

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

Hiba Berek, PhD

Curriculum Studies – The University of Western Ontario

ABSTRACT

Exploring the experiences of Syrian refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and their teachers in English and Literacy Development (ELD) classrooms is an emergent topic of interest in the field of education in Canada. There is a need to understand the ways in which ELD teachers respond to the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of Syrian refugee SIFEs and create learning opportunities for those students while supporting them emotionally, socially and academically. Thus, the aim of this research is to explore the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario. The research focused on (a) exploring classroom practices and supportive pedagogies, specifically caring and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) pedagogies enacted in ELD classrooms, (b) social structures and power relationships reflected in ELD classrooms, and (c) resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT. The major research question was *What is the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee students with interrupted formal education and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario?* The theoretical framework drew on critical theory, CRT, and Ethics of Care (EoC). The methods used are semi-structured interviews, documentation and the researcher's reflective notes. The analysis revealed (a) the complexity of the nature of Syrian refugee SIFEs' and their teachers' experiences in ELD classrooms, (b) caring and CRT practices enacted in ELD classrooms, (c) power and privileging, and (d) resources and constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT. Key recommendations included embedding equality and diversity in the ELD curriculum and putting more emphasis on caring and CRT in ELD classrooms and teacher education programs. The practical and theoretical recommendations aim to disrupt deficient institutional and classroom practices and emphasize supportive pedagogies in ELD classrooms.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

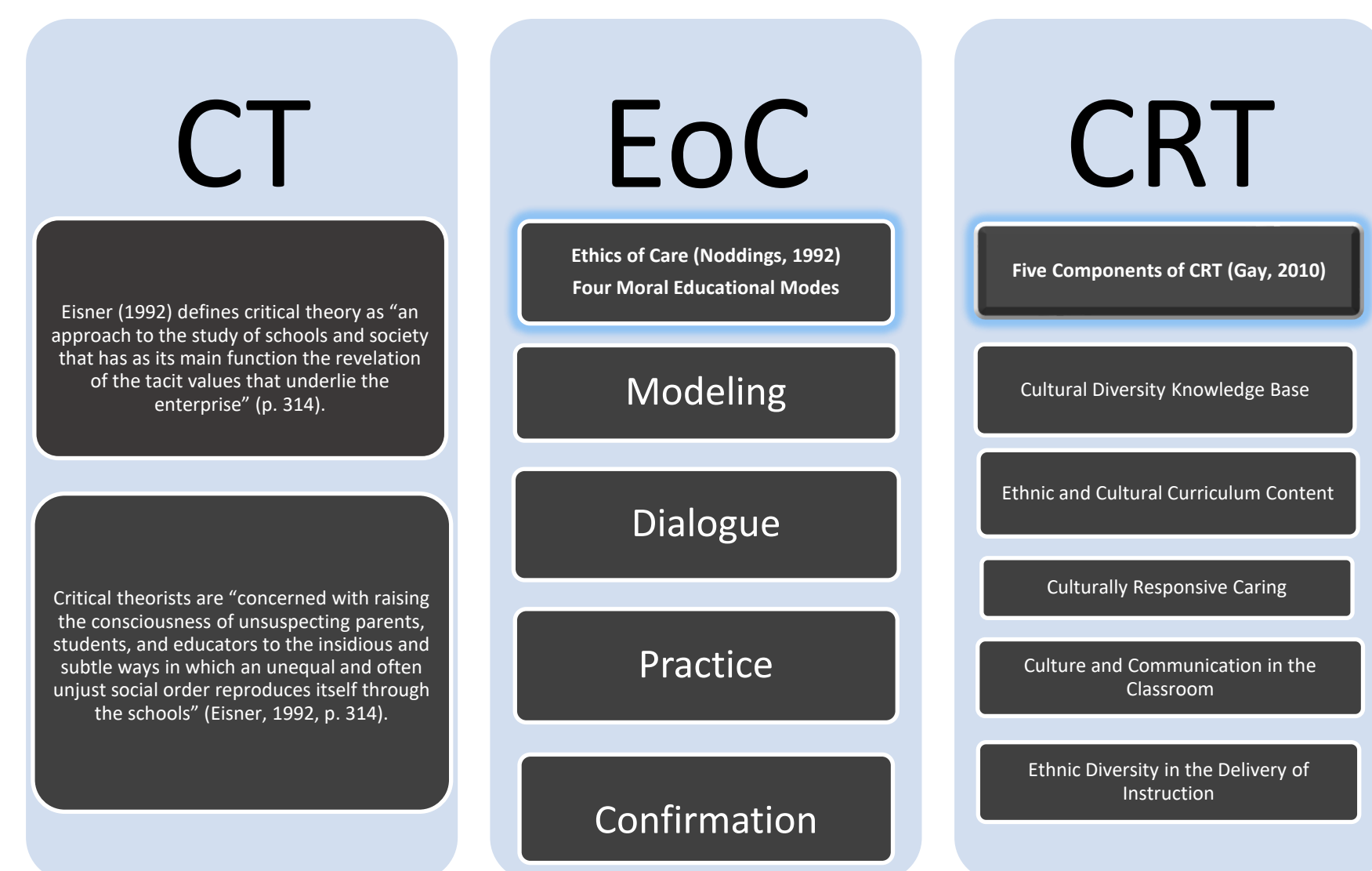
- Explore the nature of the experiences of high school Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario.
- Examine teaching and learning experiences, resources and constraints to supportive pedagogies, ways in which knowledge is created and validated and ways in which identities are collectively negotiated in the classroom.
- Stress the importance of considering the social, emotional and academic adjustments and fund processes of Syrian SIFEs and allow a more holistic view of this group of students that goes beyond academic achievement.
- Give voice to Syrian refugee SIFEs and ELD teachers.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

