT (Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test) and OSSD (Ontario Secondary School Diploma). Failing ELD or later ESL and academic English will compromise those students’ access to college and/or university. Findings from students’ data suggested that Syrian refugee SIFEs’ concerns surpass ELD and ESL to IELTS (International English Language Testing System) for students who aspire to go to university. That said, all Syrian refugee SIFEs who participated in this study expressed concerns towards becoming fluent in English. Responding to the question whether they are satisfied or not with their progress in schools in Canada, half of the students (5 out of 10) shared that they are not satisfied with their progress, 2 indicated that they are somewhat satisfied, while 3 out of 10 students mentioned that they are satisfied with their progress. The reasons behind students’ dissatisfaction was primarily related to their slow progress in English and the need to improve their language in order to graduate. For instance, Hala said, *“I am not really satisfied, I need to make more effort because this will help improve my English language and go to university.”* Ameera shared how satisfied she was with what she was achieving at school as well as the reason behind her satisfaction. She noted:

*I am very satisfied because I am comparing myself when I first arrived here, honestly, I knew only a few words in English like “Hi,” “Bye,” the numbers and the colors. Now I can speak English, and I understand when someone talks to me. It is true that I experienced interruption in my education; however, in math and science I am still doing really well.*

The student participants also shared memorable moments in ELD classrooms. Some of those moments were pleasant and others were unpleasant. In this section, I will provide only a few examples about students' pleasant and unpleasant experiences in ELD classrooms because such experiences relate to the research questions and will be discussed and described later in this chapter. Pleasant moments were mostly related to ELD teachers practicing care, teachers' overt recognition of students' effort and progress, teachers' visible encouragement and motivation, students being able to speak/express themselves in English and performing well in the ELD class. (See Appendix B - Excerpt J).

Shared unpleasant moments/memories among students in the ELD classes were related to peer bullying/mockery, teachers' uncaring practices and non-culturally responsive attitudes and practices. For instance, Sarah asserted that she had absolutely no pleasant memorable moments in ELD classrooms. She rather posited that ELD in addition to the Civics course were her least favorite subjects. Sarah said:

*ELD [English] teachers do not care whether we learn or not. If we want to leave the classroom, the ELD teachers do not mind even if we ask multiple times to leave the classroom during the lesson. ...they do not care, nor do they accord any importance to our education.*

It is worth noting that many students (Sama, Ameera, Hala, Tala, Sarah, Dunia) mentioned that they prefer their ELD teachers to be specifically Canadians and not from the Middle East. For instance, Sama said “*When I want to learn English, I would prefer the teacher be Canadian.*” Sama explained the reason behind her preference:

*Because when we have trouble understanding, a teacher who speaks Arabic would explain in Arabic, and then, how will our language improve? However, if a Canadian teacher only knows how to explain in English, we are obliged to make efforts to understand and this is how our English language gets better.*

This finding corroborates Cynthia's (ELD teacher at Edugates SS) claim that “*They [Syrian refugee SIFE] will learn more oral language with a teacher who doesn't speak their first language.*”

Further, it is worth noting that the experiences of all student participants in the ELD (English) classrooms at Edugates Secondary School were pleasant ones, while students'

experiences at Highway Secondary School in ELD (English) were characterized by more unpleasant experiences than pleasant ones. *“It really depends on the teacher”* said Mortada.

The following sections highlight the practices and pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms as described by the students. Those sections are organized by research questions, one section for each research question. Section 1 focuses on classroom practices and pedagogies; Section 2 focuses on social structures and power relationships reflected in ELD classrooms; and section 3 on resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms. In this chapter, I corroborate the analysis from the teachers’ interviews and surveys presented in Chapter 5 with the analysis from the students’ interviews and the researcher’s reflection notes. For instance, I note what specific students say may confirm, contradict, or raise inquiries about what teachers at the same school say.

The analysis of the data that responds to RQ1 was on classroom practices and pedagogies. Analysis of data on classroom practices and pedagogies fell under 3 themes drawn from the intersection of students’ responses to the interview questions and the research questions: classroom practices, ELD curriculum and resources, and pedagogies in ELD classrooms. In the analysis of the data that responds to RQ1 on pedagogies, I employed Noddings’ (1992) four Moral Educational Modes: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation, and I used Gay’s (2010) five components of CRT and Instruction.

The analysis of data from RQ 2 on social structures and power relationships was organized under two themes: (a) teacher-student power/hierarchical relationships and (b) shortcomings of the education system in Ontario. In the analysis of the data that responds to RQ 2 on power relationships and social structures I used CT. The analysis of data on RQ 3 on resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms is grouped under four themes that emerged from clustering of the subthemes. These themes include a focus on teacher

factors, student factors, interaction factors and curriculum and classroom environment factors.

Because some of the students' responses to the interview questions were translated from Arabic to English by the researcher, the English words are the words of the translator which were member checked by the researcher. It should be noted that the way some experiences of the students were narrated by the students are difficult to read in Arabic, knowing that these were experiences by students new to a country. In my translation, I maintained the meanings by the students. Because for some of what students said that they confided in me, I shared this aggregated information from my notes as a researcher.

## 6.2 Practices and Pedagogies Enacted in ELD Classrooms

In this section I describe the findings that relate to RQ1: what are the practices and pedagogies implemented in ELD classrooms? Pre-existing themes from the data that helped to answer this research question are: Classroom practices, Curriculum and Resources, and Pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms.

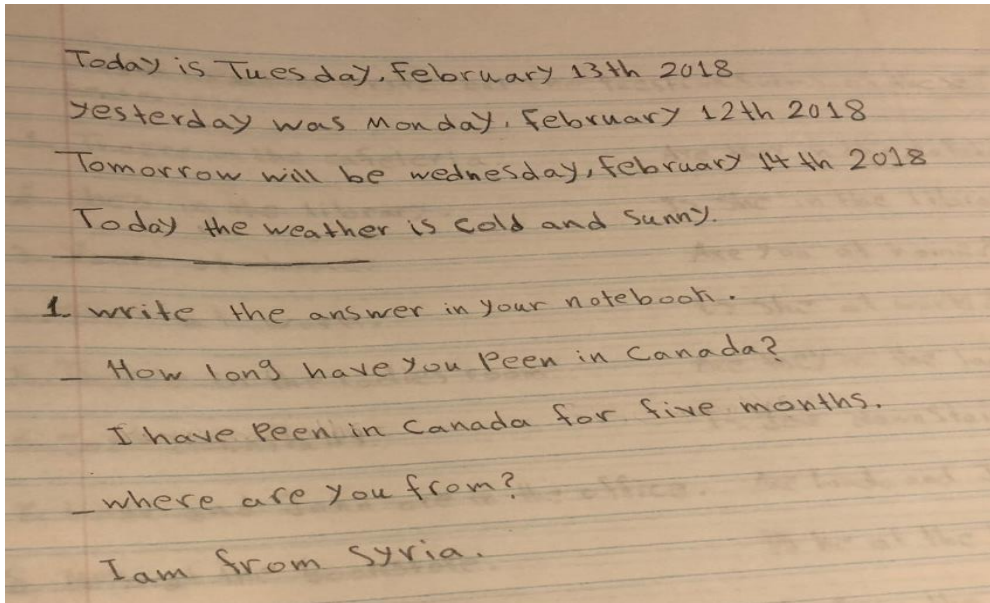
### 6.2.1 Classroom practices

Syrian refugee SIFEs described their classroom practices in ELD classrooms. Students learned literacy and numeracy (ELD) for half of the day (period 1 and 2) and they attended various mainstream course classes in the other half. According to the students, ELD classroom practices consisted of learning basic English and mathematics lessons. *"In the beginning, the teacher taught us the date, how to write the date, the months, days, gave us list of words and asked us to translate them into Arabic ...we were learning the basics, we did not know anything"* claimed Amira. (See Figure 5 for a sample of students' ELD classroom practices). The students said that, in ELD classrooms, they learned grammar (e.g., past/present tenses, singular/plural. See Figures 6, 7 and 8 for samples of students' grammar exercises), vocabulary (e.g., link the word to the correct picture, translate words into Arabic), reading (e.g., short stories, questions related to the stories), writing (e.g., write words, sentences, paragraphs; do a PowerPoint presentation), and numeracy (e.g., numbers, addition, subtraction, shapes, multiplication. See Figure 9 for a sample of students' math activities). Some of the students found these lessons and related



assignments very easy, while others found them very difficult. For instance, Sama said, “they give us very easy assignments like to translate a word to Arabic and connect it to the picture.” While Hala asserted, “English language is very difficult.”

**Figure 5. Sample of Students’ Calendar Time Practice in ELD Classrooms**



**Figure 6. Sample of Students’ Grammar Practices in ELD Classrooms - Indefinite Articles ‘a’ and ‘an’**

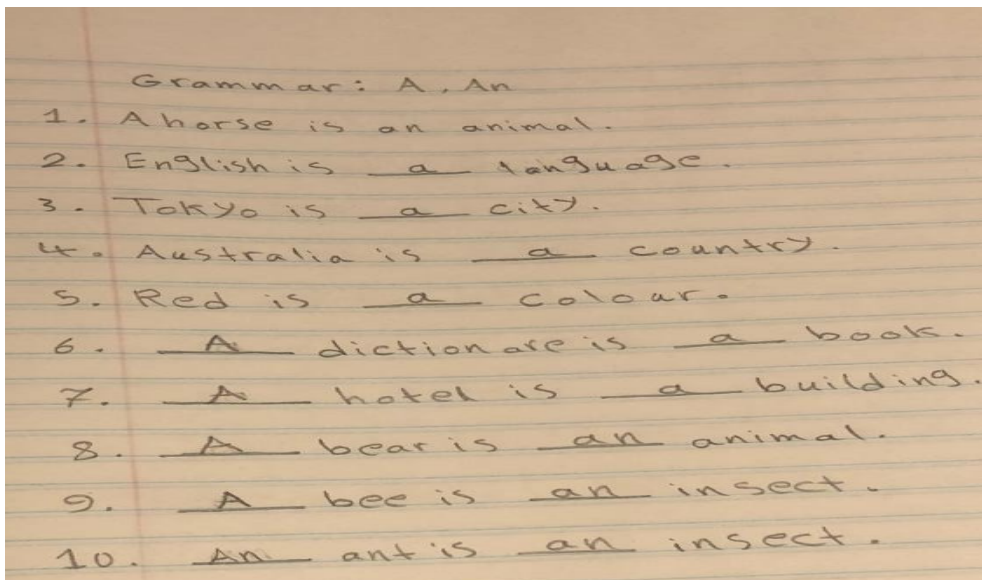


Figure 7. Sample of Students' Grammar Quizzes

25/25  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Grammar Quiz #1

**Part A: (6 marks)** Use the correct article.

1. It is a monkey. ✓
2. a horse is running. ✓
3. an ant is an insect. ✓
4. a dog is an animal. ✓

6/6

**Part B: (6 marks)** Use the correct pronouns. (He, she, it, they, we, it, them)

1. Malak studies English. she likes it. ✓
2. Amal is reading a book. it is good. ✓
3. Jun and David are speaking to the students in the class. they are entertaining them. ✓
4. Yilu works hard. she studies every day. ✓

**Part C: (8 marks)** Make one affirmative and one negative statement.

1. She is at home. ✓  
She isn't at school. ✓
2. They are in the hall. ✓  
They aren't in the classroom. ✓
3. You are in your seat. ✓  
You aren't standing. ✓
4. We are running. ✓  
We aren't walking. ✓

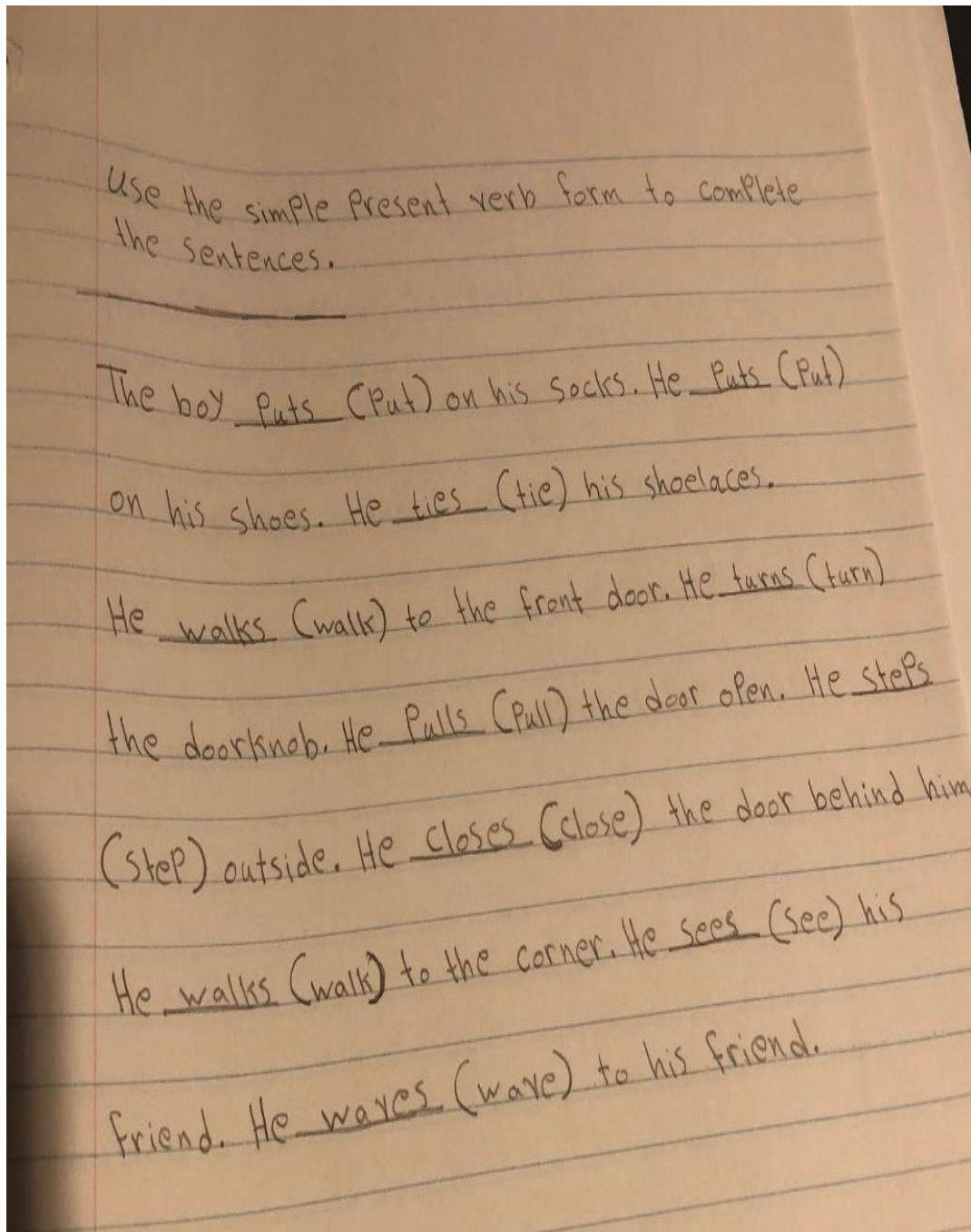
8/8

**Part D: (3 marks)** Write out the question forms of these sentences:

1. Mrs. Farrow is in the classroom.  
Is Mrs. Farrow in the classroom? ✓
2. The students are in the library.  
Are the students in the library? ✓
3. You're in the cafeteria.  
Are you in the cafeteria? ✓

3/3

**Figure 8. Sample of Students' Grammar Practices in ELD Classrooms – Simple Present Tense**








**Figure 9. Sample of Students' Mathematics Classroom Activities – Money Worksheet**

Money

In Canada, cash takes the form of coins and bills.

**Canadian Coins:**

Name	Picture	Dollars	Cents
toonie		\$2.00	200¢
loonie		\$1.00	100¢
quarter		\$0.25	25¢
dime		\$0.10	10¢
nickel		\$0.05	5¢

**Time to Practice!**  
Write the **names** of the coins you would need to make:

a) \$3.00: 1 toonie and 1 loonie

b) \$2.50: \_\_\_\_\_

c) \$1.75: \_\_\_\_\_

Students' descriptions of the classroom practices varied depending on the schools and the teachers. For instance, at Edugates SS, the students work in groups. "We are divided in 4 groups... all the students who are at the same level will be seated at the same table" said Hala. Sama and Hala described a typical English ELD class at Edugates SS. (See Appendix B - Excerpt K).

Hala mentioned: "the teacher teaches the same lesson to the class but when it comes to the stories, every group has a different story, it depends on the level of each group." On assessment, Hala added, "the teacher gives us a book, the students read the books, we do a test and if we pass the test we go to the next level." Dunia also commented that it is the

same routine every day in the classroom: *“we know what to do and we do it...it is a routine we do it every single week.”*

The students at Edugates SS described, without naming it, the Guided Reading Program that Lynn and Suzan implemented as described in Chapter 5. They seemed satisfied about the way the new program has unfolded. Confirming Lynn’s and Suzan’ description of the Guided Reading Program and its benefits and advantages to students, Sama said: *“I really like the way the teacher teaches us now. I wish they used this program when I first enrolled at school in Canada.”* Students’ descriptions of the classroom practices, routine, and the Guided Reading Program corroborate the descriptions of teachers at Edugates SS.

At Highway SS, like at Edugates SS, there are three teachers in ELD classrooms because of the high number of ELD students in the classroom. The vast majority of the ELD students are Syrian refugee SIFEs and the students are all at different academic levels. Nonetheless, according to Sarah, the ELD (English) teachers at Highway SS did not teach students in small groups at tables differentiated according to students’ levels so as to respond to each students’ academic challenges. Consequently, at Highway SS the classroom instructions and tasks were neither tailored to individual students nor modified to the levels of the students as is the case at Edugates SS. Sarah elaborated:

*The teacher gives the tasks/assignments according to the general level of the class not according to the level of each one of us... He only explains the lesson and we do the work and no one follows up with us or checks to see if we are doing the work... Teachers only answer students’ questions, if we ask questions... the teacher explains the lesson for weeks and we have to write on the notebook until we really get bored.*

Sarah’s above description about classroom instructions was not consistent with Highway SS teachers’ descriptions of classroom activities. Whereas Sarah claimed that her ELD teachers did not organize group work activities and did not make any effort to ensure the students had understood the lessons taught; Jennifer, Mark, and Jasmine (teachers at Highway SS) emphasized the importance of community in the classroom and said that they organized group work activities for their students and differentiated and modified instructions to suit their students’ needs. This contradiction in the description of classroom practices at Highway SS may be due to different teachers’ practices at this

school. As mentioned in Chapter 4, teacher participants were not necessarily teaching the student participants at Edugates SS and Highway SS.

### 6.2.2 Curriculum and resources

All student participants shared that the subjects they studied at school, the school activities, and the curricula in general did not reflect traits of their own culture, language, religion, and identity. Answering the question on the ways in which the subjects they were studying, and the school activities reflect some traits of their culture/ language/ religion/ identity, only a few students provided examples in which some ELD classroom practices relate to the students' background and the majority provided examples of the reverse. Sama said, *"they don't"* and then she continued *"sometimes teachers ask us to do a presentation and talk about our country of origin."* Similarly, Maryam said, *"they don't at all."* Tala also explained, *"there are no classroom activities that relate to our prior experiences, or stories on immigrants,"* Seif commented *"there is nothing that relates to the Arab culture or to Arab people"* and Sarah replied, *"no, never."*

The student participants shared that they used books, notebooks, computers, and smart phones for educational purposes. They utilized smartphones mostly for Google Translate. They also used applications such as Kahoot that was said to emphasize competitive spirit in a good way. Ameera said: *"tomorrow we have a test and the teacher will be using Kahoot, and we usually have lots of fun when doing that, the classroom environment becomes very competitive in a very good way."*

Both teachers and students agreed that the ELD programmatic curriculum did not reflect Syrian refugee SIFEs' culture, language, religion, and identity. Despite the said programmatic curriculum's lack of relevance, teacher participants and some teachers who taught student participants enacted caring and CRT pedagogies in ELD classrooms.

### 6.2.3 Pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms

Following the interview questions, this study looks specifically at caring and CRT practices implemented by ELD teachers, lived and shared by Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms.

### Caring experiences in ELD classrooms

*“The nice teacher we talked about earlier would show empathy, but this is not the case of all the other teachers, some of them just want to do their jobs” (Mortada)*

*“Some teachers explain in detail and it is not just explaining the lesson for the sake of doing the work” (Sarah)*

Both authentic caring and aesthetic caring practices were reported by students in ELD classrooms. For instance, seeing Ameera’s relentless efforts to improve her language, Ameera’s teacher advised and encouraged her repeatedly to join an after school extracurricular conversation club for newcomers. Ameera commented *“the teacher told me that I need to join the conversation club and she helped me join the club to improve my English... I felt that the teacher cares for me, she wants me to work to the best of my ability, she wishes me the best.”* Whereas another student, Dunia, said that she was struggling with writing for a while, so she approached her English teacher several times looking for advice to improve her writing. According to Dunia, her English teacher only advised her to read more. Dunia’s teacher did not translate her caring practices in action to change the situation for her student.

All student participants reported that at least one of their ELD teachers (English and/or mathematics teachers) showed care for either their religion, language, needs, and/or interests. About religion, Sama posited, *“during the month of Ramadan the teachers won’t eat in front of us; they even won’t drink they would hide the food...one teacher fasted for once and she told us that she wouldn’t believe she could do that and she did it.”* Maryam confirmed Sama’s statement, she said: *“teachers... share with us that they respect our traditions and they know how hard it is to fast.”* Furthermore, Tala’s teachers showed care, respect, and acceptance to the students’ religious beliefs and customs. Tala commented: *“the English teachers comment positively on my clothes and they show that they like my veil.... Once a teacher .... put on long dresses to see how we feel. Another teacher... tried to wear the veil and we liked it a lot, we felt very proud and happy.”*

Regarding Arabic language, Sarah asserted, *“during math sessions sometimes ... we say the numbers in Arabic and the teacher asks us what those numbers mean in English... he likes to learn from us as much as we like to learn from him.”* Sama also said *“One teacher told us that every day he will learn two words in Arabic, so he used to write the words on the board in English along with their translation in Arabic so he can learn them.”* Hala also claimed *“When the teachers show interest in my language, I don’t feel like a foreigner, it is a good feeling.”*

Regarding students’ needs, Rami commented: *“some teachers show care, whenever I need help they help me and explain course related matters.”* Further, almost half of the student participants (Sarah, Sama, Rami and Seif) indicated that their ELD teachers provided help during lunch breaks. That is to say that those students’ ELD teachers made time to assist their Syrian refugee SIFEs, and that they were committed to providing the support needed for those students to succeed.

Findings showed that some student participants have enjoyed and spoke positively about caring teacher-student relationships. Students’ shared experiences of caring practices in ELD classrooms revealed that some ELD teachers modeled care, established dialogue in the classroom, practiced caring, encouraged students, and confirmed their best ideals.

### **Modeling**

Modeling is one way to exemplify care for the students. Sarah described the way in which her math teacher exemplified care for her and other students in ELD classrooms, *“the math teacher always follows up with us and insists to teach us... he makes sure that we understand everything ... he cares.”* Seif also described a similar experience with one of his teachers *“if Mr. H. notices that we don’t understand something, he asks us to see him at lunch so he could explain it further.”* All student participants shared similar experiences in ELD classrooms. Sarah and Seif’s experiences were representative of other students’ experiences; therefore, I described them in this section.

### **Dialogue and Practice**



Normalizing mistakes, sharing experiences and personal stories between teachers and students, and creating learning opportunities for students to interact and show care for each other create a safe environment for the students. This practice is one step towards enacting mutual authentic care relationships between teachers and students based on better knowledge of each party. Nonetheless, this practice of care was not always reciprocated by students and some teachers did not create classroom opportunities for the students to interact (e.g., group work opportunities).

Many students (Sarah, Hala, Sama, Ameera, Tala, and Maryam) asserted that some teachers were keen to learn some Arabic words and even sometimes committed mistakes and repeatedly asked students to correct them. Normalizing mistakes puts students and teachers at the same level of struggle with regards to second language learning and normalizes the struggles/challenges. Ameera described her experience with her English teacher, she said: *“we feel like we are a family in the classroom...we share our experiences with her, and she shares her experiences with us.”* That said, the care was not always mutual. Sama noted that in one of the ELD classes, the teacher was making efforts to teach the students; nonetheless, most of them neither cared about the teacher’s efforts nor about learning. Sama commented: *“when I first arrived in Canada, the ELD teacher.... sometimes spoke Arabic in the classroom because she knew that we didn’t speak English ...No one would listen to her nor follow the explanation of the lesson.”* According to Sama, the big number of students in the ELD classroom and their ages played a role in students’ behaviors: *“there were around 30 students in the classroom, a large number, there were a bunch of students who were older than the others, some of those students didn’t respect the teacher. The teacher explains the lesson, but...it was like nothing was happening.”* What Sama said in the above example about some students not reciprocating their ELD teachers’ care at Edugates SS confirms what Suzan said about one of her students not reciprocating care (e.g., *“he stopped talking to me for 2 weeks, [but] I didn’t stop .... I’ll go up to him and ask, “how are you doing today?” and if he ignored me it was his choice... ”*), but contradicts other examples provided by Suzan and Lynn (ELD teachers at Edugates SS) on mutual care in their ELD classroom (e.g., *“I am having a really bad day guys and you have tough days too and I want you to work with me [do the classroom activities while behaving well ... and they will go “oh ok” and for*

*the most part they do and it is really sweet,” - Lynn; “I think that they also know that it is a two-way street” - Suzan).*

According to Noddings (1998), teachers also need to create opportunities for the students to practice mutual authentic care interactions. Community building and group work during which students help each other are examples of such interactions. Students at Edugates SS shared that group work was one of their daily routines in ELD classrooms. Hala at Edugates SS explained her way of providing help to her peers in the ELD class: *“when other students don’t know the answer to a question, I like to help them, but I don’t give them the answers because if I do this is going to be considered cheating, so I try to explain to them and make them try many times.”* That said, Sarah at Highway SS said that group work was not part of ELD classrooms routine, while Seif, Mortada, and Rami at Highway SS did not mention group work within their classroom practices.

