The Lie We Tell: Educational Barriers of Refugee Students in Canada

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Degree of Master of Education in the Faculty of Arts and Science

TRENT UNIVERSITY

Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

Master of Education MEd Graduate Program

January 2025

Abstract

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This study examines the lived experiences of refugee students in the Canadian education system and how the barriers they face have influenced their learning and identity. This qualitative study employs critical discourse analysis to bring visibility to the educational experiences of five participants who completed high school in Canada and explores their experiences with resettlement and what would have made their lives better at that time. DisAbility Critical Race Theory informs the researcher on deconstructing and dismantling the deeply entrenched discourses in Canadian schools; to make the implied relationships between language, Western norms, power, whiteness, and race clear. This study is motivated by the researcher's own identity as a newcomer with challenges navigating the Canadian education system, positionalities that have led to the question: Are refugees truly welcome here? Information gathered from this study can support Canadian schools to create just, critically informed, and supportive educational environments for refugee students.

Keywords: refugees, discourses, whiteness, power, race, resettlement, educational experiences, neoliberalism, identity, other, preparedness

Acknowledgements

At the time of starting this thesis, the global refugee crisis was already heartbreaking. Yet, I did not expect a genocide during the time I would be completing my research. To remain true to myself, I must first dedicate this research to every global citizen whom we have lost in Palestine and every child who was stripped of the chance of an education. To every human-- mother, father, brother, and sister, refugee, or immigrant--whose lives have been uprooted due to any global conflict, or for simply trying to find a better life, my soul feels for you and every sacrifice you have had to make. To every person calling for peace, I want to thank you.

I must first thank my original supervisor, Lu (Dr. Luigi Iannacci), who is not only my friend but also my mentor. When I met Lu, I immediately knew he had to supervise my research. His deep knowledge in the field of disAbility and newcomer research immediately indicated I found someone who was as passionate about supporting immigrants and minorities as much as I was. Never once did he waver in his support of me. He has always treated me as his equal, and has believed in my dreams from the beginning, making it one of the hardest moments for me when he had to take some time away. I am eternally thankful for our friendship, his humour, and ongoing support.

I knew Dr. Denise Handlarski had to be part of my research committee the day I met her. Stepping into the Med program from an entirely different degree, I was shaking the first day I arrived for my very first class in the program, and it was with her. She may not remember, but her words of encouragement and support the moment I shared my fears changed my trajectory for this program. Thank you for stepping in as my supervisor, for helping me cross the finish line, for always challenging my thinking, and your insightful critiques. I am not sure how many

students can go to their supervisor during devastating world events, but I have always been able to find solace in Denise.

Thank you to Karleen Pendleton- Jiménez for being part of my thesis committee and your insightful comments regarding my research and participants. Another huge thank you to Deborah for being a friend, mentor, and now on my thesis committee. Deb has coached me in various ways, and always treats me as her equal, and her accomplishments stretch as far as her caring heart. Thank you for your caring critiques and suggestions towards my research. A massive thank you to Lisa Ditschun for her amazing skills to support me in finishing this paper.

Thank you to my parents Iftikhar and Iqra for dreaming a dream of education for me. For immigrating from another country for the purpose of supporting this exact work, although they had no idea where I would end up. For letting go of your dreams, as so many newcomers do, for your children. I hope to make you proud every step of the way and give back for what you have provided.

To Tash Chase, my unforgettable support system. For listening to every problem, dream, and for believing in me more than I ever could. To my partner Patrick Ralph for his unwavering support of my dreams and education. To friends Scottie Curran, Janice Maloney, Linnea Veloce, Jocelyn Enright, and all others who have provided various supports during the past 5 years of this journey. Thank you to all the people I met in my classes and for those who became my friends.

I want to thank my participants for trusting me with their confidential stories full of strength, hopes, and trauma. Their strength and assets are as great as their dreams and aspirations--both everlasting. Their intelligence, humour, critical lens, and voices will forever stay with me. I must end with thanking them for their bravery.

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Chapter 1: Introduction - The Great Canadian Lie: My Story

I would question why I'm here. Why did I come here? I would like, why

do I have to deal with these people? Why do I have to deal with all of

this? It just brings back a whole different story when you hear those from

teachers and students (Shafia, study participant, 2022).

This is the experience of one of my participants in this study, Shafia, who questioned why she resettled in Canada after recounting experiences of racism from her schoolteachers. Can you envision having been resettled country to country for your safety, only to find yourself in a country that prides itself on acceptance, but where you still encounter horrific stereotypes of refugees and people of colour?

As an immigrant and newcomer to Canada, I found myself deeply relating to the latter part of this question when hearing Shafia's story. Although there is the pain of war and trauma I will never understand, our stories parallel in many ways, each echoing the struggles of being newcomers in a new country. Together, they highlight the complexities and challenges within the promise of refuge and acceptance.

The First Lie

In early 2000, I immigrated to Canada with my family. I was four years old and had no understanding of where I was going or why. I have no recollection of that day. I even have a hard time asking my family for the exact day we landed in this country for the purposes of this thesis. One thing I do remember is that I will never forget the way we were treated and the experiences that followed.

Figure 1

Welcome Sign for our Refugee Family and Flags for All

Note. *Poster created by a sponsorship group for a Syrian family*. From Syrian Refugees to Canada – Celebrating One Year Later by S. *Slaght, n.d.*, Travel Tales of Life (https://traveltalesoflife.com/Syrian-refugees-to-canada-one-year-later). Reprinted with permission.

Posters like Figure 1 can usually be found in the airport pick up area when refugees and immigrants arrive in Canada. They tell the tale of a welcoming Canada. The country where the newcomer dream comes true. Where all the possibilities of education, money, and employment that you could never materialize back home happen. This is the first lie that is told.

The Great Trick

There are many rules and processes you must follow when you immigrate to another country. Canada requires immigrants between the ages of 18 and 54 to speak English or French.

Unfortunately, I did not speak a word of English and yet I was thrown into the Western school system to fail. It did not matter that I attended two schools, one for kindergarten, and the other to learn the English language. I was asked to take literacy tests that I would inevitably fail.

Regardless of success or failure based on English language tests, the Western culture found in Canada is not something you learn in school or overnight, but through interactions with people every day. Nothing prepares you for that in a night school.

To become a Canadian citizen, you must demonstrate what the Canadian government deems "adequate knowledge" of English or French by proving that your "speaking and listening skills are equivalent to level 4 of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) for English" (IRCCa, 2024, para 8-9). This is similar to what my parents would have read when applying for their citizenship and they would then have had to prove "adequate knowledge" of the English language. What I wish would follow this quote is a capitalized statement stating that passing the test would not prevent you from being ostracized once you were permitted to live in Canada.

Whether you speak English or not, nothing can prepare you for understanding Canadian English culture. You may pass the literacy tests, but this does not ensure you will understand how words are used to relate to another person, or the heaviness the words hold-words that signify pop culture trends in the Western world, or bring up "Canadian" childhood memories, and that these words may foster moments of "otherness". This "otherness" is particularly manifested for children like me who enter school without knowing the dominant language of instruction. I think of this as the great trick. You are somehow expected to know the English language without adequate supports, and therefore are set up to fail. This is the trick I fell for.

How Does This Relate to Refugees?

I endured what many refugee and immigrant students experience when they move to Canada. Since I was unable to speak English, I was placed in special education and encouraged to assimilate into another culture. I was told to attend night school to learn the language as quickly as possible. My teachers also requested that my parents refrain from speaking Urdu to

me and dressing me in our cultural clothes. As a child I thought these things were required of me but 20 years later I have come to realize the goal was to have me fit the "norm" of Western schools and culture, teaching compliance through a procedural display of Western culture. This establishes the foundations for imposter syndrome, where we doubt our own skills and successes, are unsure of our public or private self-identity, and where our public selves are heralded while our private cultural selves are seen as a deficit. In becoming familiar with a dis*Ability* and critical race theory (which will be explained in the next chapter) I have come to realize that these issues stem from deficit-oriented views shaped by discourses of whiteness.

Figure 2

We Welcome Refugees With Open Arms

Note. The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) marks world refugee day in Canada and abroad by J. Biehn, 2017, June 19, PWRDF (https://pwrdf.org/pwrdf-marks-world-refugee-day-in-canada-and-abroad/). Image copyright 2015 Arindam Banerjee/Shutterstock 366262292.

The message to newcomers is that you will be welcomed into Canada, where diversity is celebrated and acceptance happens with open arms, as shown in Figure 2. As a child, I believed this grand narrative to be true. Today, it is clear to me that newcomers and refugees are asked to fit a certain mold and if they can't, they are labelled with deficits and disabilities. This is demonstrated by the fact that refugee and immigrant students continue to be overrepresented in special education compared to their white, English-speaking peers and are more likely to be identified as having learning disabilities (Connor et al., 2019). The overrepresentation is rooted in discourses of power, whiteness, and neoliberalism (Creagh, 2014; Connor et al., 2019). Minority students who do not fit the norm are therefore often othered and pathologized (i.e., labelled as abnormal or disabled) and these positionalities directly impact their identities and life course options (e.g., course placements or employment). As I continue further with my thesis, I will delve into what these norms are, how they serve discourses of whiteness, and how they create barriers for refugee students.

As an immigrant student, I recognize that I am more privileged than other newcomers, such as many refugees. Refugees resettle to countries like Canada and the United States to escape war, trauma, and to create better lives for themselves and their children (Devjee, 2008). They not only leave behind conflict but also their support systems, family, and friends. Refugees are left with the pressure to find new jobs, learn new languages and cultures, and develop new supports for themselves. Since 2015, Canada welcomed 44,620 refugees (IRCCb, 2024). As we will continue to see an increase in the arrival of refugees in Canada in the years ahead (e.g., the wars in Ukraine and Syria), it is vital to critically examine refugee students' experiences in the education system. My own experiences have led me to specifically focus this thesis on how professionally prepared teachers are to support refugee students, how whiteness is deeply rooted

in institutions, and the subsequent experiences refugee students have that lead to the barriers and challenges that these students face.

Research Questions

My research questions reflect my goal to understand the educational experiences of refugee students in the Canadian education system and provide a space where refugees have a voice and can narrate these experiences. Therefore, my primary research question is: what are the educational experiences of young refugee students in Canadians schools? Subsequent questions this study explores in relation to this main question are:

- o How do teachers shape the educational experiences of refugee students?
- o How professionally prepared are teachers to respond to refugee students, and how does this preparation contribute to or combat dominant discourses of whiteness?
- o How do discourses of whiteness impact the educational experiences of refugee students?
- o How do discourses of whiteness intersect with other discourses to shape the refugee experience?
- o How well supported are refugee students?
- o How can information gathered from this study inform the practices, pedagogies and polices in Canadian schools to create just critically informed, and supportive educational environments for refugee students?

In the next chapter, background information on important frameworks and problematic discourses that influence refugees' experiences in Canadian schools will be explored through a literature review. The main theoretical framework of this study, disAbility critical race theory,

will offer insight into the issues refugee students experience in schools and highlight their voices

and concerns.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Models/Paradigms

Research on refugee students intersects with literature about the overrepresentation of minorities in special education and critical disAbility studies, which focusses on ableist discourses (i.e., beliefs that able bodies are superior to those with disabilities) and how they impact thought, language and practice. Research in this area is informed by two main models or paradigms known as medical and critical social models of disability. These models are also known as the deficit-oriented model (dominant or traditional model of disability) and asset-oriented model (progressive/critical/social model of disability; Haegele & Hodge, 2016) respectively. Both models lead to different outcomes for students' learning, identities, positioning and placements in schools. These models will be further explained below.

Medical Deficit Model

The medical model of disability in education draws heavily on pathologizing processes (i.e., where students are categorized with disabilities, which leads to assumptions that there is something innately wrong with them) that focus on students' deficits. The medical model frames students with disabilities as 'problems', locating both the deficits and blame for these deficits within the individual student. This model assumes the students are defective and must be fixed, leading to wrongfully diagnosing learning disabilities and overrepresentation of minority students in special education (Connor et al., 2019; Lester & Anders, 2014). The medical model and deficit-oriented lens is problematically applied by examining students in relation to what they lack (e.g., English), instead of their skills, assets, interests, capabilities and first language proficiency. This results in a judgement being applied to refugee students and can affect their identities, learning and overall acculturation into the new school and culture.

One way in which refugee students have been pathologized by educators is when they are considered deficient for being English Language Learners (ELLs). Davila (2013) found that educators in a Western high school believed Vietnamese Central Highlander refugees were unintelligent and "intellectually deficient" because they could not speak English. However, Cummins (2015) has stated that a minimum of five to seven (or more) years is required for refugee and immigrant students to attain cognitive academic English language proficiency (CALP). Additionally, Cummins (2015) has demonstrated that bilingualism is an asset when learning academic language because students can code switch and make connections between their first language (L1) and English (L2). Yet monolingual educators in studies by Bal (2014) and Montero et al. (2012) drew links between English language proficiency and school knowledge, concluding that refugee ELL students had less knowledge than those who spoke fluent English. Educators in Bal's (2014) study also believed that ELL students should be in special education, and many referred these students for testing to determine whether they had learning disabilities. The results of Cummins (2015) contrasted with the Bal (2014) and Montero et al. (2012) studies demonstrates that these students are often wrongfully pathologized under a medical model and deficit lens that has remained predominant in schools.

The traditional deficit-oriented model/lens has also been used by educators to explain refugee students' gaps in formal education. Educators in a study by Cho et al. (2019) exhibited this when reasoning that refugee students lacked skills such as self-awareness and decision making because of a lack of previous formal education in their home countries. However, researchers have argued that these "education gaps" are often mischaracterized and are actually opportunity gaps because refugee students have not had the same opportunities in their country of origin that their peers have had in the country they immigrated to (Montero et al., 2012;

Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Additionally, many Western educators make these assumptions when refugee students have little or no exposure to print/and or alphabetic literacy. However, these students may have experience with other forms of literacy such as visual or oral literacies as well as a variety of non-alphabetic print, demonstrating that the traditional model of education privileges Western forms of education over others, leading to a deficit view of refugee students (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Although refugee students may have different prior schooling, they still have various abilities and skills that are often overlooked.

A deficit lens can also cause teachers to overlook students' "funds of knowledge" (Estaban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Estaban-Guitart and Moll (2014) discussed this term in the context of education, which is focused on the social and personal history of the individual. The social and personal phenomena is made up of the lived experiences and socio-cultural practices of students and their families. Funds of knowledge therefore are often made up of students' collection or accumulation of knowledge, abilities, and cultural practices. These also shift to accommodate the person's previous and present life and learning experiences. A fitting example of the consequences of overlooking a student's funds of knowledge and using a deficit lens can be seen in a study by Shapiro and MacDonald (2017). The researchers interviewed Najib, a Somali-Bantu refugee student, who shared that his teachers did not consider enrolling him in courses that would allow him to enter college. The researchers noted how deficit focussed discourses can be used as a way for schools to treat refugee students as being recipients of help rather than co-constructors and contributors to their own education and decision making. In this study, not only were Najib's assets and cultural knowledge and skills overlooked, but his teachers' deficit perspective effected his education and therefore life course options.

Finally, a deficit lens can impact student belonging and identity formation. Refugee students in a study by Cho et al. (2019) reported that due to monolingual practices in their school, their L1 was considered a deficit by educators. As they were not allowed to speak amongst each other in their first language, they reported feeling alienated and isolated from their English-speaking peers. Moreover, in a study by Borrero et al. (2012), a deficit discourse was perpetuated through harmful stereotypes of Native Hawaiian students. These students reported being seen as lazy, dumb, and uneducated, leading them to have a poor sense of self and belonging. Deficit discourses have also been internalized and influenced refugee students' identity and self-esteem. Davila's (2013) study, for example, demonstrated how the deficit culture maintained by teachers was internalized by refugee students as they also viewed themselves to be unintelligent and less smart than their English-speaking peers. Consequently, these students understood their deficits to be part of their identities as learners.

