UNVEILING VOICES:
ENGAGING SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN AND EDUCATORS THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING PROJECT

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Abstract

While a child's primary sources of supportive relationships and learning experiences are at home, schools play a critical role as the first significant social environment for refugee children. In Ontario, thousands of young refugee children, including many from Syria, attend mainstream schools. However, many educators are not adequately prepared to address the specific needs of these children. This participatory visual research study seeks to bridge this gap in teacher education by exploring the pedagogical potential of digital storytelling to do the following: 1) enable Syrian refugee children to express their resettlement experiences through first-person digital, multimodal narratives; 2) provide educators with deeper insights into the perspectives of Syrian refugee children; and 3) foster social awareness among both educators and refugee students. The study aims to highlight Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences from their own viewpoints, enhance educators' understanding of these experiences, and investigate both the children's experience of creating digital stories and the educators' experience in facilitating digital storytelling workshops. Exploring the educational potential of digital storytelling with Syrian refugee children and educators may also support the resettlement needs of refugee children from other regions entering Canadian schools. Grounded in the new sociology of childhood, sociocultural theory, and critical pedagogy, this study employs participatory visual methodology and digital storytelling to challenge dominant narratives and promote a more inclusive understanding of knowledge. These approaches are aligned with the inquiry-based learning commonly used with marginalized communities. The findings demonstrate that digital storytelling offered refugee children a meaningful way to represent their experiences and foster social transformation, strengthening their sense of connection with others.

For educators, facilitating the digital storytelling project challenged preconceptions about refugee children and positively impacted their approach to working with culturally diverse students.

Keywords

Syrian refugee children, digital storytelling, resettlement experiences, teacher education, participatory visual research, children's perspectives

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Chapter One: Introduction

Bridging Worlds

My journey into this research began over a decade ago with a deeply personal commitment - a spark lit by my own experiences as a visible minority immigrant educator. Working with young newcomer children in neighborhoods where they sought new beginnings, I witnessed their struggles as they adjusted to an unfamiliar world. Each child carried their own complex stories that weren't heard and unique needs that weren't met. As I tried to support them with my limited education on newcomer children, I realized how essential it was to move toward a child-centered pedagogy — one that would hear, see and support them.

Over the years, my encounters with newcomer children, both direct and indirect, revealed a powerful truth — if educators had the opportunity to truly understand these children, they could play a life-changing role in the children's lives. By recognizing and valuing their stories, creating inclusive spaces, and providing culturally responsive support, educators could help foster a sense of belonging in these children, empowering them to thrive in their new communities. Many educators wanted to achieve this, but a lack of *how-to* held them back. It is important to note that, there isn't a teacher education program that can fully prepare educators for all the new and complex situations they will encounter in their work; however, ongoing in-service professional learning can equip educators with the tools, strategies, and confidence to adapt, respond, and better support the diverse needs of newcomer children. Working closely with young Syrian refugee families, I felt my purpose sharpen. Listening to these families' experiences, I knew that if educators could access this knowledge and perspective, i.e. an understanding of the children's experiences and strengths, they could help these children find

belonging in their new homes. In this complex journey of newcomer children's resettlement, I became clear of my role in bridging this understanding and advocating for responsive, child-centered learning experiences.

And so, here I stand—driven, determined, and compelled to explore ways to bridge that gap. Because without this understanding, how many children might be left unheard, unseen, and unsupported?

Context

Although active conflict in Syria has subsided, the impact of the war continues to be felt, making it one of the largest displacement crises globally (UNHCR, 2023). Since 2015, Canada has welcomed more than 40,000 displaced Syrians, nearly half of whom were children. Today, thousands of these children have relocated, either with or without their families, to Ontario (Government of Canada, 2021). This influx signifies that a growing number of Syrian refugee children are living and will continue to resettle in Ontario.

Globally, research *on* and *with* Syrian refugee children reveals that many of them face significant resettlement challenges and post-migration stress during their transition to new nations. Research *on* refugee children often involves studies conducted about their experiences from an external perspective, such as examining educational attainment, mental health, or adaptation challenges, most times without engaging the children themselves in meaningful ways (see Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Celik & Icduygu, 2018; Dehnel et al. 2022). In contrast, research *with* refugee children prioritizes their voices and lived experiences, involving them as active participants, such as through storytelling or participatory projects, ensuring their perspectives shape the findings and solutions intended to support their needs (see Ali & Gibran, 2020; Ayoub, 2020; Guo et al., 2019). Along with disorientation and displacement, many children have

endured extensive pre- and post-migratory trauma. This trauma often includes direct or indirect experiences of armed conflict, violence, loss and separation from loved ones, discrimination, exploitation, precarious living conditions, and uncertainty about the future. Despite finding safety in Canada, many Syrian refugee children confront unique challenges during resettlement, including adjusting to a completely new culture and language, coping with social exclusion and isolation as visible minorities, and grappling with social-emotional and mental health issues stemming from their migration experiences (Agrawal, 2019; Al-Janaideh et al., 2023; Ayoub, 2020; Crul et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017; Shamim, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The influx of Syrian refugee children resettling in Ontario has resulted in a significant increase in their enrollment in Ontario schools (Government of Canada, 2021). While refugee children face a range of challenges during resettlement, including culture shock, cross-cultural conflicts, and family upheaval (Scharpf et al., 2021), their specific experiences are often overlooked, leaving their needs unmet (Ayoub, 2020; Crul et al., 2019; Gagne et al., 2018; Nofal, 2017; Shamim, 2020; Mishra Tarc, 2020). Although the Government of Canada has introduced support services such as English language learning programs, social work, and counseling, these initiatives often fail to address the distinctive ways children experience displacement, trauma, and resettlement. Unlike adults, children grapple with developmental disruptions, interrupted education, and the complex task of navigating new cultural expectations while maintaining their familial and cultural identities. Meeting these unique needs requires child-centered approaches that prioritize children's voices and focus on their emotional and developmental well-being.

A review of the literature reveals that schools play a key role in shaping the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee children. Responsive relationships fostered by educators can play

a critical role when supporting children's healing, psychosocial development, and adaptation to their new environment (Clark, 2017; Nofal, 2017; Ryeburn, 2016). Research indicates that many educators in Ontario, especially those in urban centers, are accustomed to working with diverse student populations and show a willingness to learn from and relate to students from different cultural backgrounds. Yet, few are familiar with the specific pre- and post-migration experiences of refugee children. As a result, many educators are unprepared to address these children's unique needs, despite their desire to create supportive environments that foster well-being (Gagne et al., 2017b, 2018; Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Tweedie et al., 2017; Thomas, 2016). This lack of preparation is largely due to the lack of understanding of this groups historical and political situation due to limited research and media coverage of the war in Syria. Despite the growing presence of Syrian children in Ontario schools, few studies have addressed the needs of this unique population to better understand how to support their resettlement.

For educators to effectively support refugee children, they must understand not only the children's unique social, cultural, and historical backgrounds but also reflect on their own (Gagne et al., 2017a; Kirova & Emme, 2008). From a sociocultural perspective (Freire, 1970, 1974; Giroux, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995), it is not enough for educators to simply express sympathy; they must also grasp the children's unique realities. However, a major challenge for educators working with Syrian refugee children is the lack of accessible information about their lived experiences, including their sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts. Without this knowledge, educators may unconsciously rely on their own assumptions and biases about minority communities, which can inadvertently harm the very children they wish to support (Gagne et al., 2017a; Nofal, 2017; Ratković et al., 2017). Therefore, it is essential that educators are equipped with a deeper understanding of refugee children's experiences to effectively

support them. Addressing this gap in educators' knowledge about Syrian refugee children's realities is critical and requires immediate attention and action.

Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to support educators to respond to the needs of Syrian refugee children in Ontario schools. Research indicates that educators who are familiar with refugee children's lived experiences are better equipped to develop caring and responsive practices (Gagne et al., 2017b; Guo et al., 2019; Mishra Tarc, 2020; Ratković et al., 2017; Thomas, 2016). Therefore, the first step in tackling the central issue of this study, educators' limited knowledge of Syrian refugee children, is to build a deeper understanding of these children's perspectives, realities, and needs.

Assumptions and beliefs are shaped by the knowledge individuals gain through their experiences and exposure. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) emphasizes that sharing and hearing stories of lived realities are crucial in challenging and decentering dominant narratives that are often taken for granted. Syrian refugee children's narratives can provide educators with valuable insight into the children's complex and challenging lived histories, revealing that these children possess expertise and perspectives often overlooked (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Barkinis, 2015). Their stories illustrate that resettlement experiences vary greatly, shaped not only by the individual but also by the broader contexts of their migration (Chen, 2015; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022). Factors such as the resources, identity markers, and socio-political circumstances in their places of origin significantly influence their experiences. Additionally, the pathways they take, such as, whether through legal migrant categories, refugee status, or informal routes, play a critical role in shaping their journeys. Equally important is how they are received in the places they migrate to, where

reception is shaped by complex and intersecting socio-political factors, including immigration policies, community attitudes, resource availability, and systemic inequities.

Together, these interconnected factors create highly individualized resettlement experiences that demand nuanced understanding and support. By recognizing these multifaceted influences, educators can move beyond oversimplified narratives of refugee experiences to develop more empathetic and informed approaches to supporting children and their families. This perspective acknowledges the complexity of their lived realities and the diverse factors that shape their resettlement journeys, fostering practices that are responsive to their unique needs and circumstances.

The multiple perspectives gained through children's narratives of their resettlement experiences can prompt educators to critically reflect on and reconsider their assumptions and beliefs, potentially reshaping their understanding and practice (Gagne et al., 2018). Digital storytelling plays a crucial role in nurturing educators' understanding of refugee children's perspectives and needs (Gagne et al., 2018; Pappamihiel et al., 2017), as typical forms of communication between educators, children, and their families are often disrupted or fail to occur as expected due to language barriers or cultural differences. These communication gaps can hinder educators' ability to fully understand and respond to the unique experiences and challenges refugee children face. Compounding this issue, educators' prior knowledge and experiences often fall short in preparing them to navigate the complexities of resettlement and cultural adaptation that profoundly shape these children's lives.

Without meaningful engagement with refugee children's stories and perspectives, educators may inadvertently rely on assumptions or dominant narratives, reinforcing misunderstandings and limiting their ability to provide effective support. Digital storytelling

offers a powerful bridge, creating an avenue for refugee children to share their experiences in their own voices. By accessing these narratives, educators gain deeper insight into the lived realities of refugee children, fostering greater empathy and equipping them with the understanding needed to better support these children's resettlement and belonging.

Given this context, the purpose of this study is to explore the pedagogical potential of digital storytelling in teacher education to: (1) provide a lens on resettlement experiences from the perspective of Syrian refugee children; (2) support educators to gain a deeper understanding of these children's perspectives; and (3) serve as a tool for raising social awareness of the situation of refugee children with both educators and children.

The study's objectives are to: (1) facilitate Syrian refugee children's first-person digital expressions of their resettlement experiences in Ontario; (2) offer educators greater insight into these children's lived experiences; and (3) explore both the children's experiences of creating their digital stories and the educators' experiences of facilitating the digital storytelling workshops. Notably, the pedagogical potential of digital storytelling explored in this study may also support the resettlement needs of refugee children from other countries attending Canadian schools.

Research Questions

The above objectives inform the following three research questions and guide this study:

- *What perspectives on their resettlement experiences in Ontario do Syrian refugee children express through their digital stories?*
- *What are these children's experiences of creating these digital stories?*
- *What are educators' experiences of facilitating this digital storytelling project?*

To respond to these questions the study will engage in storytelling. Storytelling serves as a powerful medium for sharing our perspectives and experiences with the world, allowing for the expression of alternative realities (Gagne et al., 2017a; Vasudevan, 2006). Engaging in storytelling helps us to listen deeply and find meaning in our experiences (de Jager et al., 2017; StoryCentre, 2017). It provides complex insights for both the storyteller and the listener, as it encompasses bodily, sensory, psychological, and emotional dimensions. Through storytelling, we can explore our identities and understand ourselves better (Brushwood Rose, 2009; de Jager et al., 2017). It's important to recognize that stories reflect the storyteller's perspective and can be reinterpreted with each retelling, which means they may not always represent a factual account of events. Additionally, storytelling fosters connections and strengthens relationships between individuals (de Jager et al., 2017; StoryCentre, 2017).

Just like adults, storytelling offers children a platform to express their perspectives and share their experiences. These stories paint a vital picture of their childhood contexts. The significance of refugee children's counter-stories becomes particularly evident when examining issues of identity and social inequity. Such counter-stories can effectively challenge dominant adult narratives (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022) and contest the predominantly negative portrayal of refugees in societal discourse (Lenette et al., 2015; Mishra Tarc, 2020). By sharing their own interpretations of their experiences, refugee children provide valuable insights into their initial cross-cultural encounters, informing how best to support their resettlement in new communities (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022).

Similar to traditional oral storytelling, digital storytelling (DST) offers numerous benefits and is often considered its modern equivalent. DST harnesses digital tools to create and share stories, showcasing its creative potential (Lambert, 2010). The use of digital media enhances

engagement by allowing expression beyond just spoken language; it incorporates visuals, such as images and artwork, as well as narration and audio elements like music (de Jager et al., 2017). Researchers emphasize the need for pedagogical approaches that enable children to express their unique, emotionally rich knowledge (Mishra Tarc, 2020). DST facilitates meaningful participation in the research process, enabling children to articulate their complex experiences through various non-linguistic means (Fenty & Anderson, 2016; de Jager et al., 2017; Skinner & Hagood, 2008; Vasudevan et al., 2010). This multimodality was particularly significant for this study, as it allowed children to share their perspectives despite potential language barriers, utilizing images and other media to convey their thoughts. Consequently, DST minimized the influence of outsider perspectives on their experiences.

Significance of the Study

Research studies have often acted as instruments of oppression, generating knowledge primarily from the dominant culture's perspective and neglecting alternative viewpoints (de Jager et al., 2017). In the context of refugee children, most research has focused on studying them from an *outsider* perspective, relying on adults to interpret their experiences rather than engaging directly with the children themselves (Mishra Tarc, 2020; Barnikis, 2015). This perspective is layered with disparities in age, language, culture, and lived experiences between researchers and refugee children. Even when data is collected directly from children, interpretation is often mediated through these filters, with communication shaped by language barriers, cultural contexts, and children’s ways of expressing themselves, such as through visual or verbal representations. These mediating factors, influenced by the researcher’s own cultural and experiential lens, can obscure the authenticity of children’s narratives, perpetuating dominant interpretations and limiting a true understanding of their lived realities. Consequently, this

outsider approach reinforces dominant narratives, framing minority groups through the lens of the prevailing culture (de Jager et al., 2017) and confining children's voices to adult-defined understandings (Barnikis, 2015; Mishra Tarc, 2020). This highlights the critical need for research approaches that actively address these filters, centering children's perspectives and honoring their unique ways of knowing and expressing their experiences.

Globally, there has been limited attention to the perspectives of Syrian refugee children (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022), with even less focus on those in Canada (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Ayoub, 2020; Ratković et al., 2017). The literature strongly advocates for prioritizing the voices and agency of these marginalized children, minimizing adult interpretations and emphasizing their *insider* views and nuanced understandings (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Grieshaber, 2007; Luttrell, 2010; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022). However, adult researchers can never fully achieve an insider perspective; they can only strive to mitigate the impact of differences in age, language, culture, and lived experiences.

This highlights a significant gap in existing scholarship, as research often fails to fully engage with or center the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee children in ways that respect their unique perspectives and lived realities. While my study aims to contribute to addressing this gap by exploring their experiences directly with them, it acknowledges the inherent limitations of outsider perspectives and the impossibility of fully bridging this divide. A key objective is to enable educators to support these children in sharing their stories, providing them with opportunities to express their perspectives to a wider audience, including the educators responsible for their well-being. This project positions the children as experts of their own histories, needs, and aspirations, while encouraging educators to adopt the role of learners, fostering a deeper understanding and more effective support for these children.

Refugee populations are often the subjects of research, yet participation in these studies frequently yields no direct benefits for them. Conducting research without tangible benefits for marginalized groups raises ethical concerns. However, DST research presents a different scenario; participants from vulnerable communities have reported various psychosocial benefits from creating and sharing their digital stories (Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Gagne et al., 2017a; de Jager et al., 2017; Loe, 2013; Stacey & Hardy, 2011; Vasudevan, 2006; Wexler et al., 2013). DST serves as a powerful tool for helping refugee children process traumatic experiences, offering potential mental health benefits by facilitating the expression and discussion of these experiences (Anderson & Wallace, 2015). While revisiting past events can be traumatic, studies have shown that the reflective depth prompted by DST can lead to positive outcomes (Gagne et al., 2017a; Stacey & Hardy, 2011). Additionally, child-led DST has been transformative, fostering deeper learning, critical reflection, and meaning-making (Gagne et al., 2017a). Similar to oral counter-stories (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lenette et al., 2015), digital stories often challenge dominant narratives, allowing children to redefine their identities and experiences (de Jager et al., 2017; Wexler et al., 2013). As Vasudevan (2006) notes, children seek to be recognized for who they truly are, rather than conforming to imposed identities. DST empowers them to reclaim their narratives and express new identities that resist dominant societal images.

The transformative benefits of DST extend beyond the storytellers and the creation process; they also impact the audience (Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Gagne et al., 2017a; Loe, 2013; Vasudevan, 2006). The educative potential of DST is significant, making it particularly effective in contexts where brief, engaging, and emotive communication can foster social awareness and drive change (de Jager et al., 2017; StoryCentre, 2017). Engaging with these stories can awaken new social awareness and shift individuals' perspectives on their social

realities. DST serves as a tool for knowledge production, aimed at building understanding and informing culturally responsive pedagogy that promotes social inclusion and justice (Alexandra, 2014; Dion, 2018; de Jager et al., 2017; Ribeiro, 2016; Rice & Mundel, 2018). It encourages dialogue around differences and othering, empowering individuals to develop new personal and collective meanings while enhancing their awareness (Ribeiro, 2016). By facilitating dialogue between children and educators, digital stories that capture children's perceptions can lead to co-constructed knowledge and positive changes in educational practice (Alexandra, 2014; Dion, 2018; de Jager et al., 2017; Rice & Mundel, 2018).

Based on the literature, it can be hypothesized that facilitating Syrian refugee children's creation of digital stories about their resettlement experiences through a DST project may illuminate their perspectives and diverse forms of knowledge. This process has the potential to construct new narratives around relocation, offering educators deeper insights into the children's unique experiences and needs. By engaging with these narratives, educators may be encouraged to reassess their assumptions about refugee children, leading to enhanced social awareness regarding resettlement. Such awareness can drive positive changes in educators' practices, making them more culturally responsive. This means educators may adapt their pedagogy to better reflect and honor the identities, lived experiences, and needs of refugee children. Culturally responsive practices include recognizing the strengths these children bring, valuing their diverse perspectives, and creating inclusive environments that nurture their sense of belonging.

Despite the potential of DST, many educators who wish to facilitate children's creation of digital stories lack the necessary knowledge or skills to do so effectively. Facilitating DST requires more than technical expertise; it demands an understanding of how to create safe and

supportive spaces where children feel empowered to share their stories authentically and confidently. However, the impact of the DST process on facilitators remains underexplored. Given the established use of DST in research, one might expect more studies to focus on the experiences of facilitators. Yet, while existing DST literature often emphasizes the impacts on storytellers and audiences, there is a surprising lack of research on how facilitators experience the process. This gap highlights the need to better understand the facilitators' experiences.

In my comprehensive review of the DST literature, Gagne et al. (2017a) was the only study that specifically examined the experiences of DST facilitators. This gap suggests that while some informal insights may exist, they remain unpublished. To fully understand the potential of DST, it is essential to explore the effects of the DST process on all individuals involved, including facilitators. This study aims to address this gap by formally investigating the experiences of facilitators (i.e. educators) who guide the DST process to support Syrian refugee children in sharing their resettlement stories. Recognizing the need for guidance, educators participating in this study received training on the DST method (Lambert, 2010) and on facilitation techniques prior to the project's start. The details of this training will be discussed in the Methodology chapter.

Researching and developing new topics is essential for advancing knowledge and practice (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). My study addresses this gap in scholarship both theoretically and practically. The findings could inform curricula in early childhood and teacher education programs, positioning DST projects as effective tools for fostering connections between refugee children and their host communities. The children's digital stories can facilitate critical reflection, promote dialogue about differences and othering, and encourage resistance while offering new perspectives. This approach presents a valuable opportunity for intervention

aimed at enhancing the well-being of refugee children in Canada. I believe that digital stories are vital, yet underutilized, tools for amplifying marginalized voices, fostering self-exploration, challenging existing assumptions, and supporting practices that address systemic inequities, ultimately contributing to the creation of more just futures.

Definition of Terms

Refugee

Refugees are individuals who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution, crossing international borders in search of safety in another country. According to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is defined as:

> A refugee is any person, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, 2010, p. 14).

In alignment with the United Nations definition, this study uses the term *refugee* to refer to individuals who have experienced forced displacement and migration. Unlike immigrants, who choose to resettle in a new country, refugees are compelled to flee their homes due to persecution, war, or violence (CCR, 2010).

Digital Storytelling

DST is one of many visual arts genres that has been adapted for use in research, particularly as an effective arts-based method for engaging with marginalized groups (de Jager et al., 2017). Digital stories, created by both children and adults, are short personal videos typically

ranging from 2 to 5 minutes. They combine audio recordings of individual or communal narratives with a variety of visual and auditory elements, including personal photos, artwork, video clips, music, and images drawn from historical and popular culture. These multimedia elements help convey perspectives on a specific topic or issue from the storyteller's point of view, encompassing past and present experiences, as well as hopes for the future (Lambert, 2010; Rice & Mundel, 2018).

Overview of Dissertation

As I embark on this inquiry, I invite you, the reader, to accompany me on this journey of exploration. To ensure you are well-equipped to engage with the process, I offer an overview of each chapter's content.

Chapter One opens with a narrative that positions me as the researcher, reflecting on how my personal experiences and identity have led me to this study, followed by a snapshot of the context surrounding the experiences of Syrian refugee children and a discussion of the motivations driving my research. Central to this study is an examination of how DST can address inequities in pedagogical practices for refugee children by centring their perspectives. Furthermore, this research explores how DST can serve as both a tool for raising social awareness and a pedagogical tool for educators, ultimately benefiting the children themselves.

Chapter Two includes a review of the relevant literature to provide the study's contextual background, identify knowledge gaps, and situate my research within existing scholarship. The chapter begins by discussing Syrian refugee children's pre-migration experiences, offering an overview of their time in their country of origin and first asylum, with a focus on educational experiences. It then shifts to post-migration, examining their experiences in Canada, emphasizing the limited insights into their resettlement in Canadian communities and the scarcity of research

on children's perspectives in refugee resettlement. The chapter next includes the experiences of Canadian preservice and in-service educators working with Syrian refugee students, highlighting the complex factors affecting student integration and the benefits of shifting from a deficit-based to a strength-based pedagogy. Finally, it examines scholarship on DST with refugee children and educators, discussing its potential to enhance educators' understanding of refugee students' needs and noting the limited research on its pedagogical potential for educators facilitating such projects.

Chapter Three examines the theoretical foundations of the study: the new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). It highlights how this framework cultivates a broader sociocultural, political, and historical consciousness and helps to uncovers the pedagogical potential of DST.

Chapter Four outlines the Participatory Visual Methodology and DST research method employed in the study. It includes a positionality statement reflecting how my lived experiences and identity shaped the research topic and approach. The chapter also covers the participants, setting, and recruitment process, followed by a detailed description of the data collection and analysis process, which utilized grounded theory and thematic coding. It concludes with the strategies implemented to ensure the credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of the findings, along with ethical considerations for conducting research with refugee children.

Chapter Five emphasizes how the DST project supported Syrian refugee children in expressing their experiences while helping educators gain deeper social awareness of these perspectives. The chapter explores several overarching themes from the children's digital stories and both the children's and educators' experiences with the DST project. These themes are connected to relevant literature and key theoretical concepts that informed this study.

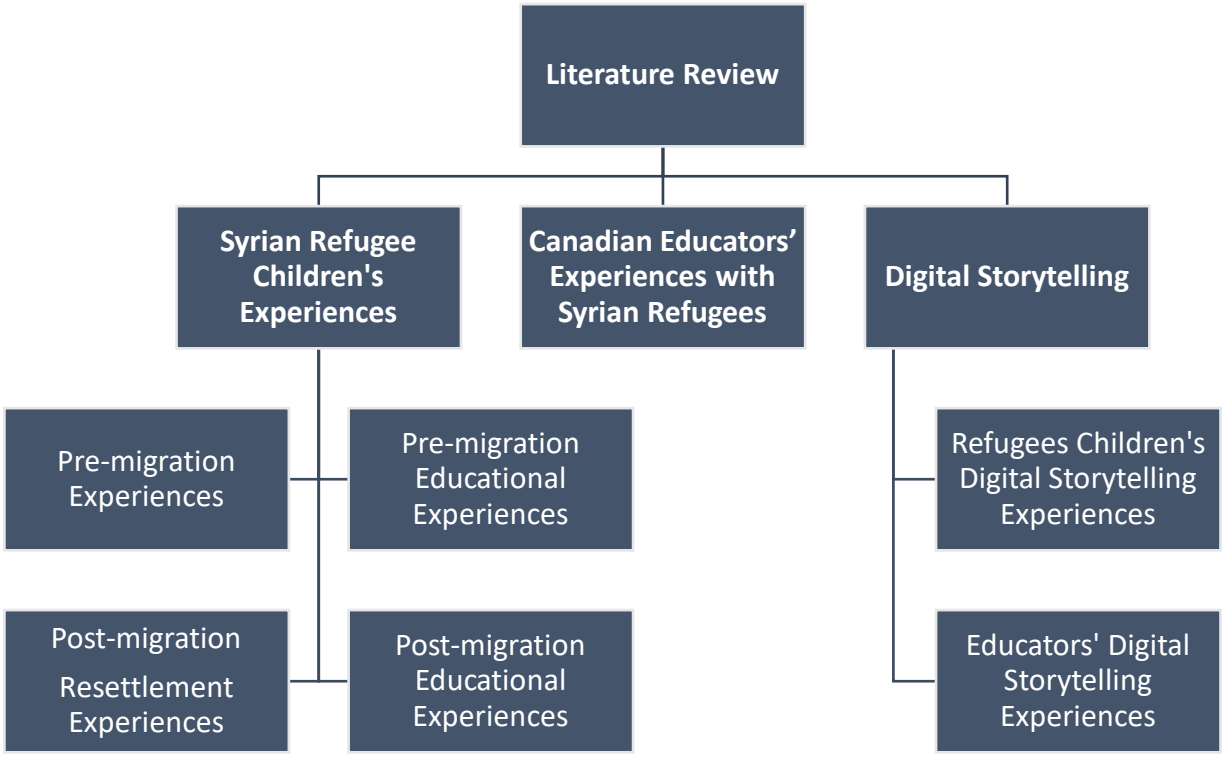
Chapter Six concludes this dissertation by summarizing the research, highlighting key findings and their significance, and suggesting promising practices and implications for theory and research that emerge from these findings. The chapter also addresses the limitations of the study and outlines potential directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter aims to review relevant literature to provide contextual background for the study, identify knowledge gaps, and situate my research within existing scholarship. I will start with an overview of Syrian refugee children's experiences in their home country, countries of first asylum, and resettlement destinations, with a particular focus on their educational experiences. Next, I will discuss educators' experiences working with Syrian refugee students in mainstream schools. This will include an examination of pedagogies that value children's lived experiences and leverage their existing knowledge. Finally, I will focus on digital storytelling studies involving refugee children and educators.

Figure 1

Overview of Literature Review



Syrian Refugee Children's Experiences

Pre-migration Experiences

From a sociocultural perspective, to support the wellbeing of refugee children we need to consider them in context, which includes understanding their histories. It is vital to consider their pre-migration experiences, as these experiences can significantly impact their wellbeing and resettlement process (Ayoub, 2020; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Gagne et al., 2018). Therefore, within this section of the literature review, I hope to address this by providing a context of Syrian refugee children's pre-migration experiences, both in Syria and in their countries of first asylum.

More than half the population of Syria has been forcibly displaced due to the Syrian civil war (UNHCR, 2023). Approximately half of the displaced population are under the age of 18 (Hassan et al., 2016; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Prior to arriving in their resettlement country, most Syrian refugees have lived in precarious conditions during their pre-migration period. They have lived in and outside of refugee camps, often in difficult circumstances and in locations not easily reached by humanitarian aid organizations (Agrawal, 2019; CORC, 2014). Repeated displacements have been a feature of the Syrian civil war, as frontlines kept changing and formerly safer areas became conflict areas (Hassan et al., 2016). This increased Syrian refugee children's symptoms of anxiety and depression, as the closer children live to conflict and hostilities, the less secure they feel and the more they experience symptoms of extreme depression and anxiety (Jabbar & Zaza, 2014).

In addition to precarious living conditions, the displaced Syrian population also represents immense human suffering. War crimes and crimes against humanity, such as massacres, murder, execution, torture, hostage-taking, enforced disappearance, rape and sexual violence, have been committed on a massive scale throughout the Syrian conflict (Hassan et al.,

2016; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Children are not spared from these crimes, they are the most vulnerable and suffer greatly. Like the adults, the children also have witnessed horrific acts and experienced high levels of trauma. Many children have witnessed conflict first-hand, endured the destruction of their homes and communities, survived forced displacement, family separations and recurrent violence to their safety and protection, including exposure to physical and sexual violence, recruitment by armed groups and lack of basic services (Hassan et al., 2016; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

The Syrian war is also contributing to an epidemic of child labour exploitation with poor pay and dangerous conditions across most Syrian refugee-hosting countries. The economic hardship of Syrian families pushes children into the labour force and puts them at particular risk for some of the worst and most exploitative forms of labour (Hassan et al., 2016; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). While exploitative labour has damaging effects on all Syrians, the damage is more severe for Syrian girls. Many young girls are being sold into marriages or being sexually exploited because of sexual favors as payment for rent and necessities. This exploitation also puts them at a much higher risk for mental health problems (Charles & Denman, 2013; DeJong et al., 2017; Hassan et al., 2016; Watkins & Zyck, 2014).

Several studies describe how Syrian refugee children's lived experiences are connected to their psychological well-being, social interactions and relationships, and academic performance. A study on Syrian refugee children's lived experiences conducted in a camp in Turkey found "79 percent had experienced a death in the family; 60 percent had seen someone get kicked, shot at, or physically hurt; and 30 percent had themselves been kicked, shot at, or physically hurt" (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015, p. 1). These traumatic experiences are connected to high levels of anxiety, hypervigilance, grief and loss, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder and suicidality (Hassan

et al., 2016; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Karadag et al., 2017; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). An alarming rate of 41 percent of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon reported having thought about committing suicide (DeJong et al., 2017). Displacement and being separated from family members have been found to cause refugee children to display feelings of insecurity, mistrust, confusion and anger. These feelings influences their social interactions and relationships. It causes them not to trust anyone, including their educators, and to frequently become afraid of educators (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Hassan et al., 2016).

The relation between war and children's wellbeing is not only dependent on levels of violence, but it is also affected by changes occurring in the families as consequences of the war. In addition to being denied daily of safety, nutrition, etc., Syrian children also experience lack of support, as their caregivers deal with the consequences of war and displacement, including poverty, lack of basic needs and services, isolation due to loss of family and community supports, and are unable to be as supportive as they once were (Hassan et al., 2016; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014). Due to the extreme stress that accompanies war, some Syrian parents report increasingly resorting to maladaptive coping strategies, such as domestic violence against their children (Hassan et al., 2016).

The Syrian conflict has devastated lives and caused a wide range of long-term psychological disorders for a generation of young Syrian people (Hassan et al., 2016; Karadag et al., 2017). Unfortunately, being in a comparatively safe environment in their destination resettlement country is unlikely to terminate the war-related trauma of all that they have witnessed and experienced (Jabbar & Zaza, 2014).

Pre-migration Educational Experiences

Pre-migration educational experiences also have considerable implications for post-migration resettlement experiences. The multiple dimensions of the complex histories of Syrian refugee children shape their identities and their resettlement experiences in Canadian communities and schools. The literature states that traumatic and discriminatory experiences can influence children's social interactions and the relationships they form, they can cause children to fear and not trust anyone, including their teachers and peers (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Gagne et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2016).

Conflict usually has a damaging impact on education systems. This often results in many refugee children experiencing frequent disruptions and limited access to schooling (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Syria's education system has taken a severe toll. By 2015, one in four schools in Syria had been severely damaged, destroyed, or was being used by armed groups or by displaced persons seeking shelter (CMAS, 2015). During this period, many Syrian children also began to rarely leave their homes due to fear and concerns over safety (Hassan et al., 2016). This was just the start of schooling disruptions and gaps in education for many Syrian children. Disrupted schooling gaps can vary from a few weeks of missed school to years without schooling. Over half of all Syrian children did not attend school by mid-2015, and this figure rose to three quarters in some of the hardest hit regions (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). In some areas, school attendance rates dropped down to six percent (CORC, 2014; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). The problem may be bigger than the statistics indicate, as refugees often enroll in school but drop out due to war related factors (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Watkins & Zyck, 2014).

The collapse of Syria's education system has left many Syrian children with an educational disadvantage. This includes both economic disadvantages, such as, loss of income or lower earnings, and non-economic disadvantages, such as, loss of social capital and political participation (Charles & Denman, 2013; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Given the timing of the Syrian civil war, it is likely that most children were too young to receive any form of education or to attend school in Syria for an extended period of time (Watkins & Zyck, 2014). As a result, many of these young Syrian children enter schools in first asylum and resettlement countries having missed the opportunity to gain learning taught in elementary school contexts, which is foundational for future learning. Their schooling disruptions place them academically far below their age-appropriate grade level, forcing them to struggle to catch up academically to their classmates while learning a new language and navigating entirely new cultural and social environments (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). An additional educational barrier for refugee children is their very high risk for mental illness due to having undergone traumatic experiences which can interfere with their learning (Aydin & Kaya, 2017). A study on Syrian children that had lived in refugee camps found that over 50 percent of children had special educational needs (Karadag et al., 2017).

It is also important to separately consider Syrian refugee children's pre-migration educational experiences in their countries of first asylum. It is generally assumed that refugees' first experiences of cultural and language adaptation occurs only when they arrive in their destination resettlement country; however, this is incorrect as a majority of Syrians have already experienced this in their countries of first asylum (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015). The three most common education experiences that refugee children face in countries of first asylum are: language barriers, educator-centered pedagogy and discrimination in school settings

(Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Before arriving at their resettlement country, most refugees will have lived in countries of first asylum for at least a year, where they struggle to access schooling due to various barriers, such as lack of resources, language barriers, curriculum differences, legal restrictions on enrollment, poverty, cultural differences, deceit, discrimination and exploitation. These barriers are in addition to psychological issues they face in adjusting to their new community and school (Agrawal, 2019; Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Since Syria shares borders with Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, most, if not all Syrians moved to these neighboring countries in search of protection and asylum.

Education is one of the most prominent needs of displaced refugee children yet only two percent of humanitarian aid goes to education (Jabbar & Zaza, 2014). Approximately half of displaced Syrian children in Syria and in countries of first asylum are unable to continue their education (Hassan et al., 2016). In Lebanon 80 percent, in Turkey 60 percent and in Jordan 30 percent of all school-age Syrian refugee children were not attending any type of schooling in 2013 (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). The attendance rates in Lebanon are particularly important, as the country hosts more Syrian children than any other country (Watkins & Zyck, 2014). An assessment of Syrian children schooling in Lebanon found that 58 percent of them were out of school due to a number of structural barriers to school enrolment (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2020). The educational crisis is more severe for Syrian girls than boys, as their secondary school attendance rates are less than 10 percent. Noteworthy is the fact that the education of girls is more significant than for boys, as girls not participating in education are more at risk of entering into sex work and more likely to marry early. Lack of education can greatly affect fertility, health of offspring, intergenerational poverty, and family health and well-being. The lack of education for girls will have a detrimental effect not only on individual girls but also on society at large

(Charles & Denman, 2013; Hassan et al., 2016; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). In some countries of first asylum, for example in Turkey, Syrian children are not allowed to enroll in school until they demonstrate their refugee status. In Jordan, children are not eligible to enrol in school until their previous education attainment is verified. Also, in Jordan, children who have missed more than three years of school are not eligible to enroll (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Watkins & Zyck, 2014).

For the limited number of Syrian children that have access to education and continue to attend school in their countries of first asylum, the learning outcomes are poor. They often gain academic skills and knowledge far below their grade level peers in Western countries (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Celik & Icduygu, 2018; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). This is because in most refugee serving schools there is a lack of teachers (both with and without teacher education), space, books and other resources. Student-teacher ratios are also very high, nearly twice the UNCHR guideline of 40:1. These factors result in teacher-centred classrooms, with teachers lecturing all of the time; few opportunities for meaningful learning for students; and curriculum that is not supportive of students' various learning and psychosocial needs (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Hos, 2016; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Watkins & Zyck, 2014).

Syrian refugee children are frequently exposed to multiple languages over the course of their migration journey due to repeated displacements and moves. Exposure to multiple languages within a short period of time often results in language confusion (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). This adds to Syrian students' barriers in the context of language within schools. They struggle to access instructional content taught in languages other than Arabic or Kurdish, which are the two most commonly used languages in Syria (Hassan et al., 2016). For example, in Lebanon, curriculum in schools is delivered in Arabic, French and English, while Arabic is the

only language of instruction in Syria (DeJong et al., 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015), and in Turkey, Syrian students are not allowed to enroll in school until they have demonstrated proficiency in Turkish (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Charles & Denman, 2013). Additionally, since Syrian students are spread across various schools in their countries of first asylum, schools tend to ignore the small number of students and not implement language-education programmes to support them. Without support for language learning, Syrian students end up taking longer to overcome language barriers, stay out of school longer and have limited opportunities to master academic content (Aydin & Kaya, 2017). Language barriers often cause Syrian students to drop out of school and result in wider academic gaps (Charles & Denman, 2013).

Syrian children in Lebanon also experience barriers in the context of curriculum content. They have been placed in lower grades than their age-appropriate grade level, as the Lebanese curriculum is deemed by the Lebanese government as being more demanding than the Syrian curriculum (DeJong et al., 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Curriculum content can also range from being difficult to understand for children who have been out of school for extended periods, contextually unrelatable and irrelevant for refugee students and, in worst case scenarios, extremely politicized and discriminatory (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Academic difficulty of catching up and failing grades are causes for Syrian students to drop out of school (Charles & Denman, 2013).

Poverty is another significant barrier to education for refugees. Due to the economic hardships refugee families face, they often need their children to work in order to make ends meet. At other times, refugee children that do enroll in school drop out due to costs associated with schooling, such as cost for transportation to get to schools (Charles & Denman, 2013; DeJong et al., 2017; Hos, 2016; Watkins & Zyck, 2014).

Refugee students encounter discrimination and violence by their teachers and other students in their countries of first asylum. Syrian students have repeatedly reported blatant social exclusion, bullying and acts of violence in school settings by teachers, school personnel and other students (Celik & Icduygu, 2018; DeJong et al., 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Hassan et al., 2016; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). These mistreatment in schools frequently exclude and alienate Syrian students, resulting in them feeling depressed and pushing them out of school (Celik & Icduygu, 2018). Parents of Syrian students and students themselves repeatedly describe incidents of social exclusion, being bullied or treated badly, including verbal and physical abuse by their teachers and classmates (DeJong et al., 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015). In contrast, Celik and Icduygu's (2018) and Aydin and Kaya's (2017) studies in Turkish public schools found that schools provide many Syrian students with a welcoming and secure environment. This could be a result of the study's participants consisting of only teachers and school principals.

The Syrian crisis has a created an impact that will detrimentally affect the lives of current and future generations. The loss of educational opportunities has significant effects, with long-term devastating outcomes (Charles & Denman, 2013). We cannot let generations be lost. The needs of Syrian refugee children are vast (Nofal, 2017; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Help for them requires more than merely measures to save their lives. Efforts are needed to integrate them into their resettlement society. Syrian children will likely need ongoing, targeted support to bridge the gaps in their education, attain fluency in their resettlement country's languages, and deal with mental health symptoms (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014). Sustained education access for refugee students to close the gap with their peers and to increase their academic performance must be prioritized. Receiving immediate and ongoing psychological and special education supports is important for children who suffer from stress and trauma, since

delays may make it severe (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Charles & Denman, 2013; Karadag et al., 2017). There is evidence that over time supports can reduce the Syrian refugee children's trauma and facilitate their adaptation to Canada (Hassan et al., 2016; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014).

While this section explored Syrian refugee children's challenging pre-migration experiences, the next section will highlight the children's remarkable sense of resilience and hope, as they establish relationships and engage in social activities and daily life in Canada. The following section examines the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee children in Canada.

Post-migration Resettlement Experiences

In this section, I review the existing body of literature directly relevant to the study's first research question, *what are Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences in Ontario?*

Although seemingly safe from conflict and persecution in Canada, many newly arrived Syrian refugees face the challenge of navigating through their new community, culture, traditions and dominant language as they adapt and integrate into Canadian society. Dramatic changes in circumstances from Syria and their countries of first asylum to Canada play a significant role in refugee children's resettlement experiences (Kovačević, 2016). As noted in the previous section, Syrians also bring with them a range of different educational and psychosocial experiences, needs and expectations when resettling to their new community (Nofal, 2017). Previous exposure to violence in Syria and countries of first asylum is a key risk factor in their wellbeing resettlement as well. Generally, studies on resettlement and post-resettlement experiences have found that Syrian refugee children experience a wide range of psychosocial problems and needs. Psychosocial problems include nervousness, tension, fears, sadness, depression (including withdrawal from family and friends), aggression, hyperactivity, difficulties sleeping, speech problems and somatic symptoms (Gagne et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2016; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014;

Karadag et al., 2017; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Many Syrian parents chose to resettle in Canada because of their belief that Canada would provide a better future for their children compared to other refugee hosting countries (Agrawal, 2019; Nofal, 2017). Refugee settlement staff recommend that overseas orientation programs provide accurate information about the realities in Canada to avoid misleading refugees (Agrawal, 2019).

From a wellbeing perspective, the priority is to identify the needs of Syrian refugees and to create accessible and culturally appropriate services to meet those needs (Hanson & Houston, 2016). Their needs cannot be merely conflated with the needs of other immigrants. The Government of Canada has put millions of dollars towards resettlement assistance to help Syrian refugees integrate into Canadian society. This includes attention to food, clothing and shelter, as well as a stipend for the first year for government-sponsored refugees (Government of Canada, 2018). However, absorbing 44,000 Syrians in a short time has presented major challenges for the government in terms of providing the necessary supports for this population arriving from a very different culture and with very different needs (Agrawal, 2019; Ahmed et al., 2017; Government of Canada, 2021; Munson & Ataullahjan, 2016).

For example, there are challenges in meeting Syrian refugees' health and linguistic needs. Syrian refugees often need ongoing psychosocial support to recover from war related trauma (Ahmed et al., 2017; Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Charles & Denman, 2013; Hassan et al., 2016). They also need language support to learn the dominant language of their new community and to be able to access health services. Language skills increase their integration into Canadian society (El-Baba et al., 2017). These are the first steps in resettlement. In response to these needs, community refugee resettlement agencies have been federally funded and assigned to support the adaptation of Syrians with language education and health and social services (Hanson &

Houston, 2016). Despite these initiatives, Syrian refugees' needs are often left unmet. This is mainly due to not being able to get into English language programs due to months-long waiting lists, and the slow process of learning vocational English due to the poor quality of programs and the limited opportunities to practice the language with English speakers (Agrawal, 2019; Government of Canada, 2019, 2021; Munson & Ataullahjan, 2016). Language barriers, lack of understanding of health and social services, and the stigma around mental health prevent some Syrians from accessing the professional health support that they need (Ahmed et al., 2017; Government of Canada, 2019; Marshall, 2017). Many refugees come from areas in the world where mental health problems are highly stigmatized (El-Baba et al., 2017; Marshall, 2017). Syrian women shared that they would be willing to talk about their mental health symptoms with a healthcare provider, but not necessarily in the presence of an interpreter, especially when the interpreter is part of their small Arabic speaking community (Ahmed et al., 2017; Marshall, 2017). The language barriers are so significant for some Syrians that it not only inhibits them from visiting a doctor but also prevents them from completing daily chores, such as getting groceries on their own when there are no accessible Arab grocery stores (Agrawal, 2019). As a result of the language and health care barriers, many opt to cope with their psychosocial needs by accessing family, friends, school, peer, and religious institutional resources or by struggling alone (Ahmed et al., 2017; Agrawal, 2019; Marshall, 2017).

Language barriers are also a cause for shifts in family roles in Syrian refugee families. Children learn the local language more quickly than their parents. Parents may spend years in the host country without learning its language, while children learn it within a few months of being in school. This results in a linguistic gap between children and their parents. Older children may step in to the role of a parent by becoming the point of contact for the family's needs outside of

their home. Language also improves career prospects (El-Baba et al., 2017). Therefore, children may need to find employment when their parents are unable to enter the job market due to language gaps (Nofal, 2017).

Agrawal's (2019) study on Syrian refugee impressions found that Syrians know little about Canada but selected it as their new home on the belief that it would be positive. Contrary to their beliefs, identifying as visible minorities, Syrian refugees also encounter exclusion from the dominant society (including discrimination and social tensions), feelings of estrangement, social isolation even though they are eager to make friends, and they yearn for their homeland (Agrawal, 2019; D'Amico et al., 2016; Guo et al., 2019; Hassan et al., 2016; Kovačević, 2016; Ratković et al., 2017; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Language barriers, economic constraints and lack of access to public transportation also prevent social integration and further contributes to social isolation (Agrawal, 2019; Government of Canada, 2019; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017; Ratković et al., 2017). Many Syrians are also eager to work to reduce their economic constraints and to support their social integration; however, lack of English proficiency, Canadian credentials and experience make it impossible to find job opportunities in their professions (Agrawal, 2019; El-Baba et al., 2017; Government of Canada, 2019, 2021; Munson & Ataullahjan, 2016; Nofal, 2017). Additionally, inaccurate information about Syria has left many Canadians with the impression that Syria is an undeveloped country, resulting in doubts about the capabilities and skills of Syrians (Agrawal, 2019). Finding opportunities to work in their professions is especially important to refugees, as government-sponsored refugees are welcomed to Canada with monetary debts to the Canadian government, which must be repaid with interest after a certain time (Munson & Ataullahjan, 2016), and some private sponsors are unable to financially support their sponsored refugees, even though they have committed to do so within

the sponsorship agreement (Agrawal, 2019). Some Syrians wish to go back to Syria as soon as the country's situation improves, mainly due to the difficulty in finding jobs relevant to their professions, in learning English and in adapting to Canadian culture (Agrawal, 2019). Socio-economic conditions are a key stressor that impacts many Canadian refugees' mental health (El-Baba et al., 2017; Marshall, 2017). Overall, these factors make Syrian refugees' resettlement experiences highly challenging and stressful (Hadfield et al., 2017; Kovačević, 2016).

In contrast to the negative findings reported in the studies above, one can also identify positive findings. For instance, findings also suggest Syrian refugees are fairly satisfied with their lives in Canada. They feel their new community is welcoming, accepting and respectful to them. They feel safe and have a strong sense of belonging to their new community and to Canada (Agrawal, 2019; Ayoub, 2020; Government of Canada, 2019). These positive perceptions of Canada could be a consequence of the hardships they experienced pre-migration, and general relief to be in a place that is comparatively safer, more secure and farther away from the war than their pre-migration countries (Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017). Syrian refugee participants in Nofal's (2017) study viewed their arrival to Canada as a "wonderful opportunity" and a "one in a million chance" (p. 40). Despite the resettlement stressors and challenges in Canada, these perceptions suggest a determination to succeed in their new home (Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017).

The Government of Canada (2019) notes that Syrian resettlement shows positive early outcomes. The majority of Syrian refugees have demonstrated remarkable resilience in quick adaption, integration and recovery once basic housing, food and security needs are met. They have learnt to thrive by integrating into their communities and making friends, volunteering and building ties, all of which contribute to their strong sense of belonging to their new Canadian communities (Agrawal, 2019; Ayoub, 2020; Government of Canada, 2019). Two factors need to

be noted when it comes to positive integration. Firstly, according to a settlement worker participant in Agrawal's (2019) study, Syrians in general have a higher education and are more professionally skilled when compared to other refugee groups in Canada. This could be a reason for their quick adaptation and integration into Canadian society as assessed by Government of Canada (2019). Secondly, staff from refugee settlement agencies have noticed a difference in the integration between government-sponsored refugees compared to privately-sponsored refugees, with the latter having more financial and material benefits, more support, more opportunities to develop better social networks, more exposure to Canadian society, and more opportunities to learn English faster (Agrawal, 2019; Nofal, 2017).

As I review the existing body of literature relevant to Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences in Canada, it is evident that there is limited empirical information on their resettlement experiences within their new Canadian communities. The majority of the studies that examine community resettlement in Canada focus on Syrian adult refugees; therefore, this section primarily draws from research on Syrian adults' resettlement experiences. This is evidence that research rarely focuses on children's views, and they receive less attention overall than adults, especially in research on refugee resettlement. The studies that do focus on Syrian refugee children focus solely on their educational experiences. This highlights the importance of the current study's first research question, *what are Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences in Ontario,* as there is a significant lack of evidence on Syrian refugee children's out-of-school resettlement experiences in Ontario and Canada as a whole.

Post-Migration Educational Experiences

The educational experiences of refugee children are an important factor in influencing their resettlement experiences, as often schools are the first social institutions that refugee

children and their families enter, and they are also one of the most impactful systems that they encounter during their resettlement. Research has found that schools are the most effective tool in facilitating refugee children and their families' social integration with the broader community, offering means to social mobility, learning resilient behaviours, and eradicating the traces of trauma. Schools allow children who have been subjected to trauma to feel secure, regain stability and a sense of normalcy. They provide a way for children to begin the trauma-healing process and support their emotional and social wellbeing (Celike & Icduygu, 2018; Charles & Denman, 2013; Guo et al., 2019; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Nofal, 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). Social bonding is a key factor for refugee integration in resettlement countries (Guo et al., 2019). Therefore, this makes refugee children's social relationships in schools a vital aspect of their resettlement needs (Guo et al., 2019; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016). Similar to the positive implications of academic experiences, the challenges they face within the schools also have negative implications for their resettlement experiences and wellbeing (Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016). In short, the wellbeing of refugee children is quite dependent upon their school environment; therefore, their wellbeing should be the focus of school practice and policy (Guo et al., 2019; Ratković et al., 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016). As a starting point for understanding Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences, within this section of the literature review, I review the existing body of literature on their experiences in Canadian publicly funded education systems and its impact on their resettlement and wellbeing as a whole.

