

**SUPPORTING REFUGEE- AND MIGRANT-BACKGROUND STUDENTS  
IN A CANADIAN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM: CHALLENGES AND  
PROMISING TEACHING PRACTICES**

by

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Learning challenges and promising teaching practices

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## **Abstract**

Canada has a long history of resettlement of refugee and protected persons, and between 2015 and 2019, over 225,000 were resettled (IRCC, 2020). Many refugee background newcomers to Canada (42%) are school-aged children and youth, including students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) (IRCC, 2017); many have experienced triple trauma due to forced migration, during transition, and upon resettlement in Canada (Stewart et al. 2019). This lack of opportunity to attend school and traumatic experiences presents daunting challenges for refugee-background students and their teachers who may lack resources and preparation to meet their complex needs (Stewart et al., 2019). This study seeks to contribute to better understandings in this area through its exploration of what an expert elementary school educator, together with her team-teaching colleagues, perceived as the challenges and successful approaches to language and literacy education for Grade 6/7 refugee-and-migrant background students (RMBS). The study also explored the potential of multiliteracies pedagogies to leverage the multimodal communicative repertoires of RMBS, as they engaged in a cross-curricular unit of study in their mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom. The theoretical frameworks drawn from were a socio-cultural perspective of literacy, multiliteracies pedagogy and learning by design, as well as conceptions of identity and investment. Data was gathered through field notes, participant observation, audio recording of classroom interactions, student artifacts and texts, and semi-structured focus groups and teacher interviews. The data collected was inductively and deductively thematically analyzed. Findings illuminated the teaching team of expert educators' perceptions of the challenges of working with RMBS students, as well as successful educational approaches to support RMBS and enhance their achievement. The findings also contributed to a better understanding of the development of innovative pedagogical practices that engage and enhance these youths' full

communicative repertoires and identities towards academic achievement, social and emotional learning, and literacy engagement.

## **Lay Summary**

The present study sought to explore a group of experienced teachers' perceptions of the language and literacy learning needs and challenges of refugee-and-migrant background students (RMBS) in elementary classrooms and their views on successful educational approaches for these learners. The study also explored how one of the teachers put into practice a social studies and language arts project to promote RMBS' engagement in literacy and their subject-area learning. Findings showed there is a connection between the teacher's perceptions of the challenges and successful educational approaches and the teaching approaches used. Implications are made for classroom instruction that connects with and develops RMBS' background knowledge, interests, and the full range of ways they communicate (e.g., languages, images, gestures, and art works), as well as developing their positive personal and social identities and competency.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the original, unpublished work of the author, Denise Blanch Zelada. The study reported in this scholarly paper falls under the umbrella of the project funded by the Social Studies and Humanities Research Council and entitled Language and Literacy Learning Among Refugee- and Migrant-Background Children and Youth in Canadian Classrooms. The UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board approved the fieldwork reported in this investigation under the certificate # H19-01074.

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>ELL</b>	English language learner
<b>LA</b>	Language Arts
<b>NLG</b>	New London Group
<b>RMBS</b>	Refugee- and migrant-background student
<b>SEL</b>	Socio-emotional learning
<b>SS</b>	Social Studies
<b>SSHRC</b>	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

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Kathryn and Brenda, thank you for your trust, for opening your doors, and especially for showing me so much about real life and real teaching in such a short time.

And to all my friends in Vancouver who have become family, I thank God for the day He connected our paths. I am blessed to have you all in my life.

## **Dedication**

To all the **Kingsway Community School** staff and teachers  
For showing me the real meaning of being a committed and loving educator,  
especially for **Elisa** and **Milena** and their wonderful students,  
who opened the doors not only of their classrooms but also of their hearts,

and

to my **Nicolas**

For believing in my dreams and giving me the strength to achieve them,  
and for never letting go of my hand.

I could not have done this without you by my side.

*Hakuna Matata*

# Prologue

## 1. Setting the Context

The qualitative case study reported in this thesis is an integral part of a larger Social Studies and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project entitled: *Language and Literacy Learning among Refugee- and Migrant-Background Children and Youth in Canadian Classrooms* awarded to Dr. Maureen Kendrick, Principal Investigator, and Dr. Margaret Early, Co-investigator, at the University of British Columbia. The data collection for my case study was conducted precisely at the time of the COVID-19 global pandemic outbreak that brought unprecedented changes. As data collection was ongoing on the SSHRC project sites, schools in British Columbia were closed (March 17, 2020) and the Office of Research Ethics at the University of British Columbia prohibited all in-person/face-to-face human participant research. In consultation with my supervisory committee, Drs. Early and Kendrick, taking into consideration the data I had collected to date at the classroom site of my study, or had played a role in gathering at the school site, my study, as originally proposed, was adapted and redesigned to facilitate its timely completion. The case study, as restructured, is comprehensively reported below. However, to better situate and contextualize my thesis, in this prologue, I will first present a brief summary of the larger SSHRC-funded study that motivated my study; next, I will provide a succinct overview of my study as originally designed and, to some extent, undertaken, together with a short narrative of the background to the study's redesign.

## 2. The Larger SSHRC-Funded Project

The SSHRC funded project (2017-2022) set out to investigate the language and literacy education of youth from refugee backgrounds, which was, until very recently, a notably under-researched population. In the context of the study, the population considered was extended to

children from refugee backgrounds and included marginalized “at-risk” migrant-background learners. Cummins et al. (2015) report:

The international research literature on educational disadvantage typically identifies three categories of students who are at risk of underachievement: (a) linguistically diverse students whose L1 is different from the dominant language of school and society, (b) students from low SES backgrounds, and (c) students from communities that have been marginalized or excluded from educational and social opportunities (often over generations) as a result of discrimination in the wider society (e.g., many indigenous communities around the world). (p. 562).

The students in the project’s research sites for the most part fall under all three categories of students who are at risk of underachievement. This is the case in the site of study for my research, where I worked first as a volunteer and then as graduate research assistant. Educational responses to the underachievement of students in these categories remain, with notable exceptions, unacceptable, as they have a high rate of ‘disappearance’ from Canadian schools (Gunderson, 2007). The larger study is situated in schools in Ontario, where there are two research sites, one secondary and the other post-secondary, and in British Columbia where there are three research sites, one elementary and two secondary schools. The summary of the successful SSHRC research proposal (2016) states:

The study addresses three urgent needs: (a) to help education systems and community groups understand how to support youth refugees to catch up to their same-age peers in school as quickly as possible; (b) to support youth refugees, for whom limited prior schooling, limited first language literacy and challenges of academic language learning (compounded by socio-emotional challenges) often present a barrier to learning, social

adjustment and academic success; and (c) to develop innovative policies and pedagogical practices that engage with the digital, multimodal literacy practices of today's youth.

To address those needs, the larger SSHRC study investigated the following questions:

1. What do teachers, principals, system leaders and settlement workers identify as unique language and literacy learning needs and challenges of youth refugees in secondary school classrooms?
2. What characterizes literacy practices of youth refugees? That is, what are their everyday and school-based literacy practices across visual, aural, and linguistic (multiple language) modes?
3. What are the most appropriate and empowering school responses, including language and literacy policies and pedagogical practices, to enable youth refugees to meet cross-curricular expectations and use language and literacy for social impact and identity affirmation?

The original study, as planned, contributed primarily to addressing question 3. In some sites, the research employs an innovative methodological approach that engages with refugee background youth as co-investigators of their own literacy practices, lives and experiences, in and out of school contexts. The original design of my case study (see Appendix A for the sequence of lessons and activities as planned) involved older students in Grade 6/7 as co-investigators in a 'buddy-reading' unit (Appendix B) with their Kindergarten buddies. The Grade 6/7 migrant- and refugee-background youth were going to start by reading and analyzing the picture book *The Matchbox Diaries* (Fleischman, 2013) during their Social Studies (SS) period, as part of a larger unit on migration so as to reflect on and comprehend the migration and family issues, as presented in the book. The migration unit was co-designed and co-taught by the classroom teacher and this

researcher. Although situated within the social studies units, it was designed to be a cross-curricular unit of study that addressed the BC Curriculum content and competencies learning standards of social studies and language arts, as well as the social and emotional learning of the students. We were able to cover half of the unit of study and data were collected in the form of field notes, audio recordings of the lessons and also of the students in table group discussions, worksheets, artifacts and interviews with the teacher. After the cross-curricular unit on *The Matchbox Diaries* was completed, the Grade 6/7 students ('big buddies') were going to be trained on reading-aloud techniques, for use in the 'buddy reading' sessions, and guided on the process of building their own multimodal diary, as a historical record of significant events in their lives, together with their little buddies. This part of the study aimed to bring in the students' diverse experiences from their in- and out-of-school lives and the possibility of promoting and expanding the full range of their communicative repertoires. Another important objective was to place the big buddies in a position of leadership and competence, giving them the chance to leave behind the 'deficit view' that some had of themselves, especially regarding their reading skills and to position them as 'research assistants' helping with observations about their little buddies and reflections about what was or was not working. Therefore, we wanted to empower these students and help them become more confident, academically competent, courageous, and willing-to-act individuals (Gay, 2018).

However, due to the COVID pandemic and the abrupt interruption of face-to-face classes in March 2020, we could not return to the school to work on the buddies' project; therefore, the study had to be redesigned. The new design had to consider the data that had been collected before the lockdown and look for the best way to investigate what the students and teachers had done until then. Fortunately, valuable data had been gathered from the teachers and the students, as the

sessions we had were demanding and intense, and the students were up to that challenge. However, it was determined that there was not enough data to comprehensively answer the original questions as stated below:

1. What is the pedagogic potential of a multimodal picture book project to leverage refugee-background youth's full range of communicative resources such that their academic (English Language Arts and Social Studies) and literacies competencies are enhanced and their identities affirmed?
2. What is the pedagogical potential of a multimodal, shared picture book, buddy reading project to promote and expand the full communicative repertoire that refugee-background kindergarten children and youth possess from their diverse lived experiences in and out of school?
3. What is the potential of a multimodal, buddy reading project to affirm the identities of refugee-background children and youth?

Therefore, it was decided to change the focus to include and address the teachers' perspectives of their principles and practices and investigate the pedagogical potential of the unit of study to the extent implemented, as stated in the original research question (no. 1), above.

As a research group, we had already collected data through various focus groups conducted at Kingsway Community School. Teachers from grades 1 to 7 had participated in these conversations, and they had shared some of their principles, beliefs and practices. Therefore, we thought it would be interesting to investigate (and thus illustrate) how these teachers work with this unique population of students in the classroom. The new study was then designed to identify the teachers' principles, beliefs, and practices but especially Elisa's (a pseudonym), the collaborating teacher with whom I worked during this whole project, together with the analysis of

the students' responses to the different tasks they participated in, in the cross-curricular unit on migration.

To gather more information about Elisa's practices, principles and beliefs, I interviewed her after the school year was over, and we went over the unit we designed together. We were able to analyze what worked and what could have been different, but mostly we spoke about why she did what she did when teaching, and we reflected on her journey as a teacher in this context.

Finding a way to redesign the study was not easy, mostly because I had already spent almost a year working with those children and youth. Trust was already there, and we were starting to create a healthy relationship. So, when I realized that it did not matter what I did, I was not going back to the school to work with them or even see them, I thought it would be hard to find another project that would move and motivate me as much as the first one. However, as I started focusing the study to include more focus on the teachers' work, I started to feel that this was something significant and something I really wanted to invest my time in. Often, we tend to neglect the people who have devoted themselves to seeing their students succeed and who do much more than just teaching. So, this redesign allowed me to learn more about their life-changing, transformational practices and to write about the work these teachers do, which is definitely inspiring and extraordinary.

### 3. Researcher's Background Experience

I have been working for the past 15 years as an English language teacher in EFL contexts with primary, secondary, and adult learners. However, my greatest passion has always been working with adolescents, as I believe that it is a life-changing time in the life of a person and if we give them the adequate tools and support them, we can see them as successful adults in the future. I have always been interested in the role that students' emotions and identity affirmation

have on the learning process and how important it is to give space to creating positive personal and cultural identities and social and emotional competencies as much as it is to develop intellectual and communicative ones.

I had the opportunity to mentor a group of teachers, when I was a principal in an international school in Santiago, Chile, and at that time I was really interested in working with the teachers on the understanding and development of projects that would target not only our students' cognitive and linguistic skills and competencies, but also objectives that targeted their identities, emotions and the relationships between these two aspects of schooling. It was gratifying to realize how many of the teachers I mentored really understood what I was advocating, and especially months later when I heard them talk about how their classes had improved and how much easier it was then to work with that group of students.

I came to Canada with the idea of opening my horizons and my ways of seeing education, and language and literacies teaching and learning in particular, but I must admit I was in shock for some time. During my MA degree at the University of British Columbia, everything that I started to listen to, to read about, and to learn was very different from what I had done for more than 13 years. English-only policies in the classroom, focusing lessons on academic examinations, extensive written tests, and so on, sounded so retrograde when I started reading about multimodality (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a; Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2000; New London Group, 1996) translanguaging (Garcia & Li, 2014), funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al. 2005), identity texts (Cummins & Early, 2011) and many other constructs and pedagogical practices new to me.

I was challenged in every possible way, and sometimes it was tough for me to understand the concepts that were being explained and implemented so naturally by many teachers in my new context. However, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to start working as a Graduate Teaching

Assistant in the Teaching English Language Learners (TELL) in mainstream classrooms course for teacher candidates at the University of British Columbia and had the chance of reading and becoming socialized to everything that was implemented and discussed in that class, including the new B.C curriculum. I felt that a whole new vision of education started opening its doors just in front of me and it was the perfect combination to what I have felt made a difference in the classroom for so many years, which was the relationships we built with our students.

Before I took on the role of a graduate research assistant, I had over the period of 7 months (two academic years/terms) been volunteering at the research site, an elementary school in the Greater Metro Vancouver area that has a high immigrant and refugee-background student population. So, once I had the chance to work directly with the immigrant and refugee-background youth (and better understand their literacy practices, and their teachers' pedagogical practices), I had a much deeper understanding of the local context. I also gained a better understanding, from my personal experiences and perspectives, as an international graduate student, of the challenges involved in becoming socialized to a culturally different educational system, with different values, beliefs and practices. With this information, to contextualize the qualitative case study which constitutes my master's degree research project, the comprehensive report of the study, as ultimately realized, is presented in what follows in this thesis.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background of the Research Problem

According to the United Nations (UNHCR), more than 79 million people have been forcibly displaced from their country of birth and those numbers will continue to increase over the next decades (UNHCR, June, 2020 ). Additionally, it is very likely that a large percentage of those people would have experienced violence or persecution as they fled from war zones and experienced the horror of war from the ‘front row.’ Traumas resulting not only from pre-settlement experiences, but, also from the transitioning process and from the resettlement experiences are also reported (Stewart et al., 2019). A recent scoping review of the literature on supporting refugee background students in Canada (Ratković et al., 2017) attests that, “Refugee students continue to experience socio-psychological challenges in Canadian schools” (p. 18), while many educators, systems leaders, and support workers lack the competencies to address these challenges. Settling in a new country and starting a new life in a conflict-free country is something that most of these families may have dreamt of for a long time. However, settlement can be very hard for some, because apart from having to adjust to a completely new language and culture, they have to face many other adjustment challenges (McBrien, 2005; Shapiro et al., 2018) such as insecure housing, lack of jobs, emotional stress, financial insecurity, discrimination, and negative stereotypes, as well as feeling isolated and experiencing problems with education (Mc Brien et al, 2017; Stewart et al., 2019).

Canadian classrooms have long been welcoming migrant- and refugee-background students. Statistics Canada (2017) reports, “in 2016, close to 2.2 million children under the age of 15, or 37.5% of the total population of children, had at least one foreign-born parent.” With respect to resettled refugees and asylum claimants, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

Canada (IRCC), in recent years, Canada admitted 151, 510 resettled refugees between January, 2015 and January, 2020. Moreover, the number of asylum claimants has increased dramatically from about 16,000 in 2015 to over 50,000 in 2017 and in the calendar year 2019, there were 64,050 refugee claimants (Government of Canada, 2019). The most common regions of origin for resettled refugees were the Middle East (Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran), various African countries (Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Somalia, Central African Republic), Pakistan and Myanmar. Many refugee-background newcomers to Canada are school-aged children (e.g., approximately 42 % of resettled refugees are under 17 years old) who are predominantly students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) (IRCC, 2018). It is necessary to consider that to educate a refugee background child may be complex and difficult, requiring coordination from several people and organizations working in conjunction (Prior & Niesz, 2013).

Another argument that is made regarding the need to pay closer attention to this group has to do with the difficulties, as mentioned earlier, that some refugees have when it comes to resettlement and to the adjustment to the dominant parent/family norms of North American societies (Mapp & Kutner, 2013; Prior & Niesz, 2013; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). For example, in a recent Canadian study (Stewart et al, 2019) conducted with Syrian children and youth in Winnipeg and Calgary:

Findings revealed that many refugees experience triple trauma as a result of forced migration, having experienced trauma in their country of origin, during transition, and again upon resettlement in Canada. Further challenges included difficulties in acquiring a new language, interrupted schooling, lack of resources for teachers who felt unprepared for

the complexities of student needs, and racism and discrimination experienced by youth trying to integrate with their Canadian peers. (p.55)

Therefore, it is important for educators, settlement workers and community members to recognize the challenges associated with resettlement, at the same time as they make an effort to understand these particular groups and families' language, traditions, ideas and expectations, in order to guide them in this new setting (Foner, 1997; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

As Shapiro et al. (2018) have noted, however, there has been limited information regarding transition to school and academic achievement specifically for refugee-background children and youth, because of a general tendency in educational research, "to lump students with migrant backgrounds into one group, for example, 'immigrant and refugee students', ... or 'English learners'" (p. 3). Moreover, relatedly, as Sarr & Morrelson (2010) emphasize:

Educators must "refrain from essentializing" refugees or ignoring differences among co-nationals; students' "personal histories and current needs must take precedence" (p. 553). The available literature signals "the importance of knowing individual refugee students and providing appropriate psychosocial support" (p. 563).

Hence, there is an urgent need to address more specifically the multiple challenges and promising pedagogies regarding the learning, social and emotional needs of refugee-background learners. While recognizing that it is important to note that these learners possess highly diverse 'Funds of Knowledge' (González et al., 2005), as well as the important strengths, including of character, that refugee background children, youth and their families possess and bring to the school (Roxas, 2011).

While there has been increased interest in recent years, this remains an under-researched area in language and literacies education; however, there is an urgency to meet these students'

distinct needs. These last few years, a large number of privately sponsored refugees are being resettled into smaller towns and cities (Rural Development Institute, 2016), and the Canadian Government uses immigration as a strategic plan to grow and develop regional centres (Keung, 2019). Therefore, there is a developing trend of refugee-background families to settle in regions where educators are less experienced working with this group of learners.

This qualitative case study contributes to the extant, growing literature (e.g., Bajaj & Suresh, 2018; Beauregard et al., 2017; Block et al., 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Roxas, 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2018, Stewart & Martin, 2018) that addresses the unique needs and challenges of children and youth refugees in elementary and secondary school classrooms, particularly as they relate to language and literacy learning. It also explores the pedagogical principles and promising practices that expert educators employ, as they design programs and curricular units of study for English language learners (ELLs) from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including Canadian-born students, many of whom (19.6% of Canadians according to Statistics Canada, 2017) speak more than one language at home. In many schools in the Metro Vancouver area the majority of students are English language learners.

## 1.2 Research Questions

Specifically, this study seeks to explore what an expert elementary school educator, together with her team-teaching colleagues, perceived as the challenges and successful educational approaches and strategies for language and literacies learning of Grade 6/7 refugee-background youth. It also explores the potential of multiliteracies pedagogies to leverage the multimodal communicative repertoires of youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds, as they engage in a language and cross-curricular unit of study (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) in their mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom. The study is intended to contribute to a better

understanding of the characteristics of the learning spaces that support refugee- and migrant-background students and the development of innovative pedagogical practices that engage and enhance these youths' full range of communicative repertoires and identities towards academic achievement, social and emotional learning, and literacy engagement.

It examines the following research questions:

1. What does an expert educator (classroom teacher), together with her team-teaching colleagues, perceive as the teaching and learning challenges and promising language and content pedagogical practices for supporting refugee- and migrant-background students in a diverse elementary classroom?
2. What is the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross-curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) for the literacy engagement and content curricular attainment of refugee- and migrant-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom?

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

As I can attest from personal teaching experiences and from the research literature (Auerbach, 2016; Lee, 2010), there remain many schools and classrooms in which an English-only attitude and school policies maintain, alongside traditional print-based notions of literacy regardless of Provincial guiding policies for English language learning and broader multimodal notions of multiple literacy recommendations to the contrary. Likewise, the tendency to attribute academic underachievement by some categories of ELLs and provide forms of 'remediation' based on 'deficits' views of the learners, their families and communities, unfortunately maintains (Cummins & Early, 2011). However, meaningful components of the background experiences and knowledge of these vulnerable groups are transformed into educational disadvantages only when

the educational setting does not respond appropriately to their background experiences and previous knowledge (Cummins, 2014). Relatedly, some scholars (e.g., Cummins & Early, 2011; Cummins et al. 2015; Early & Marshall, 2008; Marshall & Toohey, 2010; Pacheco & Smith, 2015) have shown the potential for responding appropriately by utilizing young bi/multilingual children's multiple languages and modes of meaning-making in creating oral and/or written texts in which learners invest their identities and share their understandings and experiences. While there has been some research in this area with refugee-background learners (e.g., Ajayi, 2012; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Karam, 2018; Wawra, 2018), this work has for the most part been undertaken with older youth rather than elementary aged or child learners.

Therefore, the main significance of this study is two-fold: 1) to gain a better understanding of the teaching and learning challenges and promising language and content pedagogical practices, for supporting refugee-background youth in a diverse elementary classroom; and 2) to investigate the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross-curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) for the literacy engagement and content curricular attainment of migrant- and refugee-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom.

#### 1.4 Definition of Key Terms

**Community School:** The Community Schools Blog (2020) defines community schools as a neighbourhood center, where families, students, teachers, staff, residents, and local businesses can come together to build a reliable and kind community. This is a space open to everyone in the neighbourhood and where everyone can go to make new friends, learn, develop, and grow. Community schools are no different from other public elementary schools in that they run full day academic programs and classes are taught by certified teachers. Similarly, they are catchment

schools within the school districts and students can attend these schools based on their home address.

**Elementary School:** According to British Columbia Ministry of Education (2016) and its Newcomer Welcome Letter, elementary schools in BC usually register students in Kindergarten (age 5) and from 1st to 7th grade (ages 6-12).

**Refugee:** The (UNHCR) website (2020) defines a *refugee* as someone who has been forced to leave his/her country and who is afraid to return due to war or persecution.

**Mainstream School:** Mainstream schools are the traditional and most conventional form of schools present in North America's public school system. Children are divided into grades according to their ages and learn the same subjects and the same content as a group. They are graded according to a traditional grading scale that is applied to all students (Homeschool Base, 2020).

**Migrant:** The Canadian Council for Refugees (n.d.) defines *migrant* as someone who is not in their country of origin. Often, it is used for people who are on the move, who have a temporary status or do not have any status at all in the place where they live. However, as this site also mentions the term *economic migrant*, which is defined as a person who moves countries for a job or a better economic future, I will consider the term *migrant* as someone who was pushed away from their home country to find better opportunities –educational, economic, health– for him and his family.

**Refugee- and Migrant-Background Students (RMBS):** as the terms *refugee* and *migrant* should not define a person for the rest of their lives, I chose to use the term *refugee- and migrant-background students* (RMBS) because it shows that resident status is something circumstantial, not a label to be carried forever.

## 1.5 Organization of the Thesis

There are six chapters in this thesis. In Chapter 2, I explain my three theoretical frameworks: a socio-cultural perspective of language and literacy learning as social practice, the pedagogy of multiliteracies and the theories of identity and investment, together with the literature review relevant to my study: teaching youth from refugee background, multiliteracies pedagogies and culturally responsive teaching. In Chapter 3, I describe the research site and the participants in more detail together with the research methods, procedures, data collection, data analysis, and my positionality as a researcher. In Chapter 4, I present the general findings related to my first research question. In Chapter 5, I present the general findings related to my second research question. Finally, in Chapter 6, I summarize my findings, state the study's contributions and limitations, propose pedagogical implications, and make suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks and Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The thesis draws from three influential theoretical perspectives. The first of these is the socio-cultural perspective of language and literacy learning as social practice (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978); the second conceptual framework that influenced my study is the pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) and subsequent Learning by Design work by Cope and Kalantzis (2015); and the third is the theory of identity and investment (Norton, 2000; 2013), and the related construct of identity texts (Cummins & Early, 2011).

### **2.2 Language and Literacies Learning as Social Practice**

Knowledge and learning have been considered, for a long time, as independent of the contexts where they are acquired and practiced (Resnik, 1989). This view has assumed that it does not matter where something is learnt because the world in which learners interact is a static one. However, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human learning (1978) challenges this idea and views learning as a social process, where social interaction plays a fundamental role in humans' intellectual development. Vygotsky believed that individuals learned everything on two levels; the first one through the interaction with other people, and the second one when the socially acquired knowledge was mentally integrated. This is explained in this much cited quote:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57)

Hence, according to Vygotsky's ideas, cognitive development involves two mental processes: first on a social level, between individuals, and another that happens on the personal level, inside the individual; so, learning would be the internalization of those external experiences, but for this to occur, individuals would need to interact and have authentic relations with other individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, development and learning cannot be done in isolation, and as schools are one of the most important places of socialization throughout children's lives, it is crucial to consider this in our educational systems' curriculum and instructional approaches, especially when considering the diverse backgrounds that our students currently bring to our classrooms.

The old basics of literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a) have influenced the development of people who have been taught in a certain way and for a specific workplace economy and society. The old basics of literacy learning that involved understanding phonics, translating the sounds of speech into writing symbols, and reading has been considered a valuable decoding process that allows us to understand the meanings of written words; moreover, it has given an extra focus to textual formalities, including the proper use of spelling and grammar, privileging 'standard' forms of language. Being knowledgeable or skilful in these 'old basics' was thought to demonstrate how successful we were in the acquisition of literacy (Kalantzis et al., 2016). However, this view of literacy has become outdated and insufficient for the year 2020, as literacy involves many other aspects besides decontextualized language and print-based reading and writing. Therefore, when researchers started realizing the importance of the social context and the complexity of people's day to day lives, it was possible to understand that literacy practices are how people utilize language and other modes of meaning making and how they draw upon these practices throughout their lives. A fuller understanding of people's everyday literacy practices challenges and leaves

behind the assumption of people having some kind of deficit, being unskilled, without the knowledge or having “difficulties” doing something (Barton et al., 2007) that was associated with a lack of ‘old basic’ skills.

Understanding literacies and literacy learning as a social practice is a modern view. This view recognizes that the representation of meanings symbolized in multimodal, visual, written, and oral texts will always be socially constructed and situated (Street 1984). This reconceptualization of literacy came to the fore in the 1980s with the work of a group of researchers (Gee, 1989; Street, 1984) who claimed that literacy (or literacies) is and will always be learned within the social context of individuals and will depend on the particular situations in which it is learned. Therefore, literacies had to be understood from the perspective of the user and the learner, which is something that challenged the standard and traditional way of teaching and learning as an outdated ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) challenged the previous views and models of literacy. In 1984, Street published an ethnographic study of multiple literacy forms in Iran, which defied the autonomous model of literacy that theorizes literacy only in technical terms and sees it as independent of the social context in which it occurs. In turn, Street proposed an ideological view of literacy that understood literacy as intertwined with society's pre-existing structures and acknowledged the different cultural practices related to reading and writing in diverse contexts (Street, 1994) and provided a more culturally sensitive view of literacy, considering people's notions of being, identity, and knowledge (Street, 2003).

In 1983, Heath defined a "literacy event" as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretative processes" (Heath, 1983, p. 93), confining literacy to something observable and physical. However, to put a more

profound emphasis on the social practices and the reading and writing conceptions, Street created the concept “literacy practices” in 1984, and in 1988 he expanded the idea and took into consideration Heath's view of “events” together with the social models of literacy that people bring to different events which add meaning to them (Street, 1988, 2000, 2003). Hence, the concept "literacy practice" became more comprehensive as it was linked to the particular events of people's cultural and social activities, allowing deeper and individual meanings whenever they practiced them. Being ‘literate’ was not only about reading and writing texts but also about the conceptions people have about them and the things people do with them. (Street, 2000, 2003).

Barton (2006) states that literacy practices have to be understood as the general traditional methods of applying written language, which people will employ throughout their lives or “what people do with literacy” (p. 22). He also highlights that these practices include people’s attitudes, values, feelings and social relationships and how they understand, construct, talk about and make sense of literacy. He claims that literacy practices are internal and individual processes, but at the same time, they are social processes that connect people, and they include shared understandings and beliefs of the world such as ideologies and social identities. However, a dominant group's shared understandings and beliefs will always be considered the 'idealized' version that will allow the marginalization of others (Besnier & Street, 1994; Gee, 1989; Street, 2003). Hence, if we want to be accepted within a specific group and show that we are competent, “we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes” (Gee, 1989, p. 6). According to Gee (1989), literacy practices have to be understood beyond the connected and meaningful stretches of language (discourses) and put under the lenses of Discourses (with capital D). Those Discourses are almost like an “identity kit” that allows people to speak, act and write as expected in particular roles so that others will be able

to recognize. (Gee,1989). Therefore, children will be instructed and socialized throughout their lives into social practices by scaffolded exchanges with people who already know how the Discourse works (Gee,1989; Heath, 1983). But what happens when a child becomes part of the schooling system in a delayed stage and is not capable, at that moment in time, to comprehend the Discourses of the mainstream society, as realized in school contexts?

When refugee- and migrant-background students (RMBS) enter a new classroom for the first time, they do it with their own set of Discourses, which they have learnt from their closest context. However, most of the time, the Discourse they bring with them is not the one accepted or promoted in that new setting because teachers tend to perpetuate the “mainstream” classroom behaviour when it comes to reading, writing, and assessing (Heath, 1983). When only the mainstream view is perpetuated, and the newcomers’ visions are not considered, they come to be seen as problematic, incapable of achieving what is expected of them and therefore marginalized (Faulstich & Gutierrez, 2006).

However, RMBS bring a lot with them and have a lot to offer. They come with different linguistic repertoires, experiential background knowledge and lived experiences, together with their attributes and talents; therefore, it is our role as teachers to help them thrive and show what they know to the rest of their community. They have significant assets that their classmates do not have, and those are the ones that should be considered if we want to strengthen their identity as learners and make them feel successful. Some of these assets are speaking, reading, and writing skills in the native language, outside school literacy skills, translation roles, cultural funds of knowledge and unique life experiences (Echevarría et al., 2017).

### 2.3 Multiliteracies (What and How) and Multimodality

For decades, the educational K-12 curriculum in North America has mainly considered Eurocentric views, benchmarks, and values, which do not reflect the knowledge and experiences of the culturally diverse students in the classrooms (Guo, 2018), and has considered the teaching of English literacy using only the English language (Cummins, 2009). These types of policies have made educational participation even more difficult for newly arrived culturally diverse students, who, too commonly, start their education positioned as underachievers and deficit learners.

Therefore, a new focus and a new approach to literacy were needed to address the social, cultural, and technological contexts of rapid and constant changes and so the pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996) was articulated. This pedagogy starts from the belief that there is more than just one literacy and claims that literacies are composed of modes other than language and that according to the culture and the context, they “have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects” (p. 64). The New London Group (NLG), a group of ten internationally renowned scholars, met and addressed two fundamental questions: the "What" and the "How" of the development of effective pedagogies in response to the new and changing literacies that were emerging. The NLG believed that with the development of new technologies, the expansion of communications and their different modes, together with the way new social and cultural contexts were emerging, it was necessary to “rethink the fundamental premises of literacy pedagogy in order to influence practices that will give students the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their aspirations” (NLG, 1996, p.63).

At the time of their meeting, many changes were occurring due to increasing globalization and the on-going rapid developments in information and communications technology. The changing demands of workplaces and the constantly mutable communicative landscape made it

necessary to rethink contemporary literacy pedagogical practices. However, they knew that those practices had to move away from the traditional transmission of knowledge, where the teachers are in charge of thinking and communicating, and learners are merely passive "receptors" and not "designers" of their learning process.

## 2.4 The 'What' of a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies

Under this view, classroom practices are seen as a constant process of designing and redesigning, on the part of the students but also on the part of the teachers, giving space to the collaborative creation of power. They explained:

In addressing the question of the "what" of literacy pedagogy, we propose a metalanguage of multiliteracies based on the concept of "design." Design has become central to workplace innovations, as well as to school reforms for the contemporary world. Teachers and managers are seen as designers of learning processes and environments, not as bosses dictating what those in their charge should think and do. (NLG, 1996, p. 73)

Additionally, they explained that:

We have also decided to use the term design to describe the forms of meaning because it is free of the negative associations for teachers of terms such as "grammar." It is a sufficiently rich concept upon which to found a language curriculum and pedagogy. The term also has a felicitous ambiguity: it can identify either the organizational structure (or morphology) of products, or the process of designing. (NLG, 1996, p.73)

The NLG (1996) argued that a matter of design involves, "three elements: Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned. Together these three elements emphasize the fact that

meaning-making is an active and dynamic process, and not something governed by static rules.” (NLG, 1996, p. 74).

Specifically, with respect to the “What” of multiliteracies there are two related aspects of the increasing complexity of texts: 1) the increase in cultural and linguistic diversity as represented in local diversity and global connectedness; and 2) the growing number of multimodal ways of meaning-making where the written word is increasingly found alongside and interwoven with visual, audio, and spatial meaning. Regarding the first point Cope and Kalantzis (2009a) explain that:

Multilingualism was an increasingly significant phenomenon that required a more adequate educational response in the case of minority languages and the context of globalization (Cazden, 2006b; Ismail & Cazden, 2005). (p. 166)

And, moreover, that,

For all the signs that English was becoming a world language, it was also diverging into multiple Englishes. Whereas traditional literacy curriculum was taught to a singular standard (grammar, the literary canon, standard national forms of the language), the everyday experience of meaning making was increasingly one of negotiating discourse differences. A pedagogy of multiliteracies would need to address this as a fundamental aspect of contemporary teaching and learning. (p.166)

The second point refers to the need of seeing language as a resource for meaning-making, a way to represent and communicate knowledge and experiences, in varying and new contexts. It recognized the importance of expanding learners’ communicative repertoires, as the communicative landscape expands, in changing times. One of the most intriguing aspects of this approach was the notion of multimodal forms of literacy, which is related to the second aspect of

the “what” and focuses on modes of meaning-making and representation that are much broader than the linguistic one. These modes of representation, as stated by the New London Group include the visual, the audio, the spatial, the gestural, and the linguistic designs.

Hence, whenever these modes are brought together to create meaning, we can talk about multimodal practices. Being capable of communicating through multimodal forms of literacy gives our students the possibility to find alternative ways of expressing their understanding of the world and to be naturally connected with information, communication, and multimedia technologies which are more accessible nowadays thanks to globalization.

## 2.5 The ‘How’ of a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies

Multimodal and multilingual pedagogy, or the pedagogy of multiliteracies, aims to create innovative and challenging learning environments that engage all students in a variety of literacy practices. The “how” of the multiliteracies pedagogy is based on the notion of ‘design’ and the integration of four components: *Situated Practice*, which comes from the learners’ own designed and designing experiences; *Overt Instruction*, where students are supported in developing their understanding and metalanguage of design (conceptual repertoires) by explicit instruction at teachable moments; *Critical Framing*, which relates to meanings in terms of social, cultural relevance and power relations; and *Transformed Practice* in which students transfer their understanding and re-create designs of meaning in different contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a). Multiliteracies and the use of multimodality in educational contexts allow teachers and students to move from standard forms, from passiveness, and from one-size-fits-all educational systems into alternative ones that give students the opportunity to engage with practices that include critical reflection and the re-creation of designs of meaning in order to transform their contexts.

Kress (2000) states that if schools had ‘Design’ as the central part of their curriculum and as a goal, they would give students a very different place from the one they have occupied in the traditional curriculum, moving from the ‘learning’ of knowledge to the ‘making’ of it, giving them the chance to be more agentive, transformative, creative and innovative. He also states that when students design, they produce something new, moving away from simply replicating the old, which is something:

essential to meet the demands of the new forms of the economy and of the now culturally plural societies and the conditions of globalising capital...(that) recognises the real potentials of humans as always creative, always innovative, always transformative.

(Kress, 2000, p.141)

## 2.6 Learning by Design

After some years of working with the four components of the “how” of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, Cope and Kalantzis (2009a) reframed and renamed them as “knowledge processes” which included four basic ways of knowing or *four things that you can do to know* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). In order to achieve this, they decided to work with teachers, and together they were able to create learning activities that illustrated the four knowledge processes: experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying. However, these four knowledge processes were developed keeping in mind the four pedagogical principles developed by the New London Group (1996) and their multiliteracies research. The following explanations draw closely from Cope and Kalantzis (2009a) and Kalantzis et al (2016).

*Situated practice* makes reference to experiential learning and to how human cognition is contextually situated. This experiential learning can come from already lived experiences or how

people experience new ones. Situated practice connects to the Learning by Design framework as the knowledge process of “experiencing”, “experiencing the known” or “experiencing the new.”