The Critical Social Model

An alternative to the dominant medical model that has more recently become present in society and research is the progressive, critical social model which is asset-oriented and focusses on students' skills and assets as opposed to their deficits. Under a critical/social lens, disability is understood as a social construct and students' social positioning and culture are considered and of concern in understanding their experiences (Dudley-Marling, 2004). Instead of framing students as the problem, educators look at changing students' environments that have been limiting and have limited their learning. For instance, teaching methodologies and assessment can be changed in ways that respond to students' assets and abilities (Connor et al., 2019). The mindset of a progressive lens can enable educators to create positive learning experiences for refugee students that fosters their agency, improves their interpersonal relationships, and creates

engaging learning opportunities (Cho et al., 2019; Montero et al., 2012; Shapiro & Macdonald, 2017).

A critical social model assesses refugee students' social background and context when they experience limitations in their learning as opposed to the medical model that leads to pathologizing students based on limited deficit-focused information about students. Lester and Anders (2014) highlighted this difference when examining discourses refugee students experienced in schools after resettling into Western communities. One of the refugee students in the study was not offered adequate resources to succeed in his school, was pathologized for what were deemed his deficits and placed in special education. In comparison Marguerite, the mother of a refugee student, advocated for her son's social environment and background to be considered as he was being assessed. This allowed him to acquire the professional support he needed to succeed. This study demonstrated the power a critical social model has on refugee students' learning and well-being in schools. A critical social model encourages communication between students and teachers and increases individual agency by allowing refugee students to have more control over their learning by including who they are in developing their learning plan.

Refugee students and their families are often understood and positioned as vulnerable and passive victims instead of active agents and learners (Shapiro & Macdonald, 2017). An asset-oriented view emphasizes that refugees demonstrate competence and agency. In a case study by Shapiro and MacDonald (2017), a refugee student highlighted the survival skills he and his family exhibited to escape Somalia. In contrast to a deficit lens where refugee students' skills are overlooked by educators and they are simply viewed as agentless victims, he not only positioned

himself as a survivor but also described himself as having personal agency by starting a business at a UN refugee camp.

An asset-oriented lens also assists refugee students in attaining academic language proficiency by viewing bilingualism as an asset. Under the deficit and medical lens, bilingualism is viewed as a deficit and hindrance to acquiring English language proficiency. However, educators who are informed by a critical social lens view refugee students' dominant languages as an advantage to learning English (Cummins, 2015; Montero et al., 2012). By allowing these students to use their first/dominant language, students can make connections between English and other languages and code switch in order to retrieve vocabulary or assert their identities (Iannacci, 2008). Additionally, this promotes collectivism and allows refugee students to form relationships amongst each other by speaking in their own language, which can also increase their sense of belonging in schools (Davila, 2013).

Pathologization

As previously mentioned, the medical model pathologizes students with disabilities which can lead to an internalized deficit-focussed lifelong identity. Pathologizing is embedded in the misuse of power. Specifically, medical and psychological discourses intersect with the misuse of power in schools when refugee students are pathologized as disabled due to their inability to understand new cultural cues and English (Lester & Anders, 2014). When these students are pathologized, there is an underlying assumption that there is something innately wrong with them resulting in students feeling unintelligent, dumb, and excluded (Bal, 2014).

Pathologizing intersects with deficit discourses as this process assumes students are lacking skills or abilities instead of assessing what assets they bring to the school (Lester & Anders, 2014). Lester and Anders (2014) urge special education educators to understand how a

disability diagnosis changes the entire path of a student's life course and their identity indefinitely becomes defined in ways that are disabling. These processes of pathologization are deeply connected to issues of power. For example, refugee students who are placed in special education tend to remain in it throughout their education and this can negatively impact how they see and define themselves, which can negatively impact their educational and economic futures (Bal, 2014; Lester & Anders, 2014). This is a profound issue as the pathologizing of refugee students has led to their overrepresentation in special education (Lester & Anders, 2014). These issues are evident in the literature and highlight the adverse effects of pathologizing discourses in schools.

Power

Teachers and educators hold a great deal of power within school spaces (Cummins, 2015). Educators have the power to uplift students, influence their identity formation, as well as their process of acculturation, and therefore whether individuals become part of a culture rather than assimilated into it (Cummins, 2015; Nwosu & Barnes, 2014). Cummins (2015) has stated that teachers have the power to impact the type of relationship they have with minority students as their assumptions and beliefs affect knowledge building in the classroom. Teachers can either demonstrate coercive or collaborative power relations with their students. Coercive power relations include a dominant group (i.e., educators) and a subordinate group (i.e., students). In classrooms that uphold coercive power relations, teachers may exclude minority students from engaging with the rest of the students and "other" them or attempt to assimilate them into the Western culture, both linguistically and culturally. Additionally, teachers may use standardized testing to justify or diagnose disabilities within minority students, prohibit the use of minority students' dominant language and culture, and exclude their parents from their learning. In

comparison, collaborative power relations include the use of pedagogies that assist minority students in succeeding and incorporating minority students' beliefs, culture, language and values into the classroom and during lessons. As well, parents of minority students would be asked to collaborate with teachers to improve the child's learning.

While Cummins (2015) has highlighted the importance of fostering collaborative power relations in schools, the majority of the research explored throughout the literature review process demonstrated coercive power relations between refugee students and their teachers. For example, Borrero et al. (2012) reported that some educators at a high school separated many Native Hawaiian youth from the rest of their peers, which othered students who were already marginalized. Meanwhile, Due and Riggs (2009) reported that educators in an Australian school did not make any attempts to increase interactions between refugee students and their peers. These educators also separated refugee students who were siblings and limited their interactions although they required each other for emotional support. Moreover, coercive power relations were evidenced in L1 language restriction and rewarding cultural assimilation into the Western cultural norm (Bal, 2014; Cho et al., 2019; Davila, 2013; Due & Riggs, 2009).

Teachers also engaged in coercive power relations by unjustly labelling refugee students with disabilities through standardized testing and assessments problematically administered prior to them attaining cognitive academic English language proficiency (CALP). This form of power intersects with neoliberal discourses where standardized testing is used to inequitably distribute funds necessary for minority students and programs. Further explained by Creagh (2014), neoliberal discourses have shifted schools as educational institutions into capitalist systems, where standardized testing scores are problematically used to allocate funding for different programs like special education. Creagh (2014) noted that the scores of many families and

students that were proficient in English were combined with the scores of ELL students in Australia, leading to inaccurate interpretations of the amount of funding and resources ELL students required to succeed in schools. Additionally, researchers reported that through the use of standardized testing, refugee students were labelled as ELLs or as needing special education. However, many of the tests were unsuitable to do so. For example, Bal (2014) reported Ahiska refugee students were categorized as ELLs through spatial arrangement tests (i.e. testing spatial awareness) instead of ones assessing language proficiency. Moreover, researchers have concluded that standardized tests are inappropriate to administer for refugee students as they are unfamiliar with the academic language and cultural cues, leading to low and inaccurate scores (Abedi, 2006; Creagh, 2014). However, many educators continue to use their power in schools to ensure refugee students receive this form of testing thus demonstrating their bias and predetermined assumptions about refugee students' abilities and identities (Robison-Young & Sanatullova, 2016).

Throughout the literature review I conducted, it was evident that coercive power relations were not just evident between teachers and students. Imbalanced distributions of power were also demonstrated between refugee students and their white, English-speaking peers. One way imbalanced power distribution is shown is in the way spaces are used and occupied. Due and Riggs (2009) for example, observed the power students had over spaces in schools and found that spaces like playgrounds were used by dominant groups to exclude marginalized groups like refugees. Specifically, white, English-speaking students held power over central spaces in playgrounds, while refugee students played on the edge of the playgrounds. As the refugee students were not proficient in English, they were also unable to negotiate power over spaces, demonstrating that those who speak English hold significant power over others who do not.

Throughout the Due and Riggs (2009) study, it was clear that little interaction occurred between refugee students and English-speaking students. Further, the researchers observed that refugee students not only had no power to negotiate, in some cases they were not even aware of the power already held over spaces by their peers.

Coercive power relations between refugee students and their peers also occurs using stereotypes and racism. Montero et al. (2012) for example reported that refugee students were bullied by their English-speaking peers for the way they spoke (i.e., their accent) and dressed, which negatively impacted their self and sense of belonging. This directly placed English-speaking students in positions of power where they could create a negative school identity and climate for refugee students by endorsing anti-immigrant sentiments. Similarly, Native Hawaiian students in a study conducted by Borrero et al. (2012) reported that white, English-speaking students engaged in spreading racist stereotypes about refugee students' culture, leading them to feel othered and less than. These coercive dynamics demonstrate how power is distributed unequally between racialized learners and their white, English-speaking peers, leading to harmful environments for minority students that promote racist ideals.

Finally, imbalanced power relations were evident between teachers and parents of refugee students within literature reviewed for this study. Many refugee parents who were not fluent in English faced barriers in supporting their children at school. These barriers were created by educators who prioritized Western habits, customs, language, and communication tools (e.g., flyers or leaflets) that refugee parents had difficulty understanding or were not familiar with (Croce, 2018). Moreover, many teachers utilized their power as educators to judge refugee parents against Western norms. Cho et al. (2019) recounted teachers' assumptions of refugee parents, which were deficit oriented. Teachers in this study blamed parents for their lack of

understanding about Western culture and sought to teach the parents Western norms as opposed to seeking their advice and information about their children (Cho et al., 2019). Teachers maintained authoritative roles over refugee students' learning and preferred to didactically direct them instead of collaborating with them. This was also evident in a study by Lester and Anders (2014) where educators did not translate their statements for a pair of refugee parents until the researcher was present. Such discourses and practices of power suggest that many educators have created inequitable opportunities and challenging climates for refugee parents in schools, which hamper their ability to support their children's learning.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberal practices were apparent and consequential for refugee students in relevant literature that was reviewed throughout this study. Neoliberalism in education can be understood as the belief that institutions such as schools need to mirror and operate in ways that are aligned with markets and economies to produce better outcomes (Creagh, 2014). With a focus on capitalist, private, and hegemonic practices and policies, neoliberalism primarily benefits governments and institutions in power. These bodies control and alter the distribution of funding to schools and programs like special education, and pit schools against each other through the public release of standardized testing results (Creagh, 2014). Neoliberal discourses have had severe consequences for refugees as they have: affected the quality of their education and learning opportunities through denying the impact English language development has on performance on standardized tests, meant less funding for ESL (English as second language) courses, and replaced ESL courses with improper literacy interventions (Creagh, 2014).

Standardized testing and assessments are one-way governments and institutions in power have enabled neoliberal discourses to be forwarded in schools. Through the use of testing,

governments have engaged in the surveillance and control of students' performance by comparing their test scores and using them as ways to base funding arrangements for schools (Creagh, 2014). However, these test scores are poor indicators of student performance and the quality of schools. Creagh (2014) for example found that the eligibility criteria for the use of the NAPLAN test (a standardized assessment used in Australian schools) did not only include students not presently fluent in English, but instead included all students and families who had ever spoken a language other than English. Creagh (2014) argued that this created inaccurate representations of ELLs abilities as their test scores were aggregated with the scores of fluent English speakers. By combining the scores of fluent English speakers with ELL students' data, disproportionate results were reported and reduced government funding for ELL students was subsequently allocated.

Standardized testing also highlights opportunity gaps between ELLs and non-English-language learners. Standardized tests do not account for students' level of English language proficiency (Abedi, 2006). This can lead to ELL students attaining lower test scores due to the complex wording used in standardized tests (Abedi, 2006). This issue demonstrates greater opportunities for white, English-speaking students to succeed in testing over ELL and refugee students as they have had more exposure to the language. As noted earlier, this has subsequently led to refugee students being inappropriately placed and overrepresented in special education problematically pathologized and assimilated into the dominant language/culture.

Whiteness and Race

Throughout the literature, it was clear that there was little acknowledgement of how whiteness exists and operates within institutions (Connor et al., 2019). It is important to discuss

the impacts of whiteness on students of colour, such as refugees, and to understand the beliefs it upholds and how these beliefs have severe consequences for minority students.

Whiteness does not just refer to race but indicates norms, cultures, and practices that are implicit with, and reward, whiteness. It is part of a larger racial hierarchy that maintains the power and privilege handed to those that are white and rewards individuals who assimilate into whiteness by leaving behind their own culture (Malone, 2019). Roediger (1994), stated that *"Whiteness is not only false and oppressive, it is nothing but false and oppressive"* (p. 13). This assertion demonstrates how race is constructed socially to keep people of colour at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy while individuals considered white continue to benefit and profit from this hierarchy (Connor et al., 2019; May, 2010). This is shown through the relationship between capitalism and race, which sustains economic competition between workers and creates higher paying jobs for those who are white and low paying, temporary jobs for people of colour (May, 2010).

Whiteness in schools continues to oppress students of colour. In the United States, people of colour are more likely to attend poorly funded schools than white students (Darling-Hammond, 1998). White students are also able to navigate resources and grants more than students of colour, who may not be as proficient in English nor have the power to access the resources and grants (Reid & Knight, 2006).

Whiteness, as it is taken up in schools, has severe consequences for refugee students. As a result of not performing or conforming to whiteness/white standards, refugee students are more likely to be pathologized and labelled with disabilities in comparison to their white, English-speaking peers. This again is evident in the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. Researchers have again and again found that there are more minority students (e.g.,

students of colour, immigrants, and refugee students) in special education than there are white students (Bal, 2014; Connor et al., 2019; Linn & Hemmer, 2011). The main reason for this disproportionate representation is that minority students are compared to norms of whiteness (Connor et al., 2019). They are compared to the scores white students attain on tests, the language proficiency of white students, and the way white students speak and behave. Cho (2019) quoted a teacher in making this point explicit who stated that "they [refugee students] don't know what the expectations of our [white] culture are, so they need to be taught" (p. 55). The quote by Cho et al. (2019) demonstrates the way this teacher immediately associated a deficit view with her refugee students, how their culture was perceived as less than Western culture, and therefore in need of acquiring further demonstrating how whiteness has been privileged and equated with normalcy. This is of course problematic for refugee students who arrive with different cultures, lifestyles, and languages than those positioned as normal or desirable and therefore their success becomes contingent on assimilating into this privileged white culture.

 Connor et al. (2019) believe that whiteness is rooted in the intersectionality of ableist and racist discourses and suggest using a disAbility and critical race theory (DisCrit) framework to further understand the issue. As I am interested in how whiteness impacts refugee students in schools, this study draws on DisCrit theory in order to focus on the ways racism and ableism occur in implicit and explicit ways that sustain white norms in schools.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks, Methods, My Role, and Ethics

Theoretical Framework

There are many discourses that are present in the literature about refugee students in schools. To understand discourses of whiteness, ableism, pathologization, power-- and the intersections between them--DisAbility and Critical Race Theory framework (DisCrit) was used to examine experiences refugee students have in schools to highlight their voices and concerns. DisCrit can be broken down into its social and political analysis of ableism and racism.

DisCrit theory uses an intersectional approach to understand many of the deep-rooted issues in education and "theorizes about the ways in which race, racism, dis/ability and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education, which affect students of color with dis/abilities qualitatively differently than white students with dis/abilities" (Annama et al., 2012, p. 7). One of these issues for example is the overrepresentation of minority students, specifically those who are racialized, in special education. Connor et al. (2019) stated that one of the main issues in this area of study is that a small number of researchers deny the existence of racialized differences or colour evasion in special education (i.e., they believe minority students are not overrepresented compared to students identified as white). For example, Morgan et al. (2015) refused to acknowledge the adverse effects overrepresentation had on minority students and argued that students of colour were underrepresented in special education, which demonstrates how discourses of whiteness problematically impact this body of research. Articles like this do not impact white students but do harm minority students since these findings can have a direct impact on special education funding and therefore resources allocated to minority students. They drew on DisCrit framework in their study to critique overrepresentation and understand how it should be researched.