Most refugee children bring with them special challenges when integrating into their new schools (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Thomas, 2016; Tweedie et al., 2017). However, they are not a homogeneous group with identical challenges and needs. Their histories and journeys to

Canada are not the same, and their resettlement challenges do not end the moment they come to Canada. Each child's age, gender, religion, ethnicity, linguistic background, well-being and complex lived histories influences their expectations and needs (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Gagne et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2016; Nofal, 2017; Thomas, 2016). Most Syrian students have had their education interrupted and missed years of educational opportunities or are illiterate and have had little or no formal schooling (Ayoub, 2020; Tweedie et al., 2017); have low levels or no skills in English and French languages (Government of Canada, 2019; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017); have experienced some levels of trauma, conflict and violence, lost loved ones (Nofal, 2017; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Tweedie et al., 2017); and have posttraumatic stress disorder (Anzovino et al., 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Gagne et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2016; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Karadag et al., 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015). A study conducted on Syrian refugee children in a camp in Turkey indicated that almost "half (45 percent) displayed symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder – ten times the prevalence among children around the world…[and] one-quarter reported daily psychosomatic pains in their limbs, with one in five suffering from daily headaches" (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015, p. 1). Pre-migration trauma can cause severe stress for children post-resettlement and affect their emotions, social interactions, learning, including ability to learn a new language, academic performance and development (Ayoub, 2020; Gagne et al., 2018; Kaplan et al., 2016; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016; Tweedie et al., 2017). Being mindful of deficit assumptions and focusing on strength-based practice, it is important to highlight that refugee children bring skills, abilities, resilience, hope, aspirations and dreams (Agrawal, 2019; Nofal, 2017; Tweedie et al., 2017). This is the profile of most Syrian refugee students in the Canadian elementary school

system, that is, new settlers in Canada who bring both assets and particular needs as survivors of war and trauma (Nofal, 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015). Increasingly, schools now seek to support the wellbeing, resettlement, and education of diverse groups of refugee children, in terms of academic skills, language fluency and motivations for staying in school (Celik & Icduygu, 2018; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016). We need to listen more carefully to refugee children's diverse and specific needs. It is found that Canadian provinces that distinguish between immigrants' and refugees' range of experiences, assets, needs and expectations, have more relevant policies and guides for schools and teachers to support refugee students' resettlement, wellbeing and education, and help them regain a sense of stability (Guo et al., 2019; Ratković et al., 2017; Thomas, 2016).

Unlike the experiences of Syrian refugee children in first asylum countries, fortunately, a large majority of them are reported as enrolled in Canadians schools (Government of Canada, 2019). As Syrian children are relocated from refugee camps to Canadian schools, I question whether schools have the capacity to meet the needs of these children? The literature answers my question by providing evidence that Canadian schools in various parts of the country continue to face challenges in facilitating the smooth transition of refugee children to their new school, and most teachers are quite reluctant to take refugee specific characteristics into consideration when supporting their learning (Braun, 2016; Guo et al., 2019; Kovačević, 2016; Ratković et al., 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015). Teachers' reluctance could be perceived as bias and discrimination towards refugee students (Guo et al., 2019; Ratković et al., 2017). Research has voiced concerns regarding a lack of familiarity and understanding amongst teachers and school personnel. This is a result of inadequate education and guidance received to meet the various needs of refugee students' education, social integration, and wellbeing in classrooms (Guo et al., 2019;

Kovačević, 2016; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Ratković et al., 2017). Schools receive refugee children without special support systems in place to assist them in the process of integrating into their new schools. Refugee children enter classrooms of teachers who are often unfamiliar with their experiences, have little (or no) knowledge of their languages and have few skills in addressing their special needs (Guo et al., 2019; Kovačević, 2016; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Ratković et al., 2017; Tweedie et al., 2017).

School integration is a two-way process that requires mutual adjustments by both refugee students, teachers, school personnel and local students. Not only must refugee students adapt themselves to their new school environment, but other stakeholders also need to adapt themselves to the diverse refugee population in schools and bond with them (Guo et al., 2019). Some Syrian students report having positive sociocultural experiences in their schools in Canada; are happy with teachers' welcoming and supportive approach; and feel safe and secure in their schools. They report that their teachers are providing them with varying opportunities to socialize and make new friends from different backgrounds (Ayoub, 2020; Nofal, 2017). These social activities are key, as they bring back a sense of normalcy to the children's lives and support their trauma-healing process (Celik & Icduygu, 2018; Guo et al., 2019; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). When comparing their Canadian school experiences to their school experiences in their countries of first asylum, Syrian refugee students and their parents perceived Canadian schools as "actual places of learning" (Nofal, 2017, p. 32).

Nevertheless, Syrian refugee students also shared multifaceted social challenges they experience in schools (Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Nofal, 2017). Guo et al.'s (2017, 2019) Syrian student participants in an Alberta school expressed feelings of isolation and separation in Canada. Major factors that contribute to Syrian students' social isolation were found to be

difficulty in becoming friends with local students, bullying and racism, and discriminatory attitudes of teachers (Guo et al., 2017; 2019). Many Syrian students shared the challenges they face in making friends outside of their own Arabic speaking community (Guo et al., 2017; 2019). Refugee students are often in specialized English classes, and they primarily interact with other non-English speaking students with similar refugee backgrounds. While a few students actually like being with others like themselves, there are many students who want an opportunity to interact with local students. They expressed the need for more academic support, as well as social support to connect with local students. They specifically wanted teachers to facilitate connections with English speaking students (Guo et al., 2019; Ratković et al.,2017).

Syrian parents also shared about their children's social challenges and desires to return to Syria due to not having any friends at school and feeling lost (Guo et al., 2019). For most Syrian parents, educational opportunities for their children were a main reason to choose Canada and their perceptions of success in Canada largely depends on their children's ability to succeed in school (Agrawal, 2019; Nofal, 2017). Relationships with the broader community will provide refugee students with a sense of belonging and home in their host country (Guo et al., 2017; 2019; Marshall, 2017). In contrast to Guo et al.'s (2017, 2019) findings, Nofal's (2017) Syrian student participants in an Ottawa school shared limited references to social isolation. The difference in perception could also be attributed to the stark contrast of their educational experiences in their countries of first asylum compared to Canada, as they often compared each other and viewed their current life to be an improvement (Nofal, 2017).

Bullying, racism or negative peer relationships can exacerbate acculturation challenges and disrupt children's wellbeing, leading to low self-esteem, stress, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse, and behavioural

problems among refugee children (Baker, 2017; Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Kovačević, 2016; Marshall, 2017). Refugee students are subjected to exclusion and discrimination in Canadian schools and communities. Syrian students in Alberta shared incidents of ethnic-religious discrimination when they were "beaten up and told to go back to their own country when they attempted to pray outside of the school building" (Guo et al., 2019, p. 96), and being perceived as "monsters or beasts" (Guo et al., 2019, p. 97) because of their origins from Syria, a war-torn country. Refugee students originating from other countries living in Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario also shared incidents of religious discrimination. One student said, "to be honest a lot of people hate me too here. People treat you different because you're Muslim." (Baker, 2017, p. 9). Such perceptions and stereotypes could affect the way children perceive themselves and impact their mental wellbeing (Baker, 2017; Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Marshall, 2017). Refugee students shared being scared, unnerved and angry during discriminatory experiences, and sadness following the experience, and having to live everyday with these feelings and emotions while integrating to their Canadian school (Baker, 2017; Guo et al., 2017, 2019). Syrian parents shared that they received many warnings by their communities in Syria and countries of first asylum before coming to Canada, related to Canada not allowing them to practice their religion and that they would not be accepted. They were told that in Canada "people [are] hostile towards Muslims and Arabs" (Nofal, 2017, p. 37). They dismissed these warnings as baseless rumors due a belief that going to Canada meant they had a second chance in life and were determined to succeed in their new home (Nofal, 2017). In contrast to most research findings, Syrian students in Ottawa indicated limited negative peer and teacher interactions (Nofal, 2017). Some refugee students "normalize" racism by expecting it and ignoring it (Baker, 2017, p. 9). Perhaps the contrasting findings in Ottawa could be a result of this perception.

Syrian students in Alberta also discussed concerns with teachers treating them unfairly, including the lack of support from teachers when they were subjected to bullying and discrimination. They reported how teachers often lack proper interventions when it comes to bullying and racism. Their reports of bullying and racism to teachers were addressed by "it's okay. They didn't mean it and they didn't know what they were saying" (Guo et al., 2019, p. 97). The teachers' responses to the children's experiences reveal a lack of empathy and sensitivity. Ratković et al.'s (2017) extensive review of refugee students' resettlement in Canada also found that teachers' lack of empathy and intervention to bullying and discrimination is not limited to refugee children but is extended to immigrant students. Nofal's (2017) findings contrast most research findings again. The study reports that Syrian parents in Ottawa did not indicate teacher in-competencies in supporting them or their children. In fact, the Ottawa participants reported positive perceptions of teachers and school personnel throughout the interviews. Schools should be actively working towards implementing strategies that eliminate bullying and discrimination in schools, as negative attitudes and neglect towards refugees are key stressors that increases refugee children's psychosocial challenges (Guo et al., 2019; El-Baba et al., 2017; Ratković et al., 2017). In contrast, perceived support is related to improved psychological health (Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017; Skidmore, 2016).

In order to fully participate in Canadian society and improve academic performance, it is suggested that refugee children need to achieve fluent dominant language and literacy skills (Braun, 2016; El-Baba et al., 2017). Consistently throughout the literature, all Syrian students mention lack of English proficiency to be a major barrier for their integration and resettlement (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Government of Canada, 2019; Guo et al., 2019; Kaplan et al., 2016, Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017; Skidmore, 2016). Exposure to numerous languages of instruction

during their migration journey from Syria to Canada leads to language confusion (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Kaplan et al., 2016). Syrian parents also report that their children feel like strangers in an English-speaking community (Guo et al., 2019). Both students and their parents speak of frustration related to the lack of understandable information about the school system (Nofal, 2017). Arabic speakers in the school or community are perceived as making a huge difference in some Syrian children's school experiences (Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017). For example, Syrian parents believe that if their child would have the support of an Arabic speaker at school, they would be able to overcome many challenges (Nofal, 2017). Arabic teachers who speak both Arabic and English helped Syrian students connect with other students from different classes in their school (Guo et al., 2019).

The important role of teachers in refugee children's resettlement processes is highlighted in the literature (Guo et al., 2019; Skidmore, 2016). They have a key role to play in assisting these young people to overcome resettlement challenges and realize their full potential in their new environments. Many teachers have a largely positive attitude towards Syrian students and sincerely try to help them by attempting to provide contexts that foster their wellbeing and education (Aydin & Kaya, 2017). Some of them even become passionate advocates of refugee children and work outside their academic role to support refugee families (Guo et al., 2019). However, most Canadian teachers lack an understanding about Syrian refugee children's histories, cross-cultural competencies and have not been trained in responding to refugee students' unique needs (Miller et al., 2017; Ratković et al., 2017; Ryeburn, 2016).

From a sociocultural-historical perspective, teachers supporting refugee students need to have more than sympathy, they must understand students' histories and unique realities (Kirova & Emme, 2008). The majority of Canadian teachers are White, middle-class, and appear to be

disconnected from the lives of communities of migrants (Guo et al., 2019). For example, a Syrian refugee student in Alberta shared, “my teacher does not know what Muslim means” (Guo et al., 2019, p. 97). Without adequate knowledge of refugee students’ contexts, cultures and experiences, teachers are susceptible to using their own assumptions and biases of minority communities to guide their work. Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994) state that “even today, the fact that refugees had property, education, and status before they were driven from their homes by forces beyond their control is less emphasized than their present improvised circumstances” (as cited in Braun, 2016, p. 81). As a result, a deficit discourse has invaded many aspects of refugee students’ education (Braun, 2016). Having said that, to understand the challenges young refugees face requires consideration of the multiple losses associated with being forced to leave one’s home, compounded with the stress and trauma encountered pre-migration (Marshall, 2017). Careful attention is needed to identify educational needs based on prior exposure to academic content (Dryden-Peterson, 2015).

When teachers cannot respond to the unique realities of refugee children, they are less effective in supporting them, and potentially run the risk of harming the children they want to support (Gagne et al., 2017b; Nofal, 2017; Ratković et al., 2017). For example, refugee students may be impacted by past experiences in school settings (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Hassan et al., 2016; Skidmore, 2016), such as, past experiences with teacher-centred pedagogy may leave children unaware of how to engage in learning (Dryden-Peterson, 2015), and cultural differences in the way that children interact with adults may encourage children to not approach authority figures (Skidmore, 2016). In contrast, recognizing refugee students’ past experiences may help teachers to understand any reluctance on the part of students or their parents to invest time in schools and relevant relationships (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Skidmore,

2016). Teachers' gaps in understanding can also negatively affect refugee students' sense of belonging and relationships (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). For example, many teachers reject student and parent requests for prayer accommodation in the name of secularism (Guo, 2015). This lack of religious understanding and consequent lack of accommodation in many schools threaten children's sense of religious and cultural identities and pose additional barriers to their psychosocial wellbeing (Guo et al., 2019).

The low-quality educational experiences in Syria and countries of first asylum were often one of the primary reasons for Syrian refugees to move to Canada (Nofal, 2017). Sadly, the hopes of many are crushed as Canadian schools are ill prepared to facilitate the transition of refugee students coming to terms with war, violence, trauma, interrupted schooling, and to combat the psychosocial challenges refugee students face as they enter Canadian schools (Gagne et al., 2017b, 2018; Kovačević, 2016; Ratković et al., 2017). Newly arrived Syrian refugee students face a range of challenges as they struggle to integrate into Canadian society and the school system. These difficulties include language barriers, social exclusion, difficulty making friends with local students, lack of peer support, constant bullying, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, issues with grade placement, and acculturative stress (Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017; Ratković et al., 2017; Skidmore, 2016). The challenges they face may negatively affect their mental health, sense of self, integration and education (Baker, 2017; El-Baba et al., 2017; Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017; Ratković et al., 2017; Skidmore, 2016).

As noted, little is being done to address needs of refugee students. Syrian students need stronger social supports, but their specific needs are not being met in Canadian schools. Developing strong social support is clearly an essential component of their wellbeing. Work

needs to be done to reduce discrimination in schools and communities, and support programs inside and outside schools need to be created, such as safe spaces where refugee students can express their experiences and share concerns and feelings (Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Nofal, 2017; Ratković et al., 2017; Skidmore, 2016). Teachers and school personnel can assist refugee students by engaging them in discussions about loss, transitions, identity, and cultural conflicts affecting them and their families and by helping them address and resolve these tensions (Marshall, 2017). Practices that schools might put in place for refugee students can also support local students who may also be experiencing challenges (Skidmore, 2016).

A serious effort should be directed towards studying refugee students' histories (Nofal, 2017). Mandatory education and professional development opportunities, which include knowledge mobilization about refugee students' resettlement and its impact on students' wellbeing, can help schools deliver best practice and support the successful resettlement of refugee students (Braun, 2016; Guo et al., 2019; Kirova & Emme, 2008; Miller et al., 2017; Ratković et al., 2017). Additionally, schools should develop intercultural, inclusive institutional habitus to incorporate students of all backgrounds and support their equal participation into society (Celik & Icduygu, 2018). This would include acknowledging and building upon their assets and potential that refugee students possess. As noted in the literature, despite their challenging circumstances, Syrian students and their families consistently express their hopes and desires to succeed in Canada, and demonstrate strengths and attributes, such as adaptability, perseverance and resilience, that can help them adjust positively to their new home (Agrawal, 2019; Gagne et al., 2018; Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017).

Canadian Teachers' Experiences with Syrian Refugee Students

Within this section of the literature review, I will include an overview of Canadian pre-service and practicing teachers' perspectives on and experiences with Syrian refugee children within mainstream schools. Teachers' perspectives reveal the complex and intersecting factors that impact refugee students' integration in schools (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018; Ryeburn, 2016). Promising practices that support the integration of refugee students evident in the literature, specifically the benefits of moving away from pedagogy that is based on a deficit perspective of refugee children and towards a pedagogy that values children's lived experiences and builds on their 'funds of knowledge' which provide for valuable resources that teachers can draw from (Gonzālez et al., 2013), will also be discussed.

Many Canadian teachers have many questions about Syrian refugee students, starting with what strengths and needs they bring to the classroom. The majority of them view Syrian students in a positive light (Gagne et al., 2018). For example, a teacher in British Columbia, states that "refugee children contribute to a rich cultural environment within the school community. Non-refugee students in the class learn a great deal from the stories and culture of their peers." (Ryeburn, 2016, para. 3). Another shared their experiences of learning from Syrian students, "teaching young children…how their different experiences shaped them, helped me reflect on the importance of my background and culture as a teacher" (Gagne et al., 2017a, p. 10). Others describe the high degree of motivation and resilience of Syrian students as their strengths (Gagne et al., 2017a; Ryeburn, 2016; Tweedie et al., 2017). Building on these strengths, most teachers in Ontario report that Syrian students make steady progress in all subjects, including English, when they attend school for an extended period (Gagne et al., 2018).

Some Canadian teachers perceived that Syrian students' differing experiences, both pre- and post-migration, as they relate to gender, living situation, academic backgrounds, psychosocial needs, and language fluency, influenced their needs and how they integrated to their new school (Clark, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Gagne et al., 2018; Ryeburn, 2016; Skidmore, 2016). Teachers shared examples of when they recognized the lived experiences of their students to identify their needs. Such as, a teacher in British Columbia said that her Syrian female students reported not being allowed outside the home, including to go to schools in refugee camps; therefore, she was able to identify that these students needed more support to engage in classroom activities (Clark, 2017). Another recalls a Syrian student who frequently checked the tap in the classroom to make sure water was still available due to having lived in situations where water was scarce; therefore, she responded to the students needs by frequently reassuring them that their basic needs will be met (Ryeburn, 2016). Aggression towards peers and teachers, which is a result of posttraumatic stress disorder, is also noted as a significant need (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018). Three teachers in Ontario shared their perceptions of Syrian students' behavior, "Syrian students bring this anger to school leading them to have explosive emotional outbursts and breakdowns;" "negative emotions block their learning;" "they don't seem to understand the value of an education;" "they don't respect authority – the student…gets very angry, defiant and is non-compliant…" (Gagne et al., 2018, p. 57). These are examples of how prior exposure to trauma and violence shape present needs. These examples also provide a snapshot of the range of experiences and needs Syrian students bring to the classroom. The last teacher comment echoes the perspective of many teachers in Ontario, where the student's present behaviour in their new school is not connected to their prior experiences and present realities, and the impact of trauma on learning is not understood (Gagne et al., 2018).

Teachers stressed the importance of listening more carefully and taking the time to know the diverse and specific needs of refugee students when designing and delivering pedagogy rather than pressuring the students to catch up to their peers academically (Clark, 2017; Ryeburn, 2016). Teachers advise their colleagues on the importance of providing students with the opportunity to share their experiences, "you want to get to know your students on an individual basis to best support their individual needs" (Clark, 2017, p. 25) and "get to know each individual student, and [don't] allow our assumptions to shape our views of who they are and what they need" (Ryeburn, 2016, para. 21). Some teachers shared that they often engage their students in storytelling activities to strengthen their English language skills and allow them to share as much as they want about their lives (Gagne et al, 2018).

A settlement worker shared, "[a student] spoke of internal strength that he got from Syria. And he could articulate that he gets angry because he is actually sad" (Gagne et al., 2018, p. 58). Refugees come to Canada with a great deal of knowledge and experience. When they are unable to communicate this, it can be devastating. Therefore, communication is the key in the journey of healing and learning. Teachers shared that by learning about students' experiences, they were able to develop empathy, understand challenging behaviours and implement pedagogies that better support their successful integration (Ryeburn, 2016). On the contrary, they noted that teacher assumptions about Syrian students acted as a barrier to the students' integration (Clark, 2017). This is unfortunate, as teachers note that most of their colleagues are quite reluctant to take refugee specific characteristics, such as, diverse lived experiences and knowledge gained from outside of Canada that teachers may not be familiar with, into consideration when modifying their practice to support refugee students (Braun, 2016; Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2019; Kovačević, 2016; Ratković et al., 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015).

Teachers in Ontario also reported that their greatest challenge is working with students who are returning to a formal school environment after years of interruptions. When planning and delivering engaging lessons for their diverse learners' multiple social and academic needs resulting from the large spectrum in their education gaps, they often felt overwhelmed (Gagne et al., 2018). Additionally, the literature notes that learning about students' traumatic experiences can be emotionally draining on teachers (Ryeburn, 2016; Tweedie et al., 2017).

Many Canadian teachers also have many questions about how to teach Syrian refugee students, and what resources and strategies can they use. There is a general agreement amongst stakeholders that insufficient education and resources on working with children from war torn countries, supporting the education of children who have significant gaps in their schooling, facilitating Syrian children's social integration, were provided to them. Refugee children enter classrooms of teachers who are often unsure of how to address the specialized care that they require (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2019; Kovačević, 2016; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Ratković et al., 2017; Tweedie et al., 2017). Although most teachers recognize some of the refugee students' needs, especially the need to feel safe and welcomed, a common concern among them was that they felt unprepared and under-supported (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2017a, 2018). Teachers reported that they had not received any specific education to work with refugee students (Busch et al., 2018; Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018). They explained the situation in their schools, "my Syrian students are all suffering…and I feel powerless;" "staff have felt powerless, stressed, and fatigued . . . we have not been trained or supported in helping the Syrian youngsters and their families" (Gagne et al., 2018, p. 60).

Some teachers also pointed out that they might not have had time to attend professional development even if it had been made available (Shamim, 2020), while some others are adamant

that their natural instinct to care and support their students will help them to meet all their students' needs (Ryeburn, 2016). Lack of time and motivation to attend professional development opportunities leads one to question if teachers also lack time and motivation to access additional resources, such as interpreters and cultural brokers to help meet students' needs, or if these resources are even available in schools hosting refugee students. Noteworthy is the fact no additional federal funding and resources were provided for the K-12 education of Syrian refugee children; therefore, school divisions had to adjust with existing resources (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2017b). Teachers shared that currently there is an ineffective system of resource distribution (Clark, 2017). Research on Canadian teacher views of Syrian refugee students found that teachers' ability to support students is affected by how prepared they feel to support them, including available resources. Access to resources/supports are viewed as a necessary condition by most teachers to help refugee students overcome barriers to success (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018). This perception is shared by the Canadian Government as they state that Syrian refugees often require specialized care, and it is essential that service providers work to ensure that refugees are able to access the care and services they need to help them integrate (Government of Canada, 2019, 2021). The research also highlights that the lack of teacher readiness acted as a barrier to the students' integration (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018). On the contrary, even though the majority of teachers felt that they were not supported, they perceived that Syrian students received sufficient support from them (Gagne et al., 2018). It is important to note here that this finding is based on the teachers' perceptions and the study did not use a specific criteria to assess the supports provided to Syrian students from teachers. Therefore, Syrian students' experiences and views may confirm or contradict this finding.

Social bonding is a key factor for refugee students' school integration (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2019). Using data collected from Canadian elementary teachers, Clark (2017) identified the importance of building positive and trusting student-teacher relationships to understand and meet the various needs of Syrian refugee students, including to support their sense of belonging. Teachers explained that the Syrian students with whom they had developed positive relationships were more well-behaved, were more comfortable sharing their stories, had more emotional growth, were more engaged in learning, and had more academic growth (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2017a; Ryeburn, 2016). They explained that focusing on social-emotional stability before cognitive growth facilitated an easier integration into school and supported trauma healing (Clark, 2017; Ryeburn, 2016). Teachers recommended incorporating music and artifacts from students' countries into the classroom, as these practices help to create a welcoming environment (Ryeburn, 2016). Additionally, the literature indicates that when students perceive being supported, it is also related to improved psychological health (Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017; Skidmore, 2016).

However, a few research studies (Busch et al., 2018; Gagne et al., 2018; Shamim, 2020) indicate that the majority of their Canadian teacher participants stated that Syrian refugee students at their school had strained relationships with teachers and that language barriers continue to present a significant social bonding challenge for them. Limited dominant language proficiency is repeatedly mentioned by Canadian teachers as a barrier to establishing relationships with Syrian students and their families and for parent involvement in their children's learning (Busch et al., 2018; Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018; Shamim, 2020). The demands of learning English and catching up academically to their peers in school can be overwhelming for most Syrian students (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Guo et al., 2019; Kaplan et al.,

2016, Marshall, 2017; Nofal, 2017). One teacher reports, “although [Syrian refugee students] are grateful to be in Canada, they sometimes say they feel they have exchanged one set of challenges for another” (Gagne et al., 2017a, p. 11). 36 percent of Gagne et al.’s (2018) participant teachers reported that Syrian students sit by themselves at lunch and school assemblies. They also reported that Syrian students are frequently disciplined through interventions such as timeouts because they are not able to express their ideas. A teacher shares a Syrian student’s perspective on this, “in the refugee camp she [the student] said ‘it was always the survival of the toughest and here I need to use my words instead of my hands, but how do I use my words if I don’t know them” (Gagne et al., 2018, p. 58). Teachers also mentioned hygiene, health, and school readiness as barriers to Syrian students’ social integration (Clark, 2017).

One home-room teacher spoke about the challenges she experienced in connecting with and motivating Syrian refugee students, “if you can’t communicate with your teacher then it’s that much harder for you to figure out how you’re going to connect and, therefore, how the teacher is going to help motivate you…” (Shamim, 2020, p. 30). Another teacher expressed, “these kids need to learn how to be Canadian. They have to adjust to us!” (Gagne et al., 2018, p. 61). Teachers reported observing their colleagues take Syrian students out of the classroom often because they “just couldn’t deal with it.” (Clark, 2017, p. 32). This teacher’s comments can be interpreted as if it is the student’s responsibility to “adjust”. This can be problematic as some students’ traumatic past experiences can make it challenging for them to build trusting relationships and integrate to their new school environment without help (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Hassan et al., 2016; Ryeburn, 2016; Skidmore, 2016). The teachers’ comments also do not indicate that they are making use of resources and support to meet the students’ needs. It is important that teachers understand that school integration is a two-way

process that requires mutual adjustments by both refugee students and teachers (Guo et al., 2019). Access to strong social support is an essential component of refugee students' wellbeing. Research on Syrian refugee students found that the ability to support them is affected by the teacher's ability to access resources and skills to build positive, respectful and trusting relationships with them (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2017a, 2018). Teachers explained that student driven activities that build upon students' assets and mutual respect helps foster strong relationships with Syrian refugee students (Clark, 2017).

Relationships with Syrian families is especially important as Syrian parents can also be affected by pre-migration experiences, finding it difficult to feel safe about leaving their children at school (Ryeburn, 2016). Language barriers continue to present a significant challenge for teachers when building relationships with Syrian families (Busch et al., 2018; Ryeburn, 2016). Teachers recommend making Syrian parents feel welcome by finding common ground with them, such as highlighting a shared identity of being parents and providing opportunities for them to share their knowledge and experiences (Gagne et al., 2017a; Ryeburn, 2016). A teacher shares the effectiveness of this strategy, "some parents shared their experiences with me because they knew that I too was a parent" (Gagne et al., 2017a, p. 13). Most teachers across various studies understood that refugee parents, like most parents, want to see their children succeed at school. However, several teachers also held negative views of Syrian parents, such as feeling that they didn't care about their children's school success (Gagne et al., 2018). Syrian parents' limited English proficiency was identified as the reason they were less involved in their children's schooling. When they have trouble communicating with teachers, they are less likely to inquire about school and support their children's academic development (Shamim, 2020).

In Ontario, interpreters are available at most urban schools and few rural schools. Through the support of interpreters, teachers are able to build relationships with Syrian students and their families and involve parents in their children's learning (Gagne et al., 2018). For example, one teacher in a rural area explained that he knew almost nothing about his Syrian students and their families because of the lack of interpreters at his school, while another teacher from an urban area reported building relationships with Syrian students and their families with the help of the school's interpreter (Gagne et al., 2018). When interpreters are unavailable, teachers depend on students, who may also be experience language barriers, for translation. Settlement workers are also available at most schools with large numbers of migrant students; however, most of them do not speak Arabic (Gagne et al., 2018). A teacher's concerns gives us a glimpse of the uneven provision of supports for Syrian refugee students, "the schools just say, 'oh well the [settlement worker] is busy, oh well the [settlement worker] doesn't speak Arabic'" (Gagne et al., 2018, p. 57). Teachers strongly endorsed settlement workers. Several teachers mentioned the positive impact of settlement workers in the integration of refugee students and called for additional settlement workers to be assigned in schools. Settlement workers were the only group that was consistently viewed as playing a central role in the integration of Syrian students in schools and being advocates for them (Gagne et al., 2018). Teachers described some of the contributions made by the settlement worker in their schools, "[a] Grade 8 student saw our settlement worker for help in dealing with traumatic memories and having no friends in Canada;" "teachers don't always have time to address individual needs… so, having the settlement worker to communicate the needs and possible strategies discussed with the student to the teacher is valuable;" "I have called upon [the settlement worker's] expertise for translating purposes, to

shed light on cultural information and to connect families to community services." (Gagne et al., 2018, p. 63).

Teachers viewed their colleagues' ability to speak Arabic as opening up channels of communication and fostering a safe environment for learning for Syrian students (Gagne et al., 2017a; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017). This perception is consistent with Syrian parents' perception about Arabic speakers at the school being able to support their children to overcome many challenges (Nofal, 2017). A non-Arabic speaking teacher shares their observations on the advantages of being able to speak Arabic, "one well-placed word [in Arabic] could become an encouragement, an explanation, a comfort…" (Gagne et al., 2017a, p. 14). School personnel who speak Arabic can help Syrian students connect with local students (Guo et al., 2019). Some schools are fortunate to be able to recruit teaching assistants and peer tutors who speak Arabic to work alongside teachers (Gagne et al., 2018). Teachers have such an influence on the lives of students that when communication between both parties breaks down, important wellbeing and integration needs go unmet. Therefore, it is important to consider ways to ensure that the relationships between teachers and Syrian students and their families are strengthened, such as through access to settlement workers and interpreters (Busch et al., 2018; Gagne et al., 2018).

Teachers indicated that Syrian refugee students generally understood mathematical concepts and were able to solve numerical problems; however, they were hampered by limited English proficiency when asked to solve language-based mathematical problems or to verbalize their thinking (Shamim, 2020). They also found that Syrian students were quieter than their peers in mainstream English classes, but Syrian students participated more fully when working one-on-one with the teacher, a partner, or in small groups in comparison to when working with the whole class (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018; Ryeburn, 2016; Shamim, 2020). Teachers felt that

the students would benefit more if they spoke English more frequently (Gagne et al., 2018). However, Syrian students spend most of their day in specialized English classes with other non-English speaking students and miss out on the opportunity to use their English language skills with local students (Guo et al., 2019; Ratković et al.,2017). Some teachers acknowledged that this dynamic forces Syrian students to interact only with other Arabic speaking students and prevents them from bonding with the local students (Clark, 2017). Others noted that segregating Syrian students into specialized classrooms can also be damaging to their self-esteem (Ryeburn, 2016). Taking this into consideration, some teachers incorporate adaptation into their classroom to help students experience more success. For example, some teachers set up partner or small group work as a means of facilitating communication between Syrian and local students. These facilitated peer interactions enable Syrian students to bond with their peers and to engage more in learning (Clark, 2017; Ryeburn, 2016; Shamim, 2020). 54 percent of Gagne et al.'s (2018) 40 participant teachers located in Ontario reported that Syrian students have begun to develop friendships and engage in conversations with local students, and 27 percent reported that Syrian students have begun to get involved in extra-curricular activities at school.

The countries where we have lived, the languages we speak, as well as our social class, race and religion impacts our effectiveness as teachers working with refugee students (Gagne et al., 2017a). The literature highlights the importance of teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices when it comes to supporting the integration of Syrian refugee students. The literature also reveals that there are gaps in most Canadian teachers' understanding about who Syrian refugees are, their experiences, and how best to support them in the classroom. Specifically, understanding the importance of refugee students' experiences, parent communication and trauma-informed practices were identified as gaps in Canadian teacher preparation (Ratković et

al., 2017). Some teachers also hold negative perspectives on and attitudes toward Syrian students due to knowledge gaps. Attitude is important, as teacher attitudes shape students' experiences as learners in schools (Gagne et al., 2018). Based on this, teachers encourage their colleagues working with refugee children to explore how their views and attitudes influence their practices by actively engaging with the axes of privilege and oppression, so that they would be able to better adapt to the changing student needs (Gagne et al., 2017a; 2018).

The need for teachers to rethink their role and the nature of the relationships between the schools, families, and communities, and to modify their pedagogy is greater than ever before. Mandatory training to deepen teacher understanding of how trauma impacts learning and to prepare them to support the specific learning needs of refugee students necessitates attention and action (Gagne et al., 2017b, 2018; Shamim, 2020). Teachers who understand the effects of trauma can create trauma sensitive learning environments (Busch et al., 2018; Gagne et al., 2018). Trainings with critically oriented tasks that enhance teachers' understandings of refugee learners' unique experiences, needs and how these have been informed by intersecting sociocultural-political-historical elements is key to creating opportunities for teachers to question their assumptions about refugee students and enable them to develop culturally responsive pedagogy (Busch et al., 2018; Gagne et al., 2018). Engaging teachers experientially with student stories enables key messages about refugees to be received directly from the students themselves and for teachers to develop particular, practical and critical approaches that vary depending on the context and the student. Further, these trainings encourage notions of refugee students that move beyond stereotypes, to acknowledging their complex individual identities with myriad goals for the future. It encourages teachers to move away from a deficit perspective on refugee

children and towards one befitting the children's strengths and abilities (Gagne et al., 2017b, 2018; Tweedie et al., 2017).

In addition to education and preparation, teachers also recommended establishing comprehensive and ongoing support for all refugee students (Gagne et al., 2017b). They shared that providing a setting where refugee students feel included and safe physically, socially, emotionally and academically is essential (Gagne et al., 2017a, 2018; Ratković et al., 2017; Ryeburn, 2016). Related to the above recommendation, some schools have turned resource rooms into safe spaces where students can go if they need some time away from the classroom, and need a safe space to express their experiences, concerns, and feelings (Ryeburn, 2016). Teachers explained that practices that benefitted refugee students, also benefited those students who were not refugees (Clark, 2017; Skidmore, 2016). When specialized pedagogies were implemented, teachers noted that refugee students appeared happier, displayed more enthusiasm about being at school, and developed language skills (Clark, 2017).

The next section will discuss how digital storytelling is suitable for enhancing teachers' understandings of refugee students' experiences and needs; promotes critical thinking; and enables them to move towards a strength-based pedagogy.

Digital Storytelling

In this section, I will start off by defining digital storytelling (DST) and then review the literature relevant to identify refugee children's and teachers' experiences with DST.

According to the Center for Digital Storytelling (n.d.), the term 'Digital Storytelling' would be defined as a narrative form in which any individual can document and share a meaningful life experience and their ideas or feelings by creating a short story using digital

means. It is a multi-media art practice developed by Joe Lambert (2010) that has been adapted predominantly as an arts-based research method when working with marginalized groups (de Jager et al., 2017). Using the DST method, participants engage in a range of literacy and arts-based practices, including sharing narratives in the tradition of oral storytelling, writing stories that are then audio recorded, collecting, and digitizing still and moving images, and combining all of these elements in a non-linear digital environment. Through the process of DST, participants produce two- to five-minute-long multimedia art works that can be screened like videos and that reflect a range of approaches to personal narrative and storytelling (Lambert, 2010).

DST is about listening, promoting community, trust, and closer emotional ties. DST workshops represent a semi-formal, community- and arts-based learning experience through which participants develop intimate learning communities; explore issues of social identity and difference; and improve oral, written and computer literacy skills (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010; Lambert, 2010). Story circles are an important community-building part of the workshops. The DST process encourages the emergence of unexpected or untold stories by eliciting multiple iterations of story through the story circle, script writing, and video editing, and by providing contexts for telling one's story and listening to others (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010).

Refugee Children's Digital Storytelling Experiences

Misperceptions in the dominant culture around who Syrian refugee children are and what they need are problematic because they rely on the assumption that social relations of power and social differences for an entire population group can be unambiguously categorized and understood transparently. Refugees are frequently portrayed as a population of passive victims, a burden for the host society, and potential criminals. Similarly, in schools, teachers focus on what

refugee children lack and ignore the knowledge and strengths they have to offer. Here, Syrian refugee children's narratives can be used as a tool to provide a more accurate perspective, to surface, challenge, and overcome negative stereotypes, biases, and assumptions. Their counter-narratives are crucial to challenging the largely negative and deficit-focused mainstream connotations attached to the label "refugee" (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; de Jager et al., 2017; O'Connor, n.d.). It is critical that they are provided opportunities to share their complex histories and realities. Their narratives not only provide evidence of their struggles, sacrifices, memories, what they find important in their own lives, but also stresses the power dynamics involved in their lives crossing borders, cultures and languages (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; Darvin & Norton, 2014; de Jager et al., 2017; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022; Pandya et al., 2015). Their narratives are their view of their life stories; it is their view of their experiences, identity, relationships, needs, strengths, and aspirations. This is a version that recognizes both their marginalized positioning in their host countries, a positioning attributable to their limited English proficiency, ethnicity, race, and refugee status, and their place as valuable members of local communities and change agents for a more equitable society.

Barber and Ramsay (2017) advise teachers to remember the importance of allowing refugee children to speak back, to respect their experiences, and resist the stories that simplify or idealize resettlement. Emerging research has highlighted that DST is an effective multimodal method when attempting to understand the lived experiences of children who have faced adversity, as it creates a safe space for children to reflect critically and to express their marginalized views, including the production of counter-narratives that challenge the deficit perspective of refugee children (Brown et al., 2020; D'Amico et al., 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2014; de Jager et al., 2017; Emert, 2014a, 2019). It extends possibilities for children's agencies

in authoring complex, difficult and abstract aspects of their lived experiences, feelings, identities, and social worlds. It allows children to present their experiences in contexts of reduced stress, and to promote activism and empowerment. Children create content that is relevant and meaningful for them and their communities, and leads to better ways of understanding themselves and their experiences (Brown et al., 2020; Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010; Chen, 2015; Darvin & Norton, 2014; de Jager et al., 2017; De Vecchi et al., 2016; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Vasudevan, 2006; Wexler et al., 2013). One refugee boy simply stated when asked about his digital story, "it gave me a chance to express myself through a movie" (Emert, 2013, p. 364).

The multimodal composition of DST makes it a powerful pedagogical tool that helps meet refugee children's self-authoring needs. It is suited for children of varying language abilities and learning needs as it provides different entry points into experience, enabling all children to feel capable of participating. While some children can be particularly skillful in crafting a story through words, others may be good at choosing images, finding the right music, matching the different elements, and using digital tools. DST uses visual and experiential art to understand, address, and engage with the content, it enables children to access their rich communicative repertoires and express their knowledge and identities more fully in spite of language barriers (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2014; de Jager et al., 2017; Emert, 2014a, 2014b; Fenty & Anderson, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; O'Connor, n.d.; Pandya et al., 2015; Vasudevan et al., 2010). Researchers have discovered that, though refugee children struggle with pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension in more traditional learning situations, the DST workshop environment provided a learning space in which they were engaged, fearless, and deeply

committed to producing quality digital stories (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; Emert, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2019; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). Refugee children explained that the multimodal elements of DST, such as visual and audial modes, refreshed their memories, helped them to communicate complex experiences and feelings they had experienced during difficult times in their life and construct their identities in an agentive manner. They were able to make visible the more intangible aspects of their identity, needs, strengths, and aspirations when they created meaning by combining a full range of semiotic modes (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Pandya et al., 2015). For example, Johnson and Kendrick's (2017) case study of an Iraqi refugee adolescent described how he used semiotic modes to express difficult experiences and feelings, "just when you listen [to the music], you understand what I'm saying" (p. 672), Emert's (2013) high school participants shared that selecting the 'right' image allowed them to express the language of their poems and the 'perfect' music allowed them to convey the tone and their intention, and Chen's (2015) participants found that even with their linguistic barriers, they were able to assert their identities through images and music. The literature notes that refugee children are able to produce digital stories that powerfully and compellingly depict their identities and experiences that they want to show others, in a way they have not accomplished to this degree before.

DST compels refugee children to interpret, organize and prioritize to make meaning of scattered events. Therefore, this child-led production can be an empowering and transformative experience, and a form of trauma intervention, due to its potential for meaningful engagement with lived experiences (Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016; Gagne et al., 2017b; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; O'Connor, n.d.). When working with semiotic modes and their respective cognitive and affective qualities, it

challenges refugee children to reflect critically on their experiences through the lens of different modes and to selectively pick narrative details in order to convey distinct meanings. For example, when representing emotions visually, it required refugee children to reflect about how the experience made them feel, identify, and label the complex emotions that they had experienced, so that they could use these labels as search keywords to search for images that represented those emotions. This led to opportunities to develop intrapersonal insights, such as a more overt recognition of the range of emotions in their experiences. The process of choosing an appropriate image further involved considering which image best represented their own experience of that emotion through design elements such as color, light and foregrounding (de Jager et al., 2017; Emert, 2013; Johnson, 2014). Similarly, when representing experiences audially, it required them to develop a deeper sensitivity to their shifting moods and the defining moments within their experience, so that they could select music that consists of tempo and melody that represented the experience accurately (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017).

As mentioned, the process of thoughtfully engaging with different semiotic modes within a DST project can shed new light for refugee children on their experiences and on themselves, helping to enhance self-confidence and build positive identities. The iterative process of reflection on experiences can change attitudes and beliefs about personal challenges, accomplishments and strengths (Brown et al., 2020; Emert, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2019; Gagne et al., 2017b; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; O'Connor, n.d.; Pandya et al., 2015). For Johnson and Kendrick's (2017) participant, the DST project on his migration experiences helped nurture him with a heightened awareness of his resilience, and for Chen's (2015) and Emert's (2014b) participants, their DST projects on their migration changed their perception of self so they came to view themselves as experts on their own lives. Children's digital stories have the

ability to change not only their views but also the audience's views, so they come to understand the children as competent producers and mobilizers of knowledge (Brown et al., 2020).

Given the complexity in refugee children's realities, teachers should focus on the most immediate obstacles: acquiring English language skills while valuing home languages, and building trusting relationships and creating environments to reduce trauma (Barber & Ramsay, 2017). A particular strength of the DST process is that it can be used to facilitate writing through scripts and storyboards (Chen, 2015; Emert, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Figg & McCartney, 2010; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). The DST process brought depth to refugee children's writing as it demanded that they renegotiate their own texts, revisit ideas and revise for clarity. As a result, children re-read their own writing repeatedly, becoming intimately familiar with imagery, the characters, and most importantly the language (Emert, 2013; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). One child shared about his DST process when creating a storyboard, "when I start, I just write my story, but when I listened to the music and when I see the picture, I realize I need to change some. I didn't change what happened to me there, but I just change the words or the way how I'll say it" (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017, p. 673). This statement indicates how the child's repeated interaction with his writing offered opportunities to fine-tune meanings he was attempting to convey. Refugee children shared that creating digital stories pushed them to use their growing knowledge of how to compose in English, especially how to make thoughtful choices about vocabulary and meaning (Emert, 2013, 2014a). At the end of the DST project, children felt they had improved in their knowledge of English and had also gained valuable literary and technology skills, such as critical thinking and collaborative work (Chen, 2015).

The process of producing digital stories while learning new technology boosts the confidence of refugee children as speakers, readers, writers, and digital compositionists. Many of

them admitted that they were often afraid to participate in group discussions or speak out loud in their classes. However, working alongside their DST project group, the children were compelled to practice their speaking and writing (Chen, 2015; O'Connor, n.d.). Over the course of Emert's (2014a) DST project, refugee children demonstrated a marked decrease in their anxiety about producing digital stories and introducing them to an audience. Social interactions within the DST project group became effortless, despite differences in age, ethnicity, academic preparation, and proficiency in English. The children frequently consulted each other or facilitators with questions, stopped their own work to admire someone else's, and assisted each other with trouble shooting and sharing tips (Emert, 2013).

It is evident that the benefits of DST exceed the bounds of the classroom. Bringing DST into schools not only enables refugee children to share their experiences and knowledge, but it also plays a significant role in advancing their literacy, academic achievement, technology skills, self-expression, sense of empowerment and positive identity. Importantly, it provides them with a possibility of reducing trauma as they transition to their new lives (Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Barber & Ramsay, 2017; D'Amico et al., 2016; de Jager et al., 2017; De Vecchi et al., 2016; Gagne et al., 2017b; Loe, 2013; Stacey & Hardy, 2011; Vasudevan, 2006).

Teachers' Digital Storytelling Experiences

This section will discuss preservice and practicing teachers' experiences with DST as storytellers, audiences and facilitators. A discussion of how DST is suitable for creating awareness, for promoting critical thinking about assumptions, beliefs and attitudes, and for enabling teachers to move towards a strength-based pedagogy will also be included.

Digital stories, rich in content and highly interesting, stimulate the imagination of the storyteller and the audience and evoke our senses as a story comes to life in our minds.

Researchers have made the important point that DST is a knowledge producing tool and that teachers' attitudes, beliefs and dispositions are influenced by it (Alcantud-Diaz, 2016; Challinor et al., 2017; de Jager et al., 2017; Dion, 2018; Emert, 2014b; Gregori-Signes, 2014; Tur et al., 2016; Pappamihiel et al., 2017). Kajee's (2018) study found that preservice teachers were able to reconstruct their identities through DST. The opportunity to narrate their stories gave them agency, and their stories, in turn, shaped their social realities. One participant had this to say about his narrative, "usually no one cares of who you are and how you got here. This story gives you a chance, you feel like someone is listening to you. You are not a nobody" (Kajee, 2018, p. 5). Teachers realized that their digital stories could provide connections with their students. They shared that digital media made it easier to express themselves and allowed them to capture the essence of their cultures, identities, who they were and what they valued (Long, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2016). In line with Kajee (2018), Marin et al.'s (2018) study also found that DST is a suitable strategy to enhance the construction of professional identity in preservice teachers. It helped them develop a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a professional in the education field. Similarly, Gagne et al.'s (2017a) study with teachers as DST project facilitators and Syrian refugee children as storytellers found the DST experience produced insights for teachers related to children's diverse backgrounds and the ways in which children negotiate their evolving identities. It also highlighted the connections between their own experiences of privilege and marginalization and their work with Syrian refugees. One teacher participant in Gagne et al.'s (2017a) study stated how the DST facilitation process helped them to rediscover themselves and understand the impact of their upbringing and life experiences on their unique professional identity with a clearer understanding of how they negotiate societal forces and forms of discrimination as a result of various identity markers, either ascribed or self-assigned.

The reflective nature of DST fosters deeper levels of reflection. This, in turn, helps teacher identities evolve to ones that are more social, cultural and politically aware, social values-driven and cognizant of the realities within the education field (Alcantud-Diaz, 2016; Challinor et al., 2017; Gagne et al., 2017a; Long, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2016; Tur et al., 2016). DST encourages social reflection on what is happening around us, which helps us develop a more heightened awareness of the topic of the DST project and supports collaborative learning and critical thinking, since the final product transmits a critical perspective on the topic itself (Alcantud-Diaz, 2016; Gregori-Signes, 2014). Teachers found creating digital stories to be motivating, meaningful and worthwhile (Long, 2011).

While teachers felt that creating digital stories enhanced their reflection skills, researchers have found some digital stories to be mostly descriptive with limited reflection. This was noted as being due to the particular study's DST process not being formulated in a way that allowed for deep reflection (Long, 2011). Starcic et al. (2016) argue that there is a danger of becoming overwhelmed with the technical possibilities of DST style composition, which can take away significant attention from meaning-making processes that support learning of new concepts. Within my own exhaustive DST literature review, Starcic et al.'s (2016) argument was found to be the only instance of this potential con of using DST was mentioned.

Not only is DST useful for teachers' reconstruction of their identities, it can also be used by them to begin to understand their diverse students, such as refugee students, and help them develop (or reinforce) positive beliefs (and extinguish negative beliefs) about diverse populations (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Emert, 2014b; Pappamihiel et al., 2017). It has the potential to impact the perceptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, behavior and practice teachers may hold relative to their understanding (Starcic et al., 2016; Walters et al., 2011). Pappamihiel et al.'s

(2017) and Bissell and Korteweg's (2016) studies demonstrate how students' digital stories had a positive influence on the teachers' views of their identity. After viewing students' digital stories, teachers indicated a strong sense of understanding of the unique personalities and strengths of the students and felt respect and responsibility toward them. Teachers also showed a positive shift towards the importance of helping diverse students feel like they are part of the classroom community. Teachers expressed a strong belief that DST was an excellent vehicle for improving their understandings of the students" knowledge (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Garcia & Rossiter, 2010). They found the process of reflection embedded within DST to support their social, cultural and political awareness (Alismail, 2015; de Jager et al., 2017; Walters et al., 2011). Through these findings it is evident that the benefits of DST are extended to the audience (Alexandra, 2014; Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Dion, 2018; Gagne et al., 2017b; Loe, 2013; Ribeiro, 2016; Rice & Mundel, 2018; Vasudevan, 2006).

Storytelling is often applied as a pedagogical strategy for facilitating teacher engagement in transformative pedagogical work (Starcic et al., 2016). Similarly, DST has been highlighted as a learning tool, engaging teachers and their students. Teachers found that the DST process encouraged and facilitated collaborative communication between them and their students and disrupted the power hierarchies of a typical classroom, helping them engage with students more meaningfully and establish authentic relationships (Alismail, 2015; Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Figg & McCartney, 2010; Gagne et al., 2017a; de Jager et al., 2017). Language learning is implicated in relations of power, in the sense that dominant language proficiency provides individuals with the capacity to reorganize who they are and how they relate to the world, and claim access to communities, social networks and resources (Darvin & Norton, 2014). Therefore, the potential of DST to disrupt power hierarchies is especially relevant for refugee students, who

are often language learners in their host country. Teachers that facilitated DST projects remarked on the sense of community felt by participants (i.e. students) and facilitators (i.e. teachers) within the DST project (Figg & McCartney, 2010).