*Overt instruction* needs the understanding of analytic, systematic and conscious knowledge such as the abstract and conceptual language needed to describe the basic structures of meaning. In the Learning by Design framework, “conceptualising by naming” and “conceptualising by theorising” are the knowledge processes connected to overt instruction. “Conceptualising by naming” includes classifying knowledge, forming a metalanguage or a multimodal representation of it; it is an active process. “Conceptualising by theorising” means to build cognitive models by generalising and grouping concepts into interpretative frameworks in order to make sense of new information.

*Critical framing* is related to the reflection and interpretation of the sociocultural context of knowledge. It needs us to consider different critical perspectives towards knowledge and reflect about its cultural purpose and function. In the Learning by Design terminology, “analysing” is the knowledge process related to critical framing. “Analysing functionally” includes being able to make logical processes such as reasoning, inferring, making conclusions, and establishing functional connections. “Analysing critically” includes reflection and evaluating perspectives, interests and motives behind a meaning or an action.

*Transformed practice* is related to being able to transfer knowledge into new contexts and settings. It is connected to the learning by doing or applied learning view of education. The knowledge process from the Learning by Design framework that relates to transformed practice is “applying”. “Applying appropriately” means that learners can show that they are able to use what they have learnt in correct ways either in the real world or in simulated ones. “Applying creatively” has to do with doing something else with that knowledge and applying it in a more innovative way.

Consequently, the multiliteracies pedagogy “suggests a very different curriculum . . . and a fundamentally different notion of learning” (Kress, 2000, p. 140), which can be summed up by the examination, redesigning, and creation of newly redesigned texts, incorporating critical reflection as a fundamental aspect of this process. Additionally, the pedagogy of multiliteracies possesses social and political objectives, which include placing teachers and students as active contributors in social change as well as giving them roles of active designers of the future (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). According to Cope and Kalantzis (2000), by doing this, education goes from being a static, non-flexible, “one-size-fits-all” system, which is nothing like life itself and moves into a more flexible, adaptative and democratic one, which imitates and prepares students for this ever-changing world.

## 2.7 Identity, Investment, and Language Learning in the Multicultural Classroom

For poststructuralist theorists, "language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested . . . it is also the place where our subjectivity is constructed" (Weedon, 1998, p. 173). If we use the poststructuralist lens to understand language learning and how individuals make meaning of the world, we will observe that these are social acts and that they are deeply influenced by each learner's sense of power, identity, and agency (Bourdieu, 1977; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Mercer, 1990; Norton, 2013; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Weedon, 1998).

Poststructuralism challenges the idea that meaning is something generalizable and universal, and it stands on the belief that meaning originates from different relationships and that they are inherently subjective (Harcourt, 2007), or as Norton (2013) explains:

The use of the term *subjectivity*, derived from the term *subject*, is compelling because it serves as a reminder that a person’s identity must always be understood in relational terms: one is

often subject of a set of relationships (i.e., in a position of power) or subject to a set of relationships (i.e., in a position of reduced power) (Norton, 2013, p. 4).

Bourdieu (1977) states that every time someone speaks, there is an implied value that, in order to be fully comprehended, it has to be understood from the position of the person who speaks and from the broader networks of social relationships in which they are immersed. He claims that whenever we speak, our sense of self will be continuously negotiated and renegotiated according to the speaker position we take up at that particular moment. That position is very likely to depend on our individual characteristics such as gender, class, and race. So, in order to achieve successful communication, we need to take into consideration not only the social context in which it is embedded, but also the characteristics of the speaker, ourselves included.

If we draw on a poststructuralist perspective, learning and meaning-making processes will be related to each subject's particular experiences. They will be modelled and modified according to the different relationships established by the individual and the world. Learning is seen as a social process where culturally and historically positioned participants get involved in different cultural activities, use a variety of cultural tools and therefore develop the necessary types of behaviours required for participation, changing the tools and the responses when needed (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Therefore, when using a sociocultural and poststructuralist lens, we can understand identity positioning and identity investment (Norton, 2000, 2013), empowerment (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991; Weedon, 1998), and agency (Norton, 2013, 2016; Norton & Toohey, 2011) as multiple, dynamic and flexible, especially in a language learning environment. As Toohey et al. (2007) mention, "the formation and negotiating of identity positions represent an important dimension of classroom practices that contributes critically to students' evolving relationship with school

communities and their investment in learning English" (p. 627). Consequently, if we consider this view about identity formation and negotiation, we would be able to understand our students' investment or lack of it and, together with realizing why some of them get fully engaged with their school community, while others do not.

The speakers and members of the dominant language within a group will always have a more powerful position than those who are not part of it. Therefore, legitimate language users are associated with their "right to speak" and the dominance they establish to force reception in a particular group, "which makes language not only a communication or knowledge instrument, but one of power" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648).

## 2.8 Identity Texts

Influenced by Norton's theory of 'identity', the term identity text first appeared when teachers and researchers from Vancouver and Toronto studied the instructional spaces wherein teachers encouraged students to write and to create artistic pieces that were connected to their social and personal realities while using their multilingual and/or multimodal skills in a creative way (Cummins et al., 2015).

These projects had as a focus to extend the notions of literacy and go beyond the linear print-based dominant language practices regarding reading and writing (Cummins & Early, 2011). The identity text projects revealed that it is possible to expand the instructional space from a simple and coercive English-only zone into an inclusive and collaborative space where students' and parents' multilingual and multimodal repertoires are welcomed, even when teachers do not speak the languages present in the classrooms. (Cummins et al., 2005). The students that are part of these projects take pride in their dual-language creations, as they are often shared in school libraries, on websites (e.g., [www.multiliteracies.ca](http://www.multiliteracies.ca)), and in public exhibitions, etc. and as these literacy

practices are identity affirming, students tend to improve their literacy engagement (Cummins et al., 2005).

Identity can be expressed in many ways such as in creative writing and many other different kinds of cultural productions or performances (e.g., art, video, drama, photography, etc.), so whenever identity is expressed, projected and positively re-created as a result of a dialogue and feedback from multiple audiences, there is the production of an identity text (Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011). Cummins and Early (2011) described identity texts as follows:

Students invest their identities in the creation of these texts – which can be written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light. When students share identity texts with multiple audiences, teachers, parents, grandparents, sister classes, the media, etc.) they are likely to receive positive feedback and affirmation of self in interaction with these audiences. Although not always an essential component, technology acts as an amplifier to enhance the process of identity text production and dissemination. (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 3)

## 2.9 Identity Texts – Frameworks

In 2011, Cummins and Early co-edited a book named “Identity Texts: the collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools”, which, apart from showing eighteen short case studies where teachers used identity texts in their classrooms, also explains the different frameworks needed to understand “the pedagogical rationale and impact of identity texts” (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 17).

The first framework mentioned as a base for the development of successful identity texts is the *Societal Power Relations, Identity Negotiation, and Academic Achievement* framework.

Educational achievement has always been influenced by the power relations and social relations that are developed between students, teachers and the educational system (Bishop, 2006; Cummins, 2009; Cummins, 2018; McCarty, 2005). The more traditional coercive relations of power have privileged the languages, traditions and schooling ways of the dominant groups, which have extended the “deficit view” of minority groups (Cummins, 2003). However, when teachers and school systems allow and foster collaborative relations of power instead of coercive ones, minority group students tend to perform better and due to that empowerment and are able to achieve more (Cummins, 2009).

The framework developed by Cummins (1986, 2003, 2009), suggests that the educational system structures and the roles that educators define for themselves, will depend on the existing societal power relations, going from coercive to collaborative. According to Cummins (2013), the interactions between educators, students and communities will be defined by the established educational structures and the predefined educator role; the interactions between these groups will form the interpersonal space which will be the basis of knowledge acquisition, power and identity negotiation, where “these teacher-student interactions constitute the most immediate determinant of student academic success or failure” (Cummins, 2009, p. 46). Therefore, content material starts to be seen as important as the need to empower students through the negotiation of their identities in the classroom interactions, and achievement is going to be reached when teacher-student interactions aim to engage students’ full identity investment and full cognitive involvement (Cummins, 2009). When students are empowered in their educational contexts, they are able to acquire the necessary abilities, encouragement, and confidence needed for academic achievement and “their sense of identity is being affirmed and extended in their interactions with (their) educators” (Cummins, 2009, p. 45).

The Literacy Expertise framework, which was developed by Cummins (2001) and appeared in the second edition of his book *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*, is directly related to how power relations, identity negotiation and academic achievement are present in the classroom. This framework states that the interpersonal space created between teacher-student interactions will generate knowledge together with identity negotiation and that whenever these interactions occur, they will increase cognitive and literacy engagement, improving students' literacy. (Cummins & Early, 2011). Therefore, if we want students to succeed and be committed to their learning process, educators must create a safe and non-threatening classroom atmosphere where there is space for identity creation and re-creation that will lead to the generation of knowledge. This framework highlights the need for a *focus on meaning*, a *focus on language*, and a *focus on use* in order to achieve successful instruction. The focus on meaning aims at making content understandable and developing students' critical literacy; the focus on language incorporates a critical understanding of language forms and uses; and the focus on use allows students to generate new knowledge, becoming creative actors in social realities (Cummins & Early, 2011). These three focuses go from understanding the reality surrounding students to the possibility of being critical and doing something about it.

The last framework, the Literacy Engagement framework (Cummins, 1986, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011), relates literacy engagement to literacy achievement. Guthrie (2004) reported that the concept of literacy engagement should include four relevant aspects: time on task (paying attention to the text and its meaning), affect (excitement and pleasure of literacy), cognitive quality of the reader (conceptual learning during reading), and activity-based (amount and variety of in- and out-of-school literacy practices) (Guthrie, 2004). According to his claim, it is not only

the amount of time spent on literacy practices that matters, but also the enjoyment and engagement that an individual develops from those practices. In the classroom, teachers are the ones responsible for presenting as many active and engaging possibilities to students in order to develop their literacy at school. Therefore, teachers will have to consider: the need of scaffolds in order to develop students' understanding and use of academic language (e.g., different types of learning strategies, visual/graphic organizers and the possibility of students using their L1 to clarify concepts); always bringing forth learners' prior and background knowledge so as to connect with students' lives; basing teaching in academically, linguistically, and culturally affirming instruction and giving students the possibility to present their achievements in both L1 and L2; instructional strategies that allow students to develop their knowledge of and control over language and extend those strategies throughout the curriculum (Cummins & Stille, 2012).

The next section reviews the related literature in the following areas: teaching refugee-background youth; promising pedagogical practices for teaching RMBSs language and literacy; and culturally responsive teaching.

## 2.10 Literature Review

### 2.10.1 Teaching Refugee- and Migrant-Background Students: Challenges and Promising Pedagogies

During these last decades, the importance that appropriate educational settings and approaches have for the psychosocial adjustment of refugee- and migrant-background students (RMBS) have been mentioned continuously by researchers, studies and conventions. Most of them claim that if there is not enough support in the educational areas, refugee children could be delayed in their growth, learning and acculturation processes, and most important of all, in their overall well-being (Block et al., 2014; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; United Nations General Assembly, 2016).

Therefore, schools do not only provide the first access to education to the newly arrived RMBS, but they also offer them the possibility of a healthy integration into the new and unknown context. As explained in the introduction, refugee-background children and youth face what Stewart (2011) has described as a triple trauma, that is, their pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration experiences. Drawing from her qualitative case study of 51 participants, in the Canadian context, she reports that, “There was evidence to support that students’ pre-migration experiences included loss, starvation, abuse, persecution, danger, displacement, and exposure to violence.” (Stewart, 2011, p. 176). With respect to trans-migration experiences, these “included leaving home, losing belongings, and being separated from family. Life in the refugee camps was reported as ‘difficult,’ ‘unpleasant,’ ‘violent,’ and ‘unsafe’” (Stewart, 2011, p. 178). The post-migration period was characterized by two phases, “initial excitement, followed by challenges and adjustments.” (Stewart, 2011, p. 178). With respect to the participants’ school experiences, Stewart (2011) reports,

Challenges and problems related to education were revealed in four broad categories: (a) Students had difficulty with the academics because of previous disrupted schooling and lower academic literacy levels, (b) students had a financial burden and had to work full time and, therefore, could not focus on their schooling, (c) the school was not always a welcoming environment, and (d) the students were not supported because of systemic, organizational, and policy issues. (p. 178)

McBrien (2005) claims that in order to help refugee-background students succeed and overcome their challenges, there is no “one recipe” as it was thought for some time. Many people believed that with facilitating social services, teaching the dominant language to the students and their families, and combating (or trying to combat) discrimination, everything was settled. Nothing

was further from the truth. After reading and analyzing various studies across the US, McBrien (2005) was able to conclude, that teachers and school administrators have to understand that the school community plays a fundamental role when it comes to addressing the particular needs of this population of students and that “recognizing and respecting cultural differences is important to refugee students’ academic success” (McBrien, 2005, p.354). She also highlights that English teaching should supplement the children’s and youth’s first language and culture, but it should never be seen as a replacement. There has to be a strong connection between the school and the students’ ethnic communities if school professionals want to understand the challenges, requirements, and strengths of these groups. Therefore, when schools show respect and recognize the culture, traditions and languages of the refugee-background students and their families, there is a chance of academic success and, most importantly, beneficial acculturation.

In their study about how to respond to the unique educational requirements of refugee-background children, Szente et al. (2006) shared recommendations and promising practices related to refugee children’s education. They gathered data by interviewing 26 refugee families who had children between 5- to 8-year-olds and were part of the Buffalo (NY) Public School system. They also interviewed teachers, social workers, counsellors and one school principal who had worked with refugee families and their children.

Their first recommendation is that teachers need to be prepared to answer their students’ needs in unique ways. Refugee-background students will respond differently to new environments and diverse life experiences; some act quietly and reserved, while others show aggressiveness or misbehaviour. However, these are all normal responses to their new reality, and it is part of their adaptation. The strategies recommended in this study were developed after working and interviewing an outstanding group of teachers working with refugee children for several years and

who have developed these strategies to assist them better. They suggest: (1) teaching children about basic emotions using drawings and pictures; (2) using simple sign language with them inside and outside the classroom; (3) showing positive body language; (4) smiling, (5) including artistic activities that permit children to express their feelings, lived experiences and background knowledge; (6) letting children engage in social games that will let them take turns; (7) providing water or sand tables that may help in their communication process; (8) learning some words in your students' language; and finally (9) using children's literature to teach non-refugee students about the experiences of their classmates. The authors highlight the importance of sharing effective practices and meaningful educational strategies as the numbers of refugee-background students continue to increase in our classrooms. By doing this, teachers facilitate a healthier acculturation process for newly arrived refugee children.

Taylor and Sidhu (2012) recognize seven relevant features after a case study they conducted on successful supporting practices in four Australian schools. The first practice they mention is related to targeted policies and system support. They claim that targeted policies are fundamental if schools want to support refugee-background students successfully. Moreover, if educational settings are deprived of policies and economic support, it would be challenging for individual schools and staff to translate social justice ideals into real and practical programs that could benefit and support them. The second and third practices mentioned in the study are the importance of having an explicit commitment to social justice and comprehensive support systems that work with the educational and socio-emotional needs of refugee-background students and their families appear to be significant factors that influence how schools support their refugee-background students and their educational needs. The fourth practice included in their study is the practice of leadership. They explain it as having a strong leader in the school, who advocates

strongly for their refugee-background students, proposes ideas, and gives guidance and support to their staff when it is time to take on challenges. The fifth practice is related to the term *ethos of inclusion* which is used in this study to describe programs and practices that successfully support refugee-background students and help them become an active part of the school and the wider community. These practices are the ones which do not separate refugee-background students from other students but see them as an integral part of the diverse and multicultural structure of the school. The sixth practice explains the support for learning needs and the idea that refugee-background students need to be supported in many areas other than language learning. Instead of withdrawing them from classes to get extra assistance, they get support in the classroom and are always a part of it. They do not have to miss Art, Music or PE classes to get extra support; this is a collective task done by the whole school. Finally, the seventh practice claims that working with other agencies is fundamental if schools want to embrace a holistic approach and support their refugee-background students' social and emotional needs. Specialized agencies and organizations are wanting and are prepared to help them in those areas. These practices embrace students as an integral being and consider the educational, socioemotional and welfare needs of them and their families. Schools need to act using a whole school approach that includes and makes every staff member an integral part of this journey. By using a holistic view, schools tell their students that there are so many other things that matter about them apart from academics. Furthermore, othering diminishes, and social justice and real inclusiveness can start.

Block et al. (2014) mention other challenges, along with those reported above, that refugee-background students and their families start facing as soon as they arrive in a new county. These challenges include learning and adapting to a new language and culture; children and youth start going to school after disrupted or very scarce prior education; parents have to look for new jobs

without any work or family networks; and they will likely have to face house insecurity, discrimination and negative stereotyping. If there is not an appropriate support or responsiveness by the schools, refugee-background students may suffer a huge negative impact on their learning and they “may demonstrate lack of engagement, feelings of disempowerment, absenteeism, failure to establish and sustain healthy relationships, early exit from school and risk significantly poorer achievement” (Block et al., 2014, p. 1339).

However, in their article, they suggest good practices such as the holistic model and the whole school approach gathered from studies and reviews. The holistic model includes the idea of schools working with an inclusive model that attends to the learning, social and emotional needs of refugee-background students, but with a strong focus on inclusiveness and diversity. This model allows students to feel that all aspects of their identity matters, not only their grades, not only academics. It gives them the chance to say and do something from their own perspective and use their own knowledge. The whole school approach incorporates the idea of raising awareness and talking about the particular needs (e.g., educational, welfare, socio-emotional) of refugee-background students among all the members of the school staff. This practice proved to be an essential factor when encouraging and assisting changes in school practices. Some schools even reported an increase in their staff members’ empathy towards these students. Knowing about their lives and stories helped them understand and improve the way they saw them.

Bajaj and Bartlett (2017) investigated the approaches to curriculum adopted in the US by three high schools that were attended by recently arrived RMBS. They drew from qualitative studies the authors had each conducted over a decade at the different school sites. They sought to conceptualize a transnational curriculum and provide concrete examples of the schools’ practices. Based on their analysis, the researchers put forward four tenets of a critical transnational

curriculum. These include: “(1) using diversity as a learning opportunity; (2) engaging translanguaging; (3) promoting civic engagement; and (4) cultivating multidirectional aspirations.” (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017, p. 25) The curriculum as designed and implemented responded to the learners’ needs and to their lived experiences. Bajaj and Suresh (2018) report in more detail on one of the schools, Oakland International High School, discussed in the Bajaj and Bartlett (2017) article. The authors explain that the three areas that could be useful in informing educators, systems leaders, policy makers and other stakeholders are related to “(a) family-community engagement strategies for newcomers, (b) trauma-informed practices for socio-emotional wellbeing, and (c) responsive and flexible curricula.” (Bajaj & Suresh, 2018, p. 93). The programs at the school offered what they term “wrap-around” services that establish reciprocity between home and school and provide flexible and supportive social-emotional, academic, and material structures and assistance. Community partnerships are built and nourished.

### 2.10.2 Promising Language and Literacies Pedagogies

Lotherington and Jenson (2011) provided a comprehensive review of studies of multimodal, and digital, literacy pedagogical practices in L2 settings that demonstrate the potential of this approach. More recently, Ntelioglou et al. (2014) claim that if we want to address our classroom's changing landscape and support each and every one of our students, including the Canadian-born English speaker learners and ELLs, as well as migrant- and refugee-background students’ literacy learning and academic engagement, multilingualism, multimodality, and multiliteracies are effective and powerful practices to achieve those goals. Their study, in which a number of participants were refugee-background, elementary-school students, describes a project that brought together descriptive and creative writing, the students’ lived experiences and home languages, digital technologies, and drama pedagogy. The article starts by describing other

Canadian projects, in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, both school and university that have also employed *teaching through a multilingual lens* (Cummins & Persad, 2014). This type of teaching represents the “bottom-up” school language policy initiative, where teachers challenge the standardized conventions about the linguistic diversity that still prevail in schools, and they also contest social structures of power that ignore students’ linguistic and cultural capital. The authors mention that at the beginning of their project, the teachers were worried about the lack of engagement their ELL students showed when they were asked to read or write in class. However, when they started with the multimodal/multilingual project, it was possible to change that dynamic. The students easily engaged with technologies and showed their teachers that they could express themselves in modes different from the linguistic one (visual, gesture, audio), and the multimodal approach helped students who struggled when speaking English to be more confident in their work. Moreover, as the project included multilingual tasks, students got a chance to identify themselves as experts in their home languages and were able to maximize understanding and achievement through translanguaging (Garcia, 2011). Students were also able to develop their multiple linguistic repertoires by using different mediums to express meanings, which fostered their autonomy, literacy engagement and identity investment. However, the authors contend that this can only happen when teachers open up their classrooms and start sharing space and power in the classroom. They argued that “When teachers open up the instructional space for multilingual and multimodal forms of pedagogy, languages other than English or French are legitimized in the classroom and students’ home languages and community connections become resources for learning” (Ntelioglou et al., 2014, p. 9). Therefore, when multiliteracies and multimodal pedagogy are part of the curriculum of a class, there is an enhanced chance for students to feel like they are capable of expressing much more than what they regularly do in writing or speaking; moreover, if

we acknowledge that there should be an additive view of languages in our classrooms and let multilingualism be part of our daily tasks and practices, our students will be capable of creating what they have not yet imagined.

Hughes & Morrison (2014) examined the effect of using multiliteracies pedagogy together with a social networking platform and observed if it helped a group of 6<sup>th</sup> grade ELL students build their writer identities in order to improve their self-esteem, confidence, and language and literacy skills. Unfortunately, they claim, many educators still do not know how ELLs learn, including integrating their L1 resources and improving their social presence in the classroom, which makes it a group hard to teach appropriately. The concept *social presence* is defined by Garrison (2009) as the participants' ability to recognize themselves as part of a community, connect and communicate intentionally in a trusting environment and create interpersonal relationships by projecting their individual personalities (as cited in Hughes & Morrison, 2014, p. 608). Therefore, if we trust in the environment, we are going to be able and willing to communicate with the members of that community; however, if that trust does not exist, those interpersonal relationships will be non-existent, and many ELLs will feel marginalized of their classrooms. If that marginalization continues during their academic careers, it is very probable that it would end in societal marginalization, which can lead to economic repercussions or consequences in their desire to become active citizens. Hence, not paying attention to these students in our classrooms can obstruct their language development and acculturation process. Ignoring their needs can be interpreted as a dominant culture that is not accepting them or that they are not legitimate speakers of English, which as Norton (1997) explains, is essential for ELLs if we want them to succeed in their new socio-cultural environment. In the case of Hughes and Morrison's (2014) study, the use of multimodal communication tools and a social networking site (SNS), allowed students not only

to learn the course content but they were also able to share their identities and find a space in their immediate community. Students had to write poems and limericks, which could be accompanied by images or replaced by videos. By using multimodal tools, the students were able to express themselves more freely and did not struggle as much as they did with the traditional literacy skills. This freedom helped the ELLs construct a positive online writer identity, which improved their self-confidence and increased their social presence in the online environment, enhancements that were later reflected in the classroom. The online platform was a low-stress space that did not have the usual labels; therefore, students were able to experiment using different literacies and co-construct knowledge with their peers.

Johnson and Kendrick (2017) conducted a study in a Canadian school district's transition program where refugee youth and immigrant English learners had the chance to share elements of their identities and socio-cultural environments with the help of various modes (e.g., visual, auditory, linguistic) on their own digital stories. Their objective was to understand the pedagogical potential of a multimodal digital storytelling project in the promotion of refugee students' self-expression and to evidence, together with other similar studies, that difficult knowledge is better communicated through a multimodal approach. The authors claim that refugee-background students arrive at their new environments carrying rich life experiences and a significant amount of knowledge, which may be different from those expected at a school setting due to their interrupted education. Additionally, Johnson and Kendrick (2017) argue that the knowledge and world views that these refugee-background students bring cannot be considered less important than those taught in our classrooms, which happens many times.

Their study makes references to one of the transition students' digital storytelling process (Yaqub's), which talks about his journey to Canada as a refugee. His digital story was selected for

a more thorough analysis because it presented a more advanced composition, demonstrating the powerful potential that non-linguistic modes can have to communicate meaning. Born in Iraq, Yaqub and his family lived there until the Iraqi war forced them to escape to Syria at the age of 15; however, when the Syrian war started, Yaqub and his family had to wait several years before their resettlement to Canada in 2013. At the time of the study, even though he had limited English literacy, he was able to read and write in Arabic (his first language) and was moving on positively on his trauma recovery process and on the creation of a new identity.

The project took place one day per week over five weeks, and the students were introduced to the concept of digital storytelling and analyzed some examples of them. After that, the students were asked to think about accomplishment stories, where they could see themselves achieving something relevant and constructing a positive identity. A major part of the students used recorded music and online pictures for their digital stories; however, a few shared some personal ones. Multicultural and settlement workers assisted these students in class whenever they needed extra support. They used their shared L1 to help students understand the task or communicate ideas. After they had brainstormed their ideas, the students had to create their storyboards in order to organize the different elements of their digital stories. Some students used index cards, others used paper templates, and others preferred using a computer-assisted tool such as PowerPoint. When their storyboards were ready, they assembled their digital stories using a PC compatible software, Photo Story 3, putting together their selected music, pictures, and voices.

Yaqub's digital story is a clear example of how students are fully capable of communicating their ideas and experiences when they are able to make meaning by using and mixing a full variety of semiotic modes. In his own words, he was able to express that deep and personal understanding of meanings that are expressed in the song he chose: "It start to be more

loud, and it's like sad, and the same time...there's, like, faith in the music...There's something coming, and you don't know it's bad or good" (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017, p. 5). And he is able to clearly explain his visual choices too. For example, when Yaqub explains why he chose the picture of a man sitting on the ground, totally bent with his head down, against a wall when trying to communicate at moment of anger: "I don't like to put someone, like, he look like angry because that's mean you're give up. And my story is about the 'impossible is nothing'. So, he just silent and just sitting there and don't do nothing because he can't do nothing. There is nothing to do." (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017, p. 5).

Johnson and Kendrick (2017) claim that when literacy is defined in broader terms and multimodal communication plays a role in the creation of meaning, the potential and possibilities for meaningful expression are significant and profound. Moreover, after examining and comparing field notes, final digital stories, and transcripts, they established three themes that support the claim mentioned before. The first theme was the support that a multimodal approach to literacy gives students that have a limited English vocabulary to express their difficult knowledge through images and music. These elements help them observe from a safe space some elusive aspects of their past experiences and identity. The second theme was related to literacy engagement and its effects on the learners when we allow them to think visually and musically instead of just linguistically. This case showed them that even when these students may lack some vocabulary, they have no problems transmitting emotions through an image, as color, light or foregrounding and mood through a song, a melody or tempo. The third theme was transformative literacy. As they all had to focus on their success stories, even simple and concrete ones, their self-confidence was improved, and identities were enhanced, giving them a chance to awaken and stimulate positive emotions.

### 2.10.3 Culturally Responsive Teaching

In Gay's (1994) preface to her book, *At the Essence of Learning: Multicultural Education*, written by George L. Mehaffy, it is stated that her most important premise is that it is not possible to distinguish between good teaching and multicultural teaching. It is also mentioned that she founded this statement on the idea that multicultural education is not a political ideology or extremist movement intended to challenge traditional education standards and that this premise comes from the idea that every child is a meaning-maker, and because of this, teachers have to create strategies that can help all children grasp meaning from the environment. Hence, it is explained that she believes that every child, every student, comes with multiples resources and the most important –the resource of making meaning of their world– can only be understood with the help of the adults' around them.

That same year Ladson-Billings (2009) published her book *The Dreamkeepers*, where she talks about “culturally responsive teaching” and how this pedagogy acknowledges the importance of incorporating students' cultural and background knowledge together with their identities in all aspects of learning and all subjects of schools. By incorporating these practices, students can learn about other cultures and their own, which helps them develop cultural appreciation and understanding.

According to Gay (2002), *culturally responsive teaching* can be defined as the use of cultural individualities, personal experiences, and views of ethnically diverse students as a channel to teach them more effectively. It is founded on the premise that when students' lived experiences and background knowledge are considered when they are being taught, that knowledge will have a higher impact and will be more personally meaningful, and as a result, they will be learnt more simply and comprehensively. Additionally, as a result of this type of teaching, when lived

experiences and cultural backgrounds are considered, culturally and ethnically diverse students can improve their academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002).

Gay (2018), after compiling her ideas and the ideas from different scholars in this area of research, claims that there are eight descriptors or traits that characterize culturally responsive teaching. The traits that make its “character profile” are:

1) Culturally Responsive Teaching is Validating: culturally responsive teaching can be defined as the use of the prior and cultural knowledge, styles of performance and frames of reference of culturally diverse students in order to make learning more significant and effective. This type of teaching recognizes the importance of ethnic and cultural diversity in education and sees those differences as assets and legitimate learning approaches; therefore, integrating multicultural knowledge and resources in all the subjects and skills they learn in school, helping students know and praise their own cultural heritage.

2) Culturally Responsive Teaching is Comprehensive and Inclusive: as Ladson-Billings (1992) explains, culturally responsive teachers promote academic, socio-emotional, and political education with the support of cultural resources in order to teach skills, attitudes and values. These teaching approaches are devoted to helping students preserve their identity and relations with their ethnic groups and communities, creating a sense of belonging, fellowship, mutual responsibility, and cultivating an achievement ethic. However, these culturally responsive practices should not only involve teachers but also the rest of the school staff, and they should be present in every classroom, school, and district.

3) Culturally Responsive Teaching is Multidimensional: culturally responsive teaching embraces curriculum content, learning context, classroom management and its environment, as well as relationships between students and teachers, instructional strategies, and performance evaluations.

This type of teaching can exist because of the integration and collaboration of different subjects, disciplines, and contents; however, it also requires teachers who possess a wide range of cultural knowledge and can contribute with their experiences and perspectives.

4) Culturally Responsive Teaching is Empowering: as Rajagopal (2011) mentions, culturally responsive teaching is an empowering pedagogy that enables students to become more successful students and better individuals (as cited in Gay, 2018, p. 75). Moreover, that empowerment can quickly turn into academic and personal confidence, courage, and willingness to act.

5) Culturally Responsive Teaching is Transformative: culturally responsive teaching challenges standard educational methods concerning ethnic students, and it is categorical about the respect that lived experiences and cultures of diverse students must have in and out of their classrooms; moreover, it uses them as fundamental assets for teaching and learning. It acknowledges these students' existing strengths and accomplishments and their ethnic groups and motivates them to reach even further.

6) Culturally Responsive Teaching is Emancipatory: culturally responsive teaching liberates students' intellect from the limitations of the mainstream standards of knowledge and its ways of knowing, making authentic knowledge about diverse ethnic groups available to them. When students can access this kind of knowledge, it produces validation and pride, which are psychologically and intellectually liberating. This liberation allows students to improve academically, which helps students comprehend that no single definition of "truth" is absolute and perpetual; neither should it be permitted to remain unchallenged.

7) Culturally Responsive Teaching is Humanistic: culturally responsive teaching is concerned with human wellbeing, equality and respect of human beings and the diversity of people and communities that make up the world. It allows students to acquire knowledge about themselves

and others, and the associated values that arise when people have a better understanding of cultural diversities, their origins, and their characteristics.

8) Culturally Responsive Teaching is Normative and Ethical: culturally responsive teaching describes how and why conventional education practices and policies are influenced by the Eurocentric culture, which is the dominant and privileged group. Educational discourse on diversity and social justice proposes that students from all ethnic groups, specifically those discriminated against, marginalized, and excluded as minority groups, should have equal rights, opportunities, and resources. Hence, as culture and education are inextricable, and different ethnic communities have different traditions, the educational process has to give space to cultural diversity which will aim at racially, ethnically, and socially diverse students.

Therefore, these traits show us how powerful this pedagogy can be if applied correctly and thoroughly. However, for it to be transmitted and to come alive, it needs teachers that “care for” their students, are willing to work hard to change their lives and to help them have the same opportunities as everybody else.

Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) claim that culturally responsive teaching needs to be connected to a pedagogy of ethics, caring, and effective teaching, and that even after many decades of people believing that public education is the basis for societies that want to become more equal, fair, and just it has become challenging to reach those ideals especially in the context of urban schools. Those challenges include staff shortages and a high turnover rate, underfunding, buildings without proper maintenance, low academic performance as assessed by standardized tests, and low graduation rates, among several other deficiency indicators. Additionally, the authors mention that "some educational discourse also considers cultural and linguistic diversity a ‘deficiency’" (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012, p.1087), but they argue that cultural and linguistic diversity is a

vital resource in urban schools. Therefore, teachers capable of combining culturally responsive teaching practices with caring and ethics-based approaches can do ‘a much better job’ at educating our students in urban contexts. However, the authors argue, there is a tremendous difference between “caring about” the students and “caring for” the students, which for them is the basis of culturally responsive teaching. Noddings (2002) stated that “caring about” others is essential to a moral society as it directs one’s attention to others and inspires one to pursue justice for them, including the distant unknown others; however, it overlooks one crucial factor: “caring about” something can be executed as a wholly detached activity (as cited in Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012, p. 1089). On the other hand, Noddings (2002) also claims that "caring for" can only begin when there is a face-to-face relationship surrounded by careful attention together with an openness to experience the other person’s issues, trying to comprehend the effects of those issues and to understand how that caring may affect that other individual (as cited in Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012, p. 1090).

According to Shevalier and McKenzie (2012), the objective of culturally responsive teaching is to “care for” students instead of “care about” students, creating and maintaining meaningful and positive relationships, where happiness is one of the most important outcomes. One way to achieve this, is through reflexive modeling, where teachers are constantly asked to monitor their actions in their classroom and reflect on what they could have done better to foster a culture of caring for their students and create that much-needed relationship. Noddings (1997) mentions that when we care for someone or something, we want to try hard, do well, be extremely competent about it and struggle for better competence and effectiveness (as cited in Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012, p. 1092). Moreover, effective teachers who care for their students are competent at integrating relevant elements of their students’ cultural backgrounds and identities into their

class content and pedagogy and they also have teaching and interpersonal competencies that help students succeed in the classroom. Finally, Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) explain why “caring for” and culturally responsive teaching are so intertwined:

Effective teachers employed and modeled well rounded competency to create classroom environments in which teacher and students responded to one another freely and eagerly, *not because they had to but because they wanted to* (my emphasis). By adhering to and modeling their own deeply held commitments, effective teachers taught academic content, classroom behavior, and, more important, the personal standards caring individuals hold for themselves (deep knowledge, preparation, and organization); the attitudes caring individuals hold toward others (understanding, appreciation and empathy); and the actions caring individuals use to “care for” others (clear communication, attention to others’ actions, providing sincere assistance, and self-reflection) (p. 1093).

Therefore, culturally responsive teaching can make a difference in the way students relate to learning, academic success, social relationships, and cultural empowerment. When teachers do not only tell but show their students that they “care for” them, there is space for personal growth and empowerment.

## Chapter 3: Participants and Research Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a description of the context and setting of the elementary community school where I volunteered for almost a year and later undertook this research. Then, I describe the classroom where this study took place and provide information about the recruitment processes for the teacher and the students who agreed to take part in this research. I describe the research method and I outline the data collection/sources, including within a sequence of research activities and a timeline for the cross-curricular unit of study. The data collection/sources section concludes with an account of the data collection from the teachers, that is, the focus groups and the individual semi-structured and informal discussions with the collaborating teacher, and the participating students. Finally, I describe the analysis of both the teacher data and the student data before providing my positionality as a researcher.

The specific aims of this study were to: 1) gain insight into what an expert educator (classroom teacher), together with her team-teaching colleagues, with experience teaching RMBS, perceived as challenges and promising practices in the teaching and learning of this diverse population of students; 2) gain insight into how a multiliteracies approach could support literacy engagement and language and content (subject-area) attainment of RMBS. The research questions were the following:

1) *What does an expert educator (classroom teacher), together with her team-teaching colleagues, perceive as the teaching and learning challenges and promising language and content pedagogical practices for supporting refugee- and migrant-background students in a diverse elementary classroom?*

2). *What is the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross-curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) for the literacy engagement and content curricular attainment of refugee- and migrant-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom?*

### 3.2 Research Context and Site

As reported in the prologue, this study is an integral part of a larger Social Studies and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded project entitled: *Language and Literacy Learning among Refugee- and Migrant-Background Children and Youth in Canadian Classrooms* awarded to Dr. Maureen Kendrick, Principal Investigator, and Dr. Margaret Early, co-investigator, at the University of British Columbia. The qualitative study here is set in one of the project's three research sites, an elementary community school, in the larger Metro Vancouver area.

According to one of BC's Community Schools Blog (2020) community schools are the centre of the neighbourhood where kids, youth, adults, families, residents, and local businesses can work together to construct a solid and caring community. Community schools are part of the designated catchment area schools, so students attend the school according to whether or not they are in that catchment area. However, these schools differ from regular schools as they keep constant community participation and there is a strong partnership between the schools and other community resources. Community schools have plans and programs that aim to meet the all the specific necessities of the neighbourhood it serves which include the educational, recreational, and social needs. Through community service and active problem solving, their curriculum emphasizes learning by means of real-world experiences. Teachers are assigned to community schools by the same process as any other school in a school district, and they have to follow the same application process as they would for any other school.