- War in Syria - 2011 until present time
- 4.8 million Syrians were displaced (UNHCR, 2016)
- Canada's response to the Syrian refugee crisis



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Qualitative Design – Case Study

A qualitative approach endorses an **interpretive practice** that makes the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Exploratory Case Study

- Creswell (2014) defines case studies as a design of inquiry through which the inquirer develops a thick description and "an in-depth analysis of a case" (p. 14) followed by analysis of the data for themes or issues (Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1994).
- Based on the study research questions, the unit of analysis in this research is the critical incident of **group experiences of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms**.
- Those experiences include ELD classroom practices and pedagogies, enablers and constraints to supportive pedagogies, and teacher-student relationships.

- Participants: 10 high school Syrian refugee SIFEs
5 ELD teachers, 1 ESL teacher, 1 Social Worker

Materials

- In-depth Semi Structured Interviews
- Document Data
- Researcher's Reflective Notes

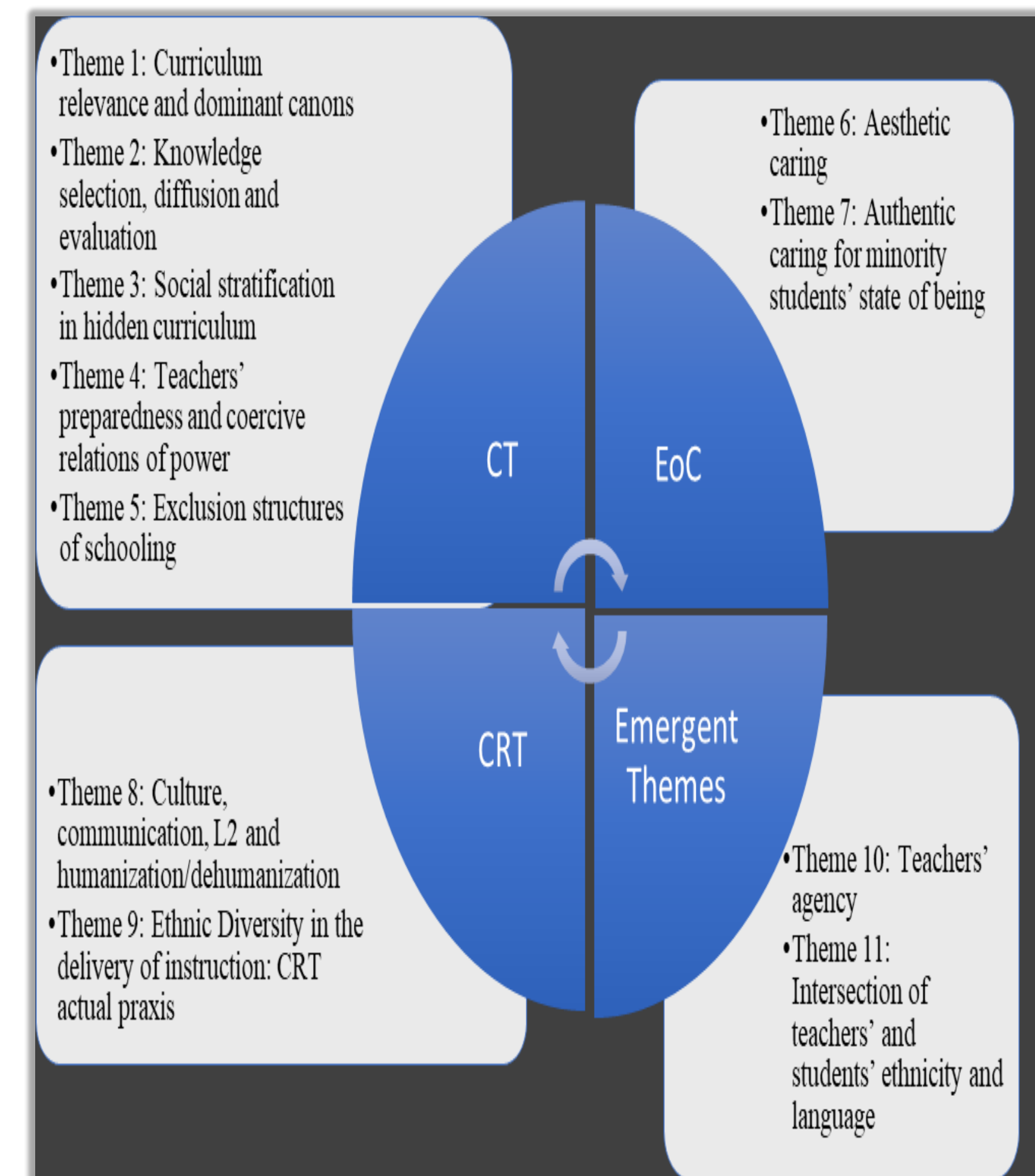
TEACHERS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Document Data e.g., Leveled book – Silent e