Research shows that teachers' familiarity, confidence and skills in integrating technology into the curriculum are dependent on education programs that provide technology-rich experiences throughout all aspects of training. Creating digital stories has been found to have a positive effect on teachers' computer technology literacy skills, critical thinking, problem solving, planning, self-control, responsibility, production, communication, cooperation, and collaboration (Alcantud-Diaz, 2016; Challinor at al., 2017; Figg & McCartney, 2010; Marin et al., 2018; Sancar-Tokmak et al., 2014; Starcic et al., 2016). Within the duration of DST projects, teachers went from being passive recipients of technology to active producers of media content. They felt that they developed technology competency, multimodal literacy and composition through designing digital stories (Long, 2011; Sancar-Tokmak et al., 2014; Starcic et al., 2016).

Teachers that have facilitated DST projects in their classrooms described it as being a useful tool for all teaching areas. They said that their students began to perceive themselves as more competent writers, displayed greater interest in learning, were motivated to work on and complete their stories while working collaboratively, felt empowered, had an increase in self-confidence, and were better behaved in class (Alismail, 2015; Darvin & Norton, 2014; Foley, 2013; Yuksel et al., 2011). Teachers found that the use of DST not only satisfies curricular expectations for improving understanding of subject area knowledge, writing skills, research skills, technical skills and presentation skills, but provides them with an opportunity to engage at-risk students in learning environments that strengthen self-esteem (Figg & McCartney, 2010; Gagne et al., 2017b; Starcic et al., 2016). They also indicated that it allows students to improve

their language, reflection, critical thinking, problem-solving, creative and social skills (Yuksel et al., 2011). All of these factors show the importance of using DST to support learning.

Moving onto the present study's focus on Syrian refugee children, it is important to highlight that as they make their way into Canadian classrooms, teachers become the frontline for addressing their complex needs. Studies on the issue of teaching about refugees in teacher education found that even though teachers are the lynchpins in providing culturally responsive education for refugee students, teacher education programmes often give short shrift to issues of cultural and linguistic diversity (Barber & Ramsay, 2017; Gagne et al., 2017b). The power of storytelling with teachers, the need to recognise and reaffirm the complex identities of refugee students, and the centrality of engaging teachers in a critical praxis that moves beyond practice to facilitate transformation, has been identified as significant elements of teacher education (Gagne et al., 2017b). Enhancing teachers' understandings of refugee students' unique situations and how these have been informed by intersecting sociocultural-political-historical elements is key to developing a responsive pedagogy. Engaging teachers experientially with refugee students' realities enables key messages about refugees to be received directly from the students themselves, and for teachers to develop particular, practical and critical approaches that vary depending on the student (Barber & Ramsay, 2017; Gagne et al., 2017b).

DST can be used as a powerful tool in bridging encounters between refugee students and teachers. As stated above, students' digital stories allow teachers to share their students' experiences, expand their own perspective and facilitate connections with students. The stories amplify students' views, personal histories and strengths in a way that is more accessible for teachers. They serve to disrupt assumed pedagogical practices of imaginary student characteristics while shaping their teaching based on the reciprocation of sharing life stories

(lived knowledge) and listening deeply to the voices, knowledge and strengths of their students. Disrupting assumed pedagogical practices can help teachers pay closer attention to the resilient identities and unique sources of knowledge that students bring to the classroom (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Garcia & Rossiter, 2010). When teachers recognize that students come with specific transnational identities, that is, identities that negotiate complex networks of values, ideologies, cultures, knowledge and competencies, this shapes students' learning experiences to be more positive, to one where students gain a sense of belonging (Darvin & Norton, 2014).

Based on the mentioned merits of DST, I believe that it can promote notions of Syrian refugee children that acknowledge their complex individual identities with myriad goals for the future. Through DST, educators may be able to acknowledge refugee children's myriad strengths, such as their funds of knowledge, resilience, dedication, and strong families. Therefore, assisting Syrian refugee children's construction of their resettlement experiences through digital stories seems like an effective method of supporting educators' understandings of their views. When educators actively seek to understand the meanings that children have assigned to elements of their digital story, they can gain a much deeper and broader understanding of the children's identities, strengths, learning needs, and conceptual understandings, as well as how they make sense of their complex previous experiences (Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017).

Summary

The first part of the literature review focused on examining Syrian refugee children's pre- and post-migration experiences. This overview of relevant literature reveals insights and identifies gaps in our understanding of Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences in Canada as told from their own perspectives. The limited research with them focus only on their

transition to schools and not on their out-of-school resettlement experiences (Ayoub, 2020; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017). There is a need for research with this young Syrian population that focuses on their views on their out-of-school resettlement experiences. As nations grapple with how to address the needs of this young population, it is critical we listen to them and support efforts to share their lived experiences. This highlights the importance of the current study's first research question, w*hat perspectives on their resettlement experiences in Ontario do Syrian refugee children share through their digital stories?* This study addressed some of this research gap by engaging, collecting and documenting the critical dimensions of Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences in Ontario. It was an opportunity for the children to present their views. Inclusion of their voices provides us with a nuanced understanding of how they perceive their resettlement experiences in Ontario.

If refugee children's voices are to be amplified and they are to be given an authentic opportunity to share their views, then researchers are compelled to create the conditions where their voices will be actively listened to by those who have the power to support and improve their well-being, such as educators (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Brown et al., 2020). Therefore, an aim of this research project was to give Syrian refugee children the opportunity to present their resettlement experiences through digital stories and to bring awareness to their realities to educators. DST can empower refugee children by giving them the means to define themselves to their audience (Brown et al., 2020; Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010; Chen, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2014; de Jager et al., 2017; De Vecchi et al, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Vasudevan, 2006). It is precisely because of this potential that I implemented this DST project with Syrian refugee children and educators.

Researchers that use DST methodologies consistently talk about the power of telling one's own story, of being heard, and of listening to the stories of others. They state that the process often promotes mutual understanding of and empathy towards lived experiences. They have found that storytellers and audiences were able to make deep and arguably life-changing connections to one another across great linguistic and cultural differences (De Vecchi et al., 2016; Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010). Therefore, the last section of the literature review focused on examining the impact of DST on teachers, specifically, the impact on their beliefs about refugee children. However, this was another gap in the literature. Although research has begun to document the importance of using DST methodologies, information on their applicability with educators and refugee children remains in its infancy. Marin et al. (2018) recommends that future research create opportunities for the exchange of ideas between students and educators, which could uncover the impact that DST has on the development of practice. This highlights a need to evaluate new teaching and learning approaches, such as DST, that facilitate understanding among educators to inform change and enhance practice. This study addresses this gap in the literature by investigating the efficacy of DST in eliciting stories of resettlement of Syrian refugee children, the perceived impact on educators facilitating a DST project, and the pedagogical potential of DST to support educators' understanding about refugee children. The study was designed to provide a meaningful and transformative experience for both the children and educators.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will outline the theoretical framework that shaped my perspective throughout my research design, data collection, analysis and writing. Focusing on the issues of teaching and learning in culturally diverse settings and exploring the potential of digital storytelling to address these issues, this research study is grounded in a hybrid theoretical framework of new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). These theories provide a conceptual framework through which to develop a broader sociocultural and sociopolitical consciousness that allows for the critique of cultural norms and values, such as dominant understandings of knowledge and the status quo. This hybrid theoretical framework will be used to examine and gain a nuanced understanding how Syrian refugee children perceive their resettlement experiences and how the children and educators experience the digital storytelling project.

It is important to note that while Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory provides a potentially powerful lens for examining children's and educators' experiences with the digital storytelling project, critical pedagogy's philosophy of transformative learning, wherein the inseparable processes of personal and social transformation are tied to fuller consciousness of oppressive forces so as to transform relations of power, offers a better foundation for the present study. Critical pedagogy's influential view of education as a way to develop critical consciousness and transform the world has inspired many, including myself.

New Sociology of Childhood

The perspective on children that a researcher works with has important implications for their research practice. It influences the choice of methods (including the researcher's role), the

analysis and interpretation of data as well as ethical practice (Christensen & Prout, 2002). As I am seeking to explore Syrian refugee children's perspectives on their resettlement experiences in Ontario and their experiences of creating digital stories on their resettlement, it is important for me to openly analyse my conceptualisation of children. As I explain below, my views of children align with those of the new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997). For these reasons the study's theoretical framework is founded on this.

The sociology of childhood sits within the theoretical framework of critical theory, which seeks to address injustices within society. It establishes childhood as a social construction and recognizes it as a complex and ambiguous phenomenon. It seeks to establish children as subjects and as social actors of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are seen to act, take part in, change and become changed by the social and cultural world they live in (Prout & James, 1997). Children are recognized as having voice, agency and standpoint. Their lives, social relationships and cultures are seen as worthy of study (Prout, 2002).

Researchers using the sociology of childhood framework argue that children are not passive recipients of social norms (Ayoub, 2020; Barnikis, 2015; Luttrell, 2010). They travel across national boundaries, with their histories, ideas, cultures, and are actively and creatively engaged in creating their own identities and those of others and the events impacting upon their lives. Children facilitate their understanding of the complex dynamics that shape their relationships and interactions with adults and the adult world and construct their own cultural experiences (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022; Shamim, 2020; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017). This is reflected in my research purpose, which seeks to recognize Syrian refugee children as competent experts with agency.

Children's lives and welfare are often investigated from the perspectives of adults. Studies with children acknowledge that adult and child perspectives can vary considerably in that adults often have a narrow comprehension of children's perceptions and experiences (Mishra Tarc, 2016), and children's perspectives present a counter narrative to social life, where it often appears differently from how it looks from an adult perspective (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Luttrell, 2010; Prout, 2002). This highlights a fundamental problem of needs assessment: what adults think is important may neglect what the children think is important. The sociology of childhood promotes the questioning of taken-for-granted adult assumptions and ideas about children and allows for children's worldviews and ways of knowing and being to be recognized and valued. Children are seen to have valuable insights and perspectives to offer on many aspects of their lives. They are seen to have a voice in matters from which they were once excluded (Grieshaber, 2007; Prout, 2011; Prout & James, 1997).

The literature overwhelmingly recommends that researchers should actively seek to give voice and agency to the silenced and forcibly displaced child population by minimizing adult voice on their experiences and focus on their insider views and sophisticated understandings of their experiences (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Luttrell, 2010; Mishra Tarc, 2020; 2022). The sociology of childhood provides a forum to document children's own actions, perspectives and experiences across a range of issues, primarily approaching children as informants and treating them as competent commentators on their own lives. Children are engaged in research as a subject acting in the world, rather than objects of enquiry that are acted upon by others (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Prout, 2002). Studies using sociological methods aimed at lifting children's voices through the gathering and documenting of their experiences have found startling insider views and sophisticated understandings on matters that concern their daily lives, including articulation of

their own agendas (Ayoub, 2020; Barnikis, 2015; Guo et al., 2019). Mishra Tarc (2016, 2020, 2022), whose work focuses on displaced children, states that children's expression and testimony can act as a profound and compelling form of social and political thought. Building on this work, my research purpose is to establish Syrian refugee children as an important source of insight and knowledge on their lived experiences. This is why my research seeks to explore how children experience resettlement first-hand, from the children themselves, thereby honouring and acknowledging their experiences and their insights.

The sociology of childhood rejects the notion that children experience childhood universally and seeks to establish "a variety of childhoods rather than a single and universal phenomenon" (Prout & James, 1997, p. 8). Each child sees and speaks from multiple, combined and intersecting positions of class, gender, ethnicity, disability and so on (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Prout, 2002). Children's experiences are personally and emotionally experienced, playfully co-constructed, and silently negotiated (Mishra Tarc, 2016). In line with this, my study seeks to explore the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee children in Ontario and does not seek to generalize these resettlement experiences as universal of all refugee children.

Key to the sociology of childhood child-centered perspective is that it recognizes the child as a person with subjectivity and as an active participant in the research process, as they are in societal life (Christensen & Prout, 2002). By listening to Syrian refugee children's narratives and valuing the ways in which they perceive their lived experiences, including their resettlement experiences during the Syrian war, this study aims to move past objectifying children in research, to acknowledging them as competent experts in their own ideas and experiences. Prout (2011) states that research on children's perspectives needs to consider the ways in which their voice might be more effectively heard. There is much to learn about ways of enabling children to speak

for themselves and in their own way. Too often children are expected to fit into adult ways of participating, when what is needed are methods that encourage and facilitate children's voice. Unfortunately, children's participation is a subject high in rhetoric but sometimes low in practical application. Children's perspectives can be nurtured, accurately captured and effectively heard through digital storytelling (Gagne et al., 2018; Pappamihiel et al., 2017). With an increased responsibility to meet the needs of refugee children, their perceptions of their histories, needs and aspirations provide significant information on how educators can meet their needs.

Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky was regarded as a 'social constructionist' as he emphasized the social aspect of children constructing their learning. He supported the idea that all knowledge is joint-mediated and co-constructed through social interaction, and children create themselves out of the social and cultural ideas available to them in their particular environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's child is context dependent, where they respond to the reality they see and experience around them, and what they learn reflects their reality. In this way, he recognized that children are cultural participants and co-constructors of knowledge, and culture is transmitted through social interactions and collaborative dialogue (Mahn, 1999).

The sociocultural theoretical framework that underpins all stages of this research is tied to this thinking of Vygotsky's. This framework emphasizes the strong influence of social and cultural factors on learning by placing people in living situations in their world and views them from within their cultural, social, and political settings. Rather than living in isolation, people are a part of a bigger social context that involves their social, political, and cultural worlds (Vygotsky, 1978). It assumes a direct relationship between social practices and individual

functioning (Dockrell et al., 2005). Vygotsky states that learning does not happen in isolation, rather all understandings of the world is a result of interactions between people, after which through a process of internalizing the learning, it is individually experienced. Here, all learning is seen as a continuous process of social interactions and negotiations with others. Within sociocultural theory, individuals learn most effectively by engaging meaningfully with more knowledgeable others, who guide their learning and the process of meaning-making through social interactions (Dockrell et al., 2005). Through this understanding, to construct new knowledge, more knowledgeable others are crucial, as everything learnt is from the negotiation of different points of view with them.

Sociocultural theory provides a valuable framework for shaping pedagogy. Rooted in Vygotskian principles, this approach views teaching and learning as collaborative processes aimed at achieving shared understanding (Mahn, 1999). Both children and adults benefit from social collaboration. The theory emphasizes the significance of identity, who we are, conceived through concepts of being and belonging, with identity shaped by interactions (De Leeuw & Rydin, 2007). This interplay between individual and collective knowledge within a community is both dynamic and complex.

Vygotsky sought methods of teaching and learning that drew on people's experiences. Through a sociocultural lens, educators recognize that children exist within their sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts, allowing them to tailor their practices to reflect students' realities. In this way, children become knowledgeable contributors, sharing insights about their lived experiences. Ladson-Billings (1995) underscores the importance of students' cultures and histories in educational settings, noting that learning falters when there is a disconnect between home and school cultures. This understanding hinges on how educators and students engage in

specific activities, utilize available tools, and draw on social networks from their communities, as well as how they navigate and value local discourses. This is not to say that discontinuities between home and school cannot be part of the learning process. Indeed, an analysis of relationships between homes, in particular minority homes, and schools can bring into sharp relief the integral role played by plurality and difference, indeed, incommensurability, whether as a multiplicity of distinguishable agendas across stakeholder groups (Ippolito, 2020); an interplay of distinct discourses around processes of knowledge production (Ippolito, 2018); and competing views on the connection between thresholds of English language ability and Canadian citizenship (Ippolito, 2021).

A sociocultural perspective deeply values the rich cultural knowledge and experiences that refugee children bring from their homes and communities (Gonzālez et al., 2013). Each refugee child carries unique histories, and it is essential for educators to create opportunities for them to reflect, share, and engage in dialogue about their experiences with peers and educators. For many refugee children, their understanding of the world is largely shaped by their pre-migration experiences. When educators help them build on this prior knowledge, their learning becomes more relevant and meaningful. Vygotsky's idea that a child's development is context-dependent encourages educators to see refugee children as situated within specific historical and social contexts. By supporting connections to their histories and prior experiences, educators are more likely to effectively address the children's needs in both the short and long term.

Guided by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, I anticipated that the digital storytelling project would promote social interactions that foster meaning-making and learning opportunities for both the Syrian refugee children creating digital stories and the educators facilitating the project. This proved to be true: the project enabled educators to reflect on and

engage with the children about their resettlement experiences in Ontario, challenging preconceived notions about their identities. The digital storytelling process fostered practices that supported effective and inclusive learning environments for the Syrian refugee children.

Critical Pedagogy

As mentioned previously, the study's theoretical framework is based on the new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and is defined by critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). The critical pedagogy lens extends the sociology of childhood and sociocultural theories, and serves as the umbrella framework encompassing them. Critical pedagogy extends both theories by building on the concept of individual meaning making through social interaction and emphasizing that individual understandings of social structures should also include understandings of the interdependence and interconnections of our social, cultural and political worlds (Freire, 1970, 1974; Giroux, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). It recognizes that there is a "dialectical relationship between [the] cultural existence [of] individuals and [their] political and economic existence as social beings" (Darder, 2003, p.568). Critical pedagogy helps individuals understand their own history and culture and how they fit into and also shape social structures.

Critical pedagogy has taken a central place in education, transforming education practices around the world, including higher education, educator preparation, and professional education. Many educators committed to social justice turn to critical pedagogy as a way of rethinking the purpose of education and embracing fundamental social change as its core goal. It is invaluable in permitting individuals to examine the social construction of power hierarchies; in revealing hidden oppressions within institutions; and in recognizing the underlying political, social, and economic foundations of society (Kincheloe, 1999; McLaren, 2003). Critical pedagogy

represents a theory where thought and action merge to create social reform and liberation (Giroux, 2013; McLaren, 2003; Ryoo et al., 2009). Through the help of education, individuals think carefully about present conditions and decide to act for change.

Critical pedagogy frames the traditional model of education, the *banking model*, as biased and reflecting of existing capitalist, racist, and patriarchist systems, and continually reinforcing white supremacy (Darder, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Freire (1970, 1974) describes the banking model of education as one where the educator-student relationship is unidirectional and the student functions as an open repository, where dominant narratives are framed as knowledge are being deposited by the educator to the student. This model devalues and marginalizes students' voice and life experience by limiting knowledge to learning gained within classrooms (Giroux, 2013; hooks, 2003; Kincheloe, 1999; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

To counteract the role of the banking curriculum in sustaining dominance and privilege, critical pedagogy suggests using student voice and experiences to reveal types of discrimination that are implicit in curriculum when only certain content and perspectives are included. Educators are encouraged not to project their own worldview on students but rather to engage in dialogue with the acknowledgement that the student's view of the world reflects their own reality (Freire, 1970, 1974). Within this practice, dialogue is employed as a pedagogical method in juxtaposition to knowledge transmission and oppression/domination (Giroux, 2013; Kincheloe, 1999; McLaren, 2003). Education is seen as not only about the educator imparting knowledge; rather, it involves both educators and students as subjects. It is about a willingness to be vulnerable to, and to be taught and change by, the lives we face. Additionally, these understandings should be followed by a reciprocal exchange and a willingness for action in ways that would meet the learner where they are (Mishra Tarc, 2019). Critical pedagogy works to

create schools as arenas of liberation that are concerned with multiple sources of knowledge; build student capacity to understand power relations so as to recognize the underlying political, social, and economic foundations of society; improve classroom practice (Freire, 1974; Giroux, 2013; Kincheloe, 2012; McLaren, 2003); redefine the purpose of education as "critical empowerment rather than subjugation" (Kincheloe, 1999, p.71); and support the social and economic mobility of diverse students from marginalized backgrounds for a more socially just world (Kincheloe 1999; 2012).

The re-conceptualization of knowledge through building on student experience is a significant concept of critical pedagogy. It suggests that the traditional role of the educator, one-who-teaches, needs to be re-examined and reconfigured. Educators must value the student experience and promote a method of teaching and learning where the student and the educator are equally engaged in knowledge production, and teaching and learning in general (Freire, 1970, 1974; hooks, 2003). Students are often a vital source of expertise and insight into their own worlds that outsiders, including educators lack. Freire (1970, 1974) went on to suggest that in order to truly reach students, one must be aware of their problems, struggles, and aspirations, while also considering the power dynamics implicit in the ideas and materials they are exposed to and the relationships they develop. He critically explored situations of oppression to foster dialogue that leads to praxis or "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51).

Within a critical pedagogy curriculum, students are respected and their knowledge, including their hopes and dreams about their world, which is constructed through their lived experiences, is valued and brought into the learning process (Freire, 1970, 1974). The lived experiences that students share can be employed as educational tools to catalyze the meaningful

engagement of often marginalized populations. Utilizing the lived experience of students as the curriculum means that students' real-life experiences are legitimized, and they have direct access to the learning material. Students learn that they are in possession of important experiential knowledge and, on this level, are empowered as educators as well as students. In this way, authority is reconstituted, and members of a community teach each other. It empowers students by helping them understand their own agency. They begin to understand they have power and are agents of change with the ability to transform their realities (hooks, 2003; Kincheloe, 1999). Through this, students and educators engage in a collective struggle against the status quo.

Freire (1970) notes that one means of enabling people to think about assumptions and to begin discussing the everyday social and political forces that influence their lives is the visual and auditory image:

> A codification [choosing the best channel of communication for each theme and its representation] may be simple or compound. The former utilizes either the visual (pictorial or graphic), the tactile, or the auditive channel, the latter utilizes various channels. The selection of the pictorial or graphic channel depends not only on the materials to be codified, but also whether or not the individuals with whom one wishes to communicate are literate. (Freire, 1970, p. 121)

These observations are highly suggestive for the pedagogical power of digital storytelling: its ease for students to share their experiences with others and its ability to engage individuals in learning that reflects students' lived experiences make it a powerful tool in bridging gaps in understanding. When combined with interesting visual and audio imagery, it is easily accessible to those who have not lived through that particular experience and encourages empathy and understanding for those who have (Fenty & Anderson, 2016; Skinner & Hagood,

2008; Vasudevan et al., 2010). In the case of this study, the dynamic and multimodal nature of the Syrian refugee children's digital stories will allow educators to engage with the children's complex experiences and promote dialogue and knowledge about issues through discussion of stories. It will also allow educators the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of children who live lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging their world, as digital stories are often explicitly posited as counter-stories of oneself, others, and the world that argues against dominant narratives (de Jager et al., 2017). The literature on refugee children's experiences relies primarily on adults from a dominant culture learning about children's experiences. This perspective confirms a dominant worldview, where the focus on representations of refugee children is through dominant culture (de Jager et al., 2017; Mishra Tarc, 2020). However, Vasudevan (2006) states that children want to be known for who they are, not for who they are not, and digital visual modalities make it possible to perform and author new selves that are resistant to a dominant image. They are able to reclaim their right to author themselves into new narratives (Vasudevan, 2006).

From a critical pedagogy perspective, knowledge is not only socially and contextually situated but also power laden. The Freirean ideal is that shared exploration can lead to new understandings of self, culture and the grand narratives of politics and history that have shaped practice. It confronts a fundamental problem of needs assessment: what educators think is important may neglect what the children think is important. This exploration starts with issues that people see as central to their lives and then enables them to identify common themes through dialogue. Dialogue is central to critical pedagogy, as it situates the concept of dialogue as necessary for co-creating knowledge. It is through dialogue that new relationships emerge, and new knowledge is gained (Freire, 1970, 1974). Understanding students deepens educators'

capacities to support and respond to them. Critical pedagogues stress that meaningful dialogue requires both time and psychologically safe spaces that allow for sharing of knowledge and fostering connections (hooks, 2003; Servage, 2008). This is where the digital storytelling project fits in. It will provide the time and an inviting space for Syrian refugee children to share their complex resettlement experiences with educators, promote meaningful dialogue, resistance, and thoughtful reflection about resettlement experiences. It will provide an opportunity for representation of a new way of knowing that changes our way of seeing. It creates opportunities for educators to consider the experiences children have lived and continue to live. Through this, a dialogical, reciprocal teaching and learning partnership is fostered. For Freire (1970, 1974), the expression of often-unheard voices, the opportunity to understand dimensions of social experiences that the banking model of education does not provide and the co-creation of knowledge through dialogue and creative literacy practices, such as digital storytelling, constitutes transformative action in itself.

Critical pedagogy focuses on individuals dialoguing with each other in an effort to come to a common understanding that invokes a shift in basic premises of thought and feel to create social change. Therefore, a central component of critical pedagogy is careful reflection on sociocultural assumptions, as it is based on constructivist assumptions, meaning is seen to exist within ourselves, and we construct meaning from our experience and validate it through interaction with others; therefore, what we make of the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences (Freire, 1970, 1974; Tejeda, et al., 2003). Perspective transformation occurs by self-reflection of assumptions. Freire (1970) states, “within the word [praxis], we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed, even in part, the other immediately suffers” (p. 69). Reflection has not always been considered an important

instrument in teaching and learning among practicing educators. Often, busy educators practice their profession but do not engage in in-depth reflection. Close examination of one's own beliefs and behavior, including practice, does not occur automatically, and it is not developed without anxiety.

As stated, reflection is integral to learning. Reflection on beliefs promotes a type of introspection necessary for understanding hidden biases and assumptions and growth in practice. Here, deep reflection on lived realities involves thinking and questioning the way things are, and the power relationships observed when considering multiple perspectives and ways of taking action to transcend the contradictory norms, values, and structural relationships of society (Darder, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Thus, for educators, reflecting deeply on the concept of subjectivity is an important first step for leading to a deep shift in political perspective during which previously blindly assimilated beliefs about representation are challenged. This acquired consciousness can change their subjectivity. Subjectivity here represents an ongoing construction of the development of the personal lens through which one sees the world, and through which notions of reality and truth are shaped (Breunig, 2005). This lens, alongside the learning gained from the lived experiences shared by the Syrian refugee children, has the potential to help educators recognize their own subjectivities, and acknowledge and confront the limits of their own knowledge. It may result in educators becoming more open, more permeable and less discriminating. It can empower them to believe in themselves as agents of social change and encourage collective action to challenge the status quo (Freire, 1970, 1974; Kincheloe, 1999, 2012; Ryoo et al., 2009).

The other central component of critical pedagogy includes reflection and analysis of assumptions governing actions, that leads into social action of reform and liberation (Freire,

1970, 1974; Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe, 2012; McLaren, 2003; Ryoo et al., 2009). When educators revise their habits of mind, they are reinterpreting their sense of self in relation to their larger social and political contexts. This empowers them to believe in themselves as agents of social change (Freire, 1970, 1974; Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe, 2012; Ryoo et al., 2009). Educators at all levels of schooling represent a potentially powerful avenue of social change (Giroux, 2011). For educators, teaching itself is unavoidably a purposeful social act, as the act of shaping learning experiences for others, that is, the control of knowledge, carries distinct powers and responsibilities (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2003; Ryoo et al., 2009). Educators need to work toward becoming more fully cognizant of the political nature of their practice (Kincheloe, 2012; Servage, 2008). Embedded in a Freirean context of critical pedagogy, the images produced, and the issues discussed and framed by people, may stimulate social action (Freire, 1970, 1974). Digital stories of Syrian refugee children's lived experiences are an example of the ways that the voices and stories of refugees can help educators inform, confront and reconstruct their beliefs and practice. The digital storytelling process of sharing and dialoguing with children can support educators' social construction of knowledge and responsive practice and identity as agents of social change.

While there is a burgeoning canon of literature on digital storytelling in research, few studies have examined digital storytelling explicitly through the hybrid lens of new sociology of childhood, sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy. This is significant as Pink (2007 as cited in Gubrium & Harper, 2013) notes that contemporary visual interventions, such as digital storytelling, are a hybrid off-shoot of Freirean collaborative image-making approaches to participatory action research. Together, the sociology of childhood, sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy are intimately intertwined, and each theory will offer a particular vantage point

for gaining insight into the pedagogical potential of digital storytelling to disrupt Canadian discourses of power and privilege that promote normative standards that all refugee children are subject to. They provide the foundation for the digital storytelling method which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. They will also serve as foundations for analyzing key characteristics of the digital storytelling process and for informing a discussion around much needed social change for refugee children.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter aims to outline the methodology used in my investigation into how digital storytelling can illuminate the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee children in Ontario. By doing so, it seeks to provide educators with a deeper understanding of these children's resettlement journeys and to enhance their social awareness on Syrian refugee children's realities. I will also explain the processes I followed for data collection and analysis.

The distinctions between *methodology, methodological approach, and method* are crucial to understanding the structure of this study. *Methodology* refers to the overarching framework that guides the research design, outlining the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study and providing the rationale for selecting specific strategies to achieve its objectives (Crotty, 1998; Durdella, 2019). The *methodological approach*, in turn, represents the specific research tradition that informs the choice and use of methods, shaping how the research is conducted (Creswell, 2015). Finally, *method* refers to the techniques, procedures, or tools employed to collect and analyze data. Together, these components ensure coherence between the study's philosophical foundations, strategic design, and practical implementation.

Figure 2

Components of Methodology

Research Paradigm

To effectively articulate the methodology of this study, it is essential to establish my ontological and epistemological assumptions. I adopt a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which recognizes reality as multiple, fluid, and socially constructed through individual experiences shaped by social contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998). According to Guba and Lincoln (1982), paradigms represent the fundamental belief systems that guide a researcher's choices regarding ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontologically, this paradigm views reality as subjective and co-constructed by individuals within specific contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Epistemologically, it emphasizes the relational nature of knowledge, which arises from interactions and shared meaning-making processes (Guba, 1990). Constructivism further highlights that these subjective meanings are not discovered but are constructed through a shared framework of mutual understanding, language, and practices (Durdella, 2019).

Interpretivism aligns with these assumptions, focusing on understanding phenomena through participants' perspectives. It acknowledges multiple interpretations, the influence of social contexts, and the interactive nature of knowledge construction (Crotty, 1998; Cohen et al., 2011). Through the principle of double hermeneutics, the researcher interprets participants' interpretations, emphasizing co-construction of meaning while maintaining reflexivity (Cohen et al., 2011). Instead of seeking generalizations, interpretivist research produces context-specific, ideographic insights that reflect the complexities of human experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This epistemological stance underpins an immersive approach, which minimizes the distance between the researcher and the phenomena under study, fostering deeper engagement with participants' lived contexts and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Broad, open-ended questions guide this process, allowing participants to construct meaning through communication and interaction.

These ontological and epistemological beliefs underpin the use of Participatory Visual Methodology, which emphasizes extended engagement with participants to understand how they construct meaning in their world (Hatch, 2010). In alignment with constructivism, this methodology reflects the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments, where knowledge is created through complex external experiences that are internalized and expressed through thought and action (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach, rooted in collaborative inquiry, illuminates how individuals' experiences and relationships shape their understanding of the world while considering the social contexts that influence these realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Methodological Approach

This study employed a qualitative methodological approach to explore contextual meanings and understandings conveyed through Syrian refugee children's digital stories, their experiences during the digital storytelling process, and educators' experiences facilitating the project. Specifically, the research addressed three questions: 1) What perspectives on their resettlement experiences in Ontario do Syrian refugee children express through their digital stories? 2) What are these children's experiences of creating digital stories? and 3) What are educators' experiences of facilitating this digital storytelling project? A qualitative approach was well-suited to this study, as it allowed for the exploration of dynamic and multifaceted perceptions, providing a rich understanding of the research topic. This approach aligned with the theoretical framework of the new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), which emphasize the individual within a social context (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I sought to avoid reproducing existing models of exploitative research on participants, particularly when working with child participants to address social issues. Exploitative research often involves extracting data from participants without offering meaningful reciprocity or prioritizing their well-being, agency, or long-term benefit. For instance, such studies may privilege the researcher's agenda over participants' voices, exclude participants from interpreting findings, or neglect the social, cultural, and emotional implications of the research (Tuck, 2009). In the context of children, exploitative practices can manifest as tokenistic participation without genuine empowerment, lack of safe and supportive environments, or dissemination of findings that perpetuate stereotypes or stigmatization rather than fostering understanding and promoting change.

My aim for this study was to involve Syrian refugee children and educators as co-investigators of the children's resettlement experiences in Ontario, giving them the agency to actively shape the digital storytelling (DST) project. I use the term *educators* to refer to individuals who support children's learning and development, including teachers, early childhood educators, and family support practitioners. My role was that of a facilitator, providing participants with the tools and opportunities to explore their own inquiries, such as their resettlement experiences, the challenges and opportunities they faced, and how they navigate and understand their new community. DST, recognized as a valuable tool for knowledge production (Rice & Mundel, 2018), was central to this process. The project had no strict specifications beyond the creation of a multimedia text that each child participant deemed representative of their personal resettlement story. This flexible and participatory approach was instrumental in determining Participatory Visual Methodologies (Mitchell et al., 2017; Mitchell & Sommer, 2016) as the qualitative approach for the study.

Participatory Visual Methodologies (PVM) are an approach derived from Participatory Action Research (PAR) that integrates PAR strategies with visual media to transform relationships during and after fieldwork. PAR seeks to dismantle the traditional divide between researchers and participants, encouraging active participant involvement in the co-creation of knowledge. This approach requires researchers to intentionally step back, critically reflect on their role, and consider the power dynamics within their relationships with participants. Rooted in an activist ethos, PAR aims to drive transformation and social change, making it a methodological approach that emphasizes collaboration and empowerment (Bergold, 2012; Chen, 2015; Gubrium & Harper, 2013).

In recent years, participant-generated visual media has garnered increasing interest for its effectiveness in fostering collaboration within the research process. PVM address power imbalances between researchers and participants by involving participants as co-creators during and after fieldwork, enabling them to produce visual media that authentically communicates their own perspectives (D'Amico et al., 2016; Gubrium & Harper, 2013). Mitchell and Sommer (2016) define PVM in the context of public health as

> modes of inquiry that can engage participants and communities, eliciting evidence about their own health and well-being. At the same time, they are also modes of representation and modes of production in the co-creation of knowledge, as well as modes of dissemination in relation to knowledge translation and mobilization (p. 521).

This multifaceted approach underscores PVM's potential to empower participants while advancing knowledge creation and dissemination. Traditional research practices that involve interpreting and telling the stories of those without access to representational tools often reinforce dominant social relations, as they position the privileged as interpreters of the experiences of the oppressed (Sitter, 2018). In contrast, PVM aims to decolonize knowledge by challenging visual stereotypes and enabling marginalized groups to take control of their own representation. By using participant-generated visual media, PVM provides a platform for oppressed groups to challenge dominant narratives, amplify their voices, and make their perspectives seen and heard. This process promotes critical thought, raises awareness, and inspires social action on issues related to social justice and human rights. The act of creating photographs, films, or digital media can be profoundly empowering, as it is inherently linked to critical education and collective organizing for change (D'Amico et al., 2016; Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Sitter, 2018).

As noted in the previous chapter, children possess unique expertise and insight into their own worlds that adults often lack. However, they are frequently denied opportunities to voice their perspectives or actively contribute to decisions that directly impact their lives. Historically, research approaches have often positioned children as passive and incompetent, treating them as objects of study. These methods reflected the power dynamics in which the privileged (in this study, educators) defined the experiences of the oppressed (in this study, Syrian refugee children) (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Barnikis, 2015; Chen, 2015; Grieshaber, 2007; Luttrell, 2010; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022).

Recent advances in research approaches emphasize the competence of children and call for innovative, participatory methods that challenge these traditional hierarchies. The value of using PVM has been recognized by researchers (Luttrell, 2010; Vasudevan et al., 2010) for creating opportunities to address longstanding power imbalances and foster a more equitable balance between adults and children in terms of knowledge and experience. PVM positions children as a vital source of expertise on their own lived experiences, acknowledging the limits of what adults can see, know and understand about childhood contexts, individual subjectivities and the diverse perspectives, identities, and expressions that children bring to their narratives (Fenty & Anderson, 2016; de Jager et al., 2017; Skinner & Hagood, 2008). Examples of PVM with children include participatory video (Altenberg et al., 2018), digital storytelling (Brushwood Rose, 2009; Chen, 2015), and photovoice (Luttrell, 2010; Kirova & Emme, 2008).

When using PVM, the emphasis is placed on the process rather than the outcomes, as it actively engages participants through participatory and arts-based methods (D'Amico et al., 2016; Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Sitter, 2018). The creative use of visual media to communicate perspectives fosters an interactive process that combines listening, watching, and discussing

images. These pedagogical spaces become sites where critical moments of consciousness emerge, empowering participants to actively engage as agents in their own transformational learning journeys (Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Sitter, 2018). Research using PVM with children has shown that children value the process, finding it not only empowering but also enjoyable and engaging (D'Amico et al., 2016; Luttrell, 2010).

PVM empowers children to address the challenges they face in their lives, by facilitating the production of new knowledge, sharing information, and raising awareness (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Vasudevan, 2006). Numerous examples illustrate how children have used PVM to respond to these challenges. For instance, in Altenberg et al.'s (2018) research, Indigenous girls participated in a Cellphilms workshop, creating short videos using cellphones to respond to the violence they witnessed in their lives and communities. The participants described the process as an opportunity to envision a different future for themselves. Similarly, in earlier PVM research, Chen (2015) found that immigrant children in the United States created digital narratives about their resettlement experiences, using the process to share the difficulties of adapting to a new culture and language, and the everyday struggles they faced. This process allowed the children to develop a renewed perception of themselves and their environment. By employing participant-centered, strengths-based approaches, PVM shifts the focus from a deficit-based framing of complex social issues to one that emphasizes agency and possibility. It opens up opportunities to produce new knowledge, engage in meaningful conversations, and raise awareness about these challenges (Bergold, 2012; Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Sitter, 2018).

Given the complex ethical considerations involved in conducting research with children, it is essential to employ methodologies that address their diverse needs. PVM are particularly

suitable for research with children, especially those facing adversity, as they integrate children's lived realities into the research process. PVM transforms research into a means of intervention by amplifying children's voices, fostering empowerment, and addressing their challenges through collaborative and action-oriented approaches. This methodology engages participants in creating visual media representations of their experiences, while also examining the meanings behind these representations and their potential to drive meaningful change (D'Amico et al., 2016; Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Sitter, 2018).

By encouraging Syrian refugee children to share their resettlement stories using DST technology, I aimed to reduce hierarchies between myself as the researcher and the participants by shifting power dynamics, granting participants control over their narratives, and positioning them as co-creators of knowledge rather than subjects of study. This approach fostered a collaborative environment where the voices and perspectives of the participants took precedence, emphasizing their agency and expertise in narrating their lived experiences. My goal was to create an empowering space where the children could freely express themselves, build community, and use their stories to creatively challenge injustices by highlighting systemic inequities, raising awareness, and advocating for social change. To address my research questions and guide the inquiry, I employed PVM as the overarching qualitative methodological approach, incorporating qualitative data collection methods to support this process.

For data collection, I analyzed the children's digital stories to gain insights into their resettlement experiences. Detailed information on how the DST project was structured and how the children were supported in creating their digital stories is provided later in this chapter under the *DST Project Process* section. In addition to the digital stories, I conducted interviews and a focus group with participants to explore their experiences with the DST process. To further

understand the educators' perspectives on facilitating the DST process, I also reviewed their journals, which provided valuable reflections on their experiences.

My interest in PVM, where individuals collaboratively create visual media to promote critical thought, raise awareness, and engage in social action, is closely aligned with the study's theoretical lens (Freire, 1970; Prout & James, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). Although other qualitative approaches, such as phenomenology (Creswell, 2015; Van Manen, 2014), were considered, they were deemed less suitable for the participants, research questions, and scope of this study. A phenomenological approach may have been more appropriate if the study participants were all adults, as it typically requires reflective writing to engage deeply with concepts of time, space and body (Van Manen, 2014). While writing is one form of expressing thoughts and feelings, similar to visual or oral storytelling, it is a required component of phenomenology, allowing participants to articulate their lived experiences in a structured and reflective manner. In contrast, PVM was a more fitting choice for this study involving children and educators. It enabled an exploration of the children's resettlement experiences while honoring and amplifying their previously unheard voices. This decision was further supported by the successful application of PVM in prior studies with children, demonstrating its effectiveness in engaging participants and fostering meaningful, action-oriented research outcomes.

Method

This section outlines the rationale for using Digital Storytelling (DST) as the participatory visual and strengths-based method for this exploratory study. PVM serves as the overarching framework, encompassing various visual methods employed to collect data, including DST. As a specific application of PVM, DST employs multimedia tools to amplify participants' voices and foster engagement. While PVM broadly emphasizes participatory and

visual processes, DST focuses on creating digital narratives, providing a structured yet flexible approach to exploring personal experiences. This alignment positions DST as a key tool within the PVM framework, both of which prioritize participant empowerment and opportunities for social change.

I am convinced that the act of telling *one* story remains powerful, often transformative, and fundamentally helpful (Brushwood Rose, 2009). Lambert (2010), founder of the Center for Digital Storytelling, suggests that each part of the life process necessitates stories that help us to remember, learn, heal and celebrate. Stories provide us with a means of organizing our previously unattended experiences, conveying those experiences to others, and re-authoring identities and selves (Brushwood Rose, 2009; Emert, 2019; Rice & Mundel, 2018). Our experience of life is mediated through the stories that we tell and that are told about who we are (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016).

Building on this innate human impulse to narrate life events, my research places digital storytelling (Lambert, 2010) at the centre of the research design. DST is a visual research method that falls within the broader framework of PVM, that blends traditional oral storytelling with elements of multimedia and is considered a valuable tool in building understanding and shifting practices that create barriers to social inclusion and justice (Rice & Mundel, 2018). Digital stories are short (2-5 minutes long) personal video clips combining photographs/images from historical and popular culture, as well as from one's own personal life, voice-over narration, and other audio, that help us understand past and present experiences, hopes for the future, and perspectives around a topic or issue of concern from the storyteller's point of view (Brushwood Rose, 2016; Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010; Lambert, 2010; Lenette et al., 2015; Garcia & Rossiter, 2010).

Digital tools have enabled the genesis of a broader range of vocabularies, genres, and styles. As a result, digital stories can be created by anyone, focus on any subject and can reflect a range of approaches to personal narrative and storytelling, from confessional to more experimental or poetic (Brushwood Rose, 2016; Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010; Hare et al., 2017; Lambert, 2010; Lenette et al., 2015; Garcia & Rossiter, 2010). Representation is simultaneously an expression of what we know and a resistance to what is considered *knowledge* (Brushwood Rose, 2009). Through the representation of marginalized voices, what is considered knowledge within dominant discourse, can be questioned, resisted and redefined. The explorations of DST indicate that this method is effective in a wide range of contexts; in addition, Jager et al.'s (2017) systematic review of DST in research indicates that it is especially appropriate for use with marginalized groups since it allows them to challenge dominant representations and make themselves seen and heard. The systemic review also found that DST was most commonly used with marginalized groups.

When using the DST method, the storyteller engages in a range of literacy and arts-based practices, including sharing narratives in the tradition of oral storytelling, writing stories that are then audio recorded, collecting and digitizing still and moving images and artefacts, and combining all of these elements in a nonlinear digital environment (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010; Robin, 2016). As a result, across DST research projects participants have reported several benefits of the DST method. It has been described as exciting, empowering, cathartic and rewarding (de Jager et al., 2017; Lenette et al., 2015).

Johnson and Kendrick (2017), emphasize the importance of recognizing both the power and limitations of the linguistic mode, as well as the meaning-making possibilities of other modalities, such as visual and auditory forms. DST is particularly effective for engaging

language learners, as it amplifies their voices through non-linguistic means (de Jager et al., 2017; Fenty & Anderson, 2016; Garcia & Rossiter, 2010; Skinner & Hagood, 2008; Vasudevan, 2006; Vasudevan et al., 2010). This was significant for my study, as it enabled the children to share their experiences, ideas, and emotions, despite challenges in communicating through English, the common language among the children, educators, and myself. For instance, when the children found it difficult to verbally express their emotions, they used images, music, and other multimedia elements to convey their feelings, offering a rich and expressive means of storytelling that transcended linguistic barriers.

Luttrell's (2010) participatory image-based research with immigrant children revealed that children make deliberate choices to represent themselves and others, often to challenge dominant or stereotypical images. Similarly, DST empowers refugee children to resist oppressive systems by allowing them to control their self-representations and depict their experiences and perspectives more fully (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Chen, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Lenette et al., 2015; Truong-White & McLean, 2015). Through personal narratives, children can challenge stigmatizing portrayals, assert agency, and highlight their resilience, disrupting narratives that frequently portray refugee children as impoverished, helpless, or traumatized (Gagne et al., 2018; Lenette et al., 2015). Lenette et al.'s (2015) research with women from refugee backgrounds demonstrated that DST accentuates strengths and creates counter-narratives to deficit-oriented portrayals. Similarly, Johnson and Kendrick (2017) found that DST helps students from refugee backgrounds communicate complex aspects of their feelings, identities, and social worlds.

Stories have the power to provide unique insights (Lenette et al., 2015). DST enables participants to acquire skills such as organizing information, writing, and using technology,

while creating meaningful content that reflects their experiences and opens conversations about difficult or sensitive topics (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010; Chen, 2015; de Jager et al., 2017; Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Lenette et al., 2015; Rice & Mundel, 2018; Robin, 2016; Walters et al., 2011). By using multimedia elements with strategies such as juxtaposition and collage, DST produces rich and often unexpected meanings (Brushwood Rose, 2009). It amplifies children's voices by encouraging reflection and enabling them to organize their experiences into meaningful narratives that emphasize what matters most to them (D'Amico et al., 2016; Walters et al., 2011).

Particularly useful for working with Syrian refugee children, DST provides a creative, multimodal platform that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, allowing them to authentically and confidently share their stories. The multimodal structure of DST supports identity construction, enabling participants to generate knowledge about themselves and their world while fostering new ways of thinking, expressing, and connecting (Lenette et al., 2015; Rice & Mundel, 2018; Robin, 2016). Additionally, DST allows participants to interpret their reality and share their perspectives on it (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Truong-White & McLean, 2015).

Sharing of life stories can be unexpectedly emotional for the storyteller (Garcia & Rossiter, 2010). Through the collaborative process, the DST workshops become a space in which storytellers feel able to explore what it means to story their experiences and to encounter the unanticipated emotions and stories that emerge in doing so – meanings are shared, contested and attributed to the experience during the DST process (Brushwood Rose, 2016; Lenette et al., 2015). It can empower children to explore and express their emotions as well as their hopes and aspirations on a wide range of issues (Brushwood Rose, 2016; D'Amico et al., 2016; Johnson &

Kendrick, 2017; Robin, 2016). The potential for meaningful expression when literacy is defined more broadly as multimodal expression is profound (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). Furthermore, experiential learning requires greater involvement from individuals where they can apply their own knowledge and expertise to their learning. This facilitates an increased sense of satisfaction, ownership, confidence and recognition associated with the overall DST process (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Brushwood Rose, 2016; D'Amico et al., 2016; Emert, 2019; Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Lenette et al., 2015; Robin, 2016; Garcia & Rossiter, 2010).

DST is uniquely effective in fostering collaboration within the storytelling process, encouraging meaningful interactions among participants, facilitators, and researchers (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Chen, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016; Lenette et al., 2015). Instead of assuming directorship, which involves controlling the process, the researcher acts as a facilitator, supporting and guiding participants while allowing them to take the lead in shaping their narratives (Chen, 2015). This collaborative process cultivates a sense of community as participants share their stories, provide creative feedback, assist with technical tasks, and support one another in gathering media (Brushwood Rose, 2016).

While participants may create individual stories, DST is inherently collective, encouraging group work that fosters deeper insights and knowledge (Brushwood Rose, 2016; Chen, 2015). It requires participants to be critically self-reflective and work collaboratively to address challenges as a group (Chen, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016). Through this process, participants become producers, interpreters, and social analysts of their own and each other's stories, reinforcing the process-driven, participatory nature of DST. This alignment with PVM makes DST an effective tool for supporting collective inquiry and action to promote social justice.

DST also offers an avenue for participants to easily share their stories with infinite others irrespective of location – DST offers a virtual accessible method for wide access of others from another part of the world (Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Lenette et al., 2015; Garcia & Rossiter, 2010; Truong-White & McLean, 2015). This feature of DST would allow the Syrian refugee children's digital stories to travel further than to only the participants in the study. The children will be able to share their experiences as represented through their digital stories with their extended families and friends that are spread across the globe.

Luttrell (2010) states that we need projects that open up opportunities to "unsettle, fragment or dislodge other's gazes" (p. 234), where children can see themselves and be seen by others in alternative ways. Pappamihiel et al.'s (2017) DST study found that even indirect contact, such as viewing the digital stories of immigrant children from cultures different than their own, shifted preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes about immigrant children from a less positive attitude to a more positive attitude. Engagement in the digital stories of others can support both individual and collective learning and action (Gearty, 2015; Truong-White & McLean, 2015). Luttrell (2010) suggests that children's visuals can introduce content and topics that might otherwise be overlooked or poorly understood from an adult viewpoint and can trigger new information, memories and meanings for individuals. Visual elicitation of the Syrian refugee children's digital stories from this study paired with critical pedagogical practices could potentially be used in preservice and practicing education to address issues of beliefs and attitudes about refugee children. It is especially useful in situations where short, engaging, and emotive communication is needed to generate social awareness and change, as it can jolt individuals into a new social awareness and may lead them to a new view of their social existence (de Jager et al., 2017; StoryCentre, 2017).

The use of visual research methods allows those who might otherwise go unnoticed to be recognized and afforded voice in public (Luttrell, 2010). I have been inspired by the possibilities of DST in facilitating marginalized/misrepresented storytellers' digital multimodal expressions of their experiences, offering listeners greater insight into the storyteller's perspectives; facilitating a collaborative dialogue between participants, facilitators and researchers; becoming a critical social awareness tool for both storyteller and audience; and stimulating collective and individual action and advocacy on important social justice issues (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Brushwood Rose, 2016; de Jager et al., 2017; Lenette et al., 2015; Rice & Mundel, 2018).

The DST method supported the creation of a safe and accessible space for the Syrian refugee children to express their marginalized voices and ideas through embedding multimedia components into their digital stories. Through engaging in the DST process, the children were able to share their previously unheard experiences of how they personally experienced resettlement and their perspectives on their lives in their new community, and the educators gained a better understanding of the children's points of view. It was an opportunity for the children to represent their resettlement experiences as digital stories and for educators to immerse themselves into a context where refugee children self-representing their identities and knowledge are at the centre of the curriculum.