There are seven goals of DisCrit (Connor et al., 2019). These include focusing on how racism and ableism exist both implicitly and explicitly to maintain white norms, highlighting multidimensional identities, emphasizing race as a social construct and critically exploring the consequences of this construct. Additionally, DisCrit focuses on marginalized voices, assesses how dis*Ability* and race have been used to silence voices, interrogates how whiteness as a norm benefits white individuals, and offers a social justice/activist approach to issues that concern overrepresentation, identities, and intersectionality.

Throughout the literature review process, it became evident that one of the gaps in the related research is the lack of refugee voices represented within it. My hope therefore is to use DisCrit to emphasize refugee students' voices and stories in my research. Researchers in this field tend to focus on the views of teachers with respect to refugee students instead of allowing students to tell their stories through the inclusion of quotes from their interviews. Instead, studies tend to include paraphrased students' interview data. This is problematic as it demonstrates how refugees hold little power over their own stories and research that is supposed to be about them. Therefore, it is imperative that refugee students' stories and experiences are at the forefront of my research so that real change that is responsive to what these students are telling us can hopefully occur in schools. Since DisCrit centres marginalized voices, it allows me to understand why refugee voices are silenced, what and how discourses are operating in this silencing and how to highlight them in this research study. Additionally, DisCrit also critiques norms and whiteness, which enables me to make visible, understand, and critically assess the standards refugee students are compared to. A DisCrit lens forwards an understanding of how educators maintain norms and what pedagogies support or challenge refugee students' learning and identities.

Disability and ableism are heavily intersected with race, which is why Critical Race Theory (CRT) is imbedded into DisCrit. CRT builds on movements of feminism and critical legal studies, which assesses issues of power and the construction of social roles leading to hierarchies and power dominance (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Presently, CRT is used to study the pivotal relationships between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Researchers specifically use CRT to understand and transform how these systems are perpetuated in institutions and social structures (Reed, Figueroa, & Carpenter, 2022).

There are five main tenets or principles of CRT. The first tenet states that racism in society is ordinary, that is it built into everyday experiences and ways of being, which demonstrates the significant normalization of racism in the West (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The causal nature of the statement is a way to express the shock that racism has become so ingrained and internalized in Western society by not only those who are holders of the sentiment but by those experiencing it. This is heavily reflected in the stories of the participants in this study, whose voices hold little shock or anger against these ingrained beliefs and actions. The second tenet is centred on the idea that racial equality is a way to enhance the power and interests of the dominant group, which historically have been white individuals. The third feature holds that race is not biological, but a category created by social, political, and legal structures to maintain power relations.

Delgado & Stefancic (2001) state race has nothing to do with intelligence, personality, or human behaviour. Relatedly, this study will show that concepts of race and whiteness are incredibly ingrained into the education systems of the Western schooling in various ways (i.e., IQ testing, language assessments, and disability identification). Moreover, this lens highlights the pattern of dominant groups weaponizing racism at different times, typically for their own

economic gain and to serve the interests of white individuals. Further, racialized identities are not monolithic. The voices of people of colour are therefore unique and hold different perspectives regarding the social and political impacts of racism.

The stories of people of colour provide a "counter story" to the typical one shared about them in dominant discourses and research. Including the voices and experiences of refugee students can highlight their agency and express their unique experiences with discrimination and racism to critically examine discourses and intersectionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Fernando & Rinaldi, 2017).

As these voices and perspectives are underrepresented, refugees' voices are at the centre of my study. Forwarding social justice, dominant discourses rooted in power, whiteness, and race must be critically examined. Discourses can be uncovered and destabilized by drawing on and including refugee students' unique perspectives of their experiences with discrimination and racism in the Canadian school system, thus allowing them to provide information that can shape how we respond to refugees' students within schools and thus seek to transform them.

Refugee students' voices and stories are a central focus of my study but are not relevant to just the theoretical frameworks I mentioned. They are also the core of my methods and methodologies. In the next chapter, I will explain how Critical Discourse Analysis was used to understand their stories and how my methods supported me to expose/critique the dominant discourses they experienced as barriers.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

Language is power. The way we communicate and interact exposes power relations and inequalities between groups in our society. These everyday interactions between groups control and are shaped by the political and social structures or discourses that influence ideologies, knowledge formation, and identities of citizens. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) deconstructs these social inequities and power relations to create social change and works to dismantle abuses of power between groups through a critical examination of discourses that are embedded in and reinforced by language, practice, pedagogy, power, and policy (Van Dijk, 2015). As my work is focused on breaking down these discourses where refugees are othered, experience power differences with peers and teachers and, as I am highlighting their agency, CDA was an appropriate fit for this study methodologically.

I believe there is a great deal to be learned from the stories of refugees. The perspectives shared in the literature and in my interviews point to abuses of power and problematic identity formation are a result of coercive power relations. These are central issues that CDA can help examine through the telling and critical examining of stories and experiences shared by refugee students, in order to understand and challenge the unequal power relations and discourses that exist in Western education, in an effort to make schools more equitable and social justice focussed.

CDA perceives discourses as ways we make meaning of social practices and how language is used to create and maintain social structures that impact knowledge, identities, and relationships (Mullet, 2018; Wodak, 2014). Mullet (2018) describes discourses as consisting of "talk, text, and media that express ways of knowing, experiencing, and valuing the world" (p.

119). Discourses both maintain and contribute to norms in society and occur at the micro, meso and macro level (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Since discourses are socially constructed and have consequences for different social groups, they open the gates to critically questioning and challenging social issues like those related to imbalanced power relationships. This can be seen in the Western education system, where it is evident that English is considered the superior language. To succeed in Canadian schools, students are expected to speak and read in English. Speaking English is then a precursor to academic achievement, creating an unfair disadvantage for refugee students, as evidenced through issues of testing (Creagh, 2014). CDA not only aims to analyse how these ideologies of power are exercised through language, but to critically explore these relations. Through both analysis and critique of language, discourses of power, and those who hold and benefit from it, can be exposed. Therefore, CDA can be used to assess how power imbalances are communicated and maintained between refugees, their teachers, and their peers.

CDA also draws on critical social theory. As so much of my work is positioned on CDA and dismantling power relations, it is vital to understand CDA's social theoretical background. For example, many CDA researchers draw on Gramsci's hegemonic theory since he argued "language is both an element in the exercise of power and a metaphor for how power operates" (Gramsci as cited in Donoghue, 2018, p.3). This theory argues that language is a metaphor for power since the use of language is embedded in a specific framework of rules and that our society is built upon controlling others through hegemony. Rules inherent in language use are also discussed by educator Lisa Delpit (1988), whose article on the "Silenced Dialogue" is one that rings so true to my own story as an immigrant student grasping to learn the language of power. Delpit explores how power works silently and is played out almost as an unfair game.

She states that the culture of power involves codes or linguistic expressions chosen by those who hold power (e.g., ways of speaking, dressing, and writing). Yet, those highly aware of the existence of the culture of power and its codes are typically individuals with the least amount of power and most aware of how it is explicitly and implicitly used. It is highly evident in my research that newcomers who do not speak English are then entering into this game. By not speaking English, they automatically do not hold power in relationships with peers and teachers and newcomers and are unable to change the "silent" ways power is displayed in schools. This desire to change the rules of power, how they are created, how they are used between individuals, and how they can be challenged by newcomers is one of the fundamental interests of CDA (Donoghue, 2018).

Additionally, Mullet (2018) describes power as being institutionalized and organized hierarchically. Abuse of power occurs when one group controls another by limiting their voices or freedom or when others' ideas are influenced (Mullet, 2018). Additionally, Mullet (2018) demonstrates that CDA specifically examines linguistic indicators of power, such as the tone people use when speaking or through controlling contexts (e.g., teachers control the context in their classrooms by choosing when and how students can speak). This is more than familiar to me. As an immigrant student I was told I could not speak my first language in the classroom, and this caused an automatic imbalance in the power dynamic between myself and the teachers who could choose how I spoke in their spaces.

Wodak (2014) defined the term "critical" as attempting to "make the implicit explicit" (p. 304). This refers to making the implied relationships between discourses and power clear. Wodak (2014) also added being self-critical and self-reflective to the definition of being critical. As a researcher, I am also entrenched in issues of power. Researchers have the power to silence

voices and impact the narratives of participants. An example of this is being reminded by my supervisor that it is not my role to give agency to participants or empower them but to highlight their stories and amplify their voices. Newcomers already have agency, but due to power relations between researchers and participates, this is not always the case in research studies. This demonstrates the importance of being self-critical and reflexive as a researcher when conducting CDA and to remember the focus of the research.

Although remaining critical throughout this study is vital, I am also reminded that a qualitative study like this is also shaped by the researcher's own insights, experiences, race, gender, and identities (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). My own experiences in the Canadian education system have driven my passion for wanting to create a difference for diverse learners. What I wish to do in this study is to understand how newcomer students experience the Western world of education and to dismantle dominant power structures, which is why I have chosen to use CDA.

Methods

To allow refugee students' voices to be at the forefront of this research, I chose to use qualitative interviewing. I was pushed to use quantitative methods in my research however I knew this methodologically would not work for this study. My Western education has historically pushed the narrative that qualitative research studies lacked validity and were riddled with bias. However, as Khan and MacEachen (2021, para. 1) argue, bias "contributes to the beauty and strength of qualitative inquiry because qualitative researchers analyze how people interpret their social world or reality, which is a meaning-making process," and as such subjective. Conducting interviews with my participants has shown me again that research is made up of a combination of participants' stories as well as the researcher's, who analyses the

meaning of their experiences and understandings of the social world (Khan and MacEachen, 2021).

I followed the steps of CDA to analyse interview data, but first I would like to break this term down. Data is such a scientific term, rooted in the medical model, which was mentioned earlier. I always have a difficult time mentioning research data as I have been working with lived experiences and human lives, not numbers. Brinkmann (2014) refers to the dilemma of data. He argues that we take the language of data too seriously, and it is something created out of experiences as opposed to something given to researchers. He concludes with the idea that data is "driven by astonishment, mystery, and breakdowns in one's understanding" (p. 1), which is a reminder of the interpretive nature of qualitative data and that the researcher is constantly trying to understand a non-linear phenomenon.

Taking this meaning of data into account, I used the steps of CDA analysis generally outlined by Mullet (2018). The first was selecting the discourse of interest. Since discourses of power and whiteness were large contributors to the barriers newcomer students experience, as outlined in the literature review, I was very interested in critically examining these discourses. Steps also included preparing data sources (e.g., interview transcripts) and examining the social and historical background of the text. Researchers then typically code and identify overarching themes and analyse both the social relationships that form the texts and how the texts form/impact social structures. Then, the language is examined to understand the social contexts. Finally, the meaning of the data and themes are interpreted and written up.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, I looked to outline participants' assets as opposed to deficits, a strategy used in many research studies detailing refugee students' experiences in school systems. Given this, I want to highlight that my own experiences as an

immigrant student and newcomer to Western education paved the way for me to do this research. In the past, I have thought of my history as a weakness, rendering me too biased to complete research on a topic I was so passionate about. However, completing this research with Professor Iannacci and reading work done by Cristall (2018) has reminded me that research is complex and made up of our own passions and lived experiences as researchers, which is an asset that should be critically examined and reflected on to be understood in the research. In better words, Diane Reay (1988) says "all research is in one way or another autobiographical or else the avoidance of autobiography" (p. 2).

Researcher's Role

My role as a researcher is to offer newcomers the opportunity to share their stories and lived experiences as refugees in the Canadian education system. We often hear from researchers or teachers on the newcomer experience, but I believe it is incredibly important to hear these stories from the people experiencing the transition themselves. I feel a sense of responsibility to create a nook in research for these stories and continue moving educational research in the direction of sharing refugees' strengths, barriers to education, and requests for change. I believe this is because of my own experience as an immigrant and the privilege my parents had to choose to move to a new country as opposed to being forced to flee due to unlivable conditions like war. These stories are important and need to be shared and be used in ways that transform educational policies in ways that create just and fair school environments for refugees.

Although my intent is to share the firsthand stories of refugees, it can be difficult to separate the researcher role from a caring listener. Mullet (2018) warns of the dangers of the researcher's own agenda and how this agenda can overshadow the voice of the research participants. I am aware of the potential to disempower participants due to a need for change that

can result in coercive relations of power embedded within micro interactions between researchers and participants as the research becomes agenda rather than student focussed. Methodologically, the work is informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (which will be described and conceptualized in chapters to come), and therefore I will be able to note my own intentions and personal perspectives while conducting the interviews and data analysis. Maintaining self-reflexivity and being critical of my role as a researcher and someone with power will hopefully allow me to be critically aware of my actions and ideologies as I engage with collected data.

I also recognize the power I will have in my role as a researcher. From the language used in this study to the way I ask and form questions, I acknowledge I have a great amount of power. For example, I use the term 'refugee' throughout this thesis as it the term my participants used to describe their identity, their journey to Canada, and/or the way they are seen. Yet, once they resettle in Canada, they are considered Permanent Residents if brought over by the Government-Assisted Refugee Program or the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (IRCCb, 2023). These terms carry great weight in regards to their identity and I do not use them lightly. It is with great intentionality that I use the term 'refugee' and wish to demonstrate the weight of the journey they experience from their displacement to resettlement.

It is quite easy to say that I aim to highlight refugee students' agency and power. However, all my actions have consequences. In the beginning stages of drafting this study, I looked to "empower" refugee students and increase their resiliency. However, I discovered that these dispositions were deeply problematic and were dominant narratives and language used within education. Although the concept of resiliency has become a worldwide phenomenon in research, this concept does not account for systemic issues of power or poverty and historical and social contexts pertaining to race (e.g., intergenerational trauma). Often, the hero narrative is

used in resiliency research, which showcases individuals who have *overcome* their struggles (Orsini, 2020). However, many refugees are met with challenges and barriers that are incredibly difficult to overcome, leading me to wonder if resiliency is truthfully an appropriate concept to understand or respond to adversity. As a researcher working with refugees, I will be critically examining this concept in my study as I acknowledge the hardships refugee students face and the systemic barriers that limit their ability to overcome adversity.

Looking to empower marginalized populations is also consequential. As Weidenstedt (2016) explains, the concept of empowerment leads individuals to believe that power can transferred and owned. This concept sustains the ideas that power must be earned or accumulated, leading to some individuals to having more power than others. Although my intent was to originally "empower" refugee students, my assumption suggested that refugees do not already hold power or agency and that I would be *providing* them with it. This is incredibly problematic and something that too many people working in education/educational research believe is the answer to supporting minority groups. As I move forward as a researcher, I will be careful to critically analyse the ways I use my power and the ways it is operating in my interactions with participants and my analysis.

My hope as a researcher, and as someone who was a newcomer to Canada, is to understand the challenges and barriers refugee students experience in schools, and to become familiar with and challenge the present context in ways that create more just and equitable learning environments.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, the experiences of refugee students in Canadian schools will be explored to understand what barriers and challenges they face in classrooms. By using critical discourse analysis (which will be described later), I hope to

highlight the dominant discourses that disadvantage these students, such as whiteness. Secondly, through my own experiences as a newcomer to Canadian education, I am aware of the power of the teacher's role in shaping minority students' identity, learning, and acculturation. I hope to assess how prepared teachers are to support refugee students and how they contribute to white dominant discourses in schools.

Participants

It was quite a difficult process to find participants. After receiving ethics approval, I began emailing newcomer agencies like the New Canadian Centre in Peterborough as well as organizations in the non-profit sector that worked with newcomers in other capacities (e.g., youth services). I had also posted ethics-approved social media posts, but this led to few contacts.

In the end, snowball sampling was the greatest contributor to finding participants for this study. For example, a peer who worked at a local college referred me to an individual and a co-worker was able to connect me with two individuals.