The aforementioned website also provides guidelines on the services these types of schools offer to their communities, which are constantly accessible to community residents and their families. The services they offer are extensive, most of them are provided for extended hours, which promotes constant relationships with all the different people that form the community. These extensive and extended services include: early education programs (StrongStart, Preschools, Child Care); extended learning opportunities for children which include before and after school programs; support services according to the needs of the families (new immigrant families and community families); activities and leadership training for the youth; adult continuing education; summer programs for all community members; celebration, events and projects to unite the community as well as volunteering opportunities. These services, together with the wrap-around approaches found at these schools, give newcomers a chance to have a healthy integration with their community and their new reality. The wrap-around process is the multi-faceted team organization that develops individualized plans to address students' or families' daily needs, focusing mainly on their strengths (Wrap Canada, 2020).

Therefore, community schools not only take care of children at schools and their education, but they are also in charge of providing a vast support system to all community members, including new immigrant- and refugee-background families and established community families.

### 3.2.1 Kingsway Community School

This study was conducted at Kingsway Community School which is one of the twenty-seven elementary community schools in the Metro Vancouver area. The school, located in a highly diverse neighbourhood in one of the four district zones, goes from Kindergarten to Grade 7 and, at the time of the study, it had approximately 350 students divided into seventeen classes.

According to its School District website (2020), Kingsway Community school is culturally very rich and diverse as it embraces more than 48 countries that are represented by Kingsway students and families. The school embodies the best of the Canadian cultural mosaic because besides Canada, the school has families and students from Sudan, Liberia, Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Mexico, the Philippines and El Salvador among others. The school has a long history and established reputation for welcoming migrant- and refugee-background learners. It was reported in 2011 that 6 out of 10 students at Kingsway spoke English as an additional language; 8 out of 10 did not speak English at home; and 1/3 of students came from refugee backgrounds, many with little or interrupted formal schooling (categorized as SLIFE: students with little or interrupted formal schooling). The school staff and students and the larger school community constantly celebrate diversity, and they are also continuously looking for ways to contribute to the cultural life of their community, city, province, and country.

As stated by the Kingsway Community school website (2015), the mission of this school is to provide a safe, caring, and welcoming environment that promotes academic success. It is mentioned that they believe that all their students are talented learners who are able to achieve academic, athletic, artistic and social success and that parents and family members are essential in the support and development of their children's learning. It is also indicated in their mission statement that their teachers and support staff is made up of highly skilled, kind, and resourceful educators whose work is directly linked to the success of their students. The majority of staff members have taught at the school for more than five years, and many for more than a decade.

### 3.2.2 Elisa's Classroom

Elisa's classroom (Appendix J) is a big bright classroom at the end of the corridor on the second floor. It has high ceilings and very high windows, which allows a lot of daylight to come

in all day long. She has been in this classroom for the last four years, and she has made it well-designed and very comfortable for her nineteen students. There is a reading corner, where students can sit on a carpeted floor, on an old, comfortable couch, or a reclining chair and choose between one of the many multilingual books she has available for them to read. This corner is one of her students' favourite spots to spend 'me time' in the morning. Her students' artwork is displayed on every single wall, and there are posters with motivational quotes all around the classroom. There is a big storage room that she has managed to adapt and make more comfortable –she added some tables, chairs, and big cushions– for her students to read and study. Class materials are very well kept and organized in this storage room and in the classroom itself, as students are continuously asked to help with all the spaces' tidiness.

There are five big tables, and students sit around them in groups of three or four, and every week, every group has to choose a name based on a particular topic. During the week, they will have many opportunities to earn points for their groups and share things such as the iPads, art materials or a worksheet. Additionally, that week they will have to learn how to work as a team with those specific classmates, as the composition of the group changes from week to week.

It is important to highlight that Elisa is very generous with her space, and this classroom has become the meeting center for Grade 6/7 students and teachers. All the extracurricular meetings with the 'leadership' students are held in her classroom, teachers' union lunch meetings and events such as "hats giving" happen there.

### 3.3 Recruitment Procedures

#### 3.3.1 Teacher

For this study, I was very fortunate to work closely with Elisa Dematteo (pseudonym), an experienced Grade 6/7 teacher, who has taught at Kingsway Community school for the past 8

years. During her first years at Kingsway, she started working as Learning Support Staff in the younger grades, with students who are now in her Grade 7 class. She has a B.Ed. in elementary education from Simon Fraser University (2012) and holds a master's in mathematics education, also from Simon Fraser University (2017).

I met Elisa in May 2019, when I first started my work as a volunteer at Kingsway Community School. I assisted her and her Grade 6/7 teammates, specifically during the math period. She was always very welcoming, and I could tell from the very beginning that she was deeply committed to her students and that she was always glad to have other staff and volunteers there to support the students who were struggling the most. Then, at the beginning of October 2019, when I came back to the school, after the first month of the students' settling in, being socialized to the practices and routines of the classroom and community building, I asked her if I could work with her class and her students, as a possible site for my research study, and she accepted with a big smile.

I started volunteering in her class twice a week, helping her and giving extra support to the students who needed it during class. Therefore, I started creating a relationship with those students and with those who stayed to talk to me during recess. When I had the chance to go to the school on Fridays, I was able to participate in the "Buddies" activities, which allowed me to connect with the students from a different perspective. The "Buddies" program consists of pairing students from grades 6 and 7 (the big buddies) with a little buddy, usually a student from Kindergarten or 1st grade, to promote leadership in the older students and create meaningful bonds between school members. These buddies would meet every week for an hour, and together they had the chance to play, draw, read, make crafts, and get to know each other. I was lucky to be there, interacting with them, every single week for six months. I also had the chance to join them in different school

activities such as the Christmas breakfast, golf lessons at the gym, the Halloween event at a neighbouring secondary school, and I went with them to a couple of plays that were presented in other schools. Those moments, especially when we had the chance to spend time with the little buddies and when we had to go walking somewhere else, allowed me to better connect with Elisa and the students (especially the students), as we were able to communicate in a different context.

Elisa has always been very open to help, collaborate and talk about her students. Sometimes we would meet before class, other times after class or during break time. However, no matter when, she always had the best disposition to help and guide me in everything I needed, and in the end, we built up a very positive, and for me rewarding, relationship.

### 3.3.2 Students

As I had been volunteering in this grade 6/7 classroom since October 2019, I was well known to the students; therefore, when I told them in February that I wanted to carry out a study with them in their class, many of them immediately agreed. However, as soon as they expressed their willingness to participate, I explained that to be part of the study, first they had to listen to its explanation and that they were going to require their parents' consent. I summarized the study orally for the students and explained that the unit and tasks I was researching were going to be part of the regular classroom activities. I also explained the purpose of the research and gave an overview of the research activities. I distributed the consent letter and read through it with the students, explaining the data collection methods (e.g., field notes, informal conversations, their student work, and short interviews). I explained that the lessons would be the same for everyone whether or not they signed the consent form and that if they consented, they could withdraw from the study at any time, and that no one would be upset or angry with them. I answered all their questions and asked some confirmation questions to ensure their understanding. The students all

had sufficient proficiency in English to understand. I then provided the parental letter of consent for the students to take home for their parents to sign, and again I explained to them that they could not participate without that letter. Finally, I insisted that if they or their parents had any questions, they were invited to contact me or a member of my supervisory committee.

### 3.4 Research Methodology

The study is a qualitative case study design. Yin (2018) defined a case study as: “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.” (p. 16) Creswell’s detailed definition, cited in Merriam and Tisdell (2016) was, as these authors suggest, helpful. They state:

For Creswell “case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual materials, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes.” (2013, p. 97: emphasis in the original) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 40)

The present study corresponds as a bounded case of a cross-curricular unit of study, in a grade 6/7 classroom, including the teachers’ pedagogical principles and practices and the students’ activities. Data collection involved multiple sources such as field notes (Appendix I), audio recordings, interviews, informal conversations, and student artifacts. There are two units of analysis in this case, the collaborating teacher’s (and her teaching team’s) principles, beliefs, and practices and the migrant- and refugee-background students’ activities.

## 3.5 Study Participants

### 3.5.1 Teacher Participants

To position the teacher participants, it is helpful to include here an overview of their participation. While there was one collaborating teacher in the case study, in order to better understand her principles, beliefs, and practices, these were first analyzed within a larger collaborative analysis of the three focus group interviews conducted in the focal school. I then conducted a close reanalysis of the collaborating teacher's principles, beliefs and practices as realized in a focus group interview with her Grade 6/7 teaching colleagues. This process will be explained further below. Thus, in this limited way, the teacher participants in this study, extend beyond the collaborating teacher who is central to this case.

The three focus groups I included in my study were part of the larger (SSHRC) project and its data collection regarding expert educators' perceptions, beliefs and practices concerning RMBS language and literacy learning in Canadian classrooms. The SSHRC co-investigators recruited these teachers. Ten teachers participated in the focus groups that were held in March 2018 (two groups) and June 2019 (one group). In the first focus group, data included two teachers (one mainstream and one resource) who taught a Grade 5/6 class and both of them had worked at Kingsway Community School for a number of years. In the second focus group, which ended up being the focal Grade 6/7 teacher and her collaborative team, more fully reported on in this study, four Grade 6/7 teachers (2 mainstream teachers and 2 resource teachers) participated. Finally, in the third and last focus group, conducted over one year later, three Grade 1/2 teachers and one resource teacher participated. The three mainstream teachers had worked as a team for the last ten years. The resource teacher had worked at the school for more than a decade. All teachers

participating in the larger study had, or were in the process of acquiring, Graduate Master’s degrees and some Graduate diplomas.

### 3.5.2 Student Participants

Eleven guardians of Grade 6/7 signed the consent forms allowing their son/daughter to participate in the study; eight had refugee or migrant backgrounds and three were Canadian born. The students that had refugee or migrant background were all first-generation refugees/immigrants and spoke their home languages at home; however, according to what I had already observed during the 6 months working with them, they were quite proficient in English. All of them arrived in Canada during their childhood years, so some of them had already been part of the ELL program. Table 3.1 shows the names (all names are pseudonyms), grade level, country of origin, languages spoken at home, year of arrival to Canada of the participants and if they were previously designated ELL while attending Kingsway Community School.

*Table 3.1 List of RMBS Participating in this Study*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Languages Spoken at Home</b>	<b>Year of arrival</b>	<b>Previously designated ELL while attending Kingsway Community School</b>
Noelle	7 <sup>th</sup>	Serbia	Serbian	2015	Yes
Maddison	7 <sup>th</sup>	Philippines	Filipino	Unknown	No
Mario	7 <sup>th</sup>	Croatia	Croatian	2015	Yes
Luciano	6 <sup>th</sup>	Argentina	Spanish	Unknown	No
Mariana	6 <sup>th</sup>	Honduras	Spanish	2013	Yes
Beatriz	6 <sup>th</sup>	Philippines	Filipino	Unknown	No

Simon	6 <sup>th</sup>	Kyrgyzstan	Russian, Kyrgyz	2018	Yes
Nadia	6 <sup>th</sup>	Japan	Japanese	Unknown	No

The three Canadian born students who signed their consent forms were Grade 7 students and included two girls and a boy. For the purpose of this study, the data that these three students generated will not be included; however, it may be incorporated in future research.

3.6 Data Collection/Sources:

3.6.1 Sequence of Research Activities

Table 3.2 presents an overview of the sequence of research activities, including the purpose of the activity, the source of the data collection, the participants involved in relation to each of the research questions posed.

*Table 3.2 Overview of the Sequence of Research Activities*

Purpose	Data Collected	Participants	Research Question Addressed
<b>Phase 1: Designing the unit (February 2020)</b>			
Co-designing of a cross curricular unit (social studies/language arts/ socio-emotional learning) together with the class teacher in order to work with the teacher’s objectives for the unit derived from the BC curriculum.	Audio recordings of meetings with focal teacher  Unit plan	Focal teacher + researcher	Question 2: What is the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross-curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and socio-emotional learning) for the literacy engagement and content curricular attainment of refugee- and migrant-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom?
<b>Phase 2: Implementing the unit: Reading, analyzing and personalizing the text (6 class periods; March 2020)</b>			

<p>Observing, recording and understanding students' language and literacies practices to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, social studies inquiry, represent their understanding multimodally and extended thinking.</p>	<p>Class observations</p> <p>Student participants</p> <p>Group-class discussion</p> <p>Worksheets/activities</p> <p>Graphs of emotion</p> <p>Journals</p> <p>Co-teaching activities</p> <p>Progress interviews (Teacher)</p>	<p>Researcher</p> <p>Participants in classroom (division 2)</p> <p>Participants and their materials</p> <p>Participants + researcher</p> <p>Division 2 teacher + researcher</p> <p>Division 2 teacher + researcher</p>	<p>Question 2: What is the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross-curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) for the literacy engagement and content curricular attainment of refugee- and migrant-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom?</p>
<p>Phase 3 (Post COVID-Re design): Data collection of Focus groups 1-2 (March, 2018); Focus group 3 (June, 2019) Reanalysis of teacher focus group 2 data (8 weeks; April-June, 2020)</p>			
<p>To better understand what expert educators, in particular the focal teacher, identify as some of the unique language and literacy learning needs and challenges of migrant- and refugee-background youth in elementary classrooms and their pedagogical practices to support and</p>	<p>Focus group interviews</p>	<p>Researchers and 10 expert teachers</p> <p>The focal teacher and her G. 6/7 team-teaching colleagues were more central.</p>	<p>Question 1: What does an expert educator (classroom teacher), together with her team-teaching colleagues, perceive as the teaching and learning challenges and promising language and content pedagogical practices for supporting refugee- and migrant-background students in a diverse elementary classroom?</p>

scaffold these students' learning.			
Phase 4: Interpretation of data and analysis (16 weeks; July-October, 2020)			
To better understand what expert educators identify as some of the unique language and literacy learning needs and challenges of youth refugees in elementary classrooms and their instructional practices in this context.	Analyze artifacts (focal children's only)	Focal participant + researcher	Question 1: What does an expert educator (classroom teacher), together with her team-teaching colleagues, perceive as the teaching and learning challenges and promising language and content pedagogical practices for supporting refugee- and migrant-background students in a diverse elementary classroom?
	Retrospective interview with teacher	Interviews with teacher to interpret understandings + researcher	
Determine the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross-curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) for the language and literacy and content curricular attainment of refugee- and migrant-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom.	Reviewing all data to look for patterns and understandings (thematic analysis) Deductive analyses were also conducted.	Researcher	Question 2: What is the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross-curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) for the literacy engagement and content curricular attainment of refugee- and migrant-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom?
	Reviewing all data to look for pedagogical practices that are realizations of the focal teacher's pedagogical principles and beliefs and indicate learners' attainment of curricular learning standards,		

### 3.6.2 Unit of Study Timeline

As stated above the unit of study for the Grade 6/7 class was co-designed with the teacher (See Appendix A for the Unit Plan design). Chapter 5 provides a more comprehensive description of each of these activities. The timeline and a brief overview of the activities are outlined in Table 3.3 below.

*Table 3.3 Timeline and Description of the Activities Carried Out in Class*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Task(s)</b>	<b>Data sources</b>
Monday, March 2 <sup>nd</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Think-Write-Pair-Square-Share: Predictions about the story “The Matchbox Diary”</li> <li>2. Connecting to the topic: Reading: “What Objects Tell the Story of Your Life?” (adapted article)</li> <li>3. “My most important objects” worksheet</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students’ artifacts:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Post-Its with predictions about the story</li> <li>- “My most important objects” worksheet</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Class recordings</li> <li>3. Students discussions recordings</li> <li>4. Field notes</li> </ol>
Thursday, March 5 <sup>th</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Graph of emotion (introduction)</li> <li>2. Think-Write-Pair-Square-Share: Prediction about the olive pit</li> <li>3. Reading time</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students’ artifacts:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Post-Its with predictions about the olive pit</li> <li>- Graph of emotion</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Class recordings</li> <li>3. Students discussions recordings</li> <li>4. Field notes</li> </ol>
Friday, March 6 <sup>th</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reading time</li> <li>2. Think-Write-Pair-Square-Share: Predictions about what will happen next</li> <li>3. Exchanging ideas within their groups</li> <li>4. Reading time</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Class recordings</li> <li>2. Students discussions recordings</li> <li>3. Field notes</li> </ol>

Monday, March 9 <sup>th</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reading time</li> <li>2. Think-Write-Pair-Square-Share: Predictions about the macaroni</li> <li>3. Reading time</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students' artifacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Post-Its with predictions about the macaroni</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Class recordings</li> <li>3. Students discussions recordings</li> <li>4. Field notes</li> </ol>
Thursday, March 12 <sup>th</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bubbles: write or draw their thoughts, ideas and/or emotions</li> <li>2. Reading time</li> <li>3. Exchanging ideas within their groups</li> <li>Pros and Cons chart</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students' artifacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bubbles with their thoughts, ideas, or emotions about the read passages</li> <li>- Pros/Cons charts</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Class recordings</li> <li>3. Students discussions recordings</li> <li>4. Field notes</li> </ol>
Friday, March 13 <sup>th</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Graph of emotion</li> <li>2. PPT. of map of great-grandfather's journey</li> <li>3. Exchanging ideas within their groups</li> <li>4. Beginning of collage activity</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students' artifacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Graph of emotion</li> <li>- Collage</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Class recordings</li> <li>3. Students discussions recordings</li> <li>4. Field notes</li> </ol>

### 3.6.3 Teacher Data Sources

#### 3.6.3.1 Focus Groups

The three different focus groups took place at Kingsway Community School between March 2018 and June 2019. These focus groups' purpose was to gather information from experienced, respected "expert educators" regarding language and literacy education with refugee-background students, related issues and challenges, and professional learning and programming needs. Each focus group took about one and a half to two hours, and they were audio recorded.

The first two focus groups were conducted by Drs. Maureen Kendrick and Margaret Early. I had the chance to read the transcripts of the first two ones in March 2019, and they gave me a strong sense of what teachers did at Kingsway and what their commitment to their students was. Fortunately, along with Jonathan Feitosa Ferreira, a graduate student member of the research team, I was able to join them for the third focus group, which took place in June 2019 with the Grade 1 and 2 teachers. The focus group interviews were semi-structured around three areas: 1) Beliefs; 2) assessment and instructional strategies related to language and literacy education with children and youth from refugee backgrounds; 3) promoting RMBS's engagement in the classroom. However, we let the conversation flow according to what stories teachers wanted to share with us. Those stories ended up being the most meaningful ones. The focus group were a friendly and open-hearted conversation about the teachers' experiences as a well-knitted team who had welcomed many RMBS and families and developed a philosophy of empathy and support. After the three focus groups were professionally transcribed, the graduate student research team (Amir Michalovich, Jonathan Feitosa Ferreira, and I) had the chance to thematically analyze that data in order to try to find common themes in those three focus groups. We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for thematic analysis and as a team we followed the six suggested phases:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data: Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. Every time we thought we had found a new code, we made a memo or a comment in our own file in the program, so as to "reflect on the process or...[to] help shape the development of codes

- and themes” (Creswell, 2018, p.184). Later, we shared them with the rest of the team and had long conversations in order to merge the codes and agree on their meanings.
3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
  4. Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
  5. Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
  6. Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis back to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis (p. 87).

#### 3.6.3.1.1 Elisa and Grade 6/7 Team

The data from the Grade 6/7 focal teachers were gathered as mentioned above, in March 2018. With respect to reanalysis with a focus on the collaborating teacher, after reading the data from that particular focus group multiple times, it was decided that for this closer reanalysis, the larger conversation needed to be the focus because the teachers’ responses were so tightly united and interwoven it was unrealistic and, moreover, unauthentic to untangle. The second instance I had to include Elisa, the collaborating teacher, in data collection was in the planning meeting we had in January 2020. There I presented my draft unit plan for the study, and she shared her ideas, suggestions, and comments about it. The meeting was recorded and later transcribed. I was able to generate additional data from Elisa during the classes where we co-taught the Social Studies unit. We had a voice recorder in the front of the classroom, so it was easy to follow her class instructions

and exchanges with the students. This data was also transcribed. A final opportunity to generate data that included Elisa was the post-interview we had after the school year was over, where I confirmed some of the ideas and analyses, I was building on after listening to the class recordings and looking at the data. This meeting was also transcribed and later analyzed.

### 3.6.3.2 Student Participants

The students’ data was collected in their classroom during their Social Studies periods during March 2020. As mentioned before, students worked in groups of three or four, and for data collecting purposes, each table group was assigned an iPad with a voice recorder app, which was turned on by the students every time they shared their opinions or ideas. Additionally, an audio recorder was placed near the teachers to register the instructions, interactions, and class procedures. These recordings were transcribed. Table 3.4 shows the data generated with each of the focal students:

Table 3.4 Data Generated with Each Focal Student

Student's Name	Post its: Prediction shop/ cover pictures (written)	My Journal Day 1 (written)	My most important object (written)	Graph of emotion group share (audio/written)	Post its: Olive Pit (written)	Post its: Macaroni (written)	Pros and Cons of leaving (written)	Thinking bubbles (written)	T-D-SH questions about ppt. (written)	Collage (poster)
1. Noelle	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2. Maddison	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√
3. Mario	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
4. Nadia	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
5. Mariana	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
6. Luciano	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√
7. Simon	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X
8. Beatriz	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

During the data collection period, I gathered data in the form of field notes and students' artifacts such as the post-its with their predictions about the story (see Figure 3.2), pros and cons charts about great-grandfather leaving Italy (see Figure 3.3), "My Most Important Objects" drawings and written explanations (see Figure 3.5), the graph of emotion that followed the main character's emotions and the students' emotions throughout the story (see Figure 3.1) and the thought bubble reflections chart that helped students express their ideas, thoughts and emotions about the story (see Figure 3.4).

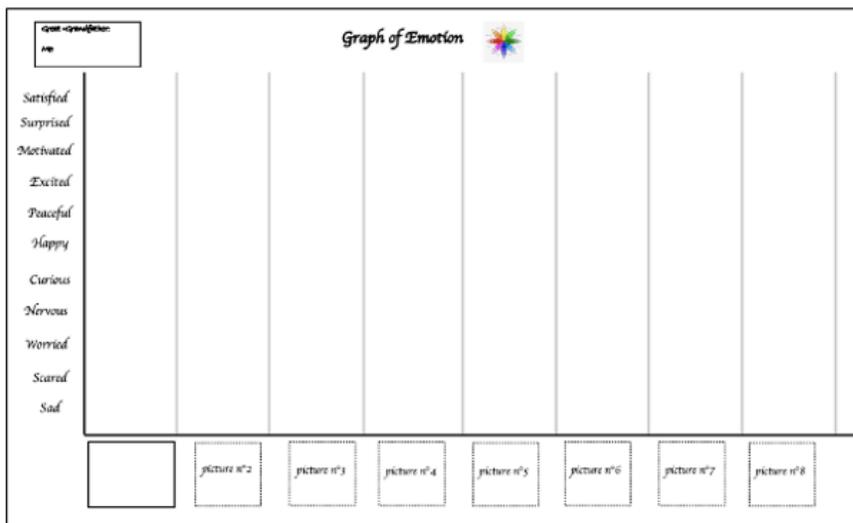


Figure 3.1 Graph of Emotion

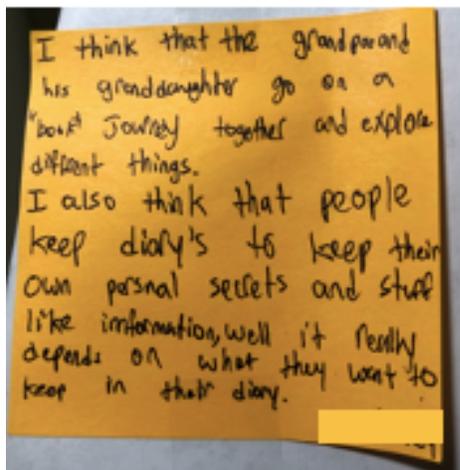


Figure 3.2 Maddison's Post-It with Predictions



## Pros and Cons - T chart



Together with your group, try to think of at least three positive aspects (pros) and three negative ones (cons) that leaving everything behind and going to a new country might have meant to grandfather's family.

Pros of leaving Italy	Cons of leaving Italy

Figure 3.3 Pros and Cons Chart

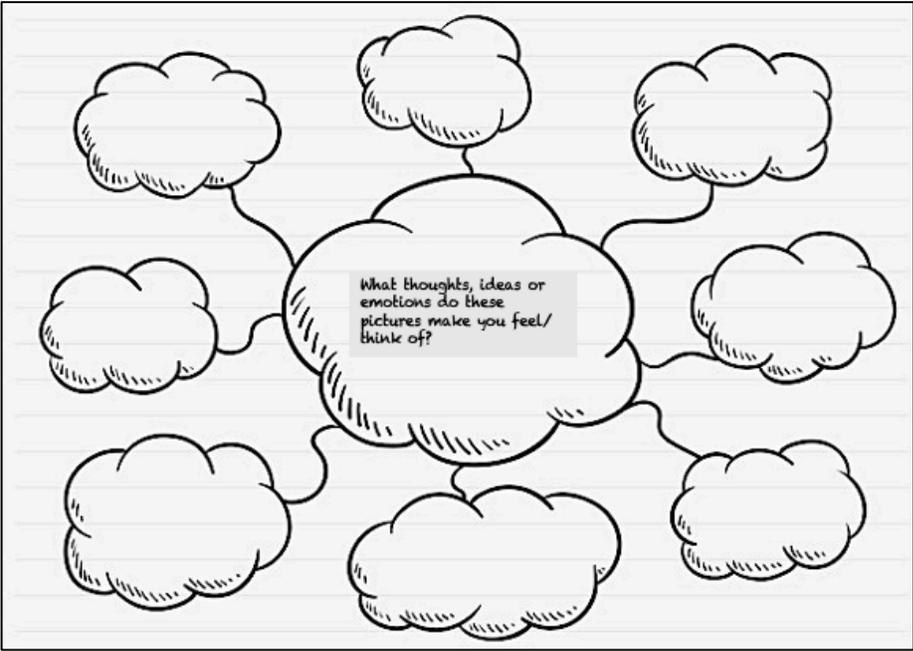


Figure 3.4 Thought Bubble Reflection Chart

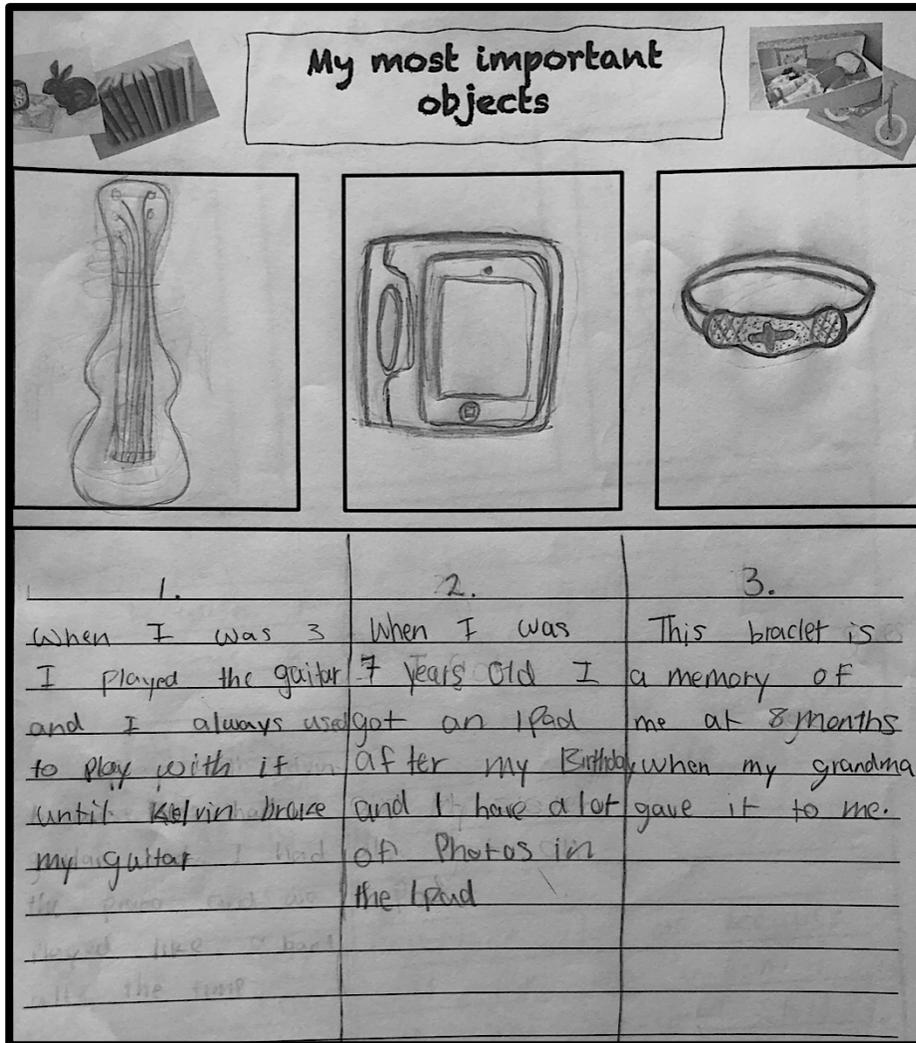


Figure 3.5 Mariana's "My Most Important Objects" Worksheet

### 3.7 Data Analysis

#### 3.7.1 Joint Analysis of Focus Groups

The transcripts of the focus group interviews were analyzed by the project team of graduate research assistants. We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for the thematic analysis of those transcripts. Our research team (Amir Michalovich, Jonathan Ferreira, and I) listened to the interviews and read the transcripts various times in order to become familiarized with data. The written files were imported into NVivo, which assisted us with the qualitative analysis. Then, each

one of us, separately, identified different themes from the data. This was done by writing comments and making annotations in NVivo about what the participants were talking about on their interviews (e.g., issue, topic, action, activity, belief, context, norm, emotion, challenge, need, practice, etc.) and we also added comments about the participants' perspectives or meanings. We centered our interpretations on the immediate concepts employed by participants, rather than on theoretical abstractions, for example, in Excerpt 3.1 it is possible to appreciate how one of the participants uses of the concept of "Spiral":

**Excerpt 3.1** "Spiral"

Michelle: ...Every kid, all kids learn different ways, so it's using as many different means to get them the information. They're going to pick up a little bit of it, from whatever way you're trying to teach them.

Patricia: I think we kind of work with it as a *spiral*, you go at it one time, some of them are going to figure it out. Then you go at it again, and you're going to pick up a couple more kids. Then you're going to go at it again. Each time when you're going at it, you're going to introduce another [type of] language ..."

We included their concept of spiraling work – doing things repeatedly in different modes as a way to reach every student – and we coded it as *winding*.

After each one of us had completed the first step, we got together and compared the interpretations in order to perceive the common themes. Then, we worked independently again, and each team member received 1/3 of the data to work on but with the annotations of the other two team members, in order to add those views into the new reading and analysis. When reading the transcriptions with the other two annotations, tentative codes were made. After creating codes that incorporated the themes and annotations of the three team members, a final meeting (or

meetings) was held in order to further revise the codes and see if they were consistent with what we read, heard and interpreted from the data.

### 3.7.2 Thematic Analysis – Grade 6/7 Teacher and Team

As I mentioned before, the first time I read the focus group the Grade 6/7 teachers, it really called my attention how closely they worked with each other that they even finished each other sentences when talking about their classroom practices. Therefore, even though I wanted to focus on the data and select only those excerpts from Elisa, the teacher I was working with, it was impossible; everything in the transcripts was utterly intertwined. Hence, instead of solely focusing on an expert educator, I reviewed the analysis of a team of expert educators, which was also a clear reflection of how this school works.

Therefore, I revisited the data that we had from the second focus groups, focusing more on those exchanges where Elisa participated. This analysis was deductive as it was based on the themes that had previously emerged, but it was also inductive as I kept looking for new emerging themes on the transcripts, other than the ones that we had found before as a research team. Then, I started looking for additional emerging themes in Elisa's class recordings and in her exchanges with the students. After the class recordings were done, I repeated the process with the transcript of our post-project interview (July, 2020).

Some of the themes and categories that appeared from the analysis of the new data were very similar to those that had emerged from the teachers' focus groups; however, new, different codes appeared. Then, I checked if those new codes were consistent with our theoretical framework and with the previously found codes. After that, I started working more deductively again, revising all of the collected data one more time; however, on this phase I checked for the presence of the new codes in the previously analyzed data.

### 3.7.3 Tasks Analysis

The data analysis regarding the students' different tasks were based on a cross-examination of my field notes, audio recordings, and the artifacts I collected after the cross-curricular unit. The data produced by the students was analyzed considering three aspects that were part of my second research question 2: 1) the multiliteracies practices that were involved in the process of performing the task; 2) the learning objectives covered (as mentioned in the BC curriculum), including the knowledge processes Cope and Kalantzis (2015); 3) literacy engagement and identity investment.

The first step in the data analysis was listening to the students' and teachers' audio recordings documented in class and transcribing them, which was very useful because it helped me get acquainted with the audio data, and it also gave me a notion of recurrent themes. Later, when the recordings were transcribed, I heard and reread them again and started looking for emerging themes (or codes) and recurrent patterns. When the work with the recordings was done, I started working with my field notes and students' artifacts. Every time I found a code, I made a memo or a note about them in order to think and reflect about the process and outline the appearance of new codes and themes (Creswell, 2018). Once I identified a significant group of codes, I went back to the research question and checked if the codes that I had were relevant in order to answer that question and if they supported the purpose of my study. After finding similar or repeated codes, I started creating categories of codes found on the students' audio recordings, on their artifacts or in the class documented teacher-student interactions.

After that, every task was analyzed regarding the objectives covered according to the BC curriculum (Social Studies, Language Arts or Socio-emotional Learning), the knowledge processes (as described by Cope and Kalantzis (2015)) and finally according to the students' identity investment and literacy engagement. I carried out the initial analysis of each of the tasks;

however, after it was finalized, my supervisor read the transcripts and the data analysis that I had been working on. Then, we started working iteratively in order to refine those analyses and the codes that had emerged.

Table 3.5 (see below) shows the BC curriculum objectives that were covered, as well as the knowledge processes developed in each task. The objectives were divided into two groups, one regarding subjects (Social studies and Language Arts), and the other the abilities mentioned in the Core Competencies, which are relevant to the Socio-emotional Learning of the students. Students’ identity investment and literacy engagement will be explained in detail in Chapter 5.

*Table 3.5 Covered Objectives and Knowledge Processes Developed*

	BC Curriculum: Social Studies, Language Arts (Grade 6)	BC Curriculum: Core Competencies	“Learning by Design”: Knowledge processes
Task 1: My Most Important Objects	<p><u>Social Studies:</u> - Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to -ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.</p> <p>- Oral history, traditional stories, and artifacts as evidence about the past (Grade 4).</p> <p><u>Language Arts:</u> - Students will be able to express and justify their opinions.</p>	<p><u>Positive Personal and Cultural Identity</u> Involves the awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the factors that contribute to a healthy sense of oneself; it includes knowledge of one’s family background, heritage(s), language(s), beliefs, and perspectives in a pluralistic society.</p>	<p>- Experiencing the known: the students had to think and discuss about the objects that were important to them or their families.</p> <p>- Experiencing the new: the students had to read an article about the 50 objects that tell the history of New York.</p> <p>- Analyzing critically: the students had to think, reflect and transfer their knowledge to a different context.</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Applying appropriately: the students had to pick the most representative objects.</li> </ul>
<p>Task 2: Graph of Emotion</p>	<p><u>Social Studies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The urbanization and migration of people.</li> <li>- Global poverty and inequality issues, including class structure and gender.</li> <li>- Use SS inquiry processes and skills to -ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.</li> </ul> <p><u>Language Arts:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.</li> <li>- Students will be able to express and justify their opinions.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Personal Awareness and Responsibility:</u></p> <p>Involves understanding the connections between personal and social behaviour and well-being; it encourages people to make constructive and ethical decisions and act on them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiencing the known: the students were already familiar with many of the emotions included in the graph.</li> <li>- Analyzing critically: reflect and decide the emotions they were going to use in the graph.</li> <li>- Conceptualizing by naming: the students had to choose an emotion for great-grandfather and one for themselves.</li> </ul>
<p>Task 3: The Olive Pit</p>	<p><u>Social Studies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The urbanization and migration of people.</li> <li>- Global poverty and inequality issues, including class structure and gender.</li> <li>- Use SS inquiry processes and skills to -ask</li> </ul>	<p><u>Social Awareness and Responsibility</u></p> <p>Social Awareness and Responsibility involves the awareness, understanding, and appreciation of connections among people, including</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiencing the known: the students had to look at an object they already knew, then tried to guess what was inside and only after that, they were able to take out the olive pit and the macaroni from the box.</li> </ul>

	<p>questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.</p> <p><u>Language Arts:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.</li> <li>- Make inferences and predictions and using different language forms.</li> <li>- Be able to express and justify their opinions</li> </ul>	<p>between people and the natural environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiencing the new + Analyzing critically: the students had to interpret the story and make connections between the objects and what was happening in it.</li> <li>- Conceptualizing by naming: the students had to think of abstract and general terms to write about their thoughts, ideas or emotions about the story.</li> </ul>
<p>Task 4: Collage</p>	<p><u>Social Studies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The urbanization and migration of people.</li> <li>- Global poverty and inequality issues, including class structure and gender.</li> <li>- Use SS inquiry processes and skills to -ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Personal Awareness and Responsibility:</u></p> <p>Involves understanding the connections between personal and social behaviour and well-being; it encourages people to make constructive and ethical decisions and act on them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiencing the known: both teachers activated students' prior knowledge of the Italian migration.</li> <li>- Experiencing the new: both teachers presented a new PowerPoint with pictures and information new to the students.</li> <li>- Conceptualizing by naming: the students had to discuss the after-presentation questions and express their thoughts, ideas and emotions about the topics presented.</li> <li>- Applying creatively: the</li> </ul>

			students were asked to create a multimodal collage, using the images from the PowerPoint.
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In order to perform this analysis, I went back and forth through the cross-curricular unit planned together with Elisa to check the achieved objectives, curricular competencies covered, and contents understood by the students, and compared them with the codes that emerged at the beginning of the analysis, tried to find new codes or make new categories and then moved on to analyzing new pieces of data. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain:

Data analysis is a complex procedure that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation. (p. 202)

The final piece was the post-project interview, which gave me the chance to member check some of the themes that I had identified with Elisa and add those interview excerpts into the analysis in order to give them more support and validity.

