PRIVILEGE AND VULNERABILITY:
EARLY STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCES AND POLICY ENACTMENT IN A SUPERDIVERSE SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the lived experience of Early Study Abroad (fee-paying international) students in a publicly funded Ontario secondary school. I situate my research in the broader context of international education, particularly the recruitment and hosting of students from abroad. The study also explores the complex world of adolescent language learning and intercultural exchange in a superdiverse school setting.

My qualitative case study comprises interviews with students, who describe their personal experiences, and educators, who reflect on their own practices and share observations of their colleagues' pedagogical response to this cohort. My analysis was influenced by my experience as an English as a Second Language/English teacher who worked with Early Study Abroad students and informed by a reading of relevant policy documents.

I use several complementary frameworks: Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model of development; theories from critical policy research (Ball, 1993, 2015; Ball et al., 2012; Levinson & Sutton, 2001) and engaged language policy and practice (Menken & García; 2010; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996); and Vertovec's (2007, 2019) concept of superdiversity.

My findings reveal that students' experiences and teacher responses are broadly shaped by discourses that support the marketization of education at a global scale. At the school level, highly agentive students successfully navigated their way through an educational system that did not widely acknowledge or support them, notwithstanding the efforts of few engaged teachers. My policy recommendations include stronger oversight of student care and well-being, more opportunities for professional development and collaboration for teachers who work in linguistically diverse classrooms, and greater transparency in accounting for the management of student tuition revenue.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Thomas Bell (1929–2022).

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Several colleagues at the secondary school where I taught shared my passion for working with multilingual learners and my obsession with policy. I thank them for many hours of conversation and collaboration and for pushing me forward when the time came for me to leap into doctoral studies.

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List of Abbreviations

CAPS-I	Canadian Association of Public Schools International
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
ELL	English Language Learner
ESL	English as a Second Language
GTA	Greater Toronto Area
IE	International Education
IRCC	Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada
OASDI	Ontario Association of School Districts International
OME	Ontario Ministry of Education
OSD	Ontario Secondary Diploma

Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

Ilya's Story in Brief

> I think it's the thing about public school . . . I think if you asked Persian people in my school, they would say that I am different from them because I wasn't that stereotypical Persian, they, you know, only communicate with Persian people. Even though I was scared I still wanted to try, but a lot of people just don't want that. Of course, that's fair, because they feel safe and comfortable. Of course, they form communities with people they know.

One and a half years after moving to Toronto to complete his high school diploma and prepare for university studies in Canada, and one year into a global pandemic, Ilya, an 18-year-old from Iran, offered his assessment on the cultural context of his new school. While understanding that many of his peers craved the safety and comfort of their own "community," Ilya wanted to master English and embrace a way of life he envisioned, largely premised on American television shows. After a year and a half, he had made a few English-speaking friends (although only one of them was from Canada), had successfully completed his Ontario Secondary Diploma (OSD) and was considering which of several offers from Canadian universities he would accept.

Ilya is not a new Canadian, nor is he certain that he wants to become one. Like thousands of other adolescents, he came to Canada to study at a publicly funded Ontario school, to which he paid $16,000 in tuition fees. And while he shares much in common with his fellow fee-paying students, Ilya's story is also unique. A self-described excellent student, he arrived in Toronto with limited proficiency in English, little knowledge of Canadian life, and no experience living

in an urban setting. Ilya initially lived with an uncle whom he did not know well, but who provided encouragement and helped him navigate the nonacademic aspects of his new life, such as the subway and the banking system. Within 6 months, Ilya was renting a room in a house with other students. Despite frustrations with programming and placement, a language barrier he worked very hard to overcome, and teachers he did not always find helpful or supportive, he did well. The onset of the pandemic triggered Ilya's germophobic anxieties; he stayed home in his boarding house and applied himself to his virtual studies.

Ilya's aspirations beyond university are unclear. Will he return to Iran, or will he become an "ideal immigrant" to Canada (Scott et al., 2015)? And what can be made of his experience in Ontario's publicly funded system? Did he receive an international education (IE)? Did his presence contribute to the internationalization of his school? What factors shaped his experiences? Was Ilya privileged—or exploited?

International Students: The "Heart of Canada's Prosperity"

Exploring the answer to these questions, for Ilya and others like him, can illuminate the complexity of the academic, social, and cultural experiences of those sojourners whom federal and provincial governments, boards of education, schools, and numerous private entrepreneurs are actively, and successfully, recruiting. Indeed, selling Canada as a global destination for students from other countries is by far the dominant activity among several collectively subsumed under the banner of the internationalization of education or international education. In recent years, the number of international students in Canada has grown rapidly, reaching 807,750 students at all levels at the end of 2023, including 40,000 at the K–12 level (Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], 2023). Following 185 per cent growth in international students from 2010 to 2020, Canada is now the third most popular destination for students from across the

globe (EduCanada, 2023). After an initial decline in numbers during the global pandemic, the number of applications for study permits rebounded, with the highest percentage of increase among K–12 students (ApplyInsights Team, 2023). Collectively, these students make a "large and growing contribution to Canada's prosperity," including $21.6 billion in spending on tuition, accommodation, and discretionary spending (Global Affairs Canada, 2019, p. 2).

With increasing momentum over the past two decades, the Canadian government has supported the international recruitment of students by promoting a Canadian brand and streamlining immigration practices (Elnagar & Young, 2021; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar, 2013). The intensification of recruitment efforts began early in the 21st century under Stephen Harper's Conversative government, in tandem with a point system designed to prioritize university-educated applicants with Canadian work experience and proficiency in French or English (Elnagar & Young, 2021).

Released in 2014, *Canada's International Education Strategy (2014–2019)* articulated the federal government's commitment to IE and its belief that the endeavour is good for Canada's economy: "In a highly competitive, knowledge-based global economy, ideas and innovation go hand in hand with job creation and economic growth. In short, international education is at the very heart of our current and future prosperity*"* (Government of Canada, 2014, p. 4). The established target of recruiting 450,000 students by 2022 was achieved almost before the report was released (Government of Canada, 2014). Five years later, *Building on Success: International Education Strategy (2019–2024)* was released. The updated federal strategy established objectives for the next 5 years, including expanding the base of countries from which international students are recruited; encouraging Canadian students to study abroad to "gain new skills" in the global marketplace; and increasing support for the sector to "grow

their own export services and explore opportunities abroad" (Global Affairs Canada, 2019, p. 7). Federal branding and marketing initiatives were largely targeted at postsecondary students. However, the federal strategy indirectly opened the K–12 sector as a "feeding ground" for the "ideal immigrant stream" (Elnagar & Young, 2021, p. 84).

Given the scope of the activity; the potential revenue involved for governments, educational institutions, and private entrepreneurs; and the broader global trend toward international study, it is certain this is an area of activity that will continue to develop. It is likely that government and educational institutions will continue to introduce new methods of delivering IE and encouraging more students to study in Canada.

Early Study Abroad Students: The K–12 International Student Experience

Academic research to date has focused on postsecondary students. Indeed, a review of definitions of "International Student" in *The Journal of International Students* includes no reference to K–12 students (Bista, 2016*)*. Because of the prevailing association of the term *international student* with postsecondary students, I have adopted the term *Early Study Abroad* (ESA) students to refer to the secondary-level students who are the subject of my dissertation research (Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023). Secondary-level ESA students are a distinct and understudied subset both of the broader international student population and of the larger K–12 cohort often referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs). Scholarly interest in understanding their motivations and experiences, and the policy-scape that informs the entire scope of activity from government rhetoric at one end of the spectrum to classroom encounters between students and teachers at the other, is gaining momentum.

The phenomenon of K–12 students studying abroad reflects a global trend, with a burgeoning middle class in the Global South and East seeking to pursue educational

opportunities internationally (Waters, 2006; Wu & Tarc, 2022). Students from China, by far the largest source of K–12 students and the second largest of international students overall, are often motivated by stressful examination requirements in China, a desire to study English, and a cultural predisposition that highly values education (Chen, 2017; Liu, 2016; Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023). Tamtik (2019) posits that pull factors drawing European parents toward study in Canada include a general interest in the economic and cultural benefits of international study (including an English education) and country-specific factors such as Canada's reputation for safety, relatively lower tuition rates, and immigration policies. In short, the reasons are complex and variable.

Policy Context

The Federal Role

The policy framework that supports this endeavour (or not) is complex and often context specific. Although education is a provincial responsibility in Canada, the federal government plays a role in framing and supporting practices relevant to the recruitment of students through four departments and agencies: Global Affairs Canada, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC); the Canada Border Services Agency; and the Canadian International Development Agency. IRCC is the gatekeeper of permits for students who want to study in Canada for an extended period (over 6 months). The issuing of study permits is a more regulated process for postsecondary applicants, who must be accepted at a designated learning institution and meet specified medical financial, academic, and linguistic standards, than for ESA students. In contrast to postsecondary permits, K–12 study visas are not tied to a particular institution; students may attend any private or public school. Students who are here with parents on a study or work permit or are refugees are exempt from study permits, as are those staying less than 6

months— typicallyshort-term study abroad students who spend a semester studying English or participating in an exchange program.

Students who are minors (under 17) must be under the legal custodianship of an adult who is a Canadian citizen and whose application has been approved through IRCC. Custodians are meant to act as parents in the event of an emergency. They must be at least 19 years of age and agree to:

- "have made necessary arrangements for the care and support of the said student in place of the parents as appropriate," and
- "reside with a reasonable distance of the student's intended residence and school." (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2023)

A "reasonable distance" and what constitutes an emergency are not defined in the federal policy. Custodianship is not monitored by the federal government; however, in some provincial and local jurisdictions further guidelines and conditions are articulated. For example, in some boards of education, the role is assumed by an administrator (Bell et al., 2023). Individual entrepreneurs and companies that provide custodial services have become part of the ESA landscape, working alongside professional recruiters who collect fees from prospective students and take a percentage of tuition fees from schools.

Provincial Policy: Ontario's Strategic Approach

From British Columbia to Newfoundland, ESA students attend public and private K–12 educational institutions for periods ranging from a few weeks to several years. Provincial governments and educational institutions both cooperate and compete in mining the market for these students. In Canada, each province has its own strategic vision and/or policy framework.

Activities that may fall under the banner of international education include supporting student/teacher exchanges, the administration of programs or schools in other countries, and internationalizing the local curriculum, in addition to the recruitment and hosting of students from abroad. Local boards and schools engage in hosting with varying levels of independence within each province's regulatory guidelines. These range from an act of the provincial parliament in Manitoba to a government-run provincial "international education program" which oversees all aspects of hosting and educating students in Nova Scotia to a loosely regulated approach in Ontario.

Ontario has become the number one destination for K–12 students from abroad studying in Canada and has experienced the most year-over-year growth (CBIE, 2019, cited in Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). Most ESA students in the province are concentrated in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Despite, or perhaps because of, this rapid growth, Ontario's activity in the sphere is relatively unregulated. Boards of education and private schools have policies and practices that are enacted locally and have evolved organically over time (Bell et al., 2023). In 2015, *Ontario's Strategy for K–12 International Education* outlined four broad and aspirational goals for the future of public-sector IE (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2015). The strategy included a commitment to manage growth and support these programs through investment, while ensuring that boards and schools provide high-quality education in safe and healthy environments (OME, 2015). The provincial strategy highlights the importance of learning English or French and encouraging "cultural engagement" between students (not defined) and cites the role of the classroom teacher in both endeavours (OME, 2015, p. 22). Further, the document commits to supporting professional learning for educators to "help them identify and respond appropriately to academic, social and mental wellness challenges that are specific to international students,"

but this agenda has not been implemented in any systematic way (OME, 2015, p. 22). As a policy text, *Ontario's Strategy for K–12 International Education* is largely aspirational and is enacted variably across the province (Bell et al., 2023; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2020). The strategy's main impact has been in supporting and encouraging recruitment (Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020).

Several organizations work collaboratively at provincial, interprovincial, and federal levels to support these initiatives, share best practices, and advocate on behalf of their members. In addition, the recruitment and hosting of students is supported by a range of private businesses, including agents who recruit overseas, homestay coordinator/providers, and agencies and individuals that provide custodial, insurance, or counselling services. The Canadian Association of Public Schools—International (CAPS-I), a federal organization with voluntary school district membership from across the country, has a mandate to develop and promote a Canadian brand and share best practices among members. CAPS-I works collaboratively with several third-party providers, as referenced above, and maintains an online marketing presence.

CAPS-I's Ontario membership largely overlaps with its provincial counterpart, the Ontario Association of School Districts International (OASDI), which plays a similar role. OASDI has over 30 English and five French district members, including the largest, and arguably most influential, school boards. In 2019, OASDI responded to one of the Ontario strategy's stated goals by developing a set of guidelines for the care and well-being of students (Ontario Association of School Districts International, 2019). The guide provides a comprehensive checklist of responsibilities for member boards and schools, as well as homestay providers, parents, custodians, and students. However, the guidelines have not been taken up as official policy at the provincial level. Moreover, they are not binding on OASDI members or

nonmember schools that host ESA students. In practice, policies, and practices range across the province even among OASDI members (Bell et al., 2023).

Table 1

Overview of ESA Policy Framework

Level	Actors Involved	Policy Activity	
Macro	Federal	• International Education Strategy • Global Affairs • Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship (study permits, approval of custodianship) • CAPS-I (marketing and recruitment)	
Meso	Provincial	• K–12 international education strategy • Curriculum • Teacher education • OASDI (marketing and recruitment)	Health & wellness oversight (in some jurisdictions)
	Boards of Education	• Recruitment • "international education" (e.g certificates, exchanges)	
Micro	Schools	• Teaching • Guidance	

Language Learning Policy and Practices

In addition, policies, and practices to support English Language Learners (ELLs), as well as curriculum and standards related to English (or French) literacy, directly impact most ESA students in Ontario. *English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (OME, 2007a) is the main policy text in this regard. The policies and programs apply to all students from kindergarten through Grade 12 including Canadian-born ELLs, newcomers (immigrants and refugees), and international (visa) students. Of the latter it notes,

> These students typically arrive in Canada without their families, and may live with extended family, a host family, or alone. Because they often represent the aspirations of their families, and because of the expense involved in sending them to study in Canada, these students are often under great pressure to do well and progress through school as quickly as possible. Some have had instruction in English but may still have considerable difficulty learning English. (p. 10)

The document outlines policies and procedures for welcoming, placement, and programming as well as initial and ongoing assessment, including the participation of ELLs in large-scale testing. It identifies supports and accommodations available for ELLs, such as the identification of special education needs and the provision of corresponding supports. Roles and responsibilities for the Ministry of Education and boards of education, as well as administrators and teachers working at school level, are outlined. Also in the text is a list of over 30 other policy texts and program guidelines that are relevant for ELLs, including English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum documents. Of note is *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (OME, 2010), which delineates policies regarding accommodations and modifications for ELLs, and others, in detail.

These policy documents collectively present an intimidating, and potentially unnavigable mélange of information about programs, policies, and supports for stakeholders, including parents who are contemplating sending their children to Ontario to study; students who are new or unfamiliar to the system; and teachers who have not had specific professional development in supporting multilingual learners. Much is left to the discretion of individual boards, schools, and classroom teachers. Perhaps not surprisingly, a recent study published by the Council of Ontario

Directors of Education (Donohoo, 2020) found that policies to support ELLs are implemented inconsistently across the province.

Research Questions and Rationale

There is much to learn and understand about ESA students in Ontario secondary schools and, in particular, the policies and practices that impact their academic, social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. The considerable literature on their postsecondary peers can provide some insight, at least as a point of departure. However, there are many varied factors that justify a "separate and unique research agenda" for ESA students and the policy context that shapes their experience, including "mandates, structures, funding, governing policies, teaching and learning practices, and the age and maturity, or independence, of students" (Elnagar & Young, 2021, p. 90).

My interest in contributing to this burgeoning field stems from my personal experience as a teacher at a large urban secondary school. In the decade before the pandemic, I was teaching full time and held the role of Curriculum Leader for ESL/literacy at my home school. During my tenure, the number of ESA students at the school grew, while the numbers of students aligning to most other cohorts decreased. For several years before the global pandemic, ESA students constituted approximately 14 per cent of the school population. Most of the students came from China, but there was a steady increase in numbers of students from Vietnam and Iran, as well as smaller numbers from a host of other countries including South Korea, Japan, Cambodia, and Turkey. Overall, 70 per cent of the students at the school spoke a first language other than English or French and approximately one quarter of the students in the school were enrolled in formal ESL classes.

The multilingual/multicultural nature of the school challenges the notion that the

presence of ESA students is necessary or sufficient to develop intercultural awareness and engagement, “by exposing [domestic students] to the diverse cultures, languages, and viewpoints” of their international peers (OME, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore, it underscores the inadequacy of homogenizing labels such as *English Language Learner* or *newcomer*. Indeed, the school displays a habitus of “superdiversity” (Vertovec, 2007), given not only the spectrum of languages, nationalities, ethnicities, languages, and religions present but also the motives, patterns, and itineraries of migration and the processes of insertion of all its students, regardless of which ones are paying fees to be there (Li et al., 2021).

Classroom teachers at the school were provided with minimal general or specific background information about this cohort. Over several years, I found myself engaging in speculative conversations with my teaching colleagues about why these students were studying here and whether or how their presence was meant to contribute to the school environment. I was, by turns, impressed by the high level of independence and motivation demonstrated by some ESA students and distressed by the obvious strains of social isolation and struggles to adjust linguistically and academically that they sometimes revealed. In some cases the stories were inspiring, in some cases they were disheartening, and, to be honest, in a few cases they were shocking. My ESA students were often privileged and vulnerable at the same time.

As I began to look at recruitment literature, school websites, and government documents, I noticed some dissonance between the rhetoric about the value and benefits of the international programs; the level of support provided through the school, the board, or community agencies; and the lived experiences of the students. The marketing literature seemed to suggest a more uniform Canadian experience than I suspected was the case. Surely the experience of a student from Iran studying in Toronto was very different from that of a student from China studying in

Sudbury. Moreover, I wondered about the factors that influenced my ESA students' decision to study in Canada and their choice of a particular province, board, or school. Although there is a great deal of similarity among various IE programs on paper, the experiences of ESA students are necessarily influenced by social, political, and geographical factors and practices that are specific to local contexts.

From a critical perspective, there is an obvious tension between the economic imperative of the initiatives and the cost of providing quality care and education to ESA students. Revenue from tuition helps fill a funding hole, but how do we ensure that the needs of students are sufficiently met? Should ESA students get the same, more, or less than their publicly funded peers? And what *do* they get in relation to those peers? In addition, the opportunity to study abroad is beyond the reach of most students. How do we reconcile the presence of these relatively privileged students alongside others—Canadian and otherwise—for whom the opportunity to buy an "international education" is unattainable? How are these tensions and struggles resolved (or not) in practice? What is the relationship between public statements of policy—whether legislation, strategy documents, or marketing literature—and what happens on the ground in schools and classrooms? These are the questions that I mused about at the end of my days of teaching.

The scholarly literature on ESAs in Canadian schools is considerably less than exhaustive, although interest in the topic is growing. Studies that centre on government, institutional, and public discourses focus primarily, although not exclusively, on postsecondary education. Some theorists and practitioners describe the internationalization of education, broadly, as encompassing a wide variety of activities, curricula, and pedagogical practices across campuses as well as the global flow of students and scholars (CBIE, 2017; Hudzik, 2011; Knight, 2003). In

contrast, critical scholars have pointed out that most institutions and governments focus on the recruitment of fee-paying students and often perpetuate inequity and educational imperialism (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011; Buckner & Stein, 2020; Garson, 2016; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). Critical studies of IE in Canada highlight a neoliberal emphasis in government discourse regarding higher education on the economic benefits of recruiting international students (El Masri, 2020; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2017; Trilokekar, 2013, Stein & de Andreotti, 2016) and increasingly in the K–12 sector (Cover, 2016; Deschambault, 2019; Elnagar & Young, 2021; Fallon & Poole, 2014; Johnstone & Lee, 2014; Winton, 2022).

The extant literature on K–12 IE in Canada includes some analyses of policy implementation in several provinces, which are discussed in my literature review (J. Davis, 2017; Lindenberg, 2015; Tamtik, 2018). Very few studies focus on the experience of ESA and draw on data from students themselves and several of the ones that do are well over a decade old (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004, 2006; Nelson, 2013; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Schecter & Bell, 2021; Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023; Wu & Tarc, 2022). The purpose of my study is to contribute to our understanding of this phenomenon by listening to the voices of two groups—ESA students themselves and the educators who work with them—in one superdiverse context. Specifically, my qualitative study explores the following research questions:

- *How do Early Study Abroad students describe their experience in a public Ontario secondary school?*
- *How do teachers describe the experience of Early Study Abroad students in a public Ontario secondary school?*
- *In what ways do official policies and enacted practices impact the experience of students at this level?*

Organization of Chapters

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical frameworks that shaped my perspective throughout my data collection, analysis, and writing. My research is informed by Vertovec's (2007, 2009) concept of superdiversity; an adapted model of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory to conceptualize "student experience"; and principles and frameworks from the related fields of critical education policy research and engaged language policy and practice. My literature review, in Chapter 3, begins with a broad overview of globalization, the internationalization of education, and IE, and then narrows in focus to consider the extant literature on the K–12 context, particularly in Ontario. In Chapter 4, I outline my methodological approach and provide pertinent background information on the site of my study and my 12 research participants.

The next section of the dissertation comprises two chapters in which I discuss the findings from my interviews with students (Chapter 5) and educators (Chapter 6). Chapter 5 is the heart of my study, as I have found the voice of students to constitute the largest gap in the extant professional discourse about ESA students. My student respondents were thoughtful and candid about their experiences. Our conversations shed light on how IE policy impacts their lives as consumers and students, but also how they themselves play a large role in determining the academic, linguistic, and cultural aspects of their time at Ravenswood Secondary School (pseudonym). The findings from my interviews with educators are presented in Chapter 6. Teachers and guidance counsellors had a broader perspective than the students, based on years of experience and interaction with successful ESA students as well those who struggled. My respondents shared stories from the darker side of an initiative that does not always deliver "well-developed infrastructure and support including ESL (English as a Second Language)

instruction and carefully supervised homestay programs" (Canadian Association of Public Schools—International, 2023). They also confirm that findings from Chapter 5, which suggest that most teachers are not fully engaged in supporting ESA students or, for that matter, their English Language Learning peers.

Finally, in my concluding chapter, I address my third research question and synthesize the findings from Chapters 5 and 6. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1977) model, I summarize the influence of policy from the broadest levels of discourse to the enactment of practices and the interaction of policy actors, including students, at the micro level. I conclude by delineating the theoretical implications of my research and outline some generative directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks

Globalization, Transnationalism, and Superdiversity

Globalization Definitions and Debates

My investigation into the lives of ESA students is conceptualized within a broader framework of theories about globalization that "attempt to think about how knowledge systems (texts and discourses), institutional practices, and social structures are intertwined through patterns that are not bound to particular nations and the politics of these relations that potentially span the globe" (Popkewitz & Rizvi, 2010, p. 10). Theoretical musings and debates about globalization centre on geography, production, governance, identity, and knowledge, all which impact education broadly and locally (Scholte, 2005). A neoliberal emphasis on marketization, competition, and privatization has been the dominant policy discourse since the early 1980s and has gained "widespread unquestioned acceptance as common-sense," despite evidence that its benefits have been far from equitable (Scholte, 2005, p. 38).

However, alternative discourses have emerged, including those that seek to reform the worst excesses of capitalism, those that see opportunities to transform society into a more globally equitable world, and those that reject globalism altogether (Scholte, 2005; see also Popkewitz & Rizvi, 2010). A debate about globalization's homogenizing tendency is central to the discussion of its impact on education (Appadurai, 1990; Scholte, 2005). The growing influence of Western culture and values and the global spread of English as a lingua franca are welcomed by some. Others challenge whether cultural and linguistic homogenization is theoretically desirable or, indeed, practically true (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2010, 2017).

The notion that traditional concepts of space and mobility are no longer adequate to describe "complex, overlapping, disjunctive relationships" is central to most definitions of

globalization (Appadurai, 1990, p. 296, see also Scholte, 2005). Appadurai (1990) conceptualized the movement of global culture as flows of separate but interrelated "scapes" of people, technology, finance, media, and ideas. He described the flow of these perspectival, subjective, and imagined communities as both disjunctive and *supraterritorial* (Appadurai, 1990). Global flows give rise to the rapid growth of "sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors" that is characteristic of globalization and has been referred to as *transnational* (Vertovec, 2007, p. 3; see also Popkewitz & Rizvi, 2010). New networks made possible by the transnational, supraterritorial flows of people, technology, and ideas transcend and disregard traditional boundaries both within and across communities (Rizvi, 2011; Vertovec, 2007, 2009).

Superdiversity in Research and Practice

Vertovec (2007, 2019) coined the term *superdiversity* to describe new communities, not locally bound by notions of citizenship or geography, that have emerged from these transnational flows. He challenged the adequacy of the term *diversity*, with its traditional emphasis on ethnicity and country of origin, to describe the new and complex patterns of social, political, and familial networks and patterns of immigration that were transforming London in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Vertovec, 2007, 2019). Advanced communication technologies, reduced travel costs for some, and massive forced migration for others have enabled and demanded the development of transnational relationships in ways that elude traditional concepts of locally situated diasporas (Vertovec 2007, 2009). Vertovec (2007) suggested that this transnational turn necessitates a new multidimensional lens that incorporates multiple categories including motives, patterns, and itineraries in addition to nationality, ethnicity, and language. He urged scholars of migration and policymakers to be cognizant of diversity *within* local

communities and across borders. Others have echoed the call for researchers to reconsider assumptions about familial connections, citizenship, and nation-states (Arnaut, 2012; Glick Schiller, 2004; Gogolin, 2011; Gogolin & Duarte, 2017). Superdiversity both challenges traditional "hegemonic diversity discourse" and "scorns the false transparency and neatness of 'multiculturalism'" (Arnaut, 2012, pp. 3–4).