Figure 3

List of Participants Involved in my Thesis

Name (All names are under pseudonyms to keep the participants' identities anonymous)	Description
Ajaz	Offered to participate after a peer of mine who works at Fleming College connected us. He recently completed his degree at Fleming and had already begun his teaching placement in a local school. He arrived in Canada after living in the war in Syria with his entire family. What struck out to me about Ajaz was his gratefulness about being

	in Canada and his positive spin about his experiences.
Beth	Reached out to me after a co-worker of mine who volunteered with the New Canadian Centre (NCC) connected us. She will be attending Trent University this fall for a bachelor's in science and is very excited. Her home country is Eritrea, and she and her family sought refuge in a few different places, such as Ethiopia and now Canada. I noticed although she was a bit shy, she was incredibly well spoken and such a critical thinker. Her way of describing her experiences was so well put, which I was grateful for.
Fred	Reached out to me over social media after a common friend of ours reposted my poster on participant recruitment. He was finishing his degree in international relations at Fleming and hoped to work with the United Nations one day. He arrived in Canada with his entire family a few years ago from Central Africa. When describing negative experiences with peers, he used the term 'Africa' to demonstrate what they perceived his background to be. He was incredibly kind, and this extended to his complex experiences in school.
Golnaz	Connected with me thanks to a co-worker of mine who met her through volunteering at NCC. She arrived in Canada in 2016

	from Syria with her family, who she supports with language translation, and by completing other tasks many newcomer children often have to do for their parents. She was very shy and soft spoken, and kind.
Shafia	Was my first participant and connected with me through one of her previous teachers who my supervisor had reached out to for me. She was incredibly powerful in her storytelling. She is from Syria and was completing her degree at a college in Toronto and had published films and documentaries, demonstrating her passion for storytelling and meaning making through media. She was very kind, forthcoming about her experiences, and incredibly strong.

Participants were all recruited through snowball sampling (i.e., people I knew who were able to connect us). One participant was recruited through one of my peers in my research lab, one was from a mutual friend who shared my social media recruitment post, one was recruited through my supervisor's connection to a friend of his teaching in Peterborough, and the final two connected with me through a co-worker of mine who volunteered with them at NCC.

Each of these students held a unique and complex story. Each lived experience held so much depth that deserves to be unpacked further, and together offer important messages about where our education system stands in Canada. These stories will be further delved into throughout the rest of this study.

Procedure

Upon receiving ethics approval, I began sharing my approved participant recruitment poster. This poster was shared in the following ways. First, I emailed various newcomer resettlement agencies, such as the New Canadians Centre in Peterborough and various ones in Ottawa and Toronto. However, this did not lead to finding any participants. Various reasons can be attributed to this problem. During this time, newcomer resettlement agencies, as well as newcomers, were bouncing back from the pandemic leading to a lower response rate. Another reason perhaps relates to the nature of this study: those contacted didn't wish to highlight the "otherness" my study points to and were worried participating would do just that. Additionally, a study of this nature can cause traumatic memories of the refugee experience to resurface and declining to participate was a safety mechanism.

I then began sharing the recruitment poster on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I was able to find one person through posting on Facebook. I also used the snowball sampling method by sharing the participant recruitment information with individuals I knew personally, such as professors, friends working in non-profit agencies, and peers. This procedure was the most helpful and I was able to find all my other participants through word of mouth.

As a result of these methods of participant recruitment, I received emails of interest in participating by 10 individuals. I emailed each of them a consent letter and information letter detailing the study and what to expect. Out of the 10 participants who expressed interest in participating, three either dropped out or did not get back to me. One of these individuals expressed interest after their previous teacher (who I knew through my supervisor) shared the study information with them. However, after agreeing to participate, she dropped out when she

received the information and consent letter. I expected this to occur with some participants as the topic of interest can be very heavy for refugees with lived experience and expressed my gratitude to the individual for taking the time to reach out to me. The other two individuals were also given the study information through snowball sampling. They were male participants who were interested at first but did not respond to any follow up emails with the recruitment information and letters. All participants were 18 or over, either in high school or graduated from high school in Canada and were former refugees who found permanent residency in Canada.

Data

Once interested participants read through the information letter detailing the study components and signed the consent letter, we set up virtual interviews over WebEx. At the beginning of interviews, I described the study again, what kinds of questions I would ask, and if participants still wished to participate to ensure they understood the components of the study and if they had any questions. At the beginning, I would also re-establish the details of consent and reminded participants their identities would be kept confidential, and their names would be turned into pseudonyms. Each participant was also reminded that the data would be deleted once the study finished and that they could drop out at any time throughout the remainder of the study period.

After consent was re-stablished, I engaged in semi-structured qualitative interviews. Using the interview questions approved by the Trent University Ethics Committee, I began asking about participants' experiences in the Canadian education system, their relationships with peers and teachers, and the barriers and supports they had during their time in school. A few of the participants either engaged in silence or were confused by the wording of some of these questions. This is where I would use prompts, which was highly important to acquire details of

the complexities of their school experiences. I would also use prompts when I sensed confusion around about the wording of some of the questions and reworded a few to ensure the participants understood what was being asked. The semi-structured nature of these interviews meant that participants would describe their experiences at various times of the interview that would lead us to a natural digression to another question from the list I created. Using the semi-structured method enabled me to reveal a greater depth of understanding about their experiences.

Data Analysis

The interview data was analysed by reading the transcripts to code for prominent patterns in the text, identify reoccurring patterns, and then categorizing these patterns into broader and significant themes. Identifying themes was made easier as I had to report preliminary findings in advance for conferences where I presented the data I had at the time. This allowed me to review the text multiple times to constantly recategorize themes and find new patterns emerging.

As mentioned, after transcribing interviews, I analysed them for codes and reoccurring themes. To do this, I read and reviewed each transcription and notes from interview observations to identify codes that emerged through words, phrases, or patterns, or feelings of participants as expressed by them. After coding, I organized them into meaningful themes that revealed dominant discourses that I then interrogated critically in order to make explicit intersectionality and macro/micro relations (i.e., central CDA concerns).

Although I was searching for themes evident in pre-existing research and relating these to my research questions, I will also be reporting on other themes and questions that emerged throughout my analysis that are idiosyncratic to the educational experiences of the refugee students I interviewed.

Ethics

The ethics process began at the start of my proposal when I was asked to begin thinking of the ethical limitations of my research. One of the issues I became aware of was that although CDA is greatly focused on social change, it is also problem oriented. This problem-orientation allowed me to focus on social issues and take a social justice standpoint on the experiences of refugee students. I am aware of the potential to disempower participants due to a need for change that can result in coercive relations of power as the research becomes agenda rather than student focussed. Mullet (2018) warns of the dangers of the researcher's own agenda and how this agenda can overshadow the voice of the research participants.

Given the reflexivity of CDA, I was able to note my own intentions and personal perspectives while conducting the analysis. Maintaining self-reflexivity and being critical of my role as a researcher and someone in power allowed me to be critically aware of my actions and ideologies as I engaged with collected data.

I also recognize the power I have in my role as a researcher. From the language used in this study to the way I asked and formed questions, I acknowledge I had and do have a great amount of power. It is quite easy to say that I only aimed to highlight refugee students' agency and power. However, all my actions have consequences. My hope as a researcher and as someone who was a newcomer is to understand the challenges and barriers refugee students experience in schools and to understand and challenge the present context in ways that create more just and equitable learning environments.

In the next chapter, I am critical and self-aware in my limitations, but that does not mean I will objectively tell the stories of participants. The next chapter will offer the data from my

interviews with participants, with their stories regarding their challenges, dreams, and wishes around resettling into Canada and in the Canadian school system.

Chapter Four: Stories of Pain and Dreaming- Refugees' Experiences in Canadian Schools

> You know… just imagine. Close your eyes and you're going to
>
> somewhere you don't know where you're going. You don't know
>
> whose gonna be there, what's the people gonna look like, nice or no.
>
> All these thing[s], they come into your mind, and you don't know
>
> anything about that, so it was a big, big hard day… We was crying
>
> from all the roads and the airplane, 17 hours in the plane, so we was
>
> crying (Ajaz, study participant, 2022).

This is the experience of one of my participants in this study, Ajaz, who wept with his mother throughout their 17-hour journey to Canada picturing the unknown, full of fear. Imagine being resettled over and over, if you are lucky enough to be resettled, while fearing for your safety. This is what my participants, and many refugees, experience. To make matters worse, they often experience this alone.

Stories like this one by Ajaz are shared in this chapter and organized thematically in ways that identify and highlight similarities and sometimes contradictions. Major findings are organized as follows: identity vs. identities, discourses of gratefulness and racism, systems of whiteness, systems of support, participants' assets, mentorship, and what constitutes supportive educational environments. Although each of these central themes derived from data analysis are explored separately, all of them shed important light on the immediate challenges refugee students face and how these difficulties are shaped by problematic dominant discourses that continue to hamper schools' ability to be responsive to newcomers.

The opening quote by Ajaz sets the scene for this chapter, and for the stories and voices I will share. By exploring the stories of my participants, I hope to share critical insights into the

difficult transition refugees have into Canadian schools and the systemic barriers they experience. By critiquing challenges of resettling into schools, I hope to shed light on how their experiences of racism, isolation, and need for supports impact their views of themselves and their identity. It is no easy feat fleeing to another country for safety, one where the final destination of arrival is often not even known. This time of uncertainty, along with the struggles that come after this period of resettlement, are bound to have a strong influence on refugee students' understanding of who they are--both as the person they were and who they are becoming.

My participants shared various examples of the misinformed ideas teachers and peers had around the capabilities of marginalized students. What was important was their reactions to it. Discourses of gratefulness remained through the presence of racism, and tales of racism revealed systems of power and whiteness that seeped through educational structures. This chapter centres these students and their voices, assets, determination, and skills, while being immersed in a critique of the discourses that led them to struggle and held them back.

I write this chapter as the refugee crisis worsens all around the world--a world where the wars on Syria, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Ukraine continue to haunt innocent civilians. As a result of the wars, over 100 million people have become displaced throughout the world as of 2023 (UNHCR, 2023). Out of this record number, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 43.3 million are children under the age of 18. Still, UNHCR reported that only 463,500 refugees had been resettled into other countries. Given the amount of people who require safety and asylum, Canada will continue to have the largest influx of refugees in its history. In the 2024-2026 Canadian Immigration Plan, Canada committed to resettle a target of 76,115 refugees (IRCC, 2023). This means a significant number of vulnerable children and youth with particular support needs will soon be entering the education system—a

system in which we have seen repeatedly, significantly fail these individuals. Therefore, it is important to critically reflect on the Canadian education system and how to support refugees in schools. The stories that follow will bring insight into the discourses at play in the current system and the impact they have on refugee students' identities and experiences as learners.

Identity Vs. Identities: Does the Transition Process Ever End?

Ever since I first resettled into Canada at the age of four, I have grappled with my identity in the same way many of my participants did. Although diversity is said to be welcomed in Canadian schools, my personal experiences demonstrated the opposite. I struggled with thinking that I was too Pakistani to belong in school but not Pakistani enough at home. Questions surrounding if I was Canadian enough to fit in with my peers haunted me throughout elementary school, in Scarborough of all places, an area with one of the highest immigrant populations. I think, looking back, that this area should have had integrated multicultural pedagogy throughout curriculum within schools where students like me attended. Newcomers continue to grapple with this negotiating of identities and responsive curriculum, which was made clear throughout their interviews. Students in my study also spoke of feeling not good enough or Canadian enough and, as such, struggled with monolithic views of identity and viewed themselves through a deficit lens sustained by discourses and experiences that ensured this possibility.

In the interviews, participants touched on the early experiences of migration and resettlement into Canada and how difficult it was and continues to be. After resettling from Lebanon, Shafia, explained "it's a big transition, and I'm still in the process." Shafia arrived in Canada in 2019 after having been to four different schools in Syria and Lebanon. She detailed the difficulty of migration and having to resettle as hard "especially because [of] different countries and different people, it's always like different problems and different culture." Other

participants in my study also described having to alter their identity in order to belong in different cultures and amongst different people. For example, Golnaz resettled into Canada from Jordan in 2016 and was placed in grade eight after having completed grade three in Syria and expressed that "it's still hard for me, but the [teachers] try their best and I try my best just to do what I can do." When I asked what was still hard, she responded with "it's still hard because I don't know anything." What became clear to me from hearing how difficult the transition still is for Golnaz and Shafia, is that their identity as learners and people are very much affected by the transition into Canadian schools and life in ways that are deficit focused. I began to wonder if the transition would ever end and be less difficult for them and generated questions about what can be done to facilitate the transition period to address the challenges and the subsequent impact these challenges have on refugee students' identities.

Cultural identities and the Canadian identity are difficult to intertwine. This is because Canadians are divided on what it means to be Canadian. Although the word Canadian recognizes the place someone resides in, many newcomers like me have come to understand that, to some, being Canadian can refer to a lighter skin tone, a dominant language (English), and practices shared by the West. This ideology took countless years of struggle for me to uncover and overcome. My own interpretation of being Canadian is presently centred on inclusivity and belonging. However, this was not always clearly the case.

Beth, one of my participants, similarly shared "feeling out of place in the sense that … [she] didn't feel Canadian at all because there would be…a simple conversation and then kids would talk about a certain show that is a big part of their childhood and it's just core memory where [she] would not relate at all." Negotiating identities is especially difficult for Cultural and

Linguistically Diverse (CLD) learners who struggle in reconciling hybridity and are immersed in deficit discourses (Cummins, 1996).

Newcomers not only experience the pressures for caring for younger siblings throughout the resettlement process, but for their parents in novel ways as well. Beth explained this caregiver role reversal by sharing "I'm the oldest in the family, so I always have to be the one translating and stuff like that. So that was new. I've been dealing with government official papers or so, whatever it is." While working through identity navigation with her cultural and Canadian identity, she was also reconciling her identity related to her role as a caregiver. Beth reminded me of my own struggles with the burden of being the oldest daughter. While being the eldest sibling in Western relationships is still understood to have some caretaking responsibilities, the pressures that are associated with being the eldest sibling of a multicultural or newcomer family are heavy, as it still is for me in adulthood.

A deficit orientation in terms of identity was also made clear by Ajaz, who explained how he viewed being around other ESL learners as holding him back. "There was a bunch of a student, they speak in my language. But the first two or three months I was walking with them. I like talked to them in my own language and I saw that this is not helping me. So, when I meet a bunch of Canadian friends, they speak in the English. Even if I don't understand them, I just sit and listen to them." Ajaz had an incredibly difficult transition learning English as an ESL learner and couldn't reconcile that he could be around other non-English speakers also. He shared, "before I left [school], there is a lot of students coming from Syria and they speaking the all language. Even they spoke their language in the classroom. This is one of the negative things." It was clear hearing this that he did not see speaking another language as an asset. Instead, he

viewed his ESL identity and L1 (first language) as a deficit and wished to only be around English speakers in order to be successful and accepted.

Participants also spoke of identity navigation and reconciliation, where they began to realize they can coalesce multiple identities. For example, Beth "learned being Canadian does not have to look a certain way. The country is very diverse and is getting more diverse every day." She added that she is "just learning how to keep my cultural identity, but also so engaged and how the way of living here is. Learning how to balance…my cultural background and then also, like not feeling like I don't belong here." Beth was aware of the difficulty of negotiating her cultural and learner identities, while viewing her first language as an asset and maintaining critical awareness and agency as she navigated through reconciling these identities.

The struggle of competing identities was also clear when participant Fred recounted his decision to change his appearance. He at first believed he "was dressing smartly, especially with [his] African clothing style" but then felt like he was "someone else in school." When he wore clothing donated by the church, he shared "once you wear good, you feel also good wherever you are." Fred's experience hit close to home and had me thinking about my own experience and dressing in Western or "Canadian" clothing to ensure I was accepted in school. My experiences as an immigrant learner led me to originally think my dark skin and diverse clothing were not "Canadian enough". I particularly felt this way after a teacher told me to dress in "normal clothing" like the other students in my class.