### **Confirmation**

The student participants shared occurrences where their ELD teachers encouraged them and celebrated their strengths. Maryam for instance described how her ELD teacher celebrated her improvement in English: *“the English teacher told me that I am doing good in writing and I don’t need to use Google Translate anymore. She also told me that I don’t need any help from anyone. This makes me happy.”* Hala also commented *“the teacher encourages me...when other students laugh at me, she assures me that she knows that I am doing well, that she sees the effort and tells me to ignore the other students.”* Moreover, Ameera also shared her struggle with shyness and the ways in which her teacher encouraged her to overcome it. (see Appendix B - Excerpt L)

Further, Sarah noted *“they just encourage the students to try. They give everyone a chance to participate.”*

Syrian refugee SIFEs used many words such as caring, patient, considerate, empathetic, compassionate, supportive, lovable, and nice to describe their caring ELD teachers. Some students even described what a caring teacher meant to them. For instance, Sarah said: *“a caring teacher is someone who focuses on me and on every student; gives me and*

*other students advanced tasks; gives everyone a chance to participate ... creates a comfortable environment in the classroom ... does not embarrass the students ... encourages the students to try their best.”*

Findings revealed that teacher-student caring relationships fostered a greater sense in the students to make more efforts towards achieving better academic outcomes (“*honestly, this motivates me to work more on myself*” - Ameera), created a safe classroom environment conducive to learning (“*we are like a family*” - Ameera), and had implications on the overall wellbeing of the students (“*this makes me happy*” - Maryam). According to Ameera, “*when teachers care for you and like you, they are giving you a reason to like the subject. This makes it easier for you to make more effort. I have to work on myself to prove to the teacher that she is not wrong about me and that I can achieve academic success.*”

Teachers’ and students’ shared experiences linked to EoC four Moral Educational Modes (Noddings, 1992) are consistent except for the part related to group work or opportunities to practice mutual care towards each other and the teachers, particularly at Highway SS. That said, teacher participants shared more examples related to caring than what the students have shared. Add to that, while the students described the different ways in which their teachers cared for them, they did not provide any examples where they reciprocated teachers’ care. Contrarily, there were examples related to some students not reciprocating teachers’ care at Edugates SS.

In addition to caring experiences, student participants described another supportive pedagogy that teachers enacted in ELD classrooms: CRT. CRT is intimately related to caring. While EoC in education focuses primarily on the nature of teacher-student interactions, CRT focuses on curriculum and instructions.

### **Culturally Responsive teaching**

In the analysis of students’ interview data, I used Gay’s (2010) five components of CRT and Instruction to analyze students’ experiences of CRT practices in ELD classrooms as

described by the students. Based on the findings, there were scant examples of CRT practices provided by the student participants.

### **CRT # 1 Cultural diversity knowledge based**

Dunia at Edugates SS mentioned that some teachers showed curiosity to learn more about what was happening in Syria. She said: “*some teachers are curious to know what is happening, my background and everything.*” Further, Hala, Sama, Tala, and Ameera at Edugates SS described their ELD (English) teachers’ interest in learning about students’ fasting rituals during the holy month of Ramadan. Sarah at Highway SS also mentioned that her Mathematics teacher showed interest in learning the numbers in Arabic. What those students said about their teachers’ eagerness to learn about their religion, language, and cultural backgrounds resonates with findings in Chapter 5.

### **CRT # 2 Ethnic and Cultural diversity curriculum content**

All student participants agreed that the ELD programmatic curriculum content does not reflect students’ culture, language, religion, and identity. That said, some student participants shared learning opportunities in ELD classrooms that reflected Syrian refugee SIFEs’ background. Those learning opportunities included linking a story to students’ personal lives, drawing their own family trees, and presenting about their country of origin. For instance, Ameera said “*sometimes we read a story and [the teachers] ask us to reflect on it and describe how it relates to us.*” Hala and Tala provided the same example as Ameera. Similarly, Maryam’s teacher once asked the students to draw their family trees. Also, Sama’s teacher asked the students “*to do a presentation ... about [their] country of origin.*” These findings corroborate teachers’ results. Further, these learning opportunities mirror the efforts of students’ ELD teachers at Edugates SS to integrate their Syrian refugee SIFEs’ culture and backgrounds in classroom activities despite the curriculum’s lack of relevance. It is worth noting that all the examples in this section were only provided by students at Edugates SS. Students at Highway SS did not provide similar examples although teacher participants at Highway SS said they integrated their students’ characteristics in their teaching. For instance, Jennifer said “*... we may read and discuss articles related to Mecca, Eid...*”. This

discrepancy may be the result of different strategies ELD teachers use in teaching Syrian refugee SIFEs at Highway SS.

### **CRT # 3 Culturally responsive caring**

The students shared stories that showed teachers' culturally responsive caring practices in ELD classrooms. Those practices included teachers' being available to assist students and "get their back" (Gay, 2018 p. 87) when in need; normalizing mistakes and lack of knowledge when it comes to second language learning and revealing own successes and mistakes; and establishing a classroom routine for students to follow. Sama, Hala, and Tala described the Guided Reading Program without naming it (previously described in the classroom practices section). They showed their satisfaction with the program and the classroom routines attached to it and highlighted the progress they were making since its implementation. Ameera asserted that her teachers encouraged her and other students to reach out to them in case they encountered problems at school. These findings corroborate teachers' findings.

### **CRT # 4 Culture and communication in the Classroom**

Culture, communication, and language are intimately related. As such, students' background, culture, language, religion, and identity influence the way they communicate with their teachers. Communication in the classroom becomes more complicated when students and teachers involved in the conversation do not share a common language. As such, showing understanding, acceptance, and respect for students' language, trying to learn the students' language, and familiarizing oneself with their communication styles constitute, according to the student participants, steps by ELD teachers towards cultural responsiveness.

Ameera's English teacher kept records of Arabic words exhibited by students. Sarah's Mathematics teacher allowed the students to write on the board in Arabic and draw pictures that reflect their backgrounds: *"Sometimes...only in the math period, the teacher let us write in Arabic and draw pictures that reflect who we are, like the Syrian flag."*

Those examples revealed a communication between Syrian refugee SIFEs and ELD teachers based on understanding, acceptance and respect of students' cultural communication styles. Also, these findings are consistent with findings in Chapter 5. Teachers shared more examples related to culture and communication in ELD classrooms.

### **CRT # 5 Ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction or cultural congruity in teaching and learning**

In an attempt to convey knowledge through students' learning preferences, strengths, needs, or styles, student participants shared that many teachers explained the lessons in simple ways, tried to connect the lessons to students' social and cultural backgrounds, gave students time to finish tasks, used Arabic translations, and allowed students to use Google Translate when needed. These findings resonate with findings from teachers' data. While related examples were previously mentioned in this chapter, Ameera's explanation of the ways in which her English and Mathematics teachers conveyed instructions and knowledge through the students' learning styles was representative of other students' (Hala, Sama, Maryam, Tala regarding English teachers; Maryam, and Sarah, regarding Mathematics teachers) explanations. Ameera asserted:

*I like English and Math courses because the teachers make everything really very simple to us. They explain in a simple way so we understand, like for instance when we have a math word problem assignment, the math teacher gives us 2 days to do it, not just 1 day. She tells us that she is doing that to give us the time to think and read the problems especially because of our language [reading challenges].*

That said, some teachers who taught Syrian refugee SIFEs, according to the students, were better at responding suitably to students' academic needs than others. For instance, Sarah shared that, following her request, her Mathematics teacher provided her with challenging tasks to match her advanced level and interest while her English teacher refused to do so. Sarah's Mathematics and English teachers' reactions to her request shed much light on the nature of teachers' perceptions of their Syrian refugee SIFEs' academic abilities and their relationships with them.

## 6.3 Power Relationships and Social Structures Reflected in ELD Classrooms

This study investigated the ways in which Syrian refugee SIFEs experienced mainstream schools, specifically the circumstances under which learning opportunities were created for them and the nature of interactions and relationships that they shared with their teachers in ELD classrooms. Its aim is not only to reveal the pain and difficulties of the day-to-day experiences but to understand and to challenge power structures that cause unjust social stratification, exclusion, and alienation of certain students.

In the interview protocol there were no specific or direct questions that sought information about power relationships and social structures reflected in ELD classrooms. However, the nature of the semi-structured interview questions focusing on students' and teachers' experiences in ELD classrooms opened up room for students to share information that referred to teacher-student power relationships and broader social structures reflected in ELD classrooms. Moreover, power relations and social structures were woven into responses to interview questions on classroom practices, teaching resources and pedagogies (RQ1), and resources and constraints to the implementation of Caring and CRT (RQ3). The themes that emerged from the data and that are associated with RQ 2 are teacher-student power/hierarchical relationships and shortcomings of the education system in Ontario and hidden curricula.

### 6.3.1 Teacher-student power, hierarchical relationships

According to Forkosh-Barush and Hershkovitz (2017), "teacher-student relationships are vital for students' academic, emotional, and social development, as well as for teachers' professional and personal development" (p.1). Data from students' interviews revealed the presence of teacher-student hierarchical relationships as a form of power relationships in ELD classrooms (and in other classes such as ESL and mainstream classes). In this kind of relationship, students would show respect to their teachers and abide by the school and/or classroom rules regardless of the ways used to enforce discipline.

In Syria, according to the student participants, physical punishment is used as a way to enforce discipline. Hala said: "*in Syria they used to ... tap on our hands with a stick if we*

*did something wrong.*” In Canada, physical punishment is absent and goes against the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, student participants shared that some teachers showed impatience, arrogance, and what students spoke of as, non-cultural and racist behaviors. For instance, Rami sharing his experience with one of his teachers at the time of a test, he purportedly stated, “*when I ask him a question during a quiz/test time he says I am x (the S-word) and I become xer (more S-word) during test times, so I didn’t pass this course.*” Hala also claimed, “*the teacher said that we are dirty.*” Seif as well mentioned that one of his Mathematics teachers in previous years exhibited explicit hatred for Arabs:

*There is this mathematics teacher in my school who hates Arabs, she is well known for hating Arabs. To pass the math course I need at least 85. I had 90 on the first assignment. Once, we had a test and as soon as we finished the teacher handed out a worksheet and asked us to do it as a homework. I put the worksheet in my backpack and totally forgot about it, especially after the test, I was quite exhausted. The next day in the math period, she asked us to hand in the homework, I approached her and explained to her what happened .... I asked her to give me until lunch time to hand it in. I tried to convince her; however, she refused and gave me zero on the assignment. This mark decreased my overall grade by around 4%. After I had to work extra hard to pass the course.*

Such experiences of racism were shared by other Syrian refugee SIFEs as well and were said to take place in mainstream classes. Along with such hierarchical power relationships, Syrian refugee SIFEs’ lack of L2 proficiency (vocabulary, sentence structures, etc.) made them more vulnerable to unpleasant situations and experiences in the classroom. Mortada and Rami described such situations:

*Mortada: if they [peers and teachers] talk about religion, hijab [veil] and the like, we wouldn’t be able to defend our point of view because we are not as proficient in English as they are. This is the problem and even if we do, we wouldn’t be able to communicate our ideas the way we want.*

*Rami (continued): we may say one word wrong or even try to find the correct word to use and then they might not get the meaning.*

Those experiences and power relationships and the ways they are lived in ELD classrooms appeared to do harm to the Syrian refugee SIFEs and can jeopardize their academic development and success as well as their overall wellbeing. It is worth noting



that those findings contradict teacher participants' descriptions of caring non-hierarchical teacher-student relationships.

### 6.3.2 Shortcomings of the high school education system in Ontario and hidden curricula

*“All my friends who I have met here or who came at the same time as me all have quit school to join the workforce” (Seif)*

Most student participants shared a common concern “*whatever we do is not enough to attend university,*” said Seif. “*I am trying my best to do better at school. Whatever I do is not enough*” claimed Maryam, and Ameera explained that she really wanted to join university; however, she will instead apply to college like her sister. Also, Hala and Tala posited, in an informal discussion, that they were aware of the difficulty of fulfilling Canadian universities' English language requirement, and thus, were thinking about joining college when they graduate from high school.

Upon their enrollment in public high schools, some Syrian refugee SIFEs (Seif, Rami, and Mortada at Highway SS) asserted that they have been told that they needed at least 4 years to graduate regardless of their age. Rami shared that the latter idea was “frustrating.” He added “*I started to get really bored. The routine of going to school every day for years doing almost the same thing, fighting in vain to get good/better marks and nothing is changing.*” Similarly, Seif commented that the whole situation was overwhelming because no matter what he and his friends did and no matter how hard they tried, they would still face barriers to fulfilling the education system's expectations. Seif mentioned: “*after, they tell us that our level in English is not good enough...I've been working on my English for three years now what else do they want me to do?*”.

In addition to their struggles in ELD/ESL classrooms, student participants also shared concerns about mainstream English courses requirements and university requirements.

Beyond the walls of ELD classrooms, Seif, Mortada, and Rami shared that the expectations for Syrian refugee SIFEs in high school exceeded the capability of the students. According to them, since the system assessed their progress using criteria built to assess mainstream students with no interruption in their education, the education

system failed them. It did not accommodate their educational needs and did not give them a fair chance to fulfil the system's requirements. Seif at Highway SS described his experience, which corroborates his friends' experiences. He said:

*We finished ELD, ESL and now we are in Grade 11 or 12 academic and the requirement now is to get 80 or 90 [percent]... In Syria we don't study in English, and you are comparing me to native speakers who have trouble getting 80 or 90. Maybe it is because of age, they evaluate or assess us and tell us that we need the 90 to get to university. This is the main problem... They have requirements and they don't give us enough time or provide us with needed resources to fulfill those requirements. It is impossible for a foreigner to learn a language in two years. Some tasks require to write 5 to 25 pages, we are not native speakers, we barely speak English, it is not our first language; add to that that at home we don't communicate in English.*

Further, according to Seif, Rami, and Mortada, fulfilling the province's English literacy requirements (e.g., OSSLT, IELTS) remains on the top of their language concerns. This shows further how the education system at postsecondary level might be failing refugee SIFEs who are automatically streamed towards college or workplace: "university is not an option." Seif said:

*For 3 years, none of my friends except of one had the courage to apply to university ... their language is not good enough to apply to university, so they go to college or choose to work instead of pursuing their education. They choose to go to college because college doesn't require IELTS.*

Seif, Mortada, and Rami shared that only one of their Syrian refugee friends from school applied to university; however, he got rejected. Seif said: "only one of our friends applied to university and he got rejected because he failed IELTS."

Mortada claimed, "we were concerned about the OSSLT (Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test) and found it difficult, so IELTS seems way more difficult...we need to have 7 across the board [speaking, listening, writing, reading]."

High school Syrian refugee SIFEs said they know and confirm from experience that there is a lot more to be done towards the efforts made to accommodate them. Seif posited:

*We were in grade 10 when we were still in Syria. If still there, we would be now at university. So, two years after grade 10 in Syria and then we graduate and go to university. However, here the first thing they told us is that it is going to take us four years to get to university. It has been so frustrating since the beginning. Four*

*years is a lot, it is two more years that we would've had spent in Syria to graduate. You feel like you are a loser.*

Regarding the additional English language requirement for students whose first language is not English and who need to provide evidence of their language proficiency, Rami added:

*when I want to apply to university, I am required to do IELTS, according to universities here all the ELD/ESL courses I did are not counted towards university, they just take into consideration grade 11 and 12 English. So, when the school guidance counselor made me take ELD and ESL A, B, C, D, E to be able to do grade 11 English, my question here is why to make me waste so many years ... they should've let me into accelerated track English courses. And now they ask us to do IELTS.*

While these challenges described by the students present future concerns of Syrian refugee SIFEs in and beyond ELD classrooms, I found it important to acknowledge those struggles and include them in this chapter because they start at the ELD level and continue to ESL and beyond, up until entry requirements for university.

It is noteworthy that what students reported in this section confirms what teachers from both schools described in Chapter 5 (e.g., “*the system doesn't work and is not meant for them [Syrian refugee SIFE] to psychologically succeed*” – Cynthia at Edugates SS, “*Early on, I realized that many of these students were not graduating...*” – Mark at Highway SS). Another issue both teachers and students agreed on was the lack of relevance of the programmatic curriculum to Syrian refugee SIFEs' socio-cultural and academic needs and interests.

## 6.4 Resources and Constraints to Caring and CRT

The third research question in this study is concerned with the resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms. The question is: What are the resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms?

Resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices were described to include those related to teachers' preparedness to teach ELD, teachers' perceptions and empathy, teacher-students' relationships, curriculum relevance and classroom environments, student characteristics (e.g., lack of L2, resilience), and interactions and support from others (e.g., peers and SWIS workers) in class and within the school. These resources and constraints coincided with some of student participants' pleasant and unpleasant experiences and the challenges and supports that they had encountered in ELD classrooms.

### **Resources to the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms**

Resources to caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms included (a) advanced teacher-student relationships, (b) teachers' patience and empathy, (c) students' resilience, and (d) support from SWIS workers. The resources, when analyzed alongside constraints, fall under the emergent clusters of: teachers' characteristics and teacher-student relationships, student characteristics, interactions and support from others in class and within the school, and further resources to caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms.

#### **1. Teachers' characteristics and teacher-student relationships**

**Advanced teacher-student relationships:** In sharing their experiences in ELD classrooms, student participants linked the nature of their advanced relationships with their teachers to some of their pleasant experiences. This applies to Seif, Mortada, and Rami's experiences with Mr. H "*he is like our friend,*" "*this teacher understands that we are adults and he treats us as such...he calls me "hey man...,"*" "*99% of the students like him.*" Ameera also said "*I like the fact that I don't feel that English teachers are taking stuff seriously. They explain the lesson and make us feel comfortable.*" Sama commented on her relationship with her ELD teachers: "*my teachers, I know them for a while now...they are very friendly. ... they don't treat us or make us feel like the relationship is a student-teacher relationship it is more like we are friends.*"

According to Seif, this kind of teacher-student relationship is very important "*specifically for English as a second language teachers so that they can make classes entertaining and*

*then students won't drop the course.*" Mortada, for instance, asserted that advanced teacher-student relationships created a safe classroom environment where students felt comfortable and safe.

**Teachers' patience and empathy:** teachers' patience and empathy came up in the interview analysis as important resources to caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms. Hala said, *"I like the teachers at my school... teachers are very patient."* Mortada also commented, *"The nice teacher we talked about earlier would show empathy, but this is not the case of all the other teachers."* Maryam claimed that both English and mathematics classes were very fun: *"I have never seen my English and math teachers mad in the classroom."* Tala also mentioned an incident in ELD classrooms where her English teacher who was also originally an immigrant, shared her story with the students and showed empathy during the holy month of Ramadan: *"40 years ago she came to Canada and she was still little... one day during the month of Ramadan she tried to fast...."* According to Mortada, it is important for teachers to be considerate and caring to support students to succeed academically.

## 2. Student characteristics

**Students' resilience:** Despite all the challenges, Syrian refugee SIFEs, from what they said, appeared to have high level of resilience. When asked about their aspirations in the interview, they described their future academic plans and ways to achieve their goals with lots of enthusiasm. Ameera who wanted to be an accountant and join her sister in college, said: *"I ... compare what I have been through and what I achieved and where I am now. I overcame lots of the problems and obstacles ... nothing is impossible."*

Seif wanted to be a pilot and Mortada said *"I thought about engineering because it is more about equations and less about memorizing, so I am considering it."* Rami expressed that he wanted to be an engineer, *"I always wanted to be an engineer, but it really depends on how things go at school."* Maryam thought about two options, she said *"nursing ... the other option is business. To do either or, I need to study well and double my efforts."* Sama wanted to be a fashion designer and join her older sister in college. To achieve her goals, Sama had plans: *"I need to improve my English. Now my oral*

*language and my understanding of the spoken language is good. I need to work on my writing and my reading.*” Sarah was considering teaching or joining law school, *“I want to help others in need”*, she said. However, to achieve her future plans, Sarah said she needed to work hard: *“no matter how hard it is, I will work hard to achieve my goals.”* Dunia said she wanted to be a pharmacist.

While still in ELD or transferred to ESL and Academic English, Syrian refugee SIFEs had already set plans in motion to achieve their academic goals.

### **3. Interactions and support from others in class and within the school**

**SWIS, Guidance, and Support workers:** SWIS workers facilitate a smooth inclusion of SIFEs into the classroom and school communities. They also play the role of a mediator between the teachers, the students, their parents, and the administration. As such some students commented on the importance of the role of the SWIS worker. Maryam for instance said: *“we used to get support only from the support worker at school ... When I had problems, I used to talk to the SWIS worker, and she used to calm me down and I know she likes me, and she treats me really well. I really like her too; she cares for me.”* Hala and Tala confirmed Maryam’s assertion. In a follow-up discussion with Hala and Tala, they both described the role of the SWIS worker as *“essential.”*

**4. Further resources to caring and CRT practices** in ELD classrooms mentioned by student participants included some students’ perceived safe classroom environment (e.g., *“we feel like a family”* - Ameera), teacher-student caring relationships, and the very few classroom practices that relate to students’ backgrounds (e.g., draw your family tree).

#### **Constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms**

Constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices mentioned by students in initial and follow-up interviews included (a) lack of teachers’ preparedness to teach ELD, (b) perceived lack of curriculum relevance, (c) failure to have a safe classroom environment to learn in, (d) students’ lack of L2, (e) peer bullying, (f) teachers’ perception, and (g) cultural conflicts among students. The constraints fall under the

emergent clusters of: teachers' preparedness, perception, empathy, and teacher-student relationships; student characteristics; interactions and support from others (e.g., peers and SWIS workers) in class and within the school; curriculum relevance and classroom environments; and further constraints to caring and CRT in ELD classrooms.

### **1. Teachers' preparedness, perception, empathy, and teacher-student relationships**

**Lack of teachers' preparedness to teach ELD:** Sarah, Hala, Tala, and Maryam confirmed that some of their ELD teachers were not ready to teach refugee SIFEs. For instance, Sarah commented on her mathematics and civics teachers' ways of teaching saying, "*they fail to do their jobs as they should do.*" Following struggles in the mathematics class, also Hala and Tala shared their perception that their math teacher was not prepared to teach refugee SIFEs:

*She wasn't doing a good job at teaching us math ... She does not explain all the details of a lesson, she explains only once and uses a single method ... Sometimes she doesn't know how to transfer the information to us ... The teacher is not prepared enough to teach refugee SIFEs.*

Although the student participants agreed that their teachers needed to be more prepared to teach ELD students, those students who had experience with the Guided Reading Program in ELD classrooms at Edugates SS asserted that their ELD teachers' methods and ways of teaching have improved significantly.

**Teachers' perceptions:** teachers' perceptions about their refugee SIFEs' culture, religion, and academic abilities were seen, from what students said, to interfere with their teaching and to, in turn, affect students' learning. Tala and Hala shared their story with their mathematics teacher: "*Last semester we had a problem with the math teacher. Once, she made fun of Syrian refugee SIFEs saying that [a specific place in the school] became dirty since the arrival of the Syrian refugees. We were shocked,*" said Hala. Hala also added that her mathematics teacher commented negatively on her Hijab/veil: "*The math teacher once ... said something that bothered me about my Hijab... she picks on us because we wear the veil ... The teacher might not talk to us directly, but we feel that she refers to us in her comments.*" Furthermore, Hala expressed her surprise about her

teacher's attitude towards Syrian refugee students: *"she is Arab, and we are Arab...she should be praising Syrian refugee students not the opposite."*

Teachers' perceptions about their students were also said to affect the learning opportunities they created for the students. Sarah shared that she tried in vain to ask her ELD teacher to provide her with more advanced literacy tasks, specifically when she finishes all the assignments and tasks and gets bored in the classroom. As a result, she used her cellphone instead to search for more advanced literacy tasks: *"I asked him to give me more challenging tasks and he responded "when you finish this level you will get to the higher level."*

## 2. Student characteristics

**Students' lack of L2:** Students reported finding it difficult to carry out meaningful communication in an ELD classroom, noting that when they spoke up, they were not understood the first time. They said this left room for misunderstandings and assumptions about the reasons behind one's behaviors, which in turn limited the ways in which teachers may implement caring and culturally responsive practices in the classroom. Sama said:

*It was difficult to follow the routines and rules; this took a while to get used to the routines and the rules especially that I was out of school for a long time. Also, because of English, it took time, and I got sick and tired because I was unable to understand English and I lost weight, it affected me mentally.*

According to Mortada, *"this all would've been easier if we were proficient in English."*

## 3. Interactions with and lack of support from others in class and within the school

**Peer bullying and stigmatization:** Hala, Tala, Ameera, Sama, and Rami shared that they feared their peers' mockery when they participated in classroom conversations, discussions or presentations. Tala said: *"sometimes when we do presentations, the students start to laugh."* Similarly, Ameera stated: *"I am always afraid of making mistakes or saying something wrong so others will start laughing at me."*



Sama and Rami also confirmed the same point. Sama said: *“I was afraid that when I speak in English, I would be embarrassed. I was afraid to make mistakes.”* Rami also posited: *“I don’t feel safe to participate; I even don’t like to talk in the classroom or participate so I don’t make mistakes.”*

Tala and Hala shared being bullied by other Syrian refugee SIFEs in ELD classrooms for wearing –what the Syrian students saw as – decent clothes: *“students [in the school who were also originally] from our village in Syria commented on our clothes because we always wear long dresses, they compared us to other [Syrian-Canadian] girls [at the same school] and how their clothes are more stylish....”*

**Uncomfortable interactions among students of different cultures:** The study findings revealed indicators of a culture conflict arising from the coexistence and interaction of Syrian refugee SIFEs and mainstream Canadian students at the broader school (not classroom) level.