The emergence of superdiversity as a conceptual lens is consistent with a multilingual turn in sociolinguistics, characterized by an increased acknowledgement and interest in plurilingualism, translanguaging, and the hybridization of national languages. Sociolinguists are broadening the concept of linguistic repertoire to encompass the "accumulation of linguistic, and, more broadly, semiotic resources at a speaker's disposal" and challenging traditional notions like *native speaker* or *mother tongue* (Pennycook, 2018, p. 4; see also Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). In such situations, the use of a dominant national language as a lingua franca—English in most contexts, but not exclusively—often allows individuals to transcend traditional cultural boundaries.

The linguistic hybridization process has been referred to as "glocalization" and used to describe cultural, as well as linguistic, communities in which the local and the global intersect (Pennycook, 2017). In superdiverse contexts, like my research site, it is not "uncommon to find multilingual individuals displaying language abilities that involve shifts between languages to accommodate the communication contexts and settings they find themselves in" (Schecter & Bell, 2021, p. 7). Translingualism is not new, but the intensity and ease with which it occurs has been accelerated by communication technology and mobility and its practice has led to a questioning of traditional notions of monolingualism and linguistic competencies (Flores &

Rosa, 2022; García et al., 2021; Pennycook, 2018). Multilingual educational contexts have the potential to comprise these translanguaging spaces (Van Viegen, 2020).

Over the past 15 years, superdiversity has been applied, descriptively, methodologically, and informatively in research, policy, and practice, although not always as Vertovec (2019) intended (see also King & Bigelow, 2018). Vertovec (2019) cautioned researchers not to use the term as a substitute for *more* diversity. Rather, it is the interaction of multiple migratory experiences, transnational linkages, labour experiences, and local responses to these movements that make a context superdiverse (Vertovec, 2019). Methodologically, Vertovec (2007) posited that new quantitative techniques that could test the relationship of multiple variables and ethnographic research with multiple groups or in multiple sites would be required to shed light on new patterns of segregation, new patterns of creolization and cosmopolitanism, new patterns of migration, and new experience of space and contact. Finally, he urged policymakers and practitioners of public service in superdiverse contexts to take account of new immigrants' "plurality of affiliations and their ability, as with all people, to belong to multiple social worlds and communities" (Vertovec, 2007).

Superdiversity and Education

Education scholars have used the concept of superdiversity to theorize the complexity of schools in which the insufficiency of labels such as *newcomer*, *immigrant* or *English Language Learner* has become increasingly apparent (Deschambault, 2019; Gogolin, 2011; King & Bigelow, 2018; Li et al., 2021; Schecter & James, 2022). Contemporary classrooms reflect the superdiverse nature of the cities in which they are located. As Gogolin (2011) stated, the multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how, and with whom we live also affect where, how, and with whom we teach and learn. Migrant or transnational students can exist

physically and symbolically in more than one place (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2008) and their identities are not bound by homogeneous silos in which people share similar ethnic, , or linguistic barriers (Li et al., 2021). A student's "'community' cannot be established by means of survey data"; rather, it is achieved through their participation in multiple groups (Schecter & James, 2022, p. xx). Inequities in students' past and current lived experiences can contribute to the simultaneity of their transnational practices (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012).

Lightman (2018) describes a transient-transilient spectrum. At one end are those whose migratory status is precarious and at the other are members of a globally mobile class whose incomes and employment status offer them the opportunity to move back and forth. The myriad experiences of students before arrival in Canada and while they are studying here contribute to multiple sets of literacies and a range of motivations, skills, and abilities (Li et al., 2021; Schecter & Bell, 2021). Many ESA students come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds with corresponding privileges and educational advantages; however, they often face the challenge of being on their own and familial pressure to adapt and succeed quickly. In some cases, although not often, ESA students or their families are applying for refugee status, reminding us that one can be simultaneously privileged and persecuted.

The reconceptualization of diversity in education is attended by critiques of traditional pedagogical approaches to multiculturalism (Li et al., 2022; Sánchez & Kasun, 2012; Schecter & James, 2022; Westernoff et al., 2021; Yon, 2022). Schecter and James (2022) have called for a paradigmatic shift that goes beyond existing culturally responsive frameworks to address issues relevant to the lives of these students "who inhabit overlapping and intermingled communities" (p xxii). In this new paradigm, teachers need to develop "diversity plus competencies" and be able to understand the nuances of mixed loyalties and belongings (Li et al., 2021, p. 4). Li (2021)

has highlighted the need to avoid deficit lenses and learn to value the multiple forms of linguistic and cultural knowledge that students bring to the classroom. Van Viegen (2020) has posited that schools in which educators and students mobilize and leverage a range of semiotic resources for teaching and learning purposes may serve as a critical response to supporting vulnerable populations. Yon (2022) reminds us that complex, cosmopolitan identities require a more nuanced response than the "cultural reductionism of multiculturalism" found in many schools (p. 57). Furthermore, teachers must anticipate "aspirational superdiversity" (Schecter, personal communication) and attend to the needs of students whose future residential and career goals may extend beyond the borders of the host country (Li, 2021).

Superdiversity, Policy, and Equity: A Case Analysis. King and Bigelow's (2018) analysis of multilingual policy and equity in the United States demonstrates both the possibilities and the limitations of superdiversity as a descriptive term, a methodological tool, and an orientation in policy and practice. Their critical analysis of Multilingual Education Policy (MEP) in the United States over the past few decades focused attention on the unintended consequences of policies that can, in practice, create or exacerbate inequity (King & Bigelow, 2018). This critique centres on the manner in which American (and Canadian) educators and policymakers have tried to categorize and label linguistically diverse students to correspond to "notions inherent in superdiversity" (King & Bigelow, 2018, p. 462). For example, in some states several new terms have been created in recognition that the label *English Language Learner* is too generic. However, the new labels tend to remain broad and group together students with "vastly different" abilities and needs (King & Bigelow, 2018).

Similar attempts to differentiate groups of multilingual learners in policy texts appear in Canadian contexts as well. Ontario's policy for supporting ELLs officially describes three

categories in its policy documents: newcomers, Canadian-born ELLs, and international students (OME, 2007a). In addition, the term *English Literacy Development* (ELD) is used to describe students whose prior education has been disrupted (OME, 2007a). In British Columbia, Deschambault (2019) has critiqued the de facto conflation of what he refers to as fee-paying international students with ELLs in practice even though, from a provincial policy perspective, they are distinct categories and not eligible for similar supports. In all three contexts, policymakers and educators have struggled to find labels that accurately reflect the diversity of needs, experiences, and aspirations of these learners.

Methodologically, King and Bigelow (2018) posited that innovative and multidisciplinary methodologies such as nexus analysis, classroom discourse analysis, and participatory pedagogy are best suited for superdiverse contexts. They found that "methods and frameworks that capture the fluidity and complexity of transnational flows and migrations are the norm rather than the exception" (p. 465). They have drawn attention to language education policies and practices in the United States that are intended to support superdiverse student populations but fail to acknowledge student's diverse competencies, such as literacy skills in languages beyond the dominant one. The authors conclude that the "intersection of superdiversity with current work in multilingual language policy in education points us toward a localized, flexible, non-standard approach" (p. 469).

The Limits of Superdiversity

The concept of superdiversity is not without its critics, even among sociolinguists who appreciate its emphasis on contemporary migratory flows, enhanced communication channels, and linguistic pluralism. Pennycook (2018) described it as "panicked multiculturalism" lacking in appreciation of the prevalence of diversity, both historically and geographically (p. 11; see

also García et al., 2021). Makoni (2012) warned that superdiversity can create an illusion of equality among diverse populations. Similarly, Arnaut (2012) suggests that academia has not realized the potential of the "transgressive moment" by tracing local diversity discourses that may challenge broadly dominant ones (p. 63). Pavlenko (2018) suggests that superdiversity can be used to further marginalize migrants as linguistic others. However, these same scholars cite potential in the term to elucidate the complexities and ambivalences in the diversities that we encounter today and encourage us to use the term to "understand the politics of difference rather than a celebration of diversity" (Pennycook, 2018, p. 11).

Student Experience: An Ecological Framework

Student Experience or the Experiences of Students?

The concept of student experience is "used in a variety of contexts and connected with both policy and practice in several countries" (R. Jones, 2018, p. 1040). The term is credited to Harvey et al., (1992) who used it to capture the totality of what determines quality in undergraduate student life, including factors beyond the classroom, and has been utilized broadly by educational institutions (cited in Benckendorff et al., 2009). Student experience is determined by an interaction between individual attributes and institutional practices (Benckendorff et al., 2009). Most understandings and usages of the term assume that a "good student experience should involve a degree of learning and personal development" (R. Jones, 2018, p. 1041). The term *international student experience* has been used more specifically in higher education literature to discuss internationally mobile students, primarily those studying in Western postsecondary institutions.

Although the concept of student experience is not often used in K–12 research and literature, I posit it as an appropriate term to examine the lives of ESA students. Like many

postsecondary students, ESA students must navigate a new academic, social, and cultural environment, often while living away from family for the first time. They have made a conscious decision to study in Canada at a particular institution and their choice of school influences where, how, and with whom they live. And, like undergraduates, they have a commercial/transactional relationship with the institutions, unlike their publicly funded domestic peers. For ESA students, there may be an added stress of facing the normal developmental changes of adolescence, sometimes without the presence of close family members (Schecter & Bell, 2021; Kuo & Roysircar, 2004, 2006; Nelson, 2013; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023). Indeed, ESA students often face additional pressure to succeed, given how much their families have invested in their education (Li, 2021; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023). All these factors—their temporary residency, their relationship with the host school, their living and custodial arrangements, and their linguistic, social, and cultural background—must be considered in a comprehensive discussion of the experiences of ESA students.

Despite its use in popular and academic literature, the concept of the "international student experience" has been problematized by several scholars and should be approached cautiously (Grimshaw, 2011; Heng, 2019; E. Jones, 2017). Much empirical research on the experiences of postsecondary IS adopts a deficit lens (Abdullah et al., 2014; E. Jones, 2017; Heng, 2019). Scholars have highlighted a theoretical tendency to homogenize the experiences of IS that can contribute to stereotypes (Grimshaw, 2011; Heng, 2019; J. Ryan, 2010), including "positive overgeneralizations," which can both be misleading and harmful (E. Jones, 2017, p. 935). Some scholars have challenged hegemonic discourses about IS by conducting qualitative studies of groups of students, using analysis that is more sensitive to the nuanced positions of the

participants (Heng, 2019; Moon et al., 2020; Väfors Fritz et al., 2008). However, even these attempts to explore the heterogeneity of IS experiences often rely on broad categories, like country of origin, "with a few disaggregating students' differential experiences within a category" (Heng, 2019, p. 608). In reality, there is not one "international student experience," but rather "international students' experiences" (Heng, 2019, p. 620).

In general, frameworks for conceptualizing student experience are variable in analytical emphasis (Benckendorff et al., 2009; R. Jones, 2018). Some definitions stress the totality of an individual student's interaction with the educational institution, while acknowledging a role for activities and relationships that may occur off campus (Temple et al., 2014). Benckendorff et al. (2009) identify four dimensions—institutional, sectoral, student, and external—but do not provide a model for explaining or examining how they interact (p. 97). Similarly, E. Jones (2017) proposed four milieus—institutional, personal, national, and familial. An extensive list of factors in each milieu can influence the academic, social, and pastoral aspects of IS experience. The complexity of the conceptualization well supports her claim that "overgeneralized comments about the needs of students from different national contexts are increasingly difficult to sustain" (p. 940). However, the matrices she proposed are unwieldy as a tool for a thematic analysis. Heng (2019) has proposed a hybrid sociocultural framework that includes three tenets: a Vygotskian view of development as "embedded and shaped by context"; the notion of behavioural and attitudinal fluidity (i.e., one can experience things differently through time and place); and human beings exhibiting agency in interactions within sociocultural contexts (p. 610). Each tenet highlights the complexity of variables that influence student experience. Finally, building on his observation that a framework needs to consider both academic and personal development, R. Jones (2018) proposed a conceptual model for examining the student experience

of undergraduates that draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model of development. This model accommodates the complexity and variability of the preceding models in a framework that captures individual agency, the academic and social environments, and the broader macro policy context in which students live their daily lives.

An Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model is an influential theory that emphasizes the role of social environments in human development (R. Jones, 2018; Leaf Zhang, 2018). It comprises five nested systems of interaction (R. Jones, 2018; Leaf Zhang, 2018). The inner circle contains microsystems of interaction between the student and significant persons such as family, friends, and teachers. The interaction and cross relationships that occur between the microsystems comprise the mesosystem. The exosystem is the setting or context in which the individual is participating and includes people and factors that are indirectly involved. It also incorporates factors that "impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). In the case of secondary ESA students, it might include school leadership or board level programs. The macrosystem is the broader layer of the ecological system, "the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social educational, legal and political systems of which micro, meso and exosystem are the concrete manifestations" (Bronfenbrenner 1977, p. 515).

R. Jones's (2018) conceptualization of Bronfenbrenner's theory placed undergraduate students at the core. He emphasized that microsystems and their interaction within the mesosystem have the most influence on undergraduates, while acknowledging the important influence of factors in the exosystem. Drawing on a large body of theoretical and empirical literature, he hypothesized seven microsystems as most influential in defining the environment of

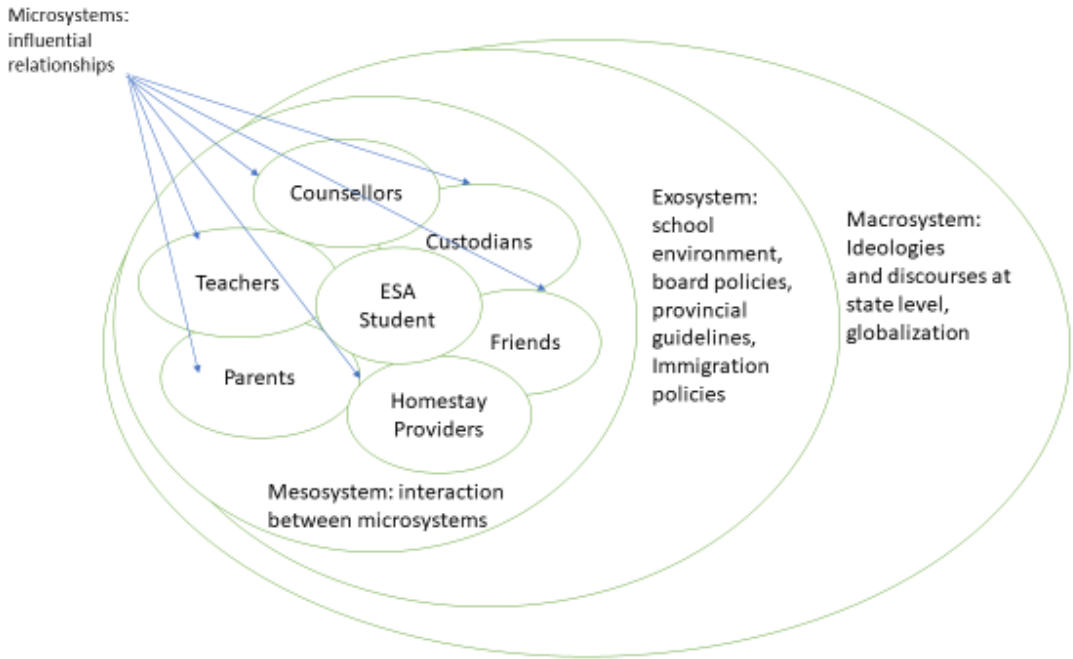
undergraduate students' experience (R. Jones, 2018). R. Jones's proposed microsystems are more suited to undergraduates—he did not include family as a microsystem, for example—but a similar spectrum can be hypothesized for ESA students (see Figure 1). Bronfenbrenners's model may also be used to examine how state-level policies and practices in the macrosystem can help influence and shape interactions between students in the exosystem and mesosystem. R. Jones (2018) encouraged the use of his model to expand institutional views of student experience beyond academics and to acknowledge how the unique experiences of individual students and their interactions within the mesosystem can contribute to engagement or alienation.

Bronfenbrenner's theory has proven quite flexible in application and has been linked to examinations of policy in several contexts. Fusarelli (2015) used it as the basis for a comparative study of the impact of child-welfare social policy and education. In another study of social policy, Leonard (2011) used it to elucidate the impact of community partnerships on student development in an urban secondary school setting. In their overview of public mental health research, Eriksson et al. (2018) found that studies that pay heed to the interactions between the systems have been useful in guiding public mental health policy and practice. Relevant to my research is Leaf Zhang's (2018) analysis of how IS academic advisement experiences have been "shaped by the individual experiences of both advisors and advisees and environmental influences at various levels" at the University of Texas (p. 1765). This study highlighted the importance of establishing strong meaningful relationships (microsystems) and confirms their reaction with one another in the mesosystem. Leaf Zhang (2018) paid less attention to the outer levels of the system, but did acknowledge how broader forces, such as changes in immigration law, can impact student experiences.

Figure 1 illustrates a framework for examining the experiences of ESA students in an Ontario school that reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and incorporates the four milieus identified by E. Jones (2017). All the systems impact the personal milieu at the centre: the importance of familial influences is manifest in the microsystems and mesosystem, while institutional and national influences are at play in the exosystem and macrosystem. The framework emphasizes the importance of individuals engaging in a dialectical interaction in the mesosystem and incorporates the three tenets of contextuality, fluidity, and agency posited by Heng (2019). This framework allows for an analysis of engaged policy and practice at the micro level, as well as the elucidation of the larger regulatory and policy context, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Figure 1

An Ecological Framework for Examining the Experiences of Early Study Abroad Students.



Policy Perspectives: Key Concepts

My examination of the experience of ESA students is shaped by concepts from the related fields of engaged language policy and planning (K. A. Davis, 2014; Menken & García, 2010; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Schecter et al., 2014) and, more broadly, critical policy analysis (Ball, 1993, 2015; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Levinson et al., 2009; Lingard & Ozga, 2006; Simons et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 1997). These scholars pay heed to the discursive construction of official policy texts that reproduce dominant narratives, while recognizing the role of informal or unauthorized policy (Ball, 1993, 2015; Lingard & Ozga, 2006; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Taylor et al., 1997). Critical theorists see policymaking as a multilayered, value-laden, and contested process (Ball, 1993, 2015; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Lingard & Ozga, 2006; Taylor et al., 1997). They are interested in the *process* of policymaking—both authorized and unauthorized—and the *practice* of policy enactment in localized contexts (Ball, 1993; Levinson & Sutton, 2001). *Engaged policy* researchers and practitioners in the critical tradition share a commitment to understanding policy consequences through a social justice and equity lens (Simons et al., 2009). They view advocacy as part of the policy analysis process and believe in the possibility of transformative action by engaged practitioners (K. A. Davis, 2014; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Levinson et al., 2009; Menken & García, 2010).

The Critical Lens

Critical policy research emerged as a field in the 1980s when theorists began to challenge the dominant positivist conceptualization of policy as developed and implemented in a rational, top-down manner (Ball, 1993; K. A. Davis, 2014; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Simons et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 1997). Scholars with a critical orientation problematize the dominant rational

approach to policy analysis, which accepts official policy texts at face value and measures their success based on the extent to which they are *implemented* as articulated in print (Simons et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 1997). They have broadened the definition of what constitutes policy to include "any vehicle or medium for carrying and transmitting a policy message" (Ozga, 2000, cited in Lingard & Ozga, 2006, p. 2). For example, in education, policy texts would include government documents, speeches, curricula, media releases and marketing/publicity materials. In addition, critical policy researchers began to examine the process of how policy is developed. Critical analysts posit that the traditional approach privileges authority and does not reflect the reality of how policy is developed or enacted locally (Levinson & Sutton, 2001). Politics and policymaking cannot be separated (Simons et al., 2009). As such, critical policy researchers conceptualize policy development as a dynamic and interrelated process influenced by broad social and economic forces as well as the localized concerns and the interests of groups and individuals (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Taylor et al., 1997).

Discourses versus Text

Policy texts reflect contested processes of "discursively suturing together differing interests to achieve apparent consensus and legitimacy" (Lingard & Ozga, 2006, p. 2). Ball (1993) reminds us that, despite the struggles that belie their construction, policy texts often reflect dominant discourses such as neoliberalism, management theory, globalization, and performativity. As such, official texts can "articulate and constrain the possibilities of interpretation and enactment" of actors at the local level (Ball, 1993, p. 15). These discourses shape our ideas and values about what is good teaching, what are good schools, what are good students and, in the case of language minority students, what languages matter. Similarly, and more specifically, dominant cultural and linguistic values are often embedded in official

language policy at the state level (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Research in the critical tradition is attentive to these discourses and questions whose voices are dominant, whose lie below the surface, and whose are missing altogether. In short, "the critical focus on policy cannot be disconnected from the focus on politics and power, and ultimately from values and debates on the social role of education" (Simons et al., 2009, p. 16).

Policy as (Engaged?) Practice

In practice, policies have unintended consequences beyond the control of their authors when they are taken up by policy actors at the local level (Ball, 1993; K. A. Davis, 2014; Gutiérrez Estrada, 2015; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Levinson et al., 2009; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Taylor et al., 1997). Notwithstanding the influence of history, tradition, and broadly accepted discourses such as globalization, critical theorists emphasize the potential agency of teachers, students, administrators, and researchers in policymaking at the local level (Ball, 1993, 2015; K. A. Davis, 2014; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Levinson et al., 2009; Schecter et al., 2014). Research into policy as practice in education explores how local actors "embed, extend, contextualize and in some cases transform" policy (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 770).

Policy researchers in this tradition tend to reject the use of term *implementation* in favour of concepts that are more reflective of the way practitioners mediate, struggle, and sometimes ignore official policy (Ball et al., 2012). Ball et al. (2012) use the term *enactment* to describe how policy is created in practice through the "interaction and interconnection between diverse actors, texts, and technology" in educational settings (p. 4.; see also A. Braun et al., 2010, 2011). In their theory of policy enactment in secondary schools, specifically, Ball et al. (2012) identify several roles that teachers play which impact how policies look in practice in various contexts, including narrators, entrepreneurs, outsiders, transactors, enthusiasts, translators, critics, and

receivers. In this sense, the authors make a distinction between those who actively engage with policy in various ways and those who may play a more passive role but nonetheless enact policy through their classroom practices.

Levinson et al, (2009) suggest that *appropriation* aptly elucidates the way "creative agents . . . negotiate and recursively form unauthorized policy," including through active resistance (p. 779). Researchers in the engaged language policy and practice tradition have used "negotiate, resist and adapt" to describe a consciously activist orientation among language practitioners who challenge official language policies they consider linguistically and socially unjust (Menken & García 2010, see also K. A. Davis, 2014). Focusing on the enactment of language education policy in local contexts through their "rigorous and committed participation in communities of practice," critically engaged language teachers have had transformative impacts in local contexts (K. A. Davis, 2014, p. 92). Menken and García (2010) suggest that educators can "carve out or close off spaces" where multilingualism can flourish (p. 4).

Studies of policy as practice use a variety of different sociocultural frameworks but maintain an analytical emphasis on how policies are enacted locally. For example, Cade (2001) conducted an ethnographic study of the enactment of federal education policy for children whose first language is not English in the American midwest. She examined how the intersection of metanarratives about immigrant experiences and official policy texts had a devastating impact on the education of one immigrant boy, in ways far beyond the intentions of the authors of the text (Cade, 2001). In another example of engaged language policy, Schecter et al. (2014) used comparative analysis to examine how "state level ideological frameworks and pressures [were] reflected in on-the-ground enactments of popular and institutional orientations towards linguistic distinctiveness and variations" in Spain and Ontario (p. 123). English and Varghese's (2010)

case study of two teachers struggling to implement language policy in an American school, demonstrated how individual educators can and do collaborate to meet the needs of their students, even without appropriate resources and support. They argued that "the wide disparities across the nation about how policies for ELLs are interpreted and put into practice make it critical to understand the circumstances when such instances are successful" (English & Varghese, 2010, p. 119).

The Importance of Context

Policy enactment in schools is a "creative, sophisticated, and complex process" (A. Braun et al., 2010, p. 549). In their extended case study of policy enactment in four similar secondary schools in the United Kingdom, A. Braun et al. (2010) highlight the complex ways that policy is enacted locally through processes that are mediated by contextual relationships. No two schools are alike, and no educational policy will ever be enacted the same way in different locales (A. Braun, et al., 2010). The researchers theorize four dimensions of context that create particular "policy enactment environments" in schools (A. Braun et al., 2011, p. 587):

- **situated contexts** (locale, intake, and setting),
- **professional contexts** (values, teacher commitment, and policy management).
- **material contexts** (staffing, budget, buildings, and infrastructure).
- **external contexts** (degree and quality).

This multiple case study of the enactment of one policy text in the United Kingdom illustrates how policy outcomes in each of the four schools are influenced by the unique confluence of these contexts (A. Braun, et al., 2011). Perhaps even more relevant to my proposal is Winton's (2013) study of how the four dimensions of context have influenced individual schools' understanding of "success." She examined how policy actors interpret a construct rather

than a discrete policy, a situation similar to that in my study. Influenced by different intakes and leaderships, the schools in Winton's (2013) study embraced subtly different concepts of success.