For the multimodal analysis of the first task, “My Most Important Objects”, I used Cope and Kalantzis’(2009b) Grammar of Multimodality to explore some of the visual and linguistic meanings in one of the works of the students. Additionally, for the multimodal analysis of the collages from task 4, I used “A grammar of visual meaning” (Kalantzis et al., 2016) in order to try to recognize the knowledge processes the students were engaged in while performing these tasks,

to record the different semiotic resources they were using in class and to try to better understand the students' works meanings.

The analysis of each task was a narration of how the three aforementioned aspects were or were not achieved by the focal students and it included a triangulation of the audio transcripts of the students, the teachers and the artifacts made by the students.

### 3.8 Researcher Positionality

I am a Latin-American, Chilean woman who have been teaching for the last 16 years. I had the chance to learn English when I was only two years old when my family moved for a couple of years to New York City. Therefore, I can say that my educational reality differed enormously from the vast majority of Chileans. However, that opportunity enabled me to educate myself about world issues from an early age.

When I started teaching, I always felt that we had two fundamental roles as teachers: 1) talk about social justice issues, especially the injustices that were happening in our own country and around the globe; 2) the socioemotional growth and wellbeing of our students. These beliefs guided me to become a middle school teacher because I always felt that that was an age when students needed someone to talk to, trust and confide in.

I knew working with refugee-background students would be something completely different from what I had experienced before. However, I also knew that caring and being there for those students would be the first step. I also knew that I lacked the research knowledge and felt a bit "rusty" after leaving university in 2004; however, I felt that I understood the adolescent's reality. But in the end, that was what made me take a chance and live one of the most wonderful experiences of my life.

## **Chapter 4: General Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I provide a detailed account of the teaching and learning challenges, as well as the promising language and content pedagogical practices, for supporting refugee- and migrant-background students that a team of teachers from Kingsway Community School perceived and reported to our research team and me. I start by explaining the four big themes identified by our initial Graduate Research Assistant team analysis. Then, I explain how my subsequent analysis supported and gave a more in- depth and expanded view of the original themes, introducing a new theme. Specifically, the research question addressed in this chapter is:

What does an expert educator (classroom teacher), together with her teaching colleagues, perceive as the teaching and learning challenges and promising language and content pedagogical practices for supporting refugee- and migrant-background youth in a diverse elementary classroom?

### **4.2 Pedagogical Context of the Research Site: Focus Group Interview**

In order to better understand the challenges and promising practices, as perceived by Elisa, the Grade 6/7 classroom teacher in this study, a summary of the themes that emerged from the focus group interviews across a range of both resource and mainstream teachers (Grades 2, 3,5,6, and 7), of whom she was one, will be shared. This will be followed by reporting, in more depth, the findings from an analysis of multiple data sources concerning Elisa, the participating teacher, along with the Grade 6/7 team's perceptions, more specifically, particularly, with respect to promising language and literacies practices, across subject areas for supporting refugee-background youth, as well as their migrant-background classmates.

The themes presented and explained in this section emerged across all three of the focus group interviews undertaken at Kingsway Community School in 2018 and 2019, and they represent the teachers' beliefs and practices according to their own perceptions. The analysis of their perceptions was made collaboratively by the graduate research assistants' group, and this data provided a rich context for my COVID adapted study.

The process of this data analysis is detailed in Chapter 3. The four themes are: elasticity; cross-dimensional flows; interdependence; winding. A fuller account of these focus group interviews will be forthcoming, as a co-authored publication. In the context of this thesis, these themes are reported and discussed briefly to illustrate and situate the work of the Grade 6/7 teacher, Elisa, the focal teacher in this case study, in the broader context of the pedagogical principles and practices of the educators in the school.

#### 4.2.1 Elasticity

The first theme that we identified as a team relates to the teachers' elasticity and flexibility. As a research team, we defined elasticity as teachers' willingness to stretch themselves to accommodate the needs of their refugee- and migrant-background students (RMBS) – such as facing challenges proactively, promoting cultural inclusiveness in an active way, effectively responding to the differences of their students, as well as being able to act very sensitively and thoughtfully. Elasticity meant to stretch beyond what one (in this case these teachers) would usually do in other circumstances (e.g., with learners who do not have the same needs). Different from elasticity, we defined flexibility as moving students between learning groups based on ongoing assessments and the emerging knowledge of students' backgrounds (as trust was built over time). The learning groups were made according to the students' level of understanding and performance; however, they could be frequently and flexibly changed due to the constant

evaluations, feedback, and exchanges about their improvements or the possible need for extra support. The teachers were flexible enough to make all the necessary changes in order to respond to their students' immediate needs. This first theme is discussed in a little more detail, as the quotes also serve to illuminate features that emerged in the other themes.

Over the years, the intermediate grades teachers and ELL/resource teachers have carefully restructured and adapted their numeracy and literacy curriculum and instruction according to the differentiated needs of their students. During the morning, learners rotate to different teachers, in different groups, relative to their varied literacy and numeracy competencies levels. Teachers constantly assess and observe their students' performance in these smaller groups in order assign learners to groups and make changes when necessary throughout the term. The ELLs are assigned in small groups of approximately four or five to one of three ELL/ resource teachers who work with a group in their resource classroom. The students work on a range of programs from relatively independent novel studies through to learning basic phonics skills and reading strategies. However, when reading in the subject area curricular units, such as social studies or science, the classroom teachers and the ELL teachers work across the full range of literacy levels using the same themes, topics, and texts which gives the students a sense of unity and belonging relative to what is happening in every classroom. As Elisa explains in Excerpt 4.1 regarding how they give the students differentiated support but still working on the same material:

**Excerpt 4.1** “We’re doing the same book”

Elisa: And then what’s nice is that because we're doing the same book... those kids [with the ELL support teacher] can still engage in the conversation with my [in class] kids and I’ll hear them talk about the book. So, they don’t feel like oh, like we're doing something different...

The ELL teachers find innovative ways to design ‘high challenge, high support’ activities using multiple modes and strategies to support the ELLs literacy engagement with the subject are texts. So overt instruction, situated practice, and critical framing (NLG, 2000) are flexibly applied to support migrant- and refugee-background learners in pedagogical practices. As Lidia (Grade 5/6 teacher) explains in Excerpt 4.2 with the co-investigators, Maureen and Margaret, when the groups are all together in their homeroom classes, other instructional adaptations are made,

**Excerpt 4.2** “Collaborative activities”

Lidia: I try to embed them [new migrant and refugee youth] in with their peers so they’re sitting with their peers doing something with their peers for sure. Try to link it to whatever the other [more proficient English language user] kids are doing and maybe it’s very simple academic language like ‘bones’, ‘bones in the human body’, ‘body parts ‘

Maureen: So, lots of vocab kinds of stuff.

Lidia: Yes, and in the hopes that because they’re embedded in their peers, often there’s collaborative activities that draws them into the topic or language

Margaret: Can they help each other by translating?

Lidia: Absolutely.

Margaret: And do you use any translation Apps like Google Translate or?

Lidia: Yes, yes, because I have a tablet in my room and it’s often used for translating.

Moreover, while the teachers are all working with differentiated learning in smaller groups, they are constantly checking ELLs’ academic and language needs and progress but also their emotional and social ones. Abigail explains, “What I find interesting about this population is because trauma and interrupted schooling can manifest in a variety of ways. Their ELL needs and

resource [support for behavioural, social and emotional] needs are often closer together.” So, as Abigail further explains teachers are flexible and make adaptations on multiple intersecting aspects of refugee-background youth’s learning accordingly.

Among the many other ways that the teachers demonstrated ‘elasticity’ is around their sensitivity to the cultural and religious family and community backgrounds. For example, the Grades 2/3 teachers explained that many of the students report, “I don’t eat meat.” for religious reasons. But when the teachers explained that all the hot dogs they were serving, at a school event, will be halal, it still took a 10-minute conversation before the students fully understood that the teachers were ensuring that everyone in the Grade 2/3 community was inclusive and respectful of their cultural and religious practices. It is clear from the analysis of the data that the teachers, in this school, do not operate within assimilationist viewpoints and are open and flexible in their pedagogical practices.

#### 4.2.2 Cross-Dimensional Flow

The second theme the data illuminated after analyzing the three focus groups was that there is a constant movement of ideas and information between all the members of this community (teachers, students, parents, administrators and community coordinators and settlement workers) that make things work and ensure information flows in a clear, timely and articulate manner. We named this movement the *cross dimensional flow*. This cross dimensional flow starts with the dimension of the students, and it begins by building on what students bring from home, from their own culture and what already know from their background knowledge and lived experiences. In this community school, as indicated by Lidia above, the use of translation and of the students’, their families’, and their communities’ home languages is always welcome at any time and in any subject. Teachers and community members want parents and students to feel proud of where they

come from and to share interculturally with the rest of the community their traditions and knowledge.

One illustrative example was a project on breadmaking across cultures in the primary grades that the community office was integral in organizing. As Michelle recounts, in Excerpt 4.3, the community officer,

**Excerpt 4.3** “Different cultures”

Michelle: [you]...found parents or settlement workers from different cultures. So, every Thursday for November, we would send a few kids from each of our classes down to the community room to bake bread. Because there is bread in every culture. So, we had .... bannock, ....and Irish biscuits and Lebanese bread... and...

While there was overt instruction (NLG, 2000) and whole-class, teacher fronted instruction, from our analysis of the teachers’ focus group interviews at both primary and intermediate levels, the curriculum of this school is also centered on three main approaches: play-based, inquiry-based, and art-based learning approaches. Teachers use as many different modes as possible to explain contents, as was pointed to with the above discussion of literacy groupings, where many visuals are used, in order to reach different students through different ‘access’ routes every time. Thus, students can show their understanding of things in different modes other than solely reading or writing. Patricia, a Grade 2/3 teacher, explains Excerpt 4.4 how they use words, actions, and all of the students’ senses to support their meaning making:

**Excerpt 4.4** “Introduce another ‘language’”

Patricia: I think we kind of work with it as a spiral, you go at it one time, some of them are going to figure it out. Then you go at it again, and you’re going to pick up a couple more kids. Then you’re going to go at it again. Each time when you’re going at it,

you're going to introduce another 'language,' let's say.

Art, drama, dance, and music are also integral in the teaching and learning in older grades.

There is also an area that is addressed by teachers, administrators and people who belong to this community. They support and give assistance to parents and students in ways that go beyond the classroom and academic needs and challenges. Working with the community coordinator, they help students and families with nutritional, material, social, and survival (basic) needs, while serving as 'brokers' and mentors in understanding and navigating the 'foreign' social, medical and financial systems, as they adjust to the resettlement process.

#### 4.2.3 Interdependence

A third theme we identified relates to the reciprocal relationships and mutual support that exist within this community which we named *interdependence*. Different combinations of mutual support found here are teacher to student and teacher to parent; teacher to teacher; parent to parent. Some of these are alluded to earlier with the support that teachers give to their students and parents and the trust and safety this builds. As Michelle explains in Excerpt 4.5, teachers also support each other a great deal,

#### **Excerpt 4.5** "We don't take it home with us"

Michelle: At the end of the day, we come together almost every day, just to like, sigh, breathe and share, and unload. Then we don't have to take it home.... We know each other's kids, so we can laugh about it, or joke about it, or cry about it, if we have to. But then we can go home, and we don't take it home with us.

These different types of mutual support play an essential role in the positive functioning of the community. Another one that is very important is the one that is created with the people offering extracurricular programs as there is a strong relation with the various extracurricular

programs that exist for students and parents. Most of the time these programs are free, and they give students and families extra tools they may be needing (language & cooking lessons, sports, childcare). Many of the activities aimed at parents take place in the community room, a spacious room in the school with tables, chairs, computers and other resources. Here, new parents find a welcoming place to meet and spend time with other adults, including member of their ethnolinguistic community. Hellen describes in Excerpt 4.6, that the community coordinator, along with other school parents, provide support for each other,

**Excerpt 4.6** “The community room listens to the needs”

Hellen: That’s the amazing part, the community room listens to the needs of the community so there's now a group where those moms who have never been at school or are illiterate in their first language or you know having a hard time learning English, there's this group where they go and they just kind of hang out and be ‘women’ and they talk about you know just whatever they want to talk about.

Socio-emotional care is prioritized all around the school not only from teachers to students and parents, but also from teachers to teachers and empathy and the compassion is palpably felt and lived in every class, office, and event in this community school.

#### 4.2.4 Winding

The fourth and last theme relates to establishing and maintaining trust, soft starts, keeping a slow pace, cultural cautiousness, and keeping in mind their students’ basic needs before academics, which we called *winding*. We decided on the term because as a winding road, it may take a longer to reach or get to a certain part or ending because of its curves, but it reaches its aim. Teachers let students take their time to grow and flourish. They do not rush them into academics before they are socially and emotionally ready but gently guide their way into what they are able to do and can

do with success. As Andrea explains in Excerpt 4.7, days start by having a “me time” where students are able to connect with themselves and their classmates and teachers are able to talk to them, to ‘read the room’ and get a sense of how to start the day,

**Excerpt 4.7** “Soft starts”

Andrea: ...all three of us do soft starts in the morning. So, they have to socialize through drawing, or puzzles and they get to just talk with their friends, get to know each other. They get to see what goes on in the classroom. And so, we’re not just getting right into it.

Nothing is done simply following the same format, nothing is repeated just because, everything is done by thinking about the specific needs holding in mind the lived experiences of these children and their families. As Lidia and Abigail describe in Excerpt 4.8 in a conversation with Maureen and Margaret, Kingsway teachers are committed to implementing trauma-informed practices.:

**Excerpt 4.8** “My first concern”

Lidia: It depends on how the trauma manifests. I mean I find that my first concern is how, are they comfortable here? Are they able to make connections with peers? That seems to take a lot of, a lot of my concern...And then academics is almost, is secondary. I mean it’s not entirely; they’re not mutually exclusive at all.

Maureen: Yeah.

Lidia: But if you have a student who’s clearly struggling emotionally it seems paramount.

Maureen: Empathy.

Abigail: Right. Like you just have to be really sensitive and remind yourself also that when they’re displaying really frustrating behaviors that this is coming from a different place that I don’t understand.

Maureen: Mm hmm.

Abigail: Right? Like and to try and just constantly have grace for those things that are incredibly frustrating.

The four themes reported here contribute, in some part, to providing insights regarding the first research question regarding this group of teachers' perceptions of the challenges and promising practices in supporting refugee youth in a mainstream elementary school. The themes reported characterize their set of beliefs together with their teaching principles and practices. They recognize that students in their classrooms, particularly those from migrant and refugee background, commonly have many needs and challenges related to the struggles they face with the cultural, social, and academic demands of academic subject areas in school, in many cases with poverty, and other factors related to pre-resettlement trauma, and trauma arising from cultural and adjustment resettlement in Canada. In keeping with the ethos and practices of the school, in general terms, their pedagogical practices are flexible and adaptable to learners' needs; they work closely with their colleagues, the settlement workers, and to the extent possible with the parents of their students and the larger community to understand and bridge home and school; they work mindfully to make connections for the students from their known experiences to new experiences and across their learnings and modes of learning. As with their close team of teaching colleagues, with a wealth of experience in working with refugee-background children and youth, they employ trauma-sensitive practices that do not apply academic time pressures and considers learner social and emotional well-being, as a priority in the learning process.

### 4.3 Pedagogical Context of the Grade 6/7 Classroom: Language and Literacy Challenges and Promising Pedagogical Practices across the Curriculum.

To specifically answer research question 1, an additional analysis was undertaken of Elisa's and the Grade 6/7 team's responses in the focus interview, as well as from co-designing and co-teaching sessions, researcher reflections/field notes, and a post-project interview. This analysis was undertaken with a particular focus on language and literacies learning across the curriculum. The finding of this subsequent analysis follows.

With respect to promising language and literacy across the curriculum pedagogies that demonstrate the themes of 'elasticity, cross-dimensional flow, winding and interdependence', the following short 'teacher story' serves to illuminate some key characteristics and principles that shape Elisa's and the Grade 6/7 team's productive practices.

#### 4.3.1 Cross-Dimensional Flow and Interdependence

In the focus group interview, Elisa reported that as part of a social studies unit on migration she introduced the reading of the book "A Long Walk to Water" (Park, 2010) to the class. The short novel is set in Sudan and based on a true story of a girl who makes a long walk twice a day to the pond to fetch water for her family and alternatively the story of a boy, who is one of the 'lost boys' of Sudan, a refugee searching and walking over long distances for his family and experiencing unimaginable adversities.

As Elisa explained Excerpt 4.9 in response to Maureen's inquiry "... did you select that book specifically because you thought it might be something that the students in your class would connect to?"

#### **Excerpt 4.9** "Kids are able to connect"

Elisa: .... the only reason, I chose that was because I planned a unit about migration, so

that was...one of the topics that we talk about in socials, and so I planned the unit ... and then I'd heard of this book and based on how that unit went talking about refugees, talking about just why people move, like push and pull factors, based on how well the conversation went and how engaged they were in that, I thought we could take a little further and I thought that there was enough comfort in the class for them to do that and that people felt okay with that. So then, because of how well that conversation went, everyone was very open.....And so it was a very open conversation with the class. I don't know that every year it will be like that depending on the kids, but it was, and then so I knew about this book and that's why I brought it... thinking that lots could connect. It's been really good because those kids [who shared their own migration stories] are able to connect and then other kids are able to connect in other ways to it so yeah, it's been great.

In this 'teacher story' we can see how Elisa's practices reflect the theme of cross-dimensional flow. This flow can be seen in the teacher's intent to choose class material that allows students to connect from diverse points of view, building on and connecting to the lived experiences and funds of knowledge of the individual learners. The different dimensions (teacher-student/ student-student) get crossed when the unit of work is designed to reach further than what is stipulated in the curriculum. In this case, the abstract concepts of 'migration' and 'push' and 'pull' can reach a different potential when there is a connection with real world experiences, and there is space for non-judgmental experience sharing. In these circumstances, what is evident is the importance to sensitively navigating the topic in a trauma-informed way, continually assessing how the students are responding to the "migration" topic of pushes and pulls first in these more abstract terms and taking the lead from the students regarding the level of personal openness and

engagement in the discussions on the topic. In some ways, this is different from the suggested practice of building first on background knowledge and previous experiences. The development in this design follows a sequence that starts with the concept of a “fictionalized” narrative based on a true story, where students can safely observe before inserting themselves into the story. The story is abstract but specifically connects to the listener’s experiences or dilemmas and opens up a possible space for those who want to share or draw on personal experiences. Students know that sharing their thoughts and personal stories is optional, and RMBS are not required to disclose their lived experiences. However, Elisa mentions that it is not uncommon for them to let their classmates know about their migration journeys or their lives before Canada. As she explains in Excerpt 4.10, she believes that this is mainly because of the feeling of connection this story gives RMBS and because reading about other children’s lives that are not that different to theirs, makes them feel empowered to share their journeys.

**Excerpt 4.10** “Connect themselves with someone else”

Elisa: ...so many of them connect with on a personal level, right? ...they have immigrated, they have emigrated.... but then bringing in like the “Refugee” story... the read aloud, ... bringing all these different things and the “Long Walk to Water” ...it just makes them understand at a deeper level, not just the level that their story is from. And then it's just nice, there's something when they can connect themselves with someone else. There's... I don't know, I don't know how to describe that but it's just like “Oh, someone else went through this too” ... there's some more gratitude and I don't know how to describe that but, it's just maybe they're able to see themselves in something else and I think that's really powerful.

Elisa emphasized, in Excerpt 4.11, this point of connecting with her students' lives and stories and of doing something more meaningful, when we reflected about the co-planning and co-teaching in our post-project interview.

**Excerpt 4.11** "Get a little...bit of comfort"

Elisa: So...I got...the new textbook...and I started... we could read through all these things and we could answer these questions and...maybe a kid can connect to it...Actually at the beginning of course, I teach the vocab of it...What does it mean to immigrate, to emigrate? What's an illegal immigrant? What's a refugee? ...And so maybe they could connect and say, 'Oh, I immigrated from Pakistan' or something like that, but that would be very simple, not really connection but they could say, 'Oh, that was what I did, right?'. But there's no story there, that doesn't honor any of the things that they've actually gone through. It just says, 'Oh, you are an immigrant'. Like that's it. That's all that does. It labels them. It doesn't honor their story and their family's story and the things that they've gone through and some of them very traumatic, right? And it doesn't honor any of that and it doesn't dig or dig any deeper. So, the reason... I pulled that story in...that book, because I thought some would connect to it. And so, some of that is me looking at the students I have in my class that year and knowing what some of their stories are...and realizing that a lot can connect with this story. And so, it sometimes it has to do with the kids in your class... that they're able to, and even if it's only a few, it's worth it because it means that those few are going to maybe be understood a little bit more, maybe be heard a little bit more and then are able to possibly get a little...bit of comfort, I guess from hearing these stories, right?

In these two short teacher stories, it is possible to observe how Elisa understands and embraces the importance of the migration topic in her students' lives. She refuses to use 'just the textbook' as it only presents the basics of the topic and it "doesn't honor or dig" enough into her students' lives as immigrants or refugees. Therefore, it is possible to see with this example that multiple dimensions are always finding their ways in Elisa's class. She does not teach only Social Studies, but she also builds on the Personal and Social competencies of her students.

These pedagogical choices of hers address the idea that most school textbooks commonly include stereotypical, negative, superficial, and imprecise information about the lives, values, and experiences of Native, Asian, African, Arab and Latino students (Gay, 2018). Importantly, as noted previously, she is continually assessing how her students respond to the topic, as presented in more abstract terms and taking the lead from them regarding the level of personal openness and engagement in the discussions.

Her aim is their comfort, and she designs her tasks, lessons, and units of work, always with that principle and objective in mind. However, things like these can be done only because she has built a strong social and emotional relationships with her students. Elisa would not be able to introduce topics and texts, such as those mentioned before, if her students did not feel that there is a safe space in the classroom. This speaks to the theme of interdependence.

The interdependence, the reliance that exists between this teacher and her students, can be clearly seen in her daily teaching practices and the pedagogical choices she makes. Empathy, compassion and mutual support are also part of this interdependence. As Elisa points out, in order to trust and rely on this classroom community, students must respect each other. However, as Elisa comments in Excerpt 4.12, this respect comes from seeing, hearing, knowing, and understanding each other's stories; they cannot respect each other if they do not know each other first:

**Excerpt 4.12** “That comes from understanding”

Elisa: And so, it started that first year that I did that, and I made the unit...because of the kids that I had in my class. And that's why I knew I needed to bring something else in because I knew it was a big topic, immigration, right? and just in our school, it's so huge for so many...it's more than just like learning the definitions...so that's why I brought it in. And so, it was great because you have these kids, some who have gone through not very good things and then are now sharing their story like things that they've never talked about with people and their classmates don't know their story and don't know the things that they've gone through. And so now you're seeing like this understanding from their classmates, and to be like, accepted and understood by your classmates it's just a goal, right? ....you know, we're always working on them understanding and respecting each other. And so much of that comes from understanding, respecting each other and so much of that comes from understanding and you can't really understand if you don't hear the story...so it's a really wonderful way to connect them all together, all these different types of learning. Right?

Her choice of teaching migration by using this book that brings into the classroom a migration story that might be familiar to some of her students, speaks to some of the challenges and considerations that need to be addressed when teaching RMBSs. Building on learners' background knowledge, drawing on their funds of knowledge and their lived experiences are part of what Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defines as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:

I have defined culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment.

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).

Therefore, Elisa not only plans her lessons with an academic curriculum in mind, but she always thinks about teaching the whole child. As a culturally responsive teacher, she builds academic, social, emotional, and political learning through educational tools to teach skills, competencies, values, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1992). The implementation of these trauma-informed pedagogical practices is extremely relevant in the process of acculturation of the RMBS. As Elisa mentions, they can vary from year to year and class to class, so, as with each learner, some aspects of promising pedagogies will be unique to each class context. RMBS may have fled from war-torn countries where family members remain in violent and dangerous circumstances. As displaced people, they likely spent time in refugee camps where living conditions, food, shelter and medical care are inadequate. RMBS may have experienced separation from their families, may have lost friends, close family members, or have witnessed torture and killings (McBrien, 2005). That is why schools and especially teachers, play a fundamental part in how these children, youth and their families start their lives as newcomers in Canadian schools and communities. It is essential that teachers navigate issues related to their students' previous experiences in any regard, so as to honour their past lives and the journeys they had in order to get into this new country. Therefore, the topic related to migrant journeys, migration stories, and family stories is particularly significant and will require extra dedication, time and attention.

With the significant number of RMBS arriving every year into the school system and considering the diversity of their nationalities and cultural backgrounds, as Mendenhall et al.

(2017) argue: "...it is important to keep in mind that the refugee population is incredibly heterogeneous [and] continues to diversify, as more refugee students enter from a wide range of countries that are both culturally and linguistically distinct" (p.4).

Therefore, as Elisa explains in Excerpt 4.13, when teachers plan and include topics and literature that are culturally and personally relevant to the lives of their students, students can receive that appropriate support even during class time:

**Excerpt 4.13** "I went to a refugee camp in Ethiopia"

Elisa: .... there's some that will very openly say well I went to a refugee camp .... or they'll even share that with the class.... I went to a refugee camp in Ethiopia... and then they'll be able to talk about it and the other kids were like... oh my gosh, that's horrible... But then some of them [refugee-background youth] are like well that was just life..... But then there's other ones who obviously don't talk about it but then they write about it and it's interesting that ...some of them are even able to do that.... I don't know what that sparked for them, but I think [the response] was so different in so many of the different refugees....

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2016), when class material is presented in a meaningful context for the students, and some tasks are relevant and cognitively demanding, this facilitates their literacy engagement and content learning, especially when talking about migrant and refugee-background students. Whenever this group of Grade 6/7 teachers plan, they keep in mind this cross-dimensional and cross-curricular flow as they design projects that integrate different content areas, in this case, social studies and language arts. They use the BC curriculum guidelines, but as they all take their time to get to know their students in-depth since the start of the year, and relationship building in the central focus of their teaching at the start of each school

year. Additionally, they always go beyond what is expected from them and their classes, especially when it comes to engaging with issues meaningful to their students. Working with projects that connect different subjects, contents, and even moments of their lives provide all English language learners in the class with opportunities to engage in learning tasks to simultaneously build content knowledge and conceptual understanding and language and literacies competencies. The pedagogical practice of constantly making connections for the students across units of work, from texts to other texts, from texts to the world and from text to self was very evident in my field notes. In the post-unit interview, I asked Elisa about this observation, as it can be seen in Excerpt 4.14:

**Excerpt 4.14** “Connections”

Denise: This is something I was thinking about recently...this connection because  
what I've seen in class and what we have just discussed is like you, as teachers,  
you're always trying to connect things.

Elisa: Oh, yeah.

Denise: Connect with other subjects, with other lessons, other things you've done there.

Elisa: Everything, all the time.

Denise: You are bringing science; you're bringing Arts and the first thing you said  
was connection. So, can you tell us how this works?

Elisa: The whole I mean, when they feel connected to something or they see the  
connections between things, even new things that they're learning, there's value  
attached to it, and if it's completely disconnected to their life or to their emotion, or  
to anything they've seen before, or just something they've already learned. They're  
just they don't put value in it.

However, getting to know how to make meaningful connections and how to make an impact on her students' lives did not come easy or right away. This was a process, as she explains in Excerpt 4.15, in which apart from basing herself on the BC Curriculum, she had to learn the best ways to approach her students and relate what was happening in the class with something meaningful for them.

**Excerpt 4.15** “The importance of finding that connection”

Elisa: ....it took years for me to understand the importance of finding that connection and building that connection with them and giving them the opportunities to make these connections. But it also took years for me to figure out how to do that well, you know, because it's not, it doesn't come naturally, that you just do that, you know, the easiest connection is to say “Hi, how do you feel about that?” That's the easiest connection, right? And you know, I could start my teaching career doing that, that's fine. But to actually build it within curriculum, and then constantly going back to it. I mean, it takes time to learn how to do that. And it's about, like, connecting what they've already learned, and then being able to ask good questions that makes them think of those connections and refer back to them in a meaningful way.

The connection of the different dimensions of students is present in every single step that these teachers make. They believe that connection is necessary to make things meaningful for their students and to reach a real understanding, and they know that when students feel that is a link to their lives or emotions, they see the value in it. However, they know that it is not something easy to do, that requires much practice they can do better every day. This practice was not, however, established in isolation. The grade 6/7 teachers have an exceptionally strong community that is

nurtured and developed through on-going cooperative design for teaching and learning, co-teaching and on-going professional conversations.

During the months spent in the school, as a volunteer and as a researcher, it was evident to observe a strong sense of interdependence between this team of teachers, a team that always includes the ELL/resource teachers. As it can be evidenced in Excerpt 4.16, they all meet regularly to co-plan and co-teach units and books such as “A Long Walk to Water” in ways that are “high challenge high support” (Gibbons, 2015), which intentionally plans to support and enhance both grade appropriate BC Curricular content and competencies and English language competencies, regardless of the RMBS’ current levels and English language and literacies.

**Excerpt 4.16** “Make them feel confident and... successful”

Emma: I think it’s important to recognize that some of these kids they can't read, they can't read at grade level, they can't write at grade level.....But they can think at grade level...

Maureen: Yeah.

Emma: ...And so to, to do a concept like migration and talk about Africa, we have kids that wouldn’t roll through easily with the expectation of what’s needed for a Grade 6/ 7 level student.

Maureen: Of course, yeah.

Emma: But they can certainly talk about it better than half the kids that could get an A. So, to have that opportunity for them to participate in that kind of thing and contribute and show .... that learning, show that they are there, in that space, I think is so important then well why don't we just focus on them writing sentences? Because, because they can’t do that you know, so instead of learning this with the

rest of the group, let's give them some more language building skills because they need it, which they do, and it's equally important.... but I think that...they also need like those content areas to do, to make them feel confident ...

Elisa: Yeah, and successful.

Emma: ...They're in the right spot, you know?

Elisa: .... it's true 'cause I know that some of the students that Dana takes for my socials for the "A Long Walk to Water" I mean [name] and [name] would never like raise their hand and give their opinion in class because ...they're just years behind.... But then she says that they just talk, and they talk about the book and they're on task and, they probably have like deeper thoughts that some of the ones that are sharing in my class but giving them like the opportunity to do that and then we're not caring if they write in a full sentence, we just care that they have you know...

Maureen: They're getting their ideas...

Elisa: ...That they're engaging in some way with the work...with the material, whatever it is so [beneficial]...

#### 4.3.2 Elasticity and Winding

For this team of teachers, students' success and knowing what they need in order to achieve it is much more important than following content or a strict curriculum. One of the most relevant practices that these teachers have adopted is the elasticity, in planning a class, assessing their students' progress and responding to their differences. These differences are not only academic, but they can also be socio-emotional, cultural, and linguistic, among others. As Dana mentions in Excerpt 4.17, they are always thinking of how to adapt the curriculum and the different tasks according to each of their students' needs. Everything is planned while keeping their students in

mind and thinking on the best ways to support them, to differentiate learning and to help them achieve success.

**Excerpt 4.17** “Just show me what you know”

Maureen: So, Dana, are you reading the book to them?

Dana: Yeah, I do it all oral.... but I've never made it an issue, it's not like I've ever said You know you need to be following along because the boys in that particular group are usually the ones in class that are off task, disruptive, so to me, it was always “just listen to it and let's talk about it”. And it was never an expectation, or something put on them that they had to be reading it, right, and that was right from the start.

Elisa: Or write their answers down.

Dana: No, and so what I did is we would, I just have a graphic organizer where they draw a picture on the key topic and then what are the top three things you remember you think are important, and that engages the whole conversation. You know so it's not heavy on writing, but they are showing me stuff that they get in their own way. So, whether it be through the picture or through one or two words or some of them are writing full sentences. There was never the expectation put on what, just show me what you know.

Maureen: Right.

As Dana mentions, this type of pedagogy enables an inclusive language, literacies and content area pedagogy where all learners can contribute around the same book to the extent they choose and are able in a mode of their choice. Teachers are elastic enough to let their students respond to the story using the mode of their preference or the one they feel more comfortable at

that time. This elasticity exists because, in these classrooms, success is not something standard or that can be assessed uniformly. These teachers have created learning environments where success is measured according to each student's abilities and considering their realities, so no achievement is comparable to someone else's. Success is part of their students' personal story; however, they are taught to understand and accept these differences in learning as soon as they become part of their class.

A great deal of elasticity can also be seen with the time these teachers give each student to adapt and develop. They know that each one will have their own timing and that emotional stability must come before learning. There is a winding road for each of their students, and as they explain in Excerpt 4.18, they know that many of them are going to take a longer path; however, that will not matter if they are successful in the end.

**Excerpt 4.18** "We don't push"

Elisa: We don't push...

Hellen: ...You can't figure that out quickly.

Elisa: .... In an assessment.

Emma: Yeah, kids will sit there until they feel comfortable giving you something and sometimes that takes months.

Elisa: And like at the beginning it's just like..... let's just make sure they know where They need to be, let's just make sure that they feel safe outside, let's make sure that there's someone in our class that is a leader that they're okay, can you make sure so-and-so comes in at the bell, like do we have someone that speaks their language that they can connect with right away to translate ...

Elisa: That's why we don't push academics in the beginning.

As Elisa explains in Excerpt 4.19, if we want to establish trust and maintain it in time, students should feel that they are being treated as distinctively as the individuals they are, and they are going to be respected according to their differences.

**Excerpt 4.19** “We’re just trying to move forward”

Elisa: ...just creating opportunities for them. I mean, to feel safe...sometimes they get embarrassed...if I give them a sheet that has less questions than the next person next to them. At the beginning, they’re embarrassed, but we have so many discussions at the beginning of the year about that...we're all just working to be successful and sometimes my success might look different than your success and that's fine. But we’re all working, we're all just about moving forward, it doesn't matter that we're here or here. And then this, is like, we’re just trying to move forward.

As commented previously, the teachers collectively invest a great deal of time and energy at the beginning of the school year to developing the BC Personal and Social Core Competencies, defined as,

The Personal and Social competency is the set of abilities that relate to students' identity in the world, both as individuals and as members of their community and society. Personal and social competency encompasses what students need to thrive as individuals, to understand and care about themselves and others, and to find and achieve their purposes in the world.

There are three interrelated sub-competences that include personal awareness and responsibility, positive personal and cultural identity, and social awareness and responsibility. As Elisa explains in Excerpt 4.20 and will be discussed later in Chapter 5, many aspects of this

development are foregrounded early on, so that the elasticity, adaptations, and differentiations in pedagogical practices are respected and understood by the students in a positive light.

**Excerpt 4.20** “Getting them where they are”

Elisa: ...there are so many discussions in September about that [personalized learning and differentiated instruction] ...so then the kids were really good about it... my first few years, I always had kids that would be like, “How come I have a different...?” ...very loud, they’d be upset about this, and “How come I have less questions?” like they think “I’m not smart enough to have the worksheet” but if you have those discussions, and you’re really transparent about why, then they understand it, and they appreciate it. And I think they feel like respected as a learner that I’m getting them where they are...So, like constantly changing what is expected of them based on their abilities, like just differentiating learning is huge and just being able to create those opportunities...

Elisa adapts at the macro level, but from the classroom observations it is clear that at the moment of teaching, she makes the necessary micro adaptations to scaffold and support (or extend) her students’ learning. She continually assesses her students’ progress in order to adapt the work they receive in class; however, in her class, assessing does not mean just being tested. She mentions in Excerpt 4.21, that for her as a teacher, it is of great importance to regularly check how confident her students are feeling with the work they have been assigned, and assessment goes from having an in-class conversation to receiving a mark for a very well supported class task.

**Excerpt 4.21** “Is everyone going to be successful at this?”

Elisa: Sometimes I create the opportunities before the lesson and when I’m planning the

lesson, I always have to think, “Is everyone going to be successful at this?” “Oh, some of them are not going to be successful at this at all.” “So, how can I adapt it for them?” So, I do have two or three types of sheets...Or sometimes it's on the spot and your doing it and you say, “Okay, but you just do numbers one, two, and three” or “I want you to do those well, and that's all you're doing”. They, they appreciate it...They’re still able to be successful. And again, having those conversations at the beginning of the year, so that they’re not really comparing themselves to each other is really big. And I think they feel safe, because I think they see that I’m trying to...kind of meet them where they are in their learning. And I think they feel safe with me doing that, you know, it’s so important to do that.

As Elisa mentions, after a while, the classroom becomes a safe place for her students. However, feeling safe and trusting their classmates and their teacher is a slow and gradual process that needs to be integrated. In our post-interview, I asked her about the creation of this safe environment and how she achieved it. She explained in Excerpt 4.22, that it all starts by identifying each student's specific needs, setting them individual and reachable goals, and making them aware of where they are at their learning.