Documenting the children's life stories digitally can provide the opportunity to not only construct narratives about experiences of relocation and resettlement but also to act as powerful tools for social advocacy, which can assist educators in ensuring meaningful outcomes for their students. As a research method DST opens spaces for critical reflection, dialogue around differences and othering, resistance, and representation of a new way of knowing. This has the potential to change the storyteller's and the audience's self-understanding by constructing new

personal and group meanings, improving their awareness, and engaging them in social action within their communities (Alexandra, 2014; Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Dion, 2018; Gagne et al., 2017a; de Jager et al., 2017; Loe, 2013; Ribeiro, 2016; Rice & Mundel, 2018; Vasudevan, 2006). It offers a potential opportunity to engage in intervention to ultimately improve the well-being of Syrian refugee children.

Research Participants and Setting

In qualitative research, participants are usually selected for a study because of their exposure to or their experience with the inquiry in question (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, purposeful sampling was used to recruit three educators, including myself, and five Syrian refugee children as research participants. This sample size was deemed to be appropriate for this study, as having a larger sample size would not allow the DST project to be effectively facilitated online.

Participating educators had preservice and in-service experience working with children, were willing and able to participate in the DST project, and shared their experiences facilitating it (see Appendix D).

Child participants were selected based on their self-identification as Syrian refugee children, being between the ages of six and 13, willingness to share their resettlement experiences, ability to participate in the DST project, share their experiences participating in it and consent from their parents (see Appendix C). English proficiency was not an inclusion/exclusion criterion, because research has shown that Syrian refugee students benefit from one-on-one, partner, or small-group support to enhance engagement and learning (Clark, 2017; Ryeburn, 2016; Shamim, 2020). To address language barriers, the educators and I worked

closely with the children, encouraging peer collaboration. For instance, children more fluent in English assisted with translation and communication for those less fluent.

The participant sample consisted of eight participants. While this may seem small to some research audiences, qualitative participant samples are often small because the researcher is not attempting to generalize the findings (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this research project, the DST workshops functioned as both the setting for the research and a method of data collection. The study was conducted in Ontario, specifically in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). While the research setting was virtual, all participants, including myself, were located in the GTA. I used the Zoom video communication software as a platform to conduct these workshops (Zoom Inc., 2023), allowing participants to engage remotely while maintaining accessibility and continuity in the data collection process.

Recruiting Participants

In this section the participant recruitment process is outlined. Before recruiting participants, an ethics application was completed and submitted to the Research Ethics and Human Participants Research Committee at York University for approval. An ethics approval was needed for this study because the research design included data collection with human participants. Once the ethics approval was received, the recruitment of participants began.

Child participant recruitment began with a Syrian family I already knew, as I was part of the team that privately sponsored and supported them during their resettlement in Toronto. Using the snowball method (Noy, 2008), I subsequently recruited five child participants between the ages of 10 and 13. Three of these children were from the sponsored family, with whom I had an existing relationship prior to the study, while the remaining two participants were recruited

through the snowball method. This prior relationship informed the selection process, fostering trust and facilitating a smoother transition into a researcher-participant dynamic.

The two adult participants, excluding myself, were recruited through convenience sampling, which selects participants based on their availability and accessibility (Etikan et al., 2016). At the time of recruitment and data collection, these participants were also my co-workers. Both were educators with relevant experience working with children and were willing to contribute to the study. My decision to include them as participants was informed by my confidence in their ability to engage in culturally responsive practices when working with the children, ensuring an environment that was respectful, supportive, and attuned to the children's backgrounds and experiences.

More detailed information about the participants are provided in the next chapter's *Portraits of Participants* section. Each child participant received an honorarium of CAD$50, and each adult participant received CAD$100.

Participants were notified of the DST project and its purpose through a recruitment letter (see Appendix A and B) shared virtually through email. Participation in the project was voluntary. Only those who expressed interest in the project were contacted.

I pre-screened participants (see Appendix C and D) via video calls before the DST project. For child participants, their parents joined the calls. I began by reviewing the eligibility criteria and once confirmed, provided consent and assent forms (see Appendix E, F, and G) outlining the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, voluntary participation, and confidentiality, as approved by York University's Research Ethics Board. I also verbally explained the study in detail, assured confidentiality, and emphasized that participation was

voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. Participants and their parents then indicated their interest in participating.

Communication with parents was primarily in English. When language barriers arose, older children, including a high school student who was related to the children but not part of the study, assisted with translation. This ensured all parties fully understood the information and could make informed decisions.

All participants, along with the parents of child participants, reviewed and signed the consent and/or assent forms. As the child participants were minors, parental or guardian consent was required alongside the child's assent, making it a two-stage process: parents/guardians first consented to their child's participation, and children then provided their assent. Completed and signed forms were required before the DST project began. While the forms were in English, I orally communicated their content to ensure understanding and addressed any questions. Copies of the forms were provided to participants and their parents for their records. Throughout the recruitment process, I treated participants and their parents with respect, encouraging questions for clarification. Although I initially planned to use pseudonyms, all but one participant preferred that I use their legal names, and I honored their requests.

It is important to note that the child participants' assent was not a one-time decision at the recruitment stage of the project; rather, it was built into the project in an ongoing way as they were able choose whether to continue, and if they wanted to share their digital story with the group and with others outside of this project. As has been practiced by others (Chen, 2015; Luttrell, 2010), the children were given multiple opportunities to 'opt-out' to minimize feelings of forced compliance. They had the right to withdraw from the project at any stage without

consequence. Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any point in the process are core principles of ethical practice in DST (Gachago et al., 2019).

Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher often serves as the primary research instrument and a valuable data source. Because qualitative research is interpretive, it is shaped by the researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs, assumptions, biases, interests, and positionality. These elements influence the study's design, the researcher's role, and how data is collected, analyzed, and presented (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Hatch, 2010; McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). As discussed in the *Research Paradigm* section, my ontological and epistemological assumptions guided my choice of methodological approach and research methods. To maintain transparency, I emphasize my role as the researcher, making my personal biases and interests explicit to clarify my perspective.

In the context of research, *bias* refers to the influence of personal beliefs, values, and assumptions that shape how a researcher interprets data, interacts with participants, and presents findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, bias may arise from my experiences, cultural background, and theoretical stance, which influence how I approach participants' experiences. By acknowledging and reflecting on these biases, I aim to minimize their impact and ensure that participants' voices remain central to the study.

McCaslin and Scott (2003) state that behind the methodology, theory, method, and analysis of qualitative research stands the personal biography of the researcher, shaped by class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic perspectives. My identity as a mother, first-generation immigrant, 'visible' cultural, racial, and religious minority, early childhood educator, graduate student, and academic shaped my role as a researcher, offering a unique perspective that

informed how I engaged with participants and interpreted their experiences. My education and experience in early childhood education provided the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out this research by enabling me to create developmentally appropriate methods for engaging children, understanding their perspectives, and facilitating their participation in the DST process. This expertise was crucial for addressing ethical considerations, fostering an inclusive environment, and collaborating with educators to support the children's learning and storytelling.

Additionally, my advocacy for culturally responsive pedagogy guided my interactions with participants, enabling me to create a respectful and inclusive research environment. Anchored in the theoretical frameworks of the new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), I approached this study with a focus on participant agency, social context, and transformative learning. While my role positioned me as an expert within the study (Chen, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016), my lived experiences and professional background allowed me to engage with empathy, cultural awareness, and a commitment to amplifying participants' voices.

I have a vested personal interest in the topic of this research study as a means to create responsive experiences for newcomer children. As an early childhood educator and family support practitioner, I have worked in child and family programs across the greater Toronto area, particularly in communities where young immigrant and refugee families have resettled. My motivation to explore the impact of transformative learning opportunities stems from 2009, when I was working as a family support practitioner at a Child and Family Centre located within a community with a significant newcomer population. My colleagues and I struggled to understand and support each child's resettlement needs and sought to better understand their experiences to provide more effective support. This experience highlighted the importance of educators

understanding the resettlement experiences of newcomer children and families to offer responsive practices rather than imposing colonial pedagogies and curricular. By *colonial pedagogies and curricular*, I mean educational approaches that prioritize Western norms and knowledge systems while marginalizing the cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences of marginalized communities, perpetuating systemic inequities in education (Battiste, 2013).

During my undergraduate studies, I conducted a research study on the impact of newcomer families' relationships with community practitioners, such as schoolteachers, early childhood educators, family support workers, on their child's resettlement experiences (Najeemudeen, 2014). It was during this research study that I first became interested in creating opportunities for educators' understanding of newcomer children's resettlement experiences. This interest was further reinforced when I facilitated culturally responsive practice workshops for educators and observed the barriers these educators faced in understanding and supporting newcomer children. Through the experiences shared by workshop participants, I gained vital insight into the lack of learning opportunities for educators regarding newcomer children's experiences. Learning opportunities here refer to opportunities that encourage educators to critically reflect on their assumptions, preconceptions and concerns about newcomer children and families. I have also had the opportunity to be a part of a team that supported the resettlement of young Syrian refugee families in Toronto. To conclude, my experiences in working with educators and newcomer children and families has inspired me to gain further insight into ways that educators can understand refugee children's experiences to better support their resettlement.

I first became interested in Digital Storytelling (DST) through a colleague who was a college professor. Each semester, their preservice early childhood education (ECE) students

created digital stories on social justice issues, and my colleague shared the transformative impact these stories had on audiences. While these ECE students received training in creating their own digital stories, the training did not include facilitating DST with children. Although I had little prior experience with DST, I quickly recognized its potential as a meaningful way to engage refugee children and educators, fostering their participation in the research process and providing a valuable experience. In this context, *meaningful* refers to a project that builds participants' capacity, empowers them, challenges power imbalances, and drives positive social change. Such change occurs as participants gain the skills and confidence to share their stories, assert their perspectives, and challenge dominant narratives, creating opportunities for collaboration and inclusivity within the research process and beyond.

The process of my own learning with online DST has been a significant part of my methodological process. Prior to the pandemic, my experience with DST was limited to supporting preservice ECE students in-person to create their own digital stories. As a lecturer for preservice ECE programs, I have taught courses where my students have had to create their own digital stories on social justice issues impacting children and families. During the teaching of these courses, I collaborated with colleagues who have expertise in digital media, specifically DST, to teach my students the technical skills needed to create their digital story and to support them through the DST process. At this time, I had only received training from attending DST webinars hosted by StoryCenter and Seneca College.

However, with the shift to remote data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to relearn facilitating DST for a virtual context. During the research proposal writing process, I learned more about DST through doing an extensive literature review on it, discussing with DST project facilitators about the process and potential, and taking DST online training. I have

completed StoryCentre's Online Digital Storytelling workshop and Online Digital Storytelling Certificate program, and Coursera's Powerful Tools for Teaching and Learning: Digital Storytelling online course. I completed these virtual DST courses in hopes of gaining the confidence to design and facilitate a DST project online. Even with this additional learning, I still did not feel confident creating a completely virtual DST project. Subsequently, I reached out to professional DST facilitators to help support the design of my project. The DST project for this study was created through conversations with DST facilitators from Weasel Tale and Seneca College. The facilitators have extensive experience facilitating DST projects with refugee youth and adults, and provided guidance on the DST workshop sessions content for this study.

I believe I gained a community *insider* perspective within the DST project by engaging as both a participant observer and a substitute facilitator, roles that allowed me to build relationships with participants and immerse myself in the collaborative storytelling process. My primary role was as a participant observer, but I stepped in as a substitute facilitator when needed, offering support to children in creating their digital stories, such as when educators were occupied or when a child directly approached me for help. This role enabled me to become part of the DST community—a collaborative and supportive environment where children, educators, and I worked together to create and share digital stories. Built on mutual trust, shared goals, and active participation, this community fostered meaningful connections and insight into participants' perspectives and interactions.

My role as a substitute facilitator made me an insider by allowing me to directly engage with participants, offer guidance, and participate in shared experiences, deepening my understanding of the storytelling process and the participants' realities. At the same time, I acknowledge, as Luttrell (2010) suggests, that adults must recognize the limits of what we can

see, know, and understand about children's realities. My positionality as an *outsider* to the refugee children's resettlement experiences inevitably influenced how I interpreted the data, as no researcher can approach data without bias. Moreover, it is impossible to observe or capture all data, as certain elements may go unnoticed or unrecognized despite their presence (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). To address these limitations, I remained reflexive throughout the research process, critically examining how my perspectives and positionality shaped my interpretations.

To limit bias and ensure accountability, ethical researchers engage in critical self-awareness of positionality and reflexivity throughout the research process, recognizing that personal experiences, interests, and biases can influence their perceptions and interpretations of data (Kwok, 2017; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). Reflexivity involves the introspective examination of how these factors affect the research process, helping to identify and address biases and dilemmas, ultimately enriching the study (Hatch, 2010; Kwok. 2017; McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). Reflexivity is a dynamic and iterative process in which researchers engage with their multiple selves, such as their research-based selves, brought selves (historical, social, and personal standpoints), and situationally created selves (Lincoln et al., 2011). This multidimensional awareness acknowledges that researchers are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the research.

Participatory visual methodologies further mitigate bias by requiring researchers to carefully document and represent the collaborative research process through reflexive writing. While both images and language can only partially capture participants' thoughts and experiences, requiring interpretation by researchers, the collaborative nature of visual methodologies lies in their participatory approach, where participants actively contribute to the creation, contextualization, and interpretation of visual data, fostering shared ownership of the

research process. Reflexivity is central to this participatory process, helping researchers interrogate not only their positionality but also the ways in which their assumptions, decisions, and interpretative processes influence the outcomes of the research (Lincoln et al., 2011). However, reflexivity is limited by the researcher's conceptual tools, skills, and opportunities, underscoring the need for continuous learning and openness to feedback to ensure an authentic and equitable process. Despite these efforts, I acknowledge that I may have remained unaware of certain issues. Nonetheless, ongoing critical reflexivity has been central to making this an ethical and thoughtful study.

In qualitative research, a reflective journal is essential for making the researcher's thinking and reasoning transparent, thereby guiding the research process (Hatch, 2002; McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). Throughout this study, I maintained a reflective journal to document my perspectives and emotional responses to participants' experiences in the DST project and the content of the children's digital stories. This practice helped me become aware of and make sense of my reactions, while identifying and addressing potential biases related to the inquiry (Kwok, 2017; McCaslin & Scott, 2003). The journal included entries for each stage of data collection and analysis, detailing the data of focus alongside personal reflections, directions of analysis, discoveries, dead-ends, and surprises. These reflections helped reveal the binaries and paradoxes that emerged within my research process, further deepening my engagement with reflexivity as a means of understanding the complex interplay between my multiple selves and the research context (Lincoln et al., 2011). Methodological and theoretical notes were also recorded, capturing hypotheses, critiques, and insights that informed the research process (McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017).

Digital Storytelling Project Process

As noted, I designed the DST project for this research study based on conversations with facilitators from Weasel Tale and Seneca College. The process closely followed the approach developed by the original co-founders of the DST movement (Lambert, 2010), with videos reflecting the digital story format described by Lambert. The design also incorporated ideas from other DST projects (Chen, 2015; Gagne et al., 2018; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Walters et al., 2011).

Flexibility and responsiveness to participants' needs in the workshops were central to the project's success. For example, I adjusted the pacing of activities to match the children's comfort and engagement levels with the DST process. To address language barriers, I facilitated peer collaboration by encouraging children more fluent in English to assist those with limited proficiency. I also supported educators by stepping in as a substitute facilitator when needed, ensuring all children received adequate guidance. These adaptations fostered a supportive and inclusive workshop environment, meeting the diverse needs of the group. All adaptations made during the project are detailed in the following subsections.

To answer the research questions and to meet Ontario public health guidelines, such as physical distancing, I designed and co-facilitated the DST project through the Zoom video communication software (Zoom Inc., 2023), accommodating five Syrian refugee children and two educators. The project was set to begin on a Monday and conclude on a Friday, running over five consecutive workshop sessions, each approximately two hours long, to prevent fatigue from extended Zoom use. Optional *lab work time* was also included for children to complete "homework" on their digital stories. Unlike the structured and collaborative nature of the workshops, lab work provided flexibility, allowing children to work one-on-one with educators

for personalized support, collaborate with peers, or work independently, depending on their needs and preferences to develop their individual digital story.

Scheduling the workshop sessions proved challenging, as expecting participants to be available for five consecutive days was unrealistic. The children had commitments such as schoolwork and extracurricular activities, while the educators had professional and personal obligations. Technology-related logistical issues further complicated scheduling. To address these challenges, I adapted the project design, ultimately facilitating the DST project over a three-week period to accommodate participants' schedules and ensure their full participation. This experience taught me the importance of flexibility and responsiveness when working with diverse groups and reinforced the need to prioritize participants' realities and constraints, highlighting adaptability as a key aspect of ethical and effective research design.

All participants had access to laptops, due to virtual schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. I had prepared to provide the necessary technology to participants who did not have access to it, but I did not have to. Specific software did not have to be installed on the participants' laptops for them to create their digital stories as they were created using WeVideo, an online, cloud-based video editing platform that works in web browsers.

The DST project introduced the children to DST skills through a structured process. I proposed the idea to the children and their parents, inviting the children to create digital stories about their resettlement experiences in Toronto, with a focus on their first experiences in their new community. The storytelling and technology related skills were learned progressively as the project guided the children step by step in producing their digital stories.

During the project, the children wrote scripts reflecting their resettlement experiences, including their journeys to Canada, challenges adjusting to a new culture and language,

memories of home, and hopes for the future. They shared these scripts in a story circle, where they received constructive feedback from peers and educators to refine their narratives. Using multimedia tools such as images, music, and voice recordings, the children transformed their scripts into individual digital stories, creating powerful representations of their unique perspectives. The sequence of learning and the project process is outlined in the following subsections.

The children used a simple movie-making tool: WeVideo, this is an online, cloud-based video editing platform that works in web browsers and on mobile devices to create the digital stories through adding images and audio to the script they produced (WeVideo Inc., 2023). Although there are a number of web-based tools that can be used to create digital stories, WeVideo was selected because it is free, user-friendly, and compatible with computers and mobile devices. Launched in 2011, each new version of the WeVideo interface adds features that bring it closer to desktop versions of video editing software (Robin, 2016).

I organized the DST project into five different workshop sessions. Sessions consisted of activities that allowed children to learn about DST and of lab work. My goals for the project was as follows:

(1) To build a workshop environment on a spirit of camaraderie rather than control, where all participants are involved in the creative process and there is genuine concern and care for one another. Children and educators had the opportunity to develop skills in dialogue, work together to solve problems related to the project and develop deeper levels of insight and knowledge.

(2) To foster an atmosphere where children feel empowered to make their own choices and have a space for creative freedom. Having control of one's own choices can be incredibly empowering (Chen, 2015).

(3) To signal that participation is completely voluntary, that children have the option of coming to the workshop or not, and where they do not feel forced or obliged to complete activities that they may be uncomfortable with. The educators and I checked-in with how children felt about tasks we suggested during the project. Awareness of and receptivity to the needs of the children are important in fostering children's agency and empowerment (Chen, 2015).

I provided the educators with a five-session training on DST prior to them facilitating the DST project with the children. During the educators' training they created a digital story of a childhood memory they felt comfortable sharing, and during the last session, they shared their digital story with the group. Their training was similar to the project that they facilitated with the children. During the children's DST project, the role of the educators were to facilitate the workshop sessions. With their support, the children rendered a story of an autobiographical experience from their own lives into a short digital video.

In the following table I provide an overview of the DST project process. I then elaborate each workshop session in sequence.

Table 1: *Digital Storytelling Project Process*

Session 1	Introductions Workshop ground rules Examples of digital stories Story Circle	90 minute workshop
	Writing the script of the story	Lab work time was different for each child as they worked individually on writing a script of their story without the help of an educator

Session 2	Story Circle Script writing	90 minute workshop
	Script writing	Lab work time was different for each child as they worked individually on editing their story script without the help of an educator
Session 3	Finalising story scripts Storyboarding Recording voiceovers	60 minute workshop
	Recording voiceovers Storyboarding	Lab work time was different for each child as they worked individually on recording the audio narration of their story script, and collecting and creating images for their story without the help of an educator
Session 4	Recording voiceovers Storyboarding Assembling digital stories	90 minute workshop
Session 5	Assembling digital stories	Workshop time was different for each child as they worked one-on-one with an educator to complete their digital story
Session 6	Rescheduling screening digital stories	30 minute workshop

Session 7	Screening digital stories	60 minute workshop

Session 1: Introductions, Project Ground Rules, Digital Story Examples and Story Circle

Establishing a social and trusting space where we (the participants and I) could feel comfortable sharing stories that made us feel vulnerable within the DST workshop sessions was crucial. Trust is a key aspect of facilitating a DST project because storytellers risk being vulnerable when sharing intimate narratives (Chen, 2015; Emert, 2014a; Gachago et al., 2019). Therefore, building trust between children and educators was a pivotal aspect of having a successful project. I set out to create a trusting conversational space within the workshops, where we felt we were able and willing to express our thoughts and feelings honestly and where social learning occurred.

During the first session, which took place through Zoom, I had planned to do an ice-breaker activity for us to get to know each other. However, time allocated for the ice-breaker activity was used up to resolve technology issues. The session began with introductions. During the introductions, we shared our name, age and things we like, such as, things we liked to do, foods we liked to eat, etc.

Online collaboration provides an opportunity for children to experience and navigate complexities of group interdependence (Truong-White & McLean, 2015). Therefore, during the first session, we spent time to collectively generating and establishing ground rules that we all agreed to abide by. Typical DST ground rules include listening actively and respectfully, creating a supportive environment, and clarifying the responsibilities of storytellers and facilitators – with no right or wrong story, no sharing of stories outside the workshops, and no judgement (Gachago et al., 2019). It was also important to introduce the idea of self-care due to

the nature of the project. I encouraged participants to identify and reflect on their needs during the project. Here are the collectively established ground rules:

I promise that I will be good

I promise I won't be negative and will be positive

I promise to say positive things to others that are going to be helpful and kind

I promise that I will be helpful and help everyone

There is no right or wrong story

I promise I won't laugh or judge anyone's story

I promise that I will pay attention

I promise to wait my turn to speak

I promise to share the different and strong feelings about my story

Following the introductions and establishment of ground rules, we moved onto viewing examples of digital stories. I had planned for the educators to introduce the concept of DST to the children. However, given the young age of the children, sharing the definition of DST did not seem relevant, instead we went straight into watching the digital stories created by the educators during their DST training. Each educator introduced their digital story and following the screening of their digital story, the children got to share their thoughts and ask questions about the digital story. I hope that, through the digital story examples, the children were able to identify the visuals and audio that brought the stories to life. Going through this process early in the story conception process is supposed to help the storyteller consider how the use of images and sound will shape their story (Lambert, 2010).

Next, we moved onto the story circle. There were no strict specifications for the children's stories, other than to reflect on their personal resettlement experiences, whatever they

perceived them to be. A prompt that was used at this time involved asking the children to imagine that they have a friend their age that is moving to Toronto from Syria or Jordan, as all of the children had lived in Jordan for a few years prior to resettling in Toronto, and to share some personal experiences that will help the friend know what it is like to move here, such as sharing their first experiences in Toronto. Other prompts that were used to help the children to start thinking about their stories included asking them, "If your teacher asked you what it was like to move from Jordan to Toronto, what will you tell them?", "How did you make your first friend after moving to Toronto?", "Your first time doing/trying [something]?"

The session ended with the children brainstorming happy memories along with difficult or sad ones, as well as anything else they wanted others, such as peers, teachers and families, to know about them and their experiences. The educators worked to help them find the story they wanted or needed to tell, and then brainstormed ideas of what details they wanted to communicate in their stories. It is important to note that this project was not about collecting stories that will shock the audience: it was about creating a process of healing where it is needed and cultivating individual empowerment. The educators and I accomplished this by asking children to also focus on positive experiences and accomplishment stories, which are about achievement and positive identity (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017).

At the end of the session, the children were encouraged to write the first draft of their story script as part of their homework (that is, lab work time). They were told not to worry about writing conventions, such as spelling or grammar, and to ask the educators for assistance in expressing their ideas. The children were offered the option to voice record their story ideas for the educators to transcribe and for the transcription to become the first draft of their story script. However, there were no children that took this option. Instead, they all chose to write their story

scripts with help from each other. Based on the literature, working one-on-one with an educator, a partner, or in small groups can support Syrian students' (with limited or no proficiency in English) engagement and learning (Clark, 2017; Ryeburn, 2016; Shamim, 2020). During the entire DST process, the educators worked closely with the children, and the children supported each other overcoming language barriers.

Session 2: Story Circle and Script Writing

All the children had a story idea or a story script draft for their digital story by the second session. In a virtual oral story circle via Zoom, where participants sit together and share stories orally (Brushwood Rose, 2016), the children shared their story ideas or scripts with the group and received feedback, such as what they liked about the story.

Following the story circle, the children and educators broke up into three smaller groups through the breakout rooms option on Zoom to work on their story scripts. During the small breakout groups with the help of the educators the children worked on their story scripts that could serve as the audio narration for the digital stories they will produce. During the script writing process, the educators also asked the children to describe the images that come to mind when they share these memories. This process will help them "see" their story (Lambert, 2010, p. 15).

Session 3: Finalizing Story Scripts, Storyboarding and Recording Voiceovers

Storyboarding in the context of DST involves creating a visual outline of the digital story by sequencing images, text, and other media elements to reflect the narrative structure (Alcantud-Diaz, 2016). It helps participants plan and visualize their story, ensuring coherence between their written script and multimedia components. Storyboards are a valuable tool for generating ideas, structuring spoken narratives, and organizing how visual and audio elements

will complement each other throughout the story (Lambert, 2010; Robin, 2016). This process encourages storytellers to reflect on meaning-making across various modes and multimodal texts. By visualizing their story before its creation, storytellers can use the storyboard as a framework to manipulate imagery, experiment with content, and make adjustments with ease (Robin, 2016).

All the children had a story script for their digital story by the third session. After a large group check-in, the children and educators broke up into two smaller groups to finalize the story scripts and create storyboards. Educators went over the importance of choosing appropriate images, and about the variety of images that could be used, such as online stock images and personal images. They discussed about copyright violations when using images found on the internet and introduced the children to databases that allow for open access images, such as https://search.creativecommons.org/. They also discussed the ways to create personal images such as through photographs, scanned artifacts, drawings, and sounds like music and recorded ambient sounds.

Next, they invited the children again to describe the images and sounds that came to mind when sharing their stories. Paying attention to multimedia elements will help lead the way in creating a multimodal narrative (Lambert, 2010). This emphasis is important to encourage children to fully explore each mode's capacities for expression as different modes can give rise to different ways of thinking and means of expressing knowledge. This can help the children communicate their experiences by tapping into their full communicative repertoires, for instance, in thinking linguistically, visually, and musically to achieve greater range of affective expression (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). The children were then directed to collect (and/or create) images and sounds for their digital stories.

Following creating the storyboards, the children learnt how to record their voiceovers (that is, their audio narration) for digital stories using their digital device, such as a cellphone and microphone on a laptop. The recorded voice of the storyteller telling their story is what makes a digital story a digital story (Lambert, 2010). The educators offered the children technology assistance with recording their voiceovers. However, there were no children that requested the educators to support them with the audio recording technology following this session, as the children that were more proficient with digital media helped those that needed support with it.

Following this session, with the help from each other, the children recorded their voiceovers and worked on their storyboards.

Session 4: Recording Voiceovers, Storyboarding and Assembling Digital Stories

Three of the five children had a recorded voiceover by the fourth session. After a large group check-in, the children that had a recorded voiceover played their voiceover for the group and received feedback, such as what they liked about the voiceover techniques used. Since two of the children did not have a recorded voiceover, the children and educators broke up into two smaller groups to record voiceovers and to continue working on the storyboards. One educator and a child that was more proficient with digital media supported the two children that did not have a recorded voiceover record their voiceovers.

Next, the children learnt how to use WeVideo (2023) to piece together their voiceover, images, texts and sounds/music to create their digital stories. The educators helped the children arrange the images and audio for their digital story.

I had planned for the children to work on assembling their digital stories on their own as part of this session's lab work time; however, the children shared that they preferred to continue working with the educators to complete assembling their digital stories. Therefore, there was no

lab work time following this session; instead, an extra sixth session was added to the DST project process to accommodate the children's request to assemble the digital stories with the educators.

Session 5: Assembling Digital Stories

After a quick large group check-in, the children and educators broke up into two smaller groups to continue assembling the digital stories. The educators helped the children finalize the media and helped them add the finishing touches for their digital stories.

Session 6: Rescheduling Screening Digital Stories

All the children had completed digital stories by this session. Prior to the session, I delivered movie theatre snacks, such as popcorn, chips, juice and candy, and research participant thank you cards and honorariums to the children. This was done to add a celebratory touch to the screening experience.

A few minutes before the session was scheduled to begin, one of the educators had a family emergency and was not able to attend the session. We, that is, the children, the other educator, and I collectively decided that we did not want to screen the digital stories without the whole group being present and chose to reschedule the session.

Session 7: Screening Digital Stories

Screening digital stories is an important step in the digital storytelling process. Through the screening process participants are able to learn more about themselves and others in the group. It is also a moment of pride and recognition for many participants (Gachago et al., 2019).

During this session we collectively engaged with the digital stories by previewing them as a group. The children first determined the order in which they will present their digital stories. They decided that they will present their digital stories from oldest to youngest. Each child first

introduced their digital story, shared about their favorite part making their digital story, and then screened it. After each digital story screening, the storyteller opened it up for group feedback. This will open the space for dialogue between the children and educators (Luttrell, 2010). We shared what we noticed in the digital story, the elements of the digital story that we liked and asked any questions we had. Some children were disappointed that they had not included specific images to complement their audio narration. The educators reminded them that anytime they wanted to, they could login into WeVideo and edit their digital story.

One of the main goals of DST is to publicly display digital stories that are targeted to community members who hold various levels of decision-making power, such as policymakers and community leaders (de Jager et al., 2017). However, children are the owners of their stories and should retain the right to choose what happens to those stories, both during the DST creation process and afterwards (Gachago et al., 2019). After screening the digital stories with the group, the children were asked if they wish to make their digital story public. Once they and their parents consented, a media release form (see Appendix H and I) for their digital stories to be screened had to be signed by them and their parents so that the digital story can be used at a later stage. The children were given the option to edit their digital story before it is shown publicly.

The session ended with the children and educators sharing gratitude for the shared DST experience and exchanging goodbyes. At this time, the children were reminded of the follow-up interviews that would take place to discuss their experiences of creating their digital story.

Data Collection

Participatory visual researchers should not only document the primary data that captures participants' perspectives on inquiry in question, such as participant final productions and interviews, but should also document "producer data" (Gubrium & Harper, 2013, p. 41), such as

the producer's motivations and decisions in making visual representations. Producer data can be collected by recording and taking notes on production workshops. Additionally, DST projects should record the participants' experiences from a variety of perspectives to allow for a nuanced understanding of the project's effects. Multiple data sources also ensure triangulation of data (Figg & McCartney, 2010). Rather than base the analysis solely on my interpretations of the digital stories, the interviews and focus group discussion, I have chosen to include other forms of data, such as recordings of the DST workshop sessions, educator journals and field notes, in order to develop a richer approach to the analysis of the digital stories and DST project process. For data collection, I utilized the following qualitative data sources:

(a) audio video recordings of the digital storytelling workshop sessions;

(b) children's digital stories, including notes, story scripts, storyboards and successive drafts of their digital stories;

(c) educator journals;

(d) transcriptions of recordings of interviews and focus group;

(e) field notes taken throughout the project process, including during discussions with the educators that occurred before and/or after the workshop sessions, and during the interview and focus group process;

(f) reflective journal with my self-reflexivity notes, including my perspectives and emotional responses for each step of the research process.

The following table includes an overview of the data sources, when the data was collected, and the data format for each source.

Table 2: *Overview of Data Collection*

Source of Data Collection	**When the Data Was Collected**	**Format of Data Collected**
Recordings of the DST workshop sessions	During every DST workshop session	Audio video recordings
Children's digital stories, notes, story scripts, storyboards and successive drafts of their digital stories	Throughout the DST project process	Electronic copies of the final digital stories, notes, story scripts, multimedia and drafts of their digital stories
Educator journals	Before the educators focus group	Electronic copies of the educator journals
Interviews	During the interviews	Audio video recordings
Focus group discussion	During the focus group	Audio video recording
Field notes	Throughout the data collection process	Handwritten and electronic copies of notes
Research journal	Throughout the data collection and analysis process	Electronic copies of research journal

I attended, observed and documented the DST workshop sessions and listened to, read and viewed all iterations of the children's stories. Immediately after each session, I made detailed field notes on any action or communication from the children and educators or specific interaction among participants that I perceived as being related to this study's research questions. I also documented personal reflexivity and positionality that might likely have an effect on my interpretation of the data collected. I repeated these steps after each interview and focus group.

Reflection is integral to learning, defined as making sense of lived experiences to inform future actions. It guides practice, offering insights and solutions to challenges (Kwok, 2017; McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). Writing tasks, such as journaling (Walters et al., 2011) and creating educational autobiographies (Breunig, 2005), foster reflection by encouraging educators to articulate their thoughts and connect their past and present, uncovering layers of their experiences. These practices help educators examine their epistemologies and biases, enabling them to understand how their beliefs shape their teaching practices and interactions with students.

Sharing and discussing reflective journals further enhances this process, allowing educators to explore diverse subjectivities and experiences within the classroom. This process often prompts educators to question previously held assumptions about teaching and learning, awakening them from passivity (Breunig, 2005). Recognizing the variety of experiences and perspectives among educators fosters critical thought, leading to the creation of new meaning, personal growth, and informed actions (Walters et al., 2011).

For the duration of the DST project, educators were encouraged to maintain individual reflective journals on their learning, their work with the children, and their experiences of collaboration and facilitation. Rather than leaving the educators' journal entries open-ended, I

provided them with reflection prompts that are related to the research questions (see Appendix K). The journal reflection prompts were supposed to help the educators focus their journal entries and encourage them to consider what matters to the children and what steps educators can take to make a difference in their own practice. Prior to the educators focus group, I requested an electronic copy of their journals; however, only one educator provided me with an electronic copy of their journals. The other educator did not provide me with a copy of their journal as they had not maintained it in an electronic format and the entries were referred to as being in "chicken scratch" format. Noteworthy that both educators referred, shared and discussed their journal entries during the educator focus group. Critical theorists (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978) state that this action is significant because even though meaning is individualistic and exists within ourselves, it becomes significant to the learner through critical discourse with others.

It is important to note that while journal writing may allow opportunities for reflection, there are difficulties associated with using such forms as a data source and evidence of reflection. First, there is the issue of whether the journal is to be examined by others and, if so, the manner in which entries are likely to be altered to meet the perceived expectations of the reader. In addition, many of the entries may be personal, reactive, emotive, and, at the time of writing, not at all reflective. This may be especially true if the author is experiencing difficult knowledge—an experience fraught with emotion, insecurity, and uncertainty. However, research on educators' reflections has identified that even when journals are written under such conditions, they can still become a significant source of data (Walters et al., 2011).

To address the concern that even my well-intentioned interpretation of the educators' journal entries could be exploitative, I remained vigilant by critically reflecting on how I used

and analyzed the data. I prioritized preserving the authenticity of the educators' voices by contextualizing their entries and resisting the temptation to impose my own assumptions on their reflections. Additionally, I carefully balanced respecting their privacy with the need to glean meaningful insights, ensuring that any excerpts used were with sensitivity to their original intent.

The interviews and focus group complemented and extended the data collected from the DST project process. Interviews and focus groups are research methods for gathering elicit descriptive answers, stories and experiences from participants (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). The purpose of interviews is to listen and learn from participants, and to collect individual perceptions and beliefs. Whilst the purpose of focus groups is to learn from participants as they interact and talk with one another, and to collect perceptions and beliefs that were not expressed nor developed individually. Focus groups are active, collaborative groups engaging in meaning-making (Creswell, 2015; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017; Tilley, 2016). The initial research design included a focus group with the children and another with the educators (see Appendix L and M). However, due to technology limitations, the focus group with the children was changed to individual interviews with them (see Appendix N). The focus group with the educators was implemented as planned.

Following the completion of the DST project, I conducted interviews with the children and facilitated a focus group with the educators, to understand their experiences, feelings and general thoughts towards the DST project process (see Appendix N and M). Semi-structured interviews and a focus group was conducted with all participants to obtain a detailed and broad understanding of their DST experiences. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups are considered appropriate when the researcher has enough information about the domain of inquiry to develop relevant questions about the topic, but not enough to foresee the answers (Creswell,

2015; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017; Tilley, 2016). All interview and focus group questions were purposefully based on the research purpose and questions, and literature. The questions were also intended to be conversational. Probing/prompting and follow-up questions were carefully considered to prompt and guide the semi-structured conversation when needed to gain understanding. I felt comfortable using semi-structured interviews and focus groups, as they relied on a basic interview guide, which could be elaborated on when needed during the course of the interviews and focus group. My goal for the interviews and focus group discussion was to encourage sharing, constructive dialogue, critical thinking and meaning-making to understand participants' views (Creswell, 2015; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017; Tilley, 2016). Therefore, I established an appropriate interpersonal online setting for conversation, asked questions and probes for inadequate answers, and encouraged thoughtful responses. I was also sensitive toward participants' avoidance, distortions, misunderstandings, or incomprehension, and cognizant of the steps to deal with these cases.

The open-ended qualitative interviews and focus group were designed to gain a rich understanding of perspectives and experiences with the DST project process. The interviews and focus group were planned to be a maximum of 90 minutes, which has been identified as a typical length for them (Creswell, 2015; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017; Tilley, 2016). The interviews with the children were approximately 30 minutes in length and the focus group with the educators was approximately 70 minutes long. The interviews and focus group began with a review of consent and rights as participants in research as well as the intent to audio video record, and guidelines for the conversation.

During the interviews and focus group, children and educators were asked to share meaningful personal experiences from the DST process, including their experiences of coming to

the workshop sessions and creating or facilitating the creation of digital stories. They were also asked about the impact of the project on their identities. This was to give them the opportunity to reflect on the DST process, including giving the children an opportunity to reflect on the significance of creating and sharing their digital stories, and giving the educators an opportunity to reflect on facilitating the creation of the children's digital stories. Asking participants to discuss their experiences of a project encourages them to consider their successes and their trials (Emert, 2019).

During the children's interviews (see Appendix N), they were also asked why they had included specific multimedia, what, if anything, was important to them about the multimedia, and whether there was anything they wished they could have added or taken out from their digital story. The children's interviews concluded by asking them if there is anything else they would like to share about their digital stories. This conversation was meant to offer a further site of storytelling, adding to the rich and complex body of data provided by the stories told and made in the workshops (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010).

I read and analyzed the one educator's journals to identify recurring themes. After my identification of themes, they were added to the focus group questions to clarify and elaborate on the insights as I had interpreted them.

During the focus group with the educators (see Appendix M), in addition to their DST project experiences, they were encouraged to reflect on the children's diverse backgrounds and experiences, and the ways in which children negotiated their evolving identities in their host community. The focus group ended with the educators being asked about their developing understanding of Syrian refugee children's experiences, ways that they can engage with these

experiences in the classroom, and the effectiveness of the DST project to give educators a greater understanding of refugee children's experiences.

Multiple opportunities to express personal views during the focus group discussion help to deter potential reservations, biases, reactive effects that are inherent within a focus group (Grandjean, 2011). Therefore, I explicitly expressed the value and respect of differing points of views at the forefront of the focus group discussion. A focus group traditionally engages in a collective discussion and captures collective thought. As a result, interviews might be necessary to uncover individual participant's thoughts, feelings, and perspectives (Grandjean, 2011). The educators were offered the opportunity to have follow-up individual interviews (see Appendix O), however, both educators did not take up this opportunity.

As noted previously, immediately after each interview and focus group, I made field notes on any non-verbal behaviours of the participants that stood out, and my own views and feelings upon completing the interview or focus group.

Audio video recordings best capture participants' conversations of their experiences. Audio video recordings help produce the most accurate transcriptions of dialogue, especially when the researcher takes part in the conversation, and note-taking becomes less likely, and recollections become less reliable. Audio video recordings provide all the nonverbal physical expressions and the social interactions and dynamics between the researcher and participants in each interview, and between participants in each focus group not captured through audio recordings (Grandjean, 2011). I audio video recorded the interviews and focus group discussion. The audio video recordings helped ensure that the data is accurate and detailed, especially since I had the role of interviewer during the interviews and moderator during the focus group and was not effectively able to capture the data through notetaking. Transcriptions of the audio video

recording of the interviews and focus group discussion were made and verified for accuracy by respective participants.

Google Drive was used to store all data collected. The children's final digital stories and the edited DST workshop sessions were uploaded to YouTube as Unlisted videos. Unlisted videos can only be seen and shared by anyone with the video's URL. Unlisted videos will not appear in the Videos tab of the channel homepage. They will not show up in YouTube's search results (Google, 2023). The children's digital stories were uploaded so that they could share their digital story with their families and friends. The edited DST workshop sessions were uploaded so that the educators and the research committee could review them.

Data Analysis

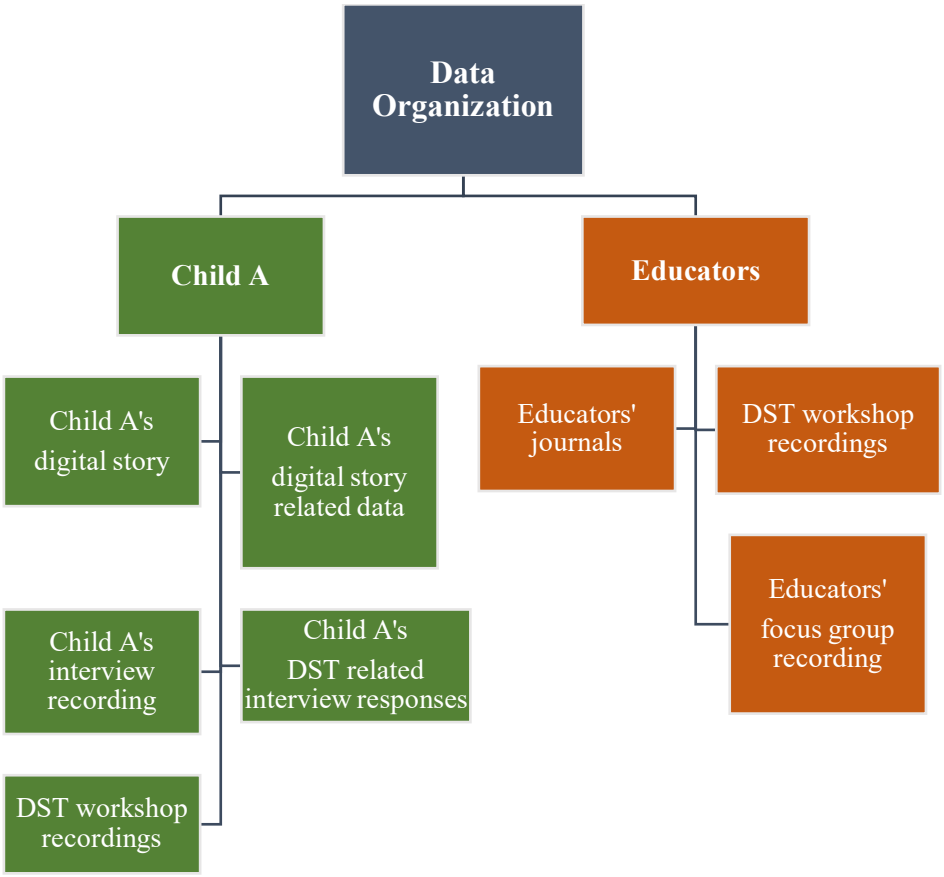
The themes of the *Findings* chapter are constructed from my analysis and interpretation of the data. Data analysis is characterized by the identification and classification of the data, which then progresses to abstract generalizations and explanation of themes (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tilley, 2016). This section will describe how I used various strategies to comprehend the complexities and intimacies of digital stories, interviews, focus group discussions, and the other data collected.

Organizing Data for Analysis

I found no ready-made framework for organizing and systematizing the multiple data types – digital stories, images, audio clips, scripts, transcripts, journal entries, and field notes. The following chart includes an overview of how the data was organized.

Figure 3

Organizing Data Sources



Collecting, organizing and systematizing the multiple data sources can take time and energy, but it pays off in terms of greater credibility for the research. Researchers gain sharper focus and a new understanding of shades of meaning when they bring together multiple sources of data (Nabudere, 2008). The children's digital stories and all related data, including successive drafts of scripts, storyboards and digital stories, and interviews were organized by each individual child. Copies of the workshop recordings were also added to each child's folder. The educators' journals and transcribed focus group was organized into one group folder, and copies of the workshop recordings, including pre-brief and debrief workshop discussion recordings were also added to that folder. As noted, I had planned to use pseudonyms to protect the

identities of the participants; however, all participants and their parents, except for one child participant requested me to use their legal name.

Data Transcription and Familiarization

As the first step of my data analysis process, I transcribed the audio narration of the digital stories, workshop discussions, interviews and focus group as they are being collected, in this way allowing my reflections to be relevant and timely with each data source. Although time consuming, I transcribed the data sources word for word, as this provides a further level of analysis that is challenging to obtain from audio/video recordings.

During my first reading of transcripts, I included textual content from both the audio/video recordings and on-screen text from the digital stories that are relevant to my research questions. In my second reading of transcripts, I reviewed the recordings once again to note other relevant features such as discernable emotions, laughing, crying, pauses and interruptions. In my third reading, I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. These repeated readings of the data allowed me to familiarize myself with it, focus on the themes and patterns, and listen for understanding (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tilley, 2016).

Digital Story Analysis

The digital stories produced during the project afforded insights into the Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences in Ontario. This section describes the strategies I used to comprehend the complexities and intricacies of the children's digital stories.

In reading through the literature, it was not clear what analytic strategies researchers are using to interpret what children might be trying to communicate through visual media. The literature states that studies following a visual methodology need to pay careful attention to how particular images are engaged with in specific, diverse and multi-sensory ways by the creator

(Rose, 2004). Therefore, when analysing digital stories, it is recommended to watch the digital story with the storyteller and ask them to explain the process of decision making in relation to story, images and sound (Gachago et al., 2019). Pandya et al. (2015) noted that children's interview comments about each image within their digital stories indicated narrative aspects that researchers would not otherwise have seen or heard by solely watching the digital stories. Unpacking the choices storytellers make in creating multimedia narratives can reveal a great deal about the personal, such as their aesthetic preferences, cognitive-developmental process and sociocultural dynamics of representation (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2013; Gachago et al., 2019; Gallagher et al., 2013). This approach aligns with this project's theoretical framework, as it positions children as knowing subjects and appreciates the limits of what we can see, know and understand about their childhood contexts, individual subjectivities and exercise of multiple voices (Luttrell, 2010).

During the children's interviews (see Appendix N), the child and I watched the digital story the child created, and they were asked to explain the process of decision making in relation to specific multimedia they had chosen to include in their digital story. Questions asked included, what, if anything, was important to them about the multimedia, and whether there was anything they wished they could have added or taken out from their digital story. The children's interviews concluded by asking them if there is anything else they would like to share about their digital stories.

I began analysis of the digital stories by organizing, transcribing and familiarizing myself with all of the data collected that were specifically related to the children's digital stories. Digital story related data were organized by individual children and added to their folder. Related data sources included:

(1) Five digital stories. The stories range in length from 2:01 - 3:16 minutes.

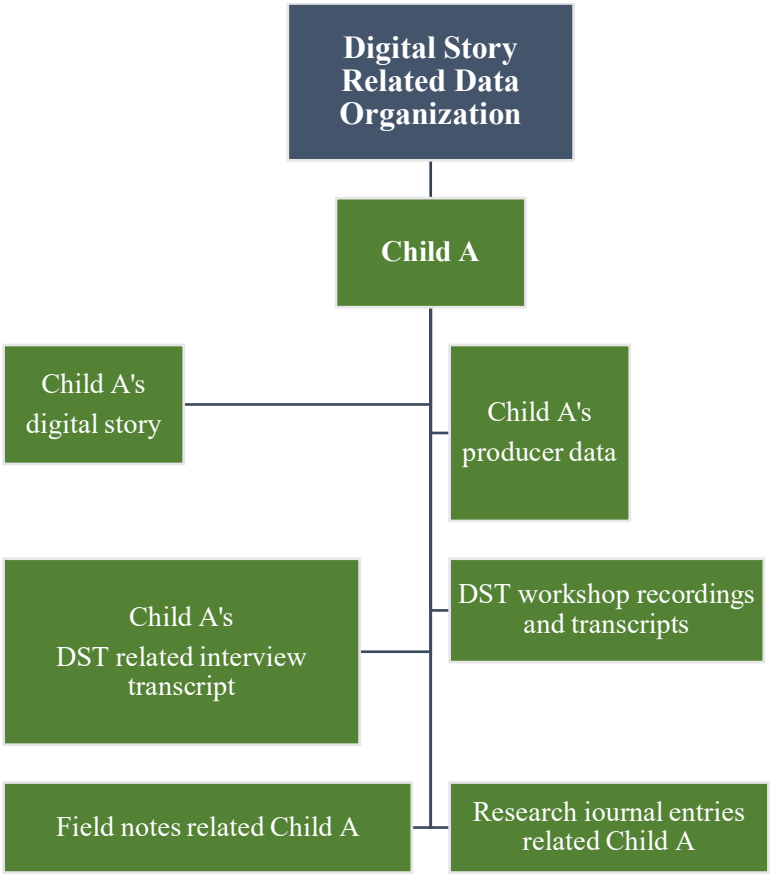
(2) Children's interview responses about their digital story elements.

(3) Children's producer data: successive drafts of scripts, voiceover recordings, storyboards and digital stories.

(4) Observational data: video recordings of the DST workshop sessions (including transcripts of story circles), my field notes taken throughout the research process on the children's perception of their resettlement, and my research journal.

Figure 4

Organizing Digital Story Related Data



The analysis in the following sections is presented in an orderly sequence but the process was not linear. The analysis moved backwards and forwards from one level of abstraction to another.

To analyse each child's digital story related data, I relied on grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Using each child's digital story and interview responses as the main units of analysis, I aimed to discover what they *had to say about* their resettlement experiences. I also took into consideration the children's intentions of expressing their resettlement experiences that did not become evident to me within their digital stories and comments but did, however, become evident to me through other related data sources, such as through their scripts and story circle conversations. This helped me to further refine my understanding of the local meaning of their story.