Researcher's Reflective Notes

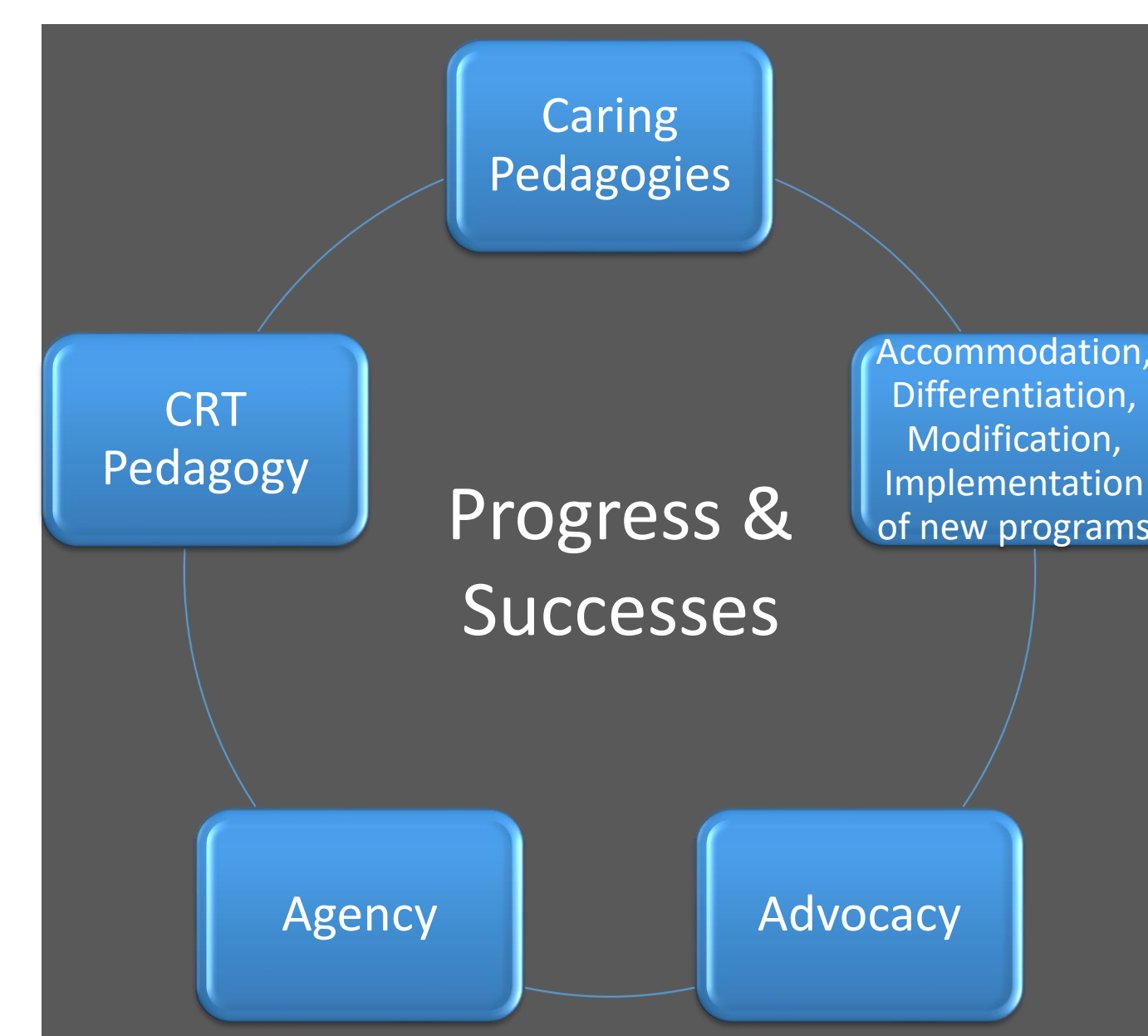
RESULTS

Themes Generated From the Study



ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

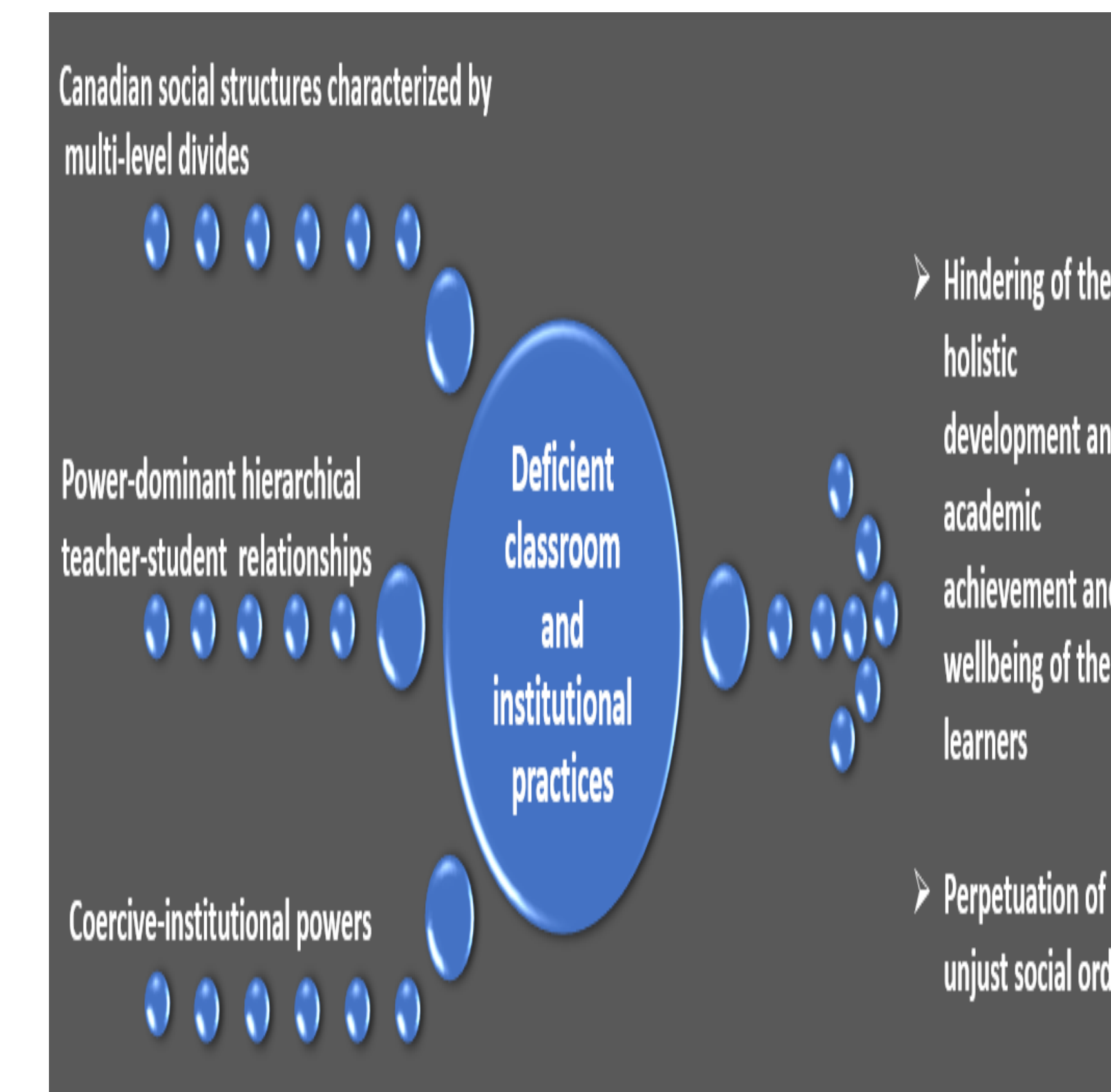
RQ # 1 What practices and pedagogies are enacted in ELD classrooms?