**Excerpt 4.22** “Specific praise”

Elisa: ... one way is just what I said of...setting them up for success in that way... that's huge, right? That means that he's going to now put his hand up, and maybe the next time he's going to be a little more competent to put his hand up, right? And then another one is really having specific praise. So that instead of "Oh, good job" ...that tells them nothing. That doesn't give them any information to move forward. So really, like "Oh, I like the detail" Like, you know, "I like the detail that you have in

this in this example" or "Oh, that was so relevant" "Thanks for staying on topic" ...like really specific praise, and they're able to kind of self-monitor, like where they're at...and I think that's huge. Like, there has to be some self-awareness in terms of where they're at in their learning. And the more they understand that, the more that they're able to play up their strengths, and then figure out what their weaknesses are to, to work on. So especially giving specific praise is so huge. And I think that I didn't do that my first few years. I just like, "Oh, great job". So being very specific in your praise is really big.

However, this safe space cannot be created only with the work done in class and it is not restricted only to academics. To build this safe environment, Elisa has to do much work outside of the classroom, as it will involve finding ways to build a relationship with all of her students. As Elisa highlights in Excerpt 4.23 below and as Bartlett et al. (2017) argue, in order to build relationships with each individual student, teachers need to observe each of their students' uniqueness and to "refrain from essentializing" refugee-background youth because that is the only way teachers will be able to give them necessary psychosocial support and help them with their acculturation process. If we want to establish trust and maintain it in time, students should feel that they are being treated as distinctively as the individuals they are. I asked Elisa about the importance of building relationships with her students during our post-project interview because I was able to see the bond she had with them, as illustrated in Excerpt 4.23:

**Excerpt 4.23** "Safe space"

Elisa: Oh, yeah, [building a relationship] huge, huge factor. That's everything. If there was no relationship, I mean, it wouldn't be success, there wouldn't be safe space, right? So that that comes with conversations, that comes with them coming and talk to me

and me not shooing them away every time. Right? Like, they want to tell me a story. And I listen to the story. And they tell me a joke. And I listen to the joke. And do I always have time at that moment? No. But you do because you want them to feel heard, you want them to know that I want them to know that I care and...that takes time. That takes time.

During the 2018 intermediate teachers focus group, Maureen also asked the 6/7 grade team of teachers about building relationships and making connections with their students, in Excerpt 4.24 they explained:

**Excerpt 4.24** “You just have to be there”

Maureen: How do you... build trust with students? How do you...make connections with them?

Emma: You just have to be there...

Elisa: It's just...

Emma: You have to be there

Elisa: Constant

Emma: ...she needs to see that you're there

It is possible to see with this example that just being able to get to these students can take a long time. It requires much constant work and trying to reach them until you finally get to them. This is a clear example of what we call winding.

Therefore, after this group of teachers has been able to build a relationship with their students, they might be ready to inquire about what they need or what their families may need. Being able to do this, will tackle a fundamental part of their wellbeing as newcomers, as one-third of the immigrant- and refugee-background children and youth live in households with incomes

below poverty thresholds. (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016). This can be linked to what Taylor and Sidhu (2011) report about successful integration and a holistic approach to education, where they mention that taking care of RMBSs and their families' welfare is also part of this holistic view. In the 2018 focus group, the team shared examples of providing personal support for the students, such as giving them supplies, rides, or needed articles of clothing such as shoes. As Emma explained in Excerpt 4.25, "it's like the little things or small things like when I give them a pair of gloves in winter or if they have a hole in their t-shirt sew it up for them..." that helped make real connections with the refugee-background students. Hellen and Emma explain that teaching is just one small aspect at Kingsway Community School, the social one at this school, is extremely important:

**Excerpt 4.25** "So much more than teaching kids"

Hellen: ...I think the understanding that socially, right, there's the social aspect of school is so much bigger than it would be anywhere else. So much bigger.

Emma: This school is not, it's not like a, this is so much more than teaching kids, it's, I feel like we're social workers, we're counsellors...

Hellen: Totally...

Emma: We're you know providing like you know food...

Hellen: And clothing.

When students start seeing their teachers as people who genuinely care about them and their wellbeing, it is easier for them to trust, open themselves and receive the necessary scaffold and support for their learning and other issues they may have. However, as illustrated in Excerpt 4.26, this group of teachers realize that one essential factor that helps them succeed with their

students and give them the support they need is the fact that they have taught at the school for many years and that they have a deep and robust relationship.

**Excerpt 4.26** “We’ve all worked together now for quite a long time”

Margaret: Yeah, but it sounds like a tremendous amount of like...

Emma: Counselors, we need to...

Margaret: ...But cooperation, conversations, planning, you know a lot of people have been involved in trying to design something that really works for teachers and kids.

Emma: And I think a relationship with the teachers too, like we’ve all worked together now for quite a long time. And that works easily, like when you try and start, when you know you need to know...

Elisa: Yeah, it is hard and we, yeah, we, yeah, we understand now what we all want and what we prefer doing and... We've taught the siblings...Which is nice.

Emma: And I think that's huge when you...okay, here's this kid coming in, you know their family background already so then I think that's really helpful.

Elisa: It's so helpful.

Emma: ... to know and then, and then to focus on the kids that come in to try and figure out their needs too, that makes it easier. I think somebody just walking in brand new to a classroom would have more difficulty.

Two other aspects that play a vital role in the success of this team of 6/7 grade teachers is having a good and trusting relationship and the elasticity they have not only with the students but also with each other. They understand that it is very probable that things may change from one minute to another, so as it is shown in Excerpt 4.27, constant communication, collaboration and elasticity are essential for them to work in harmony.

**Excerpt 4.27** “Collaborative effort”

- Margaret: But so how do you manage to coordinate, like when I arrived you were coordinating. How do you do it, do you do it before school.... lunchtime, after?
- All: All the time.
- Elisa: All day long we are communicating.
- Emma: Our rooms are across from each other.
- Elisa: I'm in her room trying to .... we're in each other's rooms constantly.
- Elisa: Yeah, or hey, can you watch this kid for me.... It's a team, it's a real team.
- Hellen: It's a lot of it's a collaborative effort.
- Margaret: Teamwork.
- Elisa: Yeah, it's huge.
- Margaret: Informal, knowing each other really well.
- Emma: Or the one opportunity too... that people.... like administrators are able to provide, time to collaborate.... if you can have space in the day to do it is really helpful for the teachers.
- Margaret: Also, just the years it's taken to build the kind of cooperation that it's clear that you have, right.
- Elisa: Yeah.
- Emma: We've been doing it for a while.
- Elisa: Yeah, we work well together and there's a lot of flexibility too, like Everyone's pretty flexible with stuff so it's nice...

### 4.3.3 Structures and Standards

In addition to the four main themes, identified in our initial research team analysis, and in this expanded analysis of Elisa, and her team of collaborative colleagues, focus group transcripts and additional data sources, another interrelated theme emerged.

During my class observation period and especially while coteaching the cross-disciplinary unit, I became aware of the enormous amount of ‘*structure*’ underpinning the elasticity and adaptability. There is much routine and structure when the day starts and when it ends, during classes and when the bell rings for a change of class schedule and breaks. There are many different examples where it is possible to see how these students follow a daily structure to which they have been carefully socialized. The students are also held accountable to specific, explicit criteria and learning standards. However, as illustrated in Excerpt 4.28, whenever it is necessary, things can be modified and changed if it is for something that will benefit the students. In our post-project interview, I discussed my observations with Elisa.

#### **Excerpt 4.28** “Structure”

Denise: ...there's a lot of flexibility, there's a lot of adaptation, there's a lot of day to day... seeing what's happening, but there's a lot of structure, too...So, I wanted to know, where does that come from?

Elisa: ...that just comes from experience in the first few years and realizing that they needed some guidelines. They need it and, and some of them are reminders to them. It's not generally new things. But it's...a way for them to understand the expectations, and then understand when they've met them. Right? Because you just want them to know where they're at, like the whole point, especially great six, seven, I don't want to constantly be giving them feedback, feedback, feedback, and

then they're not reflecting on it, or they're not being able to assess themselves before I mark something. Right? So, they should know before they hand something in, did I meet the criteria? Did I meet the expectations of what this assignment was? They can't do that. If the expectations are not clear. Like it has to be very clear, and it has to break it down... Structure is huge in grade six, seven, for sure. It's self-assessment, right? They need to be able to self-assess and they can't do that if they don't have the criteria.

Denise: Do you think it's something that might be special for kids that are in this school, maybe they need some structure? They need some limits they need...

Elisa: Yeah, I mean, especially like, there's a lot that are not confident in their learning, and they wouldn't feel confident starting an assignment or handing an assignment, not knowing at all, like, any of the specific guidelines. Like there's just a lack of confidence. I think.

As Elisa mentions, self-confidence, with respect to academic schoolwork, is something that most of the time, RMBSs do not have or it takes them time to develop. Therefore, these teachers follow classroom practices that allow their students to be successful and feel empowered due to that success. Culturally responsive teaching empowers students, helping them become better human beings and more successful learners (Rajagopal, 2011). An empowered student can translate into an academic competent, self-confident, and willing to act human being; however, first students have to believe that they are able of succeeding throughout their learning journey (Gay, 2018). That is why this learning process takes time, it is well designed with various and multiple scaffolds and clear standards to support student attainment and it can look so different for each one of their students. Some of them will understand or reach the curricular objectives quickly,

but others will have to take a “longer route,” following a winding path. However, as Elisa explains in Excerpt 4.29, these teachers always keep in mind building a strong base before moving on into more complex or more profound issues.

**Excerpt 4.29** “Understanding first”

Elisa: ...And you know, when you're first teaching the concepts, you keep it very simple ...it's like when you're teaching adding, you're gonna start with one plus one, you don't jump to these high ones to teach a concept. You stay simple...when you're teaching like fact and opinion, you stay with... “Who likes dogs better than cats?” ...you start with these very simple ideas, and then the moment that they understand, and you think that they understand the concept enough, then you want to jump to real issues...So, that they can be critical about those... So, it's so important, so important...there has to be understanding first before there can be good questioning.

One of the reasons behind this slow-paced or winding pedagogy is that these teachers want all of their students to reach the final goal, which, as Elisa explains, is to create critical thinkers capable of understanding, connecting and doing something about transforming their reality. When teachers use empowering pedagogies in their classrooms, they are developing strong skills, academic knowledge, inquiry habits, and critical curiosity about society, power, change and inequality in their students; moreover, their classroom instruction becomes “an agenda of values” that highlights participatory, multicultural, situated, communicative, desocializing, democratic, interdisciplinary, questioning, and activist learning (Shor, 1992). During my time in the classroom, I could observe that Elisa was continually directing the students to reflect on social justice issues, anti-racist issues and current political issues. Therefore, as shown in Excerpt 4.30, when I had to

chance to ask her about the importance, she gives to the development of critical thinking skills in her students, she answered:

**Excerpt 4.30** “I want to create critical thinkers”

Elisa: ...I want to create critical thinkers... I want them to develop that skill. I...see the importance of it...we had done some like current events, and we have done some articles and learning about things that were happening in the world...it's just very relevant to talk about these things...again it's like that is a connecting piece, because when you're talking about the poor and the rich, a lot of my students are poor. And so, for them to understand...what happened in the past and that might be something that's happening to them...this discrepancy with rich people, it's again another way to connect and to validate their story...if I was in another school where everyone was middle class...the idea there would be still to have those, but...they'd never really understand it, because if you don't go through it, you don't fully understand it, but at least to like, create some questions about it... whereas in our school...we have like a lot that are poor. So, some of the things that came up in the story [ The Matchbox Diaries] were between these rich and these poor...so noticing the difference between that...you just always want them to be thinking and asking questions like that, anytime. When they're looking at something on news or in the media, or like when they see a new thing on the internet on Instagram...you know a story will pop up of a news thing. And they'll get the gist of it, but you just want them to basically have these questions always, and always question what's actually happening...

This team of teachers shows us that if we want to put into practice inclusive pedagogies in our classrooms, we need to keep in mind that we need to include learning experiences that speak to the human longing of being successful at what is valued, which will affect the student as a whole human being, not just in terms of their academic success (Gay, 2018). When analyzing the focus groups and the interviews we had with the teachers, it was possible to see how these teachers plan to make their students feel successful at their own pace and level. It was also possible to see that the four themes –cross-dimensional flow, interdependence, elasticity, and winding– were represented on the data collected from them.

The cross-dimensional flow and the interdependence that exists between every member of this team allow them to have the necessary support they need before working with their students. This interdependence can be seen between the teachers, but also between students and teachers. Every member of this community plays a vital part in it. When these teachers plan, they do it connecting different dimensions. This cross-dimensional flow connects curriculum subjects with lived experiences and socio-emotional learning. Nothing is done in isolation; everything is connected with something deeper and more meaningful to their students' lives.

The elasticity and the winding are two aspects that appear to be closely related. These teachers are flexible enough to adapt, modify and change their plans according to their students' needs; however, behind that elasticity, there is a sturdy structure and explicit clear instructions and criteria/ standards to be met that provides confidence, control and safe limits to their students. The winding paths can be seen in the various trails they design for their students, taking into consideration their specific needs and abilities and making every effort to try to meet them where they are. They do not rush their learning processes; they give them all the time and support they need, always aiming for success. Nothing is done by chance; everything is carefully designed. And

throughout all is the important objective to ultimately develop students who have a critical disposition towards texts of all kinds and a confidence and capacity to transform their lives and lifeworlds.

In conclusion, Kingsway Community School teachers have a very clear notion of the needs and challenges their refugee- and migrant-background students continuously face. They know them because they honestly *care for* them and their present and future well-being. There is constant individual and collective reflection on their daily practices, and they never stop thinking about how to improve them according to their class observations and interactions with students. Owens and Ennis (2007) accurately illustrate the work of teachers who *care for* their students, which is the type of work I was able to observe at Kingsway Community School:

Caring teachers assume responsibility for initiating action in their relationships with students based on the best judgment and anticipation of what students need ... accumulate information about individual students in order to recognize, interpret, and attend to behavioral changes ... constantly reassess needs, make decisions, and institute new ways and means of caring ... [and] devote serious attention to thinking about, negotiating, and carrying out actions in the best interest of their students (p.402).

## **Chapter 5: Cross-Curricular Unit Tasks Analyses and Findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I describe the implementation of four rich tasks in a co-planned and co-taught cross-curricular unit and report on the findings regarding the Refugee- and Migrant-Background Students' (RMBS) content curricular attainment, literacy engagement, and identity investment in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom. More specifically, it answers the research question:

What is the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross-curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) for the literacy engagement and content curricular attainment of refugee- and migrant-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom?

This chapter starts with a short summary of "The Matchbox Diary" (Fleischman, 2013) to give the reader an overview of the story that was read to the students. The rest of chapter 5 is organized into four parts, each one explaining one of the tasks undertaken by the students. It includes an overview of the designed tasks, the steps the students had to follow in order to complete each part of the tasks and some examples of the artifacts they produced, as well as representative extracts taken from their group and class recordings. The findings will be reported according to the cross-curricular objectives that were covered, the knowledge processes developed, and the identity investment and literacy engagement shown in them.

### **5.2 'The Matchbox Diary' Summary**

The picture book starts when a little girl visits her great-grandfather at his home, which is filled with antiques. She asks him to tell her the story of the objects, so he tells her: "Pick whatever you like most. Then I'll tell you its story". She chooses an old cigar box to learn about and what

she finds in that old box surprises her: a diary made of different matchboxes, each holding a unique object that evokes an important memory in him. Great-grandfather tells her about his life as a child in Italy and the journey from Italy to the United States when he was a child before he could read and write which explains why he records the events using artifacts. He also tells her about each object in each matchbox, including, for example, the olive pit his mother gave him to suck on when they did not have enough food back in Italy, a bottle cap he saw when they were waiting for the steamboat and a ticket that captured the excitement of his first baseball game. Great-grandfather then tells the little girl about the time he learnt to read and write and was able to get a job as a printer. The story ends when great-grandfather tells her that he never stopped collecting things, and that is how he ended up having his bookstore and later his antique shop, something the little girl says she wants to do as well as having her own diary, too.

As was outlined in Chapter 3, in Table 3.3, the four tasks that are reported are: My Most Important Objects; The Graph of Emotions; The ‘Olive Pit’ and ‘Macaroni’ Activity; and the Collage Activity.

### 5.3 Task 1: My Most Important Objects

The overall aim of the ‘My Most Important Objects’ activity was to help the students connect to the task’s topics (‘the migration story’ and ‘objects can keep a record of events’) at a personal level, from their perspectives as members of refugee- and migrant-background families. Additionally, it was planned for the students to develop and achieve the specific BC New Curriculum content and language objectives of the task (discussed below). As reported in the findings for RQ1, making connections to the learners’ lived experiences, and to their learning in other areas, was an important pedagogical practice for Elisa. For the ‘My Most Important Objects’ activity, the specific aim relative to the social studies (SS) curriculum was to review the SS content

idea that artifacts (objects) can be used as a record of events, at a particular point in time. The Language Arts objective was for students to write short paragraphs, a few sentences in length, explaining why the chosen object was important to them.

As illustrated in Excerpt 5.1, Elisa constantly made connections across learning domains, while we were collaboratively planning the unit and talking about the ‘My Most Important Objects’ idea, she immediately noted a link:

**Excerpt 5.1** “They’ll connect it”

Denise:        So ...lesson number one is going into the story... so sharing thoughts, sharing predictions, sharing “What do you think is going to happen?” and thinking... about the role that objects have in our lives.

Elisa:         Which is so funny because today I did a science lesson about ‘artifacts’ and we looked at this picture of a family's garbage bag from the week and then what things you can figure out about people just from their garbage. So, then we talked so much about artifacts in science....

Denise:        So, we can talk about, we can link it.

Elisa:         Yeah...there was a lot of discussion around that [so it fits] nicely as long as we just make sure we use that word 'artifacts' and they'll connect it.

Margaret:     Isn't that perfect?

Elisa:         Yeah, so this was in science, because we're going to do fossils and then looking at the layers [to determine the age of rocks and fossils].

The exchange continued about objects recording events in different contexts and exemplifies Elisa’s pedagogical design process which is always to be looking for ways not simply

connect but to illustrate to the learners the larger themes and patterns of ‘Big Ideas’, knowledge structures, and processes that can be applied across different subject areas.

Once the activity was collaboratively designed, it was co-taught and proceeded through the following steps: First, the students were involved in questions and table group activities to raise their background knowledge and make connections (e.g., between ‘objects’ and ‘artifacts’ and, between their families and artifacts/objects) to the topic that were significant to them. The questions for the whole class discussions included: What’s an object? Can you define what the word ‘object’ means? Do you think that all objects have the same importance? Why or why not? What are some of the different things that might make an object valuable to someone? This was followed by the instructions: In your table group, think for a moment and then (if you are comfortable) share: Are there any particular objects that are very important to you or your family? Next, each student received a copy of ‘*What Objects Tell the Story of Your Life?*’, an adapted article from the ‘New York’s History in 50 Objects’ text (Appendix C). And the teachers (Elisa and I) projected the text on the board and read it aloud, stopping at every paragraph making sure that students understood the meaning of the words and asking comprehension questions to check for understanding; we also showed the hyperlink to New York’s history in 50 objects. Then, after reading the text, students discussed within their groups the final quote: “Think of the marks that things — the wheel, the crucifix, the credit card or the computer chip — which have made an impact on civilization” and then each group shared with the whole class their understanding of the quote. Following that, after the group-class share activity, the class as a whole discussed the queries: 1) Can you identify 3 objects that you would include in an exhibit or book about your life or your family’s life, as part of your or your family history? and 2) Why did you select each of those objects? Finally, the teachers handed out the “My most important objects” worksheet

(Appendix D) and gave the students time to think and start work on it. The students were told that they would have time to finish their work in the next class.

### 5.3.1 Knowledge Processes

If we analyze this task in terms of the Learning by Design Framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015), the students had to do several things to know about the historical importance of objects, the relevance they had in the story and their lives. In the first part of this task, students had to discuss and share their thoughts about any particular objects that could be very important to them or their families, which connects to the knowledge process of “experiencing the known” and gives a strong basis for the following reading and subsequent activities. These subsequent activities (e.g. reading about the 50 objects that tell the history of New York) immersed the students in new information, thus, they were “experiencing the new”. Then, when the students had to think of only three objects that are the most meaningful to them and part of their history, students moved into the knowledge process of “analyzing critically” because they needed to transfer their knowledge to a different context and weigh the different choices they have and then pick the most representative ones in order to fulfill the task appropriately (“applying appropriately”). They had to act on their new knowledge by responding to the task demands in a way that was typically required in this context of classroom work.

The findings from the analysis of the data will be reported around the different subject area (social studies, language arts, social and emotional learning) learning objectives for the task and with respect to any indicators of students’ literacy engagement and identity investment.

### 5.3.2 Social Studies

From an analysis of the participating students’ drawings and written explanation of why they chose each of the items, specifically regarding social studies, the approach appeared to be

successful in attaining the content curricular learning objectives. Of the eight participating focal students, all of them displayed evidence of understanding the potential of objects to record (historical/chronological) events. Here are four illustrative texts (visual and linguistic) that are representative of themes that emerged, additional samples will be used in later in this section. Figure 5.1 shows Noelle’s drawings and written explanation of her most important objects.

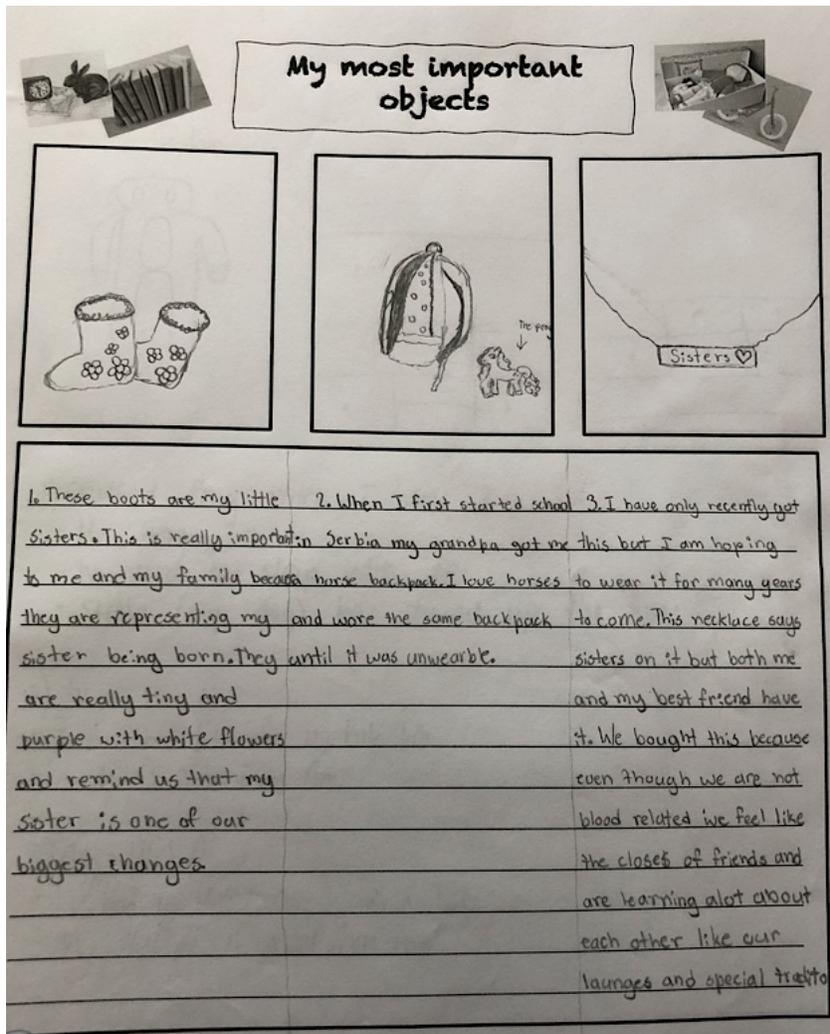


Figure 5.1 Noelle’s “My Most Important Objects” Worksheet

Noelle writes:

- 1. These boots are my little sister's. This is really important to me and my family because they are representing my sister being born. They are really tiny and purple with white flowers and remind us that our sister is one of our biggest changes.*
- 2. When I first started school in Serbia my grandpa got me a horse backpack. I love horses and I wore the same backpack until it was unwearable.*
- 3. I have only recently got this, but I am hoping to wear for many years to come. This necklace says "sisters" on it but both, me and my best friend have it. We bought it because even though we are not blood related, we feel like the closest of friend and we are learning a lot about each other like our languages and special traditions.*

The three objects that Noelle selects are records of different points in time. The 'boots' signify the birth of her sister in her home country Serbia, which was a highly significant and influential event in the family's life, as indicated in her text "that our sister is one of our biggest changes". The "horse backpack", which represents her first day of school in Serbia, and the 'necklace' which signifies the acknowledgement of a deep friendship formed in the present with one of her classmates. Each object records and illustrates a highly significant event in Noelle's life.

The next example is from Maddison, Noelle's friend. Figure 5.2 shows Maddison's most important objects drawings together with the written explanation of them.

Maddison's text:

- 1. The first one is my dog in the Philippines old collar and it's really important to me because I got him when he was little and my auntie got him from me but she recently*

passed away a couple months ago and I took it from my dog right before I left and I have it hanging on my bag.

2. The next thing is also from my aunt from the Philippines. It's a pendant that has my zodiac sign. It matches with my two oldest cousins that have their zodiac, so it is important to all of us since it's all real too.

3. Number 3 is my matching necklace with Noelle. It says sisters and mine is silver while hers is gold. We got it together at the mall and it mean a lot because it shows our friendship since we are so close, we are like sisters.

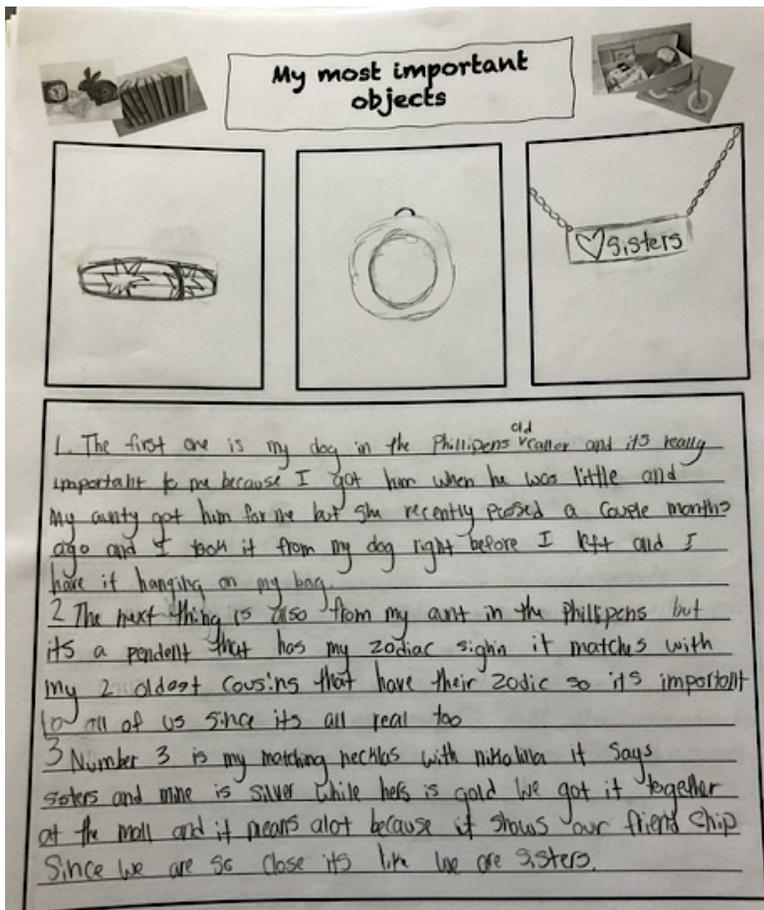


Figure 5.2 Maddison's "My Most Important Objects" Worksheet

Again, we see the three objects Maddison selected to record and represent different points in time. The ‘dog collar’ signifies two past events in the Philippines, one when she received a puppy as a gift from her aunt, and the second, when she took the collar, as a memory of and connection to the aunt, “right before I left”. The second object is a Zodiac pendant that although no specific time is given, records a time in the Philippines when Maddison received a gift from her aunt that connects her to her two oldest cousins who have similar pendants. The third object is the matching necklace with Noelle that records a moment in recent time that marks the closeness of their friendship.

The third example of Nadia’s most important objects also clearly records chronological events, from when she was 1.5 years old to a few years ago when she was 8 years old. Nadia’s most important objects drawings and written explanation are shown in figure 5.3.

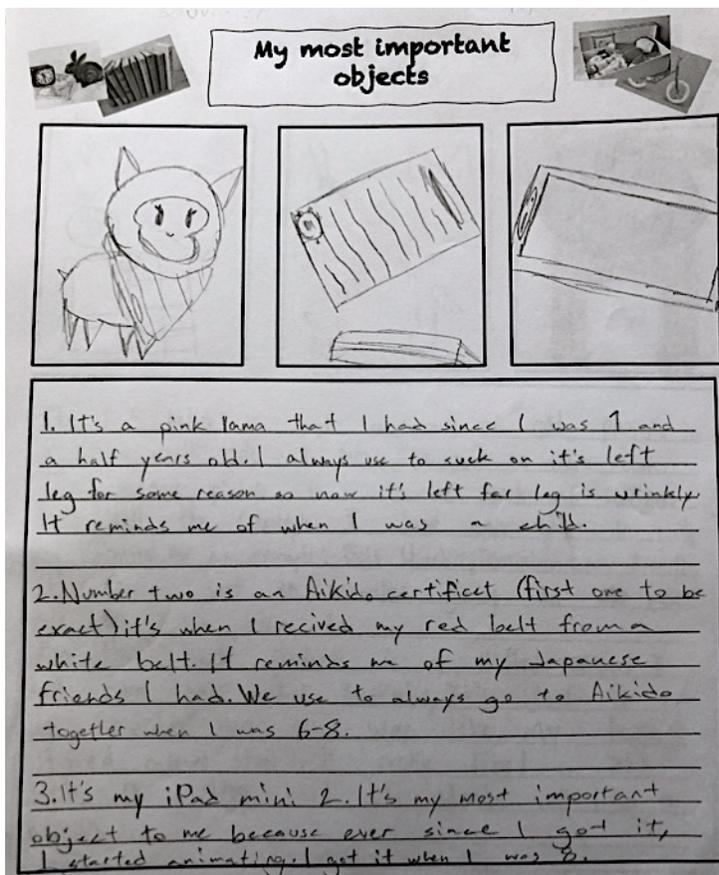


Figure 5.3 Nadia’s “My Most Important Objects” Worksheet

## Nadia's Text

- 1. It's a pink llama that I have since I was 1 ½ years old. I was used to suck on its left leg for some reason do now its left far leg is wrinkly. It reminds me of when I was a child.*
- 2. Number 2 is an Haikido certificate (first one to be exact). It's when I received my red belt from a white belt. It reminds me of my Japanese friend I had. We used to always go to Haikido together when I was 6-8.*
- 3. It's my iPad. It's my most important object to me because ever since I got it I started animating. I got it when I was 8.*

Again, there is the record of significant events from infancy which included her soft childhood toy, her time practicing Haikido with her Japanese friend, and the acquisition of her iPad when she was eight and started animating.

The fourth example of Luciano's work, which is shown in figure 5.4, is included as an example of a learner who understands the social studies concept involved and the task at hand but proceeded to make it his own.

## Luciano's text:

- 1. I have this keychain for 5 years I've never lost it since. It's very useful and has meaning to me. It reminds me of my mom because she gave it to me.*
- 2. My PC is important to me. It reminds me of how my brother taught me how they worked. It's important because I want to be a software engineer.*
- 3. These are my glasses in its case. They do not remind me of anyone but, it is very useful. It protects my eyes from the sun and allows me to see better.*

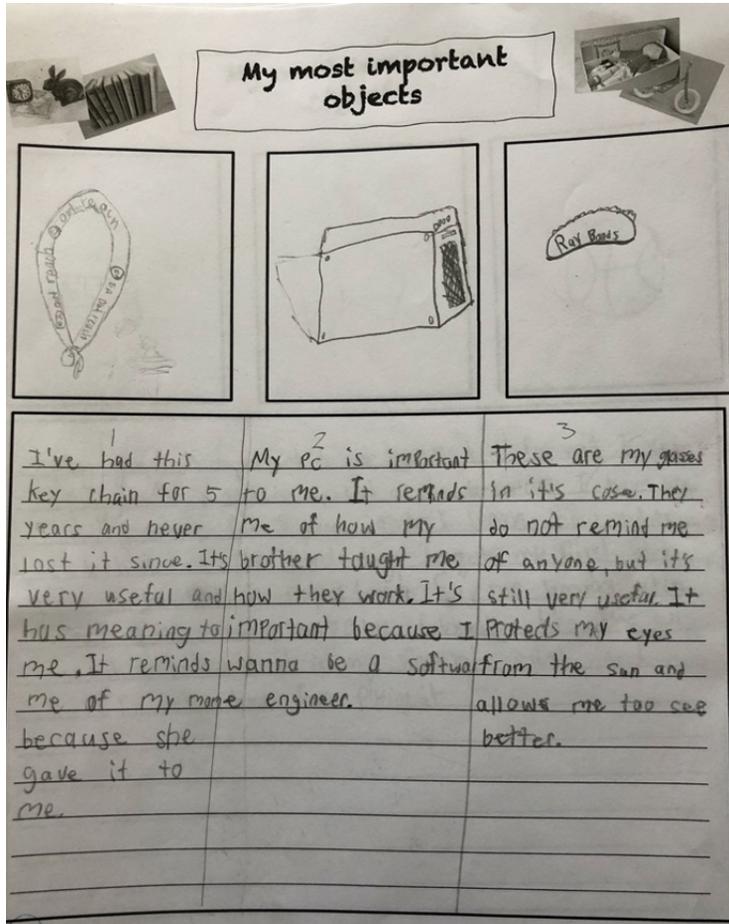


Figure 5.4 Luciano's "My Most Important Objects" Worksheet

Luciano chooses a key chain from his mom from 5 years ago that connects him to his mom. His PC marks the time when he first learned to use a computer and then he selects his sunglasses. The latter he recognizes, break from the instructions about having 'historical' significance in his and/or his family's life, as he explains to justify his choice, "They do not remind me of anyone but, it is very useful.". So, he deviated from the task, and he recognizes that, as his chosen object did not explicitly mark an event or a personal connection, but they marked 'something' as they are currently important to him. Possibly, as well as their utilitarian factor, these are arguably an 'identity' or 'cultural status', item, as it is specifically Ray Ban sunglasses and the case that are depicted in his image.

Each of the participants, either illustrated that they attained the intended SS goal of the task or did to some considerable extent, where like Luciano, they chose an object and provided an explanation that was not very explicitly linked to “a direct record of a historical event” but provided an explanation and justification for the inclusion.

### 5.3.3 Language Arts

With respect to English language arts and visual representation, the students, in keeping with the Language Arts objective wrote short explanation genre texts. Most commonly they have a sense of this genre as a simple cause effect statement wherein there is a general statement followed a logical statement explaining ‘why’. With respect to the knowledge processes used by the learners, this is an example of analyzing functionally (that is, examining the specific function of the chosen object) and using the related language. The most frequent sentence patterns that were used across the majority short texts, including those above, were “this is important to me because....” and “this reminds me of X because...of ” These were similar to the oral language used in the whole class and table discussions. Variations on the sentence pattern, which was not explicitly provided to the students in any form of a template or ‘sentence’ starter, are evident in the four texts above. Here are two additional texts below as further examples:

Mario’s text:

- 1. I used to play with Hot cars and **it’s important to me because** my grandpa gave it to me when I was a little kid.*
- 2. The Teddy bear is **important to me because** I got it when I was just born. My mom gave it to me.*
- 3. This bike was **important to me because** my dad bought it for me when I was really young, and someone stole it.*

And Beatriz's text:

1. *The first one is a ring. It's **important to me because** my grandma gave it to me for my 8-9 birthday.*
2. *The second one is a 18 carat gold bracelet. It is **important to me because** my grandparents gave it to me, as well and their names are written on it.*
3. *The third one is an album from the Philippines. It's **important to me because** it has all the memories from when I was little and also the ultrasound picture of my brother.*

#### 5.3.4 Socio-Emotional Learning

The social and emotional learning and engagements in the activity were very clear, as were connections to positive personal and cultural identities. Of the eight participants six connected their objects very strongly with people who are important in their lives. Another two participants made connections to people but not so strongly so. Another theme that emerged was expressions of identities (personal, sister, friend, son) or as an athlete (a skilled Haikido practitioner, cyclists), an artist (animator, musician), or as practical and/or stylish (Ray Ban glasses), or represented an imagined identity (software engineer). According to the New BC Curriculum, the development of Personal and Social Competencies includes building a Positive Personal and Cultural Identity, as a sub-competency, which was also involved in this task. Specifically, this sub-competency "...involves the awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the factors that contribute to a healthy sense of oneself; it includes knowledge of one's family background, heritage(s), language(s), beliefs, and perspectives in a pluralistic society" (British Columbia, n.d.).

#### 5.3.5 Identity Investment and Literacy Engagement

If we analyze the student's writing using Cope and Kalantzis' (2009b) Grammar of Multimodality, we can observe many things in those short texts, that arguably speak to the learners'

investment and engagement. It is beyond the scope of the thesis to do this for each of the texts produced by the eight focal participants, however, to illustrate and illuminate the richness of language used, and the investment in this process, I analyzed Noelle's text.