The first step of analysis, *open coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was done using a qualitative data analysis software program, ATLAS.ti. A software program was specifically selected for the first round of digital story related data coding to ease the burden of keeping track of the different categories of data collected in video, image, audio, written text and other media. ATLAS.ti allowed me to apply many categories to the same piece of data: for example, one item could be simultaneously labeled with a participant's name (or pseudonym), the source interview, and the data type, for instance, producer data.

After the initial step of breaking the data into excerpts and grouping excerpts into codes through ATLAS.ti, the next steps of analysis, *axial and selective coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were done manually by me to preserve a more holistic conception of the content of the data than that which would be possible with computer coding. I reread all the data, performing a loose form of constant comparative analysis – fundamental to a grounded theory analysis (Glaser

& Strauss, 1967) to organize the codes into categories and themes. This was done by comparing and contrasting the data so that similarities and differences in phenomena could be distinguished, and data could be sorted into categories and themes in a way that illustrated the connection of ideas between each child's digital story related data. This resulted in increasing levels of interpretation of the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The above steps of analysis were first individually completed for each child's digital story related data before moving onto analysing the group's data, that is, all of the children's digital story related data as a whole. Following individual children's data analysis, a constant comparative analysis was done between them to distinguish similarities and differences. As themes and relationships between them emerged from the group data, they were returned to the data for further substantiation and verification. This cyclic and iterative process continued until no new data emerged and theoretical saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation was evident after examining all of the children's digital story related data, whilst accounting for as much variation in the children's resettlement experiences as possible (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The analysis involved much reflection and negotiation which added to the depth and richness of the overarching themes developed.

From the digital story analysis process, I developed three core themes. Originally, I had additional themes, but I found that these themes also fit the three core themes, so I decided to collapse them into the core themes. These themes, however, present themselves differently in the children's digital stories. The core themes are not an indication that all the data can be easily confined to them: the children's resettlement experiences are diverse, and their stories have a lot to say, but to make this thesis manageable I chose to limit my analysis to three workable themes. Each of the core themes revealed information central to understanding Syrian refugee children's

resettlement experiences in Ontario. I explored what they *had to say about* their resettlement experiences in their digital stories, and identified salient themes and patterns presented within the digital story related data.

To answer my first research question, what perspectives on their resettlement experiences in Ontario do Syrian refugee children express through their digital stories, I began by identifying three core themes. Once the core themes had emerged, I linked each theme to the theoretical framework (Freire, 1970; Prout & James, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978) and relevant literature to make sense of the children's complex expression of their resettlement experiences. This linkage added theoretical depth, helped validate the analysis, and positioned the findings within the broader context of existing knowledge.

Children's Digital Storytelling Experience Analysis

This section describes the strategies I used to comprehend the children's experiences during the DST project process. Following the analysis of the children's digital stories, I moved onto analysing the children's experiences with the DST project. Similar to the digital stories analysis process, I began analysis of the children's DST experiences by organizing, transcribing and familiarizing myself with all of the data collected that were specifically related to the children's DST project experiences. These DST process related data were organized relative to individual children and added to their folder. Related data sources included the following:

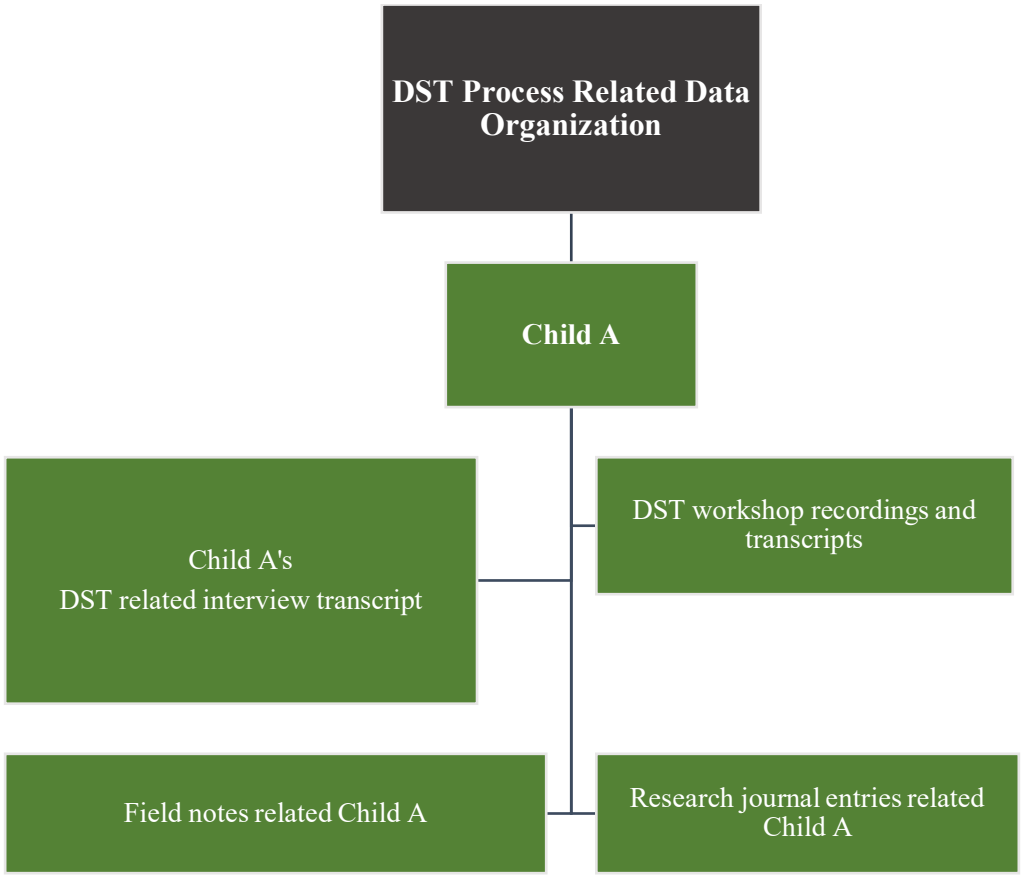
(1) Children's interview responses about their DST project experiences

(2) Observational data: video recordings of the DST workshop sessions (including transcripts of story circles), my field notes taken throughout the research process on the children's DST experiences, and my research journal.

The children's DST process related data offered insights into their DST project experiences.

Figure 5

Organizing Digital Storytelling Process Related Data



To make meaning of the children's DST process related data, I adopted the thematic analysis strategies recommended by Braun et al. (2019). Using each child's interview responses as the main unit of analysis, I aimed to discover their DST project experiences. I also took into consideration the children's experiences that did not become evident to me within their interview responses but did, however, become evident to me through other related data sources, such as through the workshop conversations. This helped me to further refine my understanding of their DST process experiences.

A thematic analysis looks for specific themes within the data that can be used to generate debate and draw conclusions, which is appropriate for this part of the study seeking to examine

the participants' DST project experiences. The first step of thematic analysis is done by assigning emergent (and descriptive) codes to each set of unitized data, that is, blocks of data that communicate one idea (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tilley, 2016). Similar to the digital story analysis, I used the ATLAS.ti software for the first round of DST process related data analysis, which is a commonly used platform for qualitative analysis and research (Mitchell et al., 2016). After the initial step of coding for units of meaning (and creating an emergent codes list) through ATLAS.ti, the next steps of analysis, sorting codes into categories, and constructing overarching themes based on categories (Braun et al., 2019) were done manually by me. The observational data were also analysed in a similar systemic fashion. They were used to develop emergent codes, categories and themes.

When analyzing qualitative data, researchers engage in a cyclic, iterative, and reflective process in which initial interpretations are challenged and data is constantly re-examined (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tilley, 2016). I returned to the earliest transcripts to concentrate on the emergent codes developed based on transcripts analysed later in the process to consider what I might have missed in the early stages. I considered the commonalities across coding language and collapsed similar codes. I also returned to the transcripts to contemplate the data I had not coded to ask why I made those decisions, so as to ensure that I had not dismissed important outlying data that are inconsistent with the majority of the data. After all codes were generated, recorded and collapsed, I sorted the final codes into categories based on how they were related to or distinct from one another and created overarching themes related to the categories developed. As themes became apparent, data sources were reviewed again to confirm themes. I reviewed all the DST process related data again, performing a loose form of constant comparative analysis of the initially coded data with

newly emerging categories and themes. This step helped me sort the data in a way that illustrated the connection between each child's DST process related data.

As was the case with my digital story analysis, the steps of analysis described above were first completed individually for each child's DST process related data and then followed by analysis of all the children's DST process related data taken as a whole. A constant comparative analysis was done between the group's DST process related data until theoretical saturation was reached. The last step of the analysis involved using the theoretical framework to interpret or make sense of the complex data and to connect the findings to the relevant literature – so as to make the analysis transparent and credible (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Figg & McCartney, 2010; Tilley, 2016). This step is referred to as *triangulation*. Once the themes had emerged, I engaged in a comparative analysis where I explored how the themes compare and contrast with the findings from other researchers. Next, I linked the themes to the study's theoretical framework and relevant literature to determine whether the DST project process provided an opportunity for the children's meaningful expression of their resettlement experiences. By connecting the data to the theoretical framework and literature, I was able to construct an analysis that is rooted in local meaning while at the same time being open to critical approaches to analyzing the data. Throughout the analysis process, I continued journaling reflexivity notes to uncover and minimize personal bias and assumptions.

To address my second research question regarding Syrian refugee children's experiences of creating digital stories I developed three core themes based on their DST experiences. Each of the core themes revealed information central to understanding this study's Syrian refugee children's DST project experiences. I explored what they had to say about their experiences, and identified salient themes and patterns presented within the DST process related data. Once the

core themes had emerged, I linked each theme to the theoretical framework and relevant literature to make sense of the children's DST experiences, add theoretical depth, help authenticate the results of the analysis, and place the findings in the context of current knowledge.

Educators' Digital Storytelling Experience Analysis

This section describes the strategies I used to comprehend the educators' experiences facilitating the DST project process. After analyzing the children's experiences with DST, I proceeded to examine the educators' perspectives on facilitating the process. The same analytical approach used for the children's data was applied to the educators' experiences. Related data sources included the following:

(1) Educators' focus group discussion

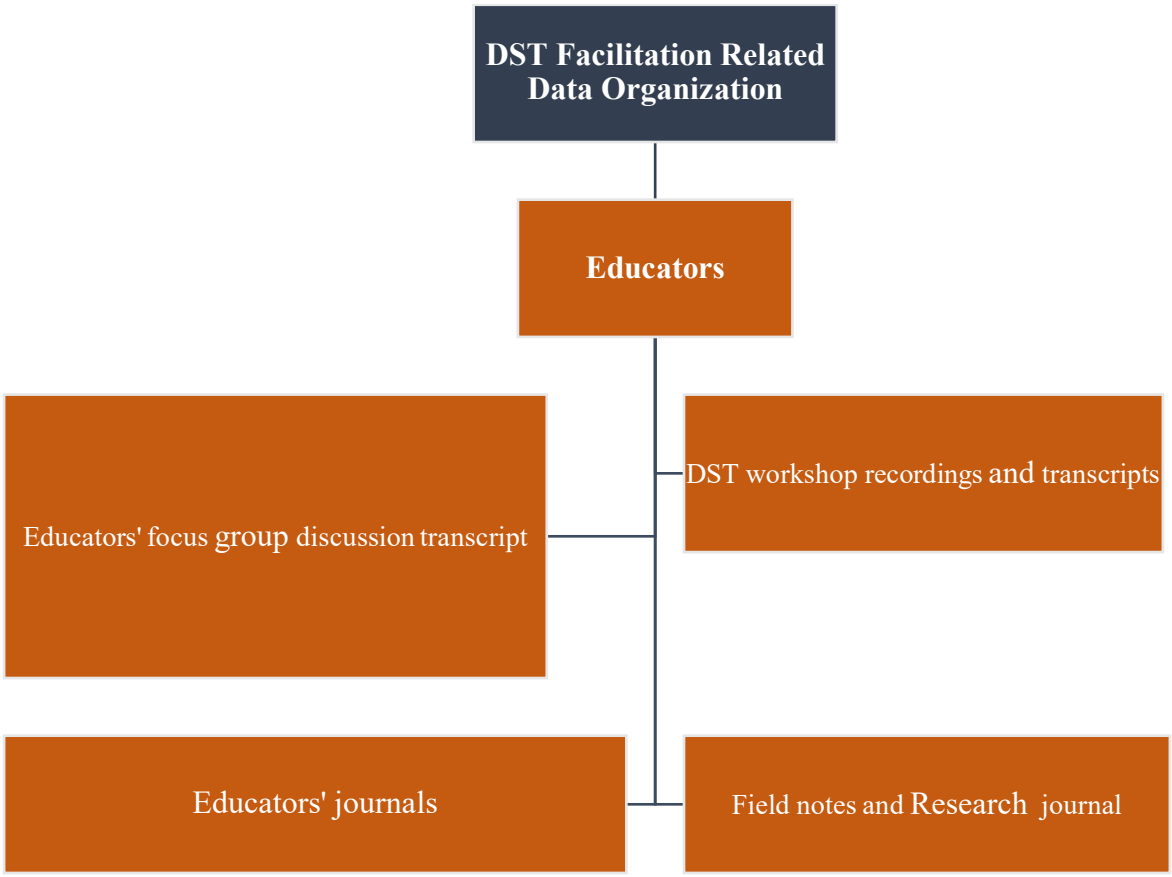
(2) Educators' journals

(3) Observational data: video recordings of the DST workshop sessions, my field notes taken throughout the research process and my research journal.

The educators' transcribed focus group data was organized by group, with copies of the workshop recordings, including pre-brief and debrief discussions, also added to the group's folder. Although I initially intended to use pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities, the educators specifically requested that their legal names be used instead. The educators' DST facilitation related data offered valuable insights into their experiences as facilitators.

Figure 6

Organizing Digital Storytelling Facilitation related Data



To interpret the educators' DST facilitation data, I employed the thematic analysis strategies recommended by Braun et al. (2019). The educators' focus group discussion served as the primary unit of analysis, allowing me to explore their facilitation experiences in depth. Additionally, I considered insights that were not immediately apparent in the focus group but emerged through other data sources, such as their journals and workshop conversations.

To address my third research question on educators' experiences facilitating the DST project, I identified three core themes based on their facilitation experiences. Each theme provided key insights into understanding the role of DST in supporting educators' working with refugee children. Once the themes emerged, I conducted a comparative analysis with findings

from other researchers. I then connected the themes to the study's theoretical framework and relevant literature to assess whether the DST facilitation process offered educators a deeper understanding of Syrian refugee children's lived resettlement experiences.

Credibility

This section will focus on the strategies that I took to increase the credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of my research study's findings. Credibility refers to the congruence between how participants view the world and the researcher's representation of this (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure credibility of findings, I triangulated the data (Creswell, 2015; Figg & McCartney, 2010; Tilley, 2016). Figg and McCartney (2010) state that multiple data sources ensure triangulation of data, and Gubrium and Harper (2013) state that collecting and organizing multiple layers of data takes time and energy, but it pays off in terms of greater critical consciousness and self-reflexivity within researchers. Researchers gain sharper focus and a new understanding of shades of meaning when they bring together the multiple forms of data. Therefore, rather than base the analysis solely on my interpretations of the digital stories and the interviews and focus group discussion, I included other forms of data, such as video-recordings of workshop sessions, educator journals and personal field notes. This helped to facilitate a deeper understanding of resettlement experiences and the project process and ensure credibility (Creswell, 2015).

During the data analysis process, I reviewed the data sources, coding protocol, coding structure and individual codes with my dissertation supervisor. This allowed for feedback on the analysis process. I continued to review the coding process/system and the existing codes regularly to ensure consistency and accuracy.

I also provided participants the opportunity to review preliminary findings and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. As the final strategy to ensure credibility of the analysis, I maintained regular reflection and journaling of personal biases and assumptions (McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics Protocol

Since the study involved human participants, I completed the internal ethics review process required for graduate research involving human subjects by the York University Research Ethics Board prior to recruiting participants. Approval from the Research Ethics Board indicated that the research protocols were designed to sufficiently protect participants' rights and welfare from unnecessary risk and harm (Creswell, 2015). However, research involving children demands a more rigorous ethical consideration than that with adults. Researchers must carefully evaluate the risks and benefits of children's participation and develop specific ethical protocols and safeguards (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Christensen & Prout, 2002; D'Amico et al., 2016). Furthermore, particular attention must be paid to the ethical, personal, political, and practical complexities that arise when working with marginalized children through DST methods (Lenette et al., 2015).

Informed Consent

Informed consent involves researchers implementing specific strategies to ensure that participants understand the benefits of participating voluntarily in research, and that consent remains an ongoing and informed process (Christensen & Prout, 2002; D'Amico et al., 2016). As previously outlined in the *Recruiting Participants* section, involvement in the DST project was entirely voluntary, with participants retaining the option to withdraw consent at any point during

the DST project. For child participants, written permission from parents was required in addition to the children's assent. Additionally, measures were taken (detailed below) to ensure participant anonymity and the confidentiality of information.

Before beginning data collection, informed consent was obtained from adult participants and assent was secured from child participants. During the recruitment process, participants were provided with a consent form detailing the study's nature and ethical considerations. They were encouraged to ask questions and express any concerns. Participants were reminded that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. Similarly, child participants received an assent form outlining the research study's purpose. I personally discussed the project with the child participants, ensuring they understood that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time up to the publication of this dissertation.

Participants were provided with my contact information to facilitate withdrawal from the study at any time between recruitment and the publication of the dissertation. For those who chose to withdraw, their data would have been deleted. This process was outlined on both the consent and assent forms. However, no participants withdrew from the study.

Potential Risks

The risks associated with participation were anticipated to be minimal. However, it is important to acknowledge that the study required child participants to reflect on their resettlement experiences, which could potentially cause discomfort if traumatic memories were triggered. Additionally, because the study focused on resettlement, there was a possibility that participants might be reminded of losses experienced in Syria and Jordan. To mitigate these potential risks and discomforts, both the educators and I made efforts to ensure the children's

comfort throughout the project. Furthermore, I had prepared a list of mental health resources to provide parents if their child needed additional support.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality presents a significant ethical concern in DST methods. Participant-generated digital stories that include personal photographs increase the risk of revealing identifiable faces (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). Although children were advised to frame their photographs to obscure faces, they chose not to follow this guidance. Initially, pseudonyms were planned for use in all data and final documents. However, as the digital stories are the children's creations, they expressed a preference to use their legal names, which was supported by parental consent. Additionally, educators opted to use their legal names to reflect their pride in the collaborative work with the children.

It is important to acknowledge that absolute anonymity cannot be assured due to the nature of digital transactions and the presence of other participants in workshops and focus groups. To protect participants' privacy, all collected data will be secured with password protection. In accordance with Christensen and Prout (2002), significant extracts from interviews were reviewed with the children before analysis to ensure accurate representation and consent.

Research with Refugee Children

Research involving refugee populations is common, yet it often lacks direct benefits for participants, raising ethical concerns when working with marginalized groups. DST studies, however, offer a notable exception. Participants from marginalized and vulnerable groups have reported psychological and well-being benefits from creating and sharing digital stories (Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Gagne et al., 2017a; de Jager et al., 2017; Loe, 2013; Stacey & Hardy, 2011; Vasudevan, 2006). DST has been shown to help children process traumatic

experiences and offer mental health benefits through reflective expression and discussion (Anderson & Wallace, 2015). While revisiting past experiences could be distressing, research indicates that the reflective nature of DST often has positive effects (Gagne et al., 2017a; Stacey & Hardy, 2011). Additionally, child-centered DST projects foster meaningful learning, critical reflection, and personal meaning-making (Gagne et al., 2017a). This process can provide tangible benefits for child participants (Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Gagne et al., 2017a; de Jager et al., 2017; Loe, 2013; Stacey & Hardy, 2011; Vasudevan, 2006).

Refugee children, given their age, ethnicity, and refugee experiences, are a particularly vulnerable population, presenting ethical, relational, and practical challenges for research methods and consent processes (Ali & Gibran, 2020). However, involving children in research can enhance community understanding and responsiveness to their developmental needs (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Grieshaber, 2007; Luttrell, 2010; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Hill (2005) outlines key ethical considerations for qualitative research on children's lived experiences: (a) welfare—research should enhance children's well-being; (b) protection—procedures should minimize stress and include contingency plans for risks; (c) provision—participation should give children a sense of contributing to society; and (d) choice and participation—children should make informed decisions about their involvement.

This research adheres to these guidelines: (a) welfare: the study aimed to improve understanding of refugee children's resettlement experiences to help educators provide better support; (b) protection: risks were expected to be minimal, and as outlined in the *Potential Risks* section, children and parents requesting support would be provided with a list of free counseling services. I also monitored for discomfort and ensured a supportive environment; (c) provision: participants and their parents were informed about how their involvement could benefit other

refugee children resettling in Ontario; and (d) choice and participation: as described in the *Informed Consent* section, children could opt in or out of the study at any time without pressure.

This chapter detailed the methodology of the study. Building on this foundation, the next chapter presents the findings, showcasing how the DST project enabled Syrian refugee children to share their resettlement experiences while fostering greater social awareness among educators.

Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

Five Syrian refugee children and three educators participated in this study. The objective of this study was to: (1) facilitate Syrian refugee children's first-person digital expressions of lived resettlement experiences in Ontario, (2) offer educators greater insight into Syrian refugee children's lived resettlement experiences, and (3) gain insight into the children's experiences of creating their digital stories, and the experiences of educators who facilitate the digital storytelling workshop. In this chapter, a discussion of the core themes that emerged from the data collected is integrated with relevant literature to analyze patterns and deepen my understanding of the inquiry. The themes of this chapter are constructed from my interpretation of the data. The process of interpretation and explicating a digital story can be subjective, as meaning can transcend the visible. To make the analysis less subjective, I triangulated the themes with relevant literature and theories related to the topic.

Portraits of Participants

In the following table I provide some demographic information about the participants followed by more detailed portraits of each of them.

Table 3: *Information about the Participants*

Name	**Age**	**Gender**	**Country of Birth**
Musaab	13	M	Syria
Jonathan	12	M	Syria
Alma	10	F	Syria
Hamza	13	M	Syria

Yomna	11	F	Syria
Amber	34	F	Canada
Jess	41	F	Canada
Safra	41	F	Sri Lanka

Musaab, a seven-year-old boy, arrived in Canada in December 2015 as a privately sponsored refugee with his parents and siblings. He is the second of five siblings. Originally from Syria, Musaab and his family had sought refuge in Jordan during the conflict, living there for four years before resettling in Canada. Musaab shared that he remembers "Syria a little but I remember Jordan much better." Having attended school in Jordan, Musaab noted the strict nature of his school there compared to his school in Canada.

At the time of data collection, Musaab was 13 years old and in grade seven. He and his family live in an area with a significant Arabic-speaking population. During the first digital storytelling (DST) workshop session, Musaab shared his interests, stating that he likes to play volleyball and go out with his friends. He also shared that his favorite food is a Syrian food called Yabraa.

Jonathan was a six-year-old boy when he arrived in Canada. He is the third of five siblings and is Musaab's younger brother. At the time of data collection, Jonathan was 12 years old and in grade six. During the first DST workshop session, Jonathan shared that he likes to play soccer.

Alma was a four-year-old girl when she arrived in Canada. She is the fourth of five siblings and is Musaab and Jonathan's younger sister. When sharing about her journey from Jordon to Canada, Alma couldn't remember much. She shared, "if someone who is in Jordan

moves to [Canada], they will be amazed when they see the big city. I thought I was in a whole new world. I only remember me being amazed."

At the time of data collection, Alma was 10 years old and in grade four. During the first DST workshop session, Alma shared that she likes to go swimming and play volleyball. She shared that her favorite food is noodles. She also shared that her favorite animals are cats.

Hamza was a nine-year-old boy when he arrived in Canada in July 2018 as a privately sponsored refugee with his parents and sibling. He is the older of two siblings. Hamza is Musaab's first cousin; their fathers are siblings. Hamza and his family are also originally from Syria and sought refuge in Jordan for six years before resettling in Canada.

At the time of data collection, Hamza was 13 years old and in grade seven. He and his family live in the same apartment building as Musaab and his family. During the first DST workshop session, Hamza shared that he likes to play soccer and eat shawarma.

Yomna was a seven-year-old girl when she arrived in Canada. She is Hamza's younger sister. At the time of data collection, Yomna was 11 years old and in grade five. During the first DST workshop session, she shared that she likes cats, and her favorite food is pizza.

Amber (she/her) is a descendant of Europeans and grew up in rural Ontario. She now lives, works, and plays in Toronto alongside her partner and teenage son. She is a Early Childhood Educator (ECE) who currently works as a project coordinator at the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario. After completing her BA in Psychology from the University of Waterloo, two years of teaching English in a nursery school in Thailand, and completing her diploma in ECE from George Brown College, Amber worked as an ECE at a George Brown Lab School before moving into her current role. During the first DST workshop session, she shared

that one of her favorite things to do all the time is riding her bicycle and her favorite food is pizza.

Jess (they/them) is an immigrant, and a visible cultural and racial minority. They were born in Winnipeg and graduated from the University of Manitoba. They subsequently completed the ECE diploma program at George Brown College and has been working with young children for over 15 years, including working with young children in Toronto and Japan. Currently, Jess is a Community Organizer for the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario, as well as serves as President on the Executive Board for CUPE 2484 Toronto Child Care Workers, and is a member of the Board for the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. During the first DST workshop session, they shared that their favorite food is frozen yogurt with sprinkles, candy and fruit.

Safra (she/her) is a mother, a first-generation immigrant, and a visible cultural, racial and religious minority. She is also an ECE, a graduate student and the researcher for this study. Currently, she works as a professional learning specialist at the College of Early Childhood Educators. Safra is multilingual, fluent in English, Sinhala, Tamil and Malay. She has over 20 years of experience working with young children in Sri Lanka and Toronto. During the first DST workshop session, she shared that she loves to be in the garden and drink coffee all the time.

Syrian Refugee Children's Resettlement Experiences

From having facilitated Syrian refugee children's first-person digital expressions of lived resettlement experiences in Ontario, this section of the findings chapter will attempt to provide a lens on the resettlement experiences from the viewpoint of Syrian refugee children through answering this study's first research question, *what perspectives on their resettlement*

experiences in Ontario do Syrian refugee children express through their digital stories? It is important to note that while this question is not the primary focus of this study, I wanted to honour the children's digital stories, that is, their voice and work. Hence, their digital stories and related data were examined to identify the resettlement experiences they shared through them. The following core themes were identified from the children's DST related data responding to the first research question. In this section, each theme is described and explained in detail, along with supporting evidence, namely, descriptive quotes from the DST related data.

Introduction to the Children's Digital Stories

In my observations, I witnessed how children utilized DST tools to convey meaningful stories rooted in their lived experiences in Toronto. This section introduces these digital stories, offering essential context to help readers grasp the children's motivations and intentions for sharing their narratives. However, I intentionally refrain from interpreting their digital stories, respecting DST's core principle of allowing individuals to express their perspectives directly, without external reinterpretation. The multimodal nature of DST enables refugee children to articulate the more intangible elements of their identities, such as their emotions, needs, strengths, and aspirations. This aligns with prior research that emphasizes how DST can reveal the deeper layers of personal experience (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Pandya et al., 2015). In doing so, DST fosters the application of the sociology of childhood theory, which acknowledges children as active agents with their own voices, agency, and unique viewpoints (Prout, 2002).

Winter Advice by Musaab, Musaab shared about wanting his digital story to inform his friends in Syria and Jordan about Canada's cold weather as they might not know that it could get

so cold in Canada. He wanted his story to help people from making the same "mistake" he made—by not dressing appropriately for Canada's cold weather:

> My video is about when I first came to Canada and how I made a bad mistake by not dressing good for Canada. I picked that story because I was in Syria and Jordan my whole entire life. I didn't know that there was this cold of a country. I was like, how cold can it be and I didn't know it would be this cold. For example, if my friends in Jordan or Syria want to come, I could tell them before they come.

My Friend by Hamza, Hamza shared that his digital story is about his friend. During Hamza's interview, Musaab helped with translation. Hamza shared that if refugee children watched his story they would learn about friendships in Canada:

> They might feel that [my digital story is] really good because they are refugees, and that friendships could be like hurtful or something like that—[friendships] might end. It would teach them a bit of English and bit of how friendships in Canada happen.

My Soccer Story by Jonathan, Jonathan shared that his digital story is about playing soccer. He was the only child participant that chose to use a pseudonym selecting the name "Jonathan," because he was "scared" that his family and friends would watch his story on YouTube and "judge" him. One possible reason for this may be that he had little experience of sharing his experiences with others. Jonathan shared that if refugee children watched his story, they would want to make one too: "They will feel proud, I guess. They will think that they want to do the same thing because they want to tell their own story."

My Story by Yomna, Yomna shared that her digital story is about a time when she was in Jordan and almost died because of a wood heater. She said that she decided to share this story because "I just feel it is very interesting. And I want people to know to be careful with wood

heaters.” Yomna was excited to show her digital story with her friends. When asked, how do you think someone will feel when they watch your story, she said, “I feel like they're going to imagine how it happened in real life.”

Never Go Down a Steep Hill with a Bike by Alma, Alma's digital story is about her experience of riding a bike, falling, and losing consciousness. She wanted her digital story to inform a friend coming to Canada to never go down a steep hill with a bike. She emphasized the fear she had experienced: “I was very scared. I don't want that to happen to anyone else. So, never go down a steep hill with a bike!”

Analysis of the Children’s Digital Stories

The data analysis revealed several key themes, highlighting the significance of the DST process for the children. Engaging in DST not only helped refresh their memories but also enabled them to communicate complex experiences and emotions related to their resettlement. Through the DST process, the children were able to construct and assert their identities in an agentive manner (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Pandya et al., 2015). Moreover, the children recognized that their autobiographical stories carried importance and value. Their digital stories offered rich insights into their lived experiences, allowing them to share insider perspectives on issues affecting their daily lives. Through their narratives, the children were able to articulate their personal agendas and viewpoints (Ayoub, 2020; Barnikis, 2015; Guo et al., 2019).

In analysing the digital stories, I was cognizant of the partiality of narratives, that the stories were shaped and reshaped throughout the process of their production (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2013). I found that some commonalities existed among their diverse stories. Some of the themes demonstrated in the children’s stories are positive sense of self, adaptation, and

belonging. These themes intersect one another and dominate the children's narratives. In this section, I offer my own close reading of the children's digital stories and the themes I identified as emerging from their stories will be discussed. The analysis of the stories presented here is organized around the three emergent themes outlined above.

Theme 1: Positive Sense of Self

The overarching theme emerging from the DST-related data was the children's development of a positive sense of self in relation to their resettlement experiences. Each child reflected on the challenges they had overcome in their new environment, emphasizing their personal strengths and qualities that aided their adjustment. Several children also shared their aspirations for the future. By focusing on their accomplishments and sense of belonging, the children were able to highlight their resilience and growth. When discussing accomplishments, the children emphasized their ability to adapt to a new culture and learn from their experiences. They frequently referred to their "mistakes", that is the challenges they encountered, and underscored their ability to learn from these experiences by overcoming obstacles. In terms of belonging, the children highlighted the importance of friendships and familial bonds in their resettlement process. This finding aligns with previous research on youth and DST, which suggests that young people use the DST process to identify positive aspects of their lives and foster more certain and positive identity formations (Wexler et al., 2013). Overall, the children's digital stories illustrate that their resettlement experiences were context-dependent, shaped by the specific point in time and circumstances in which they were situated (Vygotsky, 1978).

Qualitative researchers mostly rely on words used by those with whom we share a language, which makes them confident about drawing meanings from them (Ali & Gibran, 2020). However, with DST meaning can be drawn from other mediums, such as images and

drawings. Within the children's digital stories, they asserted their positive sense of self through their voices and photos, including personal and online images. The photos they chose indicated their visual preference and were a show of pride of their accomplishments and sense of belonging. The photos used result in the digital stories exuding the children's energy, enthusiasm, humor, and creativity that befits the storytellers behind the creative pieces. The photos gave clues to how they wanted to represent themselves to others.

The children's digital stories served as personal archives, capturing their resettlement experiences and emphasizing the positive aspects of their lives. These stories were particularly significant in publicly showcasing their strengths and resilience. For instance, Musaab explained that creating a digital story brought back "old memories that you buried deeply or maybe forgot. And you probably will remember them, and it will make you happy." The children also expressed a desire to share these memories with their friends, using their stories as a way to celebrate their experiences and affirm their personal growth.

Theme 2: Pride of Accomplishments

The next theme that emerged from the DST related data that highlights the children's achievements is the unique ways they adapted to their new home. Adaptation was mentioned in most of the resettlement experiences the children shared. Specifically, the ways they coped or dealt with the challenges that arose during the early stages of their resettlement. Musaab's digital story, "Winter Advice", is about acclimatization to winter. His story begins with the "horrible mistake" he made as he describes his experiences of leaving Jordan and arriving in Canada. He narrates:

> Canada is freezing cold. I've never been this cold in my life because I was living in Syria and Jordan, where it isn't cold. I didn't know that Canada would be that cold, so I was

> like let me wear shorts and a t-shirt because it was hot in Jordan at that time… After about four years, I was able to handle the winter weather. Now, I enjoy skiing, sledding and building snowmen. I could still remember the first time I could jump into snow.

In our conversations, Musaab shared his ability to learn and adapt from his experiences, "I've never been in that cold weather in my life, so I was like pretty surprised of how cold it is. But now I'm really used to it right now". When I asked Musaab what images in his digital story are important to him, he said:

> The one that I like the most is the one when it was me and my cousins down in the playground and it was snowing. That was one of my favorites because that was really a long time ago, and that was one of the first times I actually had fun in Canada in winter because I usually barely have snow pants. That day I had snow pants and snow gear. We went downstairs and we started playing.

This following photo is a representation of Musaab's pride in his achievement of adapting to cold weather.

Figure 7

Musaab Playing in the Snow

Musaab's response above also demonstrates his reflections on his resettlement experiences, including his needs to support his adaptation, such as having winter clothes helped him to adapt to winter, "One of the first times I actually had fun in Canada in winter because I usually barely have snow pants. That day I had snow pants and snow gear."

While Musaab's digital story focused on his achievement of adapting to cold weather, Hamza's story focused on his achievement of adapting to his new school, including to school routines, "We do the work, and listen to the teacher, and help the work. Line up together under the tree." Yomna's story focused on her achievement of adapting to Canadian extra-curricular activities:

> I really like watching hockey and the Toronto Maple Leafs. I don't play ice hockey but sometimes I play street hockey with my best friend Bronwyn when I go over. One thing I really want to get is an Austin Matthews Toronto Maple Leafs jersey.

Consistent with the research literature on refugee children's resettlement experiences (Government of Canada, 2019; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017), the findings from this study indicate that learning the English language was part of the children's resettlement experiences. In our story circles, Jonathan shared about his achievement of adapting to the English language, "When I was in Grade 1, I could speak both Arabic and English… I was able to help [a new student] in the classroom by translating what the teacher said, and translating the work we do". In Hamza's interview, he too touched on his achievement of adapting to the English language by sharing that "[his digital story] would teach [refugee children that watched it] a bit of English…" These statements reflect the children's pride in their proficiency in English, a language often regarded as "superior" among Syrian refugee families (Ali, 2019, as cited in Ali & Gibran, 2020). Notably, three of the five participants in this study, Musaab, Jonathan, and Alma, also participated in the Ali and Gibran (2020) study, further underscoring the consistency of this sense of pride in using English.

It is important to note that even though the children shared details about their journey of moving from Jordan to Canada, along with their attendant emotions, in our conversations, most of them decided to focus their stories on other resettlement experiences, with the exception of Musaab and Alma, who wrote scripts that describe their flight from Jordan to Canada and their first experiences in Canada. Musaab narrates as an image of a plane appears in his digital story:

> No one in my family had been on a plane, so everyone was feeling sick, like they were about to throw up. The airport told us to get off in Toronto early because we were feeling

sick. So, we went into the airport to get our luggage. We had to wait about three hours at the airport because there was a horrible winter storm. Because we weren't wearing proper winter clothes we had to wait.

Alma shared:

The night before we left Jordan to come to Canada, we were with the whole family. We were singing songs together and saying goodbye to each other. I was three years old at the time and was kind of confused because I didn't know what was going on.

The next day I found myself in an airplane. I remember walking down the plane aisles with my brothers and holding candy in our hands. The plane felt different, and it was very loud inside it. When I looked out the window, it was creepy and cool at the same time.

Once we landed in Toronto. The airport was very loud and there were a lot of people in it. We came out of the airport and saw people waiting for us. I don't know who they were.

When we were driving to our apartment, I was amazed when I saw the big city. I thought I was in a whole new world. Even today, I remember me being amazed.

The place where we lived in Jordan was a small city. The place was kind of dirty and it had a lot of big rocks on the ground. Toronto was big. There was a lot of people and very tall buildings. It was very different to how it was in Jordan.

I felt like I was a different person. Because I didn't feel like how I felt in Jordan. It felt so different. When I was in Jordan, it felt like home, and I was comfortable there. When I came to Toronto everything felt new and I didn't know anything.

Alma had hoped to create two digital stories: one about riding a bike down a hill, which she completed, and another about her experiences of leaving Jordan and arriving in Canada. Unlike the independently written scripts of other children, Alma's second script was co-

constructed in conversation with me. As she shared her story aloud, I typed her words, allowing her to focus on verbally expressing her emotions without the added burden of writing. This approach enabled Alma to convey her narrative authentically, as spoken words often capture nuances of emotion that writing can miss (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The conversational process also allowed for immediate reflection and clarification, helping Alma expand on her thoughts in real time. Freire (1970) emphasizes that dialogue is a transformative tool in storytelling, fostering mutual understanding and co-construction of meaning. In Alma's case, this method helped her delve deeper into her lived experiences, resulting in an especially emotionally resonant narrative. However, due to the time it takes to create a digital story, Alma was not able to make her second script into a digital story during this DST project.

This approach underscores the importance of flexibility in participatory storytelling practices, as providing alternative means of expression can empower children to share their experiences more effectively and meaningfully (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Furthermore, it highlights the need for researchers to adapt their methods to accommodate individual needs, ensuring that every participant can communicate their story in a way that feels most authentic and accessible to them (Ali & Gibran, 2020).

Learning from experiences was the next theme that emerged from the DST-related data that highlights the children's achievements. Learning gained through extra-curricular activities, such as play, was mentioned in most of the stories the children shared. I found this theme to be pervasive throughout the digital stories. Jonathan narrates about learning to play soccer in his digital story:

> I played soccer a few times back in Jordan, but I started playing for real in Grade 3 in Canada. I tried to join the soccer team in Grade 3 but did not make it in… I started

> practicing by myself downstairs in my building. Over the last few years, a ton of people from my building came to join me. We practiced together, to keep playing every time we went downstairs. We became our own team… we were really good players…

In our story circles, when Jonathan was asked what he would tell someone moving to Toronto about playing soccer, he said, "it's really hard and confusing but usually you can get used to it." It is worth noting that Jonathan did not portray himself as a victim in his digital story. Although his story demonstrated clearly the challenges he experienced, he depicted his character as persistent in his attempts at learning to play soccer. From the beginning of his story, he played an active role in his attempts to achieve his goal of learning to play soccer. His positive representation of his soccer experiences serves to articulate and suggest his determination to learn to play soccer and his pride of his soccer skills.

Alma's digital story is about learning about safety, specifically on safety when riding a bicycle. Her digital story emphasizes her ability to learn from her experiences, including learning to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle and not riding a bicycle down a steep hill. She said that she decided to share this story because "I was very scared. I don't want that to happen to anyone else. So, never go down a steep hill with a bike!" Similarly, Yomna's digital story also touches on safety—safety when using wood heaters, and her ability to learn from her experiences. She said that she decided to share this story because "I want people to know to be careful with wood heaters." In our story circles, the children often shared experiences of them getting hurt while playing and how they learned about safety precautions from each of their experiences.

Much of the existing literature on children with refugee backgrounds tends to portray them as dependent, helpless, and as passive recipients of aid rather than active agents in their own well-being. Often, children's lives are examined through the lens of adults, despite the

significant differences that may exist between adult and child perspectives (Mishra Tarc, 2016). In contrast, the children's digital stories provide direct evidence of their lived experiences and identities. These stories emphasize their personal qualities, such as perseverance, sociability, and agency, that supported their successful resettlement, and they focus on what is going well in their lives. The literature also highlights the unique power of DST for refugee children, enabling them to portray their perspectives in ways they had not previously achieved (Chen, 2015; Emert, 2013; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). The findings from this study further demonstrate how the children's stories reflect the various adaptive strategies they employed to navigate their new environments. Through these digital stories, the children are not only learning from their past experiences but also reflecting on their personal progress, expressing pride in their achievements, and reaffirming their resilience.

Theme 3: Sense of Belonging

As the literature has indicated, social relationships are an important aspect of refugee children's resettlement needs and can support their social adjustment to their new society (Guo et al., 2019; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016). The children's digital stories presented the significant relationships in their lives, especially their friendships and familial bonds, that were part of their resettlement experiences. For example, Hamza's digital story focused on his friendship with Dante and about making friends. Similarly, a part of Yomna's digital story also focused on her friendship with Bronwyn, "I play street hockey with my best friend Bronwyn when I go over". Both Hamza and Yomna wanted to include photos of their friends in their digital stories, however, these photos were not included as I did not have permission from the children and their parents/caregivers to include the photos. Instead, Yomna chose to include a

drawing of Bronwyn. The following image is Yomna's drawing of herself and Bronwyn ice skating.

Figure 8

Yomna's Drawing of Herself and Bronwyn

Hamza chose to include the following image of a basketball with hands on top of it.

Figure 9

Basketball with Hands

He said that this was his favorite photo from his digital story because “I see the people, the people is playing together”. These images are a representation of the children’s pride in making friends and playing with them.

In our story circles, Jonathan shared his experience of helping a new student and becoming friends with them: “I was able to help [the new student] in the classroom by translating what the teacher said . . . we became really good friends . . . we were friends for 5 years.” The children frequently referred to both individual friendships and larger groups of friends. From their experiences, I interpreted that these friendships played a significant and primarily positive role in their social adjustment to their new home. Although research on Syrian refugees in Canada suggests that friendships can contribute to a sense of belonging (Agrawal, 2019; Ayoub, 2020; Government of Canada, 2019), it would be an overextension here to equate these personal relationships to experiencing a sense of belonging to Canadian communities. Rather, these friendships can be understood as sources of comfort, connection, and support during the children’s resettlement journey.

More often in the digital stories, friendships were nurtured through taking part in extracurricular activities, such as playing a sport. For example, Hamza starts his story with, “in the gym class, Dante told me come and play together. Now I have so many friends to play soccer and basketball”. Similarly, Jonathan’s digital story focused on making friends with his neighbours through playing soccer: “Over the last few years, a ton of people from my building came to [play soccer with] me… I felt like a lot of people I played with were like a family”. It is important to note that, many newcomers and racialized families live in Jonathan’s building and neighborhood, which likely contributed to the sense of connection and community he described. In our story circles, Hamza shared that he likes to play soccer and basketball in his school

because his friends play them. In his interview, he also shared that refugee children that watch his digital story would learn about "how friendships happen in Canada". These statements highlight the important role extracurricular activities, particularly sports, play in fostering friendships.

In connection to the overarching positive sense of self theme, friendships provide children with a positive sense of self and give them the sense that they are fitting in. Therefore, their representations of their friendships serve to articulate the positives in their lives. For example, in our conversations, Yomna shared that she was excited to show her digital story to her friends, and Musaab said, "my friends keep on searching for my [digital story] on every single platform". In our story circles he also shared about his friends being part of his hopes for the future, "I [imagine] me being at the beach, eating and barbecuing food with lots of friends". The children in this study consistently presented themselves as being social, and having a desire to make friends and fit in, that is, to belong with their peers.

The literature on Syrian refugee children highlights challenges such as bullying, teasing, and difficulties forming friendships (Ghazyani, 2018; Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Nofal, 2017). However, these issues were absent in the children's digital stories. One possible reason is the diversity within their schools, which included a significant number of visible minorities, such as Muslim and Arabic-speaking students. This diversity may have fostered an inclusive environment where cultural and linguistic differences were normalized, reducing the likelihood of exclusion or discrimination.

It is also important to note that sociability, a personal quality linked to the desire to make friends and fit in, fosters belonging (Ghazyani, 2018). My observations confirmed that all the children demonstrated this quality. Additionally, children's perspectives often present a counter-

narrative to social life, differing from adult viewpoints (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Luttrell, 2010; Prout, 2002). DST provides a strength-based platform for children to construct and present their identities (Lambert, 2010), highlighting their skills, resilience, hope, and aspirations, allowing audiences to understand these children through their strengths (Brown et al., 2020).

Although we cannot definitively determine the reason behind the absence of inclusion challenges in their stories, it is possible that the children genuinely experienced no inclusion challenges, which could reflect inclusive environments. Alternatively, they may have felt unwilling to identify or articulate such challenges, as discussing exclusion or marginalization can be difficult for children, particularly in contexts where they are navigating power dynamics that prioritize stories that align with dominant narratives of success (Ryan, 2006). These complexities remind us to critically consider both what is shared and what remains unsaid in children's narratives. This is especially significant given that most Syrian refugee students in Canadian elementary schools are new settlers, bringing both strengths and specific needs shaped by experiences of war and trauma (Nofal, 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015).

According to the literature, the resettlement experiences of refugee children are greatly influenced by their teachers, who often have a larger impact on student outcomes than the broader school environment itself (Celike & Icduygu, 2018; Guo et al., 2019; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Nofal, 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). Teachers serve as the most immediate and personal connection to the school for children and families, embodying the school's values and practices in their daily interactions (Nofal, 2017). This makes teachers particularly significant in shaping refugee students' experiences of inclusion, belonging, and academic success (Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Thomas, 2016).

Interestingly, most of the children did not mention their teachers in their digital stories, except for Hamza, who briefly references his teacher at the beginning of his story. During interviews, the children were asked about the potential impact of their digital stories on teachers. Musaab's response is especially relevant to the literature and the study's purpose, as it highlights gaps in teachers' preparedness to address the needs of Syrian refugee children. He remarked, "maybe [my digital story] could give [teachers] an idea of how the kids would feel in the winter weather, and probably they could go to ask their boss or the principal of the school to maybe shorten the recess time a bit or just make more indoor recess". While it is unclear whether Musaab's comment reflects his direct experiences with teachers, it underscores a critical concern—many educators lack an understanding of the barriers faced by newcomer refugee families, such as access to appropriate winter clothing. This reflects broader challenges regarding teachers' readiness to support the unique needs of refugee children.

In addition to the children including details about their friendships in their digital stories, most of them also included details about familial bonds that were important to them. Musaab included details about his family's first experiences of traveling in a plane in his digital story. Jonathan's digital story included details about how his brother joined the soccer game and scored goals for his team. Yomna chose to share experiences that included her cats, mom, grandfather, dad and cousins (in order mentioned) in her digital story. Alma's digital story also included her mom, dad, brother and cousins (in order mentioned). The children shared that they enjoyed the company of both their immediate and extended family and looked forward to spending time with them. For example, Yomna ends her digital story with, "This summer, I hope that I can go to Niagara Falls with my cousins and stay in a hotel". Poignant and emotional, the DST data revealed deep family ties and valued family connections.

The children also included many photos of family members in their digital stories. Musaab included a photo of himself with his siblings and cousins, which he identified as being an important photo to him. In Jonathan's digital story, he also included a photo of himself with his siblings and cousin. He said that the image with "everybody together" was an important photo to him. Yomna included photos of her cats, mom, grandfather, dad and cousins (in order mentioned) in her digital story and shared that the photo of her cat was a photo that was important to her. When asked why this photo was important to her, Yomna said, "I really like cats, and I miss my old cats. The cat that I showed in the video was my old cat in Jordan." Alma's digital story also included photos of her siblings and cousins, which she too identified as being important to her. These images are a representation of the significant familial bonds in the children's lives. There is little research exploring the significance of sibling relationships in refugee children's resettlement experiences. The limited research in this area indicate that siblings can be important sources of social, emotional, and academic support for refugee children, and the presence of a sibling can be highly comforting and reassuring (Ghazyani, 2018).

The children shared details about their loss of family bonds and the emotions tied to these experiences. For example, Yomna's reflection on her cats highlights the loss of a significant relationship, "I really like cats, and I miss my old cats. The cat that I showed in the video was my old cat in Jordan." In our story circles, Musaab shared a memory of how his aunt saved him from drowning. He explained:

> I chose that story because it was really meaningful. And I was pretty surprised that I'm still alive right now and I could have died. So, I chose that story because it was really like when I found out that happened to me by my parents and everyone telling me about it, I

> started to tear up and start to cry. If it wasn't my aunt coming there on that time, I would have died, and I wouldn't have been here in this world right now.

Some of the stories shared by Musaab, Jonathan, and Alma echo themes they discussed in the research project, Syria Was Once a Beautiful Country (Ali, 2021), which documents the memories of Syrian refugee children living in Canada. This earlier work highlights how children's narratives often center on meaningful and emotionally significant experiences, reflecting both their personal histories and the realities of resettlement. These examples demonstrate how children's memories are often anchored in emotionally significant events, whether joy, loss, or gratitude. Such emotionally significant events tend to be more vivid and enduring in their recollections, shaping the stories they choose to share (Ali, 2021; Fivush, 2011). Musaab further emphasized the importance of helping others, even outside of one's immediate family:

> If [people] hear this story, if my aunt didn't come and save me, I would be dead, right? For example, they would know that lots of other people are still around, that they could help your child. For example, my aunt is not my mother. So, she's like my aunt. And then other people would kind of realize if lots of people are around, they would not just stand there and would help people.

Musaab's comments reveal a deep concern for children's safety. Again, it is not clear if Musaab's comment is based on his resettlement experiences of not being helped by people outside his family. It may reflect the broader worries refugee children face when resettling, particularly the absence of close family support networks and concerns for safety (Ghazyani, 2018). While younger children may express their memories in fragmented ways that do not

always yield coherent meanings (Ali & Gibran, 2020), their narratives can highlight the profound loss of family connections and the emotional weight carried into their new lives.

Theme 1: Positive Sense of Self (Continued)

To conclude this section, I return to the children's positive sense of self. Just as they concluded their digital stories with their aspirations, it is fitting to end this section by highlighting how these hopes reflect their optimism, resilience, and confidence in the future.