This speaks to the culture of Western schools and what it means to take on a Canadian identity, which I will critically discuss in the chapter that follows. The next major theme the data revealed was of gratefulness/ungratefulness and racist discourses.

Discourses of Gratefulness and Racism:

Too Thankful to Appear Ungrateful

Discourses of gratefulness/ungratefulness and acceptance were made clear throughout the interviews. In moments when students were asked about difficult experiences, they were insistent that everything they encountered in Canada was positive despite detailed accounts of the racism and discrimination they faced in schools.

Ajaz consistently spoke of challenges and stress but didn't "see any negatives from teachers" and consistently thanked them. "I have to give something I take from them. I have to give something back I take." He spoke to the depth of his gratefulness and wanting to be accepted throughout this section of the interview.

Ajaz refused to fault his teachers for any negative experiences he encountered and instead viewed other ESL students who spoke their native language as "one of the negative things," which "is not the teachers fault." He insisted that "after all this support and after all this smile, you have to show them something" referring to his teachers and the need to give something in return.

Beth also spoke about feelings of ungratefulness, but in relation to a sense of belonging. She shared "I think it's normal to not feel a sense of belonging. I think that's what I was very honestly just ashamed of it and felt ungrateful because after all that my family had been through and then living here where it's definitely a lot better, whether it's economically or safety wise. You do feel ungrateful when you don't feel fully happy." These feelings of ungratefulness and shame were tied to the identity Canada had given her, that of the receiver of help. Beth clearly felt shameful at thoughts of ungratefulness, which challenged her sense of belonging and happiness.

Much like Ajaz, Fred also maintained an attitude of gratefulness when asked if other students were friendly. He responded with "not all. But some were friendly… They were just going, coming, finishing their classes, and then leaving. That's part of life. You can't be friends with all." When Fred stated this, I wondered what was so friendly about his peers walking away from him in each class when he so desperately needed friendship during his early years of resettlement? When I prompted him further, Fred said "everyone was doing their best." He shared "I just wanted [it] to be that way, but [that] felt like... That's, okay, Fred, as long as we are all in class and we do what we are here for, what's our best." Although Fred reassured himself by viewing the best in his classmates, it struck me how unwilling he was to voice that they had ignored him, especially as he detailed instances of discrimination by his classmates earlier in the interview. The persistent gratitude to *just be there* spoke volumes in terms of what expectations refugees are required to have about school spaces and how no one in power challenged conditions that led to those feelings and in ways supported refugee students' authentic sense of belonging and destabilized dominant discourses. Interestingly, Fred also shared that once his peers noticed his high grades, they began thinking of him as an equal. His experience demonstrated problematic discourses that I will speak to later as I discuss and analyze themes from data derived from interviews.

Discourses of Whiteness:

Deconstructing Hegemony: Racism, DisAbility, and the Deep Rootedness of Whiteness

Discourses of racism, DisAbility, and discrimination, both implicit and explicit, were persistent throughout the interviews. As the students recalled examples of interactions with their classmates and teachers, they expressed disbelief. Shafia for example recounted a teacher who assumed that she no knowledge of school practices of English. "I was so mad at her." She

shared, "she was at the guidance office. I was doing some paperwork or something, and then the bell rang. It was like we were on a break, and then the break ended, and we had to go to class. And then she looked at me and she said, 'You hear? This is a bell. When you hear it, you go to class', and I was there like for seven months you know." Shafia added that she was often positioned as deficient in interactions with teachers and "those are the expectations…were always if you do something in there, they are so surprised. How did you know that? How did you speak English?" Teachers tended to view Shafia through an oppressive lens: as less than the other students, and as though she could not have any knowledge of the school despite having been there for seven months.

Her worth and intelligence were also doubted by others: Shafia detailed that "the students…when they see me or they see the ESL people, they think that we are very, very different people… They're not educated about where we came from. I think even teachers sometimes but I'm speaking exactly about Peterborough." She shared that she was presently attending a college in a bigger city and "in Toronto, it's different because I'm in college in Toronto. So, like you know when you get people asking you questions like, oh, you have school in Syria? Or, you have this in Syria? No, we don't have it. We don't have anything. We just really live in the desert." She laughed at the ludicrousness of the stereotypes she mentioned. Beth echoed Shafia's thoughts around Peterborough being a more challenging place to live in when it comes to diversity and stated, "whenever I'm in Toronto, it's a different feeling than when I'm in Peterborough." A similar sentiment was shared by Dr. Sundareswaran, a doctor at the Peterborough Newcomer Health Clinic, and a first-generation Canadian whose parents came to Canada from Sri Lanka and settled in Toronto where she was raised. In her KawarthaNow interview, she shared that "we don't have the same resources for refugees in the concentration

you would have somewhere the size of Toronto" (Rellinger, 2023). These comments paint a picture of the difference in the levels of diversity and number of resources larger cities like Toronto offer newcomers compared to Peterborough.

The maintenance of racism and stereotypes the interview data shared in this section also demonstrated hierarchical power structures in schools. Not only did the English-speaking students engage in these relations of power, but Shafia detailed that teachers did too. By making uneducated remarks grounded in racism and discrimination, both teachers and students maintain power over marginalized refugee students. These sentiments are a reminder that white, English-speaking individuals are the knowledge holders, that everything "smart"' must be in the West, that power is held by those who speak and look a certain way. These power relations will be further analyzed in the discussion.

These relations of power mentioned by whiteness/constructions of intelligence were also evident in Fred's experiences. While discussing his classmates, Fred shared "some were biased. They were stereotypical. They were like, okay, Africa…I feel like there is a comparison sociologically, because they believe, like, I'm coming from Africa, and I've been here in Canada for a few months, so I haven't really understood how things work and how system[s] works. So, they felt like they're above me in some ways, but I feel like that shouldn't be that way."

Fred was no stranger to this discourse and felt that he "understood because [he had] taken some courses in sociology, and also social conflict and many other related things that [he] then ended up experiencing at school." Fred was clearly additionally burdened to understand the oppression he was experiencing and what was informing the forms of oppression he encountered.

Many of the participants I spoke to had critical questions about being in Canada. Shafia painfully thought, "why did I come here? I would like [to think], why do I have to deal with

the[se] people? Why do I have to deal with all of this? It just brings back a whole different story when you hear those from teachers and students."

Later experiences in schools were clearly informing these questions. Shafia shared, for example, that she preferred her ESL class to all other courses because in regular classes "it was so weird. Because no one [would] interact with me. For example, in the film class when I entered, it was like academic class, and they were talking about films, and I'm interested in films, and I love films. But when I went there, they were like... The students were talking and laughing, but I couldn't understand anything." Again, deficit perspectives were applied to Shafia by both the teachers and students, who assumed if she was not proficient in English, she should be isolated, ignored, or understood as incapable. When Shafia expressed "the teachers, I think they didn't know how to do that with someone who their English is so limited as well". This demonstrated that although Peterborough's refugee population has increased tremendously over the past few years, many educators are still unable to teach ESL learners, a problem with the dominance of whiteness in Peterborough schools and a lack of training and preparedness in relation to ESL students.

Systems of Whiteness:

Neoliberalism

Participants mentioned various problems they faced in schools. Although participants did not use the word neoliberalism to describe what they encountered in schools, they mentioned experiences that reflect neoliberal practices shaped by mentalities that view people as investments. Beth shared how she told herself she had to remain grateful and therefore productive despite the difficult transition of resettlement. As demonstrated throughout the previous theme of gratefulness, refugees are expected to remain grateful and contribute to society

to be accepted, which positions them as valuable if they are producers and consumers, which is reminiscent of the theme of viewing people through an economic lens that neoliberalism forwards (Creagh, 2014). Neoliberal practices are consequential for refugees, especially when their lives are viewed as an investment to the country they are immigrating to and the "price tag" their existence in the country comes with.

Neoliberal practices in schools such as standardized testing also further enabled power relations and economic positions (Creagh, 2014). This was evident when Shafia shared her experience with the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), a standardized test high school students in Ontario must pass to demonstrate they meet a minimum level of literacy proficiency. Although she did not speak fluent English at the time, her teacher told her "I don't know if you're going to pass or not, but you have to do it." Shafia highlighted her feelings of hopelessness and shared, "I think they know that I'm going to fail but I'm just being nice to find a way why did they do that." Shafia's experience demonstrated how neoliberal practices of standardized testing set newcomer students up for failure, while they are left confused as to the reason why they are being forced to take these tests despite their burgeoning English language skills.

The global shift towards standardized testing highlights power imbalances between students by categorizing some as "normal" while others are seen as "abnormal" due to test results (Creagh, 2014). Implications of these neoliberal practices and power relations will be discussed further in the following chapter.

The harm inflicted on refugee students due to the failure they encounter in schools as a result of having to take standardized tests was abundantly clear when Ajaz shared he

"told [his] parents I'm gonna take off because I'm not understand[ing] anything." The mental harm and pressure that comes with comparisons to white English-speaking students can lead to refugee students to being "pushed out" (rather than dropping out) of schools.

Surviving Resettlement: The Power of Support Systems

Surviving the resettlement experience is not easy. Many of my participants mentioned various supports and relationships that carried them through that incredibly difficult time. They shared stories about wanting to give up but found motivation and a sense of community along the way. One relationship that supported many participants was with the ESL teacher at the high school they attended. Shafia shared that there were many "dark times" during high school, such as the OSSLT that she did not pass, leading her to have to take a summer course to make up for it. However, the ESL teacher supported her at every step. Shafia explained that "she was the one who was following with me. If I missed a day, she would call and then [ask] like, where are you? And she was even a very big supporter to my projects and my films." Ajaz also shared his experiences with the ESL teacher and how she made him feel welcome. "She [would] do a potluck... Everyone will bring food from different countries, and like we share all this, and we talk about this so sometimes even you bring something you like, and you talk about from back home." When talking about his ESL teachers, Ajaz also mentioned "they do a lot for the newcomers as well. Like they let you watch a movie and yeah, they told you, what do you understand? They just took the idea to let you learn English to understand even the accent." These recollections demonstrate the importance of culturally responsive pedagogies in schools. It was interesting that both Ajaz and Shafia could only recall one teacher who really supported them, in a school of many.

Beth also shared a strategy her teachers used to support her through her shyness and learning English. She said, "sometimes I would find it difficult to give presentations in front of the whole class, especially with my broken-up English and so they would let me do presentations whenever I had felt more comfortable, whether it was at the end of the class or at the beginning just to get it over with." Beth also felt she was provided with support by these teachers as they were "empathetic and letting me, like, whether it's writing it out or helping me out with school did ease the stress. That was very helpful."

Many of my participants recounted how potlucks allowed them to represent their culture and experience those of other students as well. Beth recalled her ESL teacher "used to have these potlucks every month, and so everyone would bring food from their culture, and then you just realize, oh, we do this in our culture too."

I asked participants how supportive their classmates were. When I asked Shafia if her peers ever supported her, she stated "in the whole year, I had one helpful classmate, and that's it." Shafia also shared how isolated some classes left her feeling and made a comparison to her identity that caused me to remember what she had previously shared about the one friend who came looking for her in the ESL class. Shafia said, "she approached me very nicely and she was like, so nice and she didn't deal with me if I'm an alien, as the other Jew, but just like that." Shafia's reflection on being seen as "the other Jew" by her peers underscores the challenges faced by refugee students during resettlement and how intimidating it can be as an ESL learner to navigate Canadian schools.

When asked about her classmates, Beth fondly shared she was able to become very good friends with the other international students in her ESL class, who reminded her of herself and had also just arrived in Canada. She shared that "there was a whole community of my school of

international students and students who are like me who had just moved to Canada" and that "we all had that common thing of we didn't have most efficient English and so that was great because we also all had something different about our cultures. But also, I found a lot of similarities and so that was great." These positive relationships provided her with a sense of belonging and in her own words, "you could see it's not just you and that feels like that finds so hard to get used to a new place."

Another consistent support participants mentioned throughout was the New Canadians Centre (NCC) in Peterborough. Fred recounted his experience of panicking about how he would make it in school, he shared he "met NCC staff, who also encouraged me in order to fulfill my dream" of doing a bachelor's degree in International Relations and supported him in "upgrading schools."

Golnaz also mentioned various services the NCC offered, such as translating for her mother who could not speak English and driving her to her appointments. She also mentioned the incredibly supportive volunteer and counselor from NCC, Lani, who drove her to school. Beth mentioned that the NCC and her sponsors were one of the reasons she felt supported through the process of resettlement. Similarly, Ajaz credited the NCC and his sponsors for the support he and his family received in the first few days of arriving in Canada. He shared that after two days, "we met like a bunch of Canadians family. They're called a sponsor group and when we met them, right now they're becoming more friend than support you know? They help us with everything, so they arrange like a doctor meeting and the school papers work." Ajaz also spoke of the support "one of the NCC member helped [him] with" when he applied to college and how comfortable he felt by them when hearing "someone who's talking my language."

Participant Assets

Beth reminded me of the power that comes with speaking a language other than English. She shared that she was able to create and maintain friendships with her peers from ESL classes years later and explained "you do create meaningful relationships, even though you could barely understand each other at first. Maybe then, over time, you just start learning and helping each other." Her ability, alongside her ESL classmates, to create relationships whilst being unable to speak each other's respective languages was a strength to me, something that English as a Second Language learners do so well. Beth's awareness of tone, body language, and emotional understanding were clear assets that allowed her to understand others in various ways. These strengths allowed her to support herself as her classmates supported her.

Ajaz also demonstrated this asset for communicating with students who spoke other languages. Although he and his ESL classmates did not speak English, he shared "because they don't understand your language, so I speak in my language and then Google translate to the English. This is how the way we connect at the first few months, even with the teachers."

It is clear that many of my participants played active roles in learning English on their own. They recounted stories of teaching themselves English when their own parents were unable to speak the language. Golnaz for example taught herself English outside of school and painfully remembered, "I have to do it by myself. I have to be to like...Get in enough time."

Similarly, Fred shared that he knew he had to take matters into his own hands to learn English. He rationalized that "school decided not to engage in my English improvement," and so "I decided to do it alone on my own by looking for resources in the community [go to the] library downtown and also YouTube is also another resource along with NCC." When the time

came to progress to college, he firmly shared, "I was confident, and I knew that I would also succeed."

While some research studies have demonstrated that there are teachers who view non-English-speaking students in ways that are deficit-focused, my participants' ability to persevere and continue learning English while having to use tools and strategies to communicate with others is indisputably an asset they possessed that went unacknowledged and underutilized within schools (Cho et al., 2019).

Unveiling Perspectives: Participants Narratives on Creating Supportive Educational Environments

After asking participants what would have made life better for them while attending school in Canada, many narratives and suggestions came to the forefront. This information helps identify opportunities for creating supporting educational environments, most of which revolve around mentorship in various ways and instances.

ESL Mentorship

Shafia spoke about the difficulty of feeling uncomfortable in classes while she was still learning English. She stated "the way they organize how we go to classes, maybe. Here's the point. When I first started, I was like, why don't I be in the ESL for the whole day for a couple of weeks? Then I can become more comfortable, and then I would go to English, and film and I don't know, other classes."

Peer Mentorship

Beth recalled being weighed down by the feeling of being the oldest daughter and not having another sibling to look to for guidance. She explained "I always thought if I had an older brother or sister that I could learn from them and of course, my teachers were always helpful, but

sometimes I feel like a bit more guidance would have been helpful and schools here work differently, like which is your own credits and stuff like that."

Golnaz vividly detailed a similar struggle to Beth and shared she often felt as though she faced the challenges of being a newcomer alone. She expressed "because on my life, I don't have anyone to help me, so it was really hard. I have to do it by myself. I have to be to like...Get in enough time. Yeah, it was like I just need help from outside, but I didn't find a lot of help."

Educational/Cultural Mentorship

Golnaz also recounted needing support to study while learning the English language and wished she had "a teacher outside or something to really help you studying everything else because the language is a big thing for [someone] who doesn't speak English and want to continue studying… I will feel like they will still need support after school."