Noelle writes about the image of the boots as representing her whole sister, so as Cope and Kalantzis (2009b) term it, it is a *relation by extension*. Noelle writes about her little sister's boots (attribute) and how "this *is really* important to me and my family" using the present tense, even though her sister is no longer that little, and this happened quite a few years ago. She also uses the adverb *really* to emphasize the importance of that event. At the end of the second sentence, Noelle writes, "they *are representing* my sister being born," and again, she uses the present tense. Later, she refers to her family again, "remind *us* that my sister is one of *our biggest changes*", implying that her presence changed everyone's life in her nuclear family. However, when Noelle writes about the backpack she had in Serbia, she uses the past simple: "When I first *started* school, my grandpa *got* this horse backpack". She writes about a horse that the backpack had as an *extension* of her backpack. Noelle refers to it as her "horse backpack" instead of a backpack with a horse in the front. The backpack is the only object described with the verb *love* when referring to her relationship with the backpack. Finally, when Noelle starts writing about the necklace, she uses the verb "I have" but immediately moves into "we, us," as if it were almost impossible to talk just from her perspective. She writes using the present tense, "We *feel* like... This necklace *says*..." but she is also thinking about the future, something that differentiates this object from the others, "I *am hoping to wear* it...". She refers to this necklace as an *extension* of her friendship and it gives her the chance to imagine her future. While not undergoing this closer level of analysis, it is still possible to see that all the students' short texts are revealing of their 'selves' and arguably illustrate

that the learners authentically invested in, and revealed their identities, to some extent, in this task, as is discussed further below.

Additionally, the visuals provided by the students give some clues about their investment in this activity. Even though the students did not have too much class time to do this activity, and no homework is allocated in the classes in this school, it is possible to observe that several drawings (e.g., Noelle's, Luciano's, Nadia's, Maddison's) were erased quite a few times to get it 'right'. From classroom observations, I noted their focus and care in their drawings, as can be seen in that it is possible to observe a high level of detail in their drawings. For example, it is possible to read Luciano's keyring words and the word "sisters" on Noelle's and Maddison's necklaces, and you can see the stamp on Nadia's Haikido certificate. Therefore, we can posit that a group of students took care to do their drawings and wanted to depict their favourite objects as close to reality as possible, which arguably shows a certain level of investment in the activity.

After the school year ended, I had the chance to ask Elisa about her impression of this activity in our post-project interview. She said that this lesson was a positive way of connecting students with what they were supposed to learn about objects and artifacts' historical importance. Additionally, as illustrated in Excerpt 5.2, she mentioned that it was also valuable how students tried to empathize and understand the character's actions and emotions, in wanting to keep a record of his memories.

**Excerpt 5.2** "Seeing the value in things"

Elisa: I think like a lot of them were able to connect...which is the goal every day...

is for them to connect to what they're learning. So, I mean, just whenever we were talking about what items...would you bring...that was a very valuable lesson. I loved that one and that we were able to get that one started. But that's a really great

thing for them to start connecting with the characters, and then possibly with the characters and the situation which the characters are in, and then be able to put it with... okay, what about me? What items would I have saved? What items would I have... kept in that way and kept safe and cherished? So, I think that was really huge because a huge part of Social Studies...is seeing the value in things and of history and of stories...so memories basically. So, I think that was really valuable...But...relating to the characters and being able to say how would I feel in this...just the empathy in trying to understand other people's emotions...that's massive that's all we're teaching in social emotional learning. ...we're doing that all the time. So, I think that was great, it fit in nicely.

In summary, from the data we can posit that by engaging in this task most of the students succeeded at understanding and achieving the Social Studies and Language Arts objectives planned for this task. They were able to understand the importance of object and artifacts when it comes to recording history, they used the language structure we had been using orally in class discussions to justify choices and opinions in written mode. As they participated in this task the students employed the knowledge process of experiencing the known and the new, they conceptualized by applying the concept that 'artifacts record history' and, they analyzed their reasons for their choices and applied creatively and appropriately. To the limited extent that can be determined without interviewing the students, there was data that suggest, such as the dedication showed on the task along with Elisa and my observations, that the learners appeared to be invested in the tasks and were developing their socio/emotional learning relative to personal and social awareness. As Newcomer et al. (2020) point out,

Teachers may think that English language learners (ELLs) cannot complete learning tasks because they do not yet speak enough English. Alternatively, teachers may focus upon the possible developmental delays that traumatic experiences may cause for refugee-background students rather than considering the complexities of these students' lives, leading them to overlook their resourcefulness, bravery, and resolve (Roxas, 2011).

As will be discussed more fully in the concluding chapter, neither of these perspectives were operating in this classroom. Rather than a deficit view of the learners' competencies, the pedagogical principles and practices of recognizing the students' rich experiences and knowledge and building on their resources were evident, so that they could engage in tasks that required a range of knowledge processes, and make meaning for themselves, relative to the curriculum and to their lives beyond school.

## 5.4 Task 2: Graph of Emotion

### 5.4.1 Introduction

The "Graph of Emotion" (Appendix F) activity's general objective was to work with the students on the social studies (SS) Grade 6 content curriculum learning standards concerning: 1) The urbanization and migration of people; 2) Global poverty and inequality issues, including class structure and gender and to use SS inquiry processes (e.g., ask questions, gather, interpret and analyze ideas; and to take perspectives). These SS Learning Standards were interwoven with the language arts (LA) Learning Standards: 1) Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking; and 2) Students will be able to express and justify their opinions. The development of Personal and Social competencies, which include Personal Awareness and Responsibility were also implicated in this task. According to the BC New Curriculum: "Personal Awareness and Responsibility involves understanding the

connections between personal and social behaviour and well-being; it encourages people to make constructive and ethical decisions and act on them” (British Columbia, n.d.).

So, as in keeping with the curricular aims, the tasks were designed to encourage students to understand how their well-being is connected to their personal and social behavior; specifically, to raise their awareness about the complex social and emotional consequences of decisions and actions. The learners were required to discuss and share their opinions about the picture book’s main character's migration journey; then, think about the main character's emotional journey throughout the story, and finally reflect on what they think their own emotions might be, if they were to make that same journey. As well as develop emotional awareness and make connections between actions and well-being, those three steps aimed to promote empathy, and help the students experience the migration unit as something meaningful in their lives, following what Elisa had accomplished the previous years. This was very important to Elisa, as she explained in Excerpt 5.3, taken from the post- project interview quoted earlier in Chapter 4:

**Excerpt 5.3** “That comes from understanding”

Elisa: ...it started that first year... because of the kids that had in my class. ...I knew I needed to bring something else in because I knew it was a big topic, immigration, right? ...it's more than just learning the definitions...so that's why I brought it in... because you have these kids, some who have gone through not very good things and they are now sharing their story... things that they've never talked about with people and their classmates don't know their story and don't know the things that they've gone through. And so now you're seeing...this understanding from their classmates, and to be...accepted and understood by your classmates it's a goal...we're always working on... them understanding and respecting each

other...and so much of that comes from understanding and you can't really understand if you don't hear the story...so it's a really wonderful way to connect them all together, all these different types of learning.

As reported in Chapter 3, Kingsway Community School receives many students with migrant- and refugee-backgrounds. They often arrive in the country and classrooms with high anxiety, trauma, or fear of this sudden new context. Focusing on the students' socio-emotional and literacy development is considered fundamental in every grade. Therefore, as shown in excerpt 5.4, when students reach Grade 6/7, most of them have had experience in explicitly talking about emotions, how to regulate them and how to manage stress. Elisa explains this further in our post project interview:

**Excerpt 5.4** “Main focus”

Denise: I was really impressed with... how [the students] were able to express...to identify, bring feelings, different emotions.

Elisa: Yeah, that's a huge focus of our school. So, if they've been at our school for a few years, that social emotional is just the main focus of our school. So, a lot of kids are well versed in all that, which is great.

The Matchbox Diaries (Fleischman, 2013) gave us many possibilities to work on social studies, language arts and socio-emotional learning. The book's illustrations were especially helpful because of the quality of the images and the way they represented the character's feelings. So, the students had vivid depictions to draw from when discussing the different emotions that the main character would have felt when facing different new and or difficult situations. As the name suggest, the main curricular focus of this activity was through the lens of social-emotional learning.

As with all the other activities, the graph of emotion was collaboratively designed, planned and implemented in class by Elisa and me. The first step of its implementation consisted of the presentation and explanation of the graph of emotion. We reviewed the emotions they were going to work with ('satisfied', 'surprised', 'motivated', 'excited', peaceful, 'curious', 'nervous', 'worried', 'sad' and 'scared') and asked the students to define or give examples of some of them to check their understanding. Later, after receiving the graph and the mini versions of pictures in the book, we explained how to use the graph and asked them to think of two symbols to use as a graph key throughout the story, one for themselves and one for great-grandfather. The mini pictures used in the graph of emotion are omitted due to copyright restrictions; however, one graph that was filled by one of the students and a blank is provided below in Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.6.



Figure 5.5 Beatriz's Graph of Emotion

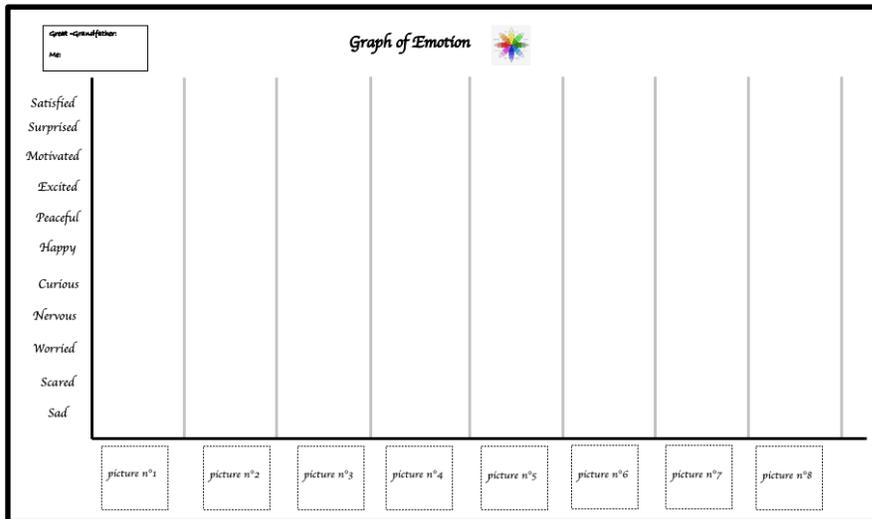


Figure 5.6 Blank Graph of Emotion

Next, we asked the students to open the book where they had finished reading the day before, which was where the great-granddaughter asked her great-grandfather about his matchboxes, and carefully look at the picture. This is a picture of the grandfather seated on an ornate wooden chair with a cigar box containing all the matchboxes he had collected, on his lap, with the lid open. The great-grand daughter is leaning on the wooden arm of the chair, close to the grandfather, and the gaze of both characters is directed towards the objects in the box. Then, we invited students to think about the emotions great-grandfather could have been feeling at that moment and asked them to think about their emotions if they were the one sitting there with that child reopening their boxes of memories. Afterwards, we asked them to share their thoughts with the rest of the group, emphasizing that they should justify their answers as much as possible. Only after the group sharing, students were invited to make the symbols (one for the great grandfather and one for themselves) on their graphs of emotions.

#### 5.4.2 Knowledge Processes, Socio-Emotional Learning and Identity Investment

If we look at this task in terms of the knowledge processes of Learning by Design framework, the students started by recalling what they already knew about emotions (“experiencing the known”) because we wanted them to bring to mind their socio-emotional awareness, and the language related to particular emotions, before looking at the pictures of the girl and her great-grandfather. Then, only after they had brought back that prior knowledge, we asked them to reflect and decide on the emotions (“analyzing critically”) the main character may have been feeling and what emotions they think they might have felt in that same situation (“conceptualizing by naming”). As shown in Excerpt 5.5, Elisa explains in her instructions to the students, as a review of “experiencing the known”:

##### **Excerpt 5.5** “Comfortable with all those words”

Elisa: Look at those words on the left column. If there any you are confused about what they might mean now is the chance because you will be working with these emotions, we need to make sure that we're comfortable with all those words...so we are reading in the left column: satisfied, surprised, motivated, excited, peaceful, happy, curious, nervous, worried, scared. Are there any words that we want to go over? Before we continue, what does it mean to be satisfied? What does that mean? Noelle?

Noelle: You're not like you don't have really much more emotion. You're like, that's fine.

Elisa: Yeah, that's fine. It's kind of like content. I'm okay... So, it is basically exactly that...we don't have an emotion up or down or looking at different ranges. We're actually quite in the middle, and we're feeling good. We're feeling okay.

For many students it was easy to understand the instructions and they did not take much time to place themselves in the great-grandfather's shoes when they were "analysing critically". Here are some illustrative examples: Amelia explained, "I chose peaceful for the grandfather because he gets to see his granddaughter and he looks peaceful with her and I chose happy for me *because I would be happy in that situation.*" For Luciano, he said "I chose for the grandfather excited because he kinds of looks lonely, he doesn't look like he has a wife with him, and I chose peaceful for him *because it's just a relaxing situation with his granddaughter and I chose peaceful for myself*". However, some students while they were able to attribute an emotion to the grandfather, they found it very difficult to place themselves in the great-grandfather's position or perhaps they misunderstood the instructions. Mario explained, "I picked for grandfather happy because that was probably the first time he saw his granddaughter and *for me I picked surprised because maybe she is feeling the same way, maybe that's the first time she saw him, so she is surprised to see him.*" So, as well as the grandfather, he put himself in the place of the granddaughter. After looking at the first picture, some students selected an emotion for the grandfather but just expressed their emotions from the reader's perspective, which showed mainly their interest in what was going to happen next in the story or to the main character. Noelle is one example, as she explains in Excerpt 5.6:

**Excerpt 5.6** "I chose curious for myself"

Noelle: I chose excited for the grandfather because I think he is excited to see his only grandchild and I chose peaceful and happy for the grandfather too because I think he is happy to be sharing all of this information with her and *I chose curious for myself because I want to know what is going to happen next.*

Beatriz responded in a similar way, “I chose for Grandfather happy because I think he would be happy sharing about his younger stage in life. *For me I chose curious because I would love to know about his things.* Simon, too, responded from his position, as a reader, “For great grandfather I chose happy because he’s got time to spend with his great granddaughter and *for me, I put curious because I don’t know what is going to happen.*”

Nevertheless, the same exercise of putting themselves in great-grandfather’s situation did not seem that difficult the second, third and fourth time. The other images that the learners considered were the second illustration of the book, was the image of the school master’s son reading a letter from the father who is in America to the boy, his mother and four older sisters, who are illiterate and are gathered together listening attentively. The third picture illustrated on the book was the family departing down the road in a horse and cart to go to Naples to take the ship to New York, where they would join the father. It is also possible to see in that picture that they are leaving their grandmother, who can be seen from the back, as a solitary figure leaning on her walking stick. Finally, the fourth illustration of the book was the grandfather as a boy sitting on a cloth bundle, and he is surrounded by sleeping bodies on the floor of the cramped quarters of the steamship station, waiting for days for their boat. Here are some representative examples of the students’ perspectives of the emotions of the character and what they might have felt. Regarding the second illustration, Nadia explains: “For both me and the great-grandfather I chose curious because I am curious about what that letter says but I am also nervous of what he [the great- great-grand father’s in New York] wrote down, maybe there are bad news, maybe he died”. Luciano explains, “For the second picture I chose excited because I would want to know what the father of grandfather said, and this kid [the school master’s son] was helping them, and I chose happy because they are going to know what he says. Some students discussed all three images together,

Beatriz explained in regard of the second illustration of the book, “I put happy for the grandfather because he was able to share his story and for me, I put curious because I would like to know about the story” Regarding the third illustration of the book, “For the grandpa I chose excited and sad because he is leaving his family in Italy and excited to see his father.” Considering the fourth illustration of the book, “For the grandfather I chose motivated and curious. Motivated because that’s when he started his matchbox diary and curious of his trip on the ship and for me, I chose curious too.” Nadia gave a thoughtful and extended response, as she explains in Excerpt 5.7:

**Excerpt 5.7** “Scared because of...same reasons”

Nadia: For the great-grandfather I chose scared, worried and nervous. Nervous because I’m moving to a new country, nervous because I don’t know how to speak that language and scared because of...same reasons. For me I chose nervous, worried, scared, curious and happy. Happy because I don’t have to live in Italy anymore, curious of what lies ahead of me, and for nervous worried and scared the same reasons as great grandpa.

Moreover, Noelle connected great-grandfather’s migration journey from Italy to the United States with her own migration journey from Serbia to Canada, which indicates that she was able to invest part of her identity while doing this activity. As she reflected on her perceptions of emotions across all three illustrations, she states Excerpt 5.8:

**Excerpt 5.8** “When I left Serbia”

Noelle: For the first picture for me I put happy and excited and surprised because if I were in that situation, I would be really happy to see the letter, but I would also be a little surprised because of what could be inside of it and also, I would be excited because if my dad was far away and I received something from him, it would definitely

mean a lot to me. For grandfather on the first picture, I put excited and happy because I think he feels excited to get the letter from his dad and happy because they haven't known anything about him for a while. For the second picture when they are leaving, I put scared and worried for the grandpa because they are moving to a new country, they don't know what's gonna happen, they don't know how hard it's gonna be, they don't have any expectations because they haven't seen anything like it before. I also put nervous for the grandpa because they are going on this big ship and he is only 5 years old. And for me I put exactly the same feelings because like I went to a similar situation when I left Serbia, it was a complete new experience for me, and I also put excited for grandpa because even though he is leaving his country, he is going to see his dad so he is probably excited. On the third picture I put nervous and sad for me because they are waving from the ship and there's a bunch of people there and now, you have more time to think about your family, which makes you sad, I think. And for grandpa I put scared and curious because he is going to a new country, so he is already scared but also, I think he is a little happy about it.

From my observations and conversations with the students, as well as the data analysis, the findings suggest that the students were once again engaged in a range of knowledge processes (experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying); and demonstrated a sensitive reading of the images, a level of reflection that was insightful, not superficial; a capacity to empathise with the character; and an ability to articulate their perceptions about complex, and at times conflicting emotions.

During our post interview, I was able to ask Elisa about this activity and what her thoughts about it were, even though we were not able to finish all the sessions. As she mentioned in Excerpt 5.9, the positive aspects this activity had was the time it gave to students to reflect and share their reflections with their peers and how it connected the students with the story of the great-grandfather:

**Excerpt 5.9** “Connect to the story”

Elisa: ...I think it was great. It was nice for them to reflect. And what was good was that they had to reflect to their group, .... you asked a few people, which was great. And what was nice was that they could compare, I mean, we didn't do enough of them...because we only did a few and then we obviously had to stop. I think that would have been very powerful...But...it was nice and it's good to always give them time to share and reflect and...justify their answers. Why do you think they felt this way? ...and then relating to themselves. How do you think you would have felt in this?... It just makes them connect to the story a little bit more to and they become a little bit more invested.

I was genuinely impressed with the level of visual understanding these students had and how accurate they were when describing the book's pictures or defining what was happening or what they were feeling according to the expressions and body language of the character, as depicted. When I told Elisa about this thought, and as she explained in Excerpt 5.10, this was something that Kingsway students are usually really good at. As many of their students arrived in Canada without knowing how to speak or read in English, they had to rely on pictures and facial expressions to understand at least the context of what was happening around them.

### **Excerpt 5.10 “Rely on pictures”**

Elisa: ... the kids are really good at that...saying, what do you think is happening here?

...what do you think this character this person is feeling or...who do you think is this? ..., they're really good at reading that and I think so many of them have had to be because they couldn't read for so long. So many were ELL and so they had to rely on pictures to get any information...and so they have like grown up with looking at the pictures first to get some information of what's gonna happen, what might be going on...I think so many of them did that first as like a coping strategy for them before they learned English. And so now I think they're still going back to that. And I noticed that with a lot of kids, and I haven't noticed that at other schools. They don't really notice the pictures a lot. It's just read and move on.

Unfortunately, as it was mentioned before, this task could not be finished because of the school closure due to the COVID 19 pandemic. However, it is possible to observe that even though we could only cover a part of it, the students were able to develop, through the reading of the visuals and the story, their social studies skills (SS) on migration of people, inequality issues, and mainly to express and justify their opinions regarding the socio-emotional aspects of the story. Thus, demonstrating the extent to which they were meeting the language arts and social-emotional learning objectives set for this task.

### **5.5 Task 3: The ‘Olive Pit’ and ‘Macaroni’ Activity**

What we entitled the ‘Olive Pit’ activity was actually a series of activities designed to support the students’ attainment of BC’s social studies and language arts curriculum content and competencies and their social and emotional learning. Regarding the social studies curriculum, similar to the ‘Favorite Objects’ activity, we planned for students to: 1) Use Social Studies inquiry

processes and skills to interpret and analyze ideas; and 2) [understand] global poverty and inequality issues, including class structure. The intended language arts objectives were students are expected to: 1) Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking; 2) make inferences and predictions and using different language forms; and 3) be able to express and justify their opinions. The Core Curriculum, socio-emotional learning objectives, regarding Personal Awareness and Responsibility and Social Awareness and Responsibility, particularly with respect to global poverty and inequities, concerning class structure, were also interwoven in the task design.

The activities are designed primarily from the information in the story that the great-grandfather had a ‘diary entry’ of an olive pit in one of his matchboxes and a single piece of macaroni in another, as well as the text and illustrations telling the reader the family was migrating to America. One additional intended purpose of the “Olive Pit” activity was for students to interact with realia to connect them with their other senses and modes, not only with sight and the visual mode. Therefore, we asked the students to touch, feel, smell, shake and listen to the matchbox and the olive pit inside that we had given to each one. We wanted to add other modes to the multimodal picture book experience. Additionally, we also thought this could be a good discussion starter and a different way to make items that may not be so familiar to these students more accessible.

This activity was designed and taught together with the class teacher, and each of the three related tasks (‘the olive pit’, ‘the piece of macaroni’ and the ‘thought bubble’) that constituted the overall activity, themselves consisted of several steps.

### 5.5.1 The ‘Olive Pit’ Activity



*Figure 5.7 Matchbox with Olive Pit Inside*

First, the students each received a matchbox, like the one seen in figure 5.7, that contained something inside (the olive pit), and they had to weigh it in the palm of their hand, shake it and listen without opening the box. Then, we told them to open the box and take out the object. After that, we asked them to guess what the object was, listened to all of their speculations and gave them the correct answer before asking them: Why do you think the great-grandfather kept such a seemingly insignificant item? This question led to a class discussion where the students gave their opinions and ideas about why the main characters kept something that might seem so trivial. After the discussion, we read together with the students the page where we learn why the great-grandfather kept the olive pit and carefully looked at the picture that illustrates that text. It is a pencil drawn image of the young boy sitting shoeless on the doorstep of the house taking an olive pit from his mother’s outstretch hand, as she bends over to give it to him. Both are dressed in ripped and tattered clothes of the period. Some minutes later, we asked them to reflect on the following questions before discussing them with their groups: What does this tell us about the great-grandfather and his earlier life? What do you think about the olive pit in the box? What does this object tell us? What else can you see in the image that can help you know more about the great-grandfather? When the group discussion ended, we asked the students to share some of their ideas with the rest of the class. Finally, we gave them sticky notes (post-its) and invited them to make notes on their thoughts, feelings and ideas on what they have read, seen and discussed, and place their notes back in the matchbox, as seen in figure 5.8.



*Figure 5.8 Matchbox with Students’ Predictions Written on Post-Its*

### 5.5.2 The ‘Macaroni’ Activity



*Figure 5.9 Matchbox with Macaroni Inside*

The next day, we repeated the experience but with a piece of macaroni, (as it can be seen in figure 5.9) instead of an olive pit inside the matchbox. The students had to guess the relevance of that object in the character's life before looking

at the picture or reading the book. The pictures of that passage of the book showed on one page several steamship tickets from

Napoli to New York, and on top of them, there is an old matchbox with a macaroni inside. On the opposite page, it is possible to see great-grandfather together with his mom and four sisters, all inside a cart that is being pulled by horses, and they are leaving behind their grandmother, who is waving at them. Therefore, when the students read that next section of the narrative, they learnt that the family was moving to the United States to reunite with their father, but they were leaving their grandmother behind, so we asked them to discuss their thoughts, emotions and ideas with their groups. After the group discussion, they were asked to write about their impressions on a post-it and then they put them inside the matchbox, as they had done previously.

### 5.5.3 The Thought Bubble Reflections

Later, we discussed their answers as a class and after the class discussion they received the thoughts, ideas and/or emotions worksheet (Appendix G) where they could freely draw or write (see figure 5.10 and figure 5.11) about what they had read and discussed so far. As well, they discussed and summarized the pros and cons of leaving and, in groups, noted three of each in a small T chart (see figure 5.12).

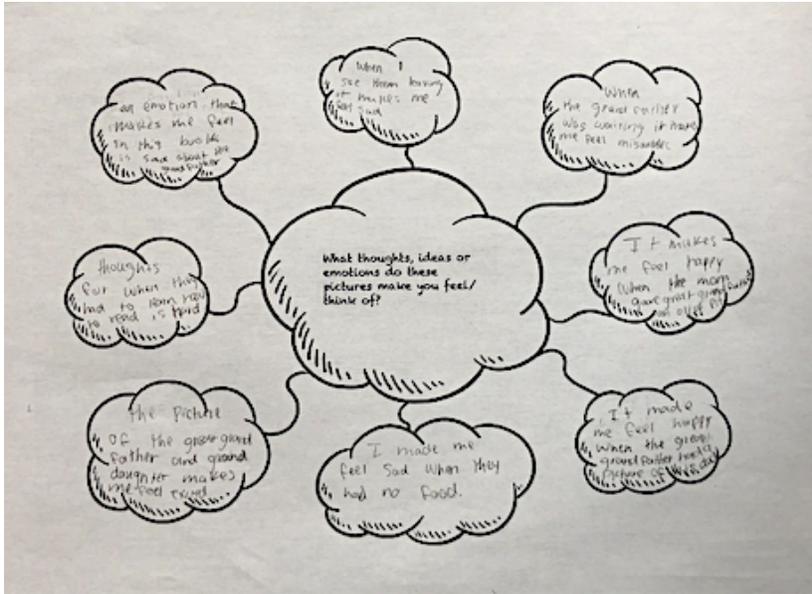


Figure 5.10 Maddison's Thought Bubble Reflections

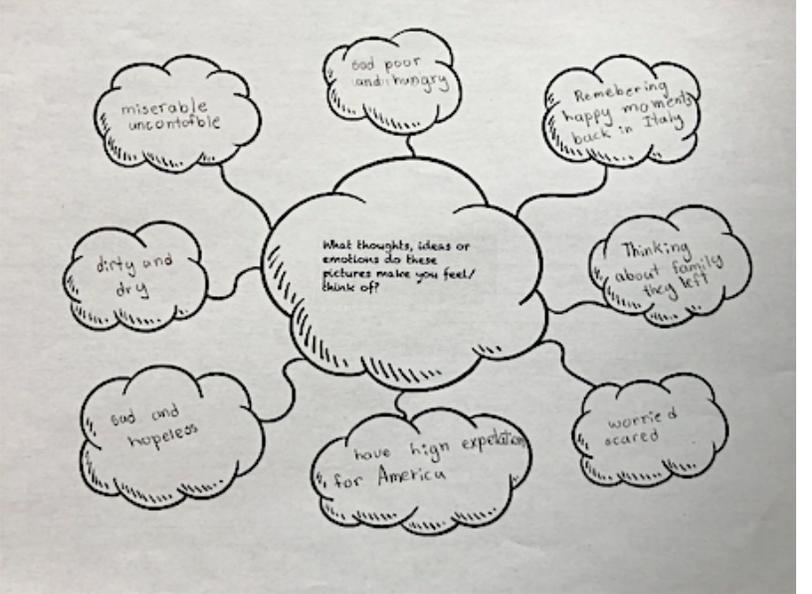


Figure 5.11 Noelle's Thought Bubble Reflections

**Pros and Cons - T chart**

Together with your group, try to think of at least three positive aspects (pros) and three negative ones (cons) that leaving everything behind and going to a new country might have meant to grandfather's family.

Pros of leaving Italy	Cons of leaving Italy
• Food and Money	• Leaving family/friends
• A proper housing/shelter	• Leaving childhood memories behind.
• School and education	• Learning a totally new language

Figure 5.12 Nadia, Beatriz and Mario's Pro and Cons Chart

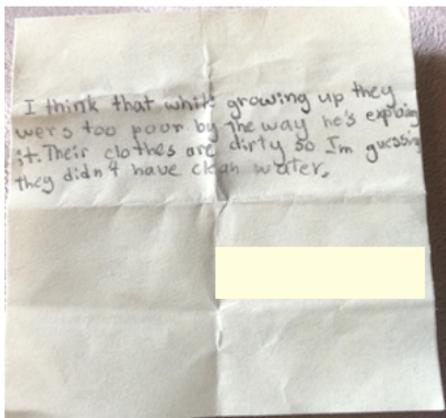
#### 5.5.4 Knowledge Processes

When planning this activity, we intended that students used several knowledge processes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a). Students started by recalling what they already knew and, bringing back their prior knowledge or “experiencing the known” when they looked at the matchbox. Then they had to guess what was inside by its weight and sound, and finally, when they took out the olive pit and the macaroni, they had to guess what they were and why they thought great-grandfather had kept it. Therefore, we knew that the students were familiar with those objects, but the “experiencing the new” and “analyzing critically” knowledge processes were developed with the connections they had to make in interpreting the story and the questions they needed to ask themselves to make those connections and interpretations. Additionally, the “conceptualizing by naming” knowledge process was applied at the very end of this activity when students had to develop abstract and generalized terms to write or draw their thoughts, ideas or emotions about the story and share it with their group and classmates.

The findings will be reported for the overall activity with data drawn from all three smaller interrelated activities (post-its, class share discussions, and thoughts, ideas or emotions ‘bubbles’ worksheet/pros and cons T-chart) and according to the different subject areas (social studies, language arts, socio-emotional learning), learning standards for the activity.

#### 5.5.5 Social Studies

As noted above, the social studies objectives that were intended to be developed by the students: 1) Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to interpret and analyze ideas; and 2) [understand] global poverty and inequality issues, including class structure and gender, as reported below, were attained. Through their answers on the post-its, their discussion comments and their comments in the ‘thought bubbles/ pros and cons’, it is argued that the students were able to: engage in a range of knowledge processes; examine and interpret the text and the illustration of the story; and gain a sound understanding of what was happening to the boy who was living in Italy at the beginning of the 1900s. These competencies are directly connected with the objective of understanding global poverty and inequality issues. Here are some sample post-it texts.



*Figure 5.13 Noelle's Prediction about Great-Grandfather's Life*

Noelle, as it can be seen in figure 5.13, writes that *“I think that while growing up they were too poor by the way he’s explain it.”* which shows us that she is able to interpret and analyze great-grandfather’s situation from what she read about his recount of the events and circumstances. However, she also adds: *“Their clothes are dirty so I’m guessing they didn’t have clean water”*, which indicates that she is observing the picture of the great-grandfather and his mom and is deducing about their poor living conditions according to the way they look.

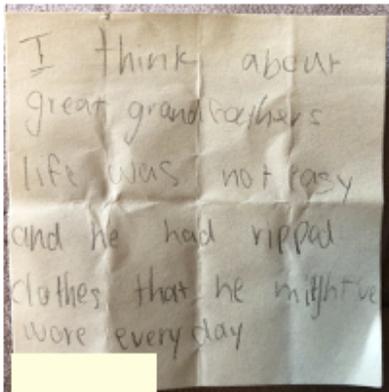


Figure 5.14 Mariana’s Prediction about Great-Grandfather’s Life

Mariana also mentions (see figure 5.14) great-grandfather’s life circumstances and his clothes as something that showed her that his life was not easy, showing us that she was able to understand the text and carefully observe and interpret the picture of the story: *“I think about great grandfathers’ life was not easy and he had ripped clothes that he might’ve wore every day”*. Maddison (see figure 5.15) makes note that the boy’s circumstances might have been caused by the country’s economic conditions. She writes: *“I think that in his time when he was a kid his country was poor, or they were struggling hints why their cloths are ripped up.”*

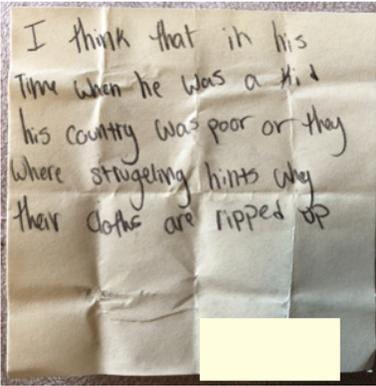


Figure 5.15 Maddison's Prediction about Great-Grandfather's Life

When the students interpreted the image and the passage about the macaroni, in their Post-It notes, and in the discussion, something similar happened. They were able to connect both with the character but also with his circumstances of poverty. Beatriz hypothesized *"I think he used to eat pasta, since his family isn't wealthy he probably had it once a week or month"*. Mario offered, *"The great grandfather was really poor, and his mom gives him everything she can."* Simon thought, *"Pasta is one of the things that they can afford. It was probably like, his favorite because that's all he really got to try."* In the discussion, the students talked about how without money you could not get an education, and the inequities caused by poverty and social class. As Mario noted, *"They [the boy and his four older sisters] couldn't read the letters"*, but the young son of the school master attended school and could read. Noelle further explained, *"People with no money couldn't get education, and without education they couldn't get a good job, so the only thing they could get in America were the kind of jobs where you don't need such a great education"*. And they demonstrated that they understood that in these circumstances of limited opportunities, *"...they had to [migrate]"* and that they *"were looking for a better or any job"* and that they needed to *"Send money back... to make money"*.

In the final part of this task, more specifically on the “Thought Bubble Reflection” and on the pros and cons discussion and T chart, the students most commonly wrote a lot about their emotional responses to the narrative. However, they also commented and shared their ideas and thoughts about the inequality, poverty, and migration issues. They considered choices the Italian migrant family were forced to make and the consequences. For example, Mario writes: “It makes me think of all the families left back. It makes me think of all the people without food.” Mariana writes, “When I see them leaving it makes me feel sad.”, referring to the part where the family leaves, their grandmother and home, to find better opportunities in New York. Maddison writes, “Sad, this make me sad to know that there are places like this, and that people go through this.” She adds, “This makes me want to help. No one should go through this.”. Beatriz relates to the circumstances in the story at a personal level and with respect to working people reflects, “It makes me wonder how my life would be if I lived back then.”

In small groups, the students then discussed and summarized the pros and cons for the family of leaving their home country of Italy and migrating to America. Here is the response of one group, including Luciano, Maddison and Mariana that is typical. Among the pros they decided, ‘Job opportunities’, ‘Better school’ and ‘Less poverty’ listing some key ‘push- pull’ factors of migration, namely, economy and opportunities. Some groups were more specific that ‘less poverty’ would mean ‘more food and money’ and ‘proper housing/shelter’. Two groups mentioned, “Seeing their father/husband” and “being able to send money home”. Collectively, they determined the main reasons for leaving and that these were related to economic (poverty) reasons, rather than political, or religious, or forms of persecution. They also articulated the cons re: migration; the same group’s response typifies the class understandings, ‘Far away from family’, ‘Culture might be replaced’, difficulties related to ‘The language barrier’. The knowledge process

of analyzing critically was the pedagogical intention of this task and the students evidently used this process.

#### 5.5.6 Language Arts

If we look at the Language Arts (LA) objectives, we can say that the objective of applying appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking was also achieved as each student successfully analyzed and interpreted the images and passages covered during the lessons, as it was shown when discussing the social studies component above. Regarding the second Language Arts objective, where students had to make inferences and predictions and use different language forms, we can say that even though the language used was very simple, orally and in written form, the students successfully applied the correct form to make predictions. They typically used the same language patterns to express their predictions (*"I think"*, or *"I believe'..."*). Beatriz writes, *"I think he used to eat pasta..."* following the same pattern, Mariana writes: *"I think about great grandfathers' life was not easy..."* and using a different sentence starter Simon writes: *"I believe this object is important to great grandfather..."*. Finally, if we look at the third Language Arts objective, where students had to express and justify their opinions, we can observe in their pieces of writing that they could support their opinions and develop their control of the 'argument genre' commonly using the conjunction '*because*'. They would use terms such as 'maybe' and 'probably' to indicate degree of probability. Luciano writes: *"The object is important to the grandfather maybe because it was his favorite food and his mom cooked it a lot."*, giving us evidence of why he thinks that way. Nadia gives us some context before telling us her opinion about why the great-grandfather sucked the olive pit: *"This olive pit tells me that great-grandfather use to live in Italy, when he was a young child, he was poor and had a hard time living, the mom gave him an olive pit because it coated his stomach with something."* Simon

is a bit more hesitant about his answer, but he tries to guess: “I believe this object is important to great grandfather probably because his mom always cooked it.”. However, his second statement is more certain as he leaves aside the “*probably*” of the first one: “*To remind of his memory’s.*”. Noelle states, “*I think that he chose the objects because I know that he lived in Italy and I know that macaroni and spaghetti are some of their natural foods, it’s...what Italians like and also because he was so poor it was one of the things his mother could afford*”.