Syrian refugee SIFEs take mainstream classes with mainstream students for half of the day. However, it is worth noting that none of them (except Dunia) had developed any friendships with other Canadians or non-Arab students. Students spoke of this as their own choice. Dunia had only one Chinese friend, who had newly immigrated. Maryam said:

*I don’t like to have Canadian friends. I am afraid that if I hang out with them, my principles would change. I don’t like it and my parents don’t like me to hang out with Canadian peers. Our principles and culture are totally different. I sometimes find that my principles and the way I was raised are even different from those of Arab-Canadian students who lived most or all their lives here in Canada.*

Sama also posited *“I don’t have Canadian friends ... I don’t think we will get along because our lives are totally different.”*

Rami also did not have any Canadian friends. He shared that he felt inferior when he was in mainstream classes: *“the problem is that I feel I am inferior and therefore I don’t feel safe to participate in classroom discussions. I even don’t like to talk in the classroom or participate so I don’t make mistakes.”* He added *“I don’t say anything, I don’t speak at all. Even if the teacher asks a question and I know the answer I don’t participate as if I*

*am not there.*” Seif continued: “*we are scared to speak with them, and they are scared to speak with us as well.*”

The interviews I had conducted with the Syrian refugee SIFEs revealed that they were facing some form of culture shock or culture conflict. After being in Canada for 3 to 5 years they were still unable to connect to or feel part of the mainstream school community, or to bridge the cultural cleavages. They said they were and still are unable to develop any bonds with any White Canadian friends. Most of the students revealed that they did not intend to have any Canadian friends. The reason why students felt hesitant to have Canadian friends is that the Canadian Western culture is completely different from theirs, in addition to the language barrier. Most of the students confided in me that this was motivated by their parents who did not encourage them to befriend White Canadians. Their parents thought that developing friendship bonds with White Canadians would negatively affect students’ behaviors, make them question their principles, and thereby threaten their identity. [Researcher reflective notes]

Although this finding describes uncomfortable interactions in the school setting and not in ELD classrooms specifically, it appears to have direct implications on the ways in which Syrian refugee SIFEs consequently experience classrooms, identify themselves and re-define their identities in Canadian classrooms in general. This also reflects the cleavage between the Canadian culture and other minority cultures such as the Arabic speaking cultures.

#### **4. Curriculum relevance and classroom environments**

**Lack of ELD curriculum relevance to Syrian refugee SIFEs’ socio-cultural and academic needs and interests:** Student participants noted the lack of representation of Syrian refugee SIFE’s culture, language, religion, identity, and needs in the ELD curriculum in Ontario. Findings showed that most of the students found that their experiences in ELD classrooms did not reflect traits of these socio-cultural aspects of their learning, nor did they relate to their backgrounds or life outside of the school. Not all of them saw this as a deficit.

When asked to describe the ways in which their experiences in school relate to (or do not relate to) their prior experiences, background and family life, all the student participants affirmed that none of the programmatic curriculum, subjects studied, classroom practices and activities, and classrooms' and school's environment reflected traits of their culture, language, religion, and identity. Very few exceptions were outlined in previous sections (section 6.2). For instance, Maryam said "*Rarely. Really rarely. It happens that we talk sometimes about our culture and identity but really not a lot. It would've been much better if lessons are related to our backgrounds.*" According to Seif and Sarah, teachers avoided talking about religion, war, and identity related issues. Seif said "*usually teachers do not discuss sensitive issues such as Hijab/veil, religion and racism. It is better this way, so they don't talk about us or against us.*" Mortada and Rami agreed with Seif, and Sarah confirmed Seif's statement: "*We never talk about Syria, war, identity, religion etc. I think the teacher knows a bit about the war in Syria, but we never talked about it in the English class.*"

**Lack of safe classroom environment to learn in:** Findings showed that all students agreed that classroom and school environments rarely reflected their lives outside of school. Sama compared her school to her home environment and noted that "*the life at school does not reflect any of Syrian refugee SIFE's experience, background or family life. The life at school and the school environment are totally different.*" She asserted: "*at home I feel more comfortable.*" Seif insisted that the teacher's role is decisive in creating a safe or unsafe classroom environment. Seif, Mortada and Rami shared an example based on an incident with their English teacher.

*Seif: It really depends on the teacher and the students in the classroom. Sometimes in the classroom and with some students you don't feel like you want to talk or participate. Sometimes you say something, and the teacher asks you to repeat several times [for her to understand what you are saying].*

*(Laughs, all agreed)*

*...and this ruins all the efforts you already made to participate in the discussion. The teacher plays a great role in this case.*

*Mortada: "this destroys you."*

Further, Rami said:

*You feel more comfortable when you talk to teachers and they correct you or give you advice or understand what you want to say. You feel comfortable trying and*

*learning in an environment that such teachers create for you in the classroom. Otherwise teachers who ask you to repeat as if they don't understand what you are saying or as if you are making mistakes or as if your accent is incomprehensible, makes you feel uncomfortable and literally destroys you and then you give up and stop trying.*

Hala and Tala also commented on the way they felt in the Mathematics classroom: “*we felt that we are worthless, and that the teacher is not going to let us pass....*” These examples revealed the lack of safe classroom environments for Syrian refugee SIFEs to learn in and succeed.

### **5. Further constraints to caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms**

mentioned by student participants included their perceived failure to have their needs accommodated, failure to have access to level appropriate learning opportunities, failure to have others empathize with their difficult learning experiences, and power/hierarchical teacher-student relationships previously described (RQ2). Those constraints, among others, appeared to be associated with students' shared unpleasant experiences in ELD classrooms. For instance, Sarah claimed that “*teachers don't [seem to] care ... I need lots of help ... and the teachers fail to do their jobs.*” Seif also mentioned:

*Once I had an assignment. I was late at work that day and I couldn't do the assignment. In the morning, I talked to the teacher and explained to her the reasons that prevented me from doing it and she just didn't accept my excuse, she doesn't understand.*

Further, Maryam explained that “*the administration and teachers care more about the reputation of the school and not the students.*”

In addition, when I asked Hala and Tala about how their experience in the mathematics class affected their performance in this course, they said “*a lot...because we weren't able to concentrate....*” These assertions, in addition to Mortada's previous comment “*this destroys you*” and Rami's “*literally destroys you and then you give up and stop to try,*” shed light on the ways in which such learning and interaction experiences, practices, and challenges might be causing harm to Syrian refugee SIFEs, negatively impacting their self-confidence, academic achievement and wellbeing.

Both teachers and students reported resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT in ELD classrooms. While teachers emphasized the importance of creating a safe classroom environment for Syrian refugee SIFEs, most student participants in this study shared examples that contradicted teachers' accounts related to safe classroom environment. Further, both teachers and students agreed that lack of teachers' preparedness to teach ELD, lack of the programmatic curriculum's relevance to students' socio-cultural and academic needs and interests, students' lack of L2, and teachers' deficit perceptions of Syrian refugee SIFEs were all constraints to caring and CRT implementation in ELD classrooms. In addition to the contradiction between students' and teachers' accounts related to safe classroom environments, findings from teachers' and students' interviews and research reflective notes diverged with regards to teacher-student relationships. Whereas student participants reported caring, advanced, and hierarchical power teacher-student relationships, teachers only described caring teacher-student relationships.

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter presented an analysis on the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs who were enrolled in ELD programs at two secondary schools in Ontario. Data gathered on the practices and pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms was analyzed through the critical theory framework, Gay's (2010) five Components of CRT and Instruction, and Noddings' (1992) Ethics of Care four Moral Educational Modes. Findings revealed that the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in the two secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario, Edugates SS and Highway SS, varied widely between two extremes: pleasant and unpleasant experiences, caring and culturally responsive practices and uncaring and non-culturally responsive practices, and advanced teacher-student relationships and hierarchical power teacher-student relationships.

The classroom practices varied between the two schools: In particular, practices, tasks, and instructions were more differentiated and modified to suit the students' needs and strengths at Edugates SS than at Highway SS. Further, students at both schools described pleasant and unpleasant experiences in ELD (English and Mathematics) classrooms.

Nonetheless, Edugates SS students' shared experiences in English classes were predominantly pleasant ones, while those described by students at Highway SS were characterized by more unpleasant experiences than pleasant ones. Pleasant experiences in ELD classrooms were mostly related to teachers practicing care, teachers' overt recognition of students' effort and progress, teachers' visible encouragement and motivation, and students being able to express themselves in English and perform well in the ELD class. Unpleasant experiences were related to peer bullying/mockery and ELD teachers' uncaring practices and non-culturally responsive behaviors. Overall, there was a common concern among the student participants that the subjects learned at school, school activities, and classroom and school environment in general did not reflect traits of Syrian refugee SIFEs' culture, language, religion, and identity. Resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching were also described to include those related to teachers' preparedness, perception, empathy and teacher-students' relationships, curriculum relevance and classroom environments, student characteristics (e.g., lack of L2, resilience), and interactions and support from others (e.g., peers and SWIS workers) in class and within the school.

In this chapter, I also corroborated the analysis from the teachers' interviews presented in Chapter 5 with the analysis from the students' interviews and the researcher's reflective notes. Some of the findings in this chapter confirmed findings from Chapter 5 (e.g., students' resilience, advantages of the Guided Reading Program, lack of curriculum relevance to students' socio-cultural and academic needs and interests, lack of teachers' preparedness) while others contradicted them (e.g., teacher-student relationships, classroom practices at Highway SS). Given that the teacher participants in this study were not necessarily the teachers of student participants, the discrepancies between ELD classroom practices, pedagogies, teacher-student relationships, and other aspects described by teachers and students may be the result of different strategies ELD teachers use in teaching Syrian refugee SIFEs. In Chapter 7, I will discuss the findings related to teachers' and students' experiences.

## Chapter 7

### 7 Discussion

The needs of refugee SIFEs are unpredictable (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015) and their experiences are different and more complex than the experiences of other CLD and refugee students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). In this study, I researched the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario trying to better-understand the nature of those experiences from the perspectives of the teachers and students. I particularly intended to investigate caring and CRT practices, describe power relationships and other ways in which the ELD classroom might reflect the broader Canadian social structure and delineate the resources and constraints for the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms. Considering the novelty of the situation after the influx of Syrian refugees, followed by the enrollment of high numbers of Syrian refugee SIFEs in public secondary schools in Ontario, and the complexity of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers, this research is timely and needed.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I presented findings on the three research questions of this study which shed light on the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario from the perspectives of the teachers in Chapter 5 and the students in Chapter 6. While Chapters 5 and 6 were organized by research questions, this chapter is organized by themes. I used the transformative lenses of Critical Theory (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Giroux, 1983), CRT (Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010, 2018) and EoC (Noddings, 1992, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999) to analyze and interpret teacher-participants' and student-participants' experiences in ELD classrooms in two secondary schools in Ontario. In Chapter 3, I elaborated on how CRT enhances the better-understanding of issues of culture, language, race and power (Bartell, 2011; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994); EoC considers ethical and moral aspects of teacher-student relationships (Noddings, 2003); and CT renders visible inequalities in the selection, dissemination and evaluation of knowledge, and highlights ways in which classrooms'

and schools' structures and teachers' practices may alienate ethnic and racial minority SIFEs.

The analysis and interpretation of the findings indicated that teachers' and students' experiences varied depending on the teachers, the students and the schools' contexts. The students' experiences included their experiences with some ELD teachers who participated in the study as well as those with teachers who did not as other experiences related to students' ELD learning.

Findings from Chapters 5 and 6 evinced (a) both caring and uncaring practices in ELD classrooms, (b) teacher-student non-power hierarchical and caring relationships on one hand and power hierarchical relationships in ELD classrooms on the other hand, (c) both evidence of CRT and lack of CRT practices in ELD classrooms, (d) CRT practices based on individual efforts from particular ELD teachers, (e) progress and successes in responding to students' socioemotional and academic needs and interests, (f) lack of the ELD programmatic curriculum relevance, (g) limited representation of and connection to Syrian refugee SIFEs' sociocultural and academic needs and interests in the classroom practices, (h) lack of some ELD teachers' preparedness to respond to the socioemotional and academic needs of refugee SIFEs, (i) shortcomings of the high school education system in Ontario, (j) teachers' agency and students' resilience, and (k) available resources and current constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms.

## 7.1 Overview

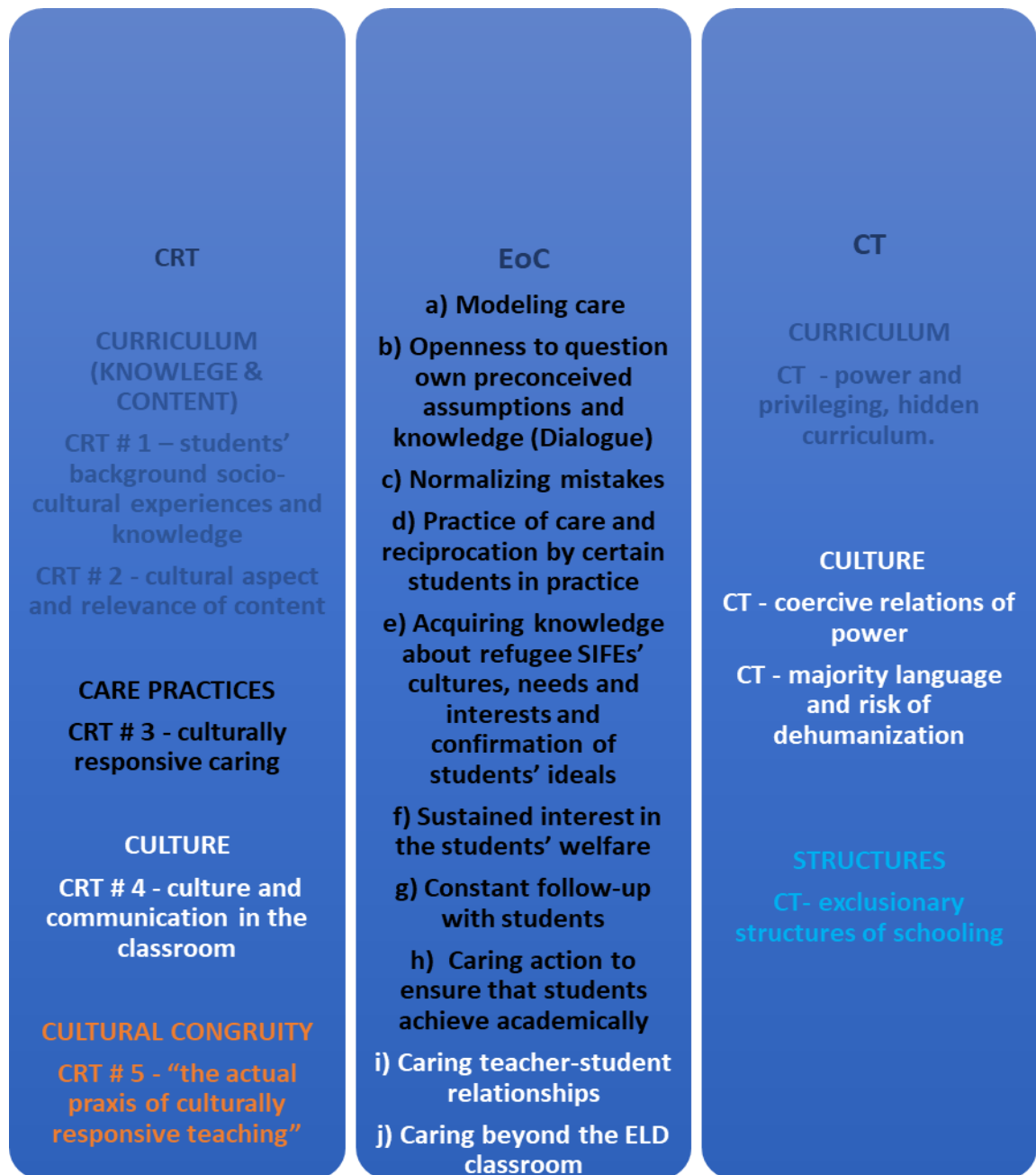
In this chapter, I elaborate on 11 themes that emerged from the findings on teachers' and students' experiences in ELD classrooms in Ontario. I organized this chapter according to the three theories that frame this study: CT, EoC and CRT. As shown in Figure 10, the three theories have components in common (e.g., an examination of the relevance of the curriculum in CT and CRT; a focus on the caring aspect of instruction in EoC and CRT; an exploration of teacher-student relationships in CT, EoC and CRT). The components as we shall see are addressed from different angles in each of the theories. Further, the



components might not be mutually exclusive, and connections are made when discussing a theme where this is the case.

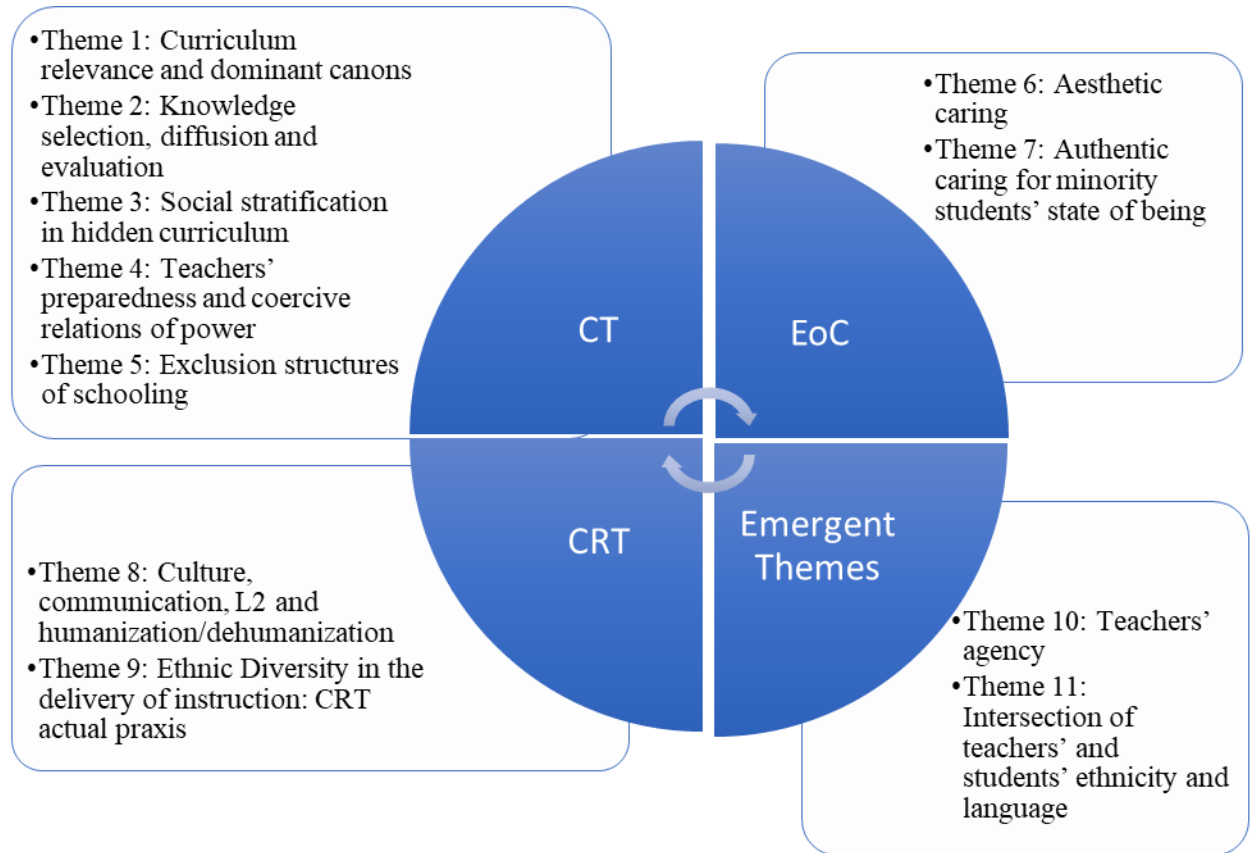
## Framework Dimensions

**Figure 10. Theoretical Framework Dimensions in Relation to Findings**



This chapter identifies and discusses the themes shown in Figure 11.

**Figure 11. Themes Generated from the Findings on the Experiences of Syrian Refugee SIFEs and ELD Teachers**



I first discuss the themes that relate primarily to CT, yet that still have connections to the other two frameworks. These are Themes 1 to 5. After, I elaborate on themes that are linked to EoC and CRT. These are Themes 6 to 9. Later, I discuss emergent themes. These are Themes 10 and 11. The rationale for discussing CT Themes first is that the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers were found to be difficult and “*very challenging*” (Cynthia) which corroborates findings in the literature review in Chapter 2. Further, I wanted to stay authentic to the findings and to the voices of teacher and student participants who greatly emphasized the challenges they encountered in ELD classrooms in Ontario at the time of the interview. Given the participants' voices, this study discusses findings on deficit practices and their related challenges and delineates supportive pedagogies, specifically caring and CRT practices.

For example, Theme 2, which discusses how knowledge taught to students was selected, diffused and evaluated in ELD classrooms by teachers who participated in the study, elaborates on RQ 1 (practices and pedagogies), RQ 2 (power relationships and social structures) and RQ 3 (resources and constraints) and is common to all three theories, CT, CRT and EoC. First, CT focuses on power and privilege, the dominance of a Western curriculum canon and alienation of minority students evident in the selection, diffusion and evaluation of students' knowledge. Then, CRT involves an examination of the multicultural aspects in the curriculum, based on students' sociocultural experiences and funds of knowledge (CRT # 1), ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content (CRT # 2) and instructions (CRT # 5). Third, EoC focuses on the consideration of the needs and academic interests of students as part of what makes a caring and safe environment when selecting, diffusing and evaluating students' knowledge.

The themes draw on all the findings from RQ 1, RQ 2 and/or RQ 3 described in Chapters 5 and 6. The themes elaborate on the findings in light of the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed. The analysis and discussion of these themes are situated in a discipline that studies curriculum, teaching and learning so as to improve it as well as to give hope that education can be just, equitable and inclusive and teaching can be caring, culturally responsive and emancipatory despite the challenges and constraints to caring and CRT pedagogies.

In the first section, I discuss the experiences of ELD teachers and students that relate to CT. I start with those that are at the intersection with the other two theories, mentioning where they diverge from CRT and EoC. In the last two sections, I discuss the findings on caring and CRT practices.

## 7.2 Findings Related to CT

Critical theory analyzes societal power dynamics and social stratification dynamics that relate to *curricula* practices, to *knowledge* taught in schools, and to the *designs of schooling*, all of which may support and advance the interests of privileged groups in power. In this section, I discuss the experiences of ELD teachers and students that relate

to CT. I start with those that are at the intersection with CRT and EoC, namely Themes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

### **Theme 1: Curriculum relevance and dominant canons**

In this theme, I discuss the findings that relate to the ELD curriculum relevance (or irrelevance) and the dominance (or, non-dominance) of a curriculum canon of those in *power*. CRT in this section encompasses CRT # 1 - focus on SIFEs' background, sociocultural experiences and knowledge, and CRT # 2 - cultural aspect of content taught to this marginalized group. EoC covers confirmation - focus on the knowledge of students' needs and interests. CT covers the curriculum's lack of relevance and dominance of a Western curriculum canon. This theme also responds to RQ 1 (practices and pedagogies), RQ 2 (power relationships and social structures) and RQ 3 (resources and constraints).

Generally, the study findings revealed a consensus, both by teacher and student participants, about the lack of relevance of aspects of the ELD curriculum. Findings from teachers' and students' experiences revealed that major aspects of the ELD programmatic curriculum lack relevance to Syrian refugee SIFEs' culture, language, religion, identities, needs and interests (e.g., "*unfortunately it doesn't*" – teachers at Edugates SS; "*Early on, I realized that many of these students were not graduating ... As such I helped creating an ELD/ESL co-op program*" - Mark at Highway SS; "*There is nothing that relates to the Arab culture*" – Seif at Highway SS). All students at the two schools and teachers at Edugates SS expressed overtly that the ELD curriculum does not adequately reflect Syrian refugee SIFEs' above mentioned characteristics, needs and interests. Teachers at Highway SS expressed the same view but in a more implicit manner. In addition to the said programmatic curriculum's lack of relevance, the classroom practices enacted by some teachers as described by student participants also seemed to disregard and undermine the knowledge and prior experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs. According to Gay (2018), this means that it is the resource component of CRT that is mainly lacking. The knowledge created in some ELD classrooms in the two schools was said to be disconnected and separated from students' sociocultural needs and interests and was

diffused and evaluated in a context of power imbalances that added to the alienation of Syrian refugee SIFEs, hindered their academic progress and wellbeing (e.g., “*this was the worst educational experience I have ever had*” - Maryam) and contributed to school dropout (e.g., “*all my friends who I have met here or who came at the same time as me all have quit school to join the workforce*” - Seif). Thus, most Syrian refugee SIFEs in this study perceive that they received an overall deficient educational experience which corroborates studies by Kanu (2008), Capstick and Delaney (2016) and Stodoldky and Grossman (2000) about refugee students’ perceptions of their education.

That said, teacher participants at both schools said they made efforts to learn more about their students and implement classroom practices and programs that are more suited to their needs and interests (e.g., Guided Reading Program, ELD/ESL co-op program). As a result, ELD teacher participants became curriculum developers (Kincheloe, 2016), a role that they did not choose, but nonetheless, they assumed willingly with “*a lot of hours of hard work and daily reflection*” (Cynthia). According to Kincheloe (2016), teachers become curriculum developers if they “are self-directed scholar professionals who produce their own knowledges and diagnose the needs of their students” (p. 611). The teacher participants in this study demonstrated their ability to juggle curriculum as planned – programmatic curriculum – and curriculum as lived experience – classroom curriculum – in what Aoki (2005) calls the *zone in between*.

Although such individual level efforts from teachers are highly valuable, they remain limited because of the absence of systematic support, namely the lack of relevance of the programmatic curriculum and the lack of information about the Syrian refugee SIFEs. The lack of representation of Syrian refugee SIFEs’ cultural and ethnic traits in the ELD programmatic curriculum, confirmed by both teachers and students, contradicts the premises on which the ELD programs and curricula were founded. The Practical Guide for Ontario Educators Grades 3-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) has emphasized that ELD students “need to see the connections between who they are, what they value, and what they are learning in school in order to make sense of the learning and integrate it into their whole being” (p. 35). While the Practical Guide has outlined the roles and responsibilities of educators in this sense, teacher participants, particularly at Edugates

SS, said that they lacked the necessary information, resources and tools that would enable them to translate the recommendations of the Practical Guide into culturally responsive classroom practices for Syrian refugee SIFEs (e.g., “*we had students with different issues from mental health to all kinds of physical health, most with nothing on file for them...I was given work that was made or prepared for ESL students and some of it was for ELD students*” – Cynthia at Edugates SS). This finding corroborates Brubacker’s (2011) critique of the Practical Guide and the Ontario policy document given their “suggested inclusion of students’ prior experiences and home languages and the need for ELD students to assimilate to formal schooling norms as opposed to schooling changing to meet the needs of ELD students” (pp. 70-71).