Policy Research Methods

Sociocultural perspectives and qualitative methods from anthropology and cultural studies have contributed to research examining "the meaning of policy in practice" (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 1). Researchers in this tradition adopt multidisciplinary approaches and engage at intersecting levels in the policy process (K. A. Davis, 2014; see also Gutiérrez Estrada, 2015; Levinson & Cade, 2002; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Menken & García, 2010; Schecter et al., 2014). They are committed to advocacy and seek "to create conditions necessary for the development of democratic participation" in the policymaking process (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 19). This research is engaged in the sense that it "promotes agency at the intersection of macro, meso and micro levels" and critical in that it embraces a Freirean intent to raise the consciousness of "actors involved in formulating or affected by policies" (K. A. Davis, 2014, p. 91).

Cycles and Onions: Analytical Frameworks

Several researchers have developed frameworks for the analysis and understanding of the complex and iterative way that policy is developed and enacted at all levels. Bowe et al. (1992) conceptualize the process of policy making as a cycle in which contexts of influence, text production, and practice/effect continually intersect. Their policy cycle model elucidates the relationship between dominant discourses that seem to establish universal truths and the reality of the way policies are contested in both formation and enactment (Bowe et al., 1992). The locus of power shifts between the three contexts, as the "various resources implicit and explicit in the text are re-conceptualized and employed" (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 13).

Vidovich (2007) further refined the policy cycle by adding three elements to address identified shortcomings in Bowe et al.'s (1992) model. She placed greater emphasis on globalization's impact on organizations and individuals at all levels. In addition, she argued for a greater acknowledgement of the state's ability to constrain individual actions. Finally, the hybridized policy cycle more explicitly highlights the two-way relationship between the levels of influence and text production within the cycle. Vidovich (2007) proposed that this hybridized version allows for recognition of various players in a policy network, while maintaining that they do not all have equal power.

In the parallel field of engaged language policy and planning, Ricento and Hornberger's (1996) similar elucidation of the policy process provides a fitting framework for a study of the ESA experience. Paying heed to the layers of "policymaking" in formal and enacted language education policy (and policy *i*n language education), they conceptualize the policy process metaphorically as an onion. There is an outer (macro) layer of broad state-level edicts; meso-institutional layers that develop and disseminate policy guidelines; and an inner layer where classroom practitioners enact or appropriate policy at micro/ local levels (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). The model lends itself to engaged and critical work and "promotes agency at the intersections of policy making" (K. A. Davis, 2014, p. 91).

The metaphor of the policy onion has been expanded and refined by Menken and García (2010). They position themselves and the other authors in their collected edition as part of a new wave of researchers who share Ricento and Hornberger's (1996) metaphorical conceptualization of policy formulation as multilayered, but they focus their lens on the inner core of the onion. Their collection of case studies of teachers working with language minority students "definitively puts to rest the unfortunate illusion that teachers—ever—simply and uncritically

enact policies handed down to them from above" (Palmer, 2014, p. 250). Rounding out the onion metaphor, they suggest that educators may be given a recipe and ingredients, but they make policy according to the ever-evolving context in which they work and their own experiences, values, and beliefs.

Theoretical Intersections, Affordances, and Synergies

Each of the above three theoretical frameworks has contributed to the development of my research perspective. I am interested in the dominance of globalization and internationalization infederal, provincial, and board-level discourse and policy texts that promote the integration of fee-paying students from around the world into local publicly funded contexts. However, I intend to focus on the complex way in which local actors enact practices in the superdiverse contexts that host these students. What are the intended and unintended consequences of this initiative, from the perspectives of the stakeholders at the inner core of this policy onion? Menken and García's (2010) adaptation of Ricento and Hornberger's (1996) onion, with a messy and agentive inner core, strikes me as conceptually similar to the ecological model of student experience outlined in Figure 1. While one framework focuses on relationships and the other on policy, both highlight the complex and iterative nature of local and state-level forces that determine the "experience" of students. These overlapping and complementary frameworks serve to focus my analytical lens on the experience of ESA students and their interaction with teachers and schooling structures, while acknowledging the impact of broader policies and discourses that influence their lives.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The Outer Layer: Internationalization and International Education

Definitions, Discourses, and Debates

Taking up the metaphor of the policy process as an onion, my review of relevant literature begins at the outer layer, with a discussion of internationalization and international education. Scholars have examined this process and the dominant, largely neoliberal discourses that have shaped it, extensively, at the postsecondary level. A smaller, but growing, body of research has begun to examine similar discourses about and within the K–12 sector in Canada with similar conclusions.

Definitions from Higher Education. Education, particularly at the postsecondary level, has always had an international quality. Visiting scholars, mobile students, and international research projects are neither new nor novel concepts in higher education. However, prior to the 1980s, these activities were largely "isolated and unrelated" (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011, p 16). Toward the end of the last century and into the 21st, the intensification of technological changes in communication, the rise of neoliberal trade, the inclusion of education in the General Agreement on Trade in Services in the 1990s, and the increased mobility of peoples have impacted student demographics, as well as pedagogy, content, and program delivery (Knight, 2004; Tarc, 2019). While the forces that spurred this intensification might be inevitable, institutions have had choices about whether to "cope with or exploit globalization" (Altbach, 2004, cited in Garson, 2016, p. 21).

International Education Versus the Internationalization of Education. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (2017) has described the range of activities that comprise IE as encompassing "inbound, outbound and internationalization at home" including learning

activities which focus on other countries or cultures and any activity that occurs outside the students' home country (p. 3). The spectrum includes ideologically driven activities that focus on learning outcomes, in the form of global citizenship education or intercultural education (Garson, 2016; Stromquist, 2002; Tarc 2019). Additionally, initiatives with positive financial benefits for hosting institutions, such as the recruitment and hosting of students from abroad, are included under the banner of IE. Tarc (2019) describes these dual pillars as *aspirational/normative* and *instrumental/literal* (p. 5).

Internationalization is the term most often used in higher education to describe institutionalized responses to "the compression of space and time caused by technology and economic competitiveness of globalization" (Stromquist, 2002, p. 81). What matters most, some theorists say, is the intentionality and comprehensiveness of institutional efforts, rather than the range of activities offered (CBIE, 2017; Garson, 2016; Hudzik, 2011; Knight, 2003, 2004). Proponents of comprehensiveness have called for "commitment confirmed through action" and a "whole campus approach" (Hudzik, 2011, p. 6). Knight's (2003) definition is considered the standard by many scholars and practitioners (Buckner & Stein, 2020):

> Internationalization at the national, sectoral, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education (Knight, 2003 p. 2).

In her discussion of the definition, Knight (2003) explained her choice of words. She used *process* deliberately to emphasize the "evolutionary" and "developmental" nature of institutional internationalization (p. 3). The terms *intercultural* and *global* were meant to signify the "breadth and scope" of cross-border personal relationships and express a pluralistic notion of

interculturality. *Integrating* was included to ensure that comprehensive internationalization remain central and sustainable (Knight, 2003, p. 3).

Critiques From the Field. Critical scholars, including Knight herself, have suggested that internationalization as a comprehensive concept has been slow to materialize, notwithstanding the aspirational rhetoric of this definition (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011; Buckner & Stein, 2020; Garson, 2016; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). Despite the broad range of activities under the banner of internationalization, most higher education institutions prioritize student mobility activities (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011; Buckner & Stein, 2020; Garson, 2016; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). In 2010, the International Association of Universities (IAU)'s global survey on globalization found that student exchanges and the recruitment of students had "the highest priority of institutional internationalization policies" (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011, p. 612). A decade later, Buckner and Stein's (2020) critical discourse analysis of recent publications by three major professional IE organizations reached similar conclusions. Their findings revealed that, despite a variety of activities, stakeholders, and programming, the effectiveness of international programs is largely measured by the extent to which institutions are "implementing new, often additive, forms of engagement" (Buckner & Stein, 2020, p. 161). They found an emphasis on "regions, languages and programs, and the quantity of international activities, rather than a more qualitative consideration of the ethical and political possibilities that are enabled by any particular activity" (Buckner & Stein, 2020, p. 164). These findings support Brandenburg and De Wit's (2011) claim that higher education institutions have focused on what institutions are doing, rather than what students are learning. Similarly, Garson (2016) suggests that the overall corporatization of internationalization activities, including the framing of students as

consumers, has led to a shift in emphasis on programs that support employability and threatens opportunities for a true epistemological pluralism (see also Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011).

Critical scholars also contend that the internationalization of education has perpetuated existing global inequities (Buckner & Stein, 2020, Garson, 2016; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). They note an inherent risk of academic imperialism in the Global North/West in terms of funding, access, and opportunity (Garson, 2016; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011). Globalization and internationalization have intensified long-established patterns of knowledge production dominated by Western higher education institutions that "reinforce centre-periphery tensions" (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011, p 613). Stein and de Andreotti (2020) have suggested that the "desire and ability" of Western countries to recruit students is rooted in a discourse of Western supremacy (p. 226). Although there are many reasons for studying internationally, students often cite the belief that a Western education will give them traction in the global marketplace (Garson, 2016).

Optimistically, Tarc (2019) contends that an emphasis on instrumental IE activities, including the recruitment of students, may be "accurate, but have little consequence" (p. 8) As such, he contends, an initial focus on the instrumental can lead to the aspirational (Tarc, 2019). As evidence he points to the emergence of programs such as IE degrees available at some universities, an increased interest in global citizenship education curricula, and the growth of programs like the International Baccalaureate (Tarc, 2019).

Others have posited that the mere presence of large groups of "foreign" students on college campuses does not necessarily lead to internationalization of the culture or curriculum (Buckner & Stein, 2020; Knight, 2011, J. Ryan, 2010). Numerous studies have cited incidents of racism, marginalization, and the othering of IS (Buckner & Stein, 2020; Guo & Guo, 2017; E.

Jones, 2017; Moon et al., 2020; J. Ryan, 2010). A related critique is directed at an associated reductionist equation of IS as "foreign" in contrast to "domestic" students (Buckner & Stein, 2020). This "false dichotomy" (E. Jones, 2017, p. 935) is noted by other scholars who remind us that college campuses are increasingly pluralistic (Garson, 2016). These scholars posit that binary notions of domestic and foreign students are inadequate conceptualizations for superdiverse campuses with students whose migratory status and cultural identity reflects an increasingly transnational pluralism or superdiversity (Arnaut, 2012; Vertovec, 2007, 2019). Consequently, internationalization should be understood less as a way of "encountering difference" than as a way to "encounter difference differently" (Buckner & Stein, 2020, p. 164).

The Canadian Context

The Neoliberal Shift in "International Education." In Canada, research using a critical lens has identified a dominant neoliberal discourse that touts the economic benefits of internationalization and is reflected in federal and provincial policy, postsecondary institutions, the popular media, and, increasingly, K–12 public education (El Masri, 2020; Elnagar, 2021; Elnagar & Young, 2021; Johnstone & Lee, 2014; Scott et al., 2015; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Trilokekar, 2013; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2017).

Stein and de Andreotti (2016) have situated the internationalization of higher education in Canada in a global imaginary of the "superiority and universality of western knowledge and education" (p. 231). They have identified discourses that conceptualize IS as cash by governments and institutions, as competition by some domestic students, and in some cases as the beneficiaries of charity. Similarly, using argumentative discourse analysis, El Masri (2020) identified three dominant storylines about postsecondary IE in Ontario: internationalization is good for the economy, it has manageable risks, and it is Canada's gateway to the world. The

assumption that IS are “ideal immigrants” is embedded in a federal strategy that seeks to increase Canada’s stakes in the growing global competition for IS (Scott et al., 2015). Studies have highlighted a gap between this rhetoric and the lived experiences of students who describe many barriers to their integration into the Canadian job market (El Masri & Khan, 2022; Scott et al, 2015: Trilokekar & El Masri, 2017).

Several scholars contend that a neoliberal shift in education reform has accelerated in the last two decades (Elnagar & Young, 2021; Johnstone & Lee, 2014; O’Sullivan, 1999; Tarc, 2023; Winton, 2022). Johnstone & Lee (2014) posited that for most of the 20th century the discourse in Canadian public schooling centred on education as a public good and a responsibility of the egalitarian welfare state. Similarly, O’Sullivan (1999) traced two paradoxical global paradigms in education reform, “economic competition” and “global interdependence,” and warned that the latter was losing ground to the former at the end of the last century. Tarc (2023) has argued that a neoliberal “global turn” is accompanied by rhetorically progressive notions of international cooperation and understanding, while prioritizing material dimensions such as funding. Elnagar and Young (2021) have employed the terms *learning driven* and *market driven* to describe juxtaposed approaches to K–12 IE and argue that the market-driven approach has gained precedence (p. 82). Their analysis of K–12 IE policy texts and discourse over the last two decades, federally and in several provinces, highlighted three prevailing neoliberal themes: “marketing K–12 public schooling institutions to international students; engaging the private sector in international education and expanding the international education community contexts to include new policy actors, like the federal government (Elnagar, 2021, p. 42). Johnstone & Lee (2014) have also cited a parallel between

the increased role of the federal government in education the increasing marketization of public education, with respect to the recruitment of students.

One way in which the federal role has had (perhaps) unintended but significant implications for the business of recruiting and hosting students is through regulating and processing the approval of custodianship for minors studying in Canada without their parents. Custodians must be Canadian citizens, agree to "make necessary arrangements for the care and support of the student" and "reside within a reasonable distance" of the student (IRCC, 2023). The federal government approves custodianship but does not monitor whether applicants adhere to these guidelines in any way (Mockute, 2016). Mockute (2016) has highlighted how policies and practices regarding custodianship in the U.K and Australia are more closely aligned with educational outcomes. In Canada, the less regulated approach has facilitated the further privatization of IE by giving impetus to the business of agents, recruiters, and homestay providers who perform the role for a fee (Bell et al., 2023). Indeed, concerns raised about the protection of "minor students, who represent a vulnerable population" have led to a review of the policy (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015, p. 38).

Notwithstanding the economic benefits of ESA students, Winton (2022) has argued that marketing K–12 schooling internationally is part of a wider trend toward privatization that is undermining "commitments to equal access, to opportunities, equity, open decision-making processes, and prioritizing the public that are foundational to public education ideals" (p. 4). Inequities arise when some districts are more successful than others at recruiting and, therefore, generating revenue. Moreover, she has noted that the cost of attending public school in Canada is unattainable for most students living in other countries and there appears to be little interest or

investment in making Canadian public education more accessible to marginalized populations (Winton, 2022).

The Middle Layer: Provincial and Board-Level Policy Enactment

Provincial Agendas

British Columbia. British Columbia's policy landscape has been examined critically by several scholars in the last decade. Fallon and Poole (2014) have argued that the phenomenon is linked to the "creeping privatization" underlying public education in the province (p. 302). They cite policy changes that enabled school districts to create for-profit companies while simultaneously cutting provincial support for public education through the downloading of costs (Fallon & Poole, 2014). More recently, they analyzed the impact of the marketization of public education on school funding, finding that the recruitment of ESA students has resulted in competition between districts and, ultimately, exacerbated geographic inequality within the province (Poole et al., 2020). Cover's (2016) discourse analysis of government documents and texts from provincial media on K–12 international programs identified two themes: i*nternationalization* with its social and cultural benefits and *marketization* with its associated economic benefits. He concluded that there isn't a "homogeneous and cohesive discursive approach" but suggested that the absence of public questioning of these programs may relate to the "dominance of marketization and associated neoliberal values already saturating the public sphere" (p. 193). Finally, Deschambault (2019) has explored the link between the province's economic and "understated" language policies, emphasizing the commodification of language learning evident in the targeted recruitment of students from countries where English is not the dominant or primary language (p. 55). Furthermore, the distinction between "fee-paying

international students" and domestic ELLs has led to inequities in funding and has impacted the language socialization practices of public schools (Deschambault, 2019).

Manitoba. The period between 2001 and 2016 was one of accelerated IE policy development in Manitoba (Elnagar & Young, 2021; Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). A desire to "enhance socio-cultural diversity in the province" seems to be a driving impetus for the *Manitoba International Education Strategy*, *2009–2013* (Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020, p. 41; see also Elnagar & Young, 2021). In addition, Manitoba is the only province to legislate IE policies and practices with an act of parliament, which limits the number of students and regulates the provision of quality education and care. An early initiative, the International Education Loan Fund, was intended to encourage public education institutions to internationalize their programs and allow interested local school divisions to build their capacities related to the provision of international student programs. Nonetheless, Elnagar and Young (2021) have noted that the current government views the recruitment of students as favourable for the economy and that boards of education regard ESA students as a solution to declining enrolment. Trilokekar and Tamtik (2020) similarly concluded that the prevailing dominant IE discourse in Manitoba stresses the economic benefits that fee-paying students bring to the province, the schools that host them, and the communities in which they temporarily live.

Ontario. Analyses of *Ontario's Strategy for K–12 International Education* have reached similar conclusions about the emphasis on the economic benefits associated with the marketization of Ontario's public education system (Bell et al, 2023; Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). The Ontario strategy strives to reach a rhetorical balance between the aspirational and the instrumental (Bell et al., 2023). For example, the document asserts that international students bring value to Ontario through intercultural engagement with domestic students, while

suggesting they can contribute to the financial stability of boards of education and schools with declining enrolment (Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). Bell et al. (2023) note that the framing of the strategy's four main objectives implicitly suggests that "financial and pragmatic considerations—growth and reinvestment—set the conditions for the idealistic and aspirational dimension of IE" (p. 16). Trilokekar and Tamtik (2020) have observed that, despite claiming that achievement against *all* the goals will be measured, only the financial benefits are quantified in the strategy document. Finally, despite emphasizing the role that teachers play in meeting the strategy's aspirational goals such as supporting language learning and intercultural engagement, there is no commitment to training or raising awareness of these pedagogical priorities (Bell et al., 2023; Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2020) .

Meso Level Policy Enactment

Leadership Networks. Taking another approach to the enactment of provincial IE policy, Tamtik (2018) and J. Davis (2017) have studied IE leadership networks in, respectively, Manitoba and British Columbia. J. Davis's (2017) unpublished multiple case study examined international program leaders in British Columbia. His research shed light on the "lack of knowledge" about these programs within their own districts and attempted to "understand theoretical foundations that may influence those who are in leadership positions in these programs" (p. 3). He illuminated the complex task of administering a program with multiple stakeholders including staff, students, homestay families, parents, and agents. From a leadership perspective, J. Davis (2017) emphasized the importance of context, such as size of school, district alignment, and the need for "relational coordination and compassionate collaboration" when dealing with some of the challenges and problems that International Program leaders face"

(p. 205). In short, the study revealed a myriad of options for local enactment and illustrated the relevance of context, as theorized by A. Braun et al. (2011).

In her study of the emergence of K–12 IE policies in Manitoba, Tamtik (2018) employed a distributed leadership approach to make sense of a complex administrative web of "overlapping responsibilities and blurred lines of authority" (p. 20). Her analysis was based on an examination of policy documents and semi-structured interviews with educational administrators at the provincial and school level. Using a distributed leadership approach, she focused on three dynamics—actors, processes, and outcomes. The process she described captured the complexity, messiness, and iterative nature of policymaking, while emphasizing "the potential of school administrators to have an important advocacy role in the province" (p. 27). Noting that Manitoba is "regarded as a leader in regulating and supporting these activities," she positioned her conclusions as a lesson for those in K–12 international leadership positions (p. 20).

International Education in Ontario's Boards of Education. Lindenberg (2015) documented a wide range of policy enactment practices among Ontario's public Boards of Education, demonstrating how material contexts like board size and situated contexts like the existing level of cultural diversity impact programmatic supports and options available for students. Similar findings emerged from Bell et al.'s (2023) qualitative exploration of the link between board-level policies and practices and the goals articulated in the Ontario strategy. This study situated board-level administrators within a broader group of policy actors including OASDI, private recruiters, homestay providers, and ultimately the strategy itself. Like Lindenberg (2015), the authors found that situated contexts impacted recruitment practices, admission standards, accommodation, and the level of support offered to ESA students across the

province. However, there was little evidence that any of the board-level IE offices were actively pursuing (or investing in) the more aspirational goals of the Ontario strategy. With one exception, administrators in the study were unable to define their board's vision for IE or internationalization beyond the business of recruiting students.

Finally, Gyamerah et al.'s (2022) recent case study of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) found a similar emphasis on recruiting students, which they characterized as a neoliberal market response to austerity cutbacks and declining enrolment. As evidence of the acceptance of the "logic of recruitment as revenue generation," the authors cited the lack of discussion about the TDSB's immediate increase in fees following the provincial government's announcement that they would take 10% of tuition (Gyamerah at al., 2022, pp. 76–77). In addition, the authors found no indication that recruiting students from other countries is explicitly addressed by or contributes to the board's strategic goals, beyond generating revenue.

The Inner Core: Teachers and ESA Students

Teachers as Policy Actors: Enactment Without Scripts

In their analysis of Ontario's strategy, Trilokekar & El Masri (2020) referred to teachers as the missing link in the provincial government's ability to realize its aspirational IE goals. They interviewed policy actors from the Ministry of Education, OASDI, the Ontario College of Teachers, and two faculties of education, and reported a unanimous belief that Ontario teachers are lacking in international and intercultural teaching skills. Furthermore, they noted that "while there is an overall emphasis on diversity, equity, and social justice agendas, these themes are more associated with immigration" than with IE (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2020, p. 191).

A tendency for educators to equate ESAs with all ELLs was found by Bell and Trilokekar (2022) in focus group discussions with teachers in four urban Ontario schools. The conflation of

these two groups of students may not have the same repercussions for funding and equity in Ontario that Deschambault (2019) delineates in British Columbia, where non-residents are not funded for ELL support. However, similar cautionary inferences are made about educators who view a language deficit as the primary characteristic of all ELL/ESA students being tasked to teach superdiverse classrooms. Focus group participants described being overwhelmed by the demands of teaching multilingual students. The differences between the teachers who were struggling and the smaller group who described being comfortable in this context were personal migration experiences, living abroad as language learners, or having taken additional qualification courses in teaching ESL. None of the research participants, including a recent Bachelor of Education graduate, recalled receiving direct instruction in teaching intercultural/multilingual classrooms in their formal teacher education programs. All the participants expressed a desire for more information, resources, and opportunities to collaborate with other teachers (Bell & Trilokekar, 2022).

Indeed, the desire and need for more support in this regard is well documented. Teacher Candidates (TCs) have reported feeling inadequately prepared to teach linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms in several studies (Bale et al., 2019; Cummins & Persad, 2014; Faez, 2012; Tandon et al., 2017; Webster & Valeo, 2011; see also Portolés & Martí, 2020, for similar research in Europe). A decade ago, Webster and Valeo (2011) reported that TCs in Ontario felt inadequately prepared to support ELLs in their classrooms. They noted a tendency among some TCs to homogenize ELLs and/or to equate their needs with those of children with intellectual disabilities. The authors concluded that effective teacher training programs must include an emphasis on "a cohesive systemic change including theories of language acquisition, diversity issues and learning needs," which should be addressed in a mandatory course, as well

as field practice (p. 109). In 2015, when Ontario's of Education program was expanded from 1 to 2 years, both the Ministry of Education and the Ontario College of Teachers recommended that these skills be included in the new curriculum but fell short of mandating a course.

Several studies conducted in the wake of this call for changes to teacher education allude to continued large-scale lack of knowledge and awareness among teacher candidates (Bale et al., 2019: Kerekes et al., 2021). Kerekes et al. (2021) have cited "inadequate funding and resources" for "quality ESL programming" as problematic, particularly in areas with high concentrations of ELL and English literacy development (ELD) learners, hence putting "certain subgroups of MLs [multilingual leaners] at a disadvantage" (p. 21). Finally, a recent study published by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (Donohoo, 2020) concluded that policies and practices developed to support ELLs (which officially includes "international students" in Ontario) have been implemented inconsistently across the province. Despite not interviewing teachers directly, the authors of the report recommended greater resources and support including professional development and collaborative opportunities to increase educator capacity and efficacy (Donohoo, 2020).

ESA Students and Policy Impacts

At the very core of the onion, a few studies, telling despite their small number, have explored the lived experience of ESA students in Canadian schools. These studies highlight unintended policy consequences of recruiting and hosting students from abroad in Canada and underscore how the enactment of policy as practice by counsellors, teachers, and homestay providers can make a crucial difference in the lives of these students.

Why Canada? Relatively few scholars have examined the push-pull factors that have contributed to students' choice of Canada as a global study destination (Chen, 2017; Liu, 2016;

Tamtik, 2019; Wu & Tarc, 2022). Liu (2016) emphasized aspects of Chinese culture that influenced families' decision to send their students abroad, namely a predisposition to value education at all costs, a saving culture that enables middle-class families to invest heavily in their children's education, and an extended family culture. Although his study was based on postsecondary students, Chen (2017) found the stress of university entrance exams to be a push factor for Chinese undergraduate students studying in Canada. One can infer that this is a factor for Chinese parents and children at the K–12 level as well. Students in Chen's (2017) study were also motivated by a desire to learn English and a perception that an American or Canadian education provided opportunities for advancement. Chen (2017) posited that Canada's favourable immigration policies may be an additional pull factor for Chinese students and their families.

Wu and Tarc's (2022) ethnographic research on Chinese students at a private school in Ontario reported similar findings with respect to avoidance of university entrance exams, as well as a desire for a high-status Western university educational qualification and English-language fluency and knowledge (p. 651). Tamtik (2019) offers insight into the motivations of primarily European parents of elementary-aged study abroad children in Manitoba. Her research participants identified a general interest in the economic and cultural benefits of international study, including an English education, and country-specific factors such as Canada's reputation for safety, relatively lower tuition rates, and more favourable immigration policies as determining factors in their decision-making (Tamtik, 2019).