As was illustrated in the reporting of the social studies objectives above, e.g. in the post-it activity, the Language Arts objective of reading the visuals was done very well and without problems, and the students were able to interpret the images and infer beyond simple readings (e.g. Nadia wrote: “*Maybe this was during the depression, so they were poor (explains the black and white)*”), and even though the language objective of using complete language forms was not expected (e.g. Noelle read the visual as depicting that the characters are: “*Miserable, uncomfortable*”), some students, including Nadia above, expressed what they viewed in the images in whole sentences anyway (e.g. Beatriz: “*In the picture where we last read, everybody else looks cold. It makes me feel sympathy for them.*”).

#### 5.5.7 Socio-Emotional Learning

The socio-emotional learning objectives of Personal Awareness and Responsibility and Social Awareness and Responsibility were developed in the way students reflected about the questions they were asked and the answers they gave in order to answer them. Their answers present an in-depth analysis of the images and texts and showed different and original ways of looking at the same situations, therefore the expression of creative thinking (e.g., “*Their clothes are dirty so I’m guessing they didn’t have clean water...*”, “*...he had ripped clothes that he might’ve wore every day*”, “*...the mom gave him an olive pit because it coated his stomach with*

*something*”). The students demonstrated not only inferencing competencies thinking but emotional engagement and empathy. When looking at the objects in the matchboxes, for example, Noelle said: *"Maybe he wanted to remember...when he looks back at his life... he's like...Oh, I remember...playing with my sisters when we shared this, and...we were poor,"* and another student added: *"Maybe you know what... I think that is the shape of the macaroni looks like half of a heart too. So, they probably had another part, so they kept this one and gave the other one to someone else”*.

All of the students referred to an awareness of the feelings the pictures and passages provoked in them. Most of the reactions were of sadness and pity; however, some mentioned happiness when referring to a possible better future. Beatriz says, *“They look weak and I feel pity for them.”* Nadia writes *“I feel bad (because of their hard life)”, “Misery (no one’s happy)”*. And *“Happy for them because they have tickets.”* Maddison, as noted earlier, commented on that she is sad to know that there are places like this, and that people should not have to go through it. She also says she feels *“Excited. This people are getting away from such a sad life and starting a new one.”* Mariana writes, *“It made me feel happy when the great grandfather had a picture of his dad.”* But *“When I see them leaving, it makes me feel sad. And When the grandfather was waiting [on the floor of the steamship station] it makes me feel miserable.”*

#### 5.5.8 Identity Investment and Literacy Engagement

Regarding identity investment and literacy engagement, without the opportunity to ask the students directly this is challenging to fully determine; however, some indicators tell us about the students’ commitment to this activity. The indicators are the amount of writing produced, with attention to form and conventions, especially, by some of the students who exceeded their norms. Furthermore, from observations, students were engaged in the activity as the discussion was active

during the table groups and also during the class sharing where some of the students made an extra effort to give creative answers which included a commentary on an emotional aspect. As can be observed, some of the students got personally involved with what was happening in the story and wondered about their life if they have lived the great-grandfather's life or wanted to help personally. As Beatriz noted *"It makes me wonder how my life would be if I lived back then."* And Madison reported, *"This make me want to help. No one should go through this."* If you look back to the reporting of responses above, regarding "Awareness and Responsibility" competencies and social emotional learning, with respect, for example, to feeling 'sad', 'sympathy', 'miserable', 'happy' or 'excited' for the family, and the care the students took in their reflections on the narrative, it can be posited that they invested in the tasks and appeared to be very engaged in the literacy practices of the unit of work.

During our post-project interview, I was able to ask Elisa about her opinion regarding this activity. Some of the things she mentioned that went well in this activity and encouraged their literacy engagement were bringing in the realia into the class, which caught some of the student's attention and the fact that the story was read aloud to the students, which we knew they really liked. The details of her response are provided in Excerpt 5.11:

**Excerpt 5.11** "They like stories"

Denise: ...do you think that anyone was...really engaged with the activities and what was happening?

Elisa: ... there's a few that I felt were really engaged...(name) was very...whenever I went to her group, she was really engaged in the ideas. And Maddison...she was another one, and there's one more that was...really... wanting to read...listen more and stuff. And, oh, (name)...seemed really engaged every time I talked to her and went

over with her and whatever ...was just talking to her about the things. She's really eager to... see what happened and what was happening next...be able to...talk about and ask questions and those ones were really into it.... (name)... loves the little things like...the matchbox...all that kind of thing really gets them. So many of them love, looking at...Beatriz loved looking at it...that's exciting for them to have something that they're not just looking at paper all the time and reading there's something there...

Denise: So, you think that that those extra things that were brought into the lesson was something extra for them to be engaged?

Elisa: Oh, yeah. Those are the kinds of things that really engage them. I mean, the story engages them, of course, but...they like listening to the story. And it seemed like the class was excited. Every time we were going to read a couple pages, they were like wanting to follow along, wanting to listen, because they like stories. They love that stuff... they love listening to stories and being read to, so I think they love that.

In conclusion, this activity addressed all the different objectives that we planned, but different components were covered with different intensity in each of its component parts. Sometimes the focus may have been more on developing the language and literacy competencies, as in viewing the images, listening to the story, orally discussing the students' predictions or providing an opinion and justifying it. They also wrote short sentences or bullet points. Other times, the focus was on social and emotional learning and building empathy designed towards consideration of the conditions that push people to migrate and what responsibilities, we as individuals and as economically 'rich' countries have. These were themes intended to be more comprehensively addressed as the unit proceeded. However, throughout the activities the Social

Studies objective of understanding global poverty and inequality issues was clearly understood by the student in every activity step. It was a core focus of these activities and always interwoven to deepen the students understanding. As with other activities, the students used a range of knowledge processes, primarily, ‘experiencing the known’, ‘experiencing the new’, ‘conceptualizing by theory’, as they were connecting their concepts to determine ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors and ‘analyzing critically’, as the learners evaluated their own and the family’s perspectives and reasons. The cognitive and language challenges were high, but these were structured and scaffolded by visual scaffolding and opportunities for peer and teacher support in group work.

#### 5.6 Task 4: Collage Creation

The main objective of the "Journey from Italy to NY Collage" activity was to help students understand the journey that Italian migrants had to make to start a new life in America in the early 1900s. As well as the other activities, there were cross-curricular objectives in the areas of Social Studies, Language Arts, and Socio-emotional learning. Literacy engagement and identity investment were also considered when we co-designed this unit. The specific Social Studies objectives were: 1) to use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions, gather, interpret, and analyze; and 2) to [understand] the urbanization and migration of people and global poverty/ inequality issues. Regarding Language Arts, the specific objective was to use the appropriate language forms 1) to express and justify opinions. This activity's socio-emotional learning objectives were related to the Personal Awareness and Responsibility competencies and two Core Thinking competencies: Creative Thinking and Critical and Reflective Thinking. Creative, critical and reflective thinking is one of the pillars of Culturally Responsive Teaching, which, as it was mentioned before, is one of the main characteristics of this teacher's type of teaching.

### 5.6.1 Knowledge Processes

The different knowledge processes that were intended for this activity were four: "experiencing the known", "experiencing the new", "conceptualizing by naming" and "applying creatively". The "experiencing the known" process started when Elisa and I reviewed everything the students already knew about the Italian migration, which we had slightly discussed in class while reading the story. After they had activated that prior knowledge, we moved into the "experiencing the new", presented on the PowerPoint with the pictures of the real ships and the immigrants' journeys. None of them had ever seen pictures like this before, so they were surprised to see real pictures showing the luxurious interiors of the first-class conditions right beside the crowded spaces of third class. "Conceptualizing by naming" started when the students had to discuss the after-presentation questions and give examples of the emotions felt, the present and past symbolism of the Statue of Liberty, among others. Finally, the students began "applying creatively" when asked to create the collage at the end of the activity.

### 5.6.2 Social Studies, Language Arts and Socio-Emotional Learning

There were various steps in this activity, which started with the students interacting with a PowerPoint presentation that included images of ships, the different decks and people who travelled on them. This first part included questions that aimed for students to reflect on the differences between the upper- and lower-class journey and the meaning of that trip. There were 6 PowerPoint slides in total. The first three showed: i) images of a map of the journey and a liner; ii) four images showing the conditions for first-class passengers; iii) four images showing the conditions for the third-class passengers; iv) the Statue of Liberty; v) and vi) images of arrival and health check inspections and passing through immigration at Ellis Island to the Kissing Post where families were reunited.

As the slides moved forward, we kept asking the students to reflect on the social issues represented in those pictures and to share their impressions about them. The co-teaching part flowed smoothly, and we could tell that the students were engaged in the class discussion. They were able to make connections and interpretations and compare and contrast the different life situations of first and third-class passengers. Excerpt 5.12 illustrates how the discussion was guided, the type of learning that was produced and the type of answers the students gave.

**Excerpt 5.12** “We are finally here”

Denise: ...So, this was more or less the inside of one of these ships. Do you think all of the ship looked the same? ...do you think all the people were this wealthy during those times?

**Noelle: I think they separated the ship by how wealthy people are and they would please you but not if you were at the bottom, because the poor were at the bottom and they only cared for the rich one’s opinion because they could actually get their money.**

Denise: Good! So, you can see everything was very elegant for them...bedrooms, dining rooms... And... the other side, which was third class...where people would sometimes struggle to buy their tickets because this was their chance for freedom or a better opportunity...

Elisa: And looking at this...one looks more like a cafeteria and the other looks like a fancy restaurant, would you agree? And then look at the right...What are those?

Maddison: Beds?

Elisa: What kind of beds?

Noelle: Bunk beds

Elisa: Bunk beds...how many people are sleeping in there? Four people, it's pretty tight, right? ...So, looking back this is beautiful...that doesn't even look like it's on a boat, does it? Like it could be someone's bedroom in their house... There's huge difference...These ones are dancing in a ballroom What are these people doing on the bottom right?

Unknown Speaker: Knitting?

Elisa: Yeah, knitting or just sitting on benches. And it looks like it's outside. So, notice that they're having to go out a lot, right? Completely different experience and they're still on the same boat. So, it's just really important that you see the differences.

Denise: ...this was the first image that most of the immigrants would see when they arrived in the States. What do you think about that statue?

Noelle: Statue of Liberty?

Denise: Yes, Statue of Liberty...What do you think that would mean to them?

Unknown speaker: Freedom

Denise: Freedom, right. What else?

**Mario: We are finally here after so long.**

Denise: Good! So, yeah made it...And here, we have people trying to get into the States... they had to go into a line for an inspection in Ellis Island.

Noelle: (reading) By the sea land inspection of arriving aliens.

Denise: Aliens...aliens is a synonym for immigrants...not from this place...

Elisa: ...that word is not used anymore as it has such a negative connotation but until people became part of the country and were accepted into a country.

Denise: And what do you think they're doing here?

**Noelle: Checking if somebody has, like some kind of sickness or something.**

Denise: Right! Checking if someone has some kind of sickness,

Unknown Speaker: Like coronavirus

Denise: Yeah, very similar to what's happening now... So, they're taking the temperature, they're looking at people's eyes... in those times they believe that if you had red eyes, you had some kind of infection... so, do you think they were gentle and considered with this huge amount of people?

Noelle: No

Denise: So, it could be hard, it could be...intimidating for those little kids, right? And this one here is called The Kissing Post...so this would be the first post after these inspection lines. So, what do you think happened there?

**Noelle: People would see their families.**

Denise: People would see their families, right. Husbands and wives, children and parents... for the first time after years, after months.

If we analyze the extract in terms of the objectives already mentioned, there is evidence that the students developed different aspects of learning while looking at the pictures, reflecting on them and answering the questions. For example, on the first highlighted interaction, Noelle says: *"I think they separated the ship by how wealthy people are, and they would please you but not if you were at the bottom because the poor were at the bottom and they only cared for the rich one's opinion because they could actually get their money."*, or when Mario says *"We are finally here, after so long"*, they are using the Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to interpret, analyze the pictures and the situations depicted in them. They are also showing that they are able

to understand the inequality issues present in them and the migration process of people who were looking for better opportunities. Their interventions expressed their opinions, and Noelle is justifying hers with arguments about why the passengers were separated in different decks, accomplishing the language objective of expressing and justifying opinions. It is also possible to observe creative, critical and reflective thinking as these two students are interpreting what was presented to them. After reflecting on the situations presented, they give answers that show previous analysis of facts to form a judgement or critical thinking.

Two other interventions were highlighted because they also fulfilled the Social Studies, Language Arts, and socio-emotional learning objectives. However, they also give evidence of the students' visual analysis and interpretation. When I asked students to observe and answer: *"And what do you think they're doing here?"*, at Ellis Island, Noelle answered: *"Checking if somebody has, like some kind of sickness or something."*, which shows that she is reading the images correctly and interpreting them according to the context of the presentation. Something similar happened when she answered the question: *"So, what do you think happened there?"*, at the Kissing Post, Noelle: *"People would see their families."*

After we went together through the slides, we gave the students a set of questions (as seen in figure 5.16) in order to expand the discussion, but this time only with their table groups. The questions were:

The image shows a PowerPoint slide with a white background and a black border. At the top, there is a horizontal bar with a purple segment in the middle. Below the bar, the title "THINK – DISCUSS - SHARE" is centered in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Underneath the title, there are four bullet points, each starting with a purple square. The questions are: "What do you think was the first impression of the people who had never seen a ship as big as the continental cruises before? How do you think they felt when the ships started sailing?", "Why do you think passengers were divided and couldn't get into each other's premises?", "What do you think did the Statue of Liberty symbolize then? Has that symbolism changed today?", and "What does liberty mean to you?"

*Figure 5.16 PowerPoint Slide with Questions for the Students to Discuss*

After the table group discussions, we asked the different groups to share their answers with the rest of the class. Excerpt 5.13 reflects the Social Studies, Language Arts and socio-emotional learning that the students showed while discussing the answers.

**Excerpt 5.13** “It symbolizes freedom, safety and well-being”

Elisa: ...let's hear some of the answers...Nadia, can you read number one, the question?

Nadia: What do you think was the first impression of the people who had never seen a ship as big as the continental cruises before? How do you think they felt when the ships started sailing?

Elisa: Okay, and what did you talk about? What do you think?

**Nadia: We said that we think that they were worried and nervous.**

Elisa: Worried and nervous? How come?

Nadia: (inaudible)

Elisa: Yeah, something different and new. And a little bit nervous about what it would be

like, right. Okay. And Luciano, what did your group come up with that one?

Luciano: That there were a few surprises there.

Elisa: Yeah. A little bit confused. What would they be confused about?

Luciano: For example, this thing here? What is it? Why is it here?...

**Mariana: Some might have been excited to see the ocean.**

Elisa: Okay excited... Noelle?

**Noelle: They were nervous and scared because they've never been on a ship before...like none of them knew them, so it was a new experience...**

Elisa: Ok... (name), can you read number three, the question?

(Name): What do you think did the Statue of Liberty symbolize then? Has that symbolism changed today?

Elisa: What did your group talk about for that one, Mario?

**Mario: Place, freedom and how they got over here.**

Elisa: And how they what?

**Mario: It's over, the journey is over...**

**Noelle: We talked about how it symbolizes freedom, safety and well-being. Because they could finally be somewhere safe where they don't have to think about like, oh, is there going to be earthquake tomorrow?**

Elisa: Right...Oh, safety. That's a good one.

Denise: Luciano had a very interesting insight on how it has changed...

**Luciano: They use the word freedom, but America's treaties haven't really supported freedom recently.**

Elisa: Recently, in the last couple years, yes...Nice. And Marco?

**Mario: It would mean they reached land and it hasn't changed.**

Elisa: It hasn't changed...and the last question is what does it mean to you? ...So, hands up. What do you think? What does it mean to you?

Unknown Speaker: Freedom...

Denise: What is for you to be free?

**Noelle: I don't know. I guess when you see the Statue of Liberty The first thing that comes up is like politics safety and stuff, but like honestly, It's not it's not really that safe.**

Elisa: Right? America has not been the best lately... and I don't think people a lot of different people feel safe there. Right and right now...

The answers to the first question: *“What do you think was the first impression of the people who had never seen a ship as big as the continental cruises before? How do you think they felt when the ships started sailing?”*: Nadia: *“We said that we think that they were worried and nervous.”*, Mariana: *“Some might have been excited to see the ocean.”* and Noelle: *“They were nervous and scared because they've never been on a ship before...like none of them knew them, so it was a new experience.”* show us that the different groups of students could reflect on the meaning of that trip and place themselves on the travellers' perspective, demonstrating a successful understanding of the Social Studies objectives already mentioned. They also expressed the feelings they thought the migrants might have felt, and some gave arguments to support their opinions, which is related to the Language Arts objective. Moreover, expressing the emotions present in those pictures confidently and naming them shows how socio-emotional learning objectives were also fulfilled.

Some of the students' answers to the third question: "*What do you think the Statue of Liberty Symbolized then? Has that symbolism changed today?*" were:

Mario: Place, freedom and how they got over here...It's over, the journey is over... It would mean they reached land and it hasn't changed...

Noelle: We talked about how it symbolizes freedom, safety and well-being because they could finally be somewhere safe where they don't have to think about, is there going to be earthquake tomorrow?... I guess when you see the Statue of Liberty the first thing that comes up is like politics safety and stuff, but like honestly, it's not really that safe...

Luciano: They use the word freedom, but America's treaties haven't really supported freedom recently...

The responses reveal that apart from using the Social Studies skills of interpreting the meaning of the Statue of Liberty for the Italian travellers in the 1900s and today, they are able to assess the significance of people, places, events or developments at particular times and places. With Luciano statement, we can see that he understands how political issues have changed the statue's significance, and Noelle does the same with her arguments about the recent lack of safety. These are examples of students' developing their reflecting and critical thinking skills towards social justice issues.

The last part of this activity was for the students to create a collage, together with their table groups, in order to express what they would feel if they were those immigrants arriving in America. They had access to the images used in the slides and could use felts, colored pencils, paint, or any other material they had in their classroom. We told them to be as creative as they wanted and that they could use colors, words, textures, patterns or whatever they thought was

suitable to express their emotions. The students started to work on this with much energy; unfortunately, we were supposed to finish the collages after spring break, but classes had to move to an online format due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so we did not have the chance to finish them.

However, two collages were partially completed on that last day before school was closed due to COVID 19. The unfinished work of the two groups is briefly reported to give a small glimpse into the ways some participating students graphically represented their understandings.



*Figure 5.17 Beatriz, Nadia, Mario's Collage*

For one of the collages (see Figure 5.17), the students grouped the images into two categories according to social class (first class and third class) and organized each set of pairs according to three different stages of the trip 'beginning', 'crossing' and the arrival in New York. Each cluster of images for each stage was outlined with the same grayish color. The only exception

is the final picture that does not have any boundaries and has the word "freedom" next to it written with a shiny light blue. All of the outlined pictures flow in a linear direction to the last "free" one, following a red dotted path, which imitates the red dotted line of the route followed by the ships from Italy to NY, in the travel map they had viewed. The line the pictures are placed along follows an undulating movement, almost like imitating the ocean waves, that crosses the poster from left to right, then right to left and then turns to the destination point which invites the viewer to follow the path until the very end. Presumably, the student designers' stance was to chronologically 'narrate' the order of events of the journey and highlight the importance of arriving at the new destination (the line, the path ends there). We can see that prominence in the students' design process because there is only one word written at the end of the line by them, at that point, and it is written with a bright color, which highlights the word "freedom!". Therefore, the interpretation suggested is this map that depicts a journey with different stages, starting at the ship, the images of life on board the ship, moving on to the health inspection when they arrive at Ellis Island, the kissing post where families are reunited, and then the journey ends when they see the Statue of Liberty, which also stands for their freedom. It is interesting because we discussed in class that the immigrants could see the statue from the ship's deck, so in the presentation it was part of the record of their journey but here the students employed the iconic image differently, making it clear that their trip's final objective is their freedom. Because the collage was unfinished, there is no way to know if or what the student designers intended to add with respect to any descriptive labels related to emotions or opinions or values for each class of migrant. It was interesting to note that while at each stage of the journey the images of passengers were divided by class, there was no class divide around the final idealized image of 'freedom'.

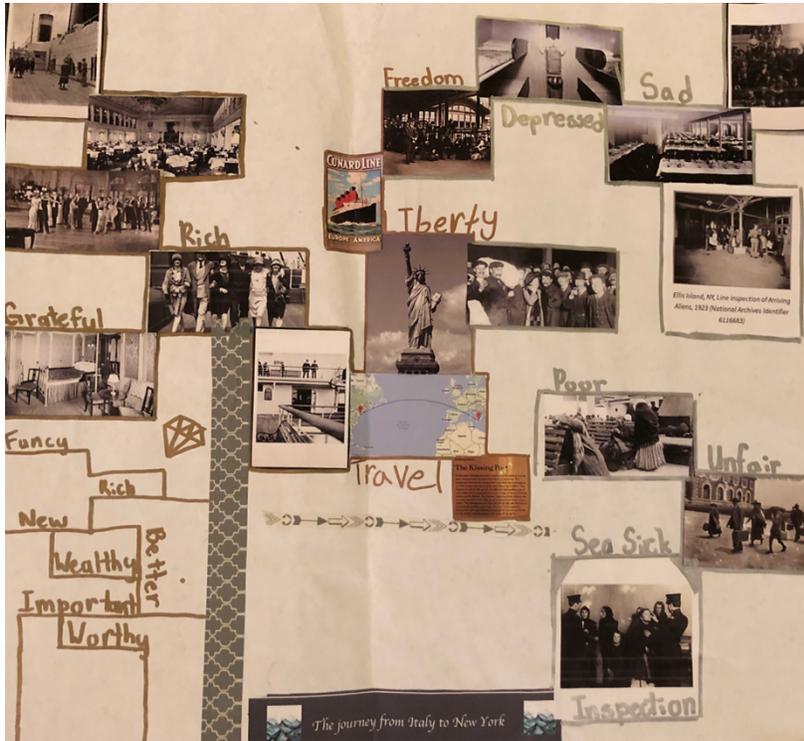


Figure 5.18 Luciano, Noelle, Maddison's Collage

The second group who were nearing completion used the images in a different way (see Figure 5.18) than to record the conditions and events of the journey in a linear/chronological way. They referenced the emotions the images evoked for the designers. Images were labelled "sad", "depressed", "grateful", "unfair" 'poor' or to the single word general description of photograph "rich", "wealthy", "fancy", "important", "travel", "freedom". The images were not in clusters or linear and are placed all over the collage. On the right side, the student designers placed all the images related to third class travellers such as "unfair", "sad", "poor" and on the left side, they placed the ones connected to the first-class travellers such as "wealthy", "important" and "better". In the center, it is possible to observe images that would be relevant for both groups like "liberty", "freedom" and "travel". There is a line of arrows that goes from left to right, which shows some travelling movement. The center of the collage immediately caught the viewer's attention as it has

the only three colored pictures altogether. Then the words "travel", "liberty" and "freedom" are the first ones that appear in sight as they contrast the grayish silver tones of the pictures and the borders the designers chose to outline the third-class one. However, it is possible to tell that they tried to keep some symmetry between the two sides. The images are linked in three big groups or categories, which are color-coded (gray: third-class/golden: first-class). This collage looked like a triptych, something that "speaks" by itself on each of its the three columns (rich; rich and poor; poor) and simultaneously. It appears that designers' standpoint is to emphasize the importance of the words: "freedom", "liberty" and "travel", as they are the first words viewers see when looking at this collage. They also wanted to manifest that even though their realities (wealthy/underprivileged) are two extremes, they can be connected by those common concepts.

These two partial and descriptive summaries (influenced by Kalantzis et al., 2016: A grammar of visual meaning) suggest that the students understood the main reason for the immigrants' trip (freedom-liberty) and could express the social differences and injustices in their multimodal compositions. They used colors, words and lines to express their feelings and impressions. Moreover, they also used the organization and the pictures' position on the collage to convey different meanings and express the separation between classes and unfairness of the conditions.

At the end of the school year and during our post-project interview, I asked Elisa what the reasons behind her constant focus on social justice issues were and why she was so demanding about critical thinking skills. Elisa also told me that those were some of the aspects she cared about the most as a teacher and that mainly because of the type of students that she had and the type of school where she worked. Therefore, it was crucial for her to keep those two objectives

always present in her teaching, as she explained in Excerpt 5.14, taken from the post- project interview quoted earlier in Chapter 4:

**Excerpt 5.14** “Let’s stop, let’s compare”

Denise: ...I also realized that whenever it was possible, you asked your students to reflect about social justice issues. For example, when we're talking about the ships “Let's stop, let's compare.” “Why do you think this was said? Why do you think the ones from the lower deck couldn't go to the upper deck? Why do you think this happened?” ...can you tell me a bit more about why you give critical issues and critical thinking so much time and importance in your classes with your students?

Elisa: Yeah, I mean, that's a huge focus in my class. I want to create critical thinkers...

I want them to develop that skill. I just see the importance of it...we had done some current events, and we have done some articles and learning about things that were happening in the world. And... it’s just very relevant to talk about these things. And then it's also again... that is a connecting piece, because when you're talking about the poor and the rich, a lot of my students are poor. And so, for them to understand that's what happened...in the past and that might be something that's happening to them, this discrepancy with rich people, it's again another way to connect and to validate their story...If I was in another school where everyone was middle class, which is a lot of schools in [this neighborhood], the idea there would be still to have those, but for them to understand at all, and to have any empathy for what the poor people were going through, right? that would be trying to teach these people what that was, they'd never really understand it, because if you don't go through it, you don't fully understand it, but at least to...create some questions about it... whereas

in our school, we have a mix, but we have a lot that are poor. So, some of the things that came up in the story were between these rich and these poor...so noticing the difference between that, and you just always want them to be thinking and asking questions like that anytime they're looking at something on news or in the media, or like when they see a new thing on the internet on Instagram and you know a story will pop up of a news thing. And they'll get the gist of it, but you just want them to basically have these questions always, and always question what's actually happening...

Even though this activity was not finished because classes were switched to an online format and students could not complete designing their collages, it is possible to say that the steps of the knowledge processes were adequately attained. The steps started from “experiencing the known” and ended with “applying creatively”, and they moved from simple to more complicated or from more directed and structured to freer. Students started remembering what they already knew, then adding some new elements with the PowerPoint pictures and information. Later, they processed that old and new information and had to reflect and discuss it to finally create something new with all that knowledge, which permitted integrating the objectives in very different ways and modes. The Social Studies objectives were fulfilled in every step of this activity, as well as the socio-emotional ones. The Language Arts ones of expressing opinion and justifying them were achieved by almost all of the students in every step of the activity and the identity objective and literacy engagement ones were achieved only in some of the steps that let the students connect and express that part more freely.

In conclusion, these four tasks illustrated that when class activities are designed thinking about RMBS as capable and resourceful, and deficit views (Cummins, 2003; Emert, 2013) of these

learners are challenged, they are able to demonstrate that they can draw from and express their rich backgrounds and life stories and are able to succeed academically. In these four tasks, albeit that two were only partially completed, the RMBS employed a range of complex knowledge processes to achieve their tasks, and they critically read, viewed and produced multiple literacies demonstrating rich communicative repertoires. The social and educational goals for these learners were in total opposition to a ‘deficit view’. That is why it is critical to have teachers and to mentor teacher candidates that will “explicitly reject deficit-based thinking and embrace the belief that students from culturally diverse backgrounds are [or can be] capable learners” (Bartell 2011, p. 60).

Ultimately, educators are the ones who decide under which light to see RMBS, as more or less capable, and they have the power to make choices. As Cummins et al. (2011) argue:

...individual educators always exercise agency – they are never powerless, although they frequently work in conditions that are oppressive both for them and for their students. While they rarely have complete freedom, educators do have choices in the way they structure the interactions in their classrooms. They determine for themselves the social and educational goals they want to achieve with their students. There are always options with respect to how educators orient their practice to students’ language and culture, to the forms of parent and community participation they encourage, and to the ways they implement pedagogy and assessment. Educators therefore have the potential, individually and collectively, to work towards the creation of contexts of empowerment. Within these interpersonal spaces where identities are negotiated, students and educators can together generate power that challenges structures of inequity in small but significant ways. (p. 156).

The principles and practices of the collaborating teacher and her team of colleagues, as well, as the whole-school community, at Kingsway Community School, serve as a particular case of educators continually working towards the creation of contexts of empowerment in significant ways.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

### 6.1 Introduction

This study intended to explore what an expert elementary school educator, together with her team-teaching colleagues, perceived as the challenges and successful educational approaches and strategies for language and literacies learning for Grade 6/7 youth refugees. It also, aimed to investigate the potential of multiliteracies pedagogies to leverage the multimodal communicative repertoires of refugee- and migrant-background students (RMBS), as they engage in a language and cross-curricular (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) unit of study, in their mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom. Overall, it sought: i) to contribute to a better understanding of the characteristics of mainstream classroom pedagogical practices that support refugee- and migrant-background students and ii) to contribute to knowledge regarding the development of innovative pedagogical practices that engage and enhance these students' full range of communicative repertoires towards academic achievement, social and emotional learning, literacy engagement and identity investment. My research questions were the following:

1. What does an expert educator (classroom teacher), together with her team-teaching colleagues, perceive as the teaching and learning challenges and promising language and content pedagogical practices for supporting refugee- and migrant-background students in a diverse elementary classroom?
2. What is the potential of a multiliteracies approach to a cross- curricular unit (social studies, language arts, and social and emotional learning) for the literacy engagement and content curricular attainment of refugee- and migrant-background students in a mainstream Grade 6/7 classroom?

With respect to the first research question, as reported in Chapter 4, the teachers' perceptions of supportive practices for migrant- and refugee-background learners were characterized around five themes that emerged: elasticity; cross-dimensional flow; interdependence; winding; and structured. When considered alongside the analysis of the data collected from a unit of study in the grade 6/7 classroom, findings suggest that there is a correlation between what the expert educator and her team reported as their principles, beliefs and promising practices and what was observed throughout classes. During the co-teaching of the unit, the collaborating teacher exemplified the team's principles in practice. Moreover, it was possible to recognize in the students' work and responses to the different tasks that: 1) the *structured and intentional* support that was given in class helped students succeed and achieve the *personalized and reachable goals* that are set for each one of them, relative to the BC Curriculum's Big Ideas and Learning Standards; moreover, some of them were able to excel and not only met but exceeded expectations. What was expected of the learners was made abundantly clear with respect to the task instructions, which were given in multiple modes, and the explicit criteria and 'standards' that were given to the students for each task, and for components in the task. The practices exemplified a 'high challenge-high support' pedagogy, where-in self-assessment and learner responsibility was promoted. However, there was also 'elasticity' with respect to adaptations to *personalized learning and personalized reachable goals* and 'winding' regarding to the several and different ways in which knowledge is transmitted for students to understand; 2) the classroom atmosphere of trust and *safe space* allowed dialogue to flow and for students to be confident enough to give their opinions and ask when they have questions. This exemplified the 'cross-dimensional flow' that exists regarding the assistance the students receive beyond the classroom and also the 'interdependence' in the learning community (teacher-students; students to students); 3)

multimodal practices helped students engage and express their *background knowledge and life stories* more freely. It was part of the design process to create adaptability ('elasticity') and was also a form of 'winding', as the students returned to revisit constructs by moving across different modes; 4) the presence of *culturally responsive teachers* that care for their students beyond academics made a big difference when it came to students' success and well-being and this principled pedagogy of culturally responsive teaching is interwoven across all of the themes that emerged.

In order to synthesize and also visualize my findings in relation to the initial codes and themes we interpreted as a research team, I created a model (see Figure 6.1) that helped me integrate the current and the previous findings/codes. The model expresses how the different agents and the different supporting practices are interconnected.

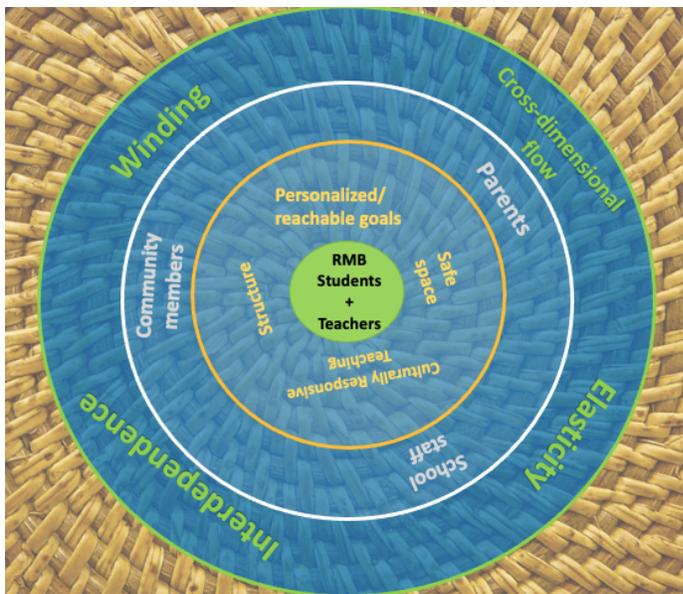


Figure 6.1 Model of Connections between Previous and Current Findings

At the center, you can see the refugee- and migrant-background students and the team of teachers, and they are embraced by all of the most immediate factors, which are the classroom

practices that I was able to observe in class and were later corroborated by Elisa in our post-project interview. The students, teachers and classroom practices are then surrounded by the rest of the agents that are needed to help them succeed: parents, teachers, school staff and community members, and these agents, together with the students and teachers, are contained by an atmosphere of interdependence, elasticity, cross-dimensional flow and winding. The model is “sitting” on a basket weaving texture to show how everything is intertwined and to help illustrate that there is constant movement that goes from the inside layers to the outer ones and vice versa.

## 6.2 Pedagogical Implications

The present findings have meaningful pedagogical implications for teachers and teacher candidates when working with refugee- and migrant-background students. First, this research shows how RMBS are capable of responding when they are given high support, high challenge (Gibbons, 2015) tasks in their classrooms, leaving aside the deficit perspective that these learners have been subjected to for too long. This study reaffirms and confirms the enormous potential RMBS have and how competent they are when they are afforded opportunities and support to participate in activities that challenge and engage them.

A second pedagogical contribution of the present research has to do with observing these expert educators’ teaching theories in action and how they are able to articulate their principles and beliefs in their classrooms and in the daily interactions with their students. We were able to listen to them talking about their teaching practices and how they said they *cared for* their students, but also observe, through the collaborating teacher’s practices how they enacted those beliefs and values with care every day. As Shevalier and Mckenzie (2012) mention, this culturally responsive teacher was able to transmit and teach not only academic content but also classroom behavior and, most importantly, the personal standards that caring individuals should embrace. They explain that

the standards must transmit values such as preparation, organization and in-depth knowledge; attitudes toward others such as appreciation, understanding, and empathy; and finally, actions to “care for” others, such as noticing other people’s actions, maintaining clear communication, providing sincere support, and keeping constant self-reflection (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012).

Regarding the theoretical (and pedagogical) implications of this study, the previously discussed findings address how the pedagogy of multiliteracies (NLG, 1996) benefited the work in a classroom where most students had migrant and refugee backgrounds, and several of them were formerly designated as ELL students. It was possible to observe how, as Ajayi (2012) states, “multimodal practices in ELL classrooms often foster greater student participation, freedom to communicate, collaboration and negotiation of meanings”, especially when using multimodal texts, because they give “the opportunity to draw on different modes and gain access to a wider range of semiotic possibilities for meaning making” (Ajayi, 2012, p. 18). It reinforced the potential of a multiliteracies theoretical perspective to inform practice and promotes the view that this can be enhanced when combined with culturally responsive teaching.

### 6.3 Limitations of the Study

The first and most important limitation of this study was the extraordinary condition of a global pandemic during which it was carried out. Therefore, as schools closed before students could return after Spring Break 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to finish my data collection as planned; so, I had to change the focus of the study. As reported in the ‘Preface’ to this thesis, the original design involved having the Grade 6/7 students read the entire *Matchbox Diaries* (Fleischman, 2013) story to their kindergarten buddies and to co-create personal matchbox diaries. This plan was not possible so my data collection with respect to student activities had to be restricted to the six classes before Spring Break and school closures.

This study presents a small case of one team of teachers that work at one Canadian community school and includes observations of one Canadian elementary teacher's classroom practices and eight RMBS during one unit of study. As a single case study, these findings are not generalizable to other community schools or classrooms that work with RMBS. However, it is hoped that my particularized findings can help guide and inform educators in their future practices when working with diverse students, as it applies to the benefits of using multimodal resources and practices with this particular group of students, in culturally responsive classrooms.

#### 6.4 Future Research

The participating students in this study showed engagement with the project, especially with the picture book and the multimodal activities that were part of it (i.e., the matchbox with objects inside, "my most important objects" worksheet, the graph of emotion and the collage). This engagement, I have argued, was mainly due to the multimodal nature of the story and of the activities that allowed them to interact with the story from different perspectives, as Early and Marshall (2008) explain, "this inter-semiotic ideational meaning-making has generative potential for different cognitive (and affective) engagement" (pp. 379-380). Therefore, further research could consider finishing, a similarly planned cross-curricular unit and the intended post-project interviews with the students so as to better understand their perceptions and insights of the experience, over an extended time frame. Another option might be work with a small group of RMBSs to discuss this picture book (or a picture book of their choice) and mentor them regarding reading strategies and rich multiliteracies to use with the little buddies' in a unit of study, so as to develop the leadership components with the Grade 6/7 RMBS and explore the multimodal artifacts created by the buddies. As originally planned, the older RMBSs, could serve as co-designers and co-researchers in this work.