Further, Gay (2018) claimed that “most textbooks used in schools are controlled by the dominant group (European American) and confirm its status, culture, and contributions” (p. 144). This explains the exclusion of Syrian refugee SIFEs’ cultural, linguistic, religious and identity-related characteristics from the ELD programmatic curriculum content and proves that the ELD curriculum in Ontario is dominated by the knowledge of those in power. Thus, the reproduction of an unjust social order is perpetuated through the dominance of a Western curriculum canon that rejects the knowledge of marginalized groups (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2001; Eisner, 1992; Giroux, 1995; Paraskeva, 2016). Based on these findings, questions related to the gap between the programmatic curriculum and Syrian refugee SIFEs’ academic and cultural needs arise given the underrepresentation or lack of representation of this group of minority students’ ethnic and cultural traits in the ELD curriculum.

## **Theme 2: Knowledge selection, diffusion, and evaluation**

In this theme, I discuss how knowledge taught to students is selected, diffused and evaluated by teacher participants and other teachers who taught student participants in ELD classrooms. Paraskeva (2016) asserts that “what is at stake, and always has been is knowledge (selected, diffused, and evaluated)” (p. 15). School curricula emerge from ideas about what or whose knowledge should be taught and learned, and how such teaching and learning can best be undertaken and then assessed.

This theme responds to RQ 1 (the practices of knowledge selection and evaluation and pedagogies of knowledge diffusion), RQ 2 (power relationships and social structures in knowledge practices and pedagogies) and RQ 3 (the resources and constraints). Further, it is related to CT, CRT, and EoC. Whereas CT focuses on power and privilege in the selection, diffusion and evaluation of students' knowledge, the dominance of a Western curriculum canon and alienation of minority students, CRT involves an examination of the multicultural aspects in curriculum content (CRT # 2) and instructions (CRT # 5) based on students' socio-cultural experiences and funds of knowledge (CRT # 1). EoC focuses on the needs and academic interests of students as part of what makes a caring and safe environment. In this section, I outline particularly the experiences of ELD teacher and student participants that relate to CT, mentioning where they diverge from CRT and EoC.

Knowledge taught to Syrian refugee SIFEs (selected, diffused, and evaluated) in some ELD classrooms by teacher participants and a few teachers who taught the student participants appeared to regard and include students' knowledge to some extent (e.g., "*we may read and discuss articles related to Mecca, Eid etc.*" – Jennifer at Highway SS), whereas, in other ELD classrooms, students' knowledge was disregarded and undermined. The latter finding corroborates the claims of critical thinkers and scholars such as Michael Apple, Jim Cummins, Geneva Gay, Henry Giroux, Joe Kincheloe, Joao Paraskeva, and Shirley Steinberg who argue that Western curricula content lacks relevance to minority students.

### **Selection of Knowledge**

Teacher and student participants described the knowledge selected and taught in ELD classrooms. All teacher participants said that they integrated culturally responsive practices in their teaching (e.g., "*When designing a culturally responsive lesson I invite students to make a ppt [PowerPoint] presentation about themselves and what they are proud of*"- Cynthia) while only a few examples about culturally responsive learning opportunities were described by student participants (e.g., "*sometimes we read a story and [the teachers] ask us to reflect on it and describe how it relates to us*" -Ameera).

This inconsistency between students' and teachers' descriptions may be due to the different strategies and pedagogies different teachers use in ELD classrooms. That said, most of the topics that were reported to integrate Syrian refugee SIFEs' social and cultural characteristics appeared fragmented, isolated, folkloristic, and neutral in that they only scratched the surface of Syrian refugee SIFEs' culture, religion, and backgrounds.

Such knowledge included activities involving traditional music, traditional food, and Eid celebrations. This is a fact that Kowaluk (2016) and Gay (2018) warned about.

Describing culturally responsive classrooms in Canada, Kowaluk (2016) asserted that "the treatment of diversity that currently exists in education is disjointed and superficial" (p. 53). That is to say that minorities' cultures are more than food, music, and costumes. "Educators should be diligent in ensuring that curriculum content about ethnically diverse groups is accurate authentic and comprehensive" (Gay, 2018, p. 192), and that the Canadian curriculum ought to reflect deeper aspects of minorities' cultures, values, and identities.

Further, noteworthy were the claims of all students at Highway SS (Seif, Rami, Mortada, and Sarah) that racism and religion-related knowledge is not usually discussed in the classroom (e.g., "*usually teachers do not discuss sensitive issues such as Hijab/veil, religion and racism*" - Seif). While these students' assertions contradicted two Highway SS teachers' claims (Jennifer & Jasmine), surprisingly, those students did not seem to mind the said exclusion of such knowledge from the curriculum (e.g., "*It is better this way, so they don't talk about us or against us*" - Seif). Reflecting on the exclusion of this knowledge from the curriculum, Seif and his peers explained that their lack of L2 makes them vulnerable and defenseless in instances where teachers or other peers in mainstream classes tackle these subjects, and thus they did not see harm in excluding such knowledge. It is important to acknowledge that ELD students' lack of L2 may also be an affecting factor in this sense, and as such it is easier for Syrian refugee SIFEs to understand concrete culture-related practices generated from their daily lives out of school, such as food and music, in L2. If the teachers are to communicate more abstract and complex concepts, such as beliefs, values and Syria's contribution to humanity, in L2, Syrian refugee SIFEs might not be able to understand them or communicate their



thoughts in L2. These factors could explain that the reported culturally responsive practices implemented in many ELD classrooms were mostly related to the most obvious and physical elements of a culture such as music, traditional food and the like, but did not touch the core of the students' culture, values, and beliefs, nor did it address political related issues (e.g., racism). Further, teachers' limited knowledge about their students' culture, histories, and backgrounds, in addition to the lack of the programmatic curriculum's relevance, might also have been a reason behind the exclusion of this kind of emancipatory knowledge from the ELD classroom practices. Seif's comment that "*so they don't ... against us,*" on the other hand points to the apprehension of being talked about from a deficit perspective.

ELD teachers ought to try to find means to communicate emancipatory knowledge in a way that ELD students may be able to grasp and engage with it. Gay (2018) asserted that "this can be accomplished by working in collaboration with ethnic scholars, community leaders, and cultural brokers" (p. 192). The resources provided to ELD teachers (e.g., PD, training, funds) may, thus, emphasize and facilitate the collaboration between ELD teachers and ethnic scholars, community leaders or cultural brokers. Those mediators would particularly assist ELD teachers in integrating politically heavy topics of power, justice and emancipatory knowledge content (e.g., prejudice and racism) into the curriculum. This knowledge empowers Syrian refugee SIFEs culturally and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and supports their academic progress and identity formation. Further, assisting students to grasp this knowledge is socially just.

### **Knowledge diffusion, teacher-student relationships, and classroom environment**

Knowledge was created and diffused in ELD classrooms where teacher-student relationships, teachers' behaviors and classroom environments were diverse in nature. The nature of teacher-student relationships, teachers' behaviors and the resulting classroom environments appeared to affect students' academic achievements, identity negotiations, and wellbeing. Whereas all teacher participants said that they cared for their students (e.g., "*They don't question that we care, they know*" - Suzan) and used CRT

approaches (e.g., *The more I know about their journeys and challenges, the better I'm able to tailor my teaching and approach to their needs*" - Jennifer), student participants' experiences of caring ranged between two extremes: caring and advanced teacher-student relationships (e.g., *"they are very friendly"* - Sama) and uncaring power-dominated hierarchical teacher-student relationships (e.g., *"ELD [English] teachers do not care whether we learn or not"* – Sarah; *"the teacher said that we are dirty."* Hala; *"there is this mathematics teacher in my school who hates Arabs"* - Seif). Moreover, students either shared very few or no experiences of CRT practices or non-culturally responsive teachers' attitudes and practices in the ELD classrooms. Caring and CRT practices will be outlined in detail later in sections 7.2 and 7.3.

Prior and current schooling experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs were said to be characterized by power relationships, racism, and marginalization (e.g., *"we experienced racism in schools in Jordan and we weren't allowed to go to public schools because of our refugee status"* – Maryam). In briefly comparing the power exercised by teachers in some classrooms in Syria and in Canada as described by the Syrian refugee students who participated in this study, I found that the way power was exhibited in the classroom is different in nature, but nonetheless the effects of it in both cases appeared harmful for Syrian students.

Some teacher-student relationships in Syria, as described by the students, are traditional hierarchical forms of relationships that mirror social stratification and power structures, where the social system, as also described by some students, is based on abiding by the government's rules out of fear of persecution or being reported to the authorities. As such, when Rami mentioned Seif's real name during the audio-recorded interview, both students laughed and commented

Seif: *(laugh) why did you say my name? (as a joke)*

Rami: *now the authorities will go after you*

This kind of power relationship is explicit and explains what student participants reported about their teachers using physical punishment in schools in Syria. In Canada, such power relationships (e.g., physical punishment, fear of persecution or being reported to

the authorities) are absent. Nevertheless, the student and teacher participants described other kinds of power relationships, different in nature (mostly hidden but some explicit) that prevail in some ELD classrooms in Ontario. The consequences of the hidden kinds of power relationships can be as harmful for SIFEs as those that are explicit and affect the learning of Syrian refugee SIFEs.

Student participants described experiences that revealed uncaring, non-culturally responsive and power hierarchical relationships exhibited by some of their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario (e.g., *“I had an assignment and I was late at work that day... I talked to the instructor and explained to her the reasons ... and she just didn’t accept my excuse [explanation]”*- Seif; *“I asked him to give me more challenging tasks and he responded, “when you finish this level you will get to the higher level – Sarah; “We never talk about Syria, war, identity, religion etc. - Seif). According to Cummins (2000) and Dei and Rummens (2010) teacher-student relationships define the ways in which knowledge is created and validated, and the ways in which identities and cultures are negotiated in the classroom. In this study, the experiences shared by the student participants such as Seif showed that the needs and the linguistic, cultural and prior experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs were disregarded and undermined (Cummins, 2001; Giroux, 1995) by some teachers who taught the student participants. Moreover, these teachers, given that they were in positions of power and unresponsive to students’ needs, might have been representing the views of those groups in power who consider themselves more knowledgeable (Freire, 2000).*

Findings from students’ experiences revealed that in some ELD classrooms knowledge was diffused by teachers who exhibited the following coercive power (Cummins, 2000), uncaring attitudes and unresponsive behaviors towards Syrian refugee SIFEs: xenophobic behaviors and arrogance (e.g., *“she is well known for hating Arabs”*- Seif at Highway SS); uncaring and inconsiderate behaviors (e.g., *“the teacher said that we are dirty”* – Hala at Edugates SS); impatient attitudes, unprofessional practices, and deficit-oriented perceptions of Syrian refugee SIFEs (e.g., *“when I ask him a question during a quiz/test time he says I am x (the S-word) and I become xer (more S-word) during test times ... so I didn’t pass this course”* – Rami). Those ELD classrooms were described by the students

as unsafe and toxic environments that hindered their academic achievements and wellbeing.

Students reported that they did not feel safe in the ELD classroom. For example, they did not feel safe to speak out (e.g., *“teachers who ask you to repeat as if they don’t understand what you are saying or as if you are making mistakes or as if your accent is incomprehensible, makes you feel uncomfortable and literally destroys you and then you give up and stop trying* - Rami). Students also said they did not feel safe to express their opinions (e.g., *“the civics teacher told me that if I don’t know how to say it all in English to go back to my seat and stay seated, but I want to express myself”*- Sarah). Students felt anxiety (e.g., *“we weren’t able to concentrate in the classroom anymore”* - Hala & Tala), tensions (e.g., *“as if she wants us to fail”*- Hala & Tala) and fear in the classroom (e.g., *“we felt...that the teacher is not going to let us pass”* - Hala & Tala). Such experiences appeared to create in the students a self-image of worthlessness and inferiority (e.g., *“I feel I am inferior”* - Rami, *“we felt that we are worthless”* - Hala & Tala); ruined their efforts to contribute to classroom discussions (e.g., *“and this ruins all the efforts you already put to participate in the discussion”* - Seif), and shattered students’ confidence (e.g., *“this destroys you”* - Mortada).

The findings on the way knowledge was diffused and the effect of this on students’ learning and socioemotional wellbeing confirm Yau’s (1995) findings which concluded that refugee student participants found “their teachers to be indifferent, uninterested, uncaring, and distant” (p. 11). They also corroborate DeCapua and Marshall (2015), Brewer and McCabe (2014), Gay (2018), and Skidmore (2016) in their research about immigrants and refugees experiencing dissonance, racism, and xenophobia in schools.

### **Knowledge evaluation: Appropriateness of the streaming process and the evaluation practices**

This section focuses on how many teachers and students at both schools viewed (a) the streaming process that is usually based on the practice of assessing students’ prior knowledge, and (b) the evaluation system that assesses knowledge taught to Syrian refugee SIFEs in Canadian classrooms. Findings from the experiences of teachers and

students revealed the proper streaming practices within ELD classrooms as well as what appeared to be improper streaming processes and inappropriate evaluation systems within and outside ELD classrooms.

As a result of the Guided Reading Program, students in ELD classrooms were streamed within ELD classrooms according to their varied literacy and numeracy skills. Nevertheless, many teachers and students described what they saw as improper streaming practices for Syrian refugee SIFEs in both schools (e.g., *“It was the school guidance counselor’s choices of courses that negatively affected me”* – Seif; *“... they aren’t being streamed that way and they are all in one class...”* – Lynn). Many student participants in both schools shared that the school guidance counselors were nonresponsive to the students’ prior experiences and failed to assign them courses that could help them improve their language skills and graduate in a timely manner. Teachers for their part considered that Syrian refugee SIFEs were not streamed properly and that they were grouped, despite different academic levels, age groups and skills, all in one class. This finding resonates with the Ontario Minister of Education’s (S. Lecce) latest decision to end what he called “systematic, racist and discriminatory” (Katsarov, 2020, para 3) streaming practices in Ontario. Lecce’s decision can be seen as a step forward towards change in Ontario education in promoting more inclusive and empowering practices for all students.

Some students’ and teachers’ reflections on the evaluation systems in ELD classrooms in both schools revealed concerns regarding what they viewed as inappropriate evaluation practices for Syrian refugee SIFEs. Teachers and students from both schools confirmed that Syrian refugee SIFEs are learning at an elementary level but expected to perform at a mainstream high school level and are assessed by criteria for this level (e.g., *“In elementary school...it is more in the skills-based side. So, I think of our students, we are teaching them at an elementary level I find it so unfair to say like you are at 45 [45%] because you are unable to do all this”* – Suzan). Those teachers and students regarded the evaluation system’s criteria as unfair and unrealistic. Teachers and students’ concerns about the said biased assessment tools and criteria (e.g., *“the board will not take away the numbers”* – Suzan) corroborate research by Roy and Roxas (2011) and DeCuire and

Dixson (2004) about deficit discourses and practices of teachers and schools which, according to the authors, are in many instances grounded in and supported by biased assessment practices.

Further, student-participants who successfully transferred to ESL shared challenges that started at the ELD level and continued beyond ELD to ESL, mainstream English courses and even college and university (e.g., *“the requirement now is to get 80 or 90 [percent]... In Syria we don't study in English, and you are comparing me to native speakers who have trouble getting 80 or 90”* - Seif). Students' concerns centered mainly on developing Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) expected at secondary and postsecondary levels (Cummins, 2000). Some students affirmed that the education system expectations and the English language requirements for university enrolment in Ontario are unrealistic given Syrian refugee SIFEs' interrupted education (e.g., *“whatever we do is not enough to attend university”* - Seif). Those factors according to teacher and student participants unfortunately narrow the options of Syrian refugee SIFEs and decrease their likelihood in accessing university. That said, all student participants shared their desires to go to university (e.g., *“I always wanted to be an engineer, but it really depends on how things go at school”* - Rami) given the importance and the weight that graduating with a university degree means for them and their parents. Nevertheless, during the last three to four years, the same students who were aspiring for university education had witnessed their former Syrian SIFE peers pushed away from the academic stream or drop out of school to join the workforce (e.g., *“the majority of the youth who enrolled during the first wave, dropped out ....”* Rina SWIS at Edugates SS). As a result, Syrian refugee SIFEs in this study started to lower their expectations of academic achievement and professional prospects. On one hand, this finding aligns with Godin et al.'s (2017) findings which report frustration amongst many Syrian refugee youths because learning English is taking longer than they had expected. Nonetheless, this finding also contradicts Godin et al.'s (2017) claim that some Syrian refugee youths in their study had high expectations regarding academic achievements, professional prospects, career goals, language learning, and integration. I am inclined to think that the divergence in the findings might be related to the fact that Godin et al.'s study was conducted in 2017 and Syrian refugee youths were still relatively newly enrolled in the Canadian education system which could

explain their high expectations. Further, in Godin et al.'s (2017) study, Syrian refugee youths were not all specified as SIFEs as is the case for student participants in the present study which may also explain the divergence in the findings.

The findings on the evaluation practices as well as the practices used to assess Syrian refugee SIFEs' prior knowledge corroborate Gay's (2018) and Kincheloe's (2016) claims on assessment and evaluation of minority students. According to Gay (2018) and Kincheloe (2016), there is a tendency to adopt evaluation tools from mainstream English language courses, such as standardized tests, and use them to assess minority students' academic achievement in a practice that disregards students' differences and needs, and thus, has a detrimental effect on minority students' education. This finding also shows that teachers and guidance counselors need further professional development and resources to align their practices with the Practical Guide's (Ministry of Education, 2008) recommendations for teachers to adopt a holistic view of the student that goes beyond academic achievement (Godin et al., 2017). According to Gay (2018), education is devoted to developing the whole being, and thus students' ethnicity and culture as "*the foundational anchors of all other behaviors*" (p. 10) ought to be reflected in students' learning and assessment. This experience has not yet been reflected in the education of Syrian refugee SIFEs in this study.

The practice of focusing solely on students' academic achievement was judged to be unfair by some teacher and student participants (e.g., "*I find it so unfair to say like you are at 45 [45%] because you are unable to do all this...*" – Suzan). That is because standardized test scores and cognitive performance alone fail to be adequate indicators of minority students' academic achievement (Bartell, 2011, p.57).

Cummins (2000) posited that students in subordinated social categories are either invigorated or weakened academically because of their interactions with teachers in the classroom. Similarly, the ways in which knowledge was selected, diffused, and evaluated in some ELD classrooms at Edugates SS and Highway SS seem to debilitate Syrian refugee SIFEs instead of invigorating them. Such approaches to knowledge perpetuate the historical, political, social, and cultural reality of oppressive hidden curricula and

preserve a social stratification in which the Western culture and way of knowing dominate through education institutions that reproduce an unequal and unjust social order.

Further, the hidden curriculum behind the discriminatory streaming practices and inappropriate evaluation system leads to fewer chances for Syrian refugee SIFEs to graduate and access higher education compared to their Canadian peers. Those discriminatory practices will cause further unequal opportunities for Syrian refugee SIFEs to compete at the professional level in the future. Thus, the hidden curriculum seems to perpetuate (and reflect) a certain social stratification and reinforce the divide in the society between those who are privileged and those who are less privileged.

### **Theme 3: Social stratification in hidden curriculum**

In this theme, I discuss findings on social stratification in hidden curriculum, particularly the historical, political, social and cultural realities of hidden curriculum that denigrate minorities' knowledge and privilege a dominant group's ways of knowing. This theme relates to CRT (CRT # 2, CRT # 5) and CT (power and privileging, hidden curriculum). CRT # 2 focuses on cultural relevance and CRT # 5 focuses on enactment of multicultural curriculum and instruction, but CT focuses on power and privileging in hidden curriculum. This theme also responds to RQ 1, RQ 2, and RQ 3.

Social stratification in hidden curriculum preserves and reproduces certain unequal and often unjust social systems. Hidden powers and privileges exhibited at different levels of the curriculum, specifically at the levels of curriculum planning and curriculum enactment (e.g., lack of representation of Syrian refugee SIFEs' cultural traits in the programmatic content and underrepresentation of this student population in classroom practices in some ELD classrooms), contribute to the challenges related to the preservation and reproduction of an unequal and unjust social order (Pinar, 1995; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1992). Further, hidden powers and privileges in the curriculum imply that "groups whose histories are missing from the national curricula ... are insignificant citizens in the community of the nation" (Wilkinson, 2014, p. 419). They also suggest that the histories, culture, contributions, identities, and funds of knowledge



of those minority groups are considered relatively unimportant, whereas they confirm the superiority of the Western identity and culture (Said, 2003). Hidden powers and privileges in the curriculum studied by the Syrian refugee SIFEs were demonstrated through the lack of representation of Syrian refugee SIFEs in the programmatic curriculum, underrepresentation of Syrian refugee SIFEs in classroom practices and school environment and teachers' deficit-oriented perceptions. Relatedly, many student and teacher participants at both schools talked about the challenges of divides at school and in Canadian society. That said, educational institutions and society are interrelated structures. Namukasa (2004) affirmed that "it is often an overlooked challenge for teachers, educators and curriculum designers to understand how the broader aspects of society are constituted by (as well as constitute) the specific and local contexts of classrooms" (p. 211). Thus, teachers, educators and curriculum designers are called to critically reflect upon their practices while picturing an image of the students' personality/characteristics they would want to shape, the classroom they would want to create, and the society they would want to live in and act accordingly, knowing that all three are interconnected.

#### **Theme 4: Teachers' preparedness and coercive relations of power**

In this section, I discuss the findings that relate to the extent of teachers' preparedness to teach ELD. This theme is related to CRT (CRT # 1, CRT # 2 and CRT # 5) and CT (coercive relations of power). It responds to RQ 1 (practices and pedagogies), RQ 2 (power relationships and social structures) and RQ 3 (resources and constraints). Whereas CRT encompasses the cultural diversity knowledge base of the teachers, ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content and ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction, CT elaborates on gaps in teachers' preparedness to teach Syrian refugee SIFEs, thereby implying coercive relations of power.

Findings from Chapters 5 and 6 revealed that a few teachers seemed to have only sufficient knowledge about Syrian SIFEs' culture, language, and history. Teacher participants were mostly unprepared to teach Syrian refugee SIFEs. They lacked

knowledge about their students' pre-immigration experiences, culture, backgrounds, and needs, and about the ELD programs they were implementing.

Teachers said that when they started to teach ELD they lacked knowledge about *what* and *who* they were teaching (e.g., “*I had no knowledge about what I am getting myself into*” - Suzan at Edugates SS). Only two teachers (Cynthia & Jasmine) seemed to have sufficient knowledge about Syrian SIFEs' culture, language and history, but not their academic needs and interests. Further, most teacher participants agreed that neither their educational backgrounds nor their prior experiences prepared them to culturally interact with this particular group of students (e.g., “*in the beginning we had no idea what we were doing*” nor “*that there is this special section of ESL which is called ELD*”, “*teachers college did not prepare me*” –Suzan at Edugates SS; “*Initially, I didn't have the slightest clue of what ELD meant*” – Mark at Highway SS), to be responsive to their traumatic experiences, or adapt the ELD curriculum to accommodate their needs. These findings on teacher unpreparedness corroborate previous studies regarding the unpreparedness of Canadian teachers to teach ELD (e.g., Clark, 2017; Ghosh.et al., 2019). The literature, nevertheless, has emphasized the need for students' identities, cultures, needs and interests to be reflected in the curriculum (Gay, 2018; Noddings, 1992; Practical guide, 2008). Gay (2018) explains that teachers cannot teach who and what they do not know. Teachers of CLD and refugee SIFEs need to know their students well in order to enact supportive pedagogies that are well suited for them (Gagné et al., 2017; Gay, 2018), and to adapt the curriculum to accommodate their needs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Gay, 2002a, 2018; Meka, 2015; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Vavrus, 2008; Yau, 1995; Yu, 2012). Thus, the lack of information about Syrian refugee SIFEs, lack of knowledge and mastery of the ELD programs, combined with the lack of curriculum relevance, have not helped most teacher participants to be sensitive to what and who they are teaching. This has not only created barriers to culturally responsive classroom practices but also turned out to be a burden on teachers. As such, some teachers expressed that the process of enacting supportive pedagogies was very challenging (e.g., “*It was definitely challenging*” - Cynthia), time consuming (e.g., “*lots of hours*”- Cynthia), and mentally stressing (e.g., “*We can have also exhausting days ourselves, you know we are humans as well*” - Lynn).

Teachers' limited knowledge about Syrian refugee SIFEs' backgrounds and lack of preparedness to teach those students are not the sole responsibility of the teachers. According to Gay (2018) and Gagné et al. (2017) teachers ought to learn about diverse student populations' backgrounds, histories, cultures and contributions before they get to teach those students. Thus, it seems ironic that ELD teachers would be expected to enact supportive pedagogies such as CRT while their educational backgrounds did not properly prepare them to do so. The failure to prepare all Canadian teachers to teach non-White and minority students represents, according to Cummins (2000), "a sociological phenomenon that can be analyzed only in terms of the persistence of *coercive relations of power* hiding behind meaningless multicultural rhetoric" (Theory as dialogue, loc 233; emphasis mine).

### **Theme 5: Exclusionary structures in schooling**

In this theme, I discuss the exclusionary structures in schooling and alienation of minority students. This theme focuses specifically on CT (privileging White middle-class value, knowledge and languages). It responds to RQ 2 (power and structures) and RQ 3 (resources and challenges).

The findings of this study revealed that education structures and schooling norms experienced by the SIFEs in the study privileged White middle-class values, languages and expectations while students' languages, socio-cultural and racial histories and community backgrounds are overlooked or denigrated (Vavrus, 2008) in the following ways: (a) Syrian refugee SIFEs were expected to achieve academically the same as their Canadian peers regardless of their interrupted education, (b) graduation criteria were viewed to be unfair, unrealistic and exclusionary, (c) English as the language of communication in ELD classrooms was dominant, (d) Syrian refugee SIFEs were alienated in some ELD and mainstream classes because of their lack of L2, (e) ELD students were separated for most of the school day from their Canadian peers which disconnected them from the mainstream school community, (f) Syrian refugee SIFEs' cultural characteristics were lacking or were underrepresented in the classroom and school climates. Such structures were challenging for the student participants and

compromised the principles of equity and inclusion to which all Canadian schools are committed (Cummins, 2000).