The theme of mentorship and needing support continued with Fred, who shared "I think if I got someone who was that specific to be my mentor, I think if I had got that person, I could have done something better or more." Remembering hardships, Fred shared "I often felt like I was on my own." He went on to explain that he needed someone to show "me how things work here in Canada, how I can become dependent afterwards, and also how I could reach my potential. But I had to be alone while I was still new, so it wasn't really a good transition to me, especially in winter."

I began this chapter with a quote about the difficulties newcomers face and the struggle and pain they endure. Not one part of the resettlement and acculturation experience is easy and many of the stories my participants shared with me were laced with critical awareness of the process. I wanted the voices of my participants to be the forefront of this chapter and for their voices to echo throughout each theme.

There is much I now want to share about the insights and the moments they generously shared their experiences. This next chapter will discuss and analyze the key themes and supporting data I have explored in this chapter in order to further critically explore and examine the significance of what has been shared.

Chapter 5: Discussing Findings

In "Objectivity is dead, and I'm okay with it," journalist Lewis Wallace (2017) writes that journalists need to adapt from strict neutrality in order to adhere to the truth-telling and public responsibility of journalism. Wallace notes this is crucial to counter lies and alternative truths created by a government that perpetuates white superiority (2017). This article by Wallace is important to discuss here because it reflects my own thought process for this research and frames how the findings are discussed.

Many disciplines of research follow the premise that objectivity is part of the scientific method (Fisher, 2004). We have come to understand that neutrality is part of maintaining scientific objectivity, and that both objectivity and neutrality are essential for rigorous research. However, neutrality washes away when hearing stories about human rights violations, suffering and advocacy: I think of how Wallace shared, "I can't be neutral or centrist in a debate over my own humanity" (2017, para. 4). This deeply resonated with me. As I listened to the stories participants shared, I quickly realized that neutrality had no place in writing about the pain, hopes and challenges refugees face. So, if it were an "objective" paper on the education of refugees you were looking for, I hope you realized at the very beginning that this would not be it.

Before I begin expanding on the themes I presented in the previous chapter, I would like to mention something else I noticed along with the themes that should not go untold. From the moment participants agreed to participate in the study and throughout sharing their experiences in the interviews, they demonstrated immense courage. Although informed consent and ethical procedures were taken to mitigate any harm, retelling traumatic stories around experiences of migration and war for refugees can still be distressing. Sharing one's history around conflict can prompt memories of loss, stress, harm, and trauma (Akesson et al., 2018). However, sharing

voices and histories can also be a source of strength. This can be understood by reviewing the Akesson et al. research where they note that a father who participated in their study on the conflict in Syria asked to be interviewed "so the world will know our story" (2018, para. 48). Sharing experiences around war and trauma in one's own words can allow refugee participants to exercise their autonomy and personal agency, something I hope participants felt throughout this study.

Gratefulness and a Darker Tale of Western Discourses

I was struck by the consistent gratitude exhibited by participants in the wake of discrimination and school challenges. Although there were instances of negative occurrences with peers and teachers, I was surprised that when explicitly asked to detail the difficulties, many participants demonstrated gratitude and a positive outlook.

Ortlieb et al. (2021) described themes of the 'good and grateful refugee' when analysing inclusion of refugees in Western workplaces. Similar to the present study, Ortlieb et al. found refugee participants had "internalised to be good and work hard" (2021, p. 276). They found that "although gratitude commonly is associated with positive emotions, there is a dark side in the form of a guilty conscience and a 'willingness' to accept poor working conditions" to be included (Ortlieb et al., 2021, p. 80). This internalization of gratitude was demonstrated by Ajaz towards his teachers, while he also placed great pressure on himself to learn English as quickly as possible due to feeling overwhelmingly behind in school. Moreover, the willingness to accept poor working conditions that Ortlieb et al. (2021) reported was present in Fred's positive outlook in the face of experiencing discrimination and stereotypes from peers.

This theme of persistent gratitude can be further examined through discourses of identity, racism, ableism and power. Better said by Ortlieb et al., (2021) these societal discourses can be

explained through the way those with power "seek to explicitly oppose the public image of deficient refugees… emphasising the refugees' efforts in exemplary hard-working and being an especially good national citizen" (2021, p. 281). They further explain that this reasoning is fully in line with their (Australian) "government's meritocratic policy approach to immigration" (Ortlieb et al., 2021, p. 281). This largely ableist discourse within the issue of immigration is no stranger to Canada as well, as there is a striking similarity in colonial histories between Australia and Canada.

Refugees know better than to appear ungrateful, especially when the Western world's messaging to refugees has revolved around a fear of acceptance. For example, in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) speech for refugees shared in "In Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement", representative Du Ploy stated, "We understand the challenges you face, but at the same time we want to give you a sound word of caution. Be careful not to come across as sounding ungrateful" (as cited in Nyers & Rygiel, 2012, p. 54). Furthermore, it was argued that granting legal status to refugees comes with a catch: "in order to be protected, refugees are expected to accept severe restrictions on their freedoms," creating a tension between freedom and protection (Du Ploy as cited in Nyers & Rygiel, 2012, p. 55). Gratitude therefore becomes a foundational part of the international colonial discourse on displacement, migration, and planned relocation (i.e., human mobility).

Ghorashi (2014) explains my concern around these discourses of power that create hierarchy by conditional protection of refugees by government. This protection is only extended on the premise that refugees will give back to the country they resettle in:

> This construction of categories in society that are in need of help is
>
> countered by categories of people who provide help. This kind of

category construction leads to a hierarchical relationship between the

giver and the receiver. It also develops a strong sense of expectation of

gratitude from migrants. Those not seen to be appropriately grateful are

considered manipulative. This line of argument is especially developed

in refugee studies. (Ghorashi, 2014, p. 111)

Clark et al. also followed this line of thinking around hierarchical relationships of givers

and receivers and note the:

strong neoliberal element of the good refugee archetype. Refugees'

labour market participation has been found to positively shape public

sentiment toward them, creating an ideal by which the "good refugee"

achieves educational and/or financial success as a means of repaying

their debt to the nation… The understanding of the social obligation to

give as requisite in the shared creation of human society is thus lost in a

neoliberal interpretation of indebtedness. Australia's migration policies

and discourses cannot be separated from the country's longstanding

preoccupation with neoliberalism and sovereignty. Conceptions of

belonging based on productivity are inextricably connected to

constructions of "race" and Whiteness that have long underscored

Australia's exclusionary treatment of forced migrants.

 (2023, p. 152)

Along with identifying neoliberal discourses in gratefulness, Clark et al. (2023, p. 10)

also witnessed something I heard from my participants: "expressions of genuine gratitude

intermingled with tactics of quiet assimilation, a key signifier of the 'good refugee motif". As put

so painstakingly well by Beth, maintaining gratitude is incredibly difficult during the challenges experienced by newcomers. The dichotomy of the good/bad refugee furthers the narrative that refugees must have positive successes and serve the political agenda of governments. More than this, it creates incredibly unrealistic expectations for newcomers and refugees who are pressured to live a tale of gratitude and positivity as though their trauma ends the day they set foot into this country.

As the essence of the stories by participants in this study were told in a framework/ discourse of gratefulness, I began to wonder if this feeling would ever diminish for them to allow them to just feel…feelings without the threat of gratitude. Nayeri shared this concern after she resettled as an Iranian refugee in the United States:

> It hinted and threatened. Afraid for my future, I decided that everyone
>
> was right: if I failed to stir up in myself enough gratefulness, or if I failed
>
> to properly display it, I would lose all that I had gained. (2017, para. 10)

The persistent need to appear grateful when asked explicitly about discrimination and sense of belonging kept seeping through the interviews, which lead me to think that each of the discourses mentioned were operating in the participants' insistence that everything was perfect, in order to maintain the status of acceptance from the dominant culture. It was evident to me during this research that participants were opposed to communicating anything except complete and utter satisfaction, and this was due to a need to remain grateful to ensure acceptance. This was the premise in Nayeri's article: "there were unspoken conditions to our acceptance, and that was the secret we were meant to glean on our own: we had to be grateful" (2017, para 14).

Most of the participants mentioned this theme of gratefulness in their own way. It does not operate the same for each person, but it does heavily influence their lives. I hope those within

systems of power begin to consider the consequences of this problematic rhetoric because, although participants' quotes speak for themselves, the actual pain caused by this discourse could never be fully explained in writing.

Deep rootedness of Whiteness

Racism is rooted into Western schools and occurs at the individual, historical and institutional levels (Borrero et al., 2012) and whiteness contributes to the issue (May, 2010). It is crucial to deconstruct whiteness in order to understand the impacts racism has on students of colour, such as refugees, and to understand the beliefs the Western system upholds and how these beliefs have severe consequences for minority students.

Whiteness does not just refer to race but indicates norms, cultures, and practices that are implicit with and reward whiteness. It is part of a larger racial hierarchy that maintains the power and privilege handed to those who are white and rewards individuals who assimilate into whiteness by leaving behind their own culture (Malone, 2019). Roediger stated that *"*Whiteness is not only false and oppressive, it is *nothing but* [emphasis added] false and oppressive" (1994, p. 13)*.* This assertion demonstrates how race is a social construct made to keep people of colour at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy while white English-speaking individuals continue to benefit and profit from this hierarchy (Connor et al., 2019; May, 2010).

Now that I have set the stage for the interconnected norms, cultures, practices, and social aspects of whiteness, I will begin identifying this system more explicitly. Whiteness has severe consequences for refugee students. One way in which this occurs is that they are compared to norms of whiteness (Connor et al., 2019). They are compared to the scores white students attain on tests, the language proficiency of white students, and the way white students speak and behave. Cho quoted a teacher in making this point explicit who stated that "they [refugee

students] don't know what the expectations of our [white] culture are, so they need to be taught" (2019, p. 55). Cho et al. (2019) highlighted how this teacher quickly adopted a deficit perspective towards her refugee students, viewing their culture as inferior to Western culture and in need of change. This underscores the way whiteness has been privileged and considered the norm.

This is of course problematic for refugee students who arrive with different cultures, lifestyles, and languages than those positioned as normal or desirable and therefore their success becomes contingent on assimilating into this privileged white culture.

"They don't know what the expectations of our [White] culture are, so they need to be taught" (Cho, 2019, p. 55). I feel summoned to go back to this quote by a teacher in Cho (2019). The cruel deficit lens the teacher immediately viewed her refugee students with was punishingly rooted in whiteness. The automatic assumption that those who speak English differently and look different than white English-speaking students have no knowledge is inherently racist. Imagine being told that you are finally leaving a war to be safe in a country that welcomes you, and then experiencing this daily.

The fact of the matter is that, unfortunately, this rhetoric continues today in Canadian schools even though the Ontario College of Teachers Act (OCTA) was amended to stipulate that "making remarks or engaging in behaviours that expose any person or class of persons to hatred on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination under Part I of the Human Rights Code" (OCTA, 1996, clause 28) is an act of professional misconduct.

This is demonstrated in schools when refugee students are constantly compared to the scores white students attain on tests, the language proficiency of white students, and the way white students speak and behave. For example, students in Ontario must take the Ontario

Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) yet, in an article by Erum, it was reported that "[these] tests were not designed with multilingual people in mind" (Bale as cited in Erum, 2023, para. 2). and "standardized tests… [involve] norms on populations that don't include multilingual people" (Bale as cited in Erum, 2023, para 3). Yet, it is these exact learners who are expected to take the test in our schools. Take Shafia, who previously shared:

> I felt bad because I didn't know how to answer many of the stuff. I was
>
> like, Oh, my God…Oh, my God. What is this? Is this English or not?
>
> You know when you have those paragraphs and then choose the best
>
> answer, and then all the answers look the same? Yeah. But then yeah, I
>
> didn't pass, and then I had to take the course during summer school.

Despite this criticism of the test, ELL students are required write it, and more students are known to be failing the OSSLT each year (Erum, 2023). Mureseanu, an ELL teacher recounted:

> if you have someone who is new to the country, just arrived from
>
> Thailand, and must write the test, you will not necessarily understand or
>
> know everything that is pertaining to culture or the community in
>
> Canada, and therefore, [students] have a very good chance to fail that test
>
> (Mureseanu, as cited in Erum, 2023, para. 19).

This test that is designed for white English-speaking students, one that various educators have stated was never intended for multilingual speakers, is continuously administered. I can only explain this through the discourse of whiteness. In a system that was built to benefit white English-speaking students, refugees and English language learners will fail indefinitely. Erum agreed with this position, sharing that a previous immigrant and English Language Learner (ELL) student they interviewed believed "the tests are harmful as they can play into stereotyping

more racialized students and also affects student self-esteem issues, especially racialized and newcomer students" (2023, para. 38).

These tests remind newcomers that they are less than their white, English-speaking counterparts and further pathologizes them with disabilities. This is unavoidable when standardized tests utilize cultural and academic English that newcomers have not yet learned, leading them to inevitably fail. Through failing standardized tests, newcomers are pathologized as needing special education and categorized with an English Language Learner (ELL) identity, which is given to them before they can even create one for themselves (Bal, 2014; Creagh, 2014). The impacts of whiteness are also evident in the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. Researchers have again and again found that there are more minority students (e.g., students of colour, immigrants, and refugee students) in special education than there are white students (Bal, 2014; Connor et al., 2019; Linn & Hemmer, 2011). The main reason for this disproportionate representation is that minority students are compared to norms of whiteness (Connor et al., 2019).

So, what now? Erum (2023) shared a few insights of various educators within Canadian schools who highlighted a series of actionable outcomes for the future of standardized testing. These outcomes, along with a few other insights from literature, are outlined as follows:

1. Support Changing the Assessment

Erum (2023, para 50) shared that according to Jeff Bale, a professor at the University of Toronto, "the province should be changing the test to better support ELL students". Bale continued to share that:

> If the province genuinely cared about literacy, then they will create a test
>
> that allows especially newcomer students to demonstrate their literacy in

the languages they know. But even beyond that, the most important

message is to have the adults in school appreciate the multilingual

abilities and the multiliteracy abilities students already have. Build the

assessment and curriculum around those multiple abilities and stop

imposing some sort of normal English way of doing it on them (Bale, as

cited in Erum, 2023, para. 51-52).

2. Support Redirecting the Funding

Ardavan Eizadirad, a former teacher in Ontario and the author of "Decolonizing

Educational Assessment: Ontario Elementary Students and the EQAO," believed the mandated

EQAO testing should not be used to evaluate students (Erum, 2023). Eizadirad (as cited by

Erum, 2023, para. 44) reported that to support ESL learners' identities and to use an asset-

oriented lens, "the test should be scrapped, and the money used to conduct the EQAO test should

be used for other student services, such as mental health."

3. Interested in Re-Focusing Outcomes

Cummins (2015) suggested that instead of placing emphasis on test scores to capture

verbal ability or potential, we redirect our focus to using tests to understand where ELLs are in

their timeline of catching up to comprehension of academic language proficiency and what

supports are needed. Cummins (2015, p. 31) stated that when we only focus policies on

"linguistic variables in isolation from the ways in which language differences between home and

school intersect with SES and patterns of power relations in the wider society, they are unlikely

to identity the most effective instructional interventions". This also means shifting our focus to

using a multilingual lens in schools or as May (2010) suggested, using critical multiculturalism.

4. Interested in Changing the Perception of Assets and Associated Value

May (2010) suggested that critical multiculturalism can realign how newcomer students are perceived in schools. To integrate this into existing pedagogy, May (2010) recommended deconstructing the ideology that schools hold neutral cultural values. For example, teachers who believe they presently use culturally universal discourses in the classroom should use culturally responsive pedagogies that accommodate different cultures and practices, which could change the perception of assets that newcomer students bring.

As well, May (2010) stated that schools must be able to recognize power relations between the minority students and teachers, and continuously critique cultural practices. In this case, practices could include interpretation of assessments. Critical multiculturalism in schools and institutions could then change the perception of associated value within relationships of power and help to shift the perception of multilingual and multiliteracy abilities as valuable assets.