The children's positive sense of self, in particular their agency, is not only demonstrated through their achievements, but also through their future aspirations. At the end of their digital stories some of the children described their future goals. In Hamza's digital story, he narrates about making new friends and having fun with them: "I will have other friends. My friends in old school will come new school. I know it will be fun because I know we play basketball together". In Jonathan's digital story, he shared about trying out for his school's soccer team. He narrates,

> Next year I will try to join the team at my school again, this time as a goalie. Right now, I am ordering some goalie equipment - some gloves and soccer shoes, to get ready for my new game with the high schoolers".

In Yomna's digital story, she expressed her hopes for the summer: "This summer, I hope that I can go to Niagara Falls with my cousins and stay in a hotel." The children's hopes for their futures were palpable throughout their digital stories. These narratives demonstrate the importance of not only reflecting on their lived experiences but also envisioning positive futures for themselves. Their ability to find meaning in their past, celebrate their successes, and look ahead with optimism is a key theme within their stories. As Rice and Mündel (2019) highlight, the "not yet of better possible futures" opens spaces of hope and potential, emphasizing the need for narratives that resist damaging perceptions and empower individuals to rewrite their stories:

"There is a kind of restless urgency *needing* to tell our stories, different stories, real stories, stories that push back at damaging narratives and perceptions that are stitched into our bodies, woven into our identities" (p. 138). Having high aspirations reflects an optimistic outlook on one's abilities, and this sense of hope is evident in the children's digital stories. These positive representations result from their agency—actively and intentionally shaping their experiences and identities in empowering ways (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022; Shamim, 2020; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017). Ultimately, the digital stories serve as powerful reminders of the children's personal assets and resilience (Wexler et al., 2013).

Stories and storytelling are creative and constructive ways that can help someone make sense of their world, build understanding of themselves, form their identities, make connections with others, and come to understand their place in the world. Similarly, DST can help children with refugee experiences to navigate their sense of self, acknowledge their capacities for self-representation and agency. By encapsulating their experiences in a digital story our young storytellers became more confident in their personal advocacy—to provide evidence of their sacrifices and struggles overcoming the power dynamics involved in their lives crossing borders, cultures and languages, and also to surface what they find important in their own lives. Their narratives are their view of their life stories – it is their view and memories of their experiences, needs, strengths, identity, relationships and aspirations. As Musaab summed it up in one of our story circles, "I chose that story because it was really meaningful". These findings are consistent with the recommendations made by Sociology of Childhood theorists—research on children's perspectives need to consider methods that encourages and facilitates children's voice, and the ways in which their voice might be more effectively heard (Gagne et al., 2018; Prout, 2011; Pappamihiel et al., 2017).

The potential for meaningful expression through DST is profound, as it enables children to communicate their experiences through multimodal storytelling. Yomna described how her digital story allows viewers to "imagine how it happened in real life." Musaab reflected on the ending of his story as his favorite part because "it showed pictures of me when I first were a baby and growing up. I changed." He added that viewers would "probably smile to see me from when I first were young and me when I was grown up". After viewing his completed digital story, Hamza chose to edit his story to replace a photo that was in the "sad part" of his story. This part showed a black-and-white image with a boy crouched on the ground, knees bent toward his head, arms folded, and head resting on his arms. Instead, he wanted to include a photo of a boy waving goodbye, explaining, "Bye I'm going to miss you because Dante is leaving". While the new image is also tinged with sadness, Hamza reframed the moment to emphasize connection and farewell rather than despair. This subtle shift reflects how children may reinterpret and express emotional experiences to focus on relationships and hope, even amidst loss.

These examples demonstrate how DST offers children a platform to express themselves richly, challenging dominant representations and stereotypes of refugee children. By integrating images of happy moments and personal milestones, the children used their stories as cultural artifacts to highlight their strengths, build understanding of their diverse resettlement experiences, and counter reductive narratives. This aligns with the study's theoretical framework, as the sociology of childhood emphasizes the existence of diverse childhoods rather than a universal experience (Prout & James, 1997). Each child speaks and sees from multiple, intersecting positions of class, gender, ethnicity, and more (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Prout,

2002), where their experiences are personally felt, emotionally negotiated, and playfully co-constructed (Mishra Tarc, 2016).

Overall, the findings I have described contribute valuable insights to the broader understanding of the resettlement experiences and identities of Syrian refugee children in Ontario, even though my interpretation is limited to the content shared through the children's digital stories, along with data collected during the project. The children's digital stories of their lived experiences can support educators' learning about their unique needs. The findings show that creating the space for stories to be created, shared and listened to in a reflective environment opens up safe and inclusive pathways for refugee children's inquiry and learning. As Mehrunnisa Ahmad Ali, a scholar with research expertise on refugee children points out, "we need to see and hear children better, especially those we know very little about" (Ali & Gibran, 2020, p. 8). Therefore, it is critical that refugee and immigrant children are provided creative and intellectually challenging learning opportunities in which they can engage with different meaning-making resources to convey their complex histories/realities (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Mishra Tarc, 2023). The educators' reflection on the children's digital stories aptly encapsulates the essence of the digital stories and the importance of creating spaces for refugee children to be seen and heard. Amber shared what she learned from the children's stories:

> While we came into this to work with children who are refugees, those aren't really the stories that came out. [This reinforces] that idea that there's like so many different pieces to someone's personality, especially when it comes to children. Their stories were about very typical children things, like riding bikes, being with their friends and playing soccer…Even though to us it seems like such a big piece of their puzzle, perhaps to them it's like only a small piece.

Syrian Refugee Children's Digital Storytelling Experiences

This study aimed to explore the pedagogical potential of a multimodal DST project in facilitating meaningful expression among Syrian refugee children and serving as a tool for social awareness. The following analysis focuses on the experiences of the child participants as they engaged in the DST process and created their autobiographical digital stories. By recording their experiences from multiple perspectives, the study sought to develop a nuanced understanding of their narratives.

A thematic analysis of data from individual interviews and workshop conversations revealed three key themes: the intrinsic value of the DST process and its outcomes, the empowerment and agency fostered through DST, and the promotion of social bonding among participants. The findings demonstrate how a multimodal pedagogy, incorporating visual imagery, sound, and movement, enabled the children to meaningfully depict their lived experiences while supporting their social and emotional transformation.

The analysis shows that engaging with non-linguistic modes provided children with opportunities to express complex and abstract aspects of their lives and identities, particularly their past experiences. These modes allowed for the articulation of emotions, memories, and perspectives that may be difficult to convey solely through language. By combining multiple forms of communication, DST offered children a broader and more flexible way to represent nuanced elements of their experiences, such as loss, resilience, and hope, in ways that were deeply personal and contextually meaningful. The following section details each theme, supported by evidence from the data.

Theme 1: The Intrinsic Value of the Digital Storytelling Process and Product

The DST project highlighted nuanced dimensions in terms of both the DST process and product of creating strength-based narratives. The process moved smoothly from the production of new knowledge to sharing experiences and raising awareness. The children's responses clearly indicate an overwhelming positivity to the DST project experience. Included here are comments such as those from Hamza, who states that the workshop was "good," Jonathan sharing "[…] it was really cool to do it," and Yomna saying that all children should do this workshop because "they will have a lot of fun." These responses indicate the children's enthusiasm. When I asked Musaab what he would tell a friend about the workshop, he explained,

> I would tell them that it was a really good experience, and it brings back lots of your old memories that you buried deeply or maybe forgot. And you probably will remember them, and it will make you happy. Seeing yourself small again might make you go wow you changed that much.

Yomna expressed a desire to share similar sentiments with her friends, saying, "I will say that it's when you talk about anything that happened in your life, or like things in the old days, and you can edit it with a group of people." The DST platform provided the children with a clear way to highlight positive personal attributes and aspects of their lives. While engaging in the DST process evoked positive memories and made the children feel good, it also facilitated the emergence of new meanings about their lives as Syrian children with refugee backgrounds. This finding aligns with previous longitudinal DST research, which shows that the process of sorting through photos and selecting background music for digital stories serves as an affirmative act of life reflection for participants (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Wexler et al., 2013). Moreover, ethnographic research has shown that DST allows storytellers with refugee backgrounds to focus

on their achievements, countering the often overwhelmingly negative public narratives about refugees (Lenette et al., 2015). Using child-centered, strengths-based approaches to examine complex social experiences, frequently framed in negative terms, offers not only valuable insights into children's lives but also opens up new possibilities for conversations about their experiences (Grieshaber, 2007; Prout, 2011; Prout & James, 1997). By shifting the focus to the children's strengths, DST provides a platform for reframing their identities in a more empowering and positive light.

At a practical level, the DST process encouraged the children to develop and foster new skills and talents. The production of a digital story involved their choice of media that the children felt best reflected their experiences, their identity, and their values. The children's responses highlight that they valued the freedom of the creative process. Hamza and Yomna stated that their favorite part of the workshop was selecting and editing the images. Yomna described this experience: "When we were editing and finding the pictures, it was so much fun because I really like editing things. When friends get pictures of themselves, they like me to edit it for them." In contrast, when asked what they found difficult when making their digital story, Musaab and Alma answered with the photo selection process. Musaab explained,

> Another [difficult part] was when you had to pick the pictures because when I was trying to pick, there was no picture that I had. The phone that we had all the pictures when we first came to Canada broke. All the pictures inside of it were gone. On my mom and dad's phone, and I only could have found, like three photos max when I was younger.

Since Musaab and Alma are siblings, it could be that Alma too found it difficult to select images because she did not have access to many personal photos from her past. During the storyboarding process, Alma stated that there should be more personal photos in her digital story, but the

photos she had included are the only ones she could find. As a result, the children supplemented their limited personal photo collection with stock images from various online sources. However, Jonathan, who is also their sibling, shared that looking for pictures was "a really good part" for him. His decision not to include personal photos of himself in his digital story could have shaped his response. As described later in this section, his response also could be an indication that other tasks of the DST process were more difficult for him. Reflecting on the DST project, most of the children's responses to the question on what they found difficult when making their digital story, they identified that recording the voiceover for their digital story was a challenging task:

> It was when I had to record my voice, because I kept on having to re-do it because I was going too fast or maybe I would keep staying quiet for a long time. I repeated it like 10 to 15 times. (Musaab)
>
> [Recording the voiceover] was just annoying and difficult, I just kept messing up. (Jonathan)
>
> I was insecure about my voice… I like it [now]. In the beginning I feel it was deep. (Yomna)

The DST project was effective in providing opportunities to practice and support recording voiceovers, as it provided a motivating atmosphere where the children remained engaged as creators, producers and discussants in the creation process amidst challenges. Hamza's interview responses indicate learning and confidence gained about DST creation through individualized support. He described his process in learning to create digital stories and how his confidence grew. His explanation as translated by Musaab is as follows:

> He wants to say that not give up because when he was recording his voice, he said it was like the worst part, but he didn't give up. He meant to not give up because in the end it would be worth it.

The children were given the choice to create their stories in English or Arabic, as they often conversed with each other in Arabic. However, all of them chose to create their stories in English. This mirrors with findings of Ali and Gibran (2020), who worked with a similar demographic, including Musaab, Jonathan, and Alma, and observed a preference for English in children's autobiographies. This consistency underscores English as their preferred medium for self-expression. As mentioned earlier, the children supported each other with English translations of Arabic words, as the educators and I were not familiar with Arabic.

The findings from this study highlight the significance of the DST process in helping children develop their stories. For some, like Jonathan, selecting a story to transform into a digital narrative was a considerable challenge from the outset. Jonathan shared that "making the story was more difficult than recording the voiceover." This task became so overwhelming for him that, during one of the initial workshop sessions, Musaab conveyed Jonathan's reluctance, "So, Jonathan just told me to tell you that he doesn't want to do this anymore. He said he wanted me to say, he doesn't want to tell any story because he's not ready to tell the story right now because none of the stories are coming to him." However, as the children collectively progressed through the structured DST process—starting with story circles and scriptwriting—Jonathan's perspective shifted. By the end of the project, he expressed that the most valuable aspect of his participation was "learning about stories and how to make a story."

In his interview, Jonathan said that if another child were considering joining a DST project, he would encourage them, "Just continue and you will see better stuff happen. And you

will learn about how to make stories and meet other people." Jonathan's experience illustrates how DST can play a crucial role in helping children, particularly those from refugee backgrounds, develop their storytelling abilities and self-expression. DST serves as a tool to amplify the voices of refugee children. It highlights their potential as rich learning resources, moving beyond the focus on academic deficits, and fosters their growth as meaning-makers (Emert, 2013). This aligns with the perspectives of sociology of childhood theorists who advocate for amplifying children's voices in contexts where they have often been marginalized (Grieshaber, 2007; Prout, 2011; Prout & James, 1997).

The findings suggest that the DST process encouraged children to construct their stories, reflect on their resettlement experiences, and share their perceptions and feelings. The iterative cycle of creating narratives—comprising activities such as sharing stories, writing short scripts, recording voiceovers, assembling and editing pictures, sharing the completed digital stories, and receiving feedback—proved to be an enriching experience for the participants. Lenette et al. (2015) emphasize that the dialogic and iterative nature of this process is a critical aspect of DST. This approach reflects Vygotskian principles, which view teaching and learning as a collaborative process, emphasizing the attainment of shared meaning (Mahn, 1999).

During individual interviews, the children expressed pride in their completed digital stories, with comments such as, "it's a really, really good story," "it was perfect," and "that was pure amazing." Yomna described the process of creating her digital story as exciting, sharing her enthusiasm, "I was really excited about it. And I am going to tell my friends when it gets posted, and I will show them it because I really like it." She further expressed satisfaction, noting that her digital story turned out just as she had "imagined it." Similarly, Musaab spoke of a sense of accomplishment upon completing his digital story:

> I feel really good. I feel proud because I finished [my digital story]. For example, I'm sharing my story, and it feels good that lots of people are going to hear my story and they would know that I am helping the people. That's making me happy and proud.

The children's choices in crafting their digital stories revealed their personal identities and values. They took great pride in these stories, viewing them as a meaningful representation of their experiences. This sense of pride was evident when they showed their stories to others, indicating that these digital narratives positively reflected their lives. For instance, Hamza was so enthusiastic about his digital story, which he worked on with Amber, that he eagerly wanted to share it with me as soon as it was finished. He anticipated that educators would appreciate it, as translated by Musaab, "They say, wow it's very nice Hamza, nice." Similarly, Jonathan believed that his digital story would resonate with refugee children and educators, expressing that "[Refugee children] will feel proud, I guess. They will want to create their own stories… I feel like [educators] will be proud too and will want to do the same with other kids." These comments highlight the children's mastery in digital expression and their ability to articulate complex social dynamics through their stories. DST recognizes the children's ability to express their understanding of complex relationships and interactions, construct their own cultural experiences and create counter-narratives that emphasize their sense of agency (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Lenette et al., 2015Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022; Shamim, 2020; Guo et al., 2019; Nofal, 2017). The pride the children felt in their digital stories highlights their value as representations of their knowledge and experiences, particularly as Syrian children with refugee backgrounds, captured in an audio-visual format.

In their interviews, the children indicated that participating in the DST project played an important role in helping them not only learn to tell their own stories but also learn through their

engagement in the stories of others. For Yomna, the digital stories served as a pathway for understanding and learning and was also the most important thing she gained from participating in the DST project, “I learned a lot from other people's stories. Musaab's story, when you come to Canada, make sure you're dressed properly, from Alma's story, you need a helmet when you ride a bike.” When talking about her own digital story, she shared that she chose to share that particular story because people could learn from it, “I just feel [my story] is very interesting, and I want people to know to be careful with wood heaters… The thing that they are going to learn is to be careful with wood heaters.” In response to a question about their favourite activities from the DST project, Musaab shared screening the digital stories was his favorite activity as the stories were new to him—he did not know about the difficulties encountered by the others:

> It was towards the end, when everyone was sharing their stories because I didn't really know everyone that had happened to them. With my cousin, Yomna, I didn't know that she almost died because of the thing in Jordan. It told me lots about them.

Yomna too shared comments of surprise after the screening, “I was really excited to see Hamza's and Jonathan's stories. I was surprised because I thought it was about something else and it was very nice. Everyone's was very nice.” Yomna singled out Hamza and Jonathan’s stories because, during the DST process, she usually worked in a breakout room with Musaab, Alma and Jess, while Hamza, Jonathan and Amber were in another breakout room. The experience of screening the digital stories prompted them to ask further questions about aspects of each other's experiences. Yomna added that children with refugee backgrounds could benefit from the workshop, “I feel they should do this workshop because if there's other kids with them, they can learn from other things not to do or to do,” while Musaab shared that refugee children, both in Canada and out of Canada, could benefit from viewing his digital story:

> So, if they're not in Canada, it would tell them how cold Canada is or to prepare yourself if you're coming to Canada, like buying stuff that would help you from cold weather and stuff in winter. And if they're probably in Canada, they're like really new or they might have come in summer. Summer is really hot here. They might not even know that winter would be this cold. And then it would tell them the winter is actually cold, it's not as hot as summer.

He continued to share how his digital story can help children that are born in Canada:

> For example, people that were born in Canada, when they are kids, they are used to the cold weather. So, it could tell them that if people are new to Canada, and then they keep on telling them it's really cold, how can you handle this weather or something like that, it could tell them that if you just came to Canada, that it's actually really cold in Canada. And they never knew that because they're used to it when they're younger.

He also shared how his digital story can help educators that are supporting refugee children:

> Maybe it could give them an idea of how the kids would feel in the winter weather, and probably they could go to ask their boss or the principal of the school to maybe shorten the recess time a bit or just make more indoor recess.

Similar to Musaab, Hamza, too, described how viewing his digital story could be helpful for refugee children. This is Hamza's response as translated by Musaab:

> They might feel that [my digital story is] really good because they are refugees, and that friendships could be like hurtful or something like that – [friendships] might end. It would teach them a bit of English and bit of how friendships in Canada happen.

The children understood the significance of their stories, recognizing their value and the importance of sharing them. They believed that other children also have meaningful stories to

tell, reinforcing the sociology of childhood tenet that children's lives, relationships, and cultures are important subjects of study (Prout, 2002). This finding also aligns with existing research on storytelling, which suggests that these stories can offer valuable insights to audiences and foster new learning (Sitter, 2018). The ability of these narratives to convey growth and resilience, and to be reinforced through sharing, highlights a distinctive advantage of DST (Lenette et al., 2015). These findings are also in line with the study's theoretical framework, as Vygotsky (1978) states that learning is a mediated activity with tools, signs and social interaction. However, while Musaab and Hamza saw their digital stories as impactful, Jonathan felt his story might not resonate with non-refugee children, remarking, "Nothing, I guess. They will think, this kid, just one playing soccer but now he moved to all his friends." Nonetheless, Jonathan saw value in the DST project for teachers, suggesting it could help them better support students by understanding their stories. He recommended that teachers participate to gain insights into students' backgrounds and improve their practice, noting, "[They] will learn about other kids' stories and learn about kids' back-stories and all that stuff. And learn about new kids—how good or how bad they are." This highlights how digital stories can deepen understanding of both individual and collective narratives, supporting relationship-based practices aimed at enhancing well-being (Lenette et al., 2015).

Theme 2: Expression and Agency Afforded by Engaging in Digital Storytelling

Researchers emphasize the importance of multimodal communication with children (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). While the power of DST as an expressive tool is well-documented, some scholars have specifically noted its multimodal nature. DST's use of various modes of communication is particularly valuable for children, who may not yet have fully developed language or writing skills due to their age. A multimodal approach enhances

literacy by allowing children to express their knowledge and identities more effectively (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Lenette et al., 2015). Niemi and Multisilta (2015) highlight how collaborative work with different artifacts in DST projects can develop children's multimodal design skills, enabling them to use diverse modes to convey meaning. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supports this perspective, asserting that learning occurs through social interactions rather than in isolation (Dockrell et al., 2005). In alignment with these principles, this study invited children to share their resettlement experiences through various modes—visual, auditory, and linguistic. This section explores how the children employed these different modes to communicate their experiences, illustrating how they strategically used elements like images and music to convey their thoughts and emotions.

The children's DST experiences highlights that they could tell their stories in unique ways through the DST process. During the creation of the digital stories, the children began to deliberate about how they wanted to express their experiences, and which images would best convey them. They explored the different ways in which the others shared their stories. They selected specific personal photos and online images to be paired with their narratives during the storyboard process. While storyboarding Alma's digital story, the children and Jess discussed how to visually communicate Alma's experience of crashing her bike into a pole as they felt this was a meaningful part of Alma's story. Alma decided that a black screen would best fit this part of the story, fully capturing the flow of emotions she experienced. The following discussion captures the level of importance the children ascribed to the images in this scene:

> Jess: I think a good place to get a new photo was when you crashed. Because that was a really important part of your story, is the crash, right? Is there any image that comes to your mind when you think of that moment?

Alma: (pause) No.

Jess: How about Musaab or Yomna, do you think of any photo that could work?

Yomna: (raises hand) If you want, you can put the picture of you in the hospital.

Alma: That's when I end up inside the hospital.

Yomna: Okay.

Jess: Is there another image? It doesn't have to be one that we have. We could Google something. But what makes you feel like crash?

Yomna: Like a white light.

Musaab: Yeah, that's what I said.

Yomna: No you didn't.

Jess: Can you describe that?

Musaab: I can.

Yomna: Maybe like a white light.

Musaab: Like a white light on the end of the tunnel or like for example, just a white light and everything around it is black because she was like fainted or like passed out.

Alma: Maybe a black color.

Jess: Just black?

Alma: I think so.

Jess: Okay, so I'm going to play it again and we will make sure that this is what you're thinking. [Jess plays Alma's voiceover recording]. Oops I think I missed it. You want to have it when you crash or when you passed out? When do you want it to turn black?

Alma: Can I put it for when I was going down the steep hill and when I crashed?

Jess: Yeah. [Jess plays Alma's voiceover recording]. The poles, you start to talk about here, so I'm going to move this over. [Jess rearranges the image of the yellow poles on Alma's storyboard to include the black screen]. So, when you said, I ended up crashing, that's when you want it to turn black?

Alma: Yes.

The black screen powerfully communicates the emotions underlying Alma's narration, "I ended up crashing into a pole, I hit my head very hard, and I passed out! I was very scared because when I passed out, I heard people whisper and some people laughing." During this observation, I wished I could have observed Alma's body language and facial expressions; however, her camera was turned off because she was not wearing a hijab. Both Alma and Yomna would switch off their cameras whenever they were not wearing their hijabs.

The following dialogues during the story boarding and assembling processes also reveal how the children were intentional about using images in their digital stories:

Amber: The very first picture, we had made a note of it would be of you playing soccer. So, what do you want to do instead? (pause) Do you have any ideas?

Jonathan: Um why not do a picture of a goalie kicking a ball, I guess.

Amber: Okay, well, we can do that. And then your final photo we also have a goalie there too. We can even use that one again if you want, or we can find a new one. (pause) What do you think? Do you want to use a different one, or the one that we have from before?... So, we're just missing the first picture now, and I think the first picture you said that you want to add a picture of someone who's dressed up like a goalie.

Jonathan: No, the first picture, a goalie kicking a really far (pause) a goalie that's about to kick a ball.

Amber: Okay… So, a goalie who's kicking a goal or who's saving a goal?

Jonathan: Just kicking, not scoring. Just passing it really hard.

Amber: Okay. [Amber scrolls through 'soccer goalie kicking a ball' images on Google]. Alright do see any pictures that (pause).

Jonathan: The first one looks good.

Amber: This first one right here? [Amber hovers mouse cursor on the first image].

Jonathan: Yeah.

Amber: Are you okay that it is a female goalie? Do you want to find someone who represents you?

Jonathan: Yeah. Um how about this? Is this a guy?

Amber: Pardon.

Jonathan: Is that a guy?

Amber: This one here? [Amber clicks on an image of a goalie dressed in an orange coloured uniform about to kick a ball].

Jonathan: (pause) No. Could you do the guy that's wearing black?

Amber: This one (see Figure 10)? [Amber clicks on an image of a goalie dressed in a black coloured uniform about to kick a ball].

Jonathan: The one on top. Yeah. Yeah, that one.

Amber: This one right here? [Amber enlarges the image of a goalie dressed in a black coloured uniform about to kick a ball].

Jonathan: Yeah, yeah, this one.

Amber: Okay.

Figure 10

Goalie about to Kick a Ball

Amber: [Amber plays Hamza's partially assembled digital story. An image of two boys playing soccer appears as Hamza narrates, "…I know we play basketball together. But I will miss Dante…"]

Hamza: No. No, they hear the basketball in the one.

Amber: Which one, Hamza?

Hamza: Listen, listen, you know the soccer boys, the two? I said, I said, the last one, I said, I like to play basketball together. Why not put the 'basketball in the hand' (see Figure 9) in there? I am not playing soccer.

Amber: Do you want to put that one at the end?

Hamza: Yeah.

Amber: Okay, so we're going to take out this picture [the image of two boys playing soccer] and make this one [Figure 9] longer like this? [Amber removes the image of two boys playing soccer and extends Figure 9 until the end of Hamza's narration].

Hamza: Yeah, this is good.

Amber: You like that one?

Hamza: Yeah, for I said, I like to play basketball, me am not said I like play soccer.

Amber: True.

Figure 11

Musaab with Face Painting

Musaab: Can I remove one photo? The one when I draw on my face.

Jess: (laughs) Why? You don't like that one?

Musaab: (smiles) No, I really like it, it's good, but it doesn't fit that part of the story, like in my opinion. Because I'm talking about like snowman and all of that and putting a picture of me in the gym, wouldn't like, isn't like, doesn't make sense.

Jess: Yeah.

As mentioned earlier, it is important to note that Jonathan chose not to include personal photos of himself in his digital story. However, he chose to include a photo of himself with his siblings and cousins, because the "everybody together" photo was important to him. Figure 10 was taken out

during the final edit of Jonathan's digital story as the goalie did not represent him and would confuse the audience.

In addition to being purposeful with the images, the children were also intentional with how the images were formatted and transitioned from one image to another. The following conversation between Musaab and Jess highlights how he explored and used DST's multimodal approach to communicate his story:

> Musaab: I liked the pictures, some of them but can I add… For example, you know how you did with Yomna's story, you did something with Canva. Can you do that with all of my baby photos, photos when I was younger?
>
> Jess: Like on one [screen]?
>
> Musaab: One, yeah. I could make them because I have used Canva before, if you don't want to do them.
>
> Jess: No, no, I can do it, it's very quick… What color do you want for your background?
>
> Musaab: Purple. Actually, light yellow because of all my colors. The backgrounds of all these pictures they're kind of like lightish yellowish reddish kind of color.
>
> Jess: [Jess formats Musaab's photos to be on one screen]. Does this look great, or should it be a little brighter or darker?
>
> Musaab: That's good.

The following is another conversation between Jonathan and Amber that demonstrates how Jonathan explored and used DST's multimodal approach to communicate his story:

> Jonathan: You know on the picture changes? Could you make the picture change slowly than instantly?

Amber: Yes, so that was one of the questions I have is about the transitions of the pictures. So, we can add a transition. It can do a few different things. So, let's add [the transition] in for two seconds. We'll try this one first. You can see what it looks like. [Amber adds a transition to Jonathan's partially completed digital story and plays it]. Did you see how it kind of switched from one to the other?

Jonathan: Yeah, that is good.

Amber: We also have a few other transitions you can use, or do you want to just use the same one?

Jonathan: Can I see the other one? [Amber previews transition options]. Could it just be the first one and this one too?

Amber: Sure. Do you want to have them for each one?

Jonathan: Yeah, accept [the personal soccer field photo] to shake.

Amber: Just the second one's going to shake?

Jonathan: Not the second one, the one that does not look good (see Figure 12).

Amber: And then the rest will do the same, fade out and fade back in. So, you just want to use that same transition for in between each of them?

Jonathan: Yeah.

Figure 12

Personal Soccer Field Photo

Through DST, children conveyed their embodied knowledge by creating digital stories that reflect their lived experiences. This process allowed for the emergence of collective knowledge as the children discussed their shared experiences and decided how to represent their understanding through these stories. DST serves as a powerful multimodal method for exploring the experiences of children who have faced adversity, providing a safe space for them to critically reflect and express their marginalized perspectives. This includes producing counter-narratives that challenge deficit views of refugee children (Brown et al., 2020; D'Amico et al., 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2014; de Jager et al., 2017; Emert, 2014a; 2019). Freire's (1970) theory underscores that individuals are experts in their own lives and should actively participate in research. Similarly, researchers (Mishra Tarc, 2016, 2020, 2022) using the sociology of childhood posits that children's expressions and testimonies can offer profound social and

political insights. Freire also argued that images can help people view their realities from new perspectives and consider the factors influencing their experiences (Sitter, 2018). Building on Freire's ideas, Vygotsky (1978) highlights that learning involves not just tools but also social interaction, where knowledge is co-constructed through collaborative processes. In this context, children develop their identities through engagement with the social and cultural ideas available in their environment.

Working with visual and audial modes and their respective cognitive and affective qualities challenged the children to explore and use different modes to communicate about their experiences. Engaging with the modes and their elements of design opened up distinct possibilities to make visible the more intangible aspects of the children's identities and past experiences. They carefully selected music that best represented this. When questioned about the music, they explained:

I really like the music because it fits in the story. (Yomna)

I like the music, it matched the story. (Alma)

The music made the video much better. (Musaab)

During the storyboard process, the children specifically asked the educators about including music in their digital stories. The following conversation captures the level of importance that Yomna ascribed to the music in her digital story:

Yomna: I kind of want to put music in the background.

Jess: Okay, let's look. [Jess plays sample music tracks].

Yomna: I don't know what song I should do. So, can you try to find a song that fits my story?

Jess: Can you describe what kind of music do you want it to be? Happy, sad, inspiring? What kind of music do you feel like you should have?

Yomna: Sad when I talk about when [inaudible]. .

Jess: The 'six year old' part you want it to be different music? Like a bit more serious?

Yomna: Yes.

Jess: Let me look at the songs and I will try to find something. You like to have it sort of serious in the middle and then happy again at the end?

Yomna: [nods head].

Thinking musically required that children identify the emotions that they experienced at particular points in their story so they could use these feelings as search words. For example, in the above conversation, to search for music tracks, Yomna thought about how her experience made her feel, and labeled her emotions as sad and happy.

The process of choosing appropriate music also involved considering which music track best represented their own experience through its overall structure and elements, such as tempo and melody:

Amber: My other question for you is, there is also a chance if you want to add music behind your voice and behind your video.

Jonathan: Can I put rock music?

Amber: We have to use the audio in [WeVideo]. But you can listen to them and see if there's any that sound rock-ish enough for you. I don't know if there will be though.

Jonathan: If not a calming.

Amber: Okay, so there's three… I'll show you each one. So, this one is Relaxing number one. [Plays music track].

Jonathan: No.

Amber: This is number two. [Plays music track]. This is number 3. [Amber plays music track].

Jonathan: Number two.

Amber: Do you want to hear any other ones just to see if you like them? Inspiring might be calm too. This is Inspiring number one. [Plays music track].

Jonathan: How about dark?

Amber: Oh, you want to hear the dark ones? So, this is Dark number one. [Plays music track].

Jonathan: Yes.

Amber: You like that one?

Jonathan: Yes.

Amber: Let's listen to the other two dark ones first and then you can see which one you like the most. [Plays music track]. This a rock music like you were thinking. And then the last one here is number 3. [Plays music track].

Jonathan: Could you do number 2?

Amber: From happy, dark or inspiring?

Jonathan: Dark.

Amber: [Adds the Dark Number 2 music track to Jonathan's partially completed digital story and plays it]. How do you feel about the music? Is it too quiet? Is it too loud? Or is it okay?

Jonathan: Can you make the music a little louder?

Amber: Okay, we can make it a little bit louder, but probably not too much or it'll be really hard for us to hear [your voiceover]. [Adjusts the volume level of the music track]. Okay, let's check it now. [Plays Jonathan's completed digital story]. Jonathan, look what you created, you made a whole entire video of your story. How do you feel about it now that you've watched it all put together? What do you think?

Jonathan: Amazing.

As a result of engaging with music the children produced final projects that powerfully and compellingly depicted their identities and experiences.

According to Lambert (2010), the co-founder of the DST movement, DST is designed to be both an emancipatory and transformative practice. The findings demonstrate that involving children as active participants in research and enabling them to create digital stories about their experiences allows them to reflect on and assert what matters to them (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Prout, 2002). A key strength of DST is the storyboarding process, which supports children in using visuals, audio, and other resources, such as words, photos, drawings, and music, as tools for self-expression. Through this process, they learned to ensure coherence and edited their work to create clear, impactful stories.

The storyboarding and creation process contributed to the children's educational and self-awareness transformation (Chen, 2015; Emert, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Figg & McCartney, 2010; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). Crafting their stories helped the children make sense of their world and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their actions (Gearty, 2015). Through social collaboration, both children and adults benefited from shared insights (Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, DST provided children with agency, allowing them to actively represent their identities and experiences, positioning them as authors and experts of their own narratives.

Reflecting Freire's concept of conscientization (1970), DST fosters insight, empowerment, and confidence, enabling participants to advocate for themselves as engaged and active citizens.

Theme 3: The Promotion of Social Bonding Among Participants

The next theme that emerged from the data is the development of social bonds between the children and educators during the DST project. According to Vygotsky, learning is an ongoing process that involves social interactions and negotiations with others (Dockrell et al., 1995). Building on this idea, Mitchell et al. (2016) argue that storytelling creates meaning and fosters community. The act of sharing stories brings people together, and this was evident in the children's DST experiences, which emphasized a strong sense of community. Both the children and educators noted the enhanced sense of connection among participants:

> [The most important thing I got from taking part in this workshop was] being close to my siblings and cousins because every time they're on their phones or doing something, and I ask them to play with me, they never do that because they're playing with their own friends. When we did this digital story, they started actually talking to me. When I tried to help them, they asked for my help. I talk to them. Sometimes they helped me. (Musaab)

> So, one of the things that I noticed was that even if the children are close and know each other well, it's still a very unique way for them to connect. They were like one of the best things was learning more about their friend or relative. So, I think even if you get children who feel like they know each other very well, there's still another way to bond with each other. (Jess)

Wexler et al. (2013) report that sharing stories can enhance relationships and foster reciprocal, caring connections. Storytelling is particularly important for understanding children's

worldviews, as their experiences are deeply personal, emotionally charged, and often co-constructed through playful and subtle interactions (Mishra Tarc, 2016). When asked about their favorite part of the DST project, the children highlighted their enjoyment of collaborating with each other and with educators while creating their digital stories:

> My favorite part was while I was creating my video and all of this was when we got time to talk to everyone in this meeting, and it was like we had fun talking to everyone and telling their stories. Some stories I didn't even hear ever, so it was like fun to hear some of the stories that I haven't heard. (Musaab)

Alma shared "my favorite part is when I was talking to [Safra] about the story." She specifically mentioned me and not the other educators because, during the script writing process, I individually worked with her in a breakout room. Jonathan commented that his favorite part of the workshop was "meeting new people." When prompted he added that the "new people" he was referring to be the educators. Yomna also shared that she had talked to her best friend about the project and the participants, including the educators. During the DST process, Hamza often commented that he would prefer to work with Amber over the other educators. These findings are evidence that the children valued the connections and relationships they built during the DST process.

In addition to the children, the educators also valued the sense of community fostered through the DST process because it provided them with an opportunity to build meaningful relationships with the children. Even though this section of the findings focuses on the children's experiences, I believe it is also important to share a brief snapshot of the social bonds the educators built with the children to gain a more holistic understanding of the children's experiences. The educators explained:

> I had no idea that five hours over Zoom could establish a relationship like this, like that was out of this world. Not even in my mind was it possible to do it to the extent that we did and to feel like we actually made a connection and bond over Zoom. It makes me think of the approach that we have - its equitable and its kind. (Jess)
>
> The relationships are the biggest part for me. Relationships take time, they take time to build. I've always found with adults it takes months sometimes to really feel comfortable. With children you always think it's going to take a long time, but it doesn't. When you're authentic, transparent, honest, kind and have a strength-based focus, you can develop those relationships really quickly. But I didn't anticipate how deep that they would be. I didn't think that after just a few sessions I'd be in tears over the work that they've done. When my partner got in the car accident and they rescheduled the [screening] party, that meant so much to me. For the children who barely know me to say like no, we can't do this without everyone being here. It was just so impactful in that way. That reminder just because you know something about someone doesn't mean you know them. (Amber)
>
> The relationship that came to be blew my mind. You know the connection was amazing when a child says, it doesn't feel right for us to have the [screening] party without Amber, even though they really wanted to have the party. We built connections with the children in five hours virtually with technical challenges. (Safra)

The DST project provided a platform for children to be recognized as cultural participants and co-constructors of knowledge. Through social interactions and collaborative dialogue with each other and the educators, they were able to exchange and build knowledge (Mahn, 1999). The project facilitated deeper connections between children and educators, reinforcing relationships through their shared creative process. This finding aligns with similar research, such as projects

involving Indigenous girls using cellphones to create short films, which demonstrated that collaboration can strengthen existing relationships and form new intergenerational bonds (Altenberg et al., 2018). Likewise, DST projects with Canadian immigrant women have shown that such activities can build connections among new migrants (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2010). DST creates meaningful opportunities for engagement and relationship-building, with impacts that extend beyond the personal domain (Lenette et al., 2015). Projects like this, which offer children a supportive and culturally safe environment, help foster community and celebrate their culture, language, history, and shared experiences (Altenberg et al., 2018).

As outlined above, much more can be written about this study's Syrian refugee children's experiences of creating their digital stories; however, I have focused on aspects that illustrate how a multimodal approach enabled them to effectively portray their resettlement experiences in Ontario and facilitated their social transformation, including their sense of connection with others. The literature suggests that researchers should recognize children as active subjects and social actors within their own lives, their communities, and broader societies (Prout, 2002). Additionally, it advocates for educators to involve refugee students in dialogic processes of meaning-making using diverse modes of expression (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Lenette et al., 2015). Creating space for telling different stories / stories of difference is crucial. My analysis of the data confirms that engaging with the multiple modes of DST provided the children with valuable opportunities to explore and represent the complex and abstract dimensions of their lives and identities.

Through the children's digital stories, they made it evident that while they contend with resettlement challenges, they also bring a wealth of life experiences and knowledge with them.

When assembling their digital stories, the children located relevant images and music, and then created fresh interpretations of their chosen personal experiences. The process of thoughtfully engaging within and among different modes shed new light for them on their experiences and themselves, helping to enhance self-confidence and build positive identities. Their multimodal telling of their experiences helped nurture within them a heightened awareness of their strengths. The children learnt to tell uniquely refugee stories with pride and confidence, which promoted feelings of personal achievement and significance. This illustrates how using DST with children from refugee backgrounds can act as a pathway to re-write their narrative and offer them an opportunity to build and foster their skills and talents. By reconstructing and recording the children's experience through digital stories, this project offered new dimensions to the process of engaging with and understanding their refugee journeys in an empowering way and yielded a deeper understanding of their social worlds. During the educator focus group, Amber shared how facilitating this DST project informed her viewpoint as an educator:

> It reminded me of all the things that I love about being an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) because our ECE pedagogy is based on relationships and process rather than curriculum and product… I feel like as a schoolteacher you're based on curriculum and outcomes and it's not about the process, it is about the product… I wish that the schoolteachers would have more opportunities like this, to be able to work in this capacity and in this way with the children in their class because it's transformational.

These findings contribute valuable insights to the broader understanding of the resettlement process for Syrian refugee children in Ontario.

Research consistently highlights the importance for educators to challenge conventional adult assumptions about children and to recognize and value their unique worldviews and ways

of knowing (Prout & James, 1997), and to draw meaningfully and authentically from children's perspectives (Clark, 2017; Gagne et al., 2018; Ryeburn, 2016). Storytelling can be a powerful tool in this regard, allowing educators to guide children in creating stories that reflect their lived experiences. Documenting these stories can help in constructing narratives about relocation and settlement, serving as valuable tools for learning and ensuring meaningful outcomes for students (Gagne et al., 2018; Lenette et al., 2015). The findings of this study underscore that DST can be an effective starting point for this documentation process. DST's multimodal nature offers pedagogical potential for the meaningful and creative expression of refugee children's experiences. As suggested by researchers, multimodality can enhance refugee students' ability to communicate their knowledge (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Lenette et al., 2015). Using various modes beyond language allows individuals to tell more nuanced stories about their lives and experiences, as different modes interact in distinct ways to create rich, multilayered texts (Lynch, 2015).

The multimodality of DST reflects sociocultural theory. A tenet of sociocultural theory identifies that language development is achieved more effectively through balanced literacy frameworks comprising interactive approaches to learning to read, write, think critically, and express oneself orally (Vygotsky, 1986). Therefore, learning is seen as a result of dialogical interactions between people, substances and artefacts (Niemi & Multisilta, 2016). By recognizing the students' existing sociocultural backgrounds, using DST, educators bridge the gap between teaching and learning, thus enabling students to make integrated connections to their worlds. In turn, through this process of learning with tools such as DST, including sharing and collaboration processes, students become even more engaged in learning and motivated to learn more (Mitchell et al., 2016).

Educators' Digital Storytelling Experiences

The primary purpose of this study was to gain insight into the pedagogical potential of DST to help educators better understand the perspectives of Syrian refugee children and to become a social awareness tool for them. This study explored educators' experiences as they facilitated a DST project for Syrian refugee children. By doing so, I intended to enhance their social awareness about refugee children's resettlement experiences and pedagogical practices that supported refugee children in their classroom and in Ontario society.

Data was collected in the form of conversations that occurred during the workshop sessions and of a focus group that was conducted following the completion of the project. The group deliberations encouraged by workshop conversations and focus group discussion produced insights surrounding children's fluid identity categories as well as the connections to the educators work with refugee children. Thematic analysis identified three themes: value of DST as a pedagogical tool, value of DST as a social awareness tool, and considerations for implementing a DST pedagogy.

The focus of the analysis illuminated how the educators found the experience of facilitating the DST project "impactful" in encouraging them to reflect and question their practice "in a way that [they've] never done before" on their existing knowledge about refugee children's experiences and identities, and in thinking more deeply about working with them. The educators recognised the transformative potential of DST in promoting understandings of refugee children's experiences and identities, facilitating reflective practice, including bringing into sharp focus the values, beliefs and assumptions that shaped what educators see and understand, and identifying strength-based pedagogical strategies. They recommended other educators could undertake a similar process, predicting that this would enable even stronger

reciprocal connections between educators and children to facilitate greater understanding of children's identities as a basis for establishing strength-based pedagogies.

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the three educators who facilitated the DST project, and whose experiences of facilitating the workshop are reflected below, are Amber, Jess and Safra. As a co-facilitator of the project, I insert my personal experiences and perceptions into the findings as a participant in the study. Throughout this section, when expressing my educator voice, I will refer to myself in the third person, for example, *Safra shared*, and for my researcher voice, I will continue to refer to myself in the first person as I have done throughout this dissertation, for example, *I found*. In this section, educators reflect on their experiences facilitating the DST project, and consider the opportunities and implications for integrating DST into pedagogical practice.

Theme 1: Value of Digital Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool

In this section, I once again explore the value of the DST project process. Reflecting on their time in the DST project, educators identified five key strength-based characteristics of DST as a pedagogical tool: its focus on process, collaborative nature, child-centered approach, emphasis on self-representation, and the fostering of authentic relationships. While educators initially struggled to understand how to facilitate a DST project online, these strengths emerged as central to DST effectiveness. The educators identified their "fears" when first learning to relate virtually to and build relationships with the children, and support them to create their digital stories. Amber reflected, "I honestly thought it was going to be really challenging to work with a group of children on a screen and to actually have a product that we were trying to put together by the end of it." Safra reflected on her own fears as a researcher and educator:

> Initially, I had all those same fears – why did I think we can do digital storytelling online… I [worried] that I didn't think that this experience was going to be meaningful because we would be having a virtual story circle and we wouldn't be able to build a connection, therefore, the bonding wouldn't be there...

Process-Focused

After facilitating the DST project, educators experienced a positive shift in their understanding of DST as a pedagogical tool. A key theme that emerged was their recognition of DST as process-focused and strength-based. Initially concerned about the types of stories that might be shared and created, the educators overcame these fears by realizing that "it's not the product, it's the process" that truly matters. This attitudinal change reflects a deeper appreciation for the transformative potential of DST, fostering a more open and positive perspective on both the value of the stories and the creative process:

> Jess: I questioned myself on how to execute [the DST project]. I became even more confident in that it's strength-based, even more confident in that it doesn't matter what the output is like, I want [the children] to be proud. Made me even more sure that was the way to go…
>
> Amber: I think of those 'aha moments' throughout the sessions just kept reminding me that it's not [the product]. Those moments where a child was like "my voice is amazing," or another child was like, "no, I'm going to wait for you, I want to work with you"… I did go into this with the idea we're going to be telling possibly traumatic stories and how were we going to get these children to tell us about this journey. I did have that expectation that that's the story we're trying to tell. When the children didn't want to tell that and you [Safra] said, it's okay, it can be any story you want to tell, I was like of

> course, it's the process, it's us getting to know each other, it's the supportive environment, it's creating this cool thing that they can have and keep for themselves for later. That was the more important part.

When asked how facilitating this DST project specifically influenced their perspectives as educators, Amber shared that the process-focused nature of DST served as a reminder and reinforcement of her core teaching philosophy:

> It reminded me of all the things that I love about being an early childhood educator (ECE) because our ECE pedagogy is based on relationships and process rather than curriculum and product. To be honest, they're all the same reasons why I wouldn't want to be a teacher [schoolteacher]. I feel like as a teacher when you're based on curriculum and outcomes and it's not about the process, it is about the product… I wish that teachers would have more opportunities like this, to be able to work in this capacity and in this way with the children in their class because it's transformational. If you weren't an ECE, if you didn't come with the background of all of this [ECE pedagogy], this is an opportunity for them to almost be like a day in the life of an ECE; how does it feel, what does it look like to work *with* children.

Amber described the ECE pedagogy as educators meeting the children "where they're at and [they] start to scaffold the learning and slowly grow it." Researchers working with silenced and forcibly displaced child populations emphasize the importance of actively providing refugee children with voice and agency (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Luttrell, 2010; Mishra Tarc, 2020, 2022). Educators in this study highlight that DST is a powerful pedagogical tool that supports refugee children's self-authorship. Its strength-based and process-focused nature makes it adaptable to children with varying language abilities and learning needs, offering multiple entry points into

their experiences and enabling all children to feel capable of participating. DST allows children to tap into their rich communicative repertoires, expressing their knowledge and offering sophisticated insider perspectives on their experiences and identities (Brown et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2014; de Jager et al., 2017; Emert, 2014a, 2014b; Fenty & Anderson, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; O'Connor, n.d.; Pandya et al., 2015; Vasudevan et al., 2010). According to sociocultural theory, children construct new knowledge through interactions with more knowledgeable others, negotiating different viewpoints to enhance their learning (Dockrell et al., 2005). DST supports this process by providing safe, equitable, and inclusive learning opportunities that are scaffolded by educators, thereby promoting children's self-authorship of their digital stories.

Collaborative Process

DST provides educators with a powerful collaboration tool that can be used in their classrooms (Alismail, 2015). The educators' experiences revealed that DST as a pedagogical tool encouraged and facilitated collaboration between them and the children. In answer to the following question, *how do you see the use of DST as contributing to creating safe, equitable and positive learning opportunities for refugee children*, the educators explained how the parts of the DST process that focused on collaboratively creating a safe space where children could feel able to express their thoughts and feelings honestly and comfortable sharing stories that made them feel vulnerable, was crucial to help create positive learning opportunities for them. They also identified the opportunity to directly collaborate with the children as enhancing their ability to engage with children authentically and meaningfully. The discussion below refers to the work we (i.e. the children and educators) did together during the first DST workshop session, where we spent time collectively generating and establishing ground rules that we all agreed to abide:

> Jess: When we [set the foundation of the workshop] with the kids, we asked, what are some rules, and those kids said things like, we're going to be kind and we're not going to judge each other's stories. That has to be done before you begin the [storytelling] process, because if you say, hey we're going to talk about our families in our digital story, depending on how they look, if you haven't already set that foundation that this is a safe place, you leave kids vulnerable. That's one of the things that probably could be done to make sure that it is a safe space. We did that work before and we did it with the children. It wasn't like, hey look at the teacher's rules, no, it wasn't. It was what they agreed to do and what they wanted this process to be like. Remember when one child was bugging another child and Musaab reminded them that it's against one of our rules. It only happens if they are the ones that decided to do it. I would hate it if it was more like, you have to listen to the teacher, the teacher said you have to do this.
>
> Amber: Way better for them to be like, these are our rules and we all came up with these together because we all want to feel safe. We didn't just say this is a safe space, they actually made it safe for themselves, and some of them maybe learned how to do that in that process too. Which is such a cool outcome.

A safe and supportive environment is essential for children to share their stories and engage in critical reflection. The Story Circle within the DST process provides a structured and collegial setting that facilitates this (Khoo et al., 2023). It is important to note that clear guidelines were put in place to create an appropriate environment (see DST Project Process Session 1).

The educators reflected on the entire DST project of creating and viewing the digital stories in a safe environment. Facilitating the DST project through a collaborative process allowed the children to take significant ownership of the experience. As a result, educators

gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of the children's strengths, engaging in reciprocal learning that fostered stronger connections. Educators reflected on how working with the children led to a renewed sense of engagement and authenticity, effectively challenging the traditional power dynamics often present in Eurocentric teaching environments (Battiste, 2013):

> Jess: I think in terms of making a safe space, when you [Safra] said from the get-go, this is your story, you can do with it what you want, we're not going to make you put it on YouTube, if you don't want to put it there, you don't have to. It's for you to have, to do with what you want. That sets the tone for the kids that this is theirs. It's not going to be evaluated; we're not going to give you a mark. All of that stuff being done beforehand makes kids feel safe and that that's how it should be.
>
> Safra: I found through the approach there was so much respect for the child. I felt the approach we took positioned the child as someone who has a lot of confidence and responsibility. There was no time that we said, this is what you need to do. Creating the rules they set it, they helped each other, they were like educators themselves. They were on par with us. We never had to discipline them or worry about their behavior or anything like that. They were positioned in positions of strength and power.
>
> Jess: During the editing, they were the directors. They were getting me fast and furious trying to get the pictures edited [laughs]. They were the experts and they were positioned in that way.