As a result, most student and teacher participants, when reflecting on the overall teaching and learning experiences in ELD classrooms, contended that the ways in which the education system in high schools in Ontario operates seem to fail Syrian refugee SIFEs (e.g., “*the system doesn’t work and is not meant for them [Syrian refugee SIFEs] to psychologically succeed*” - Cynthia at Edugates SS; “*Early on, I realized that many of these students were not graduating...*” – Mark at Highway SS) and their caring ELD teachers.

Canadian scholars have diverse opinions regarding the Canadian education system’s response to CLD and minority students’ education. For instance, Cummins (2000) states that the Canadian education system is still inadequately responsive to CLD youths’ needs, despite the efforts deployed in this sense. Ghosh et al. (2019) see in Canada’s inclusive culture, commitment to equal access to education and a “strong tradition of supporting refugee youth to integrate into Canadian schools” (p. 109), an example of best practice. Gagné et al. (2017) consider that as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis and the demographic shift in the makeup of Canadian classrooms, Canada’s current response to Syrian refugees “is driving educational practices in a way that could strategically advance a progressive educational agenda for all refugee learners, if long-term equity issues are considered over short-term political expediency” (p. 430).

Whereas this theme aligns with Cummins’ (2000) claims, it is important to build upon Canada’s commitment to inclusive culture and support for equal access to education. It is equally important to benefit from the attention accorded to Syrian refugee education to rethink the ELD curriculum and practice to better represent this group of students and respond to their needs, interests and desires.

### 7.3 Findings Related to EoC

*Caring teachers expect (highly), relate (genuinely), and facilitate (relentlessly)*

(Gay, 2018, p. 57)

According to Clark (2017), Syrian refugee SIFEs are in dire need of care during the process of adaptation to a new education system. The findings in this study provide evidence of many aspects of care implemented by many of the teachers of ELDs. In general, teacher participants and some teachers who taught the student participants exhibited aesthetic and authentic care for their students. They modelled care, established a dialogue free of preconceived assumptions with their students, actively engaged in mutual authentic care interactions with them, and celebrated their progress and successes. These aspects appeared to be reciprocated by many of the students who experienced them as care. Nonetheless, findings from students' experiences showed that there were certain aspects of care not reciprocated by the students and some that were missing.

### **Theme 6: Aesthetic caring**

In this theme, I elaborate on aesthetic caring practices exhibited by teachers and experienced by students in ELD classrooms in the two secondary schools in the study. This theme relates to CRT (CRT#3, care about) and EoC (aesthetic caring). It also responds to RQ1 (classroom practices and pedagogies) and RQ3 (resources to the implementation of caring and CRT practices).

Aesthetic caring in the educational setting, as defined by Noddings (1984, 2003), involves teachers performing their professional roles, such as teaching the content and delivering organized instructions, while at the same time having feelings of concern such as sympathy and empathy for their students' states of being (Gay, 2018). This creates a welcoming and safe classroom environment for learning (Damjanovic, 2016; Ibrahim, 2012). Reflecting on teachers' and students' reported experiences of caring, I found that teacher participants and other teachers who taught the student participants expressed a recognizable degree of aesthetic caring (e.g., empathy, sympathy) about their Syrian refugee SIFEs' states of being. This treatment, as perceived by the student participants, created a welcoming and safe classroom environment conducive for teaching and learning (e.g., "*we are like a family*" - Ameera), and thus, was appreciated by student participants (e.g., "*this makes me happy*" – Maryam; "*I have to work on myself to prove to the teacher that she is not wrong about me*" - Ameera).

The practices of sympathy, patience, empathy and enthusiasm were reported (by teachers and students) as supporting factors in the enacting of caring and CRT practices. Suzan (at Edugates SS) said: *“The kids just capture your heart and we want the best for them.”* On one hand, this teacher sentiment sheds much light on the refugees’ disposition and status and on the other hand, it is evidence of a teacher who empathized with the refugee students’ needs and struggles. Nevertheless, students’ experiences in ELD classrooms revealed that, while some teachers showed empathy towards them, others only showed practices of expediency (e.g., *“some of them just want to do their jobs”*- Mortada). For instance, Dunia at Edugates SS, said that she was struggling with writing for a while, so she approached her English teacher, whom Dunia described as a caring teacher who cared about her academic achievement, several times looking for advice to improve her writing skills. According to Dunia, her English teacher only advised her to read more. Dunia’s teacher, while caring about her student’s academic achievement, did not translate her caring into action to change the situation for Dunia. Dunia’s writing skills remained her main concern and her grades in writing were still affecting her overall literacy achievement. Dunia’s teacher did not follow-up by suggesting level-appropriate books and providing additional writing tips. It is evident, from Dunia’s account of the situation that the teacher failed to actualize her caring; she did not invest the necessary attention, commitment, involvement, pedagogy and action to respond to the pressing needs of her student. This is what Noddings described as a *benign neglect* (Smith, 2004, 2020).

Further, focusing on or caring about students’ academic achievement is important but caring merely about academic achievements is harmful for minority SIFEs’ overall development as it diminishes and distorts caring and the ethics at the base of it (Noddings, 2013). Whereas well-intentioned aesthetic caring (or caring about the cared-for) is an essential and significant force in society and a feature of people’s sense of justice (Noddings, 1984), it remains insufficient in bringing about change in schooling structures, curricula and processes to act against academic inequities in education settings (Gay, 2018; Valenzuela, 1999).

### **Theme 7: Authentic caring for minority students' state of being**

In this theme, I discuss the findings related to ELD teachers' authentic caring for their Syrian refugee SIFEs. This theme is related to EoC (modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation) and CRT #3 (culturally responsive caring). Whereas EoC is focused on ethical moral teacher-student interactions exemplified in the above mentioned four educational modes of caring, culturally responsive caring is more focused on caring through gifting oppressed students with tools of emancipation. This theme responds to RQ 1 and RQ 3.

Teacher participants and other teachers of Syrian refugee SIFEs practiced authentic caring beyond intention to actions (Gay 2018; Noddings, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999) to change the disadvantaged conditions of Syrian refugee SIFEs (Amin, 2018) and to reject deficit-based perspectives (Bartell, 2011; Brewer, 2016; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Gay, 2010; Heydon & Iannacci, 2008; Roy & Roxas, 2011) in the following ways:

**a) Modeling care:** Teacher participants and other teachers who taught student participants demonstrated their caring through their relationships with their students and showed respect and care for students' language, culture, religion, needs, interests, and desires in their actions (e.g., *“during the month of Ramadan the teachers won't eat in front of us; they even won't drink they would hide the food”* – Sama, *“When the teachers show interest in my language, I don't feel like a foreigner, it is a good feeling”* – Hala) (Noddings, 2003; OCT, n.d.).

**b) Openness to question preconceived assumptions and knowledge (Dialogue aspect):** All teacher participants (and some other teachers who taught the student participants) appeared to be open to questioning their preconceived assumptions about Syrian refugee SIFEs' culture, backgrounds, experiences, and behaviors (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Hos, 2012) and to be engaged in self-reflection and self-monitoring (Gay, 2000, 2010; Rummens & Dei, 2010) during their interactions with SIFEs (e.g., *“I've learned not to take any education background for granted ... I try to remember all that I don't know about each student”* – Jennifer). PD sessions and training were said to help teachers perturb and potentially shift their mindsets (e.g., *“there was a need to shift*

*language from cheat to help*” - Suzan). Further, dialogue between teachers and students based on better knowledge of self and students’ needs and interests seemed to help teachers reflect on their ways of teaching and knowing as well as prior assumptions (e.g., *“I apologize and change my approach if I have misrepresented or offended any learner”* - Jennifer).

**c) Normalizing mistakes:** Teacher practices that involved normalizing mistakes and struggles with regards to second language learning helped students to express themselves more often without being concerned about being judged (e.g., *“if you ask for help, it is ok no one is going to judge you”* – Suzan; *“we are very open about our mistakes”* – Lynn). Although in this study, teachers and students sometimes appeared to be hierarchically segregated, teacher participants said that they intentionally normalized mistakes in ELD classrooms in the hope of *“having students more comfortable with expressing themselves and feeling comfortable to make mistakes”* (Mark). Normalizing mistakes puts students and teachers at the same level of struggle with regards to second language learning, humanizes the struggle of learning a new language and empowers minority students.

**d) Practice of care and reciprocity by certain students in practice:** Practice of care supposes that students and teachers actively enact mutual authentic care interactions in the classroom (Hos, 2012; Noddings, 2003). Based on the experiences of teachers and students in ELD classrooms, practice of care was facilitated through pedagogies that utilized community building activities and group work that enabled students to interact with, help, and support each other while engaging in caring relationships with peers (e.g., students are *“open to make genuine connections with new students and teachers”* – Jennifer; *“it is not that they are cheating, they are helping each other, and we just have to teach them the right way to do it”* – Lynn) and teachers.

For caring to occur, a certain degree of reciprocity in the interaction between the carer and the cared-for is needed. Recognition, appreciation, and reciprocation are the conditions for caring to happen (Noddings, 2003). According to the findings of this study some students reciprocated teachers’ caring (e.g., *“I am having a really bad day guys and you have tough days too and I want you to work with me [do the classroom activities*



*while behaving well] ... and they will go “oh ok” and for the most part they do and it is really sweet” - Lynn). Such caring practices and the learner practices of reciprocating this care furthered mutual authentic caring and created a safe ELD classroom environment for Syrian refugee SIFEs and made them feel at home (e.g., “we feel like we are a family in the classroom...we share our experiences with her and she shares her experiences with us” – Ameera).*

**e) Acquiring knowledge about refugee SIFEs’ cultures, needs and interests and confirmation of students’ ideals:** Teachers appeared to make efforts to acquire knowledge about their Syrian refugee SIFEs’ backgrounds, needs, interests, and desires (Gay, 2018; Noddings, 1992) even when they were hierarchically segregated in respect to power. This knowledge is a resource into the enactment of culturally responsive caring and supportive pedagogies. Some teachers shared that they tried, against all the odds, to learn (from the students, the media and the school) about their students’ needs, interests, and desires. They also said that they faced lots of challenges surrounding circumstances with Syrian refugee SIFEs such as “students having bad days,” “fights” and “breakdowns”. Further, teacher participants said that they celebrated students’ strengths and affirmed their self-ideals (e.g., “*this motivates me to work more on myself*” - Ameera, “*you just did that!!!*” – Suzan, “*We want them to embrace it... because we never want them to lose their language, we don’t want them to lose their culture*” - Lynn).

**f) Sustained interest in the students’ welfare:** Gay (2018) maintained that students’ wellbeing and academic achievement are interrelated. Teachers care when in their practices they work closely with students and adjust their instructions according to the best needs and interests of the learners (Gay, 2018; Noddings, 2003). Teacher participants and other teachers who taught student participants were said to demonstrate a sustained interest in the students’ welfare. Further, ELD teacher participants showed persistent interest in equipping their Syrian refugee SIFEs with necessary skills to cross cultural borders, face negative perceptions and stereotypes, and strive in their new home while channeling their energy in beneficial ways.

**g) Constant follow-up with students:** Teachers' constant follow-up with the students is a way to make sure that their care actually occurs in practice (Gay, 2018; Hos, 2012). In this study teachers' constant follow-up was evident (e.g., "*the math teacher always follows up with us and insists to teach us... he makes sure that we understand everything ... he cares*" - Sarah). For instance, unlike Dunia's teacher (example provided above in Theme 6), Ameera's English teacher, as reported by Ameera, observed Ameera's relentless efforts to improve her language, so she advised and encouraged her repeatedly to join an afterschool extracurricular conversation club for newcomers and made sure that Ameera had a spot in the club. Ameera commented "*the teacher told me that I need to join the conversation club and she helped me join the club to improve my English.*" Ameera's English teacher's constant follow-up with her student actualized teacher-caring for a language learner.

**h) Caring action to ensure that students achieve academically:** Teacher-participants' care for their students translated into action with much differentiated programs, practices, and instructions they implemented in their ELD classrooms (e.g., "*I helped creating an ELD/ESL co-op program*" – Mark at Highway SS; the Guided Reading Program by Suzan and Lynn at Edugates SS). This practice conforms to what Noddings (1992) and Gay (2018) have described as authentic caring.

**i) Caring teacher-student relationships:** Noddings (2002) posits that teacher-student interactions in the classroom are empty if they do not culminate in caring relationships. Findings from students' and teachers' experiences revealed advanced and caring teacher-student relationships in the ELD classrooms (e.g., "*he really cares for us*" – Maryam).

**j) Caring beyond the ELD classroom:** The analysis of the findings from teachers' and students' experiences and the researcher's reflective notes signaled that teacher participants and other teachers who taught the study participants cared for their students in ELD classrooms and beyond. Their caring beyond ELD classrooms consisted of help provided to students when encountering problems around the school (e.g., "*I am an ally when needed*" - Jennifer), advocating for Syrian refugee SIFEs and fighting stereotypes

and deficit perspectives in the mainstream (e.g., “*we try to advocate ... because there can be negative stereotypes...*” – Lynn).

Whereas the above listed authentic caring experiences were described by teachers and some student participants, some other students reported experiencing the lack of some of those caring practices/aspects, specifically lack of follow up with students, lack of interest in the students’ welfare (e.g., “*He only explains the lesson and we do the work and no one follows-up with us or check to see if we are doing the work .... the teacher explains the lesson for weeks and we have to write on the notebook until we really get bored*” – Sarah at Highway SS), lack of group work activities (e.g., “*we do work individually*” – Sarah at Highway SS), and lack of caring teacher-student relationships (e.g., *she just didn’t accept my excuse, she doesn’t understand* – Seif). It was noteworthy that while some students reciprocated their teachers’ care, others did not, breaking the cycle of authentic caring as described by Noddings (e.g., “*the ELD teacher.... sometimes spoke Arabic in the classroom because she knew that we didn’t speak English ...No one would listen to her nor follow the explanation of the lesson*”- Sama). In the latter example, the teacher cared for the students and tried their best to create learning opportunities for them. However, while recognizing the teacher’s good intentions, the students did not appreciate the teacher’s effort and use of L1 nor did they reciprocate it. Further, student participants’ preferences for White Canadian teachers to teach them English is another example of non-reciprocation (e.g., “*When I want to learn English, I would prefer the teacher be White Canadian*” - Sama). These non-reciprocation examples are very debatable. Reflecting on the findings from the interviews and the researcher’s field notes, it became evident that student participants in this study showed pride when their native speaker Canadian teachers repeated some words in Arabic in the classroom, but they rejected that same practice coming from teachers with whom they share L1. This made me wonder whether the students themselves view White Canadian teachers as more knowledgeable or superior to other teachers with whom they share ethnic and racial backgrounds. Further, this made me also think that maybe ELD teachers should first have the students’ consent before using L1 rather than assuming that use of L1 would promote SIFEs’ learning (e.g., “*I can’t read Arabic... I don’t know what we wrote. I understand English. Why you make us do that?*”- Suzan’s student).

For authentic caring and the change that it brings along to occur, there is need to invest in students' welfare and socioemotional development, which calls for special attention and commitment towards SIFEs. Those aspects are as important as students' academic achievements and teachers' roles are primary in empowering CLD students and promoting their socioemotional and academic development. By looking at student participants' experiences, it was evident that students accorded special attention to caring teachers' roles in their education. Findings from students' experiences showed that students are conscious of the effects of caring/uncaring teachers' behaviors and attitudes on their socio-emotional development, academic outcomes and wellbeing. (e.g., *"because students know...They know if their teachers like them... they feel loved and appreciated. Then, they will improve and in the opposite case the students fail – Maryam*).

These findings provided evidence of the role authentic caring plays in the education of Syrian refugee SIFEs. Based on these findings, ELD teachers need to be trained and supported with resources to invest more in creating supportive learning environments for all their students through the practice of authentic caring. Supportive environments and caring practices (Gagné et al., 2017; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999) in addition to CRT, allow for Syrian refugee SIFEs to progressively and holistically develop and change the disadvantaging conditions for Syrian refugee SIFEs; specifically, they counter day-to-day experiences of microaggressions and power experienced in some ELD classrooms.

## 7.4 Findings Related to CRT

CRT considers issues of culture, language, race and power (Bartell, 2011; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994) in the education of Syrian refugee SIFEs. CRT and caring create means and conditions under which Syrian refugee SIFEs can flourish in safe classroom environments responsive to students' sociocultural, emotional and academic needs and interests (Cummins, Mirza & Stille, 2012; Gay, 2018). Such conditions reverse the effect of coercive and power-dominated conditions described above under the CT themes.

### **Theme 8: Culture, communication, L2 and humanization/dehumanization**

In this theme, I discuss the findings related to culture, communication and L2 in ELD classrooms. This theme relates to CRT # 4 (culture and communication in the classroom) and CT (majority language and risk of dehumanization). Also, this theme responds to RQ 1 (practices and pedagogies), RQ 2 (power relationships and social structures) and RQ 3 (resources and constraints). Whereas CRT # 4 elaborates on culture, communication in the classroom and consonance with students and in-home cultures, CT highlights the superiority of Western culture and language(s). The findings from teachers' and students' experiences revealed (a) the enabler that teacher participants and other teachers of Syrian refugee SIFEs understood, accepted and respected their students' cultural communication styles and (b) the challenge that Syrian refugee SIFEs' lack of L2 as the main means of communication in the ELD classroom in Ontario can dehumanize them.

Culture and communication are interrelated. Gay (2018) asserts that "Communication cannot exist without culture, culture cannot be known without communication, and teaching and learning are more effective for ethnically diverse students when classroom communication is culturally responsive" (p. 89). Gay's (2018) assertion resonates with findings from teacher participants' experiences. Teacher participants were found to take into consideration students' backgrounds, culture and communication styles and use CRT pedagogies to cater to their SIFEs. These teachers used CRT to bridge the dissonance between students' home and school cultures and incorporated, to some extent, Syrian refugee SIFEs' cultural values and experiences into the curriculum (Gay, 2002, 2018) in various ways (e.g., "*use [of] all kinds of ways including pictures, sign language, acting and translations to get the kids to understand the content*" - Cynthia).

Despite the efforts of these teachers, differences between Syrian refugee SIFEs' and schools' and classrooms' cultural systems proved to interfere with those students' literacy achievements and wellbeing, particularly because culture, communication and language are intimately related and lack of L2 can be dehumanizing (Gay, 2018).

In her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*, Gay (2018) started the chapter on culture and communication in the classroom with the

following quote: “language is incredibly powerful and diverse; it identifies and humanizes, and gives cultures, ideas, and thoughts the capacity to speak” (p. 89). In this respect, student participants’ lack of L2 silenced their thoughts and ideas (e.g., *“In the classroom, I don’t speak English, I am afraid of speaking English”* – Rami), shadowed their culture and identities (e.g., *“if they would talk about religion, hijab etc. we wouldn’t be able to defend our point of view because we are not as proficient in English as they are”* - Mortada) and rendered them withdrawn (e.g., *“even if the teacher asks a question and I know the answer I don’t participate, as if I am not there* – Rami) and voiceless (e.g., *“we wouldn’t be able to communicate our ideas the way we want”* – Mortada) in Canadian classrooms (Yau, 1995). Further, lack of L2 was also noted by some teacher participants to dehumanize Syrian refugee SIFEs. Suzan and Lynn at Edugates SS tackled this particular finding when advocating for their students in the mainstream (e.g., *“he is really a good kid, give him a chance but he cannot sound out CAT yet that’s probably why he has been acting as such in your class ... We try to humanize because everyone is a human.”* - Lynn). In line with that, student participants’ experiences in the classroom (e.g., *“teachers who ask you to repeat ... as if your accent is incomprehensible, makes you feel uncomfortable ...”* – Rami) confirmed Lynn and Suzan’s assertions. Rami’s and Mortada’s experiences and Lynn’s example shed light on the importance of communication in the ELD classroom and beyond. Those experiences conform with Gagné et al.’s (2018) assertion that when communication breaks down due to lack of language proficiency from both sides, educational needs among others go unnoticed, unmet, or are misinterpreted as problematic behavior that calls for correction and intervention.

The findings on the effects of lack of L2 on students’ learning experiences also corroborate findings from previous literature (e.g., Bemak & Greenberg, 1994; Gagné et al., 2018; Hamilton et al., 2000; Stewart, 2012) which describe language-linked concerns (e.g., being ridiculed in social interactions) for refugee SIFEs that make them avoid interactions with their Canadian peers and teachers. Lack of L2 was and still is a major barrier for the education of Syrian refugee SIFEs (e.g., *“this all would’ve been easier if we were proficient in English”* – Mortada) and is at the top of those students’ concerns. Students echoed the limitations noted in the literature (Cummins, 2000; Gagné, Schmidt,

& Markus, 2017; Hamilton et al., 2000; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Yau, 1995) due to lack of L2. Lack of L2 was considered by both students and teachers to be a constraint to the implementation of caring and CRT practices.

Via communication and language, individuals share ideas with others, express care for them and make connections with them (Gay, 2018). These experiences of the student participants unveiled the acuteness of the struggle in spite of the efforts, progress, and successes achieved so far.

### **Theme 9: Ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction: CRT actual praxis**

In this theme, I discuss the findings related to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction in ELD classrooms as evidenced in the two secondary schools in Ontario. This theme elaborates on CRT as a whole, yet it focuses primarily on CRT # 5, “the actual praxis of culturally responsive teaching” as it combines all the other components. CRT # 5 addresses ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (Gay, 2010, 2018). This theme also responds to RQ 1 (practices and pedagogies) and RQ3 (resources and constraints).

Findings showed that the enabler that ELD teacher participants integrated into the curriculum and classroom practices consists of students’ wealth of knowledge, culture and language (e.g., “*we never want them to lose their language, we don’t want them to lose their culture*” – Lynn; “*bringing in different foods and cultural outfits and music to their presentations*” - Cynthia) which, according to Ladson-Billings (1994), potentially reverses the previously described deficient effects of the dominant culture.

Gay (2018) delineates the ways in which the CRT components unfold:

The ethics of caring ... constitutes the ideological grounding, culture communication ... is the tool, curriculum content about ethnic and cultural diversity ... is the resource, and instruction is the actual praxis of culturally responsive teaching. Instruction combines all other components into coherent configurations and puts them into action to expedite learning. (p. 203)

Gay’s above description of CRT components presents CRT as a whole. CRT # 1 is a prerequisite to any classroom pedagogy and CRT # 2, CRT # 3, and CRT # 4 are actualized in CRT # 5 or instructions. In teaching refugee SIFEs, all five components of CRT play a significant role towards the socioemotional and cognitive growth of Syrian refugee

SIFEs. Lack of any of the components of CRT proved to affect negatively the education enterprise in ELD classrooms and hinder the academic development of Syrian refugee SIFEs simply because it compromises CRT instructions. For instance, without culturally responsive caring, the ideological grounding for CRT is lacking and learning in the ELD classroom is compromised. This may explain why uncaring teacher-student relationships (e.g., *we felt that... that the teacher is not going to let us pass*” - Hala), as described by some student participants, were often accompanied by teachers exhibiting non-culturally responsive behaviors (e.g., *“the teacher said that we are dirty*” - Hala) and an absence of CRT practices in the classroom (e.g., *there are no classroom activities that relate to our prior experiences* – Hala).

Teacher participants managed to some extent to counterbalance the programmatic curriculum’s lack of relevance by using *cultural scaffolding* (Gay, 2002b, 2018). They were somewhat able to integrate ethnic diversity in the delivery of instructions which still however need to reflect the core of the students’ culture. For instance, some teachers used translations in the classroom (e.g., *“we would write those words in English and we tell them to translate them into Arabic*” – Suzan) and others differentiated their instructions (e.g., Mark said he used *“...differentiated and tiered type pedagogy when teaching Syrian SIFEs*”) and modified them (e.g., *“students’ interest dictates whether or not I use this approach and how often.”* – Jennifer) to engage their students *“no matter what their levels are, and taking into consideration their different learning styles and intelligence”* (Cynthia). These instructions and programs (e.g., Guided Reading Program) that teacher participants implemented were said to greatly enhance students’ achievements (e.g., *“yielded excellent progress-especially for my older students”* – Mark; *“I really like the way the teacher teaches us now. I wish they used this program when I first enrolled at school in Canada.”* - Sama commenting on the Guided Reading program) which corroborates research by Gay (2018) on the benefit of such instructions for the education of CLD and refugee students. Further, aligning with Ladson-Billings (1994), such instructions seem to empower minority students intellectually, academically (e.g., *“I have to work on myself to prove to [show] the teacher that she is not wrong about me and that I can achieve academic success”* – Ameera), socially, psychologically and emotionally



(e.g., *You feel comfortable trying and learning in an environment that such teachers create for you in the classroom-* Rami).

Teacher participants' and other student participants' teachers' use of CRT practices in their ELD classrooms helped them bridge the gap between the programmatic curriculum and students' culture and needs to some extent. That said, some of the activities that the teacher participants and other teachers who taught student participants created seemed to be level appropriate, but not age appropriate (e.g., "*it is a kids tv program*" said one student - Suzan). Similarly, some activities were more work force and skills-based oriented and not entirely academic oriented and vice versa (for instance, the ELD/ESL co-op program vs. the Guided Reading Program). Some activities were very challenging, and others were less challenging and boring (as stated by Sarah, one student participant). Also, many of those activities scratched only the surface of Syrian refugee SIFEs' culture, religion, and backgrounds as discussed earlier in Theme 2. Thus, teachers need to re-consider the choices of the classroom materials (e.g., stories, books, texts) used so as to better reflect students' ages, levels in literacy and numeracy, funds of knowledge, and culture.

The efforts these teachers made to respond to students' academic and sociocultural and emotional needs show that they cared for their students and respected their language, culture, religion, and ethnic backgrounds. Based on these findings, it becomes evident that culturally responsive teaching and learning ought to be at the center of Syrian refugee SIFEs' education, in alignment with Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings' (1995) recommendations for the education of ethnic and racial minority students. Thus, there is a need to emphasize ethnic diversity in the delivery of instructions, the praxis of CRT, in ELD classrooms.