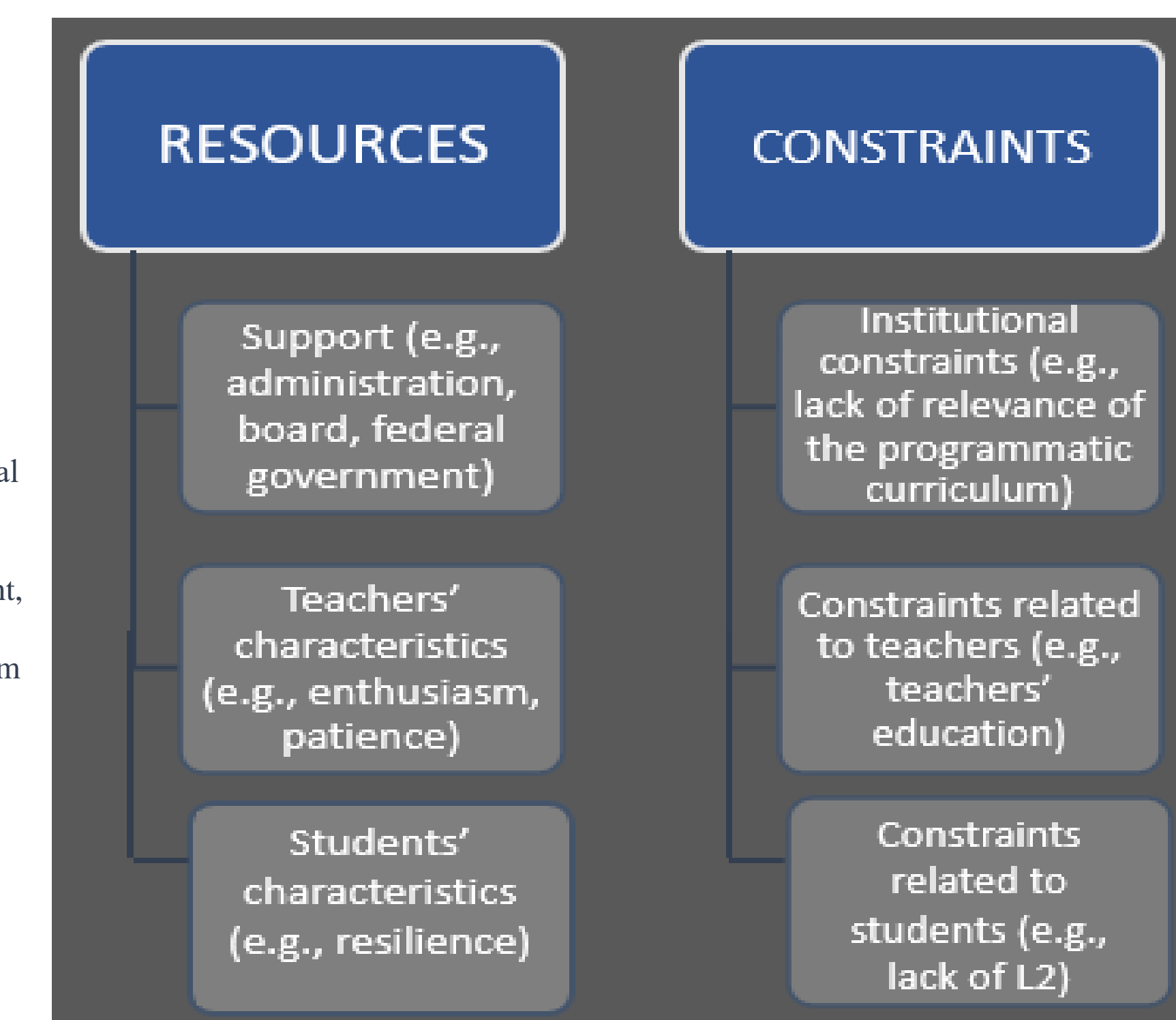
Such supportive pedagogies enhance Syrian refugee SIFEs' social and emotional development, academic accomplishments and wellbeing (Gay, 2010; Noddings, 2003)