The educators discovered that collaborating with children disrupted traditional educator-student power dynamics, fostering a deeper connection between them and the children. Furthermore, observations of the workshop dynamics revealed that these collaborations were crucial for enhancing children’s self-expression and creativity.

From their experiences with the DST project, the educators provided compelling evidence of how it disrupted traditional educator-student power hierarchies and diminished educator authority. Researchers employing a sociology of childhood framework argue that children are not merely passive recipients of social norms (Ayoub, 2020; Barnikis, 2015; Luttrell, 2010). Building on this perspective, sociocultural theory suggests that children learn most effectively through meaningful interactions with more knowledgeable peers, who facilitate their learning and meaning-making processes (Dockrell et al., 2005). The educators' experiences in facilitating the DST project highlighted how this pedagogy encouraged collaboration with the children, thereby challenging conventional educator-student power structures and fostering a stronger connection with the children. This finding resonates with other DST research (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016), where teachers reported similar disruptions of established power dynamics. This aspect of DST aligns with the sociology of childhood theory, which views children as active participants who engage with, influence, and are shaped by their social and cultural environments (Prout & James, 1997).

Child-Centered

The educators valued DST for being child-centered and strength-based, in addition to it being process-focused and collaborative, as it enabled them to meaningfully make connections and support the children's learning. Amber reflected:

> I think one of the biggest things that I took away from this whole project was that it reminded me of all the reasons why I love being an educator. Being able to connect with the children, being able to get to know who they are, being able to support their interests, being able to work from a strength-based perspective, coming to the children where they're at, hearing what they want to say, those are all the foundations of what I love

about being an ECE. It's like all the best parts were put into one project.

The educators discussed how they and other educators might think that a DST project would be “too much work,” “extra work,” and/or could not be implemented with young children. However, once they understood that DST is child-centered and strength-based, they realized that educators could incorporate it as part of their curriculum without it adding to their workload. While other studies on DST with educators have noted that the process of creating a digital story can be time-consuming (Clarke, 2017; Yuksel et al., 2011), the educators in this study report a different experience:

> Safra: There's also a lot of fear thinking you can't do this with children or it's too much work. We all felt that when we started the project, even though I knew that this was possible. People have done it so many times but I was still like what am I doing, how are we going to get these stories?
>
> Jess: For school-age educators, I think that we would need to [tell] them… that it would support the curriculum and that it wouldn't be extra work. For whatever reason, we all thought that but it actually wasn't when the children were in charge, they ended up doing all the work themselves and needed very little direction.

In contrast to Safra’s concerns about implementing a DST project with young children, researchers suggest that DST serves as a powerful instructional tool, enabling younger students to create stories that showcase their knowledge and understanding. According to these researchers, DST shifts students from simply following educators' instructions to actively "taking control of their learning" (Robin, 2016, p. 20). This finding aligns with the sociology of childhood and sociocultural perspectives, which emphasize that children's learning is deeply influenced by their lived experiences and sociocultural-historical contexts (Mahn, 1999).

Consequently, becoming active participants in both their educational journey and societal life, reflecting and shaping their realities (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

Self-Representation

Sociocultural theorists emphasize the importance of integrating students' cultures and histories into teaching and learning environments (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The analysis revealed that one of the key findings was how DST as a pedagogical tool empowered refugee children to take control of their own self-representation. The sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997) aims to address societal injustices, and educators noted that DST supported children's self-representation while fostering equitable and positive learning opportunities. Throughout the DST process, children and educators collaborated on brainstorming ideas, writing and revising scripts, and exploring how to develop the children's narratives using WeVideo in a coherent and authentic way that reflected their perspectives. Educators viewed digital stories as powerful tools that not only enabled children to articulate their identities and experiences but also helped create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment:

> Amber: In terms of being equitable, you could take any of those five [digital stories] and put them in a class of 30 children with 30 [digital stories], and you wouldn't be able to point out these are the refugee children. This is an experience for every child to really tell whatever story is important to them and everyone has the chance to tell what is important to them. It's not about what we say you have to tell, it's not about this is the important story, it's not about, well you're a refugee so we need to hear your refugee story, or you come from a home with one parent, we need to hear that. It's not about nit-picking or pointing out differences, but it's about celebrating a whole child.
>
> Jess: It really was that - it was about the child and it wasn't even about necessarily the

story itself. It was just fulfilling a need that we didn't know was there. They wanted to tell it and they never had the chance to.

During the educator focus group, when the educators reflected on watching the children's digital stories, they described how the children could tell their stories in unique ways through the DST narrative process:

Safra: The communication between those two-three minutes is so much more impactful and powerful in a way than just talking.

Jess: I don't know why that is, I can't figure it out, but seriously the stories are stuck in my brain. I don't know if would have stuck in my brain the same way if they just told it to us at one point. There's something about it that really does stick to you.

Amber: It's different when you have the visuals to go with the audio. It just gives you a double sensory input, no matter which way you learn. For me, just listening in general is pretty difficult. When I can read along, I have the transcript on right now, I could pay attention better and so I remember better. With the digital storytelling there's these images that go along with the story that made me pay attention more. So, actually, more of that audio input is actually reaching my brain because I have something to watch along with it. The visual parts don't necessarily always tell the story, they just draw you more into the story.

Safra: That's what I feel too, it just draws you in even when listening to digital stories with stock photos. It pulls something inside you.

Jess: And the narration, there's something about the person's voice. It's like they're talking to you.

Amber: Life changing. I can't explain it to you.

In their discussions, the educators clearly articulated that the features of DST significantly enhanced the children's ability to represent themselves and share their perspectives.

The educators strongly believed that DST served as an excellent tool for improving educators' understanding while empowering children to share stories of their experiences and identities. This process not only helps identify the children's knowledge and strengths but also fostered relationship-building and deeper connections. Amber said:

> Every single teacher in Ontario needs to do this, they need to have this time. It needs to be that the first two to three weeks of school are just getting to know the children, understanding the group, understanding where they're at and then how you can support them for the rest of the school year. Digital storytelling is such an incredible way to do that. There's so many different pieces of creating the story that there's a plethora of different skills that you would be able to see come out, you would get to actually hear the child's story, you get to understand a piece of them, you see how they work with the other children, how they help each other and how those kind of interactions go. There's a lot of other pieces that are going to come out of the digital storytelling process.

The educators recommended other educators to use DST with their students. They predicted that this would enable even stronger reciprocal connections between educators and children to facilitate greater understanding of children's unique personalities, knowledge and strengths as a basis for establishing child-centered pedagogy. Jess added:

> Can you imagine if the first two weeks of school was getting to know each other and then the next two weeks was making digital stories with each other?! You would have an amazing year and experience. It would set up your whole year. Or the opposite, if you were to take it up at the end of the year if you can't do the digital storytelling at the

> beginning, but you still spend that first few weeks getting to know each other, but the end of the year, middle, or in any place that you want to do it you do digital storytelling, I think it would work.

When discussing about resources that would be helpful for educators to create trusting, safe and inclusive environments for refugee children, the educators discussed that DST could also be used as a tool to facilitate learning and sharing amongst educators. Safra explained:

> This is not necessarily connected to the project but teachers building a team for themselves through getting to know each other. That's what we saw with the stories. These children hang out with each other every day and they didn't know those stories. Sitting through the story circle, getting to understand your own experiences more and getting to know somebody else's. What if teachers have that opportunity at the end of the year share the most significant thing you learned about working with immigrant children and doing a story on that, that itself can be so amazing.

Sociocultural theory advocates for teaching and learning approaches that build on children's experiences. This perspective allows educators to understand children as part of their sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts, which helps them adapt their practices to align with the children's realities. As a result, children contribute valuable insights into their lived experiences, becoming knowledgeable contributors to their own learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, the sociology of childhood emphasizes the importance of integrating children's perspectives to effectively address the needs of refugee children and provide meaningful support (Prout, 2011). The findings from this study suggest that DST effectively meets this need. Echoing the results of Figg and McCartney (2011), the educators found DST to be a powerful tool for allowing children to interpret and express their knowledge and strengths in creative and personally meaningful

ways, and Yuksel et al. (2011), who identified DST as a valuable tool for engaging community members in sharing their past experiences. DST not only nurtures and amplifies children's skills and understanding but also enhances their learning experience by enabling them to recognize and document their personal strengths and identities (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Gagne et al., 2018; Pappamihiel et al., 2017; Yuksel et al., 2011).

Authentic Relationships

The final sub theme under the value of DST as a pedagogical tool theme was one of surprise around the relationships that were fostered and deepened during the DST project. The educators were genuinely surprised that they were able to build authentic connections and relationships with the children. They identified the opportunity to work with the children on a strength-based project enhanced their ability to engage with children authentically and meaningfully. The educators discussed this:

> Jess: One of the things I wrote [in my journal] was [that the] potential impact is huge. I had no idea that five hours over Zoom could establish a relationship like this, like that was out of this world. Not even in my mind was it possible to do it to the extent that we did and to feel like we actually made a connection and bond over Zoom. It makes me think of the approach that we have - its equitable and its kind. That was the thing that really made me even more sure of the approach. The limits are crazy, like it's so so so so to the moon…
>
> Amber: The relationships are the biggest part for me. Relationships take time, they take time to build… When [you] have a strength-based focus, you can develop those relationships really quickly. But I didn't anticipate how deep that they would be. I didn't think that after just a few sessions I'd be in tears over the work that they've done. When

my partner got in the car accident and they rescheduled the movie party, that meant so much to me. For the children who barely know me to say like, no, we can't do this without everyone being here. It was just so impactful in that way…

Safra: I [thought] that this experience was [not] going to be meaningful because we would be having a virtual story circle and we wouldn't be able to build a connection, therefore, the bonding wouldn't be there… The relationship that came to be blew my mind. You know the connection was amazing when a child says, it doesn't feel right for us to have the viewing party without Amber, even though they really wanted to have the party. We built connections with the children in five hours virtually with technical challenges.

Jess: I am guaranteeing you the children have told people about us that have no idea who we are or what we're doing [laughs].

Through the educators' experience of facilitating the DST project they perceived that they gained new ways to connect with children. They identified DST as being crucial to help educators understand the children's backgrounds:

Amber: You learn so much about the children and you know their favorite sports and you know what they love to do in their free time and you would have a picture of how they see themselves.

Jess: And you know when things are not ready either. You know when a child is uncomfortable or worried about something.

Amber: I bet we learned more about those children in just a few hours of sessions than probably a teacher [schoolteacher] would learn in a long time.

It seems like the DST project fostered mutual sharing and promoted a sense of community within the workshops. This finding connects to sociocultural theory, as from a sociocultural perspective educators who help children link their personal histories and build on their experiences are better equipped to understand and address the children's needs both in the immediate and over time (Dockrell et al., 2005).

Prout (2011) emphasizes the importance of considering how children's perspectives can be more effectively heard in research. Through the facilitation of the DST project, educators gained deeper insights into the experiences, identities, knowledge, and strengths of Syrian refugee children. DST encouraged educators to challenge themselves in understanding the children's socio-cultural backgrounds, both past and present. This finding supports previous research advocating for the use of DST with refugee students, highlighting the lasting positive impact on both educators and storytellers (Emert, 2014a). By offering children a platform to express their perspectives on various issues and recognizing them as competent informants of their own lives, this approach aligns with the sociology of childhood's focus on incorporating children's viewpoints to effectively address their needs (Prout, 2011). It also resonates with sociocultural theory, which emphasizes building on individuals' experiences to support their learning (Dockrell et al., 2005), as well as with critical pedagogy, which encourages educators to engage in dialogue while acknowledging that students' views' of the world reflect their own realities (Freire, 1970, 1974). In conclusion, the educators in this study had a positive perception of DST as a pedagogical tool after facilitating the project with Syrian refugee children.

Theme 2: Value of DST as a Social Awareness Tool

To recap, the purpose of this study is to address the gap that exists in meeting the needs of Syrian refugee children in Ontario schools, with educators having little knowledge about these

children. This will be done by building a deeper understanding of Syrian children's perspectives, realities, and needs among educators. Therefore, the aims of this research were to explore the pedagogical potential of DST to do the following: (1) provide a lens on the resettlement experiences from the viewpoint of Syrian refugee children, (2) help educators better understand the points of view of Syrian children, and (3) become a social awareness tool for the educators and children. These three lines of inquiry were explored in an embedded and participative approach. Over the course of three weeks the educators worked with Syrian refugee children who told and listened to stories. The findings showed that educators did indeed perceive DST as a tool for change—change in perception, change in attitude, change in values, change in beliefs, and change in practice.

Awareness of Refugee Children's Resettlement Experiences

Upon reflecting on their experiences facilitating a DST project to support Syrian refugee children create their digital stories as a way to convey their own lived resettlement experiences, the educators recognized the transformative potential of DST in deepening their understanding of refugee children's experiences. It also promoted reflective practice by highlighting the values, beliefs, and assumptions that shaped the educators' perspectives, while helping them identify child-centered, strength-based pedagogical strategies. The educators shared some things they learnt from the children and their stories through participating together in the project:

> Amber: Part that stuck out to me is not necessarily something that was new to be learned but sort of reinforce a perspective that I already have from previous studies which was, while we came into this to work with children who are refugees, those aren't really the stories that came out. And so just reinforcing that idea that there's like so many different pieces to someone's personality. Especially when it comes to children, their stories were

just about very typical children things, like riding bikes, being with their friends and playing soccer. It's cool just to learn and refresh that idea that you know. Even though to us it seems like such a big piece of their puzzle, perhaps to them it's like only a small piece…

Jess: When you said that what we imagined would be a big part of their story or what they want to tell, I think that also was something that I made a note of because they are children and we are adults, so we prioritize life experience in different ways and we also understand them in different ways. Let's say we're talking about teaching a concept to children, you wouldn't give them all the information if they were six or seven years old - you work with what they know and how they understood it. But then if you understand it as an adult, you will have so much more information and so much more context to be able to tell that story. So, I feel like they will have a story as they get older, they will talk about this as they understand it more, but the things that they truly understand and have really robust context of, that's the story that they want to tell. And if we don't have enough time, we won't get to it. Because as an educator, if I didn't have this time to be able to sit with them for the five sessions, which isn't a lot of time, but it's still dedicated time… we would never get to it and then that label that we have, would always be that label, even though it's not actually right for that child but you wouldn't get it until you did those five sessions. My concern ended up being at the end was that we're missing a lot by not giving kids the time to tell their stories and we're just telling them for them almost, because we were doing the prioritizing of their learning.

Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994) observe that “even today, the fact that refugees once had property, education, and status before being displaced by forces beyond their control is

overshadowed by their current impoverished circumstances" (as cited in Braun, 2016, p. 81). This has contributed to a deficit-focused narrative in refugee children's education (Braun, 2016). Educators found the DST project transformative, as its child-centered, strength-based approach fostered deep reflection on resettlement experiences and helped them better understand refugee children's experiences by empowering their self-representation. These findings align with previous research showing that DST projects have a profound impact on preservice teachers understandings of lived experiences. Specifically, the DST project encouraged immigrant children to openly share their personal experiences, facilitating greater insight for preservice teachers (Kolano & Sanczyk, 2022). This finding underscores the principles of critical pedagogy, particularly the role of individual meaning-making through social interaction. It also highlights the importance of recognizing the interdependence and interconnectedness of our social, cultural, and political worlds in shaping these experiences (Freire, 1970, 1974; Giroux, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Awareness of Issues of Power and Privilege Faced by Refugee Children

The data gives a picture of educators' growing understanding of the issues of power and privilege that became apparent to them as they got to know the Syrian refugee children and their experiences. During the DST project, the educators experienced linguistic barriers when communicating with Hamza; however, these obstacles were easily overcome with the other children helping with translation, and using strength-based strategies. This experience coupled with the other experiences of facilitating the DST project made the connection between power and privilege and language apparent for the educators:

> Amber: [Getting to know the children and their experiences] definitely highlighted the experience of children who attend school with fluent skills in another language. It was

really great to hear that the teacher had paired the child with a student who spoke the same language to work together, rather than what I've found previously, which is where teachers just kind of assume that the child is incapable. It was great to learn that Hamza's teacher seems to work hard to invite him and welcome him into the classroom with English not being as strong for him. But that's such an issue of power and privilege, the most obvious out of the experience for me. Right away with our group, we were like, how can we make this easier or more comfortable or more accessible or what ways can we work this so that this child is having the best experience that they can have. And that's who we are as [educators]. As educators that's what we do. But to learn in class it's not quite like that. His friend is leaving next year and he's very nervous about that. How is that going to turn out for him now? Is there going to be someone else who helps to speak that language or is there a teacher who's available? I wonder how the next year in school will be for him because of that.

Jess: And that does bring concern to me… As much as [Hamza and Dante] ended up being great friends and they relied on each other, there is a certain responsibility and workload put on the child. Hamza is positioned in a place where he is really reliant on his peer and can become dependent on them. You don't want children to be dependent on each other all the time. You want those moments of independence. Hamza himself seems to be fine. He's got that confidence. But I can only imagine if it was a child that could be very fearful of becoming really dependent and putting even more pressure on the challenges during the interpretation. There has to be a better way. I don't know what it would look like. We can't assume everyone's first language is English or French in this country and yet everything is set up for that way. So, what are we going to do about that

> and what potential are we missing when we don't support those same children? I don't blame the teacher. At the end of the day, they can't speak every single language ever but there's got to be something that we could do to make it more accessible. We were able to do it in our [DST project], but they're going to miss that in school-age classrooms. I highly doubt that the teacher asked Hamza what language do you want to do you're work in. I doubt it. You [Amber] did – you said you can do the narration in your language, we can get interpretation, we can put captions on. I highly doubt those accommodations are being done in school-age programs.
>
> Amber: That's like a systemic issue…

Noteworthy is the fact that teacher education policy in Ontario specifies the need for all preservice teachers to learn to support English learners; however, there is no such requirement for the professional development of in-service teachers (Gagné et al., 2017b). The DST project was transformative in encouraging educators to deeply reflect on the concepts of power and privilege. The relationship between increased knowledge and a potential shift in attitudes, values, beliefs, and practice is a complex one (Pappamihiel et al., 2016). Through facilitating the project, educators experienced shifts in their understanding of power and privilege as they relate to refugee children's resettlement experiences and developed innovative ways to support these children through a strength-based pedagogy. The reflective nature of DST makes it particularly suited for tasks that involve critical reflection on practice (Marín et al., 2017). This process helped educators' understandings evolve to become more socially, culturally, and politically aware, as well as more attuned to the realities of the education field (Alcantud-Diaz, 2016; Challinor et al., 2017; Gagne et al., 2017a; Long, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2016; Tur et al., 2016). This perspective is crucial because each child navigates multiple, intersecting identities, whether

based on class, gender, ethnicity, disability, or other factors (Christensen & Prout, 2002), and is part of a larger social context that encompasses their social, political, and cultural worlds (Vygotsky, 1978). As highlighted by the educators' discussions, the DST process was invaluable in allowing them to examine the social construction of power hierarchies, reveal hidden oppressions within institutions, and recognize the underlying political, social, and economic foundations of society (Kincheloe, 1999; McLaren, 2003).

Awareness of Justice, Equity and Human Rights Issues Experienced by Refugee Children

The reflective nature of DST fosters deeper levels of reflection (Alcantud-Diaz, 2016; Challinor et al., 2017; Gagne et al., 2017a; Long, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2016; Tur et al., 2016). Jess noted that facilitating the DST project prompted themselves to reflect on and question their prior knowledge about refugee children's identities "in a way [they] had never done before." This critical thinking was essential in guiding them toward creating spaces of belonging:

> It's made me reflect on my practice in a way that I've never done before. It made me really self-reflect on why I had these ideas of even what "refugee" means and what "refugee child" means, and to be very much more thoughtful in that process. The labels is only one part of your identity, it's not your entire identity and to be very mindful of that. I imagine the number of people in your life who will ask you about it and want you to talk about it just out of curiosity. They're not actually asking about you; they're asking about a "refugee experience". That question and label isn't even meant to get to know you better in many situations, it's just so that they can satisfy their curiosity about what *refugee* means. That made me even more aware of it and to be much more thoughtful about it.

Through their work on the DST project, the educators developed a deeper awareness, respect, and sense of responsibility toward refugee children, gaining valuable insights into the social

justice, equity, and human rights challenges these children face in Ontario. This enhanced understanding can also support their understanding of the broader experiences of other marginalized groups. They emphasized the critical role of the DST process in shaping this perspective. As they remarked:

> Jess: Another big one is getting to know the children and the cultural context that children live in. You cannot imagine it. How do you expect to know a child, if you don't know their first 5/6 years of beginning in any way? You don't know what it looks like to go to the grocery store in that place, you don't know what it looks like to go for a walk. To me that is somewhere we're really lacking. If an educator or if anyone is interacting with these children and from the get-go doesn't understand the cultural context of their history, you're going to be missing so many links. Yes, we can bridge that with just basic human decency, patience and kindness. But if you aren't fully aware as an educator of your imagination and where that's going, it can be very harmful. That's one where I'm worried for in terms of those young children's own social justice, equity and human rights - is that they will encounter folks that don't have that context, yet also have the power to influence dominant discourse, and say this is where now I see something lacking. But in reality, it just doesn't fit in our culture in Canada and in Ontario. Even if it doesn't fit, does that mean that we have to make it fit? Maybe not. I feel like there is even more nuance than I ever could have imagined with children coming over at such a young age from different places from different circumstances and that we have to really have dedicated time and plan for it. It's not something that we're going to be able to just push to the side until it just doesn't exist anymore… I do think that educators probably need a bit more training or something with like cultural competence, and knowing where you're

going to be self-reflective about your biases and your assumptions. I will admit that when I first heard about the [DST workshop], I absolutely thought they were going to be more interested in telling us about Syria, or telling us about Jordan. Imagine if I had the insistence that that was the story that needed to be told because it's more important for the world?!

Amber: Imagine the harm that could have been caused to push a child to talk about something that they're not talking about, maybe for a reason.

Jess: Also, they are not experts in it. You're basically making them feel inadequate by telling you a story they don't really know, or they can't really tell at this time, or because they don't want to.

Amber: It's not necessarily like what things gave me a full understanding about 'child refugees' but almost about 'child immigrants' in general. For a child to come from a country that I as an educator know absolutely nothing about, there are so many opportunities for miscommunication, misunderstanding, misalignment, misdirection, misdiagnosis. So many of these things that could come just from a lack of understanding… We meet the child where they are at, we learn everything that we can and it's not up to us to pass judgment or assume that a child is supposed to be at a certain place when they're not. If we have insisted that they told “that story” and that is not a story that means anything to them, or it's not a story that they remember, or it's a story that causes pain and they don't feel like talking about it, what would have happened then? Because we were able to just be totally open about this, we got to see what's important to them and what they feel like is a piece of who they are. We broke down the boundaries of what would need to be done in terms of social justice because we try to set it up from the

beginning that it's not a place where that needs to happen. We went in there being we're open to you, we're here to help you tell whatever story you want, whatever is important to you, whatever pictures work for you and whatever language works for you. I decided to support you. It's not like you have to do what I say and if you don't want to do it this way, you're wrong or something silly.

Safra: That came up the first day when I went to meet the children and their families. I said we're going to do a story about what you remember when you came to Canada and they asked, do we have to tell that story? Can we tell a story about something else? I'm also thinking now for those who remember the experience of when they came to Canada. Musaab remembers the journey and the resettlement because he spoke very easily about those first moments in Canada, but what if it is not wanting to share as part of recovery? There could be not good times that they don't want to talk about. It also could be reshaping their identities, that's not who I am. A refugee/immigrant narrative is always a deficit narrative because you're not part of the dominant discourse, you don't fit into the norm, you're always at a deficit because you are always compared to the norm. The open-endedness of digital storytelling allows them to recreate their identity not to have that deficit lens of trauma, displacement and so on …

Jess: I think that that goes back to moving away from having people have to tell us their story, like for what? Unless you are using it in a very positive strategic way for us to give them resources, why are we asking that? It made me very much more conscious of that. Unless it is something that I have committed my resources to be able to do something with it, it's not my business to be making you tell me. Tell me what you want to tell me, then it really is about the kids and letting them tell the story that they want to tell.

DST's potential to facilitate reflective practice by creating supportive conditions for critical thinking led educators to question their assumptions about refugee children. It became evident that fostering reflection helped evolve their practice to be more aware of the realities faced by refugee children. This aligns with the study's theoretical framework, which rejects the notion of a universal childhood (Prout & James, 1997) and highlights the strong influence of social and cultural factors on learning by considering individuals within their cultural, social, and political contexts (Dockrell et al., 1995). It also seeks to address social justice, equity, and human rights issues faced by refugee children by using student voice to expose implicit discrimination within curricula that prioritize certain content and perspectives (Freire, 1970, 1974). The educators' reflections noted how a child-centered, strength-based pedagogy supported children's self-representation and sense of belonging. Similarly, Kolano and Sanczyk's (2022) study investigating preservice teacher interaction with immigrant children found support for ways in which creating digital stories challenged preservice teachers' dispositions about immigration and deepened understandings of their diverse students' English language learning experiences.

Awareness of Refugee Children's Strength-Based Identities

When asked about their evolving understanding of refugee children's strength-based identities, the educators emphasized the value of the time and space for critical reflection that the DST experience provided. It allowed them to question their assumptions and gain deeper insights. The educators also appreciated the opportunity to build strong, meaningful connections with the children, attributing this to the child-centered, strength-based nature of the DST pedagogical tool. They further elaborated on these strategies:

> Amber: You almost have this image in your head, like this sad kid who's been through the worst adventure to try and get here, and their clothes are dirty because they've been

on this travel road for so long. You have this very stereotypical movie version of what a refugee child is supposed to be like and to me they're just children. They talked about all their favorite things, they talked about what they love to do, they shared about their favorite pets and people.

Jess: There's that trope of having it from a deficit point but this experience we naturally didn't go that direction. That's why Musaab became our little assistant because we found where he was very strong, we kept supporting him and giving him opportunities to continue to be strong. With the narration, we were so impressed with how well they spoke and did their expressions. None of us were looking for ways to diagnose or to try to figure out where their gaps were. In this project whenever we came across something that they showed strength or they showed interest in, we just kept supporting that, scaffolding and giving it. That's the approach. This weird idea that we're there to rescue folks from these things. You don't rescue folks from difficulty by making them have to re-live it and dig into it. That isn't how we do it. We support them as they show us where they need support or where they show strength. That made it a positive experience. If you were like, let's work on your pronunciation because we found out that your pronunciation isn't great. We would be going from this deficit model – the child's speech is hard to understand, let's work on pronunciation. How horrible would that have been? That would have been a really stressful negative experience. Nobody did that. That's where the experience hinges, it's on those moments.

Amber: We also see the children as problem solvers because we asked the children, what do you think is the best way to do this, how would it work the best for you, how can I support you? And they came up with the ideas and they helped with the recording and

everything. Everyone kind of used their skills in that way. I also think of the opposite of that, in some of the cases where some of the children were a little bit insecure or not feeling confident about something. Some children didn't want to do a voiceover, they didn't want to hear their own voice, they didn't feel very good about that. But as we work together, you kind of start to help build that confidence a little bit and the children see it as a strength, a learning opportunity or moment of growth, and not as a detrimental I suck this or this makes me weak, they see it as a strength - I don't know this but it's a strength that I get to learn it. By the child that didn't want to do the voiceover was like, listen to me, I sound great, my voice is amazing. That turned into that moment of maybe insecurity becomes a strength.

Safra: Both of you saw what the children are good at and scaffolded that. You didn't try to fix anything. And it's the same thing with their stories - if this is a story that the child wants to tell, you didn't say, no, this is the story you have to tell. When I introduced the children to digital storytelling and voiceovers, some of the children were apprehensive because they thought that it's going to be a very daunting experience for them and that they would have to fix things or go through parts they don't necessarily feel comfortable. Because of your educator-skills, you automatically thought of how can we work with this without necessarily imposing a solution that they feel like they don't feel comfortable doing so.

The educators' experiences facilitating the DST project heightened their awareness of child-centered, strength-based pedagogical strategies. They recognized how these approaches, including DST's process-driven focus and collaborative process, encouraged and facilitated communication between them and the children, and enabled the children to reflect on,

understand, and express their emerging identities and strengths. Similar to the reflections of educators in this study, Gagne et al.'s (2017a) research, which also involved educators as DST facilitators and Syrian refugee children as storytellers, found that the DST experience provided valuable insights into the diverse backgrounds of children and how they navigate their evolving identities. A core element of critical pedagogy involves reflecting on and analyzing the assumptions that guide actions, leading to social reform and liberation (Freire, 1970, 1974; Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe, 2012; McLaren, 2003; Ryoo et al., 2009). This affirms the study's findings, as educators highlighted the importance of supporting children's learning without judgment, understanding their strengths, and scaffolding their learning. They emphasized the significance of valuing and acknowledging children's suggestions, which fostered confidence. Other studies have similarly found DST to be an effective tool for helping educators understand their diverse students, including refugees, and to support the development of positive beliefs about diverse populations (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Emert, 2014b; Pappamihiel et al., 2017). These findings also align with sociocultural theory's assumption that social practices directly influence individual functioning (Dockrell et al., 2005).

This study examined how a DST project involving Syrian refugee children engaged educators in understanding the children's resettlement experiences. The project notably deepened educators' comprehension of refugee children's experiences and identities, while also shifting their perspectives, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Additionally, the facilitation process led to new insights that influenced their pedagogy and encouraged the development of innovative approaches to support refugee children. Educators expressed a strong commitment to promoting social justice for refugee children. These findings align with previous research by Yuksel et al.

(2011) which highlighted that facilitating DST projects can stimulate changes in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors among preservice educators.

DST can serve as a powerful tool for fostering meaningful connections between refugee students and educators (Barber & Ramsay, 2017; Gagne et al., 2017b). Educators acknowledged the significance of DST as they reflected on teaching and learning approaches in the classroom. This finding underscores the need for developing educators' reflective practices and competencies to incorporate diverse representations in their teaching approaches. Such implications align with the principles of critical pedagogy, which emphasize that reflection is essential to learning. Reflecting on beliefs encourages introspection, helping educators identify hidden biases and assumptions, ultimately fostering professional growth. Here, deep reflection on lived realities requires questioning existing power dynamics and social norms, while considering multiple perspectives. This process leads to critical awareness and actions aimed at challenging and transforming the entrenched norms, values, and structural relationships in society (Darder, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Theme 3: Considerations for Implementing a Digital Storytelling Pedagogy

The final portion of the focus group discussion explored how DST could be integrated as a pedagogical tool within school curricula. A recurring concern among the educators was that schoolteachers often prioritize helping students meet academic and behavioral expectations, such as classroom rules over forming meaningful relationships with them. Jess emphasized that building authentic connections with students should be the first, and most important, step in meeting their needs:

> If you don't make it that an educator in a traditional school environment has to dedicate time to get to know children, they won't… But that doesn't happen in schools. It's the

> rules. They aren't worried about getting you used to them or relationships, they're concerned about you understanding the rules and then we can do our lessons… If you have children that come into school age without [those relationships], it's going to make learning not that fun, it's going to make the school environment not as welcoming. Imagine if school-aged educators were given the first month of school as just relationship building, can you imagine what a difference that would make?!

The educators' concerns are supported by the literature, which also highlights that social relationships in schools are a critical aspect of refugee children's resettlement needs (Guo et al., 2017, 2019; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016). When educators foster meaningful relationships with students, it not only shows respect but also values the students' knowledge, including their hopes and dreams, integrating these into the learning process (Freire, 1970, 1974). The process of building relationships also empowers students by fostering an understanding of their own agency (hooks, 2003; Kincheloe, 1999).

In reflecting on the DST process, even though DST and DST facilitation was a new experience for them, excluding Safra, educators acknowledged its value in shaping teaching and learning within classrooms. They recognized a strong need to incorporate DST as a pedagogical tool in the curriculum, viewing it as beneficial across various subject areas. Additionally, they offered several suggestions on how other educators could integrate DST into their own reflective practices:

> Amber: There must be ways that a digital storytelling project could be incorporated into a [school] curriculum even though it wouldn't have that same open-endedness that we had of telling whatever story we want to. It would almost be like using digital storytelling to demonstrate that you've learned something from the curriculum.

Jess: You need creativity though... You could definitely make this particular digital storytelling a language exercise or a technology exercise. It depends on what you're talking about, what the stories are about, but you could do it in a social studies class, you could do it in a science class. You would have to be able to be creative in what the outcomes were… I would say that even as an early childhood educator, this would be an amazing thing to have but they would need time and technology… I think just sort of an outline of how it would go and the experiences that we've had, I think would go a long way for educators…if they could also understand how this relates to their curriculum…

Amber: Kind of like the stuff you [Safra] did with us. When we first did the sessions with you and we created our own digital story to learn how it all works, a big part of that beginning piece was what is a digital story, what are the benefits of digital stories and all those different ways they can be used, so just that information to get out there. I almost feel like they need a 'you' who can come and sit with them, set the tone and explain it. It's one thing to read a PowerPoint or watch a video about why digital story is important, it's different to have you sitting in front of us and explaining. We also created our rules and we also had a sharing circle with the three of us. The whole tone and whole vibe that you set for us as facilitators, I think that then ebbed and flowed into the work that we did with the children...

Jess: Having educators be able to do sessions themselves before, I think there's no way around that. They would need to do it so they could see what it was. There's something about it when you do it and you finish it, you're like, I get it now.

Amber: Then you can share with others. I feel the digital storytelling workshops that we've now done with colleagues, that's because of that. We did this with [Safra] and we

> felt it. We didn't just do it; we felt the importance of it. Leaving with that deep 'oh my gosh, this is such an incredible experience for me even to relive this memory from my past or to tell this story in this way'. You're connected to it in that way now, so then when you're doing it with the children or you're doing it with others, you come at it with like this passion. That's how I feel right now, everyone needs to know about digital storytelling, everyone has to try and do it.

The educators provided numerous insights into DST's effectiveness in fostering children's self-expression. Jess highlighted this potential by stating, "when you introduce something like digital technology, I think about its potential, whether through Zoom, WeVideo, or email. I believe we're only scratching the surface right now." These reflections highlight DST's pedagogical strength—its ability to empower children to share their knowledge and engage in learning that resonates with their lived experiences, making it a valuable tool for bridging gaps in understanding. When paired with compelling visual and audio elements, DST becomes accessible to those unfamiliar with a particular experience, fostering empathy and understanding for those who have lived it (Fenty & Anderson, 2016; Skinner & Hagood, 2008; Vasudevan et al., 2010). This approach aligns with a critical pedagogy framework, where students recognize that their experiential knowledge holds value, empowering them to be both educators and learners. In this way, authority is redefined as community members teach one another, fostering a sense of agency and a capacity to transform their realities (hooks, 2003; Kincheloe, 1999). The educators recognized that every child has important stories to tell and expressed a desire to implement DST across all classrooms, enabling every student to create their own digital narratives. Echoing the aspirations of the educators in this study, participants in Mitchell et al.

(2016) also hoped to further develop the DST process, seeking meaningful ways to integrate it into their curricula in alignment with their future students' cultures and identities.

The educators also recommended that schoolteachers participate in a DST project themselves, where they would create their own digital stories. They believed this experience could foster stronger relationships among educators and enhance collaborative practice. Additionally, they anticipated that DST would deepen educators' reflections on their practice, enabling them to learn from one another's experiences. The process would also provide valuable content that educators could incorporate into their practice:

> Amber: The team building that would happen between those educators within their space from being a part of [a DST project]. You're almost starting off the school year with building your team of educators so that everyone's together and then they are all on this idea that then flows into each classroom… It's just such a way to bring people together.
>
> Jess: Can you imagine if the first two weeks of school was getting to know each other and then the next two weeks was making digital stories with each other. You would have an amazing year and experience. It would set up your whole year. Or the opposite, if you were to take it up at the end of the year if you can't do the digital storytelling at the beginning, but you still spend that first few weeks getting to know each other, but the end of the year, middle, or in any place that you want to do it you do digital storytelling, I think it would work.
>
> Amber: I guess it depends how you want to focus it. I'm focusing as a 'get to know you' activity, but this can be integrated into any stream of learning… you could use the concept and the project of digital storytelling anywhere for anything really. So, they all should.

When thinking of meaningful ways to support refugee children, establishing a supportive collegial environment conducive for collaboration, reciprocal sharing and building relationships was fundamental to the educators. They believed DST characterized this for them. They noted how the supportive environment facilitated by DST would be important to encourage educators to reciprocally share their stories.

My findings indicate that facilitating the DST project significantly benefited educators by encouraging them to challenge preconceived notions about refugee children and their resettlement experiences, ultimately leading to more effective practices in working with refugee children. The implementation of the DST project demonstrated its potential as a powerful vehicle for social reflection and awareness, fostering collaborative learning and critical thinking among both educators and children, while deepening their understanding of refugee children's experiences and identities. A key aspect of the project was that it empowered refugee children to share their knowledge with educators, completing a crucial link in the teaching-learning process, as identified in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970, 1974; hooks, 2003). This concept of critical pedagogy emphasizes the importance of valuing students' experiences and promoting a teaching and learning approach where both students and educators are equally engaged in knowledge production. This teaching and learning approach not only enriches the educational experience but also fosters a more inclusive and reflective learning environment.

The children's digital stories serve as authentic expressions of their lived experiences, enhancing their voices, communication skills, and multimodal expression. Their digital stories acknowledged the unique sociocultural contexts that shape their experiences and identities, embedding these within broader intersecting sociocultural, political, and historical frameworks. Viewing children's experiences and identities through the lenses of the study's theoretical

framework (Freire, 1970; Prout & James, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978), educators discovered that DST fostered meaningful connections between them and the children. Facilitating the project significantly influenced educators' perceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs, reinforcing the transformative potential of DST in teaching and learning. This process not only enriched their understanding of the children but also emphasized the importance of adopting inclusive and reflective practice.

In addressing the research question regarding educators' experiences of facilitating the DST project, the current findings indicate that DST is an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing social awareness. The data collected reveal that leading the DST project has allowed educators to develop a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a Syrian child with a refugee background in Ontario. Collectively, the study findings suggest that DST holds significant potential as a transformative tool for promoting social awareness in teaching and learning, particularly in supporting refugee children's sense of belonging. Moreover, DST was perceived to create opportunities for co-creation of artifacts and mutual understanding between educators and children, further enriching the educational experience for all involved.

The educators' reflections offer valuable insights into their experiences facilitating a DST project with Syrian refugee children. Despite having no prior experience with DST, Amber and Jess found that facilitating the project allowed them to view DST as an interactive and multimodal strategy for empowering children's self-representation and active construction of knowledge. These findings contribute to existing knowledge by highlighting the value of DST as a creative and reflective approach that encourages educators to explore innovative ways for refugee children to represent, share, and discuss their lived experiences. The study highlights the importance of integrating DST and multimodal design in both preservice and in-service teacher

education, demonstrating how this approach can enhance refugee children's communication skills, deepen their understanding of their own experiences and support their belonging. Moreover, the findings reveal the broader potential of DST, not only as an effective tool for educators but also as a significant contribution to understanding the resettlement process for Syrian refugee children in Ontario as a whole.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This concluding chapter summarizes the research, highlighting the key findings and their significance. It also offers suggestions for promising practices based on these findings for educators and other professionals working with refugee children, and considers the implications of my findings for practice and research. Additionally, the chapter addresses the limitations of the research and outlines potential directions for future research, particularly in relation to developing the digital storytelling (DST) approach.

Summary of Research

In the *Introduction* chapter, I provided an overview of the context surrounding the experiences of Syrian refugee children, followed by a discussion of the motivations behind my research: addressing the gap in meeting the needs of Syrian refugee children in Ontario schools. This included highlighting how the study aimed to explore the potential of DST to address inequities in pedagogical practices by centring the perspectives of refugee children. Additionally, it examined how DST could serve as both a tool for raising social awareness and an effective pedagogical resource for educators, ultimately benefiting the children themselves.

In the *Literature Review* chapter, I reviewed the relevant literature to provide a contextual background for the study, identify knowledge gaps, and situate my research within existing scholarship. The chapter began by discussing Syrian refugee children's pre-migration experiences, offering an overview of their experiences in their country of origin and first asylum, with a particular focus on educational experiences. The discussion then shifted to post-migration, examining Syrian refugee children's experiences in Canada. This section concluded by emphasizing the limited insights into these children's resettlement experiences in their new

Canadian communities. Additionally, it highlighted the scarcity of research focusing on children's perspectives, especially in the context of refugee resettlement, underscoring the need for further scholarship on the resettlement experiences of refugee children in Ontario.

The literature review then shifted to a focused discussion on the experiences of Canadian preservice and in-service educators working with Syrian refugee students in publicly funded education systems. Educators' perspectives revealed the complex and intersecting factors that influenced the integration of refugee students within schools. It included an exploration of promising practices that support the integration of refugee students, as highlighted in the literature, particularly the advantages of moving away from a deficit-based pedagogy towards a child-centered approach that builds on students' strengths.

The final section of the chapter explored scholarship on DST studies involving refugee children and educators, emphasizing key concepts and frameworks that significantly shaped my research. It then delved into a more detailed discussion of how DST can enhance educators' understanding of refugee students' experiences and needs. The section concluded by noting the limited insights available on the pedagogical potential of DST for educators who facilitate these projects with refugee children.

The *Theoretical Framework* chapter explored the theoretical foundations of this study: the new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). The discussion highlighted how this particular theoretical framework fosters a broader sociocultural, political, and historical consciousness, enabling a critique of cultural norms and values. It also provided an overview of how this theoretical perspective reveals the pedagogical potential of DST to challenge Canadian discourses of power and privilege, which frequently impose normative standards on refugee children.

The *Methodology* chapter began by detailing the qualitative, Participatory Visual Methodology I employed. It then provided an overview of the research method, digital storytelling, along with insights into my approach. This was followed by a positionality statement that explored how my personal experiences and identity shaped my interest in the topic and informed my research approach. The next section introduced information about the participants, setting, and recruitment process, noting how it was centered around a DST project. Further details about the DST project were shared, along with a discussion of the adaptations made due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I then described the data collection process and the variety of data generated by both participants and myself as the researcher.

I then outlined my approach to analysis, which centered on grounded theory and thematic coding. This section detailed the various strategies I used to grasp the complexities and nuances of the digital stories, interviews, focus group discussions, and other data collected. It also emphasized the cyclic, iterative, and reflective nature of my process at this stage. Additionally, I adopted a more holistic approach, immersing myself first in each participant's data before moving onto the group's collective data. The chapter concludes by discussing the strategies I employed to enhance the credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of the research findings, along with ethical considerations in conducting research with refugee children.

The *Findings* chapter emphasized how the DST project supported Syrian refugee children in expressing their experiences while helping educators gain deeper social awareness of these perspectives. The chapter explored several overarching themes from the children's digital stories and both the children's and educators' experiences with the DST project. These themes were connected to relevant literature and key theoretical concepts that informed this study.

Additionally, the findings refer, both explicitly and implicitly, to practices that affect the refugee children's sense of belonging.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the pedagogical potential of DST to: (1) offer a lens into the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee children from their perspective, (2) help educators develop a deeper understanding of these children's perspectives, and (3) serve as a tool for raising critical social awareness among both educators and children. The DST project at the core of this study took place over three weeks, involving five Syrian refugee children and three educators, as we co-created digital stories about the children's resettlement experiences in Ontario. This project served as a platform for investigating my research questions:

- What perspectives on their resettlement experiences in Ontario do Syrian refugee children express through their digital stories?
- What are these children's experiences of creating these digital stories?
- What are educators' experiences of facilitating this digital storytelling project?

Each of the research questions has been answered in this study. A synopsis follows.

Research Question 1

A central aspect of this research involved exploring how DST could serve as a means of expression for Syrian refugee children. The findings showed that the children's digital stories allowed them to express their experiences and identities, emphasizing their positive sense of self, pride in accomplishments, and sense of belonging.

The children's digital stories highlight their positive qualities, personal growth, and ability to navigate challenges with a strong sense of identity, framing difficulties as learning opportunities while showcasing their achievements. The narratives emphasize the importance of

social relationships, especially friendships and family bonds, for fostering belonging and aiding social adjustment. The children expressed a desire to connect with peers and be accepted, while family played a crucial role in providing emotional support. The stories also reflect their future aspirations, showing determination to create better futures. Overall, the digital stories highlight the children's agency in shaping their identities and experiences, aligning with the new sociology of childhood principles (Prout & James, 1997).

Creating digital stories gave the children confidence in personal advocacy, allowing them to highlight their challenges and values. Their narratives offered unique perspectives on their experiences, identity, relationships, and aspirations, with Musaab noting, "I chose that story because it was really meaningful." DST enabled powerful, meaningful expression through multimodal forms, challenging stereotypes about refugees and emphasizing happy moments. These stories serve as cultural artifacts that showcase the children's strengths and help build understanding of their experiences, particularly in the context of resettlement in Ontario.

Research Question 2

The findings from the Syrian refugee children's DST project experiences highlight three significant themes: the intrinsic value of the DST process and its outcomes, the expression and agency gained through engagement in DST, and the promotion of social bonds among participants. The children reported feeling overwhelmingly positive about their DST experience.

By utilizing a multimodal approach, the children were able to articulate and visualize the complexities of their experiences and identities in ways that transcended linguistic barriers. They valued the freedom to select media that resonated with their personal values, which created a motivating environment for engagement and enhanced their digital expression skills. The iterative nature of the DST process, which included various narrative creation activities,

encouraged the children to construct and share their stories. The children took pride in their completed digital stories, viewing them as meaningful representations of complex social dynamics that emphasized their agency. They noted that participating in the DST project not only helped them learn to tell their own stories but also encouraged them to engage with the stories of others. Through the careful selection of images, formatting transitions, and incorporation of music, the children expressed their stories in unique ways, revealing intangible aspects of their experiences and identities. This creative process granted them agency, allowing them to become authors of their narratives while engaging with sociocultural ideas from their context and co-constructing knowledge through collaboration and shared meaning, in line with sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, a key theme from the children's experiences was the development of social bonds between children and educators during the DST project, which fostered a strong sense of community; both groups noted increased connections, with children particularly enjoying the collaboration while creating their digital stories and valuing the relationships formed.

In conclusion, the experiences of Syrian refugee children in the DST project highlight how a multimodal approach effectively facilitated their personal expression. The findings confirm that the DST project provided valuable opportunities for the children to explore and express the complex aspects of their lives and identities, enhancing social awareness. Ultimately, the project empowered these children to reshape their narratives, develop their skills, and foster connections within others.

Research Question 3

The study aimed to explore how DST can help educators better understand Syrian refugee children's perspectives and serve as a tool for social awareness. Analysis of educators'

experiences revealed three main themes: the value of DST as a pedagogical tool, its role in fostering social awareness, and critical considerations for implementing a DST-based pedagogy. Educators found the experience “impactful”, prompting deeper reflection on refugee children's experiences and identities. They recognized DST's transformative potential in fostering understanding, promoting reflective practice, and supporting strength-based teaching strategies.

Educators identified five key strength-based elements of DST: its focus on process, collaboration, child-centeredness, self-representation, and fostering authentic relationships. The process-driven nature of DST made it adaptable for refugee children with diverse abilities and needs, enabling broad participation. Collaboration empowered the children to own their stories, promoted reciprocal learning, and shifted traditional teaching power dynamics (Battiste, 2013). The child-centered approach integrated easily into the curriculum and empowered them to express their identities. Educators found DST crucial for understanding refugee children’s backgrounds, promoting mutual sharing, and building a sense of community.

The findings showed that educators viewed DST as a transformative learning tool that deepened their understanding of Syrian refugee children’s experiences and identities, leading to shifts in their perspectives, values, and beliefs. The project encouraged reflection on the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee children, revealing the relationship between language, power, and privilege. DST prompted critical reflection on social power dynamics and hidden oppressions (Kincheloe, 1999; McLaren, 2003), increasing educators' awareness of social justice, equity, and human rights issues faced by Syrian refugee children in Ontario. This reflection inspired innovative, child-centered, strength-based teaching strategies that emphasized self-representation and belonging. Educators, drawing on critical pedagogy principles of social reform and empowerment through education (Freire, 1970, 1974; Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe,

2012; McLaren, 2003; Ryoo et al., 2009), expressed a commitment to advancing social justice and supporting refugee children's learning without judgment, focusing on their strengths and development.

Educators highlighted DST's potential and suggested ways to integrate it into school curricula. They recognized its value across various subjects and expressed a desire to implement DST in all classrooms to allow every student to create digital narratives. They viewed DST as an effective tool for fostering collaboration and support for refugee children, encouraging story-sharing and building stronger connections. Educators also recommended that schoolteachers participate in a DST project, believing it would strengthen relationships among them, enhance collaboration, and deepen reflections on their practice, improving teaching strategies.

Significance of Findings

This research underscores the transformative role of DST in enhancing educators' social awareness and fostering a sense of belonging for Syrian refugee children. By empowering children to express their experiences through their own narratives, DST enables educators to challenge preconceived ideas and develop a more empathetic, nuanced understanding of each child's unique identity. Guided by the Sociology of Childhood framework, the study advocates for research that values the diverse narratives of Syrian refugee children, emphasizing the importance of reciprocal relationships free from assumptions and stereotypes (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

Conversations about children and childhood must continuously evolve to include diverse perspectives, especially those of children themselves (Barnikis, 2023). This study highlights the powerful role of DST in enabling Syrian refugee children to share their knowledge, in line with critical pedagogy's focus on collaborative knowledge production (Freire, 1970, 1974; hooks,

2003). The findings highlight DST as an effective, multimodal tool that bridges language and cultural barriers, enriching refugee children's self-expression and fostering mutual understanding between educators and children. DST's creative and reflective approach broadens educators' perspectives, promoting inclusive teaching practices that better support Syrian refugee children's resettlement experiences.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need to incorporate DST into teacher education programs, both preservice and in-service, to enhance educators' ability to support refugee students. Overall, this research demonstrates DST's significant potential in fostering mutual understanding, its important role in supporting the resettlement process of Syrian refugee children, and its ability to enrich the educational experience for all involved.

Implications for Practice and Research

Based on the findings of this research study, the following possible recommendations for pedagogical practice and research with children are made.

Recommendations for Pedagogical Practice

Learning through Refugee Children's Digital Stories

Lambert (2010), co-founder of the DST method, argued that as participatory media, DST transforms individuals through its process and communities through its product. In this study, Syrian refugee children created and shared their own stories, engaging audiences visually and linguistically. Based on my analysis, I recommend integrating DST into learning contexts, as it enhances participants' understanding through personal storytelling and engagement with others' narratives. This recommendation aligns with existing research that highlights storytelling's educational value in offering insights and fostering new learning (Sitter, 2018).