Postsecondary International Students in Canada. Studies at the postsecondary level reveal several issues that are salient for students of all ages. A study at a western Canadian university focused on housing challenges (Calder et al., 2016). In addition to the suitability of

residences, students reported difficulty with travel, including commute times, and unfamiliar cultural norms in homestays. Even cold winter temperatures were cited as problematic (Calder et al., 2016). Housing issues also emerged as one of four themes in Zhou and Zhang's study (Zhang & Zhou, 2010; Zhou & Zhang, 2014), along with social integration, the availability of support services, and difficulty finding places in an unfamiliar cultural and geographic context. Guo and Guo (2017) have drawn attention to gaps between neoliberal policy approaches that focus on the marketing aspects of IE and the lived experiences of students in a university in western Canada. They found that international students struggle to integrate with the local community and problematize the limited internationalization of the curriculum (Guo & Guo, 2017). Carter (2016) found that specific interventions like welcoming homestays, strong orientation programs, and pedagogy embedded with strong second-language instruction helped to support the acculturation of students.

In a survey of literature on the experiences of postsecondary international students before, during, and after their time in school, El Masri & Khan (2022) highlighted additional pre-arrival issues. Reported problems included false or unrealistic expectations about the cost of living in Canada, especially the GTA, difficulty obtaining and renewing study permits in a timely fashion, and difficulties caused by unethical recruiting practices. In the latter case, the authors noted that most colleges have little oversight over the private agencies that recruit students and that the commission structure encourages maximizing enrolment numbers without accountability (El Masri & Khan, 2022). Given the extensive use of recruiting agencies, often the same ones, at the K–12 level, one might surmise a similar problem for ESA students, particularly those without local contacts or alternative networks of information.

The K—12 ESA Experience. Notwithstanding contextual, demographic, and academic differences in K–12 educational settings, similar findings emerge from studies on ESA students. Consistently, scholars of K–12 education conclude that ESA students have challenges with integration in relation to language learning, social isolation, and adapting to a new culture (Deschambault, 2019; Kuo & Roysircar, 2004, 2006; Nelson, 2013; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023; Wu & Tarc, 2022). The stories of isolation and the linguistic, social, and cultural adaptations that ESA students face tend to be even more compelling when one considers that ESAs often face these challenges without the daily support of their families at a critical time of intellectual and physical growth in their lives (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004, 2006; Popadiuk, 2009; 2010; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023; Wong et al., 2010).

One of the earliest studies was Kuo and Roysircar's (2006) quantitative survey of Taiwanese "unaccompanied sojourners" in a large Canadian city, which found that a "significant number" of students felt "ill-prepared and not adequately orientated" (p. 159). Findings indicated a "significant gap" between their expectations and their experiences (p. 170). Popadiuk (2009, 2010) used the critical incident method to identify factors that hindered or facilitated the adjustment of Asian students in Vancouver high schools. Although much of her work focused on the resiliency of these students, she painted a picture of "complex, multi-layered transition," including having to shoulder responsibilities that their counterparts do not have such as expectations of success, loneliness, and homesickness (p. 1541). Nelson's (2013) research in a Coquitlam school district also cited difficult transitions fraught with struggles to establish relationships with students beyond those from the same country of origin. One of the darkest images of the risks posed to ESA students was painted by health care professionals in British

Columbia, who found that secondary students living in homestays are "more vulnerable to poor health outcomes," particularly females who are at greater risk of sexual abuse and cocaine use (Wong et al., 2010).

More recently, studies have reported similar themes of social isolation, lack of access to information and resources, and language socialization and acculturation issues (Schecter & Bell, 2021; Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023; Wu & Tarc, 2022). Schecter and Bell (2021) noted that "social isolation and cultural alienation" were often exacerbated by pressure to succeed quickly. Teachers and administrators from the GTA described students who showed "symptoms of depression," particularly during times of transition (Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023, p. 76; see also Schecter & Bell, 2021). Wu and Tarc's (2022) ethnographic study of Chinese students in a private Ontario school concluded that students felt caught up "in multiple contested forces in transnational spaces as they attempted to accumulate educational qualifications, social connections and knowledge in Canada" (p. 656).

One of the few quantitative studies on the experiences of ESA students in Ontario is Zheng's (2014) research report on the academic achievement, engagement, and well-being of ESA students in the TDSB. The study analyzed data on 3,900 students in 13 cohorts over 8 years. Measured by indicators such as credit accumulation and absenteeism, ESA students who graduated from the TDSB were found to fare as well as or better than their peers. However, the study noted that it often takes students 5 years to accumulate the credits necessary to graduate. Significantly, 50% of students either dropped out or transferred before completing their 5th year. In addition, a survey of questions about student attitudes toward mental health and well-being indicated that ESA students were more engaged and felt safer than their peers. However, as Deschambault (2019) pointed out, although the study disaggregated ESA students from the rest

of the student population, it did not solicit feedback about the services or experiences that are unique to this cohort, including any information about English language learning or living accommodations.

Factors that have been found to impact ESA student transition positively include interpersonal competence and age of arrival (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004, 2006); receiving helpful advice or information; positive interactions with others and the new environment (Popadiuk, 2009, 2010); and strong academic performance, ability to speak English, and opportunities to use their first language (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011). Nelson (2013) also highlighted the importance of personal relationships for ESA students in British Columbia, although none of the students who participated in his research cited "school counselors and teachers" as a source of support. Rather, the students in his study primarily relied on homestay families and friends from their home country for support. In contrast, Popadiuk (2010) noted that "it is incumbent upon schools" and, especially, guidance counsellors to assist fee-paying students (p. 1542). Schecter and Bell (2021), reporting findings from a participatory action research project, concluded that "a sense of social connection among and with ESA students is key to their academic engagement and sociocultural inclusion" and emphasized the role of school-based caring adults (p. 20). Throughout the project, partnered educators and researchers pursued a "pedagogy of social contact," strengthening ESA students' capacity and agency through the deliberate nurturing of relationships (Schecter & Bell, 2021, p. 20).

Summary

This overview of relevant literature reveals insights and identifies gaps in our understanding of the K–12 ESA policy landscape from the outer layers of the onion to the school experience at the core. At the federal and provincial levels, government discourses

overwhelmingly emphasize the economic benefits of internationalization. Further, many actors are involved in various struggles over priorities, leadership, and financial gain in addition to the education, care, and custodianship of ESA students. In Ontario—the province with the largest number of students, the fastest-growing cohort, and the least regulated environment—little research exists at any level of the policy cycle. A need for more qualitative, ethnographic research into lived experiences has been noted by scholars of this area (Deschambault, 2019; Elnagar & Young, 2021). I propose to address some of this research gap by speaking to ESA students and educators in one superdiverse local context, to gain insight and understanding into how they enact, appropriate, or disregard policy.

Chapter 4: Methodology

As noted in Chapter 1, my research goal was to explore the lived experiences of ESA students in a superdiverse public secondary school. I was guided by the following questions:

- *How do Early Study Abroad students describe their experience in a public Ontario secondary school?*
- *How do teachers describe the experience of Early Study Abroad students in a public Ontario secondary school?*
- *In what ways do official policies and enacted practices impact the experience of students at this level?*

I used a qualitative research design to conduct "a systematic and planned investigation" of this little-examined academic and social phenomenon (Lichtman, 2006, p 4). In this chapter, I elaborate on this process.

Research Paradigm and Stance

I situate myself in a constructivist/interpretivist research tradition that views the world as "socially constructed through interaction where there are multiple realities and meaning is agreed upon in natural settings" (Durdella, 2019, p. 91). Each actor in the broad social setting of a school, whether teacher, counsellor, student, or other, perceives the reality of the ESA experience in different ways and creates meaning for themself. A qualitative research approach enabled me to understand, analyze, and explain the narratives of "student experience" as described by my selected participants (Durdella, 2019; Erickson, 1986; Maxwell, 2013). My study methodology was further informed by a critical perspective, rejecting a postpositivist notion of a linear relationship between formal policy texts and the lived experience of students. I acknowledge that there are consequences (intended or not) of discourses, texts, and the practices of those who

recruit, educate, and care for these adolescents, including their families; however, I believe that actors at the local level have agency to enact policy in multiple ways. I situate myself within a critical tradition that questions the values underlying the enterprise, examines social justice implications for ESA students and their domestic peers, and highlights the practices of those in authority whose actions or inactions impact student experience, either positively or negatively (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

A key element of the critical policy research orientation is a commitment to being explicit about one's stance (K. A. Davis, 2014; Simons et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 1997; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). As such, it is important that I state my own position with respect to IE and the hosting of ESA students in the public system. I am drawn to this topic, in part, because it is both theoretically and, for me, morally complex. I question the dominant discourse about the espoused values and educational benefits of the enterprise of recruiting students from abroad. As highlighted by numerous scholars in my literature review, the broader goals of K–12 "International Education" are largely neoliberal in orientation and instrumental in practice (Elnagar & Young, 2021, Fallon & Poole, 2014; Johnstone & Lee, 2013; Winton, 2022). I share the concern expressed by these theorists that the IE agenda in our public system is both an outcome and a driver of the increasing marketization of public education. IE is good, it would seem, for a privileged group of students from relatively few countries whose fees contribute to the bottom line and help shore up declining enrolment numbers in Ontario schools.

Furthermore, I am skeptical that the valued contribution that many ESA students made to our school, including my own classroom, had much to do with their fee-paying status. They were a diverse group of students, among many other linguistic and cultural cohorts in a contemporary urban educational setting, and like all others they brought assets and strengths along with

challenges and struggles. My stance in this regard is clarified in my previous chapters and in related articles I have published (Bell et al., 2023; Bell & Trilokekar, 2022).

At the same time, I am a teacher with commitments to and concerns for the education and welfare of the students in front of me. Admirably, many of my ESA students were hardworking, resilient, and engaging young people with a strong sense of familial responsibility. However, I bore witness to ESA students who experienced unintended and potentially harmful consequences of a loosely regulated policy framework that does not always adequately address their welfare or educational needs. They were often unaware of the expectations, demands, and available (or lacking) supports prior to their arrival and, while many were able to navigate their way successfully, for some the struggle was overwhelming. These contrasting realities create an intellectual tension for me, which I have not yet entirely resolved but most certainly has impacted my interpretation and analysis of the narratives at the core of my research.

Methodological Approach: A (Modified) Ethnographic Case Study

The Interpretive Lens

My initial research design comprised an ethnographic case study of an Ontario public secondary school that hosts ESA students. Erickson (1986) preferred the term *interpretive*, rather than *qualitative*, to describe the family of research methods, including ethnography, that are essentially concerned with "human meaning in social life and in its elucidation and exposition by the researcher (p. 119). Ethnographers often focus on areas where there is a deficit of in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon, as is the case with the experiences of ESA students in Ontario.

Ethnography is descriptive and interpretive and sheds light on "microscopic details" that comprise the "wall-sized culturescapes" of organizations or societies (Geertz, 1973, p. 19). As such, the ethnographer adopts an emic or insider, perspective, so in tune with the culture of the

participants that they are able to discern winks from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones (Geertz, 1973). Yet one cannot be so immersed in the setting that one does not notice what is unique about the context. Researchers in this tradition try to explain what is going on in a particular setting from the perspective of the actors involved (Erickson,1986; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Maxwell, 2013).

A defining characteristic of ethnography is an epistemological belief in the reflexivity of the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Ethnographers do not develop hypotheses and test them out; rather they are interested in describing what happens, identifying patterns as they emerge, and building theoretical explanations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). While I cannot claim to have no opinion about the education of ESA, I certainly could not claim to know enough about their lives or what occurred in classrooms other than my own to make theoretical or interpretive claims prior to engaging in this research.

Case Study Approach

A qualitative case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, a person, a process or a social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. xii, cited in Yazan, 2015, p. 139). Merriam (1998) posits three defining characteristics of a qualitative case study: it is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (cited in Durdella, 2019; Yazan, 2015). Qualitative case studies use methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and thick description to arrive at an interpretation of the culture of a particular setting (Durdella, 2019; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The case study approach embraces what Maxwell (2013) refers to as the practical goals of qualitative research: the generation of results that are understandable and credible; an intention to improve practices and policies; and, often, the participation or collaboration of participants in the study. Case studies employing ethnographic

approaches are used frequently to study the enactment of policy in practice and to "elucidate the complexity of the policy process" (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 4; see also K. A. Davis, 2014; Levinson & Cade, 2002; Schecter et al., 2014).

My role as a teacher and curriculum leader in a diverse urban secondary school provided me with an emic, or insider, perspective on a bounded context and access to a large cohort of ESA students and their teachers. Having taught at the school for a decade, I believed that I was well positioned to use my knowledge of the context and professional culture of the school to develop further insights into what was occurring. Further, my status as a part-time researcher in a participatory action project at the site during the first year of my PhD program (Schecter & Bell, 2021) allowed me to stay involved in the school while on leave while honing my observational research skills.

Research Setting

The setting for this research study is an urban secondary school in a major metropolitan city in Ontario. The school, which has been referred to elsewhere as Ravenswood, was a good choice for reasons of purpose and convenience (Maxwell, 2013; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In many respects it is typical of urban schools that host ESA students (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). At the same time, like all schools, it presents a particular environment for policy enactment, forged by the intersection of four contextual dimensions: situated, professional, material, and external (A. Braun et al., 2011).

Four Dimensions of Context

Situated Context. Ravenswood is situated within the boundaries of a large urban centre. It is easily accessible by public transit and draws students from a wide catchment area in the city. The school population is approximately 900 students, a decline from over 1,200 some 15 years earlier. There are approximately 60 teachers on staff, including three full-time guidance

counsellors. Ravenswood has both full and extended French programs, which attract students from across the metropolitan area. The school also offers a full range of ESL classes from beginner to advanced and several courses that are designated as ESL accommodated, such as history, geography, and civics. Like many secondary schools that host ESA students in this urban board, there is a large population of newcomers (permanent residents and refugees) to Canada. More than 70% of the students enrolled at Ravenswood speak a language other than English or French at home.

While Ravenswood has always been culturally and linguistically diverse, the school has experienced a demographic shift in the last 10 to 15 years. In addition to a growing cohort of ESA students, there has been an increase in students from the Philippines, who are often reuniting with family members after years apart. Like ESAs, these students belong to strong transnational networks with distinct relationships and settlement patterns, contributing to the superdiversity of the school. However, it is fair to say that students from the Philippines have garnered more attention from teaching staff and administration, primarily because of their relatively poor academic performance, particularly among boys (Guerrero et al., 2022; Kelly et al., 2014).

As well, the growth of the ESA student population at Ravenswood over the past decade has accelerated. In the 2019–20 academic year there were approximately130 ESA students in the school, comprising 14% of the total student population of 900. As noted, these students helped to slow the tide of declining domestic enrolment at the school. Ravenswood's ESA students come from several countries including China, South Korea, Vietnam, Iran, Turkey, Cambodia, and Japan. There are also a small number from Mexico and Europe. The increasing heterogeneity of the ESA population reflects a trend, at least in the GTA, toward a relative decrease in the

numbers of students from China, which nonetheless is still the largest cohort. Ravenswood's large Iranian ESA population is also something of an anomaly. Reflecting the demographic of the neighbourhood, the school has always had a significant number of students from Iran; however, that cohort now includes second generation students, recent immigrants, ESA students, and occasionally refugees. Several years ago, for example, the school had a student who was registered as a fee-paying ESA student, while his parents, who were still in Iran, were applying for refugee status for the whole family. Such is the superdiverse nature of the school.

Ravenswood's ESA students range in age from 15 to 19 years and are found in grades from 9 through 12. Some of them stay with family, many live in homestays, and a few live on their own or room with other students. During the pandemic, the number of ESA students declined precipitously, with many new students opting to study virtually from their home country or defer their studies altogether. The students who participated in my research were part of a cohort of approximately 40 students who stayed at Ravenswood in the fall of 2020. One of them completed their last semester through the virtual school, which consisted of online classes that were centrally coordinated and delivered. In the latter scenario, Ravenswood was considered their "home school" for administrative purposes and guidance support. The variety of methods by which students completed their OSD while enrolled at Ravenswood attested to the necessary flexibility of the teachers and students during the pandemic.

Professional Context. My description of Ravenswood's professional context is subjective, reflecting my emic perspective as both an observer and a participant in the culture over a decade. As is the situation in many schools, the professional context is "not necessarily consistent or uncontested" (A. Braun et al., 2011, p. 591). There are multiple perspectives, values, and pedagogical approaches at play in Ravenswood. A number of teachers have taught at

the school for several decades. As a result, until quite recently teachers who were newer to the profession often held "long term occasional" (temporary) positions or were moved from school to school as part of the annual seniority placement process. I found these temporary teachers were often well versed and comfortable with critical pedagogical strategies, including culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy or allowing the use of multiple languages in the classroom. They were less inclined than some of their older colleagues to compare the school and the students unfavourably to the way they used to be.

For the most part, Ravenswood had a collegial atmosphere and there was much good will between teachers, even those whose pedagogical practices and beliefs were not aligned. I would describe most teachers as well-meaning and there was a core who devoted extraordinary amounts of time to supporting students outside class academically and through extracurriculars. However, when it came to the overall academic achievement of the school, there was a lack of consensus about the nature and extent of the perceived "problem" and the most appropriate and effective solutions to address it. There was a commonly voiced narrative about how the school had become "less academic" than it had been, and many teachers voiced the opinion that this reputation contributed to the school's declining enrolment. At staff meetings, Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) scores that had slipped below the provincial average in the last decade and similar concerns about numeracy skills were commonly discussed issues. As well, there was widespread discourse about student apathy. Certain populations were, I believe unjustly, dismissed by some members of the teaching staff as academically weak, including "ESL students" who were, according to some, weaker and not as driven as they had been in the past.

Material Context. Ravenswood is housed in a 60-year-old building, reflective of

midcentury architecture. While it did not show the dramatic signs of neglect that plague many of the city's older schools, the school budget seemed strained. Facilities like the music room, the swimming pool, and the gymnatorium were serviceable but hardly state-of-the-art. Computers and internet technology were a step or two behind the times. Prior to the pandemic, WiFi was still not available throughout the school and most classes had just one computer. Indeed, when classes moved online after the onset of the pandemic, many teachers were compelled to work from home because they did not have computers with cameras in their classrooms. Generally, the student body was not affluent and most students did not own laptops. In the 2 years prior to the pandemic some noticeable material improvements were made, and since 2020 the technology situation has improved immensely, as significant investments were made board-wide.

External Context. A. Braun et al. (2011) describe the external context as including, "aspects such as pressures and expectations from broader local and national policy matters… . . . as well as the degree and quality of local authority support and relationships with other schools" (p. 594). Of significance to my study is the sense that there was external pressure from the board, the provincial government, and perhaps the local community to improve literacy test scores and return Ravenswood to its former reputation as an "academic" school of high standing in the community. Administrators at the school and from the board emphasized the need for data both to document academic benchmarks and measure the success of initiatives to improve them. There were few direct supports for ESA students who were struggling, but at the same time there was pressure to ensure that they did not drop out or go to another school. As noted, there was concern that the school was "less academic" than it had been and as a result was losing local domestic students to other schools in the area that were seen as competitors.

Negotiating Access

My project received permission to proceed from the university ethics committee, the board of education's external research committee, and the school principal. The board of education expressed concern that my study remain anonymous and requested that I not publish information that would reveal the identity of the board or the school, which I believe I have honoured. My description of the context applies to many schools in urban Ontario. However, because of the request for anonymity I have withheld some geographic, demographic, and financial information that might have provided a fuller description of the material and situated contexts of the school.

Site Disruption and Adaptation.

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted my research setting; significant adaptation was required in this unfamiliar and shifting context. Teachers and students had to adjust several times to changes in the method of course delivery from online to in-person to hybrid classroom scenarios. The quadmester system introduced in response to the pandemic was designed to maximize social distancing during in-person instruction. In this new instructional model, students took two credit courses every 10 weeks, taking one course 2 days in a row. Teachers met with half the students in the class in the morning (either online or in-person) while the rest of the class worked independently from home. In the afternoon the whole class met online. On alternate mornings, the groups were flipped. The same format remained in place until the fall of 2022. During this time, school shifted back and forth from fully online to hybrid. Teacher colleagues reported that they were exhausted and applying all their energy to adjusting their teaching style and methods to the ever-changing context. Moreover, as they were teaching

primarily from their homes, several of them told me that they also felt disconnected from the school context at this time.

The situation imposed a consequential condition on my study. I was informed that I could not do onsite visits until the schools were operating fully in-person. In the summer of 2020, I was hopeful that the fall would see a return to "normal" school operations, but it soon became evident that this was not going to happen. I was faced with the choice of delaying my data collection or revising my research design. Although I attended staff meetings, observed online classes, and worked as an online substitute teacher, it was difficult for me to position myself as an insider in this ever-changing context. Moreover, while I could observe my colleagues' teaching methods online, it was nearly impossible to engage with students or gauge their response to what was happening. Allowing students to keep their cameras off while in class was a policy that was enacted immediately, out of privacy concerns for students and their families, and remained in place throughout the pandemic. As discussed in my findings, this scenario did not yield much meaningful information about the engagement/interaction of individual students. Given the shift in context, the interview component of my plan took precedence.

Participants

Participant Selection

Students and teachers were chosen purposefully, using the principle of maximum variation, as well as for convenience (Maxwell, 2013).

Student Participants

Recruiting student participants online proved to be a little more challenging than I had envisioned because access to students was more limited than before the pandemic. Nonetheless, I was successful in finding students who fit my criteria with regard to age, length of time, and

country of origin. I used my professional contacts at the school who were familiar with the students and their backgrounds to help me recruit research participants. I also outlined my research goals to ESA students I met during several online activities and workshops organized as part of the ongoing SSHRC-funded research project in which I am involved. I recruited students, purposively, from several countries including China and Iran, home countries of the two largest ESA cohorts at the school. This was done to reflect the diversity of the ESA population at Ravenswood and to distinguish my study from earlier studies that had focused mainly on students with a shared cultural and linguistic background (Kuo & Roysicar. 2004, 2006; Nelson; 2013; Popadiuk; 2009, 2010). My interview participants were all in their final semesters of study; they had been in Canada for varying lengths of time but all of them had completed at least one full year of study prior to the interview. Three of them started in Grade 9 or 10 and the other three began after completing the equivalent of Grade 11 in their home countries. I limited my participant pool to students who were18 years of age or older and could legally consent to be interviewed without parental permission. Table 2 provides a profile summary of the students I interviewed, who are described in more detail below.

- Guo is from China and attended Ravenswood from the fall of 2016 to June 2020, when he graduated with his OSD. He is currently studying business at the University of Toronto, as an online/virtual student.
- Cam came from Vietnam in 2017 and graduated in the spring of 2021. She is studying nursing at Seneca College and hopes to complete a Bachelor of Science through York University.
- Nuon, from Cambodia, began Grade 10 at Ravenswood in the fall of 2017 and graduated in June 2020. When I interviewed her, she was planning to study business and tourism at

Seneca College in January 2021 after taking a semester off. She did not want to do college courses online and hoped that school would be back in person by then.

- Li Wei, also from China, began studying at Ravenswood in September 2019 and graduated in June 2021. He is currently studying at University of Toronto Scarborough. At his parents' encouragement, Li Wei is studying business and minoring in philosophy; his goal is to be a film director.
- Daria came to Ravenswood from Iran in 2019, at the age of 17. In the summer of 2020, during the pandemic, she accelerated her timeline so she could complete her studies by the end of 2020. When I spoke to her in the spring of 2021, she was taking one course through a private school to upgrade her marks. She had been accepted into the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at York University.
- Ilya also had completed Grade 11 in Iran and came to Canada in 2019 to complete his final year. However, he had to adjust his plans and his expectations, and spent 2 years completing his OSD. At the time of the interview, he was planning to study neuroscience at McMaster University or the University of Windsor and eventually go to medical school.

Table 2

Summary of Student Respondent Information

Student Name (Pseudonym)	Country of Origin	Age at Arrival	Years at Ravenswood
Guo	China	14	4
Cam	Vietnam	14	4
Nuon	Cambodia	15	3
Li Wei	China	17	2
Daria	Iran	17	2
Ilya	Iran	17	2

There is one way in which my students were, perhaps, less representative of the ESA cohort at Ravenswood than I would have preferred: they were very high-achieving. In this regard, their experience is not the norm for all ESAs, although it does conform to stereotypes noted in recent literature as misleading (Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023). While many ESA students are successful in their studies, there are others who struggle academically or socially and emotionally. Indeed. Ravenswood's board has a high attrition rate. Ideally, I would like to have included some struggling students in my study; however, not surprisingly, it was difficult to recruit them. These students are frequently absent, they tend not to have strong relationships with their teachers, and they are often reluctant to speak to others about their experiences. Although I contacted a few students whom teachers identified as struggling, they either declined, changed their mind, or failed to show up for the interview.

Educator Participants

The group of educators I interviewed included guidance counsellors and ESL, math, and science teachers. For content teachers, I selected math and science because many ESA students focus on these subjects and intend to study related fields in their postsecondary studies (as did most of my participants). I chose three guidance counsellors, two of whom taught classes as well.

Counsellors often have a perspective about students' relationships with other teachers. A summary of the educators' positions (Table 3) and a brief description of the participants follows.