## 6.5 Final Remarks

Every day I am more confident of what Gay (2018) states is an absolute truth: “You can’t teach what and who you don’t know” (p. 36). When I started this study, in October 2019, I did not know who I was going to work with or what I was going to do with them. However, after spending my days in Elisa’s class with her students, and once they gave me a chance to get to know them better, I was able to really understand what I could accomplish with them. This was my first experience in such a diverse school and classroom, and I learnt that we not only need to get to know our students, their backgrounds, and life stories but to have spaces to acknowledge and honor them and help them feel proud of who they are. Possibly many of us educators do not fully weigh the impact we can have on our students’ lives. However, as I experienced during the time working with the students at Kingsway Community School, we are usually the mirror in which they reflect themselves and the image that we give back to them, especially when they are going through adolescence, can be transformational. We can empower them, or we can belittle them; we can choose practices to honor who they are or where they come from, or we can ignore their life stories; we can choose to focus on their emotional needs and view academic attainment as integrally related to promoting emotionally healthy students or we can train students for standardized tests, at the risk of leaving aside the development of mediating tools that will help them for real life and life-long learning. As educators, we are the ones who make those decisions, every day, every class and with every student. When we honestly care for our students and take the time to know each one of them, we will always raise the probability that we can design pedagogies and activities around what is best for them and act consequently. Therefore, let us never forget our “Excellence” as teachers, as Collins (1992) invites us, we owe it to each and every one of our students:

I bear the flame that enlightens the world. I fire the imagination. I give might to dreams and wings to the aspirations of men...I build for the future by making my every effort superior today...I am the parent of progress, the creator of ages. I dispel yesterday's myths and find today's facts. I am ageless and timeless...I banish mediocrity and discourage being average...I stir ambition, forge ideals, and create keys that open the door to worlds never dreamed...I am the source of creation, the outlet of inspiration, the dream of aspiration. (pp. 218–219)

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**Appendix A - Grade 6/7 Lesson Plan – Migration Unit “The Matchbox Diary”**

**Big Idea(s): What students will understand:**

Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world.

Complex global problems require international cooperation to make difficult choices for the future.

Curricular Competencies: What students will <i>DO</i>	Concepts & Content: What students will <i>know</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.</li> <li>2. Use and experiment with oral storytelling processes.</li> <li>3. Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts.</li> <li>4. Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Skill → Use comparison, classification, inference, imagination, verification, and analogy to clarify and define a problem or issue.</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments at particular times and places.</li> <li>6. Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions, or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past (ethical judgment).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reading strategies: using contextual clues; using phonics and word structure; visualizing; questioning; predicting; previewing text; summarizing; making inferences.</li> <li>2. Features of oral language: including tone, volume, inflection, pace, gestures</li> <li>3. Metacognitive strategies: talking and thinking about learning (e.g., through reflecting, questioning, goal setting, self-evaluating) to develop one’s awareness of self as a reader and as a writer.</li> <li>4. The urbanization and migration of people.</li> <li>5. Global poverty and inequality issues, including class structure and gender.</li> </ol>

**Language Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to make inferences and predictions and using different language forms.
2. Students will be able to express and justify their opinions.
3. Students will be able to write using varied sentence structures, use of transitional words, and add rich adjectives/ adverbs to make their writing more descriptive.
4. Students will be able to use “If I were...” to talk about what they would do in someone else’s position.
5. Students will be able to use academic language to express inference, imagination and make (ethical) judgements.

**Resources and references**

[https://clpe.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Matchbox%20Diary%20sequence\\_0.pdf](https://clpe.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Matchbox%20Diary%20sequence_0.pdf)

<https://www.history.com/news/immigrants-ellis-island-short-processing-time>

<https://libertyellisfoundation.org/>

<https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/30/what-objects-tell-the-story-of-your-life/>

[https://www.flickr.com/photos/erica\\_marshall/3839459129/in/photostream/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/erica_marshall/3839459129/in/photostream/)

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b34008/>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGv\\_Qvus22g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGv_Qvus22g) (Child labor in 1900’s)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QVfbYvPaAM> (Coaching for big buddies)

**Materials & Technologies**

*Students will use the following materials, tools, equipment:*

- “The Matchbox Diary” book
- PPTs
- Post it notes
- Folder
- Projector
- Worksheets
- Matchboxes

## Lesson 1 (Teacher Action/Student Action)

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.
- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.
- Skill → Use comparison, classification, inference, imagination, verification, and analogy to clarify and define a problem or issue.
- Students will be able to make inferences and predictions and using different language forms.

### Materials:

- Post-its (yellow and blue)
- Big picture of the girl and her great-grandfather in his shop (standing)
- “What Objects Tell the Story of Your Life?” summarized article
- “My most important objects” worksheet
- Folder

### I. Connecting to the story

#### Think-Write-Pair-Square-Share

1) In groups, students get a big illustration of p.4 (the girl and her great-grandfather at the shop) with some blank spaces on the sides where they will be able to paste their yellow post its.

2) Then, T. asks:

- Who do you think they are?
- What is their relationship?
- What's going to happen in this story?
- What do you think this story might be about?
- What do you wonder about this picture?

*\* If possible, teacher elicits from the students, different ways to write predictions and gives some other examples. (I think, I guess, it might be, I believe, I predict...will happen...because*  
→ **Write on board**

2) Students have a couple of minutes to discuss their ideas with their group and another minute to write their ideas on their post its.

3) After pasting their ideas on the big sheet of paper, the teacher asks for some examples.

4) After the class share, the teacher gives out the book and asks students to look only at the cover of the book (the title and the illustration). And then she asks:

- Now, what do you think the book will be about? What will happen in this story?
- Were some of your predictions correct?
- Why do people keep diaries?
- Why do you think in this case the diary is made of matchboxes?

### **III. Connecting to the topic**

- What's an object?
- Do you think that all objects have the same importance? Why or why not?
- What are some of the different things that might make an object valuable to someone?
- In your table group, think for a moment and then share:
- Are there any particular objects that are very important to you or your family?

3) Each student receives the “What Objects Tell the Story of Your Life?” adapted article.

4) Teacher projects the text on the board and reads aloud the text, stopping at every paragraph making sure that students are understanding the meaning of the words and asking comprehension questions, and also at the hyperlink that shows New York's history in 50 objects.

5) After reading the text, students discuss with their groups the final quote: “Think of the marks that things — the wheel, the crucifix, the credit card or the computer chip — which have made an impact on civilization” and then share with the rest of the class their understanding of it.

6) After the pair-class share, the teacher asks the students:

Do you think you are able to identify 3 objects that you would include in an exhibit or book about your life or your family's life, as part of your or your family history?

7) Teachers show her example → ppt.

8) Teacher hands in “My most important objects” worksheet and gives time to students to think and work in it and tells them that they will have time to finish it next class.

### **V. Journaling**

## Lesson 2 (Teacher Action/Student Action)

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts.
- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.
- Skill → Use comparison, classification, inference, imagination, verification, and analogy to clarify and define a problem or issue.
- Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions, or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past (ethical judgement)
- Students will be able to make inference and predictions using different language forms.
- Students will be able to express and justify their opinions.

### **Materials:**

- Graph of emotion worksheet + Mini pictures of the illustrations of the book
- Post its
- “My most important objects” worksheet
- 1 Macaroni in a matchbox per group
- 1 olive pit in a matchbox per group
- “Thought/emotion/idea” worksheet
- Folder

### **I. Graph of emotion**

- 1) Teacher introduces the graph of emotion.
- 2) Each student receives a graph of emotion worksheet and looking at p.3 decide the emotion the great-grandfather may be feeling at that moment and what emotion they would feel, if they were in that same situation.
- 3) When they are ready with those decision, they make a mark for the great-grandfather and a different one for themselves.
- 4) Before making a mark on the worksheet, students have a minute to discuss their opinions within their groups and discuss different opinions. Students file their graphs of emotions, as they will follow great-grandfather’s emotions and their emotions throughout the story.

## **II. Connecting to the topic**

- 1) Teacher recalls the questions about objects that were asked the class before and encourages them finishing their drawings/ paragraph. (5 minutes)
- 2) Teacher collects their work to assess for learning.

## **II. Reading time**

- 1) Teacher ask the students to cover the text on p. 7.
- 2) Then, she hands out the box with the olive pit inside and asks the students to think about what is in the box.

- Do you know what that is? (olive pit)
- Why do you think the great-grandfather kept such an insignificant item?

- 3) After that, she asks students to uncover the text and to read p. 6. Discuss the text with the children.

- What does this tell us about the great-grandfather and his earlier life?
- What do you think about the olive pit in the box and what does this object tell us?

## **Think-Write-Pair-Square-Share**

- 4) Ask the students to look at the illustration of the child and his mother and to discuss with their group what else can see in the image that can help them know more about the great-grandfather, where and how his family lived, when this might have happened and how they know from the text and image.

- 5) She then asks some children to share some of their group's ideas to the rest of the class.

- 5) Then, she asks children to make notes about their thoughts, feelings, and ideas on post it notes and to place them inside the matchboxes.

## **III. Reading time**

- 1) Before reading the text, ask the children to cover it and look at both images and inside discuss in groups thinking time to discuss who the person in p.8 may be, why he may be important in the story and what do they think may be happening on p. 9.

After exchanging ideas within their groups, the teacher asks students to share some ideas.

- 2) After the class share, the teacher reads p. 8 aloud. Then she asks:

- Why did his father have to go to America?
- Why do you think his father had to leave Italy?
- Why couldn't most people read and write on those times?

#### **IV. Connecting to the topic**

1) The teacher hands out the boxes with the macaroni inside, and asks the students:

- Why do you think a small macaroni may be important to the story?
- What connections can you make between what we already know about the great-grandfather and this macaroni?
- Why do you think the great-grandfather kept it?

#### **Think- Pair- Share**

2) Students share their thoughts with their groups for a minute, write their opinions, thoughts and predictions on their post-its and then share their ideas with the rest of the class. She then asks them to place them inside of the matchboxes.

#### **V. Reading time**

1) The teacher asks the students to open their books on p. 12 and she reads the text aloud. Then, she asks them to think about their predictions and if their predictions were correct or not and if not, why not.

2) Then, the teacher asks students to look at the picture on p. 13 and asks them to describe what is happening and then gives them a minute to write or draw their thoughts, ideas and/or emotions on the **sheets** they have. Then the teacher asks them to turn to p.14 them to describe what is happening and then gives them a minute to write or draw their thoughts, ideas and/or emotions on the **sheets** they have. They will have to hand them in at the end of the class.

3) She then reads p. 15 aloud.

#### **VI. Journaling**

### Lesson 3 (Teacher Action/Student Action)

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts.
- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.
- Skill → Use comparison, classification, inference, imagination, verification, and analogy to clarify and define a problem or issue.
- Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions, or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past (ethical judgement)
- Students will be able to write using varied sentence structures, use of transitional words, and add rich adjectives/ adverbs to make their writing more descriptive.

#### **Materials:**

- Pros/ cons chart
- PPT “The journey from Italy to NY”
- Small pictures of the PPT + big white sheet of paper
- Crayons, felts, color pencils, etc.
- Post-its
- Graph of emotion worksheet + Mini pictures of the illustrations of the book
- Folder

#### **I. Connecting to the topic**

1) The teacher starts the class asking the students to look at the pictures on p. 7, p.9, p.11 and p.15

2) Then, the teacher asks the students to discuss in groups if it was a good or a bad decision of the family to leave everything behind and go to a new country. During the group discussion, the teacher asks them to complete a **Pros and Cons chart**.

*\* If possible, teacher elicits from the students, different connectors (other than ‘and’ or ‘because’). → writes on boards*

*She also gives some other examples for them to use in their writing and tries to encourage the use of adjectives and adverbs in their writing.*

3) After they finish, some of the students share their thoughts with the rest of the class. Teacher collects T charts for assessment.

## **II. Graph of emotion (5 minutes)**

- 1) Each student receives small pictures of p.7, p. 9, p.11, p.13 and p.15. They are asked to paste it on spaces n°2, n°3, n°4 and n°5 of their graph of emotion worksheet.
- 2) The teacher asks them to look think of the emotion the great-grandfather may be feeling at that moment and what they would feel if they were there at that moment. Before making a mark on the worksheet, students have a minute discuss their opinions within their groups. Students make the corresponding marks on their graph of emotions.

## **III. Connecting to the topic**

- 1) The teacher shows the ppt. of map of great-grandfather's journey and of the real pictures of ship traveling in those times and the Italian immigration.

### **Think – group – class share**

After looking at the pictures, the teacher asks the students to assign 2 or 3 notetakers (take turns) in their group and then discuss in groups the following question that are projected in the ppt:

- What do you think was the first impression of the people who had never seen a ship as big as the continental cruises before? How do you think they felt when the ships started sailing?
- Why do you think passengers were divided and couldn't get into each other's premises?
- What do you think did the Statue of Liberty symbolize then? Has that symbolism changed today?
- What does liberty mean to you?

- 2) She then asks some students, using the notes, to share some of the opinions given by the group.

- 3) After the class share, each group receives the pictures of the ppt. and a big white sheet of paper and explains that each group will have to create a graffiti wall with at least three pictures of it. The graffiti wall can include drawings, words, colours, textures, etc.

- 4) Teachers asks them to make it almost as brainstorming, doing what comes first to their minds.

## **VI. Journaling**

#### Lesson 4 (Teacher Action/Student Action)

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts.
- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.
- Skill → Use comparison, classification, inference, imagination, verification, and analogy to clarify and define a problem or issue.
- Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions, or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past (ethical judgement)
- Students will be able to use “If I were...” to talk about what they would do in someone else’s position.
- Students will be able to use academic language to express inference, imagination and make (ethical) judgements.

#### **Materials:**

- Images of the buttonhook man.
- 1 empty matchbox per group
- Post-its (yellow and blue)
- Graph of emotion worksheet + Mini pictures of the illustrations of the book
- Folder

#### **I. Connecting to the topic + reading time**

1) The teacher asks the students to open their books on p. 16 and she reads the text aloud.

She stops at: “People said there was gold lying on the ground in America”.

- What’s the meaning of the phrase?
- Why do you think people would say that?

2) Then, she continues with p. 18 and asks for the meaning of:

“The boat bucked like a horse”.

- What do think that sentence means?
- Can you think of any other similar sentence?
- Do you know the name of that literary device (figurative language)?
  
- What do you think is the boy feeling at that moment?
- What questions do think is he asking to his mom?
- Look at the other passengers, what are they thinking?

### **Think – group – class share**

4) She then asks the students to think what will happen next in the story and to share their thoughts with their groups for a minute. She then asks them to write their opinions, thoughts and predictions on their post-its and paste them on the empty spaces of they have next to the picture on p. 20. Then share some of their ideas with the rest of the class.

### **II. Graph of emotion**

1) Each student receives a small picture of p. 17, p.19 and p.20. They are asked to paste them on spaces n°5, n°6 and n°7 of their graph of emotion worksheet.

2) The teacher asks them to look think of the emotion the great-grandfather may be feeling at that moment and what they would feel if they were there at that moment. Before making a mark on the worksheet, students have a minute discuss their opinions within their groups and discuss different opinions. Students make the corresponding marks on their graph of emotions.

### **III. Reading time**

1) Before reading the text, the teacher asks the children to cover it and they look at the image of the girl holding an empty box and gives each group an empty matchbox. Then, the teacher asks:

- Why do you think there is an empty box in the matchbox diary?
- What do you think may have happened?

Teachers asks students to write their predictions, questions or thoughts on their yellow post its and then asks them to place them inside the empty matchbox.

2) After discussing the questions, the teacher reads p. 22 aloud. Then she asks:

- Who do you think the buttonhook man is?
- What do you think his job is?
- Why do you think Great-grandfather was crying before he met him?

3) The teacher projects the picture of a buttonhook and the real pictures of the buttonhook men from Ellis Island.

Then, the teacher asks students to turn the page and look at the picture on p. 24, covering the text on p.25.

- What do you think they felt?
- What do you think they told each other?
- What do you think is the importance of this moment?
- What would you do if you were the boy, the father, the mother?

*\* The teacher explains the use of “If I were...”*

*If I were the boy, I would tell my father that....*

*If I were the mother, I would hold...*

Teachers asks students to write their feelings, questions or thoughts on their blue post its and then asks them to place them inside the empty matchbox.

After discussing in groups, the teacher invites students for a class share and then reads aloud p. 25.

### **V. Graph of emotion**

1) Each student receives a small picture of p. 23 and p.24. They are asked to paste it on spaces n°8 and n°9 of their graph of emotion worksheet.

2) The teacher asks them to look think of the emotion the great-grandfather may be feeling at that moment and what they would feel if they were there at that moment. Before making a mark on the worksheet, students have a minute discuss their opinions within their groups and discuss different opinions. Students make the corresponding marks on their graph of emotions.

### **IV. Journaling**

## Lesson 5 (Teacher Action/Student Action)

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts.
- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.
- Skill → Use comparison, classification, inference, imagination, verification, and analogy to clarify and define a problem or issue.
- Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions, or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past (ethical judgement)
- Students will be able to use academic language to express comparison and contrast and make (ethical) judgements.

### **Materials:**

- “The Convention on The Rights of the Child in child friendly language”
- “Compare-contrast conventions of the child”
- Thought/emotion/idea worksheet
- Post-its
- Big final picture of the girl and her great-grandfather sitting
- Graph of emotion worksheet + Mini pictures of the illustrations of the book
- Folder

### **I. Connecting to the topic**

1) Teacher asks students for ideas related to child labor in Canada (minimum age, hours of work, wages, etc.) and ask them if they know what happens in other countries.

2) Teacher presents “Child labor” ppt. + video (2.57 min)

3) During and after, students fill in a “Thought/emotion/idea” worksheet, that will be collected at the end of the class.

4) After students finish the worksheet, teacher asks students to take out “The Convention on The Rights of the Child in child friendly language” worksheet (they have already worked with it in class). She also projects it on the board. She goes quickly with some of the rights together with the students.

5) Then, she hands out the “Compare-contrast conventions of the child” worksheets and also projects it on the board. Now that everybody has both documents, she gives 5 minutes for each group to analyze which of the rights weren’t respected in the beginning of the 1900’s and why.

6) She then checks some of the answers with the students and later collects the worksheets to grade.

## **II. Graph of emotion**

1) Teacher asks the students to cover the text from p. 26 and p.28 and look at the pictures on p. 27 and p. 29 and discuss within their groups what they think is happening to great-grandfather and his family on those pictures.

2) The groups also have to discuss about the emotions great-grandfather may have felt and as they receive the small pictures of p.27 and p.29 for spaces n°10 and n°11, they make a mark on their graph of emotions.

3) The teacher asks students to debrief about their ideas regarding the pictures and great-grandfather's emotions and also asks them about what they would feel in a situation like that one. Do they think such situations exist in Modern society in Canada?

## **III. Reading + Debate**

1) The teacher asks the students to open their books on p. 26 and she reads the text aloud. She continues with p. 28.

2) Then teacher reads p. 30, p.32, p. 34 and p.36 aloud. Then she asks the students to reread them in silence looking at the pictures.

5) She asks them to discuss after they finish reading and examining the pictures:

- How does he have a better life at the end of the book?
- Would things have worked out for him if he had of stayed in Italy? Why or why not?
- Why did the great-grandfather use the matchboxes to tell his and his family's story? How did he use them?

She hands in a big picture of the last image of the book, and she encourages students to write on their post it their thoughts, ideas and/or emotions and they post them on the blank space next to the picture.

## **IV. Graph of emotion**

1) Each student receives a small picture of p. 31, p.33, p.35 and p.37. They are asked to paste it on spaces n°12, n°13, n°14 and n°15 of their graph of emotion worksheet.

2) The teacher asks them to look think of the emotion the great-grandfather may be feeling at that moment and what they would feel if they were there at that moment. Before making a mark on the worksheet, students have a minute discuss their opinions within their groups and discuss different opinions.

3) Students make the corresponding marks on their graph of emotions and share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

**If time: Debate**

1) Teacher asks students to think if the family made a good decision leaving Italy or not and tells them that they will be having a debate in class.

2) Half of the class will support their decision and the other half will oppose to their decision.

3) Each group will have 5 minutes to write as many arguments as they can and every one will have to present at least one argument.

4) The team with the best arguments will win.

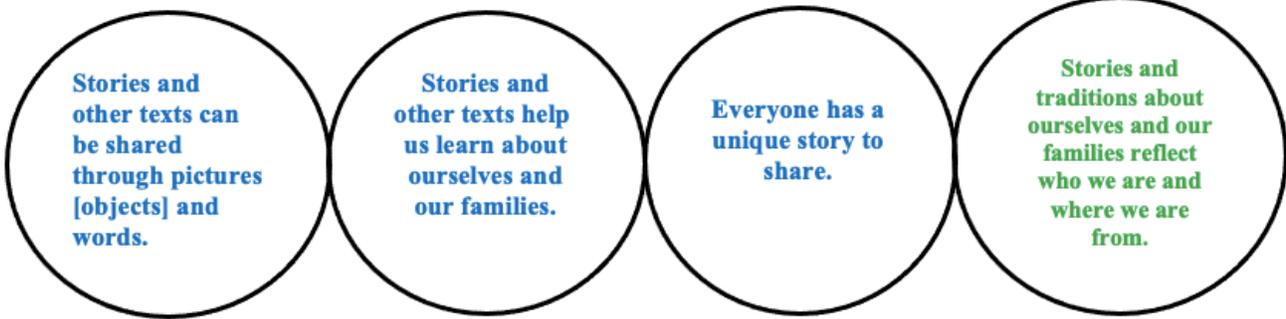
**IV. Journaling**

**Extra Lesson:** Using and experimenting with oral storytelling processes.

- Coaching video
- Explain buddy-diary project

**Appendix B - Matchbox Diary – Buddy reading lesson plan**

**Big Idea(s):** What students will **understand:**



Curricular Competencies: What students will Do	Concepts & Content: What students will know
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use developmentally appropriate reading, listening, and viewing strategies to make meaning.</li> <li>• Engage actively as listeners, viewers, and readers, as appropriate, to develop understanding of self, identity, and community</li> <li>• Recognize the importance of story in personal, family, and community identity</li> <li>• Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to stories and other texts to make meaning</li> <li>• Explain the significance of personal or local events, objects, people, or places (significance)</li> <li>• Recognize causes and consequences of events, decisions, or developments in their lives (cause and consequence)</li> <li>• Acknowledge different perspectives on people, places, issues, or events in their lives (perspective)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading strategies → making meaning using predictions and connections; making meaning from story using pictures, patterns, memory, and prior knowledge; retelling some elements of story; and recognizing familiar words/names and environmental print.</li> <li>• Oral language strategies → adjusting volume, pace, tone, and articulation; focusing on the speaker; taking turns; asking questions related to the topic; making personal connections; making relevant contributions to discussion</li> <li>• Metacognitive strategies → talking and thinking about learning (e.g., through reflecting, questioning, goal setting, self-evaluating) to develop awareness of self as a reader and as a writer</li> <li>• Ways in which individuals and families differ and are the same</li> <li>• Personal and family history and traditions.</li> </ul>

**Language objectives:**

- Students will be able to identify, name and use basic emotions from the pictures of the story.
- Students will be able to use colors, shapes, size and numbers (1-10) to describe their objects and/or drawings.

**Materials & Technologies**

*Students will use the following materials, tools, equipment:*

- “The Matchbox Diary”
- Matchboxes
- Big white shoe box

**Pre-Class Preparation**

- Show Big buddies the video of reading aloud strategies and encourage them to choose a couple.

**Topics**

1<sup>st</sup> session:

1. Food
2. Nuclear Family members

2<sup>nd</sup> session:

3. Grandparents
4. Religion/ beliefs

3<sup>rd</sup> session:

5. Good memories
6. Jobs in the family

## Lesson 1 (Teacher Action/Student Action)

### **Matchboxes topic:**

- Food
- Nuclear family members

### **Materials:** (per pair)

- 1 Book
- 2 Ziplock bags to carry the matchboxes
- 4 white matchboxes
- 1 white shoe box

### **I. Before reading the story**

- Big buddy (BB) shows little buddy (LB) a matchbox and ask him/her if (s)he knows what it is and what it is used for. If (s)he doesn't know, BB explains the use of a matchbox and matches.
- Then BB shows the cover of the book to LL and asks him/her if (s)he can help him/her describe the objects that are present in the picture. BB asks LB to describe the picture of the two people that appear and asks for the name and a bit of the story of the LB grandpa. If possible, BB tells him/her a bit of the story of his/her grandfather, too.
- Then, BB asks LB to try to guess the connection between the boxes and the picture of the grandfather and the girl and the other objects from the cover. After LB is finished with the prediction, BB reads the title, the author and the illustrator.

### **II. During the reading of the story**

- BB and LB read together until p. 11. Stopping, looking and discussing the pictures, asking questions, asking for personal connections, etc.

### **III. After reading the story**

- After reading p. 11 BB tells LB that they will be creating their own matchbox diary together. BB shows LB a shoe box (covered in white paper or a plain white box) and explains to LB that the box will hold all of their matchboxes together, but that it will stay white until they finish collecting the objects to put inside the matchboxes.

- BB then gives LB the 2 first white matchboxes and a Ziplock bag and shows him/her that (s)he will have another 2.
- Then, (s)he explains that they will need to bring in the matchbox a special object, drawing, picture they would like to include on their diary (they can bring it any day of the week and give it to the teacher to keep) and that they can cut and then paste something on top of the matchbox, draw on it, ask someone to help them draw on it, etc.

## Lesson 2 (Teacher Action/Student Action)

### **Matchboxes topic:**

- Grandparents
- Religion/ Beliefs

### **Materials:** (per pair)

- 1 Book
- 2 Ziplock bags to carry the matchboxes
- 4 white matchboxes
- 1 white shoe box

### **I. Before reading the story**

- Before reading the story, Big buddy (BB) asks little buddy (LB) to show him/her his/her matchboxes and asks him/her for the meaning of the object, picture, drawing inside of the matchbox and on top of it. When the LB is done, BB does the same. They exchange matchboxes and spend a couple of minutes looking at each other's. Then, they put them inside the white shoe box.

### **II. During the reading of the story**

- BB and LL read together from p. 12 to p. 23. Stopping, looking and discussing the pictures, asking questions, asking for personal connections, etc.

- BB brings a macaroni in the matchbox, a map of the journey and some sunflower seeds for the LB to see in case she/he haven't seen them before.

### **III. After reading the story**

- After reading p. 21 BB tells LB that they will need to bring in the matchboxes two other special objects, drawings, pictures they would like to include on their diary (they can bring it any day of the week and give it to the teacher to keep) and that they can cut and then paste something on top of the matchbox, draw on it, ask someone to help them draw on it, etc.
- Before the BB leaves, together BB and LB put the big box in a place where it will be kept until the following week.

## **Lesson 3 (Teacher Action/Student Action)**

### **Matchboxes topic:**

- Good memories together
- Jobs in the family

### **Materials:** (per pair)

- 1 Book
- 2 Ziplock bags to carry the matchboxes
- 4 white matchboxes
- 1 white shoe box

### **I. Before reading the story**

- Before reading the story, Big buddy (BB) asks little buddy (LB) to show him/her his/her matchboxes and asks him/her for the meaning of the object, picture, drawing inside of the matchbox and on top of it. When the LB is done, BB does the same. They exchange matchboxes and spend a couple of minutes looking at each other's. Then, they put them inside the white shoe box.

### **II. During the reading of the story**

- BB and LL read together from p. 25 to p. 38. Stopping, looking and discussing the pictures, asking questions, asking for personal connections, etc.

### **III. After reading the story**

- After reading p. 38 BB tells LB that they will need to bring in the matchboxes two other special objects, drawings, pictures they would like to include on their diary (they can bring it any day of the week and give it to the teacher to keep) and that they can cut and then paste something on top of the matchbox, draw on it, ask someone to help them draw on it, etc.
- Before the BB leaves, together BB and LB put the big box in a place where it will be kept until the following week.

### ***Lesson 4 (Teacher Action/Student Action)***

- This whole session will be dedicated to the decoration of the box that will contain the matchboxes and the recalling of the objects that are inside. and the stories behind them.

## Appendix C - “What Objects Tell the Story of Your Life?” (adapted article)

### What Objects Tell the Story of Your Life?

BY MICHAEL GONCHAR  
SEPTEMBER 30, 2014



Carefully curating objects has become a popular way for museums and historians to tell large histories (e.g., the history of the world, or of [New York City](#)). After all, artifacts can help us visualize the past and see complicated events as something material.

We can use the same method to tell our personal histories as well. We relate to objects since we are born. A sentimental T-shirt, a kindergarten drawing or your favourite children’s book? What objects tell the story of *your* life?

In his essay “Object Lessons in History,” Sam Roberts, who is an expert journalist in cultural matters, discusses how telling history through objects is developing as the common language between historians, so long and repetitive explanations are becoming less popular.

Five years ago, the BBC and the British Museum collaborated on [a](#) extremely successful radio series and book called “A History of the World in 100 Objects.” Last week, the Smithsonian Museum followed up with its “History of the World in 1,000 Objects” because people are really interested in learning about history through things they can see.

It’s not that these 900 artifacts suddenly appeared since these historians started to look for them. These collections present artifacts, from a 230,000-year-old female statue to a jar of dust collected in Lower Manhattan after 9/11. Historians have been collecting these items for many years in order to put these collections together.

The “100 Objects” book has been reprinted in 10 languages and its companion, a 15-minute podcast, has been downloaded more than 35 million times. This summer, although it was vacation time, the Smithsonian asked the public for the “most important” object in its collection. They were expecting a low volume of the answers, but more than 90,000 people answered the survey.

“It is only in the world of objects that we have time and space,” T. S. Eliot wrote. Think of the impact that things — the wheel, the crucifix, the credit card or the computer chip — have made on civilization.

Adapted from: <https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/30/what-objects-tell-the-story-of-your-life/>

\* Curate: select, organize, and look after the items in (a collection or exhibition).



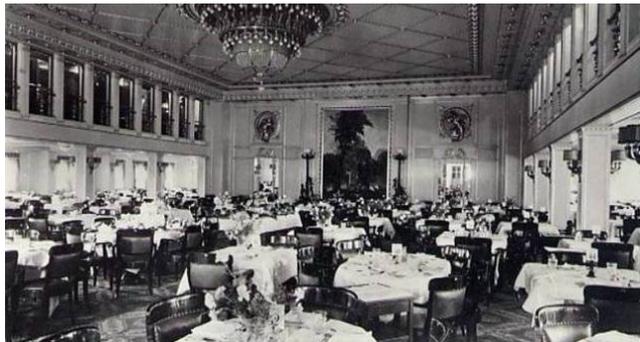
## Appendix E - “The journey from Italy to New York” PowerPoint pictures



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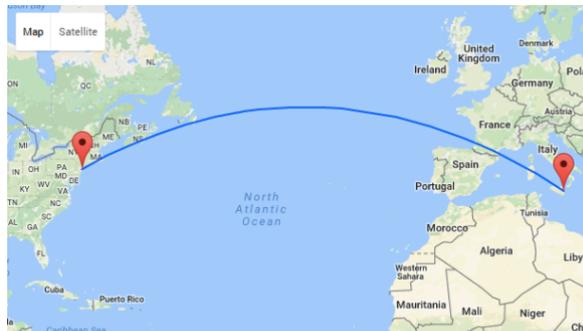
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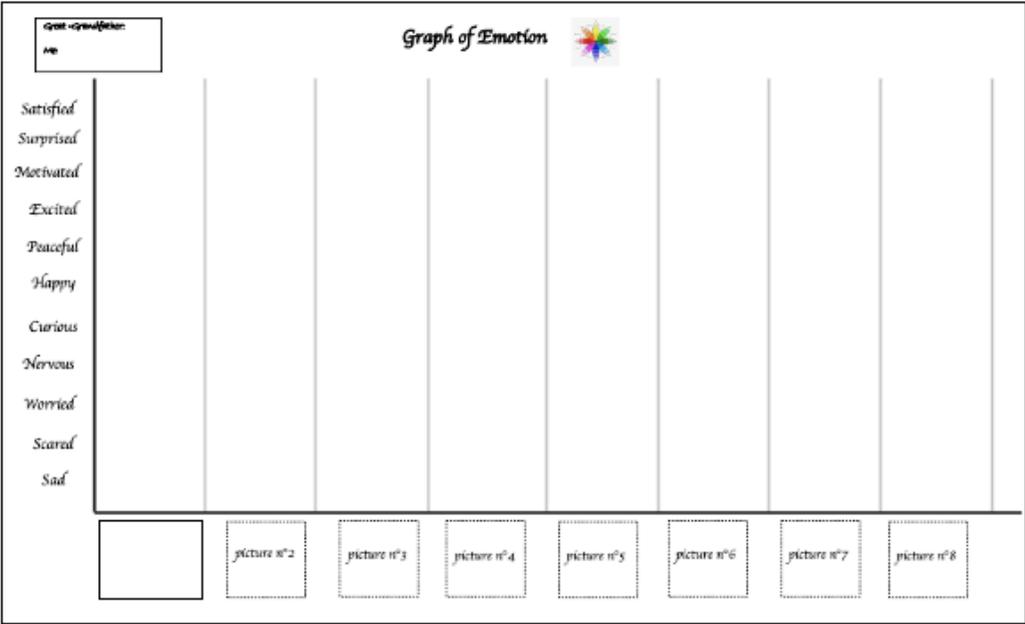


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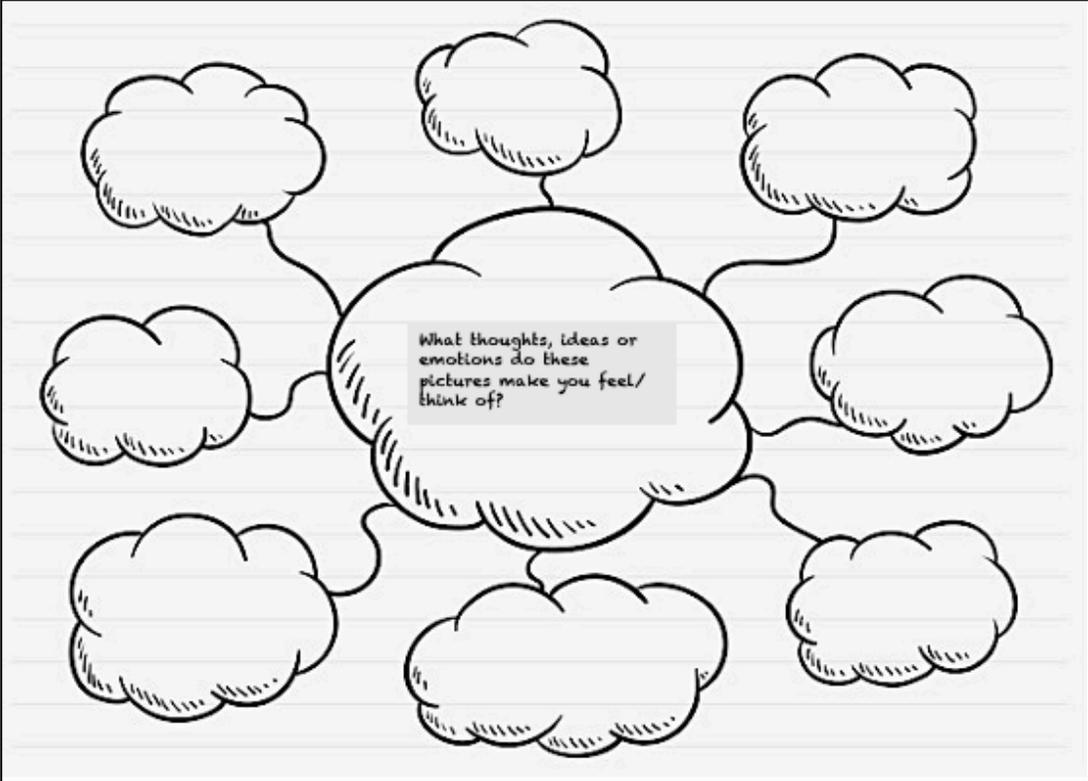


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Appendix F - "Graph of emotion" template



Appendix G – Thought bubble reflections worksheets template



Appendix H - "My journal" template

**My Journal**  
**Day \_\_\_\_\_**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*The pictures /story make(s) me feel/ think ...*

---

---

---

*I like that...*

---

---

---

*I don't like that...*

---

---

---

*I think/guess/ believe that...*

---

---

---

*Are there any connections you can make of this story with your own? Do you have any other thoughts/ideas you would like to write about?*

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Appendix I – Field notes sample

March 5 | Sunday

The pink-haired lock pack her grandpa gave her in Sedro. Learning Sedro. Family connections - childhood. Still has it.

→ [redacted] = [redacted] mentions that they didn't have very thing as they were growing. Maybe they didn't have many toys growing. Sedro - Brooks. Is that an issue? Will this be an opportunity to connect things?

8) The journal activity is not as easy as I thought it was going to be.

9) Student have issues reflecting on some of the topics. → still too concrete? → too childish or don't want to?

10) There's a good natural flow in the class.

11) [redacted] mentions something about seas being important for him. How did he make them? Why are they important? (playing basketball?)

March 5 |

12) [redacted] tells me about his key hidden his mom gave him 3 years ago and he likes it because it's his mom. Looks made for a grown up but connects him to his mom. Cool but also because it reminds them of her.

13) [redacted] told about having a special rock that reminds you of a special day / joy / help. She has a deep connection w/ nature. Glad she can see how you can give meaning to objects you pick up.

14) [redacted] looks confused & faint, struggling with instructions. What's happening?

15) [redacted] flew lay again, felt less nervous but forgot the vice recorder. Checklist!

16) [redacted] was really grateful about the

Appendix J - Elisa's classroom