## 7.5 Emergent Themes

Two emergent themes emerged from data analysis. These are Themes 10: Teachers' agency, and Theme 11: Intersection of teachers' and students' ethnicity, cultural background, and language.

### **Theme 10: Teachers' agency**

This theme is an emergent theme. In this section, I discuss findings related to teachers' agency in ELD classrooms. This theme is related to CT, CRT (CRT # 5), and EoC (authentic caring). Also, it responds to RQ 1, RQ 2, and RQ 3. Whereas CT covers teachers' negative stereotypes and compliance with a given planned curriculum prescribed by outsider curriculum designers likely unfamiliar with the unique needs of each and every single student, EoC, and CRT focus on eliminating negative stereotypes and on integrating diversity in classroom instructions to meet the holistic needs of minority students. Teachers' agency focuses on advancing the interests of the students despite challenges and constraints in order to contribute to social change.

According to Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015), agency is not a quality that people have; it is rather what they achieve. The authors assert that agency "denotes a quality of the engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts-for actions" (p. 3). Aligning with this view of agency, findings from teacher interviews, surveys, and the researcher's reflective notes showed that teacher participants made agentic choices in their responses to Syrian refugee SIFEs' learning needs. Most teacher participants indicated that, despite all the challenges and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices, they tried to make sense of their students' situations, learned about students' backgrounds, reflected on their own pedagogies and classroom practices, and figured out ways to create supportive learning opportunities for their students. Teacher participants said this is how initiatives such as the Guided Reading Program and the ELD/ESL co-op program were born, and other modified and differentiated activities were subsequently created. The aim was to respond to students' sociocultural and academic needs and interests throughout the classroom practices and bridge the gap between the programmatic curriculum and students' needs. Particularly, Lynn, Suzan, and Mark acted as agents of social change.

Mark provided a voice for all his students via community building activities while focusing on strengthening students' oral, reading, and writing proficiencies, that is in addition to the ELD/ESL co-op program he implemented. Lynn and Suzan searched in other schools and school boards for programs that suited their students' abilities when

they realized that the ELD programs were not responding to their students' needs. They took into their responsibility the implementation of the Guided Reading Program. Further, they advocated for their students in and beyond the ELD classroom and against what they considered some of the board's unjust decisions. For instance, they fought negative stereotypes about Syrian refugee SIFEs in the mainstream and tried to change the lenses through which mainstream teachers perceive Syrian refugee SIFEs (e.g., "*we try to advocate*" – Lynn). Some mainstream teachers were said to misunderstand cultural and language differences for low academic and speaking abilities (e.g., "*there can be negative stereotypes*" - Lynn). Additionally, away from the school setting, Suzan's care (e.g., "*he knew that I cared*") for her students indirectly shaped the way members of her family perceived Syrian refugees. Suzan's family members represent many other Canadians from dominant groups who have not experienced any interactions with Syrian refugees. Suzan and Lynn hoped that people belonging to dominant groups restrain from *othering* racialized and ethnic minorities based on preconceived assumptions. At the same time, there were teachers who taught student participants who only wanted to do their jobs, showing lack of agency as previously reported in Theme 6.

Agentic practices of teachers in classrooms are in line with agentic practices at other education levels and in the public such as when many teacher participants (personal communication, n.d.), along with other teachers and students in Ontario, challenged and protested the provincial government's cuts to education (Jones & Burns, 2019) that directly affected the support provided to ELD students in schools across the province (Barek, Namukasa, & White, 2020).

Teacher participants proved to have a high level of agency related to the enactment of supportive pedagogies and opposing unjust decisions and practices (Priestley, M, personal communication, March 30, 2017). They embarked on a journey of self-reflection, deconstruction, and reconceptualization of their knowledge and practices (Pinar, 2016). Such orientations show agency and genuine caring and involve active commitment to social justice through challenging others including "existing politics of official knowledge whenever and wherever it is repressive" (Apple, 2014, p. 166).

Teacher participants' agentic practices may set examples for other teachers to follow when they see fit.

### **Theme 11: Intersection of teachers' and students' ethnicity and language**

This theme is an emergent theme. In this section, I discuss the findings related to students' preference regarding their teachers' cultural and ethnic backgrounds and the extent to which teachers and SIFEs' having common background may be an added value to those students' education. This theme encompasses CRT (CRT # 4, culture and communication) and EoC (practice and reciprocation). It responds to RQ 1 and RQ 3.

According to Spindler and Spindler (1982), teachers are more likely to relate to students with whom they share racial, linguistic, or ethnic characteristics. This applies particularly to Cynthia and Jasmine (ESL) who shared Syrian refugee SIFEs' ethnic, racial, and linguistic characteristics. Other teacher participants did not share any ethnic or cultural backgrounds with Syrian refugee SIFEs and still seemed to develop genuine relationships with their students and to respond to their needs, such as the case with Suzan, Lynn, Mark, and Jennifer. Nevertheless, contrary to Spindler and Spindler's (1982) claim, there were teachers who taught student participants and shared their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but some student participants said these teachers exhibited uncaring and non-culturally responsive behaviors towards them and maintained power relationships with them (e.g., *"once, she made fun of Syrian refugee SIFEs saying that [a specific place in the school] became dirty since the arrival of the Syrian refugees. We were shocked"* - Hala; *"she is Arab and we are Arab ... she should be praising Syrian refugee students not the opposite"*- Hala; *"the civics teacher told me that if I don't know how to say it all in English to go back to my seat and stay seated"* - Sarah).

The findings on the relation between teachers' ethnicities and relationships with SIFEs were surprising in that they contradicted some teacher participants' assertions (e.g., *"I am at an advantage because I speak their language, they have a connection with me and I can relate to their needs."* – Jasmine). Nevertheless, the findings on student participants' preference of English teachers' ethnicity aligned with one teacher participant's (Cynthia) claim that sharing SIFEs' L1 may not be always beneficial when teaching them L2.

According to Cynthia, “[*Syrian refugee SIFEs*] will learn more content with the teacher who speaks their first language [but] They will learn more oral language with a teacher who doesn’t speak their first language.” Aligning with Cynthia’s assertion, surprisingly many student participants overtly expressed an explicit preference for their English teachers to be native speaker Canadians (e.g., “*when I want to learn English, I would prefer the teacher be Canadian.*” – Sama).

Further the finding on teachers maintaining power and uncaring relationships with SIFEs while sharing the same ethnicity contradicts previous literature (e.g., Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015; Ogbu, 1992) that argue that a match between the ethnicity/race of teachers and minority students leads to better outcomes. According to this body of literature, teachers who share their minority students’ culture, ethnicity and language are best positioned to teach minority students and to empower them through CRT practices.

The findings from this theme put more emphasis on teachers’ personal characteristics, attitudes (e.g., caring, cultural awareness, agency), and the practices they enact in the classroom (CRT) than teachers’ ethnicity and cultural backgrounds when teaching minority students.

## 7.6 Summary

In 2016, Janet Dench, executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) asserted that the Canadian education system had not figured out, until that time, how to support Syrian refugee SIFEs youth in secondary schools (Chignall, 2016). Four years later, findings from this study to a large extent still align with Janet Dench’s claims (Chignall, 2016). The study’s findings showed that there is progress in catering to Syrian refugee SIFEs in secondary schools, but it is slow and there is still a lot to be learned about how to support this student population in a way that would change their disadvantaged conditions (Amin, 2018).

CT unveiled the following: aspects of the ELD curriculum that lacked relevance to SIFEs; the inequalities that were reflected in the selection, dissemination, and assessment of knowledge; the nature of social stratification in the hidden programmatic and

classroom curricula; the ways in which teachers were unprepared to teach ELD; and the existing exclusion structures of schooling in Ontario. CT framework also revealed uncaring, non-cultural, coercive and oppressive practices that existed in ELD classrooms, and disclosed the practices that were deficient and discriminatory. By comparison, EoC encompassed aesthetic and authentic caring practices, and CRT highlighted culturally responsive communications and instructions in ELD classrooms.

Further, EoC and CRT combined, highlighted the ways in which ELD teachers perceived the wealth of knowledge, skills, culture, and identities Syrian refugee SIFEs brought to the classroom. Combined, those theories provided information about how ELD teachers managed, despite the challenges and constraints, to cater to their Syrian refugee SIFEs. ELD teachers did so by reflecting on and questioning their prior assumptions, caring about their students, developing caring teacher-student relationships, enacting CRT, making agentic choices, resisting repressive politics of official knowledge, and advocating for minority students in and beyond the ELD classroom. Through these practices, ELD teachers honored their minority students' ethnic and cultural characteristics, based the classroom practices on their knowledge and tried relentlessly to respond to their needs, interests, and desires.

The findings on the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms have the potential to inform practice and theory. Particularly, they inform ELD curriculum making, curriculum enactment and classroom pedagogies and teacher education curriculum, programs and instructions.

## Chapter 8

### 8 Conclusion

*I hope that people can see, I hope that more people know but they can see that students aren't troublemakers, they are either bored or they don't understand what is happening and they only need a caring adult to help them and understand that ... they are worth it ...A lot of the problems with the students are based on that the fact they are not understanding [content and communication], but it is not the teacher's fault. There is a lot going on ... when you have students who they are at university level and in the same class students who are working at a kindergarten level, they are trying to work out their classroom at the best of their ability. So, it is not the teachers' fault by any means, they are trying the best they can, but also these students are not bad students (Suzan – teacher participant)*

*I want the teachers to genuinely love the students and to be more friendly. I want them to show the students that they want them to come to the classroom because students know... They know if their teachers like them and feel it right away. And, when they feel that the teachers really want them in the classroom, they feel loved and appreciated. Then, they improve, and in the opposite case [when they feel that they are not cared for] the students fail... (Maryam- student participant)*

This final chapter provides an introduction and an overview of the study's findings. It revisits the research questions and delineates the study's limitations. Further, this chapter presents the implications of the study for practice and theory and describes recommendations. These recommendations aim to advance change in the ELD classroom practices, pedagogies, and curricula to improve the conditions for teaching and learning and consequently improve learners' experiences in ELD classrooms. This chapter ends with suggestions for future research.

#### 8.1 Introduction

In this qualitative case study, I focused on the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in two secondary schools in Ontario. I described the classroom practices and caring and CRT pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms. I also described the power relationships and social structures reflected in ELD classrooms as well as the resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices. The main purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms. The major research question on

which this study is based was *What is the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students with interrupted formal education and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario?* The objectives of this study were to (a) explore the practices and pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms in Ontario with a focus on caring and CRT pedagogies, (b) describe social structures and power relationships reflected in ELD classrooms, and (c) delineate the resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms.

My focus was on the classroom, curriculum, and pedagogy. I consulted other aspects of education such as policy when they provided insights into my focus. My aim in this study was to help teachers and give them the tools to work in the classroom and educate their students so as to graduate rather than drop out. Students enroll in ELD programs to excel in all subjects and to be able to go to college and university. To differentiate my work from psychology, I talked about inclusiveness only when it advanced learning.

Critical theory (Apple, 1982; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Giroux, 1983), EoC (Noddings, 1992, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999), and CRT (Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995) provided the theoretical lenses of the study through which I analyzed and interpreted the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in two secondary schools in Ontario. The literature review contributed, along with the theoretical framework, to the design of the study and the interpretation of the findings.

Teacher participants' and student participants' experiences revealed enactments of caring and CRT in ELD classrooms. Further, findings in the study showed progress and successes in the teaching and learning of Syrian refugee SIFEs. For instance, teachers at Edugates SS described a successful implementation of the Guided Reading Program. Teacher and student participants at Edugates SS said that the advantages of the program were remarkable. Mark's ELD/ESL co-op program yielded good outcomes. Students' behaviors improved and teachers' stress levels decreased as reported by some teacher participants. Such successes and progress are worth building on to foster the academic achievement and wellbeing of refugee SIFEs.



Given the complex experiences and unpredictable needs of Syrian refugee SIFEs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015), the combined theoretical framework helped to better understand social structures and relationships, pressing issues about the classroom practices and pedagogies as well as resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT pedagogies in the ELD classroom. This study's theoretical framework provided the means to identify power relationships, deficient practices in ELD classrooms, social and systemic structures perpetuating the supremacy of a Western canon of knowledge (Paraskeva, 2016), and the creation, preservation, and reproduction of an unjust social order. Also, it helped to explore caring and CRT practices and pedagogies. Caring and CRT pedagogies have the potential to reverse the negative effects of classroom and institutional deficient practices and advance the socioemotional and academic development of Syrian refugee SIFEs.

This study allowed a more holistic view of Syrian refugee SIFEs that goes beyond academic achievement (Brubacher, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008; Pugh, Every, & Hattam, 2012). It considered cultural diversity a strength, viewed Syrian refugee SIFEs from an asset perspective, and believed in the potential and richness that Syrian refugee youths bring to Canadian classrooms and society.

This study responds to a need identified in the literature for more studies of classroom experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in Canada (e.g. Clark, 2017). Thus, it contributes to scholarly knowledge by filling a gap created by the dearth of research related to the nuances and complexities (e.g., content and knowledge processes, attitudes, interactions of both teachers and students; social inclusion norms, culture and structures in the classrooms that affect students' abilities and achievement; school structures and programmatic constraints) of classroom experiences and practices of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario.

## 8.2 Overview of the Study's Findings

The findings of this study were discussed in relation to the theories CT, EoC, and CRT. The findings related to the CT framework showed deficient institutional and classroom practices at secondary and postsecondary levels, at the levels of planning/designing and

execution of the curriculum, namely aspects of the ELD programmatic curriculum's lack of relevance, dominant canons of knowledge, power relationships, social stratification in hidden curriculum, teachers' unpreparedness and coercive relations of power, and exclusion structures in schooling. Nevertheless, findings also revealed pedagogical efforts to cater to Syrian refugee SIFEs through supportive pedagogies, specifically caring and CRT pedagogies. These supportive pedagogies, when combined, have led to progress in responding to the needs of Syrian refugee SIFEs, leading to successful teaching and learning experiences. EoC and CRT frameworks related findings included teachers' enactments of aesthetic and authentic caring in ELD classrooms, enactments of culture and communication in relation to L2, and integrations of ethnic diversity content in the delivery of instruction.

In spite of the constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices, most teacher participants benefited from the resources provided to them by their schools, school boards, and the provincial government, made agentic choices, challenged the status quo, and dwelled in the zone in between programmatic curriculum and classroom curriculum to respond to the socioemotional and academic needs of their students. Particularly, students' resilience, advanced sense of community, and hands-on skills were reported by teachers as enablers for the teaching and learning of Syrian refugee SIFEs.

There were specific findings from this study that surprised me. These included teacher participants' agency and dedication, despite the constraints and challenges they said they encountered; students' resilience and ability to conceptualize the struggles and recommendations in spite of the challenges they and their teachers described; teachers' unawareness of ELD programs prior to their teaching ELD; the use of unprofessional and inappropriate language to refer to Syrian refugee SIFEs (e.g., S-word, dirty); most students' explicit preference for their ELD English teachers to be native Canadians and specifically non-Arabic speakers; some students' non-reciprocation of their teachers' care; students' showing pride when their native Canadian teachers spoke some words in Arabic while not appreciating the same practice coming from teachers of the same language and culture; and uncaring, non-culturally responsive behaviors and power

relationships that some teachers who shared students' ethnic backgrounds exhibited towards their SIFEs.

Although I can understand that teachers may not be able to enact supportive pedagogies such as CRT if they lack related knowledge, I find it difficult to understand the reasons behind unprofessional, uncaring and unempathetic teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards students in general and minority students particularly because I believe that individuals are innately caring and that the entire process of teaching is an act of care.

### 8.3 Revisiting the Study's Research Questions

The major research question was:

What is the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students with interrupted formal education and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario?

The research questions that guided this study are

- (a) What practices and pedagogies are enacted in ELD classrooms?
- (b) What social structures and power relationships are reflected in ELD classrooms?
- (c) What are the resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms?

This study revealed the complexity of the nature of Syrian refugee SIFEs' and their teachers' experiences in ELD classrooms in Ontario and the nuances these experiences entailed.

In the following, I describe how the research questions have been answered.

- (a) What practices and pedagogies are enacted in ELD classrooms?

To answer this research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five ELD teachers and ten Syrian refugee SIFEs. Students' works and teachers' artifacts were also collected in addition to the researcher's reflective notes. Further, I also corroborated the findings on RQ 1 from Chapters 5 and 6. The interview questions were aimed at

identifying the classroom practices and pedagogies that teachers enacted in ELD classrooms. I utilized EoC four Moral Educational Modes (Noddings, 2003) and the five components of CRT and Instructions (Gay, 2010, 2018) to analyze teachers' practices in ELD classrooms.

Findings from both teachers' and students' experiences reflected basic entry level literacy and numeracy practices and routines (e.g., alphabet, counting, classroom behavior). Findings from students' and teachers' accounts regarding some classroom practices were inconsistent (e.g., group work). All teacher participants said or demonstrated that they enacted caring and CRT pedagogies in their ELD classrooms. Student participants said that some of their ELD teachers utilized caring and CRT pedagogies while others did not use these supportive pedagogies. Teacher participants used varied practices to respond to the very diversified and unique socioemotional and academic needs of each and every single one of their SIFEs. These practices included modification, accommodation, differentiation, adaptation and implementation of new programs tailored specifically to the needs and interests of ELD students (e.g., Guided Reading Program; ELD/ESL co-op program).

Some of the classroom practices created for/with the students needed to be more aligned with students' academic levels, ages, needs, interests, and aspirations. Further, the classroom practices needed to reflect a deeper understanding of students' core culture and histories and to integrate empowering content (e.g., racism, social justice, equality). Despite the challenges and constraints, the efforts that teacher participants made to cater to their students showed high levels of agency and advocacy. Progress and successes were also described (e.g., advantages of the Guided Reading Program and the ELD/ESL co-op program).

(b) What social structures and power relationships are reflected in ELD classrooms?

To answer this research question, I analyzed teachers' and students' responses to the semi-structured interview questions and the researcher's reflective notes. I also corroborated the findings on RQ 2 from Chapters 5 and 6. The findings showed that Canadian social structures, characterized by multi-level divides (e.g., divide between

citizens who accept, respect and care about Syrian refugees and citizens who denigrate them; divide between privileged White majority and disadvantaged ethnic and racial minorities), were found to be reflected in ELD classrooms, other mainstream classes, and school settings. Power-dominant hierarchical relationships were also described by student participants.

While teacher participants did not report any power relationships in their ELD classrooms, students reported many instances during which their teachers maintained power-dominant and hierarchical relationships with them. Some student participants' experiences in ELD classrooms were described as unpleasant experiences characterized by racism, alienation, discrimination, and xenophobia.

Reflecting on these experiences, some teachers appeared to maintain advanced caring relationships with their Syrian refugee SIFEs, identifying with those from the society who care. By comparison, other teachers appeared to maintain power-dominant and hierarchical relationships with Syrian refugee SIFEs, identifying with those who denigrate and alienate Syrian refugees. The latter statement gives the impression that teachers and SIFEs are hierarchically segregated on the basis of status, power, ethnicity, race, or other characteristics. This also seems to apply to Syrian refugee SIFEs and Canadian mainstream peers who appeared to be segregated based on privilege, ethnicity, race, and language.

In addition, coercive institutional powers were reported and reflected through teachers' lack of preparedness to teach ELD, lack of representation or underrepresentation of Syrian refugee SIFEs in the programmatic curriculum and the shortcomings of the high school education system in responding to the holistic needs, interests, and aspirations of this group of students. Such deficient classroom and institutional practices hinder the holistic growth of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their wellbeing and contribute to the perpetuation of an unjust social order that privileges the majority's ways of knowing and alienates ethnic and racial minorities.

- (c) What are the resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms?

To answer this research question, I analyzed teachers' and students' responses to the semi-structured interviews and utilized the researcher's reflective notes. I also corroborated findings from Chapters 5 and 6. The interview questions aimed at identifying the supports, resources, challenges, and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms.

Teachers and students described many similar resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices. Major resources included supports from school administration, school board and provincial government; PD sessions; collaborations between teachers; programs tailored specifically to SIFEs' needs and interests; caring and advanced teacher-student relationships; teachers' characteristics (e.g., sympathy, patience, empathy, and enthusiasm); students' resilience; safe classroom environments conducive to learning; intersection of teachers' and students' ethnicities and language; and interactions and support from others in class and within school (SWIS workers and specialized services).

Major constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT practices in ELD classrooms included institutional constraints (e.g., lack of relevance of the ELD programmatic curriculum, lack of information about refugee SIFEs, cuts to education); constraints related to teachers (e.g., teachers' education, confusing ELD and ESL, high levels of stress); constraints related to students (e.g., language barrier, attention span related issues); students' perceived failure to have their needs accommodated; and students' failure to have others empathize with them.

## 8.4 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are not meant to be generalized. This study explored the experiences of six teachers, a SWIS worker and ten students in only two secondary schools in Ontario. Other schools and ELD classrooms in Ontario may have contextual differences, such as cultural and social differences. Other ELD teachers and Syrian refugee SIFEs in Ontario may have experienced different or similar experiences than those described in this study. Nevertheless, the study findings might be, with caution, transferable to similar contexts "with similar research questions or questions of practice"

(Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 201) considering those contexts' particularities. In this sense, the results of this study may inform teachers' successful classroom practices, caring and CRT practices so other ELD teachers can benefit from them, and if appropriate, tailor them to their particular classrooms.

The literature review contributes to ensuring confirmability (I situated my research and findings in the literature, and I reflected on my biases). Further, the use of a combination of theories helps in capturing, reporting, and analyzing the complexity of the experiences of study participants. The study may be replicated in other schools and regions to provide insights into the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms.

Further, I did not observe teachers and students in their classrooms, which is a limitation of using professed but not observed data. Teacher participants' classroom practices, such as caring and CRT practices, are based on the teachers' descriptions. Students' experiences in the ELD classrooms are based on their own descriptions. Nonetheless, when teachers and students provided similar or close descriptions of their experiences, they added to the credibility of the study and closed the gap between what teachers and students have reported and what they might have really experienced in ELD classrooms. Additionally, I did not utilize participatory or action research, which has been noted, to utilize the theories of CT and CRT in the research process itself.

## 8.5 Recommendations for Practice and Theory

This study provides teachers, practitioners, and other stakeholders with detailed descriptions on the ways in which caring and CRT pedagogies are enacted in ELD classrooms in two secondary schools in Ontario. It also brings to light deficient practices and resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT. Additionally, this study also highlights the need to provide more means to support ELD students through the implementation of caring and CRT pedagogies for more meaningful teaching and learning experiences in ELD classrooms in Ontario. The responsibility falls on policy makers, curriculum designers/developers, stakeholders, teacher educators, teachers, and

students to promote supportive pedagogies in ELD classrooms. The findings of this study inform recommendations for practice and theory including curriculum studies.

The recommendations of this study aim to disrupt deficient institutional and classroom practices and emphasize supportive pedagogies in ELD classrooms. Thus, for more meaningful teaching and learning in ELD Classrooms, there is need to (a) emphasize supportive and successful teachers' practices and build on them, (b) cultivate a pedagogy based on ethical teacher-student relationships, (c) rethink the ELD curriculum to enable better representation of minorities, and (d) foster continuous non-hierarchical forms of communication between curriculum theory and practice. The latter suggestion aligns with suggestions from Pinar's (2012), Petrina's (2004), Deng's (2010) and Dillon's (2009) studies, all of which also emphasize non-hierarchical forms of communication between curriculum theory and practice as a necessary step towards change and improvement of teaching and learning conditions for disadvantaged students.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

**Recommendations for ELD Teachers:** ELD teachers are encouraged to collaborate with each other and with other mainstream teachers, SWIS workers, and school and community leaders to help themselves and the students bridge cultures. ELD teachers need to make agentic decisions, be mindful of societal power dynamics as they relate to curricular practices (Apple, 1996; Giroux, 2011), critically reflect on their pedagogies, and bridge the gap between the programmatic curriculum and students' needs. Further, teachers are encouraged to not concede to standardized tests in assessing minority students despite the institutional pressures (Gay, 2018). Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to integrate more empowering content (e.g., racism, prejudice, equality) into ELD classroom practices. ELD teachers may consider also reflecting on their pre-conceived assumptions about SIFEs, learning about their SIFEs' communication styles and addressing them differently according to the students' styles.

**Recommendations for school leadership:** School principals need to understand the complex nature of ELD students' and teachers' experiences and support them. Schools and school boards need to provide teachers of SIFEs with more training and PD



opportunities that focus on meeting the Ontario College of Teachers' (OCT) ethical standards<sup>10</sup> (OCT, nd) that emphasize the importance of care and respect for all students. Such PD and training prepare in-service ELD teachers to ethically interact with minority SIFEs in light of caring and CRT pedagogies enhancing teachers' cultural awareness, caring and agentic characteristics.

Further, school leaders need to provide more opportunities for ELD students and Canadian students to enjoy common activities outside of the classroom. While L2 is reported as a major barrier to communication, common activities such as sports activities (e.g. soccer games, basketball games) and other extracurricular activities (e.g., chess or field trips) that do not require an advanced level of L2 should be considered. Such activities help create a bond between students regardless of language proficiency.

**Recommendations for teacher education:** There is need for more emphasis on supportive pedagogies such as caring and CRT that enhance authentic care, culture and communication in the classroom. Teacher educators may need to consider how to prepare all teacher candidates to ethically interact with minority SIFEs in light of caring and CRT pedagogies to enhance teachers' cultural awareness, caring, and agentic characteristics. For instance, teacher educators' modeling of the four Moral Education Modes and the five components of CRT and Instruction with their teacher candidates prepare teacher candidates to authentically care for their students and create a classroom culture on the basis of understanding, trust and respect.

Further, ELD programs should be introduced to teacher candidates as different and independent programs from ESL, targeting a specific student population with specific characteristics and needs. Furthermore, the curriculum of teacher education may also include ongoing updated information about major SIFEs populations in the province with

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<sup>10</sup> The ethical standard of *Care* includes compassion, acceptance, interest and insight for developing students' potential. Members express their commitment to students' wellbeing and learning through positive influence, professional judgment and empathy in practice... Intrinsic to the ethical standard of *Respect* are trust and fair-mindedness. Members honor human dignity, emotional wellness and cognitive development. In their professional practice, they model respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy and the environment. <https://www.oct.ca/public/professional-standards/ethical-standards>

information about sociocultural contexts, histories, contributions, languages, and religion as well as resources to support these students' learning.