- Ms. J taught at Ravenswood for over 20 years and has taught many subjects, primarily geography, music, and, in the last 10 years, ESL and guidance. When the board stopped providing central guidance support for ESA students in 2012, funds were directed to each school for locally based support. At Ravenswood, this meant, initially, a full-time guidance position that was subsequently reduced to part-time. When the allocation was reduced, Ms. J's timetable was split between guidance and ESL, which meant that she had two kinds of relationships with ESA students. Ms. J was involved in Dr. Schecter's action research project (Schecter & Bell, 2021). She retired in 2022.
- Mr. P is another Ravenswood 20-year veteran, primarily working in guidance but occasionally teaching French (which Grade 9 ESA students, like Cam and Guo, are required to take). In his guidance role, he supported all students including any ESAs who were on his roster; however, he did not address issues such as visa renewal, fee payments, or medical insurance.
- A third guidance counsellor, Mr. F, began working at Ravenswood in September 2019. In 2018, the board changed the structure of guidance support, centralizing the position that Ms. J had been in for the last 5 years. In the new structure, Mr. F worked in six schools, spending 1 to 1.5 days a week at Ravenswood. His position provided him with a broader perspective on the issues and interests of ESA students across the board and greater knowledge of board-level policies and practices than the other participants, although as he had not been in position for very long, he was not aware of much of the history of the school context.

- Ms. E is an ESL teacher who has been teaching at Ravenswood since 2019, filling a leave of absence for another teacher. In the past, she has taught ESA students at all levels and had taught in several other schools in Ontario as well as in Manitoba, providing her with a comparative perspective.
- Another newcomer to Ravenswood, Ms. S teaches science, usually biology and chemistry, as well as General Learning Strategies. A native of Hong Kong, she is fluent in Cantonese and speaks some Mandarin. She taught at several other schools in the board before coming to Ravenswood and expressed the view that her cultural heritage provided her with insight into the large cohort of ESA students from China.
- Finally, Ms. M, a math teacher, has been at the school for over 20 years and teaches primarily, though not exclusively, senior math classes. Her first language is Polish. Ms. M. had a positive relationship with all her students, and students often dropped by at lunch or after school for extra help or just to socialize.

Table 3

Summary of Educator Respondent Information

Name (Pseudonym)	Subjects Taught	Years at Ravenswood (at time of interview)
Ms. J	International Student Guidance, ESL, Geography, Music	20 plus
Mr. P	Guidance, French	20 plus
Ms. M	Mathematics	20 plus
Mr. F	International Student Guidance	1.5
Ms. E	ESL	1.5
Ms. S	General Science, Chemistry, Biology, Learning Strategies	3

Data Collection

Conducting Interviews on Zoom

Student and teacher interviews, conducted in English over Zoom, comprised the core of my data. Research shows that using Zoom for interviews has advantages and disadvantages (Oliffe et al., 2021; Gray et al., 2021) The disadvantages include technical problems caused by poor connections leading to poor audio and visual quality; participant reluctance or unfamiliarity and the potential for participants to be distracted by other tasks. I was cognizant of these potential issues; however, they did not prove problematic for me. By the time of my interviews, all my respondents had been studying and meeting online and they were highly familiar with Zoom. All of them participated in the interviews from a quiet, private place, either an office or their home base. Indeed, for my student respondents in particular, the ability to conduct the interview at a time convenient to them in a private quarter may have been less intimidating than had we met in person at school or another public place (Gray et al., 2021). All my respondents conducted the interview with cameras on and agreed to be audiotaped.

Interview Protocol

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions based on prompts identified through a review of relevant literature and my own knowledge of practices in relation to ESA students (Appendix A). These included initial expectations and choices, familial support (from home), custodial and homestay relationships, academic issues and supports (school-based), social and cultural integration, and linguistic issues. I spoke to the students for an average of 1.9 hours, spread out over two or three interviews. We spent considerable time at the beginning of the first discussing our respective backgrounds and interests. As recommended in ethnographic interviews, I did my best to create a rapport to make the interviews more conversational and less

interrogative (De Fina, 2019). Several of the student respondents expressed interest in my studies at York and my research. I did not always follow the order of questions exactly as outlined in my interview protocol; rather, we jumped back and forth from one topic to another. Several of the students contacted me after they had graduated to report on their decisions about postsecondary choices, suggesting to me that that they were comfortable the process of interviewing and with me.

Educator respondents were asked similar questions about their perceptions and observations of how ESA students fared in their classroom, throughout the school, and, to the extent they knew, in their extra-school lives (Appendix B). I also asked teachers about their awareness of the macro context, in terms of policy texts and discourses around internationalization, and I probed to get a sense of their positionality with respect to the broader educational initiative. As with the students, I did not always follow the order of questions in the interview protocol. In several cases, I had follow-up questions or issues to clarify that were addressed through email or additional Zoom interviews.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the interview data reductively and reflexively using coding and thematic analysis (V. Braun et al., 2019; Durdella, 2019; Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). My analytical approach was guided by a framework described by V. Braun et al. (2019), as outlined below.

Familiarization With Data

Interviews were transcribed using a software program, and then checked against the audio recording to ensure accuracy (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) and to familiarize myself with the data (V. Braun et al., 2019). During this process, I made notes and analytical memos,

highlighting areas where further clarification or elucidation might be needed and describing my codes in more detail. Interview transcripts were forwarded to the respondents, who were asked to confirm their accuracy. I had questions and additional comments from four respondents, two teachers and two students. These were addressed through email or follow-up interviews.

Initial Coding

In my first pass at creating a code book, I focused on student interviews. This process entailed coding chunks of text from the transcripts using a software program that allowed me to create, edit, and merge codes readily. I used both descriptive and value codes in this initial pass (Saldaña, 2009). I wrote analytic memos about salient ideas and explanations of codes that I was creating and began to identify connections between them. After I completed a first pass using this process, I assigned colours to codes that were similar as an initial step toward creating code categories. The software enabled me to create a beta tree map which identified the frequency of codes, numerically and visually. Although frequency is not the goal of thematic analysis (V. Braun et al., 2019; Saldaña. 2009), the dominance of colour associated with similar codes provided me with a snapshot of emerging trends in concerns, issues, and attributes and to some extent guided me in the next phase. An example of the beta tree map can be found in Appendix C. With each new transcript, I added, combined, and deleted codes. At the end of my initial coding of student transcripts I had generated 95 codes, a figure that Saldaña (2009) suggests is appropriate at this stage in the analytical process. Coding the teacher interviews led to further refinement and the creation of a set of 87 similar, but not entirely overlapping, codes.

Second Cycle Coding

In this phase I used focused coding to create semantic categories (V. Braun et al., 2019). This additional step helped me further organize my coded data before I could build dominant

themes. Next, I organized my coded transcript excerpts on spreadsheets by participant and category and continued to make analytical memos about emergent patterns and their relationship to theoretical concepts and links to the broader context. I further refined categories used in my second cycle of coding into headings and subheadings that were both topically and thematically oriented.

Building Themes.

V. Braun et al. (2019) posit that themes do not emerge from the data, but rather are built through reflexive analysis, moving back and forth, testing prototypes against the data. This is where the researcher's subjectivity and selected theoretical lenses begin to tell a story (V. Braun et al., 2019). By way of example, "English learning" was a topic that came up repeatedly in many different categories, such as students wanting to learn English, using English in class, using English socially, being intimidated by native English speakers, and developing strategies to overcome the English barrier. This led to the development of a theme I initially called "English as a bridge and barrier" to describe and explain the complex role that English language learning plays in the lives of ESA students. In the end, the challenges and opportunities afforded by learning English were subsumed under two dominant themes—the agency of students and the lack of systemic, pedagogical support for content-based language support.

Refining and Reporting Themes

The process of writing Chapters 5 and 6, my findings chapters, helped me to further build and refine the themes that were part of the story I was seeking to tell (V. Braun et al., 2019). Theme building was a reflexive process; my writing drove my cognition (Schecter, personal conversation, 2021). As I wrote, I continued to take notes and I referred to my literature review, additional sources of data (outlined above), and theoretical frameworks while further mining the

original coded transcripts. I identified areas of convergence and divergence, both within each group of participants and between my student and teacher respondents. I tried to account for these tensions in the final chapter. For example, as I continued to work on the theme of English as a bridge and barrier, I realized that it was not nuanced enough to capture the complex ways that students negotiated their way around the barriers, largely (but not always) relying on their own agency to build bridges. Rather, the student's strategic approach to their language learning as a tool for academic achievement and social integration became the theme emphasized in my conclusion.

Ethical Considerations

This research study was approved by the York Human Participant Research Review Committee, the external research committee of the participating board of education, and the principal of the school that hosted the secondary students I interviewed. As noted, maintaining anonymity of the participating board and respondents was a condition of participation and, as such, I avoided including any identifying characteristics that are not essential to answering the research questions. Another potential ethical issue was that English was not the first language of the students I interviewed. I could not afford a translator and I wanted to establish a personal rapport with the respondents. To mitigate this factor, I spread the interviews out over several meetings, so as not to exhaust my participants. Encouraging respondents to check the transcripts gave them a further opportunity to reflect on their answers.

Finally, I am conscious that the student/teacher power dynamic might have influenced the students' perception of the answer I might be seeking (Maxwell, 2013, p. 92). Indeed, some of the students I spoke to were likely conditioned to present their best to adults. As I was no longer a secondary teacher and most of my respondents were well on their way to graduating, these

factors were not likely a concern for these students. Overall, I believe that the risks were not great, and were outweighed by the potential benefits of this study. Among these benefits, I count allowing students to hear their own voices and, in this manner, to clarify their own thinking on this important stage of their education and their lives.

Validity and Quality of Research

V. Braun et al. (2019) liken the role of the qualitative researcher to that of storyteller, interpreting data through "the lens of their own cultural membership and social positionings, theoretical assumptions and ideological commitments, as well as their scholarly knowledge" (p. 849). The goal of such research is "to provide a coherent and compelling *interpretation* of the data," which I hope I have done (V. Braun et al., 2019, p. 849).

There are several aspects of my research design that speak to the validity and quality of my findings. As noted, the inclusion of multiple data sources, including interviews with educators and students, policy documents, literature from the field. and my own parallel research, served the complementarity purpose of the design and allowed for triangulation of my findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 205). In addition, my prolonged engagement in the research setting, care taken in finding representative participants, and checking of the initial findings with participants, further strengthen the trustworthiness of my findings (Maxwell, 2013; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This said, I cannot claim to be unbiased, and indeed have declared my tendency toward a critical stance about the macro and meso level IE policy context. However, in qualitative research, reactivity or reflexivity—influencing and being influenced by the setting and participants—is unavoidable (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). Given the complexity of the ESA landscape in Ontario and more broadly, the results of this study may not be highly generalizable. However, in a qualitative case study such as this,

generalizability is not the goal (V. Braun et al, 2019; Maxwell, 2013; Yazan, 2015). Rather, I am concerned that my interpretation accurately "reconstruct[s] the cultural logic [and] the embedded meanings" of the social context I described and provides a working hypothesis for future research (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 4).

Summary

In summary, I employed an ethnographic case study approach to conduct a qualitative inquiry into the experiences of ESA students in one urban secondary school to answer my research questions. In so doing, I was informed by a stance that was both critical of the values and the educational agenda of the broader policy scape and empathetic to the narratives of challenge and resilience that my student respondents offered. The global Covid-19 pandemic disrupted my study site and the routines of my respondents. Restrictions imposed by the pandemic led me to rely more heavily on interviews of purposefully chosen educators and students and less on onsite observations than I had originally intended. Nonetheless, I believe that my inquiry yielded valuable data, from which I was able to build salient themes through a systematic analysis.

Chapter 5: The ESA Experience Through Students' Eyes

In this chapter, I address my first research question: *How do ESA students describe their experience?* I delineate the narratives of six ESA students from four countries who studied at Ravenswood between 2016 and 2021. As noted, the students were purposefully identified and selected through my connections with guidance counsellors, former students, and teachers at Ravenswood. My student participants came from China, Iran, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Three of them began studying in Grade 11 or 12, just one semester before the onset of the pandemic, and the others began their studies in Grade 9 or 10. These students were high achievers by any standard, and thus reflect the stereotype, if not the reality, of the prototypical ESA experience (Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023). Nonetheless, their sojourns were not without challenges, and they experienced their share of anxiety, disappointment, and loneliness. Much can be questioned and learned about how and why they fared as they did. Their observations on the academic programs and their interactions with educators, other students, and support networks outside the school provide important insights into how policy was enacted in their micro context.

Coming to Canada

Push Factors: Demanding School Systems

The students expressed dissatisfaction or frustration with previous education systems they found demanding and inflexible. In Vietnam, according to Cam, "knowledge is massive" and hours of work every night are required to stay on top of academic demands. Nuon complained about the number of courses and the lack of flexibility in Cambodia: "I mean, like, um, we study all of the subject. Like we didn't choose the subject." Guo explained that he and his entire family became tired of the demands in China and wanted to "move on" to something "easier."

Despite their complaints, students described the academic standards in their home countries as advanced in comparison to North American schools, particularly in mathematics and science. Guo equated Grade 10 mathematics in Canada to Grade 8 in China, and Daria claimed to have studied advanced functions several years before coming to Ravenswood. Only Nuon claimed that school was "better" in North America, although when I asked her why, she explained that she meant it was better *recognized* outside Cambodia. Li Wei attended a private international school in China for several years where he studied a Western curriculum. It was a "great school" with teachers from all over the world and, according to Li Wei, the standards were very high. Ilya complained about the lack of educational resources, like technology, in Iran but believed the education there was more than adequate to provide him with "a good life, a normal life"—just not the life he wanted.

Pull Factors: Opportunities, Connections, and English

Like others, these ambitious students and their families claimed to believe that a Western education would be easier and afford better opportunities for their future (Chen, 2017; Liu, 2016, Wu & Tarc, 2022). Guo declared that he wanted to study in North America "just for the university." Echoing Nuon, he explained that more people had heard of the University of Toronto than Beijing University; therefore, it would be advantageous for his future career in China to have studied here. Li Wei observed that studying in the West was essential to a successful career in the film industry, to which he aspired. Unanimously, the students expressed a belief that learning English was a key to success and emphasized their desire to become proficient while they were young. Nuon explained, "I am young so I can get the English done before I grow up to 18 or 19." Their families placed a high value on learning English and, prior to coming to Canada, all the students studied English in school and/or with private tutors. At Li

Wei's private international school, most of the teachers were American but the students were mostly Chinese, so he felt that his exposure was limited. Consistent with findings reported by other scholars, the desire and appeal of learning English as a marketable skill was clearly a driver for this group (Deschambault, 2019; Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023; Tamtik, 2019; Winton, 2022).

Additionally, the students cited Canada's safe and welcoming reputation as a factor in their decision to study here. Li Wei explained, "I think that Canada is the easiest country to come to study . . . I think it is more willing to share resources than America." Guo's mother extensively researched options, including Australia, Europe, and the United States, and decided that "Canada was the best choice" because "the people are not-racist and open-minded." Ilya and Daria both reported that they had been looking forward to attending a school that was not segregated by gender. As Daria reflected, "We always dream about experiences like American TV show us."

Transnational Networks and Aspirations

In planning their study abroad experiences, my student respondents drew upon transnational networks and benefited from the privilege of having choices to enhance their chance of success. They consulted with recruiting agents; however, for this group, the advice of family and close friends who lived or had studied in the GTA carried more weight in their decisions. The desire to learn English and prepare themselves well for postsecondary studies was a key driver in their deliberations. Guo, Cam, and Li Wei were all advised by agents to go to private schools. Li Wei and his family agreed that this was a good option for one semester, to assist his transition to Ravenswood where he could interact with a greater number of native speakers. Similarly, Cam declared, "The agency want me to go private school because they can

make more money, but . . . my uncle who has pretty much knowledge and information he'd say Ravenswood is pretty good." Guo's mother was advised by friends that private schools might make it easier for him to get into university but would not prepare him as well. Only Daria, who did not have a local network of support, followed the advice of her custodian who, unlike the other agents, encouraged her to attend public school.

The students' living arrangements reflected the availability of familial and cultural networks, the financial status of their families and their personal desire for independence. Cam lives with her uncle and their young child, and her grandparents live close by. Nuon lives with family friends and is connected to a tightly knit Cambodian community in an apartment block in the northwest end of the city. She is close to her brother, who went to college in Toronto, and travels between Canada and Cambodia frequently to support the family business. Guo's and Li Wei's mothers rented apartments in Toronto and stayed with their sons for 6 months at a time, returning to China when their visitor visa expired, until they were able to come back to Canada. Both families had spent time in Toronto in the past and are closely connected to expatriate Chinese networks in Canada. Indeed, Guo complained that his social life was dictated by his mother and her community of Chinese friends. Although he moved out on his own as soon as possible, Ilya lived with his uncle for the first few months and expressed gratitude for the initial assistance:

> [My uncle] brought me to the banks, and taught me how things worked here, like very basic stuff, . . . I was stressed out and I didn't have the guts to do it, so and I would be like, hey can you do this stuff for me [to uncle], cause I can't speak.

Daria was the only one of the group who lived in a homestay, an Iranian family that spoke Farsi at home. Her mother accompanied her when she moved to Canada but Daria

recounts that she wasn't much help: "My mother didn't know anything of English at all." Her homestay family treated her well but were not involved in her transition to Canadian life or education.

Early Institutional Supports

Initial Reception. The initial assessment of English and mathematics for students new to Ontario is managed centrally in Ravenswood's board of education. Speaking from personal experience, teachers who administer the initial assessment do their best to make students feel comfortable; however. many students, including my respondents, find the testing a stressful experience. Cam recalled "it was scary for me" because everything was new and unfamiliar and she wanted to do well. Her aunt, who accompanied her to the assessment, was a calming influence. Similarly, Nuon's brother reduced her anxiety by coaching her in advance. Guo volunteered that although the math test was "easy," he found the English test very challenging and did not do as well as he expected. Daria described the experience as a "really tough day" because "no one was there to help us . . . and I am really shy."

Orientation Variations. In recalling their first day of school, Cam, Nuon, and Guo described individualized responses that were characteristic of how they navigated much of their experience at Ravenswood. Cam recalled being very distressed when she found she had just 5 minutes to move from one class to the next but forced herself to overcome her anxiety. She told me that she panicked, initially, and then calmed herself and solicited help from people she thought looked like "non-native" English speakers, so she would not have to be embarrassed about her English. She said she was relieved there were many others who were learning English, although she thought they were better than she was. Guo visited the school before the first day, created a map in his head based on the classroom numbering system, and used it to navigate

around the school. Nuon recalled being surprised later to learn that there were adults in the building available to provide help, like custodians and hall safety monitors; however, initially she relied on her three Cambodian cousins.

Li Wei, Daria, and Ilya started studying at Ravenswood in September 2019, and each one had a unique orientation experience. Li Wei was part of a cohort of students who participated in a one-month centralized board-run program for new ESA students. The program, introduced in 2019, is meant to be mandatory for new ESAs; however, neither Daria or Ilya was aware of or attended it. Li Wei described the experience positively. He completed two credits, including ESL B, which he observed was the "best course" that he had ever taken because "it's easy and all of the students don't speak English well." He recalled making friends from Switzerland, Vietnam, and Japan and was disappointed that they did not maintain contact with any of the other students in the program when they dispersed to schools across the city. When given the opportunity to participate in a locally based welcome orientation, he declined.

Daria arrived too late for the full board orientation, but in September 2019 she participated in a welcome retreat for new ESA students at Ravenswood, which was part of a participatory action research project (Schecter & Bell, 2021). Daria asserted that "International Day actually was useful because I was really confused and they taught us really helpful things like how to take TTC, how to choose courses . . . and I really, I could find friends that day." In fact, Daria, who describes herself as introvert, met another Iranian student who remained her best friend throughout their time at Ravenswood. She suggested that all ESA students would benefit from a similar orientation.

Ilya's transition was an anomaly. He arrived at Ravenswood after the semester had begun without visiting the welcome centre or being formally assessed, which neither he nor his

counsellor was able to explain. Somehow, Ilya had a timetable that included an ESL course and Grade 10 science. He recounted his frustration to me: “I wanted Grade 12 because I was in Grade 12 and I wanted everything to be perfect . . . and I was embarrassed.” His guidance counsellor, concerned about Ilya’s ability to do well in a class that would impact his university application, urged him to take at least one ESL course. Finally, they agreed to place Ilya in Grade 11 English and science. He reluctantly followed the counsellor’s additional advice and dropped one course to provide extra time to concentrate on the demands of senior level science and English courses. In retrospect, he concurred: “I think what Mr. P told me, . . . I didn’t like it, I didn’t appreciate at the time, but now I know it was the right decision. I think like mentally, I can understand the system here better.” The determination to take senior level courses and accelerate their progress through ESL is not uncommon among ESA students and highlights a certain agency on their part. In the end, Ilya did extremely well in his courses, although it did take him longer than he anticipated to complete his OSD.

Overall, the students I interviewed described their introduction to Canadian school as stressful and a little confusing, but not terribly traumatic. The transition was made easier by the level of support provided by family, friends, and to some degree educators at the school. Moreover, the students responded in ways that were characteristic of their personalities and previously formed habits.

Academic Experiences

Expectations and Attitudes

My study participants may be viewed as high achievers. Prior to attending Ravenswood, they did very well in demanding school systems, and they continued to excel in Ontario. Ilya stated, “I don’t want to sound arrogant, but I was a good student. I had good marks.” Others

reported similar achievements in their prior studies. Failure or mediocrity was not an option for these students. They were determined to pursue post-secondary education and, initially, they targeted top-tier programs in business and sciences, although the reality of the demands—academically and financially—forced several of them to modify their plans. Ilya, Guo, Li Wei, Daria, and Cam aspire to medical school or graduate studies. Cam clearly articulated her sense of responsibility that she had to do well and be beyond reproach:

> I would prefer everything supposed to be perfect . . . I should work hard to take care of my brother and take care of my parents and make them proud and make all of the people, like have a new perspective about students from Asia and Asian girls.

My respondents' ambitions were reflected in their work habits. As noted, several students reported that they were attracted by the more leisurely pace of school in North America, yet they worked extremely hard and spent much of their time studying. Daria rarely left her basement room to interact with her homestay family. Like Ilya, she took a spare during first semester, using the additional time to study and revise work. Cam recalled her "worst experience" when she received a mark of 60% on her first academic essay. She cried all night, but she reported that the experience strengthened her resolve to do better. She described working on her next essay: "I study until 1:00 every night mostly to do the work and edit the essay and make sure the editing was fine." By the end of the course, Cam received one of the highest marks in the class.

Studying English

The ESL curriculum in Ontario has five levels ranging from ESL A (beginner) to ESL E (roughly the equivalent of Grade 10 English). Because there are four strands in the curriculum—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—there can be a large range of abilities, skills, and areas of vulnerability among students at the same level. ESL A and B focus on conversational English;

in ESL C the curriculum becomes more academic. Generally, students cover two or, if they take a summer course, three levels in one year. Many newcomer and ESA students struggle with ESL and later with academic English. Passing is not a given; students can be, and are, held back to repeat a level if they do not earn a passing grade.

All the students in my study except Ilya were assessed at an intermediate level of English. My respondents observed that learning English in Canada was quite different from the experience in their countries of origin. Guo described the Ontario curriculum as "less specific", like others he was accustomed to greater focus on grammar and memorizing vocabulary. Others cited the emphasis on essay writing, literature studies, and oral presentations as challenging. Ilya said of Grade 11 English, "It was more like culture was involved, history was involved, literature."

Nonetheless, all these students adjusted and progressed well. Daria's "favourite" teacher at Ravenswood recommended that she skip ESL E, so in the summer of 2020 she took Grade 11 English online and then finished Grade 12 in her final semester. After adjusting to the emphasis on academic writing in ESL C, Cam received an award for the highest marks in ESL D. Guo recalled doing better in each level of ESL than the previous one. Li Wei and Ilya both had Grade 12 marks in the A range. Indeed, the student participants consistently spoke highly of their experience in ESL and English. All the students mentioned ESL/English teachers whom they found helpful, kind, and inclusive. Li Wei "adored" his ESL C teacher who was "like a grandmother" to him and could relate to her students: He explained:

> English is her second language, so she know how we feel, think. She wants to listen to me. I always write about my ambitions in my essay and . . . she kinda like encouraged me—you can do it, [it] really genuinely feels good"

Daria offered a similar assessment of her "really, really, really good" ESL teachers: "They want to improve your English but not just academic, not just speaking and writing, but the way you think, fit in, you know what I mean?"

The Ontario ESL curriculum is meant to develop foundational literacy skills in the genres and discourses that are necessary for success in academic English. As many of the ESL teachers also teach English, they understand the curricular expectations. Skills such as inferring, summarizing, and predicting that are transferable across disciplines are explicitly taught. However, the curriculum does not focus on the subject-specific vocabulary, registers, or knowledge structures of other academic disciplines, particularly mathematics and science (Cummins & Early, 2015; Gibbons, 2015). Herein lay a challenge for my participants.

Studying in English

The challenge of meeting the linguistic demands of subjects taught in English was the barrier most frequently mentioned by my student respondents, notwithstanding their success in ESL and English classes. Guo was able to transfer some of the skills he learned in ESL; however, he described the demands of reading and writing in geography and history as challenging. Cam cited art as demanding because her teacher adopted an "English only" stance and the terminology was very unfamiliar. Li Wei explained how he was able to understand his interior design teacher because his English listening skills had been honed from years of watching English-language movies. However, he noted that most of his ELL peers were struggling to follow the dialogue in class. He explained, "If you don't know a word and you stop to look it up, she just kept talking, talking, talking and soon you are lost."

The most demanding subjects for these students, linguistically, were mathematics and science. This appeared to have taken them by surprise, given their confidence that they were

ahead of their Canadian peers in terms of understanding related concepts. Ilya described how frustrating this was for him:

> I had to study a lot, even harder than the Canadians because I had to become familiar with the scientific terms . . . and I was embarrassed because the materials, speaking of chemistry and the math, I already knew them, but the challenging thing was to learn them again but in a different language.