Realigning Social Support and Mentorship

Mentorship

Looking back on their experiences in Canadian schools, most participants recounted feeling isolated and wishing for a mentor or a sibling who could have supported them. Those who were the eldest of their siblings faced greater feelings of loneliness and pressure, a feeling that resonated with me deeply being the eldest sibling of an immigrant family. Since schools are often the first and influential contacts for refugee children when they resettle, it is incredibly important students feel supported and have a sense of belonging in their schools. Refugee children already face tremendous pressure when they resettle into a new country and feeling supported at school is crucial for fostering connection and belonging.

Bešić et al. stressed the importance of school connectedness, which "includes an emotional (i.e., feeling safe, supported and valued by teachers and peers), behavioural (i.e., engagement with school activities) and cognitive level (i.e., faith in school values and its significance)" (2020, p. 723). School connectedness protects students' mental health and promotes social inclusion amongst teachers and peers (Bešić et al., 2020). Yet, this connectedness proved to be a key gap in the experiences of many of the students I interviewed.

Vickers et al. similarly emphasised the importance of "promoting sustained interaction among student peer groups in order to establish a more supportive social environment for refugees and immigrants" (2017, p. 1). Most of the students I interviewed mainly engaged in social interactions with their peers in their ESL class as they spent a significant amount of time together. ESL was also one of the only safe spaces that fostered a feeling of belonging for some of the students. One participant shared that the newcomers at her school would only go to school for the ESL class where they felt safe, and that they felt alone in mainstream classes with English-speaking students. Feeling alone was not limited to their time in school and some participants also mentioned these feelings were present when attempting to complete homework and practicing learning the English language after hours.

There are two concerns I must deconstruct here: the issue of refugee students only feeling safe in ESL spaces in schools and the feelings of loneliness and exclusion that newcomers face both in and out of school. Due et al. (2015) uncovered these same concerns in their research where refugee students reported the English Language Program was a safe space for them, and one in which they found a sense of community with other students resettling into the country. However, teachers expressed "concern that the students' feelings of belonging may be disrupted"

when transitioning into mainstream classes due to a lack of resources as compared to the English Language Program classrooms (Due et al., 2015, p. 176).

Due and Riggs (2009) also speak to one of the concerns I share around refugees and spaces. They suggested that Western schools perpetuate hierarchies and coercive power relations through spaces that divide refugee students learning English from those who are in mainstream classes and speak the dominant English language. This further highlights an issue that has existed in both the field of education and the broader Western community: English serves as a prerequisite to inclusion (Due & Riggs, 2009). Additionally, although researchers stress the importance of increasing interactions between refugees and their English-speaking peers, Due and Riggs remind me of an important truth: "The learning of language always occurs on a particular social terrain in which those who already know the language hold considerable power" (2009, p. 60). Therefore, social inclusion of refugees alone is not enough. Inclusion must be thought of through a lens of realigning power relations where students who speak English as their dominant language are not placed in "positions of relative power" to non- English speakers (Due & Riggs, 2009, p. 60).

Mentorship and afterschool programming can also alleviate the feelings of loneliness that participants like Golnaz experienced when having to complete homework and engage in English literacy after school. Assigning refugee students a buddy in their school for support with homework and socialization can also foster a sense of inclusion and belonging. Vickers et al. (2017) proposed the Equity Buddies Program to respond to the great need for support for refugee students. Although this program was designed for university students, the concept can be applied to other levels of schooling.

The Equity Buddies program created a sense of agency for refugee students and fostered a feeling of inclusion for them (Vickers et al., 2017). The program also highlighted the capital they brought as learners, such as adaptable perspectives, cultural knowledge, and understanding. The structure of the program consisted of equity facilitators (mentors) and mentees (refugee students) and offered three types of social interaction: weekly face to face interaction, small debriefing groups, and meetings with teachers to keep up to date with students' grades and learning.

Implementing a buddy system or peer mentorship program can also be instrumental in adjusting to a new learning environment. The first few weeks attending a new school are vital in shaping refugee students' academic and emotional trajectory (Carley & Farnan, 2013) especially because many refugee students do not start at the beginning of the school year. Many students begin halfway through the school year due to the timing of their resettlement, and this can impact their sense of belonging as friendships and classroom expectations are already established. Joining school mid-way through the academic year can create feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anxiety (Carley & Farnan, 2013). A peer or buddy assigned to the student can decrease barriers to belonging and inclusion by providing an immediate supportive relationship (Vickers et al., 2017).

Reconceptualizing Identity

The insights participants provided around their identity formation depicted how identity has been historically weaponized by a dominant group to other those who do not fit into their cultural norms. Participants' stories of identity navigation tell a larger story of the legacy created for newcomer children to feel out of place and never enough. These experiences of identity

reconciliation and competing identities fit into long standing research on identities of newcomer and ELL students (Borrero et al., 2012; Cummins et al., 2005; Due & Riggs, 2009).

To begin to understand the complexity of newcomer identity navigation, it is vital to begin with the migration journey and create space for Indigenous stories of displacement. I think back to the quote by Ajaz that opened the previous chapter and to Shafia's experience resettling many times. Although my participants have been displaced various times in different countries, they still have deep histories with their country of origin: their home. Understanding what home is to former refugees helps add dimension to the Canadian identity and what it portrays to be. Can home only be Canada and to embody what it means to be Canadian? Or is home something more, like a social construct or an experience linking to other identities?

On the outside, the government has repeatedly stated that Canada is a multicultural and welcoming society. However, once the veil falls, Canadian culture and identity is built upon a web of intertwined values and history of neoliberalism, power and whiteness, demonstrated by knowledge and understanding of the English language, and being economically and socially active in Canadian society.

Shafia's experiences with being displaced in Lebanon and having attended 4 high schools, because her original education from Syria was never considered as enough, highlights some of the challenges of migration. Her recounting of the "different problems and different culture[s]" she has experienced also shines a light at how often former refugees have attempted to engage in identity reconciliation, and how many cultures they have tried to integrate with their understanding of home.

I recall Beth's previous recounts of not feeling Canadian enough, and how she shared she was unable to relate to aspects of the Canadian identity: the clothes people wore, the music they

listened to, the shows they grew up watching. Behind these prominent displays of being

"Canadian," or calling Canada 'home,' there was one overarching untold story between these

Canadian values: the English language.

Lisa Delpit (1988) dived into this in the "Silenced Dialogue," where she discussed how

the culture of power involves codes or linguistic expressions chosen by those who hold power in

the dominant group (i.e., ways of speaking, dressing, and writing). Knowing the rules of

language (i.e., how it is explicitly and implicitly used) is typically held on to by those with

power. Despite this, Cummins et al. state that:

> current educational policies in Canada and elsewhere make virtually no
>
> mention of power relations as a relevant variable affecting bilingual/ELL
>
> students' academic achievement. The construct of identity is also absent
>
> from most discussions of school improvement. Yet these constructs are
>
> clearly at play in all aspects of educational organization and teacher-
>
> student interactions. (2012, p. 31)

If Canada's said values of multiculturalism were true, we would see all newcomer

children develop a sense of belonging as their cultural identity was welcomed. This could not be

further from the case, as evidenced in the recounts of identity expression from my participants

and those in the literature on identity navigation. Cummins shared the following experience

related by Sidra, a newcomer child:

> I was new, and I didn't know English. I could only say little sentences. I
>
> wore cultural clothes, and people usually judge a new person by their
>
> looks. If they see the clothes that I am wearing are not like their clothes,
>
> they will just think that I'm not one of them. If we had any partner

activities, no one will pick me as their partner. I felt really, really left out.

Kids also made fun of me because I looked different, and I couldn't

speak English properly. (Sidra (newcomer child), quoted in Cummins et

al., 2005, p. 39)

I argue that Cummins painted a significant tale: that the Canadian identity does not

"affirm the identities of English language learners" (2005, p. 39). It is set up to compete against

the cultural identity of newcomers, leading them to believe they must assimilate into the

dominant Western identity. Yet, I think of Beth being able to verbalize her trajectory of

reconciling her identities, demonstrating that those who understand the conscious and

unconscious ways language can be used are able to reconcile their identities into hybrid/fluid

identities, reconceptualizing the idea of a fixed identity.

Beth outlined what reconciliation of various identities looks like. She clearly re-defined

her stance against the culturally understood concepts of ethnicity and existing power structures

when she "learned being Canadian does not have to look a certain way." It struck me when Beth

stated that she was "learning how to balance…[her] cultural background and then also, like not

feeling like I don't belong here." Beth outlining how she continues to negotiate her cultural

identities positively can be understood through the concept of "cultural pride", which I take from

Borrero et al. (2012, p. 25). Borrero et al. shared that "youth seem to know that they are victims

of a system that subjugates them, yet at the same time, they are part of a historically resilient and

cohesive cultural group that will support them" (2012, p. 29). Another concept that supports

Beth's identity navigation is acculturation. Berry et al.'s model of acculturation assesses two

main questions relevant to this matter: "the degree to which people wish to maintain their

heritage culture and identity; and the degree to which people seek involvement with the larger

society" (2006, p. 306). Individuals can either choose to acculturate in one of four ways into or from the dominant culture: Assimilate, separate, marginalize, or integrate. In this case, we see Beth integrating both her cultural identity and the new "Canadian" identity.

Through Berry et al.'s (2006) theory of acculturation, assimilating into the dominant cultural identity can also be understood. I think of Ajaz, who viewed other ELL students speaking in their dominant language (L1) as negative. His conceptualizing of code switching (alternating between languages) and hearing others speaking in their dominant language as a deficit demonstrated his struggle between his competing identities and needing to leave his dominant language behind to learn English. This paints a larger tale of ELLs often having competing identities as they navigate through learning a new language and finding belonging in schools.

Using a disAbility and critical race theory is also highly important to understanding identity navigation. Discourses of ableism and racism are internalized in Canadian education and are one of the reasons for the overrepresentation of ELLs in special education (Connor et al., 2019; Chu & Flores, 2011). For newcomers and ELL students who are unable to grasp the unconscious and conscious ways culture is embedded into the English language, they are more likely to be pathologized with a disability and seen through a deficit lens (Chu & Flores, 2011; Delpit, 1988). This disability label carries with students throughout the trajectory of their education and can impact their life course events.

Cho et al. (2019) echo my argument in their research on teacher's perceptions of refugee students. They found that teachers viewed refugee ELLs with a deficit view by choosing to see them as problems, as if they had little knowledge before resettling (Cho et al., 2019). I remember very clearly when Shafia shared about teachers who treated her like this. She took a look back at

her teacher's expectations which "were always if you do something in [class], they are so surprised. How did you know that? How did you speak English?" To sum the ableist and racist discourse simply, Shafia described it as though they thought she "didn't go to school in my life".

Although Shafia advocated for herself and never viewed herself through a deficit lens, many newcomer and ELL students continue to internalize this identity and view themselves as less than their white, English-speaking peers. Shafia was clear when she said: "Why did I come here?...Why do I have to deal with the people? Why do I have to deal with all of this?"

This cannot be the end of the story. There is a path forward. In the following chapter, I will make recommendations for next steps, and for where we should focus our efforts. I must, because if we do not begin to deconstruct and dismantle the discourses so deeply entrenched in our school system, we will have failed the refugees who seek safety in our country. Like Shafia, they will wonder why they chose to come here. We will continue having newcomers believe they will be welcomed here. You may say there are many teachers who are the opposite, yet these are not enough. Our schools must do better. No, our governments must do better. Otherwise, the belonging and inclusivity we continue to pride ourselves on will be the greatest lie we tell.

Chapter 6: Reconceptualizing Newcomer Education

A dear friend said something to me, something so profound, I knew I wanted it here, at the beginning of this chapter. Recounting her own struggles as an ESL student in the Canadian school system, she challenged the notion that her teachers could label what her second language was when, as she put it, she "*dreamed* in English". I was reminded of the countless times my participants shared that their identity as an ESL learner "othered" them instantly, allowing teachers and peers to associate them with a deficit view. As I considered this in the context of this chapter, I recognized that participants' stories, truths, and needs had to be so well told that I began to wonder if they could be put into words. As Pinar (1999, p. 94) noted, "it is not only a matter of identifying what exists now, but also a task of delineating a collective aspiration". This chapter focuses on reconceptualizing not only newcomer education and language within Canadian schools, but how their identity is chosen for them before they even begin.

In thinking about reconceptualization, I refer to Pinar (1999) and the context that educational paths of all students should be emancipatory. He described education as political. Pinar (1999) defined reconceptualization as a critique on where the field had been and where it currently is. Thus, beginning with a critique of the field as it is today (i.e., what is and is not working for curriculum pertaining to newcomers) and how it can be transformed (i.e., what must change). To reconceptualize newcomer education, I will follow his direction by taking a lead from the lived experiences and autobiographical knowledge of my participants.

Where does Reconceptualization Begin

Although never stated explicitly, my participants offered various thoughts for how the education system should be reconceptualized. These insights were found in their stories; by retelling their challenges and wishes for what could have made their lives better at the time they

were enrolled in school. They conveyed reconceptualized education in a series of inter-connected requirements:

1. Preparedness, in the form of

    a. more culturally aware teachers and school environments.

    b. school-wide inclusivity and reflexive teaching, beyond the ESL classroom

    c. an end to stereotyping and deficit orientations

    d. elimination of neoliberal English assessments

    e. re-organization of timing of enrolment in ESL and other classes

2. Re-defining the Canadian identity and social connection, in the form of

    a. more support through mentorship/after school help

    b. more connection to larger community/communities

Teaching Teachers: The Need for Preparedness

As we prepare for the high influx of refugees to come in the years ahead (IRCC, 2023) the need for teacher preparedness is more important than ever. Students spend most of their day in schools and the relationships they have with their teachers impact their identity formation and sense of belonging (Cummins, 2015; Maadad & Mathews, 2018). I began my education 24 years ago in the Canadian education system and can recall many teachers who negatively impacted my sense of self. This research shows there are still many teachers without a multilingual and culturally sensitive lens: consider Shafia's story of her guidance councillor assuming she did not know the sound of a bell, nor its implications, despite having been at the school for seven months. Shafia further stated "those are the expectations, [they] were always if you do something …they are so surprised. How did you know that? How did you speak English?". This reflects the

lack of a welcoming and multicultural country, despite the assertions of our government. More so, it represents the current state of newcomer education, but it cannot be the future.

As we continue welcoming thousands of refugees per year, it is not only teachers who must deepen their awareness of instruction and language. Effectively teaching and welcoming newcomer students is also a responsibility of the entire school. As Maadad and Mathews argue, "schools must also recognise and challenge perceptions and discourses about refugees within which schools operate" (2018, p. 3).

As I begin to shape these re-envisioned schools into words, I come back to the guidance of Cummins (2015) who agrees that there must be more effective teaching for English Language Learners (ELLs). His 2015 book on teaching ELLs touched on the significant increase in immigration in Canada yet, teachers and administrators had few opportunities to understand best teaching approaches for English as a Second Language (ESL). This issue is two-fold: not only are discriminatory societal attitudes towards "cultural, linguistic, racialized, and religious diversity" at play, but many teachers have had little preparation in teacher education or through professional learning "to equip them to teach effectively in contexts where linguistic and cultural diversity is the norm… there is little expectation or requirement that educators who assume positions of responsibility (e.g., school principals or vice-principals) are familiar with the knowledge base relating to effective instruction for bilingual/ELL students" (Cummins et al., 2012, p. 26- 27).

One reason for this may be a perceived division of labour, that teaching ELLs and newcomers is only the responsibility of the ESL teacher. However, this lack of shared responsibility is detrimental to students' learning and inclusion. For example, Shafia recounted her experiences in classes outside of ESL. She shared that in one class, "the teacher didn't you

know, introduce me. But also, the teachers, I think they didn't know how to do that with someone, who their English is so limited, as well."