**Recommendations for students:** Students need to reciprocate the care provided by teachers. They are encouraged to maintain their resilience and sense of community despite the challenges.

**Recommendations for community and parents:** Community and parents should also support the education of SIFEs in specific ways. For instance, community leaders can be cultural brokers and parents can support the education of their children, confirm their strengths, and encourage them to engage more with their Canadian peers.

### **Recommendations for Theory**

#### **Recommendations for ELD curriculum**

There is a need to rethink the ELD programmatic curriculum and practice to better represent Syrian refugee SIFEs and respond to their needs, interests, and desires. More curriculum and entrusting work needs to be done for the teaching of SIFEs to align with the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates that every individual is entitled to survive and develop with dignity (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The recommendations for ELD curriculum include (a) the programmatic curriculum content, and (b) streaming and evaluation practices.

**(a) Programmatic Curriculum content:** Curriculum designers ought to consider embedding equality and diversity in the ELD curriculum. A multicultural programmatic curriculum content facilitates ELD teachers' tasks and contributes to enhancing the socio-emotional and academic achievements of minority SIFEs. Authentic communication between curriculum designers, ELD teachers, and students is needed. Curriculum designers may consider observing ELD classrooms, communicating with ELD teachers and ELD students, investing in knowing them, listening to their voices and concerns, and integrating their suggestions/recommendations into future curricular programs. Only then, when communication between curriculum theory and practice is established, can change occur.

**(b) Streaming and evaluation practices:** Given the identified unfairness and inappropriateness of the streaming and evaluation practices, it is important to rethink these practices and their criteria to reflect SIFEs' true academic levels and potentials and teach them accordingly. Ending the discriminatory practice of academic streaming in Grade 9 is a paradigm shift in the education of all students, particularly minority and racialized students. There is a need for this shift in evaluation. Evaluation practices ought to consider the socioemotional and academic development of the students as well as alignment with curriculum content and instruction.

### **Recommendations for CRT**

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are inextricably linked and need to coexist in harmony for the sake of refugee SIFEs' growth. Thus, it would help to explicitly add and adapt an assessment component to CRT. Although Gay (2018) elaborated on assessment/evaluation of minority students, she did not specify a component for assessment strategies tailored to ethnic and racial minority students as she did for the multicultural curriculum content (CRT # 2) and ethnic diversity in instruction (CRT # 5).

In addition to the study recommendations, teacher and student participants provided their own recommendations for more meaningful teaching and learning in ELD classrooms.

## **8.6 Teachers' and Students' Recommendations**

This study gave Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers a voice (Barek, Namukasa, & White, 2020) regarding their experiences in ELD classrooms in Ontario. Teachers and students were offered an opportunity to reflect on and make meaning of their experiences in ELD classrooms. In addition to teachers' and students' shared classroom experiences, challenges and constraints, in this section, I outline teacher and student participants' suggested recommendations and hopes which could be part of an action plan aiming to support ELD students and their teachers.

ELD teachers' and other stakeholders' recommendations for practice, policy, and research are as follows:

### More support

- Lynn and Suzan: *“More support, definitely more support”*. Lynn and Suzan affirmed that they were getting lots of support. Nonetheless, they expressed that more support was needed, which corroborates Cynthia’s, Jennifer’s, and other teachers’ recommendations.

### See the same teachers teaching the same courses

- Cynthia: *“I hope to see the same teachers teaching the same courses to continue to improve on it rather than giving it to different teachers to teach it... [I hope to see] smaller classroom sizes because at times we have 28 students at different language levels and most of them need one on one help due to a lot of different factors ... [I hope to see] faster access to assess any students with special needs or learning difficulties.*

### Easily accessible support services for staff and students

- Jennifer: *I wish more support services were easily accessible for staff and students. For hundreds of learners we have one or two SWIS workers which provide additional support to these learners but expanding those roles would be helpful. Smaller class sizes whenever possible is important in helping these students and giving them more individual attention.*

### More hands-on or co-op type programs can be offered

- Mark: *These students need to have more pathways available to them to help combat their poor graduation rates. Perhaps more hands-on or co-op type programs can be offered to help provide these students with skills that will help them in the real world. We need to build on their strengths and in many cases these students have been working for many years before even coming to the country. Why not try to build on their strengths so they can be strong, contributing members of society? We always try to place our students in the best possible situations to be successful, so why not apply that same strategy to our Syrian SIFEs in greater numbers?*

### Research to be done in areas of supporting SIFEs

- Rina: *“Supporting ELD students in secondary schools has been very challenging in the last couple of years, and not much research has been done in areas of supporting them.”* Rina wished for more research that can be shared with schools and school boards to support this group of youth.

Syrian refugee SIFEs’ recommendations for more meaningful learning in ELD classrooms mostly targeted the ways in which teachers teach and treat SIFEs. Those

recommendations included those related to caring practices, classroom instructions, and teachers' perceptions and equitable practices. If anything, this shows the impact of teachers' care, enacted pedagogies, and perceptions in the education of SIFEs. Those recommendations are, in my view, calls for teachers to (a) care more (e.g., *be more considerate, assure them that there is always room for improvement, encourage students to put in more efforts*), (b) be better prepared to teach ELD and to enact supportive pedagogies (e.g., *differentiate classroom instructions, involve students in decision making in the classroom*), and (c) avoid pre-conceived assumptions about refugee SIFEs and create equitable learning opportunities for all students (e.g., *focus on all students not only students who show academic potential, realize that students' shyness does not mean that they are not smart or do not want to work to the best of their abilities*).

Other recommendations included calls for support classes to be resumed (e.g., *"I would like to see the support class back again"* – Maryam, student at Edugates SS). Those classes were affected by the 2019 provincial government budget cuts.

Policy makers, curriculum developers/designers, and stakeholders are invited to consider the voices of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in general, and particularly from this study, when planning future policy implementations and programs in ELD classrooms.

## 8.7 Future Research

The unfortunate sustained conflicts in developing countries and the refugee influxes that may result, along with Canada's open-door policy for refugees, render studies such as those exploring the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms timely. Ethnographic studies that allow observing teachers and SIFEs in their natural classroom setting are needed. More research investigating supportive pedagogies used to educate SIFEs in ESL and mainstream classes would also help to further explore successful and best practices tailored for those students. Further research is needed to investigate the experiences and progress of Syrian refugee SIFEs and other SIFEs in colleges and university as applicable. Studies that look at possible areas of reform of the high school ELD curriculum to meet socioemotional, academic, and cultural minorities'

needs and respond to their inspirations are also needed. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate the ways in which the COVID-19 crisis has affected the education opportunities of Ontario refugee SIFEs and the nature and enacting of supportive pedagogies to redress the extended effects of the pandemic.

## 8.8 Summary

This study contributes to the scholarly knowledge and discussion pertaining to the education of Syrian refugee SIFEs and other SIFEs in ELD classrooms in Ontario. The purpose of this research was to explore the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. The research sought to explore classroom practices, caring and culturally responsive teaching pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms along with resources and constraints to the implementation of those pedagogies. Also, social structures and power relationships reflected in the ELD classroom were investigated.

Ten high school Syrian refugee SIFEs, five ELD teachers, one ESL teacher, and one SWIS worker were recruited to participate in this research using purposeful sampling. Teacher participants included male and female, native Canadian and Middle Eastern-Canadian ELD teachers and other stakeholders who were teaching and/or supporting Syrian refugee SIFEs at the time of data collection. Students were all Syrian refugees who have experienced interruption in their formal education, both males and females, some of them were still enrolled in ELD classrooms while others transferred to ESL, mainstream English classes or adult education. Despite the challenges, all teacher participants found it very rewarding to teach Syrian refugee SIFEs. All student participants showed gratefulness for being enrolled in schools in Canada and shared that they thought there were better ways to cater to Syrian refugee SIFEs in ELD classrooms, and thus provided recommendations. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 14 participants and due to the COVID-19 situation, three participants preferred to respond to the interview questions in the form of an open survey.

Findings in this study were outlined in two chapters, the teachers' experiences (Chapter 5) and the students' experiences (Chapter 6). Deficient classroom and institutional

practices, best practices (e.g., Guided Reading Program), and diverse creative ways in which teachers and schools turned constraints faced by Syrian refugee SIFEs into opportunities (e.g., ELD/ESL co-op program) were reported. There were indicators of teachers' uncaring and non-culturally responsive practices and behaviors (e.g., "*ELD [English] teachers do not care whether we learn or not*" - Sarah) and power hierarchical relationships (e.g., "*I had an assignment and I was late at work that day... I talked to the instructor and explained to her the reasons ... and she just didn't accept my excuse [explanation]*" - Seif) in some ELD classrooms. Nonetheless, there were also indicators of supportive pedagogies (e.g., "*we may read and discuss articles related to Mecca, Eid*" - Jennifer) specifically caring and CRT pedagogies enacted in some ELD classrooms along with advanced caring teacher-student relationships. Resources (e.g., advanced teacher-student relationships, teachers' empathy) and constraints (e.g., lack of teachers' preparedness to teach ELD) to the implementation of caring and CRT practices were identified by student and teacher participants.

Reflection on the major study findings and research questions, study limitations, and recommendations for practice, theory, and future research were delineated.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A : Quotes – Chapter 5

#### Excerpt A

Suzan

*In the beginning, we had no idea what we were doing for the students so we were seeking anywhere we can go to get help...we were looking, we had different speakers coming to the school and we got ...in contact with... another school board and they were doing “the guided reading program”. We went to see them...I went to school watched them and I told myself ... this is what we need to do. It is going to be tons of work, but I will do what I can because the kids are worth it...we had some resources, we didn’t really have that many books. The idea is in an ELD classroom we had 28 students, out of these 28 students all of them are on different levels, so instead of trying to teach a small group let’s say of 10 students that understand what the teacher is trying to do, let’s put them all in groups based on their own levels. The ELD A [the first level] is basically pre-school to Kindergarten (Figure 12)*

**Figure 12. Revised Secondary ELD A Achievement Chart**

Revised Secondary ELD Achievement Chart	
ELD A	
<b>Reading: Levels 0-15</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read for meaning: simple texts</li> <li>• Answer questions about the book</li> <li>• Do what Good Readers do: make predictions, read with attention to punctuation</li> <li>• Try new words: use word patterns, use sight words, look at pictures</li> <li>• Find information in the book</li> <li>• Use words and simple phrases to tell what the book is about, and what happens in the story</li> </ul>	<b>Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand simple instructions and directions</li> <li>• Use familiar expressions (<i>hello, and thank you</i>)</li> <li>• Use appropriate tone and nonverbal communication</li> <li>• Listen to write words and letter sounds</li> <li>• Read aloud/present to peers</li> </ul>
<b>Writing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write short simple sentences</li> <li>• Use sentence stems, pictures and brainstorming to organize ideas</li> <li>• Link ideas using <i>and, but, after, then, etc.</i></li> <li>• Write short texts on personal topics, like <i>shopping lists, cards and e-mails.</i></li> </ul>	<b>Socio-Cultural Competence &amp; Media Literacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use appropriate non-verbal body language</li> <li>• Know how to use some school and community resources</li> <li>• Use learning skills to work well alone or in a group with other students (taking turns, listening)</li> <li>• Learn about and understand simple media: read signs, flyers, posters, and listen to and watch videos, announcements</li> </ul>

Lynn interrupted:

*...and I have students who many of them don’t know to write their names in their own language and they should finish up at a kindergarten reading level.*



Suzan continued:

*Putting them into a group of 4 to 6 giving them books based on their reading ability... and in each of those levels or groups, they are at different levels themselves, and you just continue to build on their skills. For instance, in [the] ELD C course, we break it down to the reading level ... their communication ... their writings ... their cultural competence and media literacy... we break ... each ELD C course into those levels and skills (Figure 13). So, for ELD C they have to write a short paragraph and practice on how to write a short paragraph. They need to write short text on personal topics like personal letters or emails describing experiences or notices on lost items, so looking at those things and giving them different activities to work on ... they are slow. I had them do a power point [presentation] that would take ESL students a couple of days and for our students it took 2 weeks, which is ok, and I am willing to give them the time to work on those writing aspects because they need to know how to do it, when they get to ESL they won't have the help we do in the classrooms.*

**Figure 13. Revised Secondary ELD C Achievement Chart**

ELD C	
<b>Reading: Levels 15-25</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read for meaning: adapted texts</li> <li>• Retell the main idea of the text</li> <li>• Notice literary elements: theme, plot, message</li> <li>• Do what Good Readers do: talk about the text with other readers, make text to text connections</li> <li>• Try new words: use prefixes, suffixes or word families</li> <li>• Find, record and organize information from a text</li> </ul>	<b>Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand detailed directions and instructions</li> <li>• Discuss topics in small groups</li> <li>• Present ideas and information</li> <li>• Listen to write sentences, noticing punctuation</li> <li>• Present to peers</li> </ul>
<b>Writing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write a short paragraph</li> <li>• Use strategies to organize ideas, like a Venn Diagram, concept web, interviews or background reading</li> <li>• Link ideas using several words and phrases, like <i>when, first, secondly, in the beginning, etc.</i></li> <li>• Write short texts on personal topics, like <i>personal letters/emails, describing experiences or notices on lost items</i></li> </ul>	<b>Socio-Cultural Competence and Media Literacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose and use appropriate body language and spoken English in different classroom situations</li> <li>• Show understanding of good citizenship</li> <li>• Make use of school and community resources</li> <li>• Use some study skills appropriate to time management</li> <li>• Understand and create different media texts for specific purpose (eg. brochure, advertisement)</li> </ul>

Suzan continued:

*They are all at different levels ... I have them separated that students at the same table are at the same level because they worked towards moving [to the other table] this is the visualization for them: if I go to the other (that) table it means I have gone up a level...*

Lynn agreed and commented:

*So, the teacher would then teach this part of the book for each level ... and then rotates to the next table. So, each teacher would kind of jump stations...*

Suzan also mentioned that

*In other schools the students move, but here in our school the teachers move...students will only move to the next table when they level up.*

*We were grouped before only 1 teacher and 28 students. Only the strong students will do something, and the rest of the students will be too shy, or on their phones ... Because if we are all at the same reading level, phonics ... no one cares if you mess up so they actually love showing you what they can do in the small group. And so, ... when they achieve certain criteria, they move on to B or to C... and that's what they are pushing for... instead of that grade*

Lynn and Suzan shared an example of a guided reading lesson plan (Figure 14)

**Figure 14. Guided Reading Lesson Plan**

Guided Reading Lesson Plan

1. Read the book three times (once for each of the subheadings below). List possible challenges and page numbers that you plan to 'debug' in the picture walk.

Meaning (Teaching Topic 1)	Structure (Teaching Topic 2)	Visual Information (Teaching Copy 3)
<p><b>Do a book walk first:</b> look over the vocabulary, title, page numbers etc.</p> <p><b>Vocabulary words:</b> Names of objects: sun, plane, birds, balloon, clouds, rain rainbow</p> <p><b>Student Reading</b> - Have the students quietly read the book to themselves.</p>	<p><b>Grammar and Mechanics:</b> Principles: You can say a word slowly. You can hear each sound in a word. You can match consonant sounds and letters at the beginning of a word and at the end of a word. Some words have one vowel between two consonants. The sound of the vowel is short.</p> <p>Give the students the magnetic letters: a,e,f,g,h,i,m,n,o,p,t,u. Have them sort the letters into vowels and consonants. You are going to make words with three sounds.</p> <p>Remember that you can say a word slowly to hear each sound: Say the words fun, peg, ham, and lot one at a time. Have the students say each word slowly to hear each word slowly, construct the word with magnetic letters, and check the sound sequence with their finger. Encourage them to use the Alphabet linking chart to help them notice letter sound relationship.</p>	<p><b>Frequency</b> Principles: You can say a word slowly. You can hear each sound in a word. You can match letters and sounds in words.</p> <p>Hear, Say, and Write: Sound Boxes Now that you have introduced all the short vowel sounds, reintroduce sound boxes as a support for hearing and recording words that the students do not know.</p> <p>Draw three sound boxes on the whiteboard and model saying a new word slowly, and writing the letters that represent each sound in sequence inside the boxes. For example, Say the word run. What sounds do you hear? (students respond) Say the word again slowly to help the students hear sound in the word. If needed, model one or two more examples. For example: cap, sit.</p> <p>Give each student one of the whiteboards with sound boxes. Have the students say each of the words slowly and record the letters in the boxes: pot, leg, fan, him. Encourage the students to use the alphabet linking chart to help them notice letter sound relationships that may be hard to hear. Once the students have them say the words slowly again as</p>

**Excerpt B**

Suzan: *One of my students in period 4 one of the first things he was able to tell me is*

*“Miss it is Tuesday”  
“yup it is Tuesday”  
“do you know what Tuesday is?”*

*“no, what’s special about Tuesday?”  
 “half price pizza dominos”  
 (teachers laugh)*

*This it was a big thing for him to tell us this, so this was a year and a half ago, and today I go*

*“do you know what day it is?”*

*“Tuesday”*

*“what is Tuesday?”*

*...*

*Suzan*

*It is things we periodically will do back and forth to each other, and we won’t do it for another month and then of a sudden the student will do it... and we will laugh about it.*

### **Excerpt C**

*Suzan*

*There are 2 boys in my ELD B who were just under the radar [avoiding attention] and could speak English perfectly, they understood everything that we are saying but...they didn’t want to do it and one student particularly is reading higher than an E [level], he is almost at a G level and he is slow, but you give him time and he can read every word on the page and it is incredible and again both of those boys when they look at you they are like “ I just did that!” and I would be like “you just did that!!!*

*Interviewer: this must be very rewarding!*

*Suzan: it is very rewarding*

### **Excerpt D**

*For a lot of our students as soon as they can make this personal connection, it helps with their memory and it helps them understand what they are reading as soon as they have that connection. If they don’t have a connection with what they are reading they won’t have that understanding*

### **Excerpt E**

*so we would say let’s learn the food vocabulary and you can choose a recipe from any country and they tend to pick from their own culture and it is cool they get to learn English words and also show us food from their country and they get so excited especially the music, they like to purposely play the music a bit loud because they are proud about how it sounds. lessons like that, we would never squash it and say hey do this instead. We want them to embrace it... because we never want them to lose their language, we don’t want them to lose their culture*

*and we are not this kind of teachers who would say “let’s pick an English name, Never.”*

### **Excerpt F**

Suzan

*Student: Miss why do you make us write this in Arabic*

*Suzan: and I was like “well to help you remember” and he goes*

*Student: “I can’t read Arabic, I actually can understand the English words more than I can read Arabic” so “I go back to this word and I don’t know what I wrote. I understand English why you make us do that?”*

*Suzan: and then I go like, “you are not going to write in Arabic anymore, you have the choice if you know what it is”*

*Lynn commented: or just find a picture*

*Suzan continues but if you don’t understand, don’t do that.*

*So, it was me trying to say “keep your language, you need to embrace it”*

*Suzan: and then they go “I don’t know how to read it”*

### **Excerpt G**

Lynn and Suzan

*“We are fortunate on UPHS funding and it is for teachers to be paid as a supply teachers’ salary to come into our classroom and become that extra body [person to help]. Without that we would not be able to run this program...I get why other schools can’t do it if they don’t get the UPHS funding like we do, it is the only way that this program can work”.*

### **Excerpt H**

Cynthia

*We managed with a lot of hours of hard work and daily reflection. It was definitely challenging but watching them learn the language is very rewarding. I basically survived on the words of encouragement from my admin., who appreciated us for the work we did and the problem-solving skills we had to put to use daily. At times, it was just surviving the day that we had to worry about, not too much the curriculum, because at times we had one teacher with 28 plus ELD students – who have come straight from war zones, and are very irritated, lost, stressed, and have been out of school for so long, [and] who also vary in ages from 14 to 21 – in one classroom.*

### **Excerpt I**

Lynn

*my ability now to differentiate [instruction to suit different kinds of learners] has gotten better...like the understanding of individual needs and again seeing people at base value rather than taking away some stereotypes...You just look at them at base value and find out...this translates into better teaching practices if we end up outside of the ELD which we hope staying in.*

Suzan

*advocates...My family is a unique sort of family but having my personal experience, I think they understand I think they have better understanding because they listen to the stories they have seen things from a different perspective other than what you see in the media showing you they have a different perspective, so making us more understanding, advocates.....now I can check myself a little bit more and I would say "they could be having a bad day, no one knows what is going on in their life" in that way I feel I am a more relaxed person".*

## Appendix B: Quotes – Chapter 6

### Excerpt J

*I am happy that my grades in English are improving. Two days ago, the teacher handed out an assignment and I was really scared to check the mark, so all the students checked their marks and I did not until the end of the period. The teacher told me that I should check it and I was surprised that I had a very good mark I was very happy and the teacher too – Sama*

### Excerpt K

*First, we go into our groups and we sit around our group's table. The teacher explains a lesson about the present and past, sometimes about plural, etc. They give us five sentences and those sentences for example will have to be written in plural or past tense etc. then we will have to write those sentences ... changing and modifying them according to the instructions. Once we finish grammar, we read a story and whoever has a summary [role that day] will write the summary. Some students read the story with the teacher.... usually we sit in groups and each student reads two pages and the teacher follows up with us. There is more than one teacher in the classroom, we are divided in four groups/tables and there are three teachers. For instance, three groups would be reading the story and the fourth group would be reviewing the vocabulary sheet from the story to work on it. When we finish, we switch, we do the summary and then the other group who wasn't reading the story will be reviewing it. The stories correspond to each group's level. Students at the same table form a group and they are all at the same level of English – Hala & Tala*

### Excerpt L

*I don't like to participate in the classroom discussions. The teachers know that I am shy and they always encourage me. Once a teacher told me: "speak don't be shy if I will learn your language it is going to be difficult for me to learn it, you are smart, you are learning the English language fast... I encourage you and I want you to speak even if you make mistakes because if you don't practice you won't learn the language ... They encourage us a lot in the English class... this motivates me to work more on myself Ameera*

## Appendix C – Western Ethics Approval

**Date:** 13 November 2018

**To:** Dr. Immaculate Namukasa

**Project ID:** 111526

**Study Title:** Exploring the Experiences of Syrian refugee Students and Their Teachers in ELD Classrooms: A Critical Ethnographic Study

**Application Type:** NMREB Initial Application

**Review Type:** Full Board

**Meeting Date:** 01/Jun/2018 12:30

**Date Approval Issued:** 13/Nov/2018 16:25

**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 13/Nov/2019

Dear Dr. Immaculate Namukasa

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above-mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

### Documents Approved

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Informal discussion guide - Stakeholders	Interview Guide	25/Sep/2018	2
Letter of information and consent - Parents	Written Consent/Assent	29/Aug/2018	2
Letter of information and consent - Students	Written Consent/Assent	29/Aug/2018	2
Letter of information and consent - Teachers	Written Consent/Assent	25/Sep/2018	3
Letter of Information and Consent-Parents-Arabic Translation	Other Document	29/Aug/2018	2
Letter of Information and Consent-Stakeholders	Written Consent/Assent	29/Aug/2018	1
Letter of Information and Consent-Students-Arabic	Other Document	29/Aug/2018	2
Non- Participant observation guide	Non-Participant Observation Guide	29/Aug/2018	2
Non-Participant Observation Guide-Arabic Translation	Other Document	29/Aug/2018	2
Participant observation Guide	Participant Observation Guide	29/Aug/2018	2
Participant Observation Guide-Arabic Translation	Other Document	29/Aug/2018	2
Recruitment Email - Reminder	Recruitment Materials	29/Aug/2018	2
Recruitment Email- School Principals.docx	Recruitment Materials	21/May/2018	1
Recruitment Email-Teachers	Recruitment Materials	25/Sep/2018	3
Student Interview Protocol-Arabic Translation	Other Document	29/Aug/2018	2
Students' Interview Protocol	Interview Guide	29/Aug/2018	2
Teachers' Interview Protocol	Interview Guide	29/Aug/2018	2
Verbal Recruitment Script	Oral Script	29/Aug/2018	2
Verbal Recruitment Script-Arabic Translation	Other Document	29/Aug/2018	2

**Documents Acknowledged:**


Translator Attestation Letter Other Document      Doc Date: 05/Nov/2018      V. 1

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

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

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

Sincerely,

 Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

***Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).***





The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision about your participation in this research.

## **2. Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFE and their teachers in ELD classrooms, and the ways in which ELD teachers enact supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive teaching to create learning opportunities for their students.

## **3. Study Procedures**

Your involvement in this study will include participating in a 45 to 60 minutes interview. The interview will be conducted at a time and a place that is convenient for you in the community. Interviews will be audio-recorded. If you do not want to be audio-recording in the interview, you are going to be asked to respond to the interview questions in writing in the form of an open survey. Also, copies or photographs of learning materials, document artifacts and teachers and students' work will be collected at the time of the interview and may be used in the dissemination of the research. Data from document artifacts and students' and teachers' work will help understand the classroom practices and experiences of study participants in the ELD Classroom. Further, I will conduct peer checking this means that participants' non-identifiable information such as interview data may be shared with colleagues/supervisors. Peer checking adds validity and accuracy to the researcher's interpretations.

## **4. Potential Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

## **5. Potential Benefits**

The possible benefits may be that during and/or after the interview participants may reflect on their past education experiences and think about their education pathways in Canada.

## **6. Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information. If participants wish to have their information removed they should let the researcher know.

## **7. Confidentiality**

All efforts will be made to keep participants identity and all data confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. Participants will be given a pseudonym and a study number to ensure anonymity; all consent forms, audiotape records, and interview notes will be filed and kept in a locked safe throughout this study. All files will be collected, coded, analyzed and kept on a private computer protected by a password for a minimum of 7 years. Participants will be granted a unique study number. A list linking participants' study number with their name

will be kept in a secure place separate from participants' study file. All electronic study records and identifiable information will be encrypted and password protected. Participants may be directly quoted in the dissemination of the study. If the results of the study are published, participants' names will not be used. Participants will be invited to contact the researchers for a copy of the results if they are interested.