Nuon offered a similar description of her experience in Grade 9 math:

> I don't really get, like, what is *divide*? what is *plus*? What is a *multiply*? It's like something like that. And for the math, uh, for Grade 9 in Canada, I used to study at Grade 7, 8 in Cambodia, so I can understand it . . . when I get the sign.

Daria agreed that understanding mathematical concepts in Farsi was one thing but understanding the term "*coefficient* . . . it takes time to sit on your brain." Once they mastered the content-specific vocabulary, they were able to manage the mathematics work quite readily; however, the language barrier was persistent.

Like Ilya, Daria wanted to start science classes at a senior level, despite her guidance counsellor's advice. However, she recalled being overwhelmed by the vocabulary and the demand that she produce written answers in prescribed and unfamiliar formats when she transferred into the Grade 11 biology course. She remembered a test in which she was required to label a diagram, answer some multiple-choice questions, and write a paragraph. Daria questioned why she had to write in an unfamiliar format in English, reasoning that "at that time grammar was really hard for me. I couldn't focus on grammar, vocabulary, and knowledge." Daria's comment may reflect a lack of understanding that academic subjects have content-specific vocabulary and genres, and that students are expected to master them. Her story also

suggests that her teacher probably was not teaching those demands explicitly and was not willing to be flexible about the communicative modalities of her multilingual students.

Student-Initiated Strategies. For the most part, my student respondents describe facing these challenges through hard work and by using strategies that they initiated on their own. In class, they used dictionaries and, when permitted, their phones to translate unfamiliar vocabulary. Guo recalled:

> In science and geography, you may see me running in the hallway with two huge dictionaries, one is Chinese-English and the other is English-Chinese. Holding them on my shoulder, running between classes, just preparing the for the next quiz or exam."

Cam spent hours at home each night studying mathematics vocabulary in preparation for the next day. As noted, both Daria and Ilya dropped from four classes to three in their first semester, using the extra time to revise and study. Ilya described his strategy:

> I have some sort of notebook, that I write all the new words I learn. Like when I see a new word, like in a movie or in a textbook whatever, when I see that new word I get the translation for it, I like learn the word and what it means, I learn everything about the word and I just write it down . . . I expand my lexical resources.

Similarly, Cam and Daria created personal subject-specific dictionaries. Daria worked on her science dictionary every night. She translated 10 pages of words from one chapter of her Grade 11 biology text into Farsi, a process which she explained was time-consuming but necessary.

Students were also strategic about soliciting help from peers who spoke their first language and, if not available, from other ESA or ELL students who were also translating from another language into English. In her Grade 11 biology class, Daria befriended a Korean boy

who, like her, understood the scientific concepts “more than the Canadians” but struggled with the English vocabulary. Guo described his strategic approach to seeking help from his peers:

> I didn't really ask a lot of help from the teacher but I asked some help from other Chinese students. And sometimes students not from China but from Vietnam or Korea because our education, especially our math education, we had more similar topics.

At no point did my students indicate that they were segregating themselves with other ELLS out of reluctance to integrate or engage with their Canadian peers. Rather, they explained that working with someone who faced the same linguistic challenges and shared similar perspectives on how to approach the work was a strategy for success.

Another student-initiated strategy to achieve higher marks is to repeat courses or take courses at another school to obtain better grades. All the students were familiar with this practice. Guo explained to me, “Before getting into Grade 9 even, I heard that teachers in public schools give less marks than private schools. It's true but it is reasonable.” When I asked why it was reasonable, he replied, “You get high marks, because you pay more.” When he received a mark of 83% in Grade 11 English, he decided to take his Grade 12 English course at a private school to ensure that he would get 90%, which he did. Similarly, Li Wei took a math course in private school to ensure a better grade after being disappointed in his final mark at Ravenswood. Daria repeated the same course through a public board at night school because she was dissatisfied with the mark she received initially. While the option of repeating courses or “shopping” for schools that give better grades is available to everyone, the practice appears to be more characteristic of ESA students. Regardless of whether their teachers and administrators approve, this strategy has proven to work for some of these students. It also speaks of a

consumer orientation toward education, and a reminder that for these students Ontario's public education system is a commodity.

Teacher-Initiated Support. In contrast, respondents recalled relatively few examples of teacher-initiated supports or strategies that helped them meet the language challenges of their courses. Ilya complained about lack of support and understanding about the demands of studying senior-level courses in English: "Yes, ah I think, I mean my math teachers they didn't really differentiate international students from Canadians. In their eyes we are all the same. We weren't special you know." Others were less judgemental but expressed low expectations for support. Cam spent several nights crying about her essay but refused to let anyone know how stressed she was, including the teacher. She explained, "It was hard for me that I had stress but I did not tell anybody, I was like holding everything into myself." Daria, Li Wei, and Ilya similarly expressed the view that it was their responsibility to figure out the language demands of their classes. As Daria said, "It kind of really depends on us, because she [the teacher] can't really help." Only Nuon mentioned regularly asking her teachers to explain words and concepts she did not understand.

Guo relayed a telling anecdote about using interlinguistic mediation and being worried that he would be penalized for using his self-initiated learning strategy. He would translate words from questions on test papers and write them in the margins of the paper: "Sometimes the answers, I mean the answers with Chinese words may be marked as wrong or something like that. So, I sometimes write it down like in tiny Chinese and then translate it word by word to English." Then he would erase the Chinese before submitting it. Once he forgot the last step and described being surprised and relieved when the teacher did not penalize him for using his first language.

The students told me that they understood they were entitled to extra time on assignments and tests (a standard accommodation for ELLs) but they did not like to ask for it, especially in their senior classes. Daria explained that in Grades 11 and 12 few students were in ESL anymore and that all students "should be working at the same level." Most of their teachers allowed, if not encouraged, limited use of first language in the classroom. However, only Cam recalled a class, Grade 9 geography, where the teacher used language supports including word walls, graphs, and multimodal resources. It is worth noting here that I specifically prompted all the students to tell me about the use of these supports in their classes. Although these are well-accepted pedagogical supports for students whose first language is not the language of instruction, they do not seem to be used widely in this very multilingual school.

Pandemic Challenges and Affordances

For ESA students, one of the initial stressors of the pandemic was having to decide whether to stay or leave, without knowing what the future would hold. In the end, all the students in my study stayed in Toronto. Nuon and Guo were both in their final semester of their academic program in the spring of 2020 and wanted to complete their final credits. Guo's mother returned to China, leaving him alone for an extended period for the first time since he came to Canada 4 years earlier. Li Wei, likewise, was left alone in the condo he had been sharing with his mother. Though many of Cam's friends returned to Vietnam, where there was less risk of infection, she was worried that she might not be able to return to Canada and mused, "What would happen to my education plan?" After consulting with her parents in Vietnam and her family members in Toronto, she decided to remain. Similarly, Daria was afraid that she might not be able to return to Canada if she went back to Iran. Moreover, the pandemic impacted her family's financial situation, causing her more stress and prompting her to accelerate her completion timeline. Ilya

described the onset of Covid as very distressing but did not for a moment consider going home: "I am a germophobe so I am really cautious about this stuff and about my health and as an international student everything is expensive, and I couldn't afford to get sick."

For the most part, my respondents adjusted to their new circumstances, including online learning, quite quickly, albeit without much enthusiasm. Li Wei described studying online as "low efficiency;" and complained that "you can't really see the teacher and the teacher can't see us." Nuon said it was "really bad, especially calculus," where her teacher posted a video every day but wasn't available to answer questions. She joined a social media group organized by students in the class, which she claimed was easier to do now that she was in Grade 12 and had "Canadian" friends. Cam reported having little interaction with her chemistry and biology teachers who posted videos online and left students to work on their own, but she liked "individual learning" and was "okay with it." Daria, also a self-described introvert, recalled that the first few weeks "were like a dream" because she was able to stay home and focus on her work. However, when she noticed that her English was not developing, she began to make a deliberate effort to engage with others online.

In the fall of 2020, when the future of program delivery was uncertain, Ilya opted to study through the centralized virtual school rather than begin the year in person at Ravenswood. He described the beginning of the year as "a general panic." There were some glitches in the new online platform and students had trouble logging in. By the time the issue was resolved, everyone was feeling the pressure of time and the students "were all stressed." Unlike many of his fellow students, Ilya did not turn off his camera. He was determined to engage with his peers under any circumstance.

For the most part the students I interviewed adapted quite readily, if not enthusiastically, as they had done when they first adjusted to academic life at Ravenswood. Ironically, during the pandemic, ESA students benefited from the disruption of several provincial and institutional policies at a broader level. For example, linked to the formal study of English is the requirement for all students to pass the OSSLT. The test is administered to all Grade 10 and older students who have not previously been successful. Successful completion at a rate of 75% is a mandatory graduation requirement; students who are unsuccessful twice are required to take a literacy skills course. Students who perform strongly in their senior-level English classes are not necessarily successful on their first or second attempt, and often take the course. Statistically, fully participating ELL students, even those who have deferred writing the exam for a year or two, have a 10% lower than average success rate (Education, Quality, and Accountability Office, 2019).

In March 2020, when the pandemic began, only Cam had completed the requirement. Guo and Nuon had been unsuccessful at least once. Nuon was planning to write it again in April and Guo was taking the literacy skills course. Li Wei, Ilya, and Daria were all scheduled to participate in the test for the first time in April. However, both the test and the course were cancelled, and the graduation requirement was waived for a year, thus providing my respondents with time to focus on their classes. In addition, third-party English proficiency tests, which universities require ELLs to pass prior to acceptance, also loosened their criteria, allowing for online rather than in-person testing.

Engaging Socially and Interculturally

Common Expectations

Adapting to a superdiverse school where English is the dominant language can be challenging for an adolescent. Some research, including observations from teachers and administrators, has cited a tendency among international students to engage with peers from their home country (Bell et al., 2023; Guo & Guo; 2017; Kuo & Roysircar, 2004, 2006; Nelson, 2013). My dissertation findings indicate that ESA student engagement with other students is more nuanced and complex than these conclusions suggest (see also Schecter & Bell, 2021). ESA students' interactions with their peers are influenced by several factors including language, culture, individual objectives, levels of confidence, and perhaps to a lesser extent the direct interventions of educators. Most of my respondents initially connected with peers from similar backgrounds; however, they expressed a willingness and made individual efforts—some more readily than others—to engage with students from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Classrooms where students engaged in group work often provided a foundation for intercultural relationships, if not friendships.

English was sometimes a barrier, but also often a bridge to making friendships with others who were also learning the language. As noted, all the students in my study were motivated by a desire to learn English. They found common ground with others who were in a similar situation. Certainly, the diversity of Ravenswood appealed to Ilya, who said,

> [There are] many people from different cultures and backgrounds and you form bonds with different, you know, kinds of people and it was really interesting to me, you know, I just love that and one of the other reasons I didn't want to hang out with my you know Persian classmates you know, was I wanted to get to know you know other cultures and other people and that was interesting to me.

When I asked the students about their experience or observations of racism, they all claimed it was not an issue for them at Ravenswood. Cam and Guo commented on anti-Asian racism broadly, especially in the wake of the pandemic, but asserted that Ravenswood was not like some of the schools they had heard about from others in their cultural communities. Indeed, Guo told me that his family had considered and dismissed several other school choices in favour of Ravenswood because they believed these other schools, while strong academically, were "too white" and "probably racist."

Not surprisingly, the three students who began studying at Ravenswood in their junior years formed more friendships and were more engaged in school activities than the three who started in Grade 11 or 12. The latter group felt even more pressure to focus on academics and they did not have sufficient time to form a social support network before the pandemic disrupted their education. Consequently, I will address the social experiences of these two cohorts separately.

Long-Term ESA Students: Cam, Guo, and Nuon

Intercultural vs Intracultural Experiences. Cam, Guo, and Nuon's earliest friendships largely focused on other ESA students and ELLs. In their first 2 years, they took ESL classes and several accommodated Grade 9 and 10 courses, such as geography, history, science, and civics, that were populated by multilingual students from many countries. These superdiverse classrooms provided them with opportunities to engage with other migrants while limiting their interaction with "native Canadians."

When Nuon started at Ravenswood, she spent every lunch hour with her three cousins, who constituted the entire Cambodian cohort at the school at the time. However, in her classes she became friendly with other multilinguals: "We mixing up the Filipino the Korean the

Chinese, . . . and we have a Russian girl. So, we not really meet the Canadian." Exhibiting the same confidence that made her comfortable asking her teachers for help, she said she had no hesitation reaching out to classmates and found that they could understand one another well enough. In particular, she became friends with two other ESA students from China. As her friendship with these two girls deepened, they joined several clubs and activities together, and she spent less time with her Cambodian cousins. By Grade 12 she was comfortable working in study groups with students from all backgrounds, such as the online peer support group in her calculus class.

Cam recalled initially looking for "non-native" speakers when she needed help or had questions. She wanted to practise English, but she claimed to be embarrassed by her limited fluency and felt more comfortable with other language learners. In the first few weeks of school, she met a few other Vietnamese students. They became her core friends; however, they were a small group and were not in her classes. She worked hard to overcome her shyness and her distaste for group activities and soon developed a friendship with a girl from the Philippines and connected casually with a few other Asian students. By Grade 12, she had made some "native Canadian" friends as well. As the cohorts of student from Vietnam and, especially, Cambodia were relatively small, it is not surprising that Nuon and Cam quickly broadened their social circles to include peers from other countries. They did not seem to feel isolated or uncomfortable in the diverse groups of students that they interacted with in their multilingual classes.

Guo, on the other hand, could readily have spent all his time with other students from China, had it been his goal and desire. However, he described deliberately approaching students from Brazil, Japan, the Philippines, and Korea during his first week of school. He identified students who were in multiple classes with him as potential "study buddies." Despite having

different “pronunciations,” he explained that the students from different countries were able to communicate with one another and became better at speaking English together. He noted that the “mixing” of cultures occurred most readily in classes where one ethnicity did not dominate.

Group work and assignments, although unfamiliar to my participants, provided them with opportunities to practise English and make friends. I asked my respondents whether their teachers encouraged this “mixing up” of cultures. The responses varied: sometimes the teachers put them in mixed groups, but more often, students reported, they did not. In some classes, there was little interaction between students at all.

Cam recalled one ESL teacher who welcomed students from different countries and encouraged them to learn about one another’s cultures:

> During the free time, [teacher] ask about country, what kind of food should I try? and ask other students if they heard about Vietnam and ask me if I ever heard about their stuff, just like a casual talk, daily.

Her history teacher asked students to share the history of their country’s involvement in World War II, rather than focusing on Canada and Europe. Also in history, Guo and his group members gave a presentation on the Korean War and the teacher encouraged him to discuss the war from a Chinese perspective. Cam and Guo’s anecdotes stood out to me in their exceptionality. Notably, both experiences happened in a history class that was designated for ELLs. Most of the “mixing up,” as Nuon called it, seems to have happened spontaneously, through the deliberate choices made by students to break out of their comfort zone and talk to others, or as a result of the lack of an alternative viable strategy.

Extracurricular Engagement. Ravenswood is a busy school with well over 50 sports teams, clubs, and activities, including culturally based groups such as the Filipino and Chinese

clubs. In the focus group from our participatory action research project, students explained that it was difficult to obtain information about these activities. Daily announcements, delivered in English through the public audio system, were challenging to understand and ESAs found it intimidating to join groups by themselves (Schecter & Bell, 2021). Cam, Guo, and Nuon followed a similar pattern of becoming involved at the end of their 1st or 2nd year. Cam and Guo participated in the school's annual multicultural festival, often the first activity that newcomer students join along with friends from the same culture. Later each of them joined a variety of clubs. While these activities may have enriched their experiences in the long run, they were not an initial panacea for cultural engagement. The students primarily engaged in them *after* they had found their comfort zone and made a few friends in classes with whom they joined in clubs.

Outside School. Outside school, the students' social lives remained largely focused on family (both locally and abroad) and their specific cultural communities. Cam spent most of her free time with her grandparents, her aunt, her uncle, and their young children, whom she often babysat. She claimed to be content with her family-focused life beyond school. As noted, Nuon lived in an apartment building with a large Cambodian population and was strongly connected to her homestay and custodian (not the same person). Her social engagement outside school was limited to members of this community, and she described this part of her life as boring; Before the pandemic, she sometimes went downtown in the company of her Cambodian cousins, but mostly stayed home. During the pandemic she spent time on her phone and playing video games. When I asked her if she was ever homesick, she replied no because she was "tough" and could talk to her family every day; however, she described her overall social life as a disappointment. Guo also expressed regret about his social life in Canada, notwithstanding involvement in activities and connecting with "study buddies" in class. He explained that he had not experienced

"the whole part of Toronto" like the zoo and restaurants and parties with friends, because he spent most of his time with his mother and her social circle of expatriate Chinese families. He even met his community volunteer commitment by working at a Mandarin kindergarten.

Short Term ESA Students: Daria, Ilya, and Li Wei

Unique Beginnings. Daria, Ilya, and Li Wei moved to Canada as senior students, at 17 years of age. As noted, each had a unique transition experience: Li Wei attended a board-sponsored week-long orientation in August; Daria attended a one-day welcome retreat at Ravenswood, and Ilya somehow fell through the cracks of the "official" placement process. Their transition to online learning, at the beginning of their second semester, and the broader lockdown of Toronto, which carried on into the 2nd year of their studies, had a devastating impact on their social experiences.

Daria's extreme study habits and self-described shyness contributed to her social isolation. For her, the Ravenswood orientation session was a welcome intervention because she connected with another Iranian student. Otherwise, she found it "very hard to make friends." She recalled that she "sat lonely" in her classes where there wasn't much opportunity to interact with others. In science, she met with a Korean boy who, like her, understood the concepts but struggled with English. She even started to learn Korean on Duolingo so that they could communicate better. However, once the class was over, she didn't see him anymore. She recalled that at the orientation the teachers and mentor students had encouraged her to get involved in extracurricular activities, so she inquired about a club she but claims that no one responded. At the end of the first semester, she fell into a "deep depression" that lasted several weeks. During this time, she reported, "you are surrounded by many Canadian people, and you want to speak like them, wear clothes like them, or make friends like them." She dealt with her loneliness by

going outside and walking or shopping by herself and did not disclose her feelings to anyone. Eventually, her despondency lifted and she resolved to become more engaged in the second semester. However, the pandemic started shortly afterward, so she stayed in her room and focused on her studies, taking courses in summer and in the evening to accelerate her graduation date. She noted, "I wasn't that much upset or sad at that time, because I am alone most of the time, I like to be lonely."

Li Wei asserted that making friends was the most challenging aspect of studying at Ravenswood: "You could say it is language. I think most international students don't care, they just hang out and speak Chinese friends. They don't bother, but I am in Canada, I am learning the culture." Ironically, he avoided participating in the welcome retreat at Ravenswood, even though he had enjoyed meeting other students from around the world at the board-wide orientation in the summer. Li Wei might have benefited from Cam, Nuon, and Daria's strategy of making friends with other newcomers as a first step toward developing Canadian friendships. Indeed, he acknowledged that it was easier to find people to talk with in his ESL class, but he was determined to make "Canadian friends." This proved difficult for him, as he described:

> The thing is, how should I say? I was expecting there would be easy to make friends in [Ravenswood] but in fact it's hard, I barely have no friends and I feel hard to get involved. Miss, how can I make more Canadian friends"?

Unable to find another student who shared his passion for Western film, he connected with several teachers who had a similar interest. During the pandemic, Li Wei started going for long drives on the weekend to explore other parts of Ontario. He invited a few students to join him on the excursions, but they didn't enjoy it the way he did and so he stopped trying.

Ilya's described his first few weeks at Ravenswood as "messed up." He was enamoured with the multicultural aspect of his new school but, like his peers, was initially intimidated by the environment:

> I was such an embarrassment. At first, I couldn't really talk to people, I was very scared and thought everybody was judging me and I am the new guy and it's the thing with new guys—you know, we're just always scared. . . . So, I really didn't try to talk to others, I mean, I did try sometimes, but I mean like I said that was the very first time I saw women and girls in my school so like I couldn't even look. . . . So, I was very shy, but it was mostly just in the first semester.

Like Li Wei, he was determined to improve his English and embrace multiculturalism. Still, he described himself as "introverted" and kept to himself at first. Like Daria, he explained that he had summoned the energy to become more engaged by second semester. Then the pandemic hit and his opportunities for social engagement were dramatically curtailed. Ilya expressed frustration that, unlike him, most students kept their cameras off during online learning and did not participate more than necessary. Again, like Daria, he focused on his studies. By his 2nd year at Ravenswood, when I spoke with him, Ilya had three close friends, one Canadian and two Persian, although he stressed that the latter were not from Iran—one had grown up in Canada and one had studied in England. He assured me that they spoke in English when together.

Clearly, the switch to online learning disrupted the social adaptation of these students. However, one can infer that they would not likely have achieved the same level of extracurricular engagement in Ravenswood as their peers who started studying here earlier, regardless. The academic demands of transitioning to a new system are much greater in Grade11 or 12 than in Grade 9 or 10, particularly when students are facing an accelerated English learning

curve. Cam, Nuon, and Guo seem to have been less isolated, perhaps because they had more time to learn English, or perhaps because they had more classes with large cohorts of ELLs and, therefore, more opportunities to interact with others in those classes.

Summary

The group of learners with whom I spoke overcame their challenges and achieved their goal of acceptance into North American postsecondary institutions without major trauma, notwithstanding the onset of a global pandemic in their final months of study. Although they experienced stress and bouts of despondency, their frustrations and anxieties were neither chronic nor crippling. To some degree these students fit the stereotype of relatively economically privileged "consumers" of English learning and cultural capital associated with Western education. Their stories are less illustrative of the trope of the isolated and overwhelmed student living in an unfamiliar homestay,

As they navigated their sojourns as secondary students in a new country, English created both bridges and barriers, an experience they with shared other multilingual leaners. This group of ESA students faced those challenges with some advantages over others in their superdiverse school. Harking back to Lightman (2018) on the transient/transilient spectrum, they had some advantages over other ELLs in their multilingual school. All six were products of previously demanding school systems and prior language studies. They also benefited from transnational networks—especially Guo, Lie Wei, Cam, and Nuon—that helped ease the anxiety of their initial transition to Canada and to the school.

My student respondents developed and implemented strategies to overcome the language barriers they face in many of their content classes. Strategically, they developed social relationships with those who shared their first language and they bonded with those who faced

the common challenge of learning and studying in English, while maintaining transnational family ties and links to local expatriate communities outside school.

Chapter 6: Observing Policy in Action: Educators' Perspectives

This chapter explores my second research question: *"How do educators describe the experience of ESA students in their school?"* My findings are based on interviews with six educators who work closely with ESA students, either as teachers, guidance counsellors, or both. As outlined in Chapter 4, I identified three educators who worked directly with ESA students by virtue of their position and three who would encounter them as one of many cohorts. I purposefully sought out teachers of subjects that were most discussed by ESA students—mathematics, science, and ESL/English—and selected guidance counsellors who worked with them. One of the educators taught geography, music, ESL, and guidance. Three of the respondents had been teaching at Ravenswood for 3 years or less at the time of the interview; the others were 20-year-plus veterans.

Educators provided narratives about the attributes of successful ESAs and recounted stories of students who were less resilient than my respondents. They offered perspectives on the practices of their colleagues and the strengths and weaknesses of broader system, as well as describing their own beliefs and actions.

Policy Musings

Educators' Understanding of the Policy Landscape

All the educators in this study interacted with ESA students every day at school; however, their knowledge of the broader policy context was limited to their understanding and experience of local events. They were not well versed in specific goals—aspirational, strategic, or economic—at the board or government level. None were familiar with organizations such as OASDI and CAPS-I, but they did understand that there was a wider group of private entrepreneurs involved in the business of recruiting and hosting students from abroad. Only Mr.

F, who reported to the central IE office, had a sense of board-level support services, practices, and activities directed toward these students.

Respondents agreed that the primary motivator for the recruitment of ESA students is financial. "It's all about the money, right?" Ms. S commented, a sentiment expressed by several respondents. At the local level, educators claimed to be unaware of any direct financial impact from the tuition fees of ESA students. However, they were aware that the increase in ESA students over the past decade has helped to offset a steady decline in enrolment at Ravenswood. They understood that without ESA students, fewer courses would be offered, and full-time teacher positions would be eliminated.

Several educators offered rationalizations for the presence of ESA students in the school that echo the broader neoliberal discourse found in government documents and marketing literature. One teacher speculated that ESA students attending postsecondary institutions in Canada would be "good for the economy" and another suggested that some of the "very good brains" might settle in Canada permanently. Several remarked that the presence of ESA students in the school contributed to a global awareness among all the students "and the rest of us" and helped foster a sensitivity to understanding human connectedness. I asked how ESA students contributed to that objective more or differently than other students in this superdiverse school. Mr. P commented on the possibility of ESA students spending time here and then returning to their own countries with a broader international perspective, emphasizing the global economy and the need for cooperation and common understanding. Ms. M exclaimed, "Oh my goodness, I am happy to have them [ESA students] . . . they motivate the other students to work harder." Mr. F expressed hope that the presence of ESA students would broaden their teachers' cultural

awareness and “there would be some learning how to, uh, maybe adapt their teaching and content.”

(Lack of) Inclusion in Policy Discussions

Regardless of their role—teacher or guidance counsellor—respondents reported feeling excluded from formal policy discussions about ESA students. Ms. S offered the following comment about how policies with respect to individual groups of students were poorly supported by the board and school leadership:

> I always wonder, like, when these policies come through, like, do they think about how to make sure that it is implemented in a meaningful way rather than just okay here it is, here are the few things that we need to do . . . It’s like, okay, we need to care about the students but what actual supports are in place for teachers to support the students?