Syrian refugee children's digital stories offer a powerful means to counter stereotypes,

presenting “very typical” childhood experiences that contrast with common media portrayals of war-torn refugees. In this study, the children highlighted not only their resettlement challenges but also their rich life experiences and knowledge. DST enables refugee storytellers to emphasize their achievements, challenging negative public narratives and providing a pathway for reframing their stories (Lenette et al., 2015). Engaging with these narratives can reveal new meanings of refugee children’s lives. Rolón-Dow (2011) argues that tensions in digital stories about race and racism create valuable entry points for dialogue, while Barnikis (2023) recommends creating spaces for multiple narratives to deepen understanding. Based on this study, I recommend using refugee children’s digital stories as a pedagogical tool to encourage discussions on resettlement, emphasizing children’s agency in shaping their identities and advocating for systemic change. Child-centered, strengths-based narratives reveal complex social experiences, expanding our understanding of children’s lives (Grieshaber, 2007; Prout, 2011). Such narratives challenge dominant assumptions and foster equitable perspectives. However, viewers should should be mindful not to interpret a single story as representative of an entire race or take narratives as a comprehensive portrayal of the storyteller’s life (Gallagher et al., 2013). They should interpret each story as a partial narrative, shaped and reshaped during its creation (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2013).

Refugee Children’s Expression through Digital Storytelling

Research recommends incorporating multimodal approaches in teaching and learning practices, as these methods can enhance refugee students' ability to communicate their knowledge (Barber & Ramsay, 2017; Emert, 2014a; Lenette et al., 2015). Using modes beyond language allows individuals to convey more nuanced stories, as different modes interact to create rich, multilayered texts (Lynch, 2015). Research also suggests that collaborative use of

technology supports refugee children's expression more effectively (Chen, 2015). In alignment with these insights, this study invited Syrian refugee children to share their resettlement experiences through visual, auditory, and linguistic modes. This multimodal approach provided the children with opportunities to develop digital literacy skills, helping them articulate complex dimensions of their lives and identities. DST enabled the children to draw from their rich communicative repertoires, expressing themselves beyond the constraints of English language barriers, fostering meaningful and creative expression. Based on these findings, I recommend that educators provide refugee students with multimodal tools, such as DST, which foster creativity, intellectual challenge, and meaning-making. These tools enable refugee students to convey complex histories and experiences, aligning with research on DST's role in supporting refugee children's storytelling and self-expression (Emert, 2013). Through a multimodal lens, i.e. viewing refugee students' diverse modes of expression, can deepen educators' understanding of students' identities, strengths, and learning needs, as well as how they interpret their complex experiences (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017).

Refugee Children's Agency through Digital Storytelling

Research advocates for educators to involve refugee students in dialogic processes of meaning-making through diverse modes of expression (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Lenette et al., 2015). The findings indicate that the dialogical, iterative nature of the DST narrative process creates an enriching environment that fosters safe and inclusive pathways for Syrian refugee children's inquiry and learning. By using DST, educators enable refugee children to become active participants in their own learning, offering multiple entry points into the experience that help all students feel capable and engaged (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). DST highlights refugee children's potential as rich learning resources, fostering their growth as meaning-makers (Emert,

2013). As an experiential learning tool, storytelling encourages students to apply their personal knowledge and experiences, promoting a sense of ownership over their learning journey (Sitter, 2018). DST bridges the gap between teaching and learning, enabling students to connect with their worlds and become more engaged and motivated (Mitchell et al., 2016). The study's DST project demonstrated these strengths through the children's high attendance, engagement, and completion of their digital stories. The children expressed that the DST project helped them to tell their own stories. Based on these findings, I recommend that educators design learning opportunities that encourage refugee children's active participation and strengthen their agency in the learning process. Incorporating DST into pedagogical practice can support these efforts. When artistic and creative methods, such as DST are blended into the foundation of teaching strategies, there is greater potential for deeper reflection amongst learners as the process moves individuals to consider multiple concepts (Lenette et al., 2015).

Refugee Children's Sense of Belonging through Digital Storytelling

The act of sharing stories brings people together, as shown in the findings that highlighted Syrian refugee children's social transformation and enhanced sense of connection with others. The mutual sharing and collaboration, both individually and collectively, led to new and deeper connections, insights and growth (as also found by Khoo et al., 2023). This process fostered a learning environment where relationships could develop beyond stereotypes of culture and immigration status, authentically acknowledging children's identities and promoting a sense of belonging. A key recommendation arising from the findings is to focus on the role of technology in supporting refugee children's expression to facilitate their sense of belonging. Teacher education and professional development should inform educators about tools that enhance refugee student engagement and make them aware of methods that help or hinder

student learning. Educators must be trained in diverse approaches to meet the varied needs of their students (Kovačević, 2016). Preservice and in-service trainings need to equip educators with experiences, support, and strategies to use strength-based technology tools. In this study, educators who received such guidance were able to use DST to meaningfully engage Syrian refugee children, supporting their expression and sense of belonging. Collaboration between educators and administrators is essential to creating learning environments that meet the unique needs of refugee students.

Digital Storytelling as a Social Awareness Tool

To promote equity in Canadian education, cultural competence must be prioritized in both preservice and in-service teacher training (Kovačević, 2016). Initially uncertain about connecting with Syrian refugee children, educators in this DST project found it fostered strong connections, reciprocal relationships and deepened their understanding of the children's identities and experiences (as also found by Barber & Ramsay, 2017; Gagne et al., 2017b). They recommend that other educators working with refugee children consider similar projects, predicting that this would facilitate even stronger, reciprocal connections that support child-centered, strength-based pedagogy. This underscores the importance of developing cultural competence, particularly to meet refugee children's diverse needs. DST provides authentic opportunities for relationship-building and enhances educators' social awareness, particularly for those often marginalized (Lenette et al., 2015). Preservice and in-service teacher education should integrate context-based, authentic tasks, such as DST, to better prepare educators to support refugee learners and foster a more inclusive, understanding classroom environment. Educators should also consider involving refugee children's families in the curriculum, as parent and caregiver participation in DST projects can provide valuable insights into children's cultural

backgrounds and home experiences, further enriching educators' cultural competence (Khoo et al., 2023).

Given the importance of adult-child relationships in teaching and learning, educators must reflect on how their conceptualizations of refugee children shape their pedagogical practices (Barnikis, 2023). In this study, the DST project created a space for critical reflection, enhancing educators' social awareness and deepening their understanding of refugee children. This process allowed educators to challenge their assumptions, dominant understandings of the "refugee" label and reconstructing their practices to adopt strength-based practices that are more relevant and supportive of refugee children and their families. This finding highlights the need for developing educators' reflective practices in their pedagogical approaches. Informed by critical pedagogy and critical childhood studies, preservice and in-service teacher education should support educators in unpacking their assumptions to challenge dominant views of refugee children. Using DST alongside other pedagogical tools can support educators' critical reflection and strengthen their ability to support refugee learners through diverse strategies.

Despite formal educational policies promoting equity, Canadian schools often fall short, with refugee and immigrant students experiencing persistent social inequality, marginalization, and otherization (Kovačević, 2016). This study advances our understanding of pedagogical approaches by demonstrating how DST can be a valuable tool for enhancing educators' social awareness and their ability to work effectively with refugee children. By engaging educators in a DST project, this study encouraged critical reflection, leading to valuable insights on belonging-based pedagogical strategies that can support refugee children (as also found by Khoo et al., 2023). The findings recommend implementing DST throughout Canadian schools, as it would help create socially just environments and foster a greater sense of belonging for refugee students

within their new communities, and advance more equitable and inclusive pedagogical practices across the Canadian education system.

Recommendations for Research with Refugee Children

From a sociology of childhood perspective, it is essential for social research to recognize children's lived histories by actively listening to their perceptions and experiences (Prout, 2011). This study highlights DST as an effective way to document Syrian refugee children's lived experiences, fostering meaningful and creative expression. DST not only helps children reflect on their identities and sociocultural worlds but also encourages them to envision their futures. Following the recommendations of other researchers (Ali & Gibran, 2020; Mishra Tarc, 2022), this study recommends that researchers create spaces that genuinely engage with refugee children's expression and meaning-making.

This study recommends a methodological shift from conducting research *on* children to conducting research *with* children, recognizing them as capable informants (as also recommended by Barnikis, 2023). This requires researchers to relinquish or share control. Drawing from the collaborative process, participant-centeredness of this study's DST project, I recommend DST as a research method that deepens researchers' understanding of refugee children's perspectives and allows for shared authority in the research process. Opportunities for collaboration requires researchers to reconsider redefining traditional research practices to create spaces that actively engage children in the research process (as also recommended by Kirova & Emme, 2008).

Limitations of Research

This study has provided valuable theoretical and empirical insights; however, as is typical with exploratory research, certain limitations are inherent. First, the small sample size and unique

context of the study, which involved a close collaboration between educators and a group of Syrian refugee children in Ontario through Zoom, limit the generalizability of the findings. Since this qualitative study focused on one case study, i.e. a single DST project, the findings are specific to the participants involved. Caution should therefore be exercised in extending these findings broadly to every group engaging in DST projects. Further, it is not possible to replicate study results exactly, especially given the contextually situated nature of storytelling. Any inferences drawn from the data are applicable only to this study's participants and may not be generalizable to a wider population (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2015; Hatch, 2002).

Additionally, participant recruitment relied on convenience sampling (Etikan et al., 2016), meaning the educators and Syrian refugee children involved were from a specific geographical area (Ontario) and may not represent similar groups across other locations. This sampling approach further limits the representativeness of the study. In addition, the study's adaptation to a virtual DST project due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the depth of insights into the physical interactions between educators and children. An in-person project, as initially planned, would likely have provided a richer understanding of how being in the same physical environment influences educator-child interactions.

Finally, language barriers posed another limitation in this study. Neither the educators nor I speak or understand Arabic, which created challenges in fully supporting one of the children. To bridge this gap, we enlisted the help of another child to assist with translation. However, this approach may have led to missed subtleties in communication, as the interpreting child could have conveyed messages differently based on their own understanding. Fluency in Arabic would have allowed for a deeper comprehension of cultural nuances and expressions, enhancing our ability to accurately interpret and respond to the child.

Despite the study's small sample size, the findings far exceeded initial expectations. This research not only explored the Syrian refugee children's insights and experiences in creating digital stories but also captured the educators' perspectives as they facilitated the project. These insights emerged from observing the interactions and reactions of both children and educators during DST workshop sessions, as well as through direct conversations with them. I have aimed to provide rich, thick descriptions of participants' contexts, perspectives, and responses to the DST experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While this research represents a singular experience and the findings cannot be generalized to a broader population, they are relevant to similar contexts welcoming refugee children and offer nuanced insights into the potential for adopting DST in curricular. This study highlights how DST can support strength-based, child-centered pedagogies, offering both preservice and in-service educators a pathway for fostering meaningful engagement and relationships with refugee children.

This study provides valuable initial insights into DST with Syrian refugee children and educators. Building on this foundation, future research can address several important questions to deepen our understanding. Through the course of this DST project, several key areas for further exploration emerged. First, larger-scale studies that examine the perceptions of both participating refugee children and facilitating educators could provide a more generalized understanding of DST's impact. Additionally, establishing the impact with greater reliability may require randomized sampling in future research designs. Exploring DST's effectiveness in less diverse contexts, both in Ontario and other provinces, could further identify its relevance across different communities.

This study, conducted during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, required adapting the DST project to a virtual format, offering unique insights but also highlighting

directions for future research. One key recommendation is to explore in-person DST projects within educational settings to compare and evaluate their impact relative to virtual facilitation. Additionally, future studies would benefit from involving researchers fluent in the refugee children's home languages, enabling a deeper understanding of subtle communication cues. While this study primarily focused on the perspectives of children and educators, expanding future research to include refugee parents and caregivers would be valuable. Examining their usage of DST with their children could yield insights to better understand the impact of DST on them and their children.

This study revealed shifts in traditional classroom power dynamics through the use of DST, suggesting that DST can play a role in fostering Syrian refugee children's engagement and sense of belonging. To better understand and support strength-based child-centered curricular, future research should further examine the efficacy of technology in fostering belonging. This opens up important avenues for exploring blended and adapted forms of DST, as well as other multimodal pedagogical tools that support refugee children's expression. In doing so, we will enhance our understanding of DST and other strength-based multimodal tools, and reveal how they can be effectively blended with pedagogical approaches to meaningfully support refugee children and create inclusive environments for them.

As DST gains traction in research and education, it is essential for researchers and educators to critically examine how DST is implemented, presented, and shared. There is currently limited research exploring refugee children's perceptions and experiences when their digital stories are shared publicly, despite the fact that a key goal of DST is to screen stories with community members. Existing literature underscores the importance of participants' active involvement during the dissemination phase, highlighting a valuable area for further exploration.

Future research should therefore investigate refugee children's perceptions on sharing their digital stories with various audiences. This line of inquiry can cultivate more nuanced understandings of the DST process, which includes screening digital stories, and its impacts. Additionally, such research could provide valuable insights to inform practices and policies, helping ensure that refugee children's voices are prioritized.

Lastly, to better support refugee children, research must prioritize listening to their perspectives in decisions affecting their lives. Findings from these studies will offer educators valuable insight into supporting refugee children's transition into Canadian schools.

Dissemination

Participatory visual method studies often generate new visual data that, once produced, can be used in ways that no one can completely foresee (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). In addition, there is limited literature on participants' experiences and perceptions when their visual data is publicly shared (Sitter, 2018). Therefore, I carefully considered the ethical implications of disseminating children's digital stories, anticipating potential issues and have attempted to and addressed these as thoroughly as possible.

Ownership of the digital stories remains with the storyteller (Gachago et al., 2019; Lenette et al., 2015; Sitter, 2018). Given the children's age, both them and their parents were given time to reflect on the final digital stories before consenting to them being share outside the research project. Weeks after the completion of the DST project, all children and their parents remained eager to share the digital stories. As part of the media release consent process, informed consent and right-of-use agreements (Appendices H & I) were obtained. This process ensured that each child and their parents fully understood the implications of screening the

digital stories, especially since anonymity was not possible due to the inclusion of faces, voices, and names.

Digital stories, as powerful tools for engaging new audiences, should not only be viewed but also used as catalysts for discussion (Gearty, 2015). One goal of the study was to share children's digital stories with preservice and in-service educators. Following Gubrium and Harper's (2013) recommendation, I incorporated audience engagement through facilitated dialogue to avoid a "human zoo model" (p. 40) approach and align with the study's theoretical framework (Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978), where dialogue reveals deeper themes that are embedded within images. Screenings were followed by discussions encouraging educators to reflect on the digital stories, and to engage in dialogue about the ways they can change their practice to better support refugee children. By sharing these stories, I aimed to raise awareness and sensitivity about refugee children's experiences and identities, turning the research into a form of intervention (D'Amico et al., 2016).

During the initial media release consent processes, it was not feasible for me to anticipate exactly in what ways and for how long the digital stories will be used in the future. Even though the children and their parents did not object to me using their digital stories beyond the immediate research, I plan to reconnect with them to discuss next steps, including public screenings or creating additional media. This ensures the children's ownership is respected while expanding the impact of their stories beyond the immediate research context.

Final Thoughts

This study explored the pedagogical potential (and risks) of DST to:

- provide insights into the resettlement experiences from the perspective of Syrian refugee children,

- help educators better understand these children's perspectives, and
- raise social awareness among both educators and children.

The findings highlight DST's significant potential to support expression, foster mutual understanding and a sense of belonging, and create a rich learning experience for all involved. Through the process of helping Syrian refugee children create their own digital stories on their experiences, educators were encouraged to reflect on and challenge their beliefs and assumptions about refugee children, inspiring the development of meaningful, belonging-based pedagogical practices that support them. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating multimodal pedagogical tools such as DST into teacher education programs, both preservice and in-service, to enhance educators' ability to support refugee students.

The use of DST demands time, resources, training, and most importantly, relationships built on trust. Unlike pedagogical tools that promise quick results, DST unfolds through a slower, deliberate process. In this study, over three weeks, Syrian refugee children created their stories, sometimes with one-on-one support to develop skills and build confidence, showcasing the transformative power of this child-centered, strength-based approach. Despite its demands, DST's impact is profound. It offers educators a window into the lived experiences and identities of refugee children, fostering empathy and understanding, and the creation of inclusive and equitable pedagogies. It is my hope that this research bridges a critical gap in how educators can use multimodal tools to foster belonging and amplify the voices of young refugees. By making the space for these children's unique stories, we can create classrooms where every child feels seen, heard, and valued. This study is a call to action for future pedagogical practice and research – an invitation to reimagine schools as a space where diverse experiences and identities enrich our understanding, and belonging becomes a shared reality. The investment may be great, but the

reward is immeasurable: a generation of refugee children empowered to tell their stories and a society enriched by their voices.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter for Parents/Guardians

Dear Participant,

My name is Safra Najeemudeen and I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at York University. For my Doctoral thesis, I am interested in exploring the resettlement experiences of Syrian child refugees, and the potential of digital storytelling to facilitate Syrian child refugees' expressions of lived experiences, help educators better understand the points of view of Syrian child refugees and to become a social awareness tool for the study participants. It is my hope that the findings from this study will offer educators and other practitioners working with child refugees greater insight into child refugees' integration experiences and help them to provide culturally appropriate services for the children.

I would like to invite your child to participate in this study. If you consent your child to participate, your child will be part of a five-day digital storytelling workshop. Your child will be asked to share, through a story, about their experiences of resettling in Ontario, and work with other children and educators participating in the study. The digital storytelling workshop will be conducted online at a time that is convenient for the participants. Each workshop is five days long and each session is 1.5-hours in length. During the workshop, your child will learn how to create and edit digital media to tell their story of resettlement in Ontario. The digital story will not include their face. Your child may choose to do audio recording of their voice as part of the digital story, but are not required to do so.

I will also set up a focus group and interview with your child and the other children in which I will talk to them about their experiences of creating a digital story. The focus group and interview will be conducted online at a time that is convenient for the participants and will last approximately 1.5-hours each. I will also gather data through observations from the digital storytelling workshop to learn more about your child's experiences of creating a digital story. Participants will be asked to keep the identity of the other participants and the information shared private. When information is shared in a group setting privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your child's responses may be shared by a participant.

This study will use the Zoom video/audio conferencing software platform to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate. Please contact me at (416) 792-8770 or fathiman@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito at (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 or jippolito@edu.yorku.ca for further information. Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file to the researcher's local computer, not in the Zoom cloud-based service.

Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized

recordings of the content of meetings/data collection sessions.

If you are interested in your child being a part of this study, please feel free to contact me. I will then arrange to meet with you and your child online to discuss the study in further detail, and you and your child can then determine whether to participate in this study. If you decide for your child to participate, you will be given a consent form to sign, and your child will be given an assent form to sign. Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary.

The plan for this study has been reviewed and approved for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at York University. For questions regarding the research in general, your child's role in the study, or participant rights and ethical conduct of research, please feel free to contact me at (416) 792-8770 or fathiman@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito at (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 or jippolito@edu.yorku.ca.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Safra Najeemudeen

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter for Educators

Dear Participant,

My name is Safra Najeemudeen, and I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at York University. For my Doctoral thesis, I am interested in exploring the resettlement experiences of Syrian child refugees, and the potential of digital storytelling to facilitate Syrian child refugees' expressions of lived experiences, help educators better understand the points of view of Syrian child refugees and to become a social awareness tool for the study participants. It is my hope that the findings from this study will offer educators and other practitioners working with child refugees greater insight into child refugees' integration experiences and help them to provide culturally appropriate services for the children.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be part of a five-day digital storytelling workshop. You will be asked to facilitate Syrian child refugees' sharing, through a story, about their experiences of resettling in Ontario, and work with other educators and children participating in the study. The digital storytelling workshop will be conducted online at a time that is convenient for the participants. Each workshop is five days long and each session is 1.5-hours in length. Prior to the workshop with the children, you will attend a digital storytelling training, where you learn how to create and edit digital media to create a digital story. During the workshop, you will help the children to create and edit digital media to tell their story of resettlement in Ontario. You will also journal your experiences with the digital storytelling workshop for the duration of it.

I will also set up a focus group and interview with you and the other educators in which I will talk to you about your experiences of facilitating the digital storytelling workshop. The focus group and interview will be conducted online at a time that is convenient for the participants and will last approximately 1.5-hours each. I will also gather data through observations from the digital storytelling workshop to learn more about your experiences of facilitating it. Participants will be asked to keep the identity of the other participants and the information shared private. When information is shared in a group setting privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be shared by a participant.

This study will use the Zoom video/audio conferencing software platform to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate. Please contact me at (416) 792-8770 or fathiman@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito at (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 or jippolito@edu.yorku.ca for further information. Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file to the researcher's local computer, not in the Zoom cloud-based service.

Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of meetings/data collection sessions.

If you are interested in being a part of this study, please feel free to contact me. I will then arrange to meet with you online to discuss the study in further detail, and you can then determine whether you would like to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you will be given a consent form to sign. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

The plan for this study has been reviewed and approved for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at York University. For questions regarding the research in general, your role in the study, or participant rights and ethical conduct of research, please feel free to contact me at (416) 792-8770 or fathiman@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito at (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 or jippolito@edu.yorku.ca.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Safra Najeemudeen

Appendix C: Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Parents/Guardians

Your child's eligibility to participate in this study would depend on meeting the below criteria.

1) Is your child of refugee status? (Must identify as refugee to meet the eligibility criteria)

2) How old is your child? (Must be between the ages of 6-13 years to meet the eligibility criteria)

3) When did your child arrive in Canada? (Must have arrived in Canada within the past five years to meet the eligibility criteria)

4) Are you willing to let your child share their resettlement experiences? Is your child willing to share their resettlement experiences? (Must be willing to share resettlement experiences to meet the eligibility criteria)

5) Are you willing for your child to participate in the five-day digital storytelling workshop, focus group and/or interview? Is your child willing to participate in the five-day digital storytelling workshop, focus group and/or interview? (Must be able to participate in the digital storytelling workshop, focus group and/or interview to meet the eligibility criteria)

6) Are you willing for your child to share their digital storytelling workshop experiences? Is your child willing to share their digital storytelling workshop experiences? (Must be willing to share digital storytelling workshop experiences to meet the eligibility criteria)

7) Are you willing for your child to participate in this study? Is your child willing to participate in this study? (Must be willing to consent to their child participating in the study to meet the eligibility criteria)

Appendix D: Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Educators

Your eligibility to participate in this study would depend on meeting the below criteria.

1) Do you have preservice education to work with children and/or in-service experience working with children? (Must have preservice education or in-service experience with children to meet the eligibility criteria)

2) Are you able to participate in the digital storytelling training, five-day digital storytelling workshop, journaling, focus group and interview? (Must be able to participate in the digital storytelling training and workshop, journaling, focus group and interview to meet the eligibility criteria)

3) Are you willing to support Syrian child refugees share their lived experiences through digital stories? (Must be willing to support Syrian child refugees to meet the eligibility criteria)

4) Are you willing to share your digital storytelling workshop experiences? (Must be willing to share digital storytelling workshop experiences to meet the eligibility criteria)

5) Are you willing to participate in this study? (Must be willing to consent to participating in the study to meet the eligibility criteria)

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educators Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Researcher: Safra Najeemudeen, PhD student, Faculty of Education, York University
Phone: (416) 792-8770 E-mail: fathiman@yorku.ca

Supervisor: John Ippolito, PhD, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Phone: (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 E-mail: jippolito@edu.yorku.ca

Research purpose: To explore the resettlement experiences of Syrian child refugees, and the potential of digital storytelling to facilitate Syrian child refugees' expressions of lived 3, help educators better understand the points of view of Syrian child refugees and to become a social awareness tool for the study participants. It is my hope that the findings from this study will offer educators and other practitioners working with child refugees greater insight into child refugees' integration experiences and help them to provide culturally appropriate services for the children.

Why is your child being asked to be part of this study? Your child is being invited to take part in this study because your child resided in Syria and migrated to Ontario within the past five years as a refugee.

Study Procedures: Data will be collected through the children's digital stories, the five-day digital storytelling workshop, focus group with your child and the other children, and individual interview with your child in which I will talk to them about their experiences of creating a digital story. The digital storytelling workshop is five days long and each session is 1.5-hours in length. The workshop will be held online at a time that is convenient for the participants. During the digital storytelling workshop, your child will learn to create and edit digital media to tell their story of resettlement in Ontario. The focus group and interview will last approximately 1.5-hours each and will also be held online at a time that is convenient for the participants. The focus group and interview will be video-recorded to help remind me of what was discussed, and transcribed by myself. At the end of the study, I will share with you my findings and give you an opportunity to verify the information that I collected during the research process to ensure that it is accurate and to provide any feedback. I will respect your input as to what data can be included. Upon your request, once this study is completed, I will provide an electronic pdf copy of the study once it is on file and online with York University.

What will your child be asked to do in the study? Your child will be asked to participate in the five-day digital storytelling workshop and share about their resettlement experiences in Ontario. They will be asked to work with other children and educators participating in the study. They will be asked to create a digital story of their resettlement experiences in Ontario. They will be asked to not include their face in their digital story and to use pseudonyms (fake names) to ensure confidentiality. They can choose to include audio recordings of their voice. Your child will also be asked to participate in a focus group with the other children and an interview to discuss their experiences of creating a digital story.

Benefits: Your child will learn a new technological skill, digital storytelling, that they may use in the future. They will also make new friends. Your child also may benefit from their personal insights based on their digital story and the questions asked in the focus group and interview.
Findings from this study will lead to a deeper understanding of the resettlement experiences of Syrian child refugees, and the potential of digital storytelling to facilitate child refugees' expressions of lived experiences, help educators better understand the points of view of child refugees and to become a social awareness tool for children and educators. Further, they may help guide educators and other practitioners working with child refugees in developing effective supports for the children, and pre-service and in-service training for educators. The results from this study, in which your child's identity will not be revealed, will also be published and presented at various conferences in order to help others gain a better understanding of how to support child refugee populations.

Risks: Though the risks to participating in this study are minimal, memories of previous losses or trauma may be triggered during the digital story creation process. To ensure that your child is as comfortable as possible, they can choose not to share lived experiences that may lead to discomfort, not answer any question that they do not want to answer and not participate in any activity that they do not want to. You will also be provided with a list of support services that you can reach out to as needed.

Voluntary participation: Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your child is under no obligation to participate in this study. This study will be explained to your child and they must sign a form after you sign this form to be part of it. If you do want to be part of this study or if they do not want to, you can just decline to sign this form.

Withdrawal from the study: Your child is also able to leave the study at any given point that you or your child wishes to drop out, for any reason. The decision to stop participating, will not affect your relationship or child's relationship with the researcher, Safra Najeemudeen, or York University. If you or your child chooses to leave the study, all information gathered from your child will be destroyed immediately in an ethically appropriate manner.

Confidentiality and anonymity: Research materials will be kept confidential to the greatest extent possible, and only my supervisor and I will have access to this information. The identity of you and your child will be kept confidential. All names will be replaced with fake names in all transcripts, notes, and documents, and any identifying information that can be linked back to you or your child will be removed from any reports, publications or presentations of the findings of the study. You and your child's privacy will be protected to the fullest extent allowable by law.
The electronic data will be password-protected. If the need to include interpreters in the study process arises, they will also be bound by these terms of confidentiality.
Participants will be asked to keep the identity of the other participants and the information shared private. When information is shared in a group setting privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your child's response may be shared by a participant.
This study will use the Zoom video/audio conferencing software platform to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a

third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate. Please contact me at (416) 792-8770 or fathiman@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito at (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 or jippolito@edu.yorku.ca for further information.
Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file to the researcher's local computer, not in the Zoom cloud-based service.
Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of meetings/data collection sessions.

Further information: If you have any further questions regarding this study in general or about your child's role in the study, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito. Our contact information is above. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at York University. This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your child's rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at (416) 736-5914.

If you consent to your child to take part in this study, please write your name, your child's name and sign below. You can change your mind about allowing your child to be part of the study. All you have to do is let me know. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

□ Yes	□No	I understand that my child has been invited to be in this study.
□ Yes	□No	I understand the objective and procedures of this study.
□ Yes	□No	I understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this study.
□ Yes	□No	The issue of confidentiality has been explained to me.
□ Yes	□No	I understand that my child is free to leave this study at any point.
□ Yes	□No	I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.
□ Yes	□No	I give consent for my child to take part in this study.
□ Yes	□No	I give consent for video/audio recording my child's participation in this study.

Name of parent/guardian: _____

Name of child: _____

Signature of parent/guardian: _____

Date: _____

Name of person who obtained consent: _____

Signature of person who obtained consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Informed Assent Form for Child Participants

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educators Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Researcher: Safra Najeemudeen, PhD student, Faculty of Education, York University
Phone: (416) 792-8770 E-mail: fathiman@yorku.ca

Supervisor: John Ippolito, PhD, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Phone: (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 E-mail: jippolito@edu.yorku.ca

We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. A research study is a way to learn new information about something. We would like to find out more about how child refugees from Syria, like yourself, first experienced living in Ontario, and how you feel about creating a digital story about it. You are being asked to join the study because you recently moved here from Syria and you are now living in Ontario.

If you agree to join this study, you will be asked to participate in a five-day digital storytelling workshop and to create a digital story of your first experiences of living in Ontario. You will learn how to create and edit digital media to create your story. You will be working with other children, like yourself and educators participating in the study. You will also be asked to answer some questions about your digital story and your experiences of creating it.

When creating your digital story, you might remember some difficult times you experienced in Syria and difficulties that you might have had here in Ontario. You can choose not to answer a question or participate in an activity if it makes you uncomfortable. We will make sure you have support if you become upset at any time.

You will learn a new skill, digital storytelling and make new friends. You get to keep the digital story you create. You will also be able to share with others your first experiences of living in Ontario by making a digital story about it.

By hearing about your first experiences of living in Ontario and creating a digital story, we may learn something that will help other children who are also coming from Syria and are new to Ontario. This study will also help us learn about how child refugees from other countries become used to living in Ontario.

You do not have to join this study. It is up to you. You can say okay now and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me you want to stop. No one will be mad at you if you do not want to be in the study, or if you join the study and change your mind later and stop.

Before you say yes or no to being in this study, we will answer any questions you have. If you join the study, you can ask questions at any time. Just tell me that you have a question. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito. Our contact information is above.

If you want to take part in this study, please write your name and leave a mark below. You can change your mind about being part of the study and stop being part of it at any time. All you have to do is let me know. You and your parent/guardian will be given a copy of this form to keep.

□ Yes Yes, I will be in this research study.

□No No, I do not want to be in this research study.

□ Yes Yes, I give consent for video/audio recording my participation in this study.

□ No No, I do not want my participation in this study to be video-recorded.

Name of child: _____

Mark of child: _____

Date: _____

I have discussed this research study with (name of child) using language which is understandable and appropriate for the participant. I believe that I have fully informed them of the nature of the study and its possible risks and benefits. I believe the participant understood this explanation and assent to participate in this study.

Name of person who obtained assent: _____

Signature of person who obtained assent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G: Informed Consent Form for Educators

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educators Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Researcher: Safra Najeemudeen, PhD student, Faculty of Education, York University
Phone: (416) 792-8770 E-mail: fathiman@yorku.ca

Supervisor: John Ippolito, PhD, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Phone: (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 E-mail: jippolito@edu.yorku.ca

Research purpose: To explore the resettlement experiences of Syrian child refugees, and the potential of digital storytelling to facilitate child refugees' expressions of lived experiences, help educators better understand the points of view of child refugees and to become a social awareness tool for the study participants. It is my hope that the findings from this study will offer educators and other practitioners working with child refugees greater insight into child refugees' integration experiences and help them to provide culturally appropriate services for the children.

Study Procedures: Data will be collected through the five-day digital storytelling workshop, your journal reflections, focus group with you and the other educators, and individual interview with you in which I will talk to you about your experiences of facilitating the digital storytelling workshop. The digital storytelling workshop is five days long and each session is 1.5-hours in length. The workshop will be held online at a time that is convenient for the participants. During the digital storytelling workshop, you will help the children to create and edit digital media to tell their story of resettlement in Ontario. You will also journal your experiences with the workshop. The focus group and interview will last approximately 1.5-hours each and will also be held online at a time that is convenient for the participants. The focus group and interview will be video-recorded to help remind me of what was discussed, and transcribed by myself. At the end of the study, I will share with you my findings and give you an opportunity to verify the information that I collected during the research process to ensure that it is accurate and to provide any feedback. I will respect your input as to what data can be included. Upon your request, once this study is completed, I will provide an electronic pdf copy of the study once it is on file and online with York University.

What will you be asked to do in the study? You will be asked to participate in a digital storytelling training, where you will learn how to create and edit digital media. You will then be asked to participate in a five-day digital storytelling workshop, where you help the children create their digital stories. You will be asked to work with other educators and children participating in the study. For the duration of the workshop, you will also be asked to journal your experiences with the workshop. Finally, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with the other educators and an interview to discuss your experiences of facilitating a digital storytelling workshop.

Benefits: You will learn a new technological skill, digital storytelling, that you may use in the future. You also may benefit from personal insights based on facilitating the digital storytelling workshop, questions asked in the journal reflections, focus group and/or interview.
Findings from this study will lead to a deeper understanding of the resettlement experiences of Syrian child refugees, and the potential of digital storytelling to facilitate child refugees' expressions of lived experiences, help educators better understand the points of view of child refugees and to become a social awareness tool for children and educators. Further, they may help guide educators and other practitioners working with child refugees in developing effective supports for the children, and pre-service and in-service training for educators. The results from this study, in which your identity will not be revealed, will also be published and presented at various conferences in order to help others gain a better understanding of how to support child refugee populations.

Risks: There are no known risks to participating in this study. If you experience any emotional discomfort during the research process, I will debrief this with you and ensure that you are provided with a list or resources for support.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you do want to be part of this study you can just decline to sign this form.

Withdrawal from the study: You are able to leave the study at any given point that you wish to drop out, for any reason. The decision to stop participating, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, Safra Najeemudeen, or York University. If you choose to leave the study, all information gathered from you will be destroyed immediately in an ethically appropriate manner.

Confidentiality and anonymity: Research materials will be kept confidential to the greatest extent possible, and only my supervisor and I will have access to this information. Your identity will be kept confidential. All names will be replaced with fake names in all transcripts, notes, and written documents and any identifying information that can be linked back to you will be removed from any reports, publications or presentations of the findings of the study. The electronic data will be password-protected. Your privacy will be protected to the fullest extent allowable by law. Participants will be asked to keep the identity of the other participants and the information shared private. When information is shared in a group setting privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be shared by a participant.
This study will use the Zoom video/audio conferencing software platform to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate. Please contact me at (416) 792-8770 or fathiman@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito at (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 or jippolito@edu.yorku.ca for further information.

Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file to the researcher's local computer, not in the Zoom cloud-based service.

Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of meetings/data collection sessions.

Further information: If you have any further questions regarding this study in general or about your role in the study, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, Dr. John Ippolito. Our contact information is above. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at York University. This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at (416) 736-5914.

If you consent to take part in this study, please write your name and sign below. You can change your mind about being part of the study. All you have to do is let me know. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

□ Yes □No I understand that I have been asked to be in this research study.

□ Yes □No I understand the objective and procedures of this study.

□ Yes □No I understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this study.

□ Yes □No The issue of confidentiality has been explained to me.

□ Yes □No I understand that I am free to leave this study at any point.

□ Yes □No I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.

□ Yes □No I give consent to take part in this study.

□ Yes □No I give consent for video/audio recording my participation in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of person who obtained consent: _____

Signature of person who obtained consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Media Release Form for Parents/Guardians

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educators Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Researcher: Safra Najeemudeen, PhD student, Faculty of Education, York University
Phone: (416) 792-8770 E-mail: fathiman@yorku.ca

Supervisor: John Ippolito, PhD, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Phone: (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 E-mail: jippolito@edu.yorku.ca

If you consent to your child's digital story to be shown outside of this study, please write your name, your child's name and sign below. I may use quotes from your child during the screenings. I won't use your child's real name with the quote or the digital story unless you and your child tell me you want for me to do that. You can change your mind about allowing your child's digital story to become public. All you have to do is let me know. You are not waiving any of legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

☐ Yes ☐No I give consent for my child's digital story to be shown outside of this study.

Name of parent/guardian: _____

Name of child: _____

Signature of parent/guardian: _____

Date: _____

Name of person who obtained consent: _____

Signature of person who obtained consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I: Media Release Form for Child Participants

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educators Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Researcher: Safra Najeemudeen, PhD student, Faculty of Education, York University
Phone: (416) 792-8770 E-mail: fathiman@yorku.ca

Supervisor: John Ippolito, PhD, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Phone: (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 E-mail: jippolito@edu.yorku.ca

If you want your digital story to be shown outside of this study, please write your name and leave your mark below. I may use quotes from you during the screenings. I won't use your real name with the quote or the digital story unless you and your parent/guardian tell me you want for me to do that. You can change your mind about allowing your digital story to become public. All you have to do is let me know. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this form. You and your parent/guardian will be given a copy of this form to keep.

□ Yes Yes, I want my digital story to be shown outside of this study.

□No No, I do not want my digital story to be shown outside of this study.

Name of child: _____

Mark of child: _____

Date: _____

I have discussed this media release with (name of child) using language which is understandable and appropriate for the participant. I believe the participant understood this explanation and assent to screening their digital story outside of this study.

Name of person who obtained assent: _____

Signature of person who obtained assent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix J: Confidentiality Agreement for Interpreters

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educators Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Researcher: Safra Najeemudeen, PhD student, Faculty of Education, York University
Phone: (416) 792-8770 E-mail: fathiman@yorku.ca

Supervisor: John Ippolito, PhD, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Phone: (416) 736-2100 Ext. 88802 E-mail: jippolito@edu.yorku.ca

I, (name of interpreter), the interpreter have been hired to translate Arabic/English communication between the researcher and participant(s).

I agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., audio, video or written) with anyone other than the researcher.
2. Keep all research information in any form or format secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information in any form or format to the researcher when I have completed the research tasks.

Name of interpreter: _____

Signature of interpreter: _____

Date: _____

Name of person who obtained consent: _____

Signature of person who obtained consent: _____

Date: _____

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at York University. This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at (416) 736-5914.

Appendix K: Journal Reflection Prompts for Educators

Session 1: Introductions, Workshop Ground Rules, Digital Story Examples and Story Circle

- What are some things you learned from the child refugees through participating together in this first workshop session? (e.g. new perspectives, questions, or concerns)
- What social justice, equity, and human rights concerns became evident today?
- How has this learning informed your viewpoint as an educator?

Session 2: Story Circle and Script Writing

- What issues of power and privilege have been highlighted for you as you get to know the child refugees' lived experiences?
- What is your developing understanding of Syrian child refugees' strength-based identities?
- How has this learning informed your viewpoint as an educator?

Session 3: Finalizing Story Scripts, Storyboarding and Recording Voiceovers

- How do you see the use of digital storytelling as contributing to creating safe and equitable learning opportunities for child refugees?
- What are other ways you suggest for creating trusting, safe, and inclusive environments for child refugees?
- How has this learning informed your viewpoint as an educator?

Session 4: Recording Voiceovers, Storyboarding and Assembling Digital Stories
Session 5: Assembling Digital Stories

- In what ways has the digital storytelling workshop given you a greater understanding of child refugees' experiences?
- What other resources, activities, and curriculum do you think would be helpful for further supporting educators' in their work with child refugees?
- How has this learning informed your viewpoint as an educator?

Session 7: Screening Digital Stories

- How have you personally been impacted by facilitating this digital story workshop with child refugees?
- What fuller understanding do you now have about the social justice, equity, and human rights issues faced by child refugees now living in Ontario?
- How has this learning informed your viewpoint as an educator?

Appendix L: Focus Group Protocol for Children

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educator Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Date and time:
Location:
Focus group moderator name:
Focus group participants names (use pseudonym):

Introduction:

- Describe the purpose of this focus group to participants: "The purpose for this group discussion is to understand all of your different experiences with the digital storytelling workshop."
- Explain the consent process: "Before we begin, I want to remind you that you and your parents have all agreed for you to participate in this group discussion at the beginning of this project. Please let me know if you have any questions about it. [Pause for questions]. This discussion will be video-recorded. If you feel uncomfortable with the recording, let me know. You do not have to participate in this discussion. It is up to you if you want to participate. You can change your mind about participating at any time during the discussion. All you have to do is let me know."
- Explain the rules for the discussion: "Some guidelines to remember for this discussion: there are no wrong answers, only different experiences. You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their experiences. My role is to ask you some questions about your digital storytelling experiences. Your role is to talk to each other and answer the questions you feel comfortable answering. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to. I also request that you keep the identity of the other participants and the information they share in this group discussion private."
- Establish agreement: "Do you have any questions? [Pause for questions]. Is everyone okay to begin? [Pause for answers]."

Focus group discussion guide

Digital story elements:

1. If a friend asked you about your digital story, what would you tell them?
2. What images in your digital story are important to you?
3. What sounds or music in your digital story are important to you?
4. What did you find was difficult to do when making your digital story?
5. What do you wish you could have added to your digital story?
6. What do you wish you could have taken out of your digital story?

Digital storytelling workshop experiences:

7. If a friend asked you about this digital storytelling workshop, what would you tell them?
8. What activities of the digital storytelling workshop were your favourite?
9. What activities of the digital storytelling workshop were your least favourite?

10. What is the most important thing you got from participating in this workshop?

Implications of digital storytelling:

11. How do you think your digital story will impact others?
12. What value could these digital storytelling workshops be for other child refugees?
13. What value could these digital storytelling workshops be for non-child refugees?
14. What value could these digital storytelling workshops be for your teachers?

Clarifying and elaborating probes for all questions include: “Could you tell me a little more about what you mean?” or “How so?”, “Could you give me an example?” or “For example?”, “Anything else?” The probes will be used as needed.

Conclusion:

- “We discussed all the questions I had for today’s discussion. Does anyone have any other comments or questions? [Pause for questions].”
- “If you have any thoughts that you did not get to share with the group today, please let me know. I can individually interview you. The purpose of the interview is for you to share any thoughts that you did not get to share during the group discussion. Please ask if you have any questions. [Pause for questions].”
- “Thank you very much for participating. The hope is to learn from this project how to better support child refugees in their new homes.”

Appendix M: Focus Group Protocol for Educators

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educator Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Date and time:
Location:
Focus group moderator name:
Focus group participants names (use pseudonym):

Introduction:

- Describe the purpose of this focus group to participants: "The purpose of this focus group discussion is to understand all of your different perspectives and experiences regarding the digital storytelling workshop. The length of the focus group is 90 minutes."
- Explain the consent process: "Before we begin, I just want to remind you that you have already signed the consent form that was needed to participate in this focus group discussion at the beginning of this project. Please ask now if you have any questions regarding the consent form. [Pause for questions]. This focus group discussion will be video-recorded. This was indicated in the consent form. Measures to the greatest extent possible will be taken to protect your confidentiality. However, if you feel uncomfortable with the recordings you are free to stop participating at any time. I need to stress that your attendance and participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. At the end of this focus group discussion you will be asked if you would like to participate in an individual interview."
- Explain the rules for the discussion: "Some guidelines to remember for this discussion include: there are no wrong answers, only different points of view. You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views. My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion. I have a set of questions that will guide our focus group discussion. Your role will be to talk to each other and answer the questions you feel comfortable answering. I also request that you keep the identity of the other participants and the information they share in this group discussion private."
- Establish agreement: "Is everyone okay to begin? [Pause for answers]."

Focus group discussion guide

Insight into child refugees' resettlement experiences:

1. What are some things you learned from the child refugees through participating together in the workshop? (e.g. new perspectives, questions, or concerns)
2. What issues of power and privilege have been highlighted for you as you get to know the child refugees' lived experiences?
3. What fuller understanding do you now have about the social justice, equity, and human rights issues faced by child refugees now living in Ontario?
4. What is your developing understanding of Syrian child refugees' strength-based identities?
5. In what ways has the digital storytelling workshop given you a greater understanding of

child refugees' experiences?

Digital storytelling workshop experience:

6. How have you personally been impacted by facilitating this digital storytelling workshop with child refugees?
7. How has facilitating this digital storytelling workshop informed your viewpoint as an educator?

Implications of digital storytelling:

8. How do you see the use of digital storytelling as contributing to creating safe and equitable learning opportunities for child refugees?
9. What are other ways you suggest for creating trusting, safe, and inclusive environments for child refugees?
10. What other resources, activities, and curriculum do you think would be helpful for further supporting educators' in their work with child refugees?

Clarifying and elaborating probes for all questions include: "Could you tell me a little more about what you mean?" or "How so?", "Could you give me an example?" or "For example?", "Anything else?" The probes will be used as needed.

Conclusion:

- "We addressed all the questions I had planned for today's discussion. Does anyone have any other comments or questions? [Pause for questions]."
- "If you have any thoughts that you did not get to share with the group today, please let me know. I can individually interview you. The purpose of the interview is for you to share any thoughts that you did not get to share during the group discussion. Please ask if you have any questions. [Pause for questions]."
- "Thank you very much for your time and willingness to participate. The hope is to gain significant findings from this study that will support child refugees' resettlement in their new host countries. Remember that you may contact me for research updates. Thank you again for your participation."

Appendix N: Interview Protocol for Children

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educator Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Date and time:
Location:
Interviewer name:
Interviewee name (use pseudonym):

Introduction:

- Describe the purpose of this interview to participant: "The purpose for this interview is to understand your experiences with the digital storytelling workshop."
- Explain the consent process: "Before we begin, I want to remind you that you and your parents have all agreed for you to participate in this interview at the beginning of this project. Please let me know if you have any questions about it. [Pause for questions]. This interview will be video-recorded. If you feel uncomfortable with the recording, let me know. You do not have to participate in this interview. It is up to you if you want to participate. You can change your mind about participating at any time during the interview. All you have to do is let me know."
- Explain the rules for the interview: "Some guidelines to remember for this conversation: remember there are no wrong answers. My role is to ask you some questions about your digital storytelling experience. Your role is to answer the questions you feel comfortable answering. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to."
- Establish agreement: "Do you have any questions? [Pause for questions]. Are you okay to begin? [Pause for answers]."

Interview guide

Digital story elements:

15. If a friend asked you about your digital story, what would you tell them?
16. What images in your digital story are important to you?
17. What sounds or music in your digital story are important to you?
18. What did you find was difficult to do when making your digital story?
19. What do you wish you could have added to your digital story?
20. What do you wish you could have taken out of your digital story?

Digital storytelling workshop experiences:

21. If a friend asked you about this digital storytelling workshop, what would you tell them?
22. What activities of the digital storytelling workshop were your favourite?
23. What activities of the digital storytelling workshop were your least favourite?
24. What is the most important thing you got from participating in this workshop?

Implications of digital storytelling:

25. How do you think your digital story will impact others?

26. What value could these digital storytelling workshops be for other child refugees?
27. What value could these digital storytelling workshops be for non-child refugees?
28. What value could these digital storytelling workshops be for your teachers?

Clarifying and elaborating probes for all questions include: “Could you tell me a little more about what you mean?” or “How so?”, “Could you give me an example?” or “For example?”, “Anything else?” The probes will be used as needed.

Conclusion:

- “We discussed all the questions I had for today’s interview. Do you have any other comments or questions? [Pause for questions].
- “If you have any thoughts that you did not get to share today, please let me know. I can interview you again. Please ask if you have any questions. [Pause for questions].”
- “Thank you very much for participating. The hope is to learn from this project how to better support child refugees in their new homes.”

Appendix O: Interview Protocol for Educators

Study title: Exploring the Potential of Digital Storytelling: Syrian Child Refugees and Educator Experiences with Digital Storytelling

Date and time:
Location:
Interviewer name:
Interviewee name (use pseudonym):

Introduction:

- Describe the purpose of this interview to participant: "The purpose for this interview is to understand your experiences with the digital storytelling workshop and for you to share any thoughts that you did not get to share during the group discussion. The length of the interview is 90 minutes."
- Explain the consent process: "Before we begin, I just want to remind you that you have already signed the consent form that was needed to participate in this interview at the beginning of this project. Please ask now if you have any questions regarding the consent form. [Pause for questions]. This interview will be video-recorded. Measures to the greatest extent possible will be taken to protect your confidentiality. However, if you feel uncomfortable with the recording, please let me know. I need to stress that your attendance and participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time."
- Explain the rules for the interview: "Remember there are no wrong answers. My role as the interviewer will be to guide the conversation. I have a set of questions that will guide our conversation. Your role will be to answer the questions you feel comfortable answering."
- Establish agreement: "Do you have any questions? [Pause for questions]. Are you okay to begin? [Pause for answers]."

Interview guide

Insight into child refugees' resettlement experiences:

1. What are some things you learned from the child refugees through participating together in the workshop? (e.g. new perspectives, questions, or concerns)
2. What issues of power and privilege have been highlighted for you as you get to know the child refugees' lived experiences?
3. What fuller understanding do you now have about the social justice, equity, and human rights issues faced by child refugees now living in Ontario?
4. What is your developing understanding of Syrian child refugees' strength-based identities?
5. In what ways has the digital storytelling workshop given you a greater understanding of child refugees' experiences?

Digital storytelling workshop experience:

6. How have you personally been impacted by facilitating this digital story workshop with

child refugees?

7. How has facilitating this digital storytelling workshop informed your viewpoint as an educator?

Implications of digital storytelling:

8. How do you see the use of digital storytelling as contributing to creating safe and equitable learning opportunities for child refugees?
9. What are other ways you suggest for creating trusting, safe, and inclusive environments for child refugees?
10. What other resources, activities, and curriculum do you think would be helpful for further supporting educators' in their work with child refugees?

General questions:

11. What are some thoughts that you wanted to share during the group discussion but did not share?

Clarifying and elaborating probes for all questions include: "Could you tell me a little more about what you mean?" or "How so?", "Could you give me an example?" or "For example?", "Anything else?" The probes will be used as needed.

Conclusion:

- "We addressed all the questions I had planned for today's interview. Do you have any other comments or questions? [Pause for questions]."
- "If you have any thoughts that you did not get to share today, please let me know. I can interview you again. Please ask if you have any questions. [Pause for questions]."
- "Thank you very much for your time and willingness to participate. The hope is to gain significant findings from this study that will support child refugees' resettlement in their new host countries. Remember that you may contact me for research updates. Thank you again for your participation."