By having the responsibility of teaching ELL students fall on only the ESL teacher, newcomer students also begin making the association that support and learning only take place within the ESL classroom. Shafia shared that, as ESL students, "we would go to school just to go to the ESL class because we feel safe there. It's different because in the other classes, it was so weird." I prompted her to elaborate on what she meant by "weird". Shafia responded, "what we do as ESL students, we would leave the class and go and work on the assignment in the ESL room, or we would do it ourselves because we are shy to approach the students and the students, they don't invite".

Without shared responsibility of teaching all students, ELL students and newcomers are left to depend on themselves or on one teacher alone. It is quite clear that regardless of the existing literature on the need for teacher training, this theory has yet to turn into practice, and is harming newcomer students. The Ministry of Education and Canadian school systems also do not clearly state how much experience educators, principals and vice principals must have in ELL and newcomer education (Cummins, 2015). According to Cummins (2015), most principals' courses have little mention around culturally aware or linguistically diverse schools. I argue that our Ministries must clearly state in policy that school educators have extensive training in postcolonial frameworks, linguistics, and supporting newcomer students (e.g., their experiences, community resources, and trauma informed practice).

Along with this, school leadership must also create shared responsibility between teachers to teach all students using culturally diverse pedagogies. One simple example is understanding how long it takes to learn the English language. Ajaz shared that he struggled

when he was immediately placed in courses where English was a pre-requisite, stating how it was "difficult for, let's say, the first two years at the school. Then I told my parents I'm gonna take off because I'm not understand anything". Many teachers are unaware that learning the English language for an ELL takes around five to seven years (Cummins, 2015). Without this knowledge, they may have unrealistic expectations of ELL students. Without understanding a realistic timeline for learning the English language, what is truly a lack of support and pressure on students may be recorded as a dropout rate. There is a large body of literature on newcomer and ELL dropout rates from school. Ajaz clearly struggled with his identity as a learner after two years of learning English, yet I wonder if his view would have been more positive if his teachers verbalized how long academic proficiency in another language realistically takes.

Teacher preparedness includes shifting societal attitudes towards newcomers and ELLs, as the dropout rate can be connected to complex interlinked factors. Take Shafia's experiences with teachers who stereotyped her, or Fred answering "no" when I asked if his teachers attempted to connect to his language, culture or interest. These beliefs are consistent with other literature: Cho et al. (2019) reported that teachers believed refugee students lacked awareness of social norms, rules and communication, and believed they were "problems" that could be fixed. Maadad and Mathews echo my own argument for "teacher training that allows teachers to understand both the structural and emotional challenges experienced" as "bullying and violence at school may well be the cause of high dropouts" (2018, p. 13). If this is the case, it is all the more important to break the "cycle of abuse of children that have been victims of war and trauma and provide healing school climates" (Maadad & Mathews, 2018, p. 13).

Outing the Neoliberal Agenda

Throughout this paper, I have articulated that our educational institutions have historically benefited white, English-speaking students. Yet, as our schools reflect high levels of diversity, we "can no longer continue to operate in the interests of those intent on maintaining a status quo that sustains inequality and secures exclusivity" (Maadad & Mathews, 2018, p. 14). The rise of facility in the English language as being a necessary skill for success rests upon two facets of neoliberal ideology: that English language competency is vital for the economy and skilled work, and that "developing English skills strengthens a nation's economic competitiveness and increases individual economic returns" (Kubota, 2011, p. 248). Kubota labels this as linguistic instrumentalism, which "underscores the usefulness of language skills in achieving utilitarian goals such as economic development and social mobility" (2011, p. 248). I have previously illustrated how deeply entrenched neoliberal discourses are within language instruction and assessments within schools.

It has been well documented that the market-based policies neoliberalism upholds isolates and marginalizes the most vulnerable students. Apple concluded, "Whether it works is open to question. Indeed, as I shall show shortly, in practice neo-liberal policies involving market 'solutions' may actually serve to reproduce—not subvert— traditional hierarchies of class and race. Perhaps this should give us reason to pause?" (2001, p. 413).

Standardized tests such as the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) and the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) advance neoliberal goals by furthering the gap between white, English-speaking students and racialized ELL students. On her experience with standardized individual assessments, Shafia surmised "I think they know that I'm going to fail but I'm just being nice to find a way why did they do that?" The answer is political.

We saw Mike Harris' government create the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Sound familiar? We continue to see neoliberalist government agendas, such as Doug Ford's government, invoke what Wodak (2015) defined as the politics of fear through methods of funding allocation, funding cuts, etc. Wodak shared that "all right-wing populist parties instrumentalize some kind of ethnic/religious/linguistic/political minority as a *scapegoat* for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the respective group as dangerous and a threat '*to us*', to 'our' nation" (2015, p. 2). Now, here is the key to neoliberalism. It favours a dominant group. Thus, test scores favouring white, English-speaking students create a distinction between a marketable group our government can profit off of versus newcomer ELL students set to fail and deemed non profitable. Not only are standardized tests themselves problematic, but so is the process of interpreting them. Cummins) expressed extreme caution "in the way we interpret assessment of students' academic English skills or verbal cognitive abilities during the period when they are still catching up to native speakers" (2015, p. 22. My point here is not to place the responsibility on a few to change the system. I am unsure if that will even be possible within my academic career. What I do hope occurs is the rejection of neoliberal agendas within education by the teachers and principals leading the very schools that welcome thousands of refugee students each year. I envision reframing education based on what is most important for students to learn while also reflecting on what truly makes an individual a contributing member of society.

Considering Sellars and Imig, I hope ministries "create educational policies and practices which dignify all of humanity with philosophies of compassion, care and collaboration" and ask schools to "take advantage this narrow opportunity to rethink teaching and learning, reframe school conventions, re-educate their educators and reconnect with families and the community"

(2020, p. 9). Understanding the harm of standardized assessments can create resistance for the future of education and I hope teachers are given the opportunities necessary to set refugees up to succeed in this ever-changing world.

Reconceptualizing Identity Without Whiteness

Reconceptualizing identity begins with contextualizing how identity is already conceptualized in Canada. As noted previously, discourses of whiteness and racism enable monolithic identities, creating a vast barrier to newcomers' experiences of belonging. The current shared cultural understandings around identity legitimize the formation of a "Canadian Identity"', a combination of mainstream values and beliefs adopted by whiteness while othering those who choose not to assimilate into the dominant culture. This understanding of what it means to be Canadian does not reflect modes of acculturation or diverse understandings of identities. As Caxaj and Berman suggest, a "sense of belonging require[s] alternative ways of conceptualizing identity. These identities [are] often ambiguous, flexible, and multiple" (2010, p. 27).

Beth explained her challenges navigating what it meant to be Canadian, sharing "people would be shocked that you didn't read certain books that they love or watch a show or just a moment in pop culture that just stuck with them, and you just have no idea what they're talking about." However, she later "learned being Canadian does not have to look a certain way. The country is very diverse and is getting more diverse every day." Thus, reconceptualizing identity also gives way to create a new shared understanding of the "Canadian Identity", one that is post-colonial, diverse, and allows for flexible and multiple identities that better reflect various other cultures.

When do I Belong?

Reconceptualizing the "Canadian Identity" should also deconstruct the problematic nature of the language used to describe citizenship, as well as the immediate feeling of acceptance that comes with citizenship. Beth shared that she "recently got [her] citizenship" and "had some time to reflect on that". She shared "it was very like I felt a sense of relief in the background". This is no different from the sentiment I hear from other refugees and permanent residents in the community, who wait for their citizenship to feel a final sense of relief, as the citizenship is the final marker to belonging in Canadian society for them. We must flip this script to reframe what it means to belong to all levels of society in Canada and when this takes place. True and permanent belonging should not be conditional on the grounds of citizenship, but when former refugees safely arrive after experiencing trauma and turmoil. I argue that arrival and acceptance is a truer sense of what it means to be Canadian and reconceptualizing identity will be an "important source of agency that enable[s] a deeper sense of belonging and kindred connectedness" for all those who flee their countries to be with us here (Caxaj & Berman, 2010, p. 28).

English as a Second Language is a Strength

English as a Second Language (ESL) should be viewed as an asset. However, my participants were clear: teachers and peers positioned their ESL identity as a deficit. Shafia recounted the times her teachers treated her as though she had no education which left her thinking, "Why did I come here? I would like, why do I have to deal with the people? Why do I have to deal with all of this?"

Other participants like Golnaz and Ajaz also viewed their limited English as a deficit, but what if speaking another language was reconceptualized as a strength? I look to Cummins to

think of tangible ways to dream of this in schools. Cummins (2015) suggested that teachers must be aware of the image of ELL learners they project to the classroom. For example, are they indicating that ELLs are capable learners and can generate new knowledge? He also highlighted the power relations between teachers and students, and the power that teachers have on students' image, the school curriculum, and instruction.

When developing inclusive policies, Cummins (2015) reminds us that it is important to assess literacy engagement. Are students listening and building off previous knowledge in classrooms? Are teachers developing students' reading skills based off readings of previous years? Are teachers connecting to students' culture and previous experiences? Moreover, teachers' ways of thinking can influence students' creativity and accomplishments. Are they allowing ELL students to speak in both English and their home language? If so, this can allow students to express themselves in many ways and feel more comfortable, opening the path to acculturating and reconciling multiple identities. Other ways teachers can build students' image and language through curriculum is by using technological tools in conjunction with pedagogies, finding ways assessment can encourage learning, using resources and material that reflect ELLs culture and first language, and involving parents who know their children and culture best.

Shafia had asked, "Why don't I be in the ESL for the whole day for a couple of weeks? Then I can become more comfortable, and then I would go to English, and film and I don't know, other classes". If we can bring the inclusivity, comfort, and accommodations the ESL classroom provides for students of all ethnicities, languages, and origins to the entire school approach, then perhaps it would alleviate Shafia's feeling that she had to remain in ESL. This shift could be achieved by reconceptualizing multi-language speakers as an asset, leading to a more inclusive and just school environment.

I Just Need Somebody

The pressure on refugees is insurmountable. For those stepping into the school system, such as my participants, these responsibilities include success in school, while providing and caring for their families. I know this responsibility all too well: from supporting filing tax documents, to translating for my parents, and even caring for younger siblings, these responsibilities are also shared by Ajaz, Beth, Shafia, and Golnaz. Yet, my privilege is becoming limited, as my relation to the experience only goes this far. In addition to these responsibilities, my participants also lived with the memories of trauma and war, of running from home various times, and of having been resettled and displaced more than once. Who can be expected to remember the horrors of the past while facing present pressures of maintaining their cultural identity, learning a new language, and providing for their family alone? Golnaz shared, "I just need somebody… That's it."

The theme of needing help, of needing someone for one reason or another, was shared by each participant. When asked what could have made your life better at the time of school, Beth said, "I always thought [if] I had an older brother or sister that I could learn from… sometimes I feel like a bit more guidance would have been helpful, and schools here work differently". She went on to share that the support of a translator and "the setting for the language my family speaks," (speaking to the pressures of translating for her family) would have been helpful as well. I also think of Fred, who wished for a mentor, when he said he could "have done something better or more". Although each participant and their families were able to find differing levels of support through local non-profit organizations, they still felt alone while learning English and navigating the Canadian school system.

In the previous chapter, I shared research on the positives of peer mentorship and buddy systems, yet Canadian schools have not adopted a system or policy to support all newcomers and ELLs with a partner or mentor. I refuse to share my dreams for a school climate using a deficit lens or naming ideas using the scarce amount of resources schools have. I instead dream of offering each newcomer student a supportive friend or mentor who can acclimate them to the school's processes and the education system at large. By pairing an existing student with a newcomer student, belonging and inclusion can also occur at the start of the school entry, instead of struggling later as some of my participants did.

I remember Beth saying "it's more of like a village thing. The more support you have, the better, I would say." I hope that our path forward leaves no newcomer to grasp our school system alone. No, I don't hope. I expect that compassion and the existing evidence of creating belonging prevail against a system that has left refugees hoping for just "somebody".

Reconceptualizing Language and the Refugee

I previously used the words "flip the script" and will use them once more when speaking to discourses of gratitude. As established in earlier chapters, the problematic language surrounding governments' messaging when accepting refugees has detrimental effects to their belonging. I will once more share the words of a UNHCR representative who cautioned refugees to "be careful not to come across as sounding ungrateful" (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012, p. 54).

I wish to flip the script on this message. Who should really be grateful for accepting refugees? Is it really the refugees who are forced to flee their homes or the countries that create the very existence of the refugee? To understand how gratitude amongst nation states has been conceptualized, I will offer the words of Mountz who shared that the International Organization of Migration (IOM) which operates at the intersection of nation-states

creates networks across governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental actors. Within this nexus, the IOM is able to 'regulate' migration through seeming egalitarianism that enforces the 'rights' of migrants and marks the transformations of citizenship, moving away from notions of citizenship as a right, to citizenship as a gift. (2011, p. 34)

To answer my question around who should be grateful, I wish to elaborate on how a refugee is constructed.

Wars created by the West have been long documented along with the refugee crisis that follows suit. The Oxford University Forced Migration Review Publication shared that

wars by Western powers in Iraq and Afghanistan…made those

two countries the largest sources of refugees…and the 'war on terror'

which triggered a wave of new attempts to restrict, control and deny

entry. As night follows day, the new apparatus of control led to efforts by

migrants and refugees to find other ways to enter. (Bundy, 2016, p. 5-6)

The Canadian government's (2024c, p. 1) website states that it "is not as easy to define 'refugee' as one might expect. In its simplest meaning, a refugee is a person who flees his or her home country because of fears of persecution or abuse, particularly by their own government. However, the meaning is affected by political change, public perception and history". I would argue it is easy to define and that the political change mentioned should be what is deeply focused on.

So, I wish to flip the script here and reconceptualize the language we use when accepting refugees into our country. Perhaps, instead of enforcing the gratitude of refugees, Western

powers that are involved in the wars which play a role in creating refugees should be more concerned in fulfilling their promise to welcoming them.

The Lie We Tell

By now, I am hoping you have been able to decipher the meaning of the title of this paper. You may have thought the "The Lie We Tell" alludes to a few different things: that refugees are welcome here in Canada, that they are treated fairly, that our schools are ready for them perhaps. It can be all these things. The title "The Lie We Tell" refers to the discrepancy between Canada's public declaration of being a welcoming safe haven for refugees and the harsher, often unwelcoming reality that many refugees face upon arrival.

Here is the thing: I hope this lie becomes a thing of the past. That after countless research projects, literature seeped in evidence of how to support refugees, and recommendations made to the ministry, I hope our schools begin to change. I dream of a world where, instead of refugees adapting to our culture and struggling to feel Canadian enough, we adapt schools to reflect their needs and cultures. I hope that the language used to describe refugees shifts from pathologizing to humanized, that schools move from static and deficit-oriented to reflexive and socially just climates. Above all else, I hope that the lies we tell become a distant past and one day I wake up to a Canada that gratefully welcomes newcomers and is ready to meet their needs.

I write this final chapter on the week of World Refugee Day. I am not sure if this is a true coincidence or something meaningful, but I do know that these stories deserve to be voiced. The theme for World Refugee Day this year is 'Home,' so I will leave you with excerpts from the following poem by Warsan Shire of the same title. I hope by reading this, that if you have ever met the refugee experience with skepticism, heard voices wishing them away, or struggled to comprehend their choices, you will instead find empathy in understanding that we have not faced

even a shadow of their hardships. Each one of my participants deserves what every human

should have: the right to an education, to find their passions, to dream and not run for safety, and

finally a safe haven called home.

Home

no one leaves home unless

home is the mouth of a shark

you only run for the border

when you see the whole city running as well…

you have to understand,

that no one puts their children in a boat

unless the water is safer than the land

no one burns their palms

under trains

beneath carriages

no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck feeding on newspaper unless the miles

travelled

means something more than journey.

no one crawls under fences…

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear saying-

leave,

run away from me now

i dont know what i've become but i know that anywhere

is safer than here

(Warsan Shire, 2009)

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