Ms. E, who teaches ESL, also described feeling unsupported. She explained that the teachers in the ESL department were very dedicated, but they weren’t working as a team. There had been a lot of turnover in the last 2 years, including prior to the onset of the pandemic. She described the new curriculum leader as lacking in experience and claimed that the challenges of responding to pandemic restrictions had resulted in everyone working in isolation. She further suggested that most teachers in the school were not well informed about the needs of ELLs generally, and probably had “no idea” who the ESA students were. She recommended that there be at least one workshop every year devoted to strategies for supporting ELLs including the ESA students, but was not aware of this happening in her time at the school. Generally speaking, workshops to support ELL students might be offered during board-wide or localized PD days, although teachers are usually given a choice about which ones to attend.

The guidance counsellors expressed a desire to know more about the specific policies that impact ESA students. School-based counsellors like Mr. P, who are not appointed or supported by the board's central IE office, do not have access to information about student visa requirements, tuition payments, or medical insurance. However, because Mr. P counsels these students on academic issues and has a relationship with them, he is often asked for assistance in this regard. He refers questions related to ESA issues to Mr. F, who is only at the school 1.5 days a week. Ms. J was assigned to work exclusively with ESA students on site at Ravenswood for 6 years prior to the change which assigned one itinerant counsellor to multiple schools. She recalled attending a half-day training session at the beginning of her tenure in that position, but beyond that her ongoing contact with the IE department was "limited to phone messages and email communication" and she described the response as often inadequate. In the latest structure of the IE department, a principal for international students was appointed in 2019 to deal with ESA students' academic issues. As a group, the principal, Mr. F, and other centrally assigned counsellors met regularly to discuss issues of concern with ESA students and plan for board-level workshops and social events. However, the person in the role of IS principal left the board in the spring of 2021 and the position has remained vacant.

Whatever their awareness of the policy context and understanding of their role within it, all my respondents understood that the task of educating the students and supporting them socially and emotionally often falls on the shoulders of educators such as my respondents. Some of them were more actively and consciously involved in enactment than others.

The Path Toward Academic Success

Ambition and Achievement

Educators described their ESA students as generally high-achieving or having ambitions to be so. Ms. M elaborated, "They bring this determination to succeed and the dedication, right? And they are interested. They have the goal of like succeeding, right? And manage many things on their plate, right?" Ms. J asserted that many ESA students are "hungry for learning" and motivated to get into the "best" universities. Several educators noted that ESA students were often competition winners in mathematics and science. The respondents suggested that many parents of ESA students expect their children to do well academically and that students feel the pressure of the investment their families have made, as Cam and Guo articulated. ESA students "tend to prioritize academics above all else," and they want to advance quickly, according to several teachers and counsellors. These comments are consistent with the narratives of my respondents and the students in our participatory action research project (Schecter & Bell, 2021).

However, two educators offered counternarratives to the "ambitious and high-achieving student." Mr. P disclosed that, in some cases, parents send their students to study in Canada because they don't know what to do with them in their home country. Noting that this is an exception to the norm, he explained that he was referring to "some wealthy kids without life skills who are here to fend for themselves." Ms. S, a native of Hong Kong, asserted that she believed many Chinese families send their children to study in the West because it is "a status thing" and they don't really care if the students do well. These counternarratives serve as reminders that stereotypes can, indeed, be misleading or at least simplistic (Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023).

Educators agreed that for most ESA students the path to success is not an easy one, nor one at which they are always successful. As delineated below and consistent with the extant literature (Kuo & Roysicar, 2004, 2006; Nelson, 2013; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Schecter & Bell, 2021), respondents posited that excelling as an ESA student requires adjustment to culturally different pedagogical approaches, unfamiliar curricula, and the demands of learning a new language. However, their comments about the extent to which these challenges are "manageable" and how much teachers can and do address them varied.

Managing Expectations

Several educators ruminated on whether there was an ideal age or level of English for ESA students to begin their sojourn. Younger students, they suggested, have more time to adjust and learn English, but they are often less mature and less prepared emotionally to live away from their families. On the other hand, students who come to Canada in Grade 11 or 12 often have "unrealistic" confidence in their ability to adapt and excel quickly. Mr. F explained, "Like if a Grade 12 student applies, they think they're going into Grade 12 and next year they can go into the university. Um, but . . . that might not be the case." Guidance counsellors often try to direct students away from demanding subjects like senior-level math and science and into courses considered less demanding linguistically or ones that are officially designated to accommodate ELLs. As noted in Chapter 4, as a school with a large ELL cohort Ravenswood offers several of these language-accommodated courses, although they tend to be mandatory Grade 9 and 10 courses like history, geography, and civics. Of course, taking classes below their grade level means that it will take students longer to accumulate the necessary credits for graduation. Such recommendations are often resisted by students, like Ilya and Daria, and their custodians. Learning that they may not be ready or able to complete their high school education as quickly as

hoped often leads to frustrated and disappointed students, custodians, and parents, according to the counsellors I interviewed. Not following their counsellors' advice turned out well enough for Daria and Ilya, although to compensate for the demands of higher-level courses, both dropped their course load from four to three classes, thereby reducing their credit accumulation.

Mr. F suggested that unclear expectations and lack of enforcement of the admission requirements outlined in recruitment materials contribute to this problem. He explained that the standards described in the official recruitment material are not adhered to when accepting potential ESA students at the board:

> We look at their academic average . . . We look at their English ability . . . And then we say "you're approved." It's almost like we're not following our own admission requirements. It's not like when I apply to college . . . They'll [the colleges] say, uh, unfortunately you do not meet our admission requirements.

Several other teachers agreed that minimum language standards, at least, should be a requirement, particularly for senior students. From the classroom perspective, Ms. M also asserted that students would benefit from greater clarity about the expectations or requirements for success in Canadian high school and for university/college acceptance. She suggested, "Maybe there would be a [web]site where they could post the curriculum expectations of the different grades. The kind of layout of expectations may well help them to focus and bridge the gaps."

Shopping for Credits

The practice of students going to other boards or schools instead of, or in addition to, their home school in pursuit of higher grades was cited as problematic by educators. Respondents expressed the most wariness about private schools, which they described as

"unregulated" and "easy credits." They made a distinction between established independent schools and "corner store" schools that cater to wealthy students who want to improve their senior-level grades. They expressed concern that the practice of "shopping for easy credits" and higher marks can lead to grade inflation and does not properly prepare students for the rigours of university. These observations reflect my conversations with Li Wei and Cam, who suggested that ESL and English credits were easier to come by at some private schools, and Guo, who indeed improved his grade significantly by taking an English course at a such an institution. The issue poses a dilemma for postsecondary institutions as well. According to Mr. F and Ms. J, while some universities and colleges claim to account for such discrepancies when assessing applications, student transcripts do not indicate if individual courses are taken at an institution other than the one issuing the transcript. In other words, Guo's university application will not indicate that his Grade 12 English credit was not earned at Ravenswood.

A distinction in the federal policy that regulates the issuing of study permits is relevant to this discussion. At the postsecondary level, students must study at a "designated learning institution," but no such provision exists at the K–12 level. If a student fails or is demitted, they can go to another board or school. One guidance counsellor told me that agents sometimes charge a commission to refer a student to one school or board and then charge another fee to find an alternative if things do not work out well for the student. And while the option of moving to other schools is available to all students, educators declared it is a much more common practice among ESAs, as asserted by Guo in the previous chapter. In a focus group discussion with administrators from other boards, this was cited as an area where they would like to see more government regulation (Bell et al., 2023)

Language, Culture, and Pedagogy: Variable Experiences

Adjusting to New Classroom Routines

Educators cite inquiry-based learning, group work, oral presentations, and emphasis on metacognition as classroom practices that often pose challenges for students from non-Western cultures, like most ESA students. Ms. J stated,

> I think the whole cultural issue, the fact that our school system runs so differently, right? They [ESA students] are not used to being able to ask questions. They are not used to being able to ask for extensions . . . I think group work is scary for them because they are not used to that.

Ms. J's comment is consistent with the feedback from my students, all but one whom described a reluctance to ask for help. However, as I discussed the issue with educators, I concluded that as much as students were unfamiliar with these practices, student attitudes and teacher practices can significantly impact the ease of transition to a new system.

For example, Ms. S and Ms. M offered contrasting assessments of how ESA students adjust in math and science. Ms. S claimed that ESA students are often frustrated when required to go beyond providing the "right" answer by discussing real-world applications of scientific theories. She declared that many students could not "pivot" quickly enough to get the high marks they desired. In contrast, Ms. M asserted that ESA students, who were often advanced in mathematics skills, quickly become comfortable with new ways of learning and demonstrating knowledge. She remarked, "So, there is this kind of openness to learning and the moment that you show that learning can be with thought, rather than just mechanical learning they kind of get you know, already hooked. And so, they don't see it as a barrier."

A few educators and several student respondents highlighted an emphasis on oral participation as an unfamiliar practice. However, some teachers believed this was not a huge barrier. Ms. J described how she scaffolds tasks to help the students become more comfortable with presenting. She begins by having students discuss issues with a partner, preferably someone who speaks the same language, then introduces small group work, and graduates to having students do full class presentations. On the other hand, she noted that she incorporates opportunities for all students to engage in quiet, solitary deep thinking, which she described as an approach to learning that also required adjustment for some students. She claimed that students benefited from both practices and that this was part of "intercultural learning." When asked for an illustrative example, she cited clozed readings. In this activity, students are given a text with words or phrases missing and must fill in the blanks while listening to a teacher or another student read the full text. The task requires focused listening and concentration. Ms. J. noted that many of her ESA students excelled at this task.

Several educators emphasized how important it was for teachers to be explicit about expectations. By way of underscoring this, one educator recalled an anecdote that an ESA student had shared with her. The student had been assigned to take notes from a text and write them on cue cards. Not understanding the learning goal of practising note-taking by summarizing key ideas, the student spent hours preparing "hundreds" of cue cards and received a poor grade. The educator asked, "Was this an example of a student having difficulty adjusting, or an example of poor pedagogy?"

Whose Language Barrier?

Learning *in* English is a significant challenge for many ESA students, as my student respondents described. Educators agreed but they were not aligned in their assessment of how

significant the barrier is or how teachers can bridge the gap. Two guidance counsellors suggested that some students' struggles with English may represent a placement issue, particularly senior students who are at beginner levels of English/ESL when they come to Canada. As Mr. F noted, ESA students are accepted regardless of their proficiency level, notwithstanding the board's official admission criteria of "intermediate English," a common practice throughout the province (Bell et al., 2023). As noted, several educators expressed the view that younger students like Cam, Nuon, and Guo benefited from having more time to develop English proficiency before taking senior-level courses. Ms. J offered a counteropinion, declaring "engagement in learning the language" to be more critical than students' age or level upon entry. She suggested that some students "just don't have an aptitude for language" and struggle regardless of the level they are in, while others gain proficiency quite readily. She asserted that when students experience the "feeling of moving ahead and going forward versus being stagnant," they become motivated to continue learning. Teachers' ability to support success and ignite inspiration can make a big difference, she contended.

As noted earlier, there are several key policy texts in Ontario that outline procedures for the reception, placement, education, and assessment of ELLs, including ESA students, who are specifically identified as a subset of this cohort. In addition, the Ontario IE strategy states that *"*supports to help [international] students achieve English- and/or French-language proficiency are a key element of the [international education] strategy" in Ontario (OME, 2015, p. 22). Nonetheless, educators noted that accommodations and supports are not always provided—either at a system level or in individual classes. All three guidance counsellors and Ms. E cited teacher inflexibility, "with language, with curriculum, with behaviour," as problematic for many ESA students. Mr. F claimed that some teachers, especially in math and science, are often quick to

disregard struggling ESA students, rather than "you know, helping with their language and understanding, pairing them up with another student who can help them." According to Ms. J,

> A lot of teachers quickly forget that it takes years to learn a language, right? They think the student's going to acclimatize really quickly and that doesn't happen. We know that it takes years to, to learn a language . . . And I think that's, that's one of our problems is that teachers don't realize how hard it is for the students to, um, you know, to, to learn a subject content and language at the same time.

Ms. E echoed this sentiment and added the observation that content teachers require more training on how to work with ELLs. She cited several strategies that are well documented to support the success of multilingual learners in content classrooms, including accessing their prior knowledge, drawing on first-language literacy skills, and allowing and encouraging the use of first languages in the classroom (Cummins & Early, 2015; Gibbons, 2015; Lucas et al., 2008; Westernoff et al., 2021) She and Ms. J both use word walls, dictionaries, translations, and visuals and incorporate other multimodal literacies in their classes; they review concepts regularly and check for comprehension. However, Ms. J. noted that many ESAs student, like most of my respondents, are reluctant to ask for help or let the teacher know when they are struggling. As such, it's important for content teachers to look for signs that students are struggling and proactively provide accommodations and scaffolds. Ms. M. claimed that her own struggles with complex word problems when she was learning English led to what she described as a "flexible" approach. When assessing student work, she tries to "make the test kind of adjustable" and check for comprehension by allowing students to "kind of use fewer words." These approaches are examples of engaged language practices enacted by teachers. However, comments from educators and students suggest that they are not commonly implemented in this context.

Ms. S, for example, disclosed that she finds it challenging to break down language barriers, despite empathizing with her ESA and other ELL students. She described having to return students' assignments with low grades as "soul crushing" for her. Although she expressed willingness to help students and offered to proofread and provide feedback on drafts, she claimed that many ESA students did not take advantage of the offer for extra support. She lamented,

> They come and go, and I feel like I failed another one. Not failed in terms of like zero, but like, you know, like I failed this person. You know like I could have helped him, but I didn't know how.

When I asked her about allowing students to use Google Translate and to work in their first language, she declared that the work students did when they used translation tools was "not as if a native speaker wrote it." The difference between this and Ms. M's flexible approach suggests inconsistency in practice with regard to expectations about "standards" in English and linguistically flexible pedagogy.

In a related theme, several educators shared concerns about the practicality of the formal ESL/English curriculum, which they claimed does not have enough emphasis on skills that students need to be successful in other classes. Ms. M expressed the view that there is value in teaching students how to communicate clearly but questioned the relevance of "so much" western European literature and poetry, "especially Shakespeare." Ms. J further noted that the Grade 12 university English course was a source of stress and anxiety for many ESA students, especially those who start in their senior years, and subsequently one they often opt to take at private school, as Guo did. The leap from intermediate-level ESL (or lower) to reading *King Lear* in a year or two is a big one and does not always prepare students adequately for their postsecondary studies. Even those who succeed in their English classes may struggle to pass the

OSSLT (like Guo and Nuon) and other language proficiency tests, or be overwhelmed by the vocabulary and language demands of other courses. Ms. J suggested that perhaps a course emphasizing broader literacy skills and the demands of other genres rather than literature might be more appropriate for ESA students on an accelerated path to postsecondary studies. Suffice it say that the teachers I spoke to were all in agreement that ESA students were struggling in classes where English was the language of instruction; they held both the curriculum and lack of teacher preparedness to account for this.

Adjusting Socially, Emotionally, and Culturally

Abroad and Alone

Home Away from Home. While many students experience isolation, loneliness, or mental health issues, living abroad and often alone can exacerbate these challenges for the ESA student cohort. In the GTA, ESA students often live with family members or close friends, as did most of my student participants. The existence of many transnational communities in the urban environment may mitigate feelings of isolation for these students. However, many other ESA students board with a local family that they have not previously met, and these arrangements are not always regulated or supervised by agencies. In addition, students occasionally live on their own or in boarding houses with other students. Educators agree that the latter is the worst scenario but there is nothing, from a policy perspective, that stops this practice.

Counsellors and teachers alike emphasized the importance of a welcoming and supportive homestay. They reported that many homestay families treat ESA students well by trying to integrate them into their family life and helping them to adapt to Canada. However, even in homes where they are well cared for, the culture shock of adjusting to unfamiliar people, who often do not speak their language, and new household routines can be challenging for ESA

students. Meals consisting of unfamiliar foods are often a source of unhappiness. Ms. J recalled students asking for her advice and input on navigating rules like closing windows at certain times of the day, expectations around bedtime and curfews, and limitations on doing laundry. For a shy 15- or 16-year-old without strong language proficiency, these can seem like daunting problems. Counsellors observed that switching homestays is not uncommon for ESA students, a process which requires the involvement of the legal custodian and sometimes the intervention of a guidance counsellor.

Custodial Concerns. Mr. F observed that, in his experience, problems are less likely to become serious issues when the custodian lives and engages with the student, as did Daria's. However, as outlined earlier, this is not a requirement at the federal, provincial, or board level. Both Ms. J and Mr. P have contacted custodians on behalf of students who were struggling with homestays; sometimes the custodian intervened, but not always. Educators also reported that it could be difficult to reach custodians and that "the adults don't always know the student well." Ms. J offered the following analysis:

> Like you know you have these amazing guardians [custodians]. And then you have a lot of okay guardians. But then you also have some real, like, people who should never be guardians, right? And I would say more than 60% of our students don't have guardians who are there for them on a regular basis. I would feel comfortable saying that.—The guardian . . . may not even spend any time with the student. And, um, they may not connect with them in any way because the guardians sometimes see themselves as the, um, administrator, right?

Although living accommodation and custodianship were not problematic issues for my student participants, educators unanimously cited this as an area where greater oversight and accountability were required.

Falling Through the Cracks

Occasionally, serious problems do arise. Poor attendance, falling grades, and lack of engagement are warning signals that something is amiss. After an initial honeymoon period, most students adjust, but some begin to withdraw. They isolate themselves at school and miss classes. Sometimes concerned teachers observe patterns of disengagement and contact the custodian or inform guidance personnel. Ms. J reported, "They don't do so well on a test, and they haven't been able to, or they don't realize they can talk to their teacher. Right? And, and so they become, they start to stop going to class and they start to fall through the cracks." In her opinion, the reluctance to talk to someone is not uncommon among ESA students, as we saw with Cam, Daria and Ilya who worked through their feelings of despondence and frustration on their own and were reluctant to ask for help.

According to Mr. P, however, not all teachers report attendance issues or are sensitive to lack of engagement. Guidance counsellors, who are trained to respond to lack of engagement, don't always see the students regularly enough to notice the signs that something is amiss. Mr. F described a system he used to identify struggling students. He kept a record of attendance and marks and would follow up with students who were missing classes. However, by the time he called a student to the office, they might have 20 or 30 absences and the problems were quite deeply rooted. In addition, not all struggling students would stop attending class, and he might not be aware of their struggles at all.

Guidance counsellors try to intervene in situations where a student is showing signs of deep stress—sometimes with the cooperation of teachers and sometimes without. If deemed necessary, they will contact the parent in the home country as Mr. F reported:

> And then, you know, in that case, it's a call home and letting them know that, you know, their, their child is basically not doing well and we're unable to get hold of the custodian. Uh, and that is a problem cuz the custodians should be the parent, yeah? Or your child is in this country and they're [the custodian's] not doing their job. Basically, it's our job to let the parents know that the person that they've entrusted their child with is not fulfilling their obligations.

Like all others, ESA students who have missed 15 consecutive days of school can be demitted from the school, although this recourse is rare in practice. Rather, according to counsellors, efforts are made to support struggling students. Ms. J expressed the view that the school has an obligation to do what they can to intervene. She explained,

> For students who are just falling through the cracks because of the language, or, you know, because of, you know, not being supported at home, you know that if there's something going on within . . . there's no place for them to sleep at night, it's like late at, uh, late and somebody's talking till three in the morning, they they're tired and they can't study. Well, those things we can, we can work on. Right? I mean, that's, they've come here to our, to our place . . . We should be able to provide them a comfortable place to be.

Furthermore, she noted, the board is reluctant to demit students, knowing that the support ESA students receive from school personnel is often crucial to their well-being.

Occasionally, efforts to support students fall short. An example of a student falling through the cracks arose during my data collection. Ariana's guidance counsellor, Mr. P, had

suggested that she would be willing to chat about her experience in a homestay and some of the challenges she faced during her adjustment to Canada. In addition to a stressful homestay move, the young woman had spent all the money her mother had advanced for the semester, thereby straining her relationship with her family and her custodian. Her counsellor suggested that she might have mental health issues; however, the custodian had not been helpful in trying to address them. Mr. P gave Ariana my contact information. Although we connected by email, and she agreed to speak with me. she did not appear at the appointed time. When I followed up with her teachers it seemed that she had stopped attending classes. Because Ariana had recently turned 18, she was no longer under the supervision of a custodian and the school was not able to reach her. According to teachers and counsellors, Ariana's story is not unusual.

Building Community

Overall, respondents reported that most ESA students weather initial bouts of loneliness and build networks of support in the school, as did Guo, Nuon, and Cam. Ravenswood hosts students from many cultures; and multiple languages are present, if not spoken, in every classroom. Some of my respondents observed that ESA and other migrant students often "stick together" with others from their own culture, at least initially. Mr. P and Mr. F. noted that ESA students often found support through online relationships with their peers from Canada and from home. Ms. M. described the need to connect with students with whom you share a language and culture as a "security blanket." She explained that she deliberately pairs students with others from the same country, so that they could speak their language, adding, "But that's okay, right?" Ms. E agreed that "the easiest most comfortable thing is to kind of gravitate to your own—whether it's your linguistic or cultural background." She added, "Some of them [ESA students] will make a point of hanging out purposely with other cultures because they want to practise

their English," but "it really takes a very motivated kind of headstrong student to have that have that attitude." As we have seen, most of the students I spoke to exhibited that motivation to varying degrees. Similarly, one educator noted that ESA students are often drawn to teachers who share their language or cultural heritage, if such a teacher exists, because "it makes them feel more comfortable. Like they feel like they are understood better." As Li Wei noted, even knowing that their teachers shared the experience of learning English at one time can be a source of comfort.

Educators observed that, over time, some students start to mix with students from other cultures. Several of the educators spoke of strategies and activities they used in class to encourage interaction, like, icebreakers/warmup activities and carefully orchestrated "mixed" group activities. However, based on my student interviews, this does not seem to be common practice, particularly in senior grades. Nor does this strategy always go smoothly. Ms. J used the term "culture clash" to describe incidents where she has had to navigate behaviours that seem normal in one culture but were intimidating to others. She described students reacting in tears to classroom behaviours that others might view as innocuous, such as "borrowing" a pencil from a peer's desk without permission. Ms. E said that she only saw "intercultural issues" when one or two linguistic/cultural groups dominated the classroom and some students felt isolated as a result, echoing a statement that Guo made in his interview.

Like the students I interviewed, none of the educators reported incidents of explicit racism in intercultural intersections in the classroom. Ms. J posited that undoubtedly some of the students have unconscious biases about other cultures but stated that in her view the point of intercultural classes was to "work through that" with the students. In her opinion, a bigger challenge was teachers who made sweeping generalizations about students based on their

backgrounds, and did not make an effort to know the students individually. Specifically, she observed that some teachers divide ESAs into two groups—the high achievers and the strugglers—and do not try to support the latter group. Respondents all expressed the view that students benefit from engagement outside the classroom. Mr. F explained that he advises new ESA students to get involved:

> When we were able to meet with international students and, and meet with them, near the start of school, we would, we would tell them to always, uh, recommend and encourage them to get involved in the school, to join clubs, um, you know, to get, to get more involved in the school, uh, cuz that that's, you know, a big way to alleviate any kind of, um, you know, isolation or loneliness or even feel like, um, you know, they just go to school and that's it.

Several educator respondents noted the efforts of the ESL department to provide opportunities for social and cultural engagement such as field trips, ceremonies to celebrate student achievements, and special events like pizza lunches for ESA students. Educators who had been at Ravenswood for several years cited the school's annual multicultural festival as an activity that new students gravitated toward, often encouraged by their friends. However, these events all involve interaction with other multilingual or newcomer students. This observation is consistent with my findings. The ESA students I interviewed engaged interculturally over time and through personal effort, first with other migrant students and later, for Cam and Nuon, with native students. Even Ilya and Li Wei, who explicitly desired to make "Canadian" friends, found it difficult to do. Furthermore, ESA student engagement in group activities often happens after friendships have been formed, as was the case with Cam and Nuon. These findings are consistent with findings from Schecter and Bell's (2021) study at Ravenswood and other literature on

bridging intercultural relationships (L. Ryan, 2011; Mandell et al., 2022; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). For many ESA students it seems the path to engagement is through the classroom rather than outside it.

Context Disruption

Learning in a Pandemic

The challenge of managing in an unfamiliar context in a second language was exacerbated by the disruptive changes brought on by the global pandemic in 2020. Over the course of 2.5 years of the pandemic, ESA students participated in one or more of several scenarios: studying online from Canada; studying online from their home country; and studying "in person" in a new quadmester system. As outlined earlier, in the quadmester system students took two courses every 10 weeks). Each morning, half the class met with the teacher and the other half of the students worked independently on assignments from the same course at home. During the afternoon the entire class met online. In this structure, in-person contact (when it was permitted at all) was limited to half the class time. The same structure was in place when all learning was online. Educators unanimously expressed the view that the system was challenging for students and teachers and the disruption of shifting back and forth between in-person and online negatively impacted student learning.

Some students, like Ilya, opted to attend virtual school, which meant they took courses with teachers who were located centrally. These students were supported by guidance counsellors from their affiliated bricks-and-mortar school but did not have contact with their previous teachers or classmates. Students who opted for virtual school were given the option of studying from their home country, further isolating them. Mr. F, as international student guidance counsellor, described spending several weeks at the beginning of each semester

"working in tech support"— helping students log on to the newly developed learning platform the board adapted in 2020. The situation left him little time to deal with other academic or social issues. Technical difficulties were responsible for late starts and disruptions for many ESA students, thus rendering them further behind their peers, as alluded to by Ilya. Ms. E. recalled the challenge of supporting a student with a 13-hour time difference:

> That was a disaster. Yeah, because it was like 10 pm 11 pm, when we had class, and he was logging in and going to sleep, and when I call on him, he'd never respond, or claim internet issues. So that was not an ideal situation.