Data will be destroyed confidentially seven years after publishing the study results. While we do our best to protect participants' information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law we have a duty to report. Data that identify participants (i.e., field notes, audio recordings) may be inspected by a regulatory agency and/or the University of Western Ontario. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to participants' study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

#### **8. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for the participation in this research.

#### **9. Rights of Participants**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you agree to participate, you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time and data will be discarded from the study should you wish to decline and this will not affect you.

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

#### **10. Contacts for Further Information**

If you have questions about this research study please contact Dr. Immaculate Namukasa at [REDACTED] Dr. Mi Song Kim at [REDACTED], or Hiba Barek at [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [REDACTED]

#### **11. Consent**

Informed consent will be indicated by signing the consent form that accompanies this letter. Both parent and child signatures are needed to indicate consent.

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



**Consent Form**

Project Title:

Exploring the Experiences of Syrian refugee Students and Their Teachers in ELD  
Classrooms

Document Title:

Consent Letter – Parents/Caregivers

Principal Investigator:

Immaculate Namukasa, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.  
[REDACTED]

Additional Research Staff:

Mi Song Kim, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]

Hiba Berek, PhD student, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]

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

**CONTACT FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

Please check the appropriate box below and initial:

\_\_\_ I agree to be contacted for future research studies

\_\_\_ I do NOT agree to be contacted for future research studies

**I want to participate in this study**

YES  NO

**I consent to:**

Interview

YES  NO

Audio-recording interview

YES  NO

Providing copies of classroom work and artifacts

YES  NO

Photocopy of participant’s work

YES  NO

Use photos of participant's work in the dissemination of this research  YES  NO

The use of the participant's unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research.

YES  NO

Accessing an online site for member checking activities  YES  NO

Providing participant's email address to access an online site for member checking activities

YES  NO

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

_____	_____	_____
Print Name of Person	Signature	<i>Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)</i>
Obtaining Consent		

_____	_____	_____
Print Name of Child/Participant	Signature of Child	<i>Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)</i>

_____	_____	_____
Print Name of Parent/ Guardian	Signature of Parent/Guardian	<i>Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)</i>

## Appendix E – Letter of Information and Consent – Stakeholders



**Western  
Education**

Project Title:

Exploring the Experiences of Syrian refugee Students and Their Teachers in ELD Classrooms

Document Title:

Letter of Information and Consent – Stakeholders {School principal/Vice-Principal/Support Staff/Workers etc.}

Principal Investigator:

Immaculate Namukasa, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.  
[REDACTED]

Additional Research Staff:

Mi Song Kim, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Hiba Barek, PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

### Letter of Information

My name is Hiba Barek, I am a PhD Candidate in Curriculum Studies at the Faculty of Education at Western University. Working with my Supervisors Dr. Namukasa, and Dr. Mi Song Kim. I will be conducting an exploratory qualitative study to understand the nature of experiences of Syrian refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in English Literacy Development (ELD) classrooms in Ontario.

#### **1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study about the experiences of Syrian refugee students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in ELD classroom because you are/were a {school principal/vice-principal/Support-Staff/worker/etc.} of a high school that has a significant number of Syrian refugee SIFE in Ontario.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision about participation in this research.

## **2. Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFE and their teachers in ELD classrooms, and the ways in which ELD teachers enact supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive teaching to create learning opportunities for their students.

## **3. Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate you will be asked to partake in an informal discussion and you will be asked questions about your experience and role as a {principal/vice-principal/etc.} with Syrian refugee SIFE and their ELD teachers. The discussion may take up to an hour, and will be conducted at a convenient time and place for you. Informal discussions will be audio recorded and transcribed. If participants do not agree to be audio-recorded in the discussions, participants are going to be asked to respond to the discussion questions in writing and drop them in the OWL mailbox for the student researcher, in the form of an open survey.

Also, I will conduct peer checking this means that participants' non-identifiable information such as the informal discussion data may be shared with colleagues/supervisors. Peer checking adds validity and accuracy to the researcher's interpretations.

I will share with you my interpretations so you can check the accuracy of my description and interpretation, also at that time you can contribute your own interpretations, ideas, comments, or reflections.

## **4. Potential Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

## **5. Potential Benefits**

The possible benefits to you may be that during and/or after the discussion you may reflect on your roles and responsibilities to inform your future decisions regarding ELD students.

## **6. Voluntary Participation**

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed please let the researcher know.

## **7. Confidentiality**

All efforts will be made to keep your identity and all data confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. You will be given a pseudonym and a study number to ensure anonymity; all consent forms, audiotape records, and interview notes will be filed and kept in a locked safe throughout this study. All files will be collected, coded, analysed and kept on a private computer protected by a password for a minimum of 7 years. You will be granted a unique

study number. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept in a secure place separate from your study file. All electronic study records and identifiable information will be encrypted and password protected. You may be directly quoted in the dissemination of the study. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. Participants will be invited to contact the researchers via email for a copy of the results if they are interested. The research report is going to be made available to the participants who contact the researchers.

Data will be destroyed confidentially seven years after publishing the study results. While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law we have a duty to report. Data that identify you (i.e. field notes, audio recordings) may be inspected by a regulatory agency and/or the University of Western Ontario. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

#### **8. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

#### **9. Rights of Participants**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time and data will be discarded from the study should you wish to decline. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your career. We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form.

#### **10. Contacts for Further Information**

If you have questions about this research study please contact Dr. Immaculate Namukasa at [REDACTED], Dr. Mi Song Kim at [REDACTED], or Hiba Barek [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [REDACTED]

#### **11. Consent**

Informed consent will be indicated by signing the consent form that accompanies this letter.

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





## Consent Form

Project Title:

Exploring the Experiences of Syrian refugee Students and Their Teachers in ELD  
Classrooms

Document Title:

Consent Letter – Stakeholders

Principal Investigator:

Immaculate Namukasa, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.  
[REDACTED]

Additional Research Staff:

Mi Song Kim, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Hiba Berek, PhD student, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

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

### CONTACT FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Please check the appropriate box below and initial:

I agree to be contacted for future research studies

I do NOT agree to be contacted for future research studies

I agree to be audio-recording in this research informal discussions

YES  NO

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

YES  NO

I consent to access an online site for member checking activities

YES  NO

I consent to provide my email address to access an online site for member checking activities

YES  NO

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

_____	_____	_____
Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Signature	<i>Date (DD-MMM- YYYY)</i>

_____	_____	_____
Print Name of Participant	Signature	<i>Date (DD-MMM- YYYY)</i>



## Appendix F – Letter of Information and Consent – Teachers

Letter of Information and Consent

Project Title:

Exploring the Experiences of Syrian refugee Students and Their Teachers in ELD  
Classrooms

Document Title:

Letter of Information and Consent – Teacher

Principal Investigator:

Immaculate Namukasa, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.

[REDACTED]

Additional Research Staff:

Mi Song Kim, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.

[REDACTED]

Hiba Barek, PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University.

[REDACTED]

### **Letter of Information**

My name is Hiba Barek, I am a PhD Candidate in Curriculum Studies at the Faculty of Education at Western University. Working with my Supervisors Dr. Namukasa, and Dr. Mi Song Kim. I will be conducting an exploratory qualitative study to understand the nature of experiences of Syrian refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in English Literacy Development (ELD) classrooms in Ontario.

### **1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study about the experiences of Syrian refugee students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in ELD classroom because you are currently teaching, or you have previously taught Syrian refugee SIFE in a high school in Ontario.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision about participation in this research.

### **2. Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFE and their teachers in ELD classrooms, and the ways in which ELD teachers enact supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive teaching to create learning opportunities for their students.

### **3. Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to partake in an interview and you will be asked questions about your experiences and role as ELD teachers of Syrian refugee SIFE, and about students' experiences. The interview will take up to an hour and will be conducted at a convenient time and place for you. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. If participants do not agree to be audio-recorded in the interview, participants are going to be asked to respond to the interview questions in writing and drop them in the OWL mailbox for the student researcher, in the form of an open survey.

Further, copies of curriculum material, artifacts and students' work will be collected at the time of the interview and may be used in the dissemination of the research.

Also, I will conduct peer checking this means that participants' non-identifiable information such as interview data may be shared with colleagues/supervisors. Peer checking adds validity and accuracy to the researcher's interpretations. Follow up telephone and skype interviews might be conducted if needed or requested by the participants.

I will share with you my interpretations so you can check the accuracy of my description and interpretation, also at that time you can contribute your own interpretations, ideas, comments, or reflections.

### **4. Potential Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

### **5. Potential Benefits**

The possible benefits to you may be that during and/or after the interview you may reflect on your teaching practices to inform your future teaching of ELD students.

### **6. Voluntary Participation**

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed please let the researcher know.

#### **7. Confidentiality**

All efforts will be made to keep your identity and all data confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. You will be given a pseudonym and a study number to ensure anonymity; all consent forms, audiotape records, and interview notes will be filed and kept in a locked safe throughout this study. All files will be collected, coded, analysed and kept on a private computer protected by a password for a minimum of 7 years. You will be granted a unique study number. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept in a secure place separate from your study file. Your email address, Skype ID, years of teaching, and telephone number will be collected upon your consent. All electronic study records and identifiable information will be encrypted and password protected. You may be directly quoted in the dissemination of the study. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. Participants will be invited to contact the researchers for a copy of the results if they are interested.

Data will be destroyed confidentially seven years after publishing the study results. While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law we have a duty to report. Data that identify you (i.e., field notes, audio recordings) may be inspected by a regulatory agency and/or the University of Western Ontario. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

#### **8. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

#### **9. Rights of Participants**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time and data will be discarded from the study should you wish to decline. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your career. We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form.

#### **10. Contacts for Further Information**

If you have questions about this research study please contact Dr. Immaculate Namukasa at [REDACTED] Dr. Mi Song Kim at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] or Hiba Barek [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics  
[REDACTED]

**11. Consent**

Informed consent will be indicated by signing the consent form that accompanies this letter.

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



## Consent Form

Project Title:

Exploring the Experiences of Syrian refugee Students and Their Teachers in ELD  
Classrooms

Document Title:

Consent Letter – Teacher

Principal Investigator:

Immaculate Namukasa, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.  
[REDACTED]

Additional Research Staff:

Mi Song Kim, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Hiba Barek, PhD student, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

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

### CONTACT FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Please check the appropriate box below and initial:

I agree to be contacted for future research studies

I do NOT agree to be contacted for future research studies

I consent to interview

YES  NO

I agree to be audio-recording in this research interview

YES  NO

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

YES  NO

I consent to provide photocopies of my work

YES  NO

I consent to the use of copies or photographs of my work artifacts in the dissemination of this research

YES  NO

I consent to access an online site for member checking activities

YES  NO

I consent to provide my email address to access an online site for member checking activities

YES  NO

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person      Signature      Date (DD-MMM-  
Obtaining Consent      YYYYY)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Participant      Signature      Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYYY)



## Appendix G – Letter of Information and Consent – Students

Letter of Information and Consent

Project Title:

Exploring the Experiences of Syrian refugee Students and Their Teachers in ELD  
Classrooms

Document Title:

Letter of Information and Consent – Student

Principal Investigator:

Immaculate Namukasa, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.  
[REDACTED]

Additional Research Staff:

Mi Song Kim, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Hiba Barek, PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

### Letter of Information

My name is Hiba Barek, I am a PhD Candidate in Curriculum Studies at the Faculty of Education at Western University. Working with my Supervisors Dr. Namukasa, and Dr. Mi Song Kim, I will be conducting an exploratory qualitative study to understand the nature of experiences of Syrian refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in English Literacy Development (ELD) classrooms in Ontario.

#### **1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study about the experiences of Syrian refugee students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in ELD classroom because you are currently enrolled or you have been enrolled in ELD classes in a high school in Ontario and your age is between 14 to 22.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision about participation in this research.

## **2. Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFE and their teachers in ELD classrooms, and the ways in which ELD teachers enact supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive teaching to create learning opportunities for their students.

## **3. Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in an interview and you will be asked questions about your education and experiences in the ELD classroom. The interview will take up to an hour and will be conducted at a time and a place that are convenient for you in the community. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. If you do not agree to be audio-recorded in the interview, you are going to be asked to respond to the interview questions in writing in the form of an open survey. Further, copies or photographs of learning materials, document artifacts and teachers' and students' work will be collected at the time of the interview and may be used in the dissemination of the research. Data from document artifacts and students' and teachers' work will help understand the classroom practices and experiences of study participants in the ELD Classroom. You can choose to participate in any combination or none of the study activities.

Also, I will conduct peer checking this means that participants' non-identifiable information such as interview data may be shared with colleagues/supervisors. Peer checking adds validity and accuracy to the researcher's interpretations. I will share with you my interpretations so you can check the accuracy of my description and interpretation, also at that time you can contribute your own interpretations, ideas, comments, or reflections.

## **4. Potential Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

## **5. Potential Benefits**

The possible benefits are that during and/or after the interview you may reflect on your education experiences and pathways in Canada.

## **6. Voluntary Participation**

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed please let the researcher know.

### **7. Confidentiality**

All efforts will be made to keep your identity and all data confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. You will be given a pseudonym and a study number to ensure anonymity; all consent forms, audiotape records, and interview notes will be filed and kept in a locked safe throughout this study. All files will be collected, coded, analysed and kept on a private computer protected by a password for a minimum of 7 years. You will be granted a unique study number. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept in a secure place separate from your study file. All electronic study records and identifiable information will be encrypted and password protected. You may be directly quoted in the dissemination of the study. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. Participants will be invited to contact the researchers via email for a copy of the results if they are interested. The research report is going to be made available to the participants who contact the researchers.

Data will be destroyed confidentially seven years after publishing the study results. While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law we have a duty to report. Data that identify you (i.e., field notes, audio recordings) may be inspected by a regulatory agency and/or the University of Western Ontario. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

### **8. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

### **9. Rights of Participants**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time and data will be discarded from the study should you wish to decline. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on you. We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form.

### **10. Contacts for Further Information**

If you have questions about this research study please contact Dr. Immaculate Namukasa at [REDACTED] Dr. Mi Song Kim at [REDACTED]





Consent Form

Project Title:

Exploring Experiences of Syrian refugee Students and Their Teachers in ELD Classrooms

Document Title:

Consent Letter – Student

Principal Investigator:

Immaculate Namukasa, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.



Additional Research Staff:

Mi Song Kim, PhD, Faculty of Education, Western University.



Hiba Barek, PhD student, Faculty of Education, Western University.



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

CONTACT FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Please check the appropriate box below and initial:

\_\_\_ I agree to be contacted for future research studies

\_\_\_ I do NOT agree to be contacted for future research studies

**I want to participate in this study**

consent to:

YES  NO

Check YES or NO for all the items that apply

Interview

YES  NO

Audio-recording

YES  NO

The use of my personal unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

YES  NO

- Providing copies of classroom work and artifacts YES  NO
- Photocopies of my work YES  NO
- The use of photos of my work in the dissemination of this research YES  NO
- Accessing an online site for member checking activities YES  NO
- Providing my email address to access an online site for member checking activities  
YES  NO

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

_____	_____	_____
Print Name of Person	Signature	<i>Date (DD-MMM- YYYY)</i>
Obtaining Consent		

_____	_____	_____
Print Name of Participant	Signature	<i>Date (DD-MMM- YYYY)</i>

\_\_\_\_\_

Age of the Participant

## Appendix H – Teachers Interview Protocol

Pseudonym	Study ID	Interview #
Date	Time	

### Introduction and Setting the stage

- I. Introduce myself
- II. Thank the interviewee and reassure him/her of confidentiality

*I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. Before we begin, I would like to reassure you that the information collected in this interview will be confidential. Directly identifiable information (names, email address, Skype ID, and years of teaching) will not be collected on this document. You will be given a pseudonym/ ID number to ensure anonymity. Your name and ID will not be included in this document, they will be saved separately and encrypted. The tapes and the transcripts will be filed and kept in a locked safe. Coded data will be filed on a private computer protected by a password. All electronic study records and identifiable information will be encrypted. Information from this interview will be available only to me, and to my academic advisers at the University of Western Ontario.*

*Excerpts of this interview might be included in the final research report and might be discussed with my advisers at the University of Western Ontario. However, under no circumstances will your name, location, school site, or other identifying characteristics be mentioned in the final report. Please be aware that there are no right or wrong answers. Your participation is voluntary, you can withdraw at any time, and data will be discarded should you wish to withdraw from the study.*

- III. Remind the interviewee of the purpose of the study:

To understand the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFE and their teachers in the ELD classroom

To understand how teachers integrate supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive teaching practices for Syrian refugee SIFE throughout the ELD curriculum

To understand how the classroom reflects broader societal structures



IV. Ask if the interviewee has questions

*Do you have any questions before we start the interview?*

*Is it all right to begin the interview now and turn on the recorder?*

V. Test audio recording

**Interview questions**

**Demographic/background information**

1. Can you tell me about your teaching education/expertise and experiences (e.g., degrees, PD, courses)?
2. Share with me your history and cultural background that are related to teaching refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE).
3. If you do not mind share with me your educational, cultural and personal background that may have or have not prepared you to teach refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE).
  - a. Probe, if needed: What courses, workshops, readings, seminars etc. in your teaching program have helped and prepared you to teach refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)?

**Experiences:**

4. Tell me about what you have come to learn about Syrian refugee SIFE?
  - a. How do you learn about your students' experiences, languages, and cultures?
  - b. What are you learning from your interaction with Syrian refugee SIFE, what is memorable?
  - c. What are the strengths of Syrian refugee students with limited or interrupted formal education?
  - d. What are their weaknesses?

**Support:**

5. What kind of support do you and your Syrian SIFE receive?
  - a. From the school administration and personnel?
  - b. From parents?
  - c. From community?
  - d. From other?

**Challenges:**

6. Can you describe for me a typical day at the ELD classroom?
  - a. Tell me about a challenging time when teaching Syrian SIFE

- b. Tell me about a rewarding moment when teaching Syrian SIFE
- c. How do you respond to challenges when teaching Syrian SIFE?

**Classroom practices:**

- 7. How do you incorporate classroom practices that are tailored to these students?
  - a. Which terms have you heard used when referring to ways of teaching or pedagogy specific to the cultures, languages, religion ethnicities and interruptions of refugee students?
  - b. Would you say that care is one of the specific classroom practices that is key for these students?
    - i. If yes, how do you show your students that you care (or other pedagogy) for them? Can you give an example?
      - From your experience, how do you think caring (or other pedagogy) affects your students learning? well-being? Can you give an example?
      - Describe the resources and constraints to caring teaching?
  - c. If no, what else do you say is one of the specific classroom practices that is key for these students?
  - d. How do you define your primary role in teaching Syrian SIFE?

**Curricula, pedagogy, and resources:**

- 8. What curricula, pedagogy, or resources do you use or follow?
  - a. Which of these curricular reflect your students' culture, language, religion and/or ethnicity, and interruptions?
  - b. Which terms have you heard used when referring to curricula or content specific to the cultures, languages, religion ethnicities and interruptions of students' formal education?
  - c. Have you heard about culturally responsive teaching?

If yes, what does it mean to you?

If no, this is what it means and perhaps you refer to it differently.

- a. How do you, if applicable, enact cultural responsiveness (or, other similar curricular) in ELD classroom?
- b. Walk me through a culturally responsive or inclusive lesson that you designed
- c. What challenges and successes you have personally encountered in designing a culturally responsive, supportive or inclusive classroom practice?
- d. In what ways do you think culturally responsive classroom practices affect your students learning? well-being?

- e. Describe the resources and constraints to caring, culturally responsive, or supportive and inclusive teaching and curricula?
9. If any, how does your experience teaching Syrian refugee SIFE affect you as a person and an educator?
  10. Is there any thing you would like to see put in place to support the learning of Syrian refugee SIFE?
  11. Would you like to add anything?

## Appendix I – Students Interview Protocol

Pseudonym	Study ID	Interview #
Date	Time	

1. Introduce myself
2. Thank the interviewee and reassure him/her

*I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. Before we begin, I would like to reassure you that the information collected in this interview will be confidential. Directly identifiable information will not be collected on this document. You will be given a pseudonym/ ID number to ensure anonymity. Your name and ID will not be included in this document, they will be saved separately and encrypted. The tapes and the transcripts will be filed and kept in a locked safe. Coded data will be filed on a private computer protected by a password. All electronic study records and identifiable information will be encrypted. Information from this interview will be available only to me and to my academic advisers at the University of Western Ontario.*

*Excerpts of this interview might be included in the final research report and might be discussed with my advisers at the University of Western Ontario. However, under no circumstances will your name, location, school site, or identifying characteristics be mentioned in the final report. Please be aware that there are no right or wrong answers. Your participation is voluntary, you can withdraw at any time, and data will be discarded from the study should you wish to decline.*

3. Remind the interviewee of the purpose of the study:
  - To understand the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their English Literacy Development (ELD) teachers in the classroom
  - To understand how teachers integrate supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive teaching practices for Syrian refugee SIFE throughout the ELD curriculum
  - To understand how the classroom reflects broader societal structures
4. Ask if the interviewee has questions

*Do you have any questions before we start the interview?*

*Is it all right to begin the interview now and turn on the recorder?*

5. *Test audio recording*

6. Interview questions:

Educational experiences in previous countries

1. Can you walk me through your education experiences in your country? Share with me some specific examples.

Educational experiences in Canada

2. Can you walk me through your typical class, week or day in Canada? Share with me some specific examples.

- a. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the really like, 4 somewhat like, 3 neither like or dislike, 2 do not like, and 1 strongly dislike, tell me which number best ranks how you like to go to school? Why is that?
- b. What are most of your friends' backgrounds?
- c. How satisfied are you with what you are achieving in school?
- d. What classes do you like the most? Why?
- e. What courses/subjects are you doing well in? why?
- f. What courses/subjects you are not doing quite well in? why?
- g. What is your strategy to deal with difficult subjects?
- h. Can you tell me about pleasant experiences you had at school in Canada?
- i. Tell me about an unpleasant experience you encountered at school in Canada.
- j. What do you think would help you to achieve better at school?

Educational Aspirations

3. What are your future education plans?

- a. what are you planning to do to achieve your educational goals?

Experiences in ELD classrooms

4. How can you describe your typical lesson or day in the ELD classroom?

- a. Tell me about a memorable moment (pleasant or unpleasant?) in the ELD classroom?
- b. Tell me about other moment you would like to share about in the ELD classroom?

Relation between ELD classroom experiences and other experiences, background and family life

5. Tell me about the ways in which your experiences in school relate to (or do not relate to) you own experiences, background and family life
- a. In what ways do the subjects you are studying and the school activities reflect some traits of your culture/language/religion/identity?
  - b. In what ways do you feel that the subjects and the school activities relate to your prior experiences and background?
  - c. How do the classroom or school environments reflect some traits of your culture/language/religion/identity?

Tailored pedagogies, classroom practices, and curricular

6. In what ways do you think your teachers give you some special or different treatment (such as relating their practices to your background) because you are ELD students?
- a. For instance, do you see that they show care for, say, your language/religion/identity needs and interests? Give me an example
  - b. Do you remember an occurrence when one of your teacher showed special or different treatment for you? Can you tell me more about that?
  - c. In what ways do they relate what they teach to your situation as an ELD student originally from a different culture and language, and possibly family background and religion than other students.
  - d. Do you like it or not, when the teachers give you some special or different treatment (such as relating their practices to your background) because you are ELD student? Give me an example
7. Is there any thing you would like to see put in place to make your learning more meaningful (i.e., more interesting, more relevant, or more successful) for you at school?
8. Would you like to add anything to what we have talked about today? Or do you have any questions or comments for me?

## Appendix J – Informal Discussion Guide – Stakeholders

Pseudonym	Study #	Discussion #
Date	Time	

### Introduction and Setting the stage

- I. Introduce myself
- II. Thank the interviewee and reassure him/her of confidentiality

*I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. Before we begin, I would like to reassure you that the information collected in this interview will be confidential. Directly identifiable information (names, email address, telephone number, Skype ID, and years of teaching) will not be collected on this document. You will be given a pseudonym/ ID number to ensure anonymity. Your name and ID will not be included in this document, they will be saved separately and encrypted. The tapes and the transcripts will be filed and kept in a locked safe. Coded data will be filed on a private computer protected by a password. All electronic study records and identifiable information will be encrypted. Information from this interview will be available only to me, and to my academic advisers at the University of Western Ontario. Excerpts of this interview might be included in the final research report and might be discussed with my advisers at the University of Western Ontario. However, under no circumstances will your name, location, school site, or other identifying characteristics mentioned in the final report. Please be aware that there are no right or wrong answers. Your participation is voluntary, you can withdraw at any time, and data will be discarded from the study should you wish to withdraw from the study.*

- III. Remind the interviewee of the purpose of the study:
  - To understand the nature of the experiences of Syrian refugee SIFE and their ELD teachers in the classroom
  - To understand how teachers integrate supportive pedagogies such as caring and culturally responsive teaching practices for Syrian refugee SIFE throughout the ELD curriculum
  - To understand how the classroom reflects broader societal structures
- IV. Ask if the interviewee has questions
 

*Do you have any questions before we start the interview?*  
*Is it all right to begin the interview now and turn on the recorder?*
- V. Test audio recording

**Interview questions**

1. What are your roles and responsibilities at school? what is your role in working with Syrian refugee students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)?
2. What do you know about Syrian refugee SIFE in this school? what are the sources of your information about those students?
3. If any, what can you tell me about some of the challenges Syrian refugee SIFE's face? Are these challenges cultural, linguistics, emotional, socio-economic? Kindly describe some of these challenges?
4. How do you respond to Syrian refugee SIFE's challenges and needs?
5. What can you tell about those students' strengths?
6. How are you supporting those students socially, academically and emotionally? Describe.
7. What are the resources available for you to support Syrian refugee SIFE?
8. What are some of the challenges ELD teachers face when teaching Syrian refugee SIFE and that you are aware of?
9. If you are aware of successful strategies/pedagogies that advanced Syrian refugee SIFE's academic achievement and integration to school community, can you kindly try to describe those strategies/pedagogies for me?
10. What do you know about Syrian refugee SIFE who have graduated from high school? Do the school personnel follow up with them or inquire about their postsecondary academic achievement?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add?