RESULTS

RQ # 2 What social structures and power relationships are reflected in ELD classrooms?



RQ # 3 what are the resources and constraints affecting the implementation of caring and culturally responsive teaching practices in ELD classrooms?



CONCLUSIONS

- The findings from this study contribute to scholarly knowledge by filling a gap created by the dearth of research related to the nuances and complexities of the classroom experiences and practices of Syrian refugee SIFEs and their teachers in ELD classrooms in Ontario (e.g., content and knowledge processes, teacher-student relationships, culture and structures in the classrooms, school structures and programmatic constraints).
- Findings from this study showed:
 - ❖ Enactment of supportive pedagogies specifically caring and CRT
 - ❖ Advanced caring teacher-student relationships
 - ❖ Resources to the implementation of caring and CRT pedagogies (e.g., advanced teacher-student relationships, teachers' empathy)
 - ❖ Deficient classroom and institutional practices
 - ❖ Power hierarchical relationships
 - ❖ Constraints to the implementation of caring and CRT pedagogies (e.g., lack of teachers' preparedness to teach ELD)

IMPLICATIONS

- This study informs education practice and theory e.g., ELD curriculum making, curriculum enactment and classroom pedagogies, and teacher education curriculum, programs and instructions.
- This research redirects the attention of teachers and stakeholders to the importance of the ethic of authentic care and CRT pedagogies in the education of refugee students with interrupted formal education in Canada.

REFERENCES

Amin, N. (2018). *Successes and Challenges of Syrian Refugee Children in Canada: Language and Literacy*. Retrieved from <https://scholars.uwo.ca/etd/2066>

Clark, K. (2017). *Are We Ready? Examining Teachers' Experiences Supporting the Transition of Newly-Arrived Syrian Refugee Students to the Canadian Elementary Classroom*. (Master's Thesis). Retrieved from <https://rspac.library.uutoronto.ca/handle/1807/76952>

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Eisner, E. W. (1992). Curriculum Ideologies. In P. W. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Curriculum* (pp. 302–326). New York: Toronto, Macmillan Pub. Co.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: an alternative approach to education* (Vol. 8). Teachers College Press.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2016). *Syria regional refugee response*. Retrieved from <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

Wolcott, H. T. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Yau, M. (1995). *Refugee students in Toronto schools: an exploratory study*. Vol. no. 211. Toronto Board of Education, Research Services.

Yu, H. (2012). *The language learning of refugee students in Canadian public elementary and secondary schools*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2002&context=etd>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACTS

Hiba Berek, PhD
Curriculum Studies
The University of Western Ontario

Berek, H. (2020). Exploring the Experiences of High School Syrian Refugee Students with Interrupted Formal Education and their Teachers in ELD Classrooms. *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 7532. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/7532>

Thesis Supervisors: Dr. Immaculate Namukasa, PhD
Dr. Mi Song Kim, PhD