After a few months, the board offered ESA students who were studying from their home county the option of studying asynchronously. One of the students I approached for an interview was finishing his final credits from Korea, with the asynchronous approach. His teacher videotaped and posted their lessons online and he submitted his assignments as he completed them. It seemed to work well for this student who, like my respondents, was in Grade 12 and a high achiever.

According to Mr. F, many ESA students struggled on their own, particularly in the first semester when their teachers were still adjusting to teaching online. Consistent with the narratives of my respondents, few students reached out to their counsellors for help and support and students rarely dropped in during office hours. Ms. E and Ms. J. claimed that the students who were beginning their ESL studies in the spring of 2020 were unable to maximize oral language learning opportunities at a critical time in their language development. Speaking and listening skills were difficult to practise and assess both in person with masks on and online with cameras off. Opportunities for group work were also limited by space restrictions in person and the nature of breakout-room discussions online. As final grades in the first semester of online

learning in the spring of 2020 were based on prepandemic grades (after less than a month of study), students progressed to the next level regardless of whether they had met the required curricular outcomes. For students like Guo and Nuon, who were in their final months of study at the beginning of the pandemic, this seemed fortuitous. For others, it was not so advantageous in the long run. Ms. E. described the students she had in the fall of 2020, who had done their first semester of language learning in the spring, as "linguistically the weakest I've ever had."

Pandemic Blues

Educators observed that the "exaggerated loneliness" associated with online learning was particularly challenging for those who were not living with their families. At the time of the interview, Mr. P suggested that it was too soon to gauge the impact of this isolation in the long term, but nevertheless expressed concerns for students' well-being. He and others observed that it was difficult to monitor ESA students and support their learning and social needs when they could not check up on them in person. He reported,

> Like some of my kids that I, well, I know they're international and I know that they're they're on their own or whatever. I'll email them just to check in like, hey, how's it going? Are you managing?

Mr. F agreed that it was difficult to connect with ESA students during this period: "[When] we were in school, we could, uh, you know, we could hold meetings, we could get them together . . . it would be a lot easier to disseminate information to them, um, getting them into, uh, calling them down from class and meeting after school."

Teachers described the same challenge with ESA and other language learners in their classes. As one teacher explained,

> It's very impersonal . . . it is so funny what you take for granted. Um, in a school on a regular school day the little conversations that you have with students. And the little conversations that they have with other students. And the meetings that they make or the connections that they make in the hallway, like those things are all gone.

Educators expressed the view that the loneliness of online learning was exacerbated for ESA students who were here without their families and, in essence, condemned to solitary confinement. Ms. E expressed concern for students who were living on their own and told me about a student who had confided about how lonely he was watching TV and playing video games in his homestay with no one to talk to. She responded by regularly checking in on students and began having "mental health Mondays" in her ESL classes, including a slideshow of things that they could do on their own like online yoga or walking tours of the city. She gave lessons on "how to make friends" during a pandemic. Students were encouraged to exchange emails and then meet outside for some socially distant exercise and interaction with peers. Apparently, several students followed through and reported back that they had enjoyed themselves. She asserted that isolated students needed this extra additional intervention. However, none of the students I spoke to reported having that sort of encouragement from their teachers during the pandemic.

Summary

Educator narratives echoed themes that dominate my student findings and further enhance our understanding through their stories of students who were either less resilient or less well supported. These educators share a consistent perspective on the overall purpose of the ESA initiative, accepting its financially driven motivation with a note of cynicism and an absence of reflection about its impact on public education. They echoed some of the aspirational rhetoric

about the benefits of hosting ESA students without offering much explanation of how those goals were being enacted. As observers of policy in practice, they bore witness to the experiences described by my successful respondents and elaborated on some of the more disturbing risks inherent in the unregulated environment. As enactors, a few members of this group took steps to support students and address some of those risks. However, they also shared concerns that the needs and challenges of ESA students were not systematically addressed at the board or school level, by their colleagues. Like the students I spoke to, they asserted that many teachers, as policy actors, were not explicitly aware of or engaged in supporting this cohort of students.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

In Chapters 5 and 6 I discussed the data that inform my first two research questions:

- *How do Early Study Abroad students describe their experience in a public Ontario secondary school?*
- *How do teachers describe the experience of Early Study Abroad students in a public Ontario secondary school?*

When reporting these findings I have referred, at times explicitly and at other times implicitly, to official policies and enacted practices, particularly at the school level, that impact the experience of my student respondents and some of their ESA peers. In this final chapter, I include a more robust analysis of my third research question:

- *In what ways do official policies and enacted practices impact the experience of students at this level?*

In addition, I consider the implications of my findings for theory and practice and make suggestions for further research.

Mapping Layers of Policy on Student Experience

As noted, theoretically the policy onion framework provided by Ricento and Hornberger (1996) and elucidated by Menken and García (2010) utilizes a visual framework that is complementary to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecology of student experience (see Figure 1, Chapter 2). These theories provide overlapping conceptualizations for the examination of policy enactment in a micro context with a superdiverse population of multilingual learners with varying aspirations, socio-emotional needs, transnational relationships, and prior education.

Macrosystem: Discourses and Transnational Flows

While not the focus of my dissertation, my respondents' narratives serve to remind us that stakeholders at the local level are impacted by and engage in discourses about international education. My student respondents, their families, and to some extent their teachers echoed a neoliberal belief in the benefits of globalization afforded by transnational educational opportunities and the cultural capital of study in Western/English contexts.

These discourses were a driving force behind my students' sojourn. They articulated a desire to master English while they were young and to leverage their secondary ESA experience to secure a place in a Canadian (Western) university. Unlike many of their multilingual peers at Ravenswood, they do not appear to be driven, by necessity or inclination, to become Canadian citizens. A few spoke of study in Canada as one of several "international education" options available to them; for others it was one location in a transnational family enterprise. In this regard, their ambitions and their participation challenge the dominant discourse of IE as a pathway for the ideal immigrant.

At the micro level, the discourse among educators does not seem to include a focus on "the values and debates on the social role of education" (Simons et al., 2009, p. 16). My educator respondents adapted some of the rhetoric about the intercultural benefits of hosting international students, including the notion that they would contribute to a global world economy. And while they expressed cynicism about the financial motivation for the initiative, they did not question the implications of having fee-paying students in a publicly funded system or raise any related issues of inequity. Perhaps, as Cover (2016) suggested about British Columbia, their lack of engagement in this topic reflects the dominance of the discourses and the normalization of the of marketization of education (Winton, 2022).

Exosystem-Level Policies: Benefits, Risks, and Losses

Critical policy orientations posit that (language) policymaking is an exercise of power that provides more benefits for some stakeholders than others, either intentionally or unintentionally (Ball, 1993, 2015; K. A. Davis, 2014; Levinson et al. 2020; Simons et al., 2009). Such is the case with IE policy as enacted in this location. School boards, including Ravenswood's, have enjoyed financial gains from tuition revenue and/or shored up declining enrolments by hosting ESA students. Moreover, in addition to indirect economic benefits, the Ontario government has profited from a 10% levy on tuition fees, implemented in 2019. There has been a proliferation of third-party entrepreneurs involved in consulting, recruiting, and providing custodianship services and accommodation—activities that are largely unregulated or monitored in my study site. In short, there are many policy actors who benefit from this lucrative free-market approach.

Many ESA students, including my respondents, also benefit from the initiative. The loosely regulated context facilitated the transnational flow of my students, and sometimes their families, across the globe. My respondents were able to take advantage of a competitive market in educational options between countries and within the local context of the GTA. Notwithstanding the pressure and demands they faced, they enjoyed privileges that were unavailable to most of their peers—both Canadian citizens and other migrants.

The lack of regulation is not without risk. The darker consequences of the initiative, although not experienced by my student respondents, were noted by teachers and counsellors at Ravenswood and in other literature (Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023). My educator respondents shared stories of academically and emotionally vulnerable students. Sometimes these students benefit from the intervention of a concerned teacher or counsellor, sometimes they muddle

through on their own, and sometimes they fall through the cracks. There is little official policy at the federal, provincial, or local level that protects these vulnerable students.

There are additional risks for students whose challenges with English language learning may jeopardize their overall academic progress. While some ESA students, like my respondents, have the resources to succeed without those language supports, there are others who struggle in classrooms with teachers who either do not understand or forget how difficult it is to learn in another language. Ironically, support for English language learning is explicitly addressed in Ontario policy documents, including the ESL curriculum and policies and procedures for assessing and supporting ELLs (OME, 2007a, 2007b, 2010), and cited as key to a successful IE program (OME, 2015). Despite these explicit guidelines, in practice these policies are enacted inconsistently at Ravenswood and around the province (Donohoo, 2020).

Finally, one could argue that the IE initiative disadvantages teachers at Ravenswood as the responsibility for educating and supporting ESA students largely falls on their shoulders. Unlike other stakeholders in the enterprise, they do not experience any direct benefit beyond the cold comfort of knowing that recruiting these students helps keep their classes full and their schools open. Revenue from student tuition is not used to support professional development in supporting linguistically or culturally diverse students, despite the well-documented need for such training, or to provide additional classroom resources.

Policy in Practice: The Mesosystem at the Core of the Onion

As noted in Chapter 2, Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecology emphasizes the importance of individuals engaging in a dialectical interaction and incorporates the three tenets of contextuality, fluidity, and agency (Heng, 2019). Using this framework, Ravenswood can be viewed as a mesosystem in which influential relationships interreact with the experiences of ESA students

(Figure 1, Chapter 2). Alternatively, and complementarily, we can conceptualize the experience of ESA students at Ravenswood as the enactment of policy by various actors. These include the students at the very core, onsite teachers, counsellors, and others just beyond the school but still within the context of the daily lives of the students, such as (extended) family, friends, and care providers. Ultimately, it is activity at this inner core layer of the onion that illuminates what policy in practice looks like for ESA students in this context.

The Central Role of Student Agency. While my student respondents described relationships that influenced them in this context, perhaps the most pronounced finding from my study was the degree of agency they employed in determining their own experience. They largely navigated their sojourns successfully, albeit not without stress, by working hard and explicitly employing strategies known to be successful in supporting content-based language learning (Cummins & Early, 2015; Gibbons, 2015; Schecter & Cummins, 2003; Westernoff et al., 2021) They translated, engaged in interlinguistic mediation, and created personalized subject-specific dictionaries. They spent countless hours mastering subject-specific language demands and were successful, in part, because the content was below the level of mastery they had achieved in previous countries. They sought out and nurtured classroom allies, if not friends, among whom they found support and with whom they bonded over shared academic challenges and linguistic demands. They also benefited from previous English language studies and strong literacy skills in their first language, which have been found to help students more readily meet the demands of learning content in a second language (Lucas et al., 2008; Cummins & Early, 2015, Westernoff et al., 2021).

Several educator respondents noted, with concern, ESA students' reluctance to self-advocate. Indeed, with one exception (Nuon), my respondents expressed a disinclination to ask

their teachers for help, assistance, or the accommodations to which they were entitled as ELLs (OME, 2007a). Ironically, these students displayed their agency in other ways, sometimes challenging the counsel of their educators with respect to their readiness to sit for proficiency tests or participate in senior-level courses, or by taking courses at other schools where they believed they would get higher grades. These actions speak to the agency and resilience of my respondents and, according to their educators, sets them apart from other migrant students. These behaviours may be born out of their experience in educational systems that were more demanding and where they were expected to push themselves. They may have been responding to pressure to accelerate their transition to postsecondary school.

While most of my respondents rated their social experiences as less satisfying than their academic achievements, here too they managed to develop relationships with peers, largely through their own initiative. They approached social engagement with others strategically, as classroom allies who shared common goals. They formed bonds with students from the same countries, but this tendency was less pronounced, especially over time, than reported in other contexts, or indeed in previous research at Ravenswood (Nelson, 2013; Schecter & Bell, 2021) Indeed, all of my students expressed a desire to engage with students from other countries, including "native Canadians"; however, the degree to which they were successful depended on their individual personalities, the length of time they had been at the school, and, to a lesser degree, school-based programming or educator interventions. No doubt the superdiverse nature of the school may have also contributed to the "mixing up" of cultures in the classroom, as Nuon described it.

Educators as (Sometimes Unwitting) Policy Actors. There is ample evidence to suggest that some caring, engaged educators can and do make a positive impact on the

experiences of ESA students at Ravenswood (Schecter & Bell, 2021). Students and guidance counsellors highlighted kind, helpful ESL teachers who encouraged students to "fit in," to use Daria's phase. ESL teachers and one math teacher I interviewed employed evidence-based accommodations and supports for language learning in their classrooms. Students shared a few narratives of teachers who were sensitive and inclusive, if not explicitly engaged in culturally responsive pedagogy, although these stories stand out in their exceptionality. In addition, some educators, especially guidance counsellors, were conscious of the socioemotional challenges that ESA students faced, and intervened, to the extent that they could, when there were indicators of academic or emotional stress.

However, based on student narratives and corroborated by the observation of educators to whom I spoke, as a distinct cohort, ESA students are neither noticed nor accommodated on a large scale. Many teachers appear not to make specific accommodations to support either the language learning needs or the sociocultural engagement/adjustment of this cohort of multilingual learners. Given the lack of professional development focused on this cohort at the school or board level, this finding is not surprising. In the absence of the broad-scale implementation of linguistic supports, educators have "closed off" rather than "opened up" spaces for multilingualism, despite the superdiverse linguistic context of the school (Menken & García, 2010, p.4).

Enabling and Constraining Family Ties. My student respondents' experiences were influenced, if not supported, by their families and transnational networks. Certainly, for most of my student respondents the transition to living in Canada was both eased and constrained by the presence of either transmigratory parents (Guo and Li Wei) or extended family members (Cam, Nuon, and Ilya). Their parents consulted with agents and maintained the services of legal

custodians for their children; however, they were not dependent on third parties in their decision making. They developed long-term plans for their children's postsecondary education and beyond, to which the students subscribed.

While these supports may have contributed to the students' success, they also had a constraining impact. Cam would not share her self-doubt or struggles with her family and described feeling enormous pressure to do well. Li Wei, Nuon, and Guo all commented that outside school they felt confined by their ties to their expatriate communities. Daria and Ilya were less influenced by their families. Perhaps there were cultural reasons for their relative independence and perhaps their relative age and maturity were factors.

Entrepreneurial Actors: The Privatization of Care. Recruiting agents, custodians, and homestay providers who might play an influential role at the inner core had minimal impact on the students with whom I spoke. This finding would seem to contradict some of the more salacious narratives of ESAs and their families being preyed upon, exploited, or, in the case of homestay providers and custodians, left to their own devices (Schecter & Merecoulias, 2023). The absence of these issues for my respondents underscores that the students I spoke to were perhaps exceptional in their agency and access to local supports. However, the teachers and counsellors I interviewed expressed concern that these unregulated practices rendered less informed or supported ESA students vulnerable to isolation and neglect. This is an important area of policy enactment that is worthy of more research.

The Impact of Covid

In the months following the outbreak of the global pandemic, my research study, like all aspects of life, seemed irredeemably disrupted. How would I conduct my research? How long would I have to delay my data collection? Would the results be valid? Gradually, it became clear

that I would have to adjust my study and I began to think that the story of Covid might dominate my research findings. After all, the quick pivot of education to an online format was the most significant disruption to the day-to-day educational experiences of public education in a very, very long time. Many ESA students left the country and many more were delayed entry. Were the days of ESA students migrating to Ontario for a few years of study over? Over the course of the next 6 months, through my engagement with the research site, I could see that the new "normal" was going to continue for a while.

Surprisingly to me, the students in my study unanimously described the impact of moving to virtual studies as not much more than a somewhat boring inconvenience. Their resignation and acceptance of pivoting to a new way of doing things was characteristic of their overall stoicism and adaptability. They were experienced at adjusting to change and navigating new academic requirements in unfamiliar contexts without much direct support. As a footnote, in an email correspondence from Guo, in 2022, he told me how much he was enjoying studying online at the University of Toronto from his home base in China. The pattern of studying at night and working during the day suited him well and he was happy to be home, surrounded by friends with whom he planned to spend the summer travelling. He did not miss Canada and was ambivalent about coming back to finish his degree in person.

Teacher narratives suggest that not all ESA students fared as well with the transition to online learning, particularly those who were younger or at beginner levels of studying English. While all teachers and educators had to adjust, the demands of online learning in a homestay were no doubt even more isolating than for those who were at home. The long-term impact of these years of disrupted study should, and no doubt will, be studied more.

Theoretical Implications

The Lens of Superdiversity

The lens of superdiversity shed light on Ravenswood's complex cosmopolitan context, which a binary conceptualization of newcomer versus native Canadian could not capture. The varied backgrounds, languages, privileges and aspirations of my student respondents and their peers confirm that terms such as *ELL, ESL student* or even the more inclusive *multilingual learner* falsely homogenize the linguistically and culturally diverse student body. From a policy perspective, the practice of intentionally recruiting students from a global middle class, many of whom are part of transnational networks and do not aspire to become Canadian citizens at the end of their sojourn, directly impacts the potential for "superdiversity" in the school. At Ravenswood, any given classroom has students who were born in Canada, students who want to become Canadian, students who have no choice but to try to become Canadian, and students whose options include staying in Canada, returning home, and going elsewhere.

However, as noted in Chapter 2, Vertovec (2019) contends that it is the *interaction* of multiple migratory experiences of people with these various experiences, rather than the range of difference, as well as the local responses to the movements that marks a context as superdiverse. There is evidence in my findings to suggest that some ESA students participate in a subtle and complex "cultural exchange" with their student peers, school, and communities (local and transnational). My respondents were strategic about the relationships they fostered, forming alliances with others whose past experiences and future aspirations did not always align with their common cultural/linguistic backgrounds. They formed common bonds with other migrant students, based on their shared use of English, similar prior academic experience, and the short-

term goal of adapting to a new educational environment, showing less regard for linguistic and cultural boundaries based on country of birth of migration.

In this context, however, the local response to these conditions is less robust than it might be. Supports for English Language Learners, overall, are not strongly embedded in school culture and recognition of further difference seems limited. I posit that the superdiverse nature of the student body at Ravenswood, and schools like it, warrants a more nuanced response from educators—one that is more in keeping with Vertovec's (2007) call for greater appreciation of different types of difference within local communities – in this case within the broader cohort of multi-lingual/cultural students in the school.

Revisiting Policy Enactment

The Role of Teachers. Governments, administrators, and critical policy theorists emphasize the role of educators in "implementing" or "enacting" policy, depending on their own theoretical perspective. The role of teachers is highlighted in the Ontario Ministry's strategy and IE administrators from several boards identify a need for champions—educators at the local level who ensure that ESA students' academic, linguistic, and social/cultural integration is supported at the school level (Bell et al., 2023). Engaged practitioners exist at Ravenswood; they could be said to fulfill the role of policy enthusiast or influencer (Ball et al., 2012). However, far more prevalent in this context are what Ball et al. (2012) refer to as receivers, who cope with the situated context and enact IE policy by default. Their lack of engagement does not appear to be based on an active translation, appropriation, or critique of IE policy; rather, it is rooted in a failure to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. Regardless of their consciousness of discourses or text, they enact policy through their inaction.

The Influence of Context. One might assume that the superdiverse situational context of the school and its surrounding geographic area would increase the likelihood of Ravenswood being a site where multilingualism would flourish under the guidance of engaged teacher practitioners (Menken & García, 2010). It seems paradoxical that, in a context with so much cultural, linguistic, and migratory diversity, pedagogical inflexibility about language is cited so often by my student and educator respondents.

I posit that the intersection of several dimensions of context, as theorized by Ball et al. (2012), helps to explain this incongruity. With respect to the material context, the presence of ESA students is partly responsible for keeping classes full and teachers employed. Educators seem to accept this without question, perhaps because of the increasing normalization of other elements of privatization (Winton, 2022). For better or worse, this lack of recognition appears to contribute to the homogenization of multilingual learners within the context.

In addition, perhaps other demands and pressures from the external context, beyond those which relate directly to the hosting of fee-paying students, take precedence over these issues. As noted earlier, for example, Ravenswood has struggled to raise standardized school-wide test scores in numeracy and literacy to the provincial or board standard, at least in part because of the underperformance of English Language Learners. Rather than serving to encourage greater school-wide adaptation of supports for multilingual students, the situation seems to have contributed to a sense of resignation or frustration, exacerbated by a pervasive belief that students are not as "academic" as they used to be. Furthermore, the professional context does not provide sufficient opportunities for training and collaborative development for educators to develop the knowledge and tools to support multilingual learners.

Students as Policy Actors. As noted, the agency of my student respondents in determining their own experience was a major theme in my findings. They were hard-working, resilient, and resourceful students with high self-expectations. For the most part, they had access to financial and familial resources and benefited from prior academic success. Academically, they navigated a new educational environment in English, using strategies that their teachers, in theory, should be implementing for all students. As well, there are indicators that these students carved out spaces where interculturality and multilingualism existed, if not flourished, at Ravenswood. In short, my respondents played the role of enthusiast, or model policy actor (Ball et al., 2012).

While the achievements of these students are admirable, their ability to navigate their path to success with little support has social justice implications. By conforming to the stereotype of the resilient, hard-working ESA student, their success stories can unwittingly contribute to the notion that supports are not needed for this cohort or, by implication, other multilingual students. The accomplishments of the most agentive ESA students perpetuate a neoliberal system that rewards those with the most personal, familial, and financial resources and is ultimately at odds with the values of publicly funded education. Moreover, as consumers of education, these students can and do seek out the best opportunities in other publicly funded or private schools. These advantages and options clearly are not available to all. As the recruitment and hosting of students shows no sign of abating, the situation poses concerns about equity for all students—some of which may be minimized by the following recommendations.

Applied Implications

Academic Achievement and Language Support

Ontario's international education strategy ties students' academic success to their mastery of English (or French) and a high level of cultural exchange; it implies that classroom teachers are largely responsible for the achievement of these goals (OME, 2015). And yet, my study shows that successful ESA students are facing linguistic barriers, which they overcome largely through their own agency. Opportunities for professional development and collaboration—perhaps supported in part by ESA tuition fees—would help to ensure that educators can better support *all* multilingual learners in their classrooms.

Care and Well-Being of Unaccompanied Minors

In this large, diverse urban centre, there may be fewer students who are truly on their own than in other contexts. My student respondents, for example, were supported by diasporic, transnational communities. However, my educator respondents expressed the view that the supports in place were often inadequate for students who were staying in less hospitable homestays or whose legal custodians were less involved in their care. Stronger regulation and oversight of custodianship and home care at all levels of government following the guidelines established by OASDI (2019), would help to strengthen all aspects of the endeavour.

School-Level Supports

Designated counsellors, at school level, such as Ms. J (in her former position) and Mr. F who are knowledgeable about the particularities of visa requirements, fee payments, and medical insurance can help ESA students, play a critical role in supporting the successful transition of ESA students. Their link to the centralized IE office enables these counsellors to troubleshoot

issues around administration, custodial support, and homestays when problems arise. My educator respondents unanimously supported this model but expressed the opinion that one day a week was not enough. Without the daily support of a dedicated person (funded by ESA revenue), issues of oversight for care fall to educators who are not trained in the particularities and further blurs the public/private distinction.

Another salient finding is the impact that formal orientation programs can have in setting students up for success. One such program was implemented centrally by the IE office in 2019. However, a centrally based orientation program does not provide details about individual schools or their local communities. Furthermore, a summer program is not likely to be accessible to all incoming ESA students, as it entails early processing of visas and an extra month away from home. An alternative onsite model was introduced at Ravenswood as part of the action research study that preceded my research and received positive feedback from students and teachers in both studies (Schecter & Bell, 2021). The findings suggest that locally based supports are more effective than centralized ones.

Funding and Accountability

Demand for a transparent accounting of the financial costs and benefits associated with care and well-being is a critical policy question that should be addressed. Indeed, the separation of costs associated with the care and well-being of ESA students is consistent with the ministry's objectives of managed growth and financial sustainability, but it has not been realized in practice (OME, 2015). While it may be incumbent upon caring teachers to identify when a student is struggling in their class and to know which students are living away from a parent or custodian, the oversight of these students should not be downloaded on them. Sufficient support for ESA students should be included in the IE program and funded by revenue from tuition.

Contributions, Limitations, and Areas for Future Research

This research contributes to our understanding of policy enactment by examining the experiences of ESA students and the practices, largely based in human relationships, that shape them. My study confirms that discourses that tout the benefits of internationalization from a market perspective are echoed at the local level by educators and students, without questioning the implication of introducing fee-paying students into a publicly funded system. As noted in my literature review, the provincial response to managing and governing the initiative is variable. Ontario, with the most ESA students, is arguably the least regulated. As such, the enactment of ESA education policy is necessarily shaped by local contextual factors in this province.

My micro investigation into Ravenswood confirms that the combination of contextual factors in a school can result in something more than the sum of the parts. Here we find that the professional ethos, a decline in enrolment which accounts for the large number of ESA students, a demanding external environment, and the superdiversity of the student body contribute to a context that is not unwelcoming, but not overly accommodating to the students. ESA students do not appear to stand out at this school—they are not marginalized, but nor are they particularly noticed by many of the educators. Ironically, the value of supporting English language learning (for educational and market-driven reasons) is a discourse that is reflected in policy texts in Ontario, specifically for this cohort, but is not widely enacted in this linguistically diverse setting.

My study emphasizes the previously understated role of individual agency, influenced by many factors, as a key to determining the academic, linguistic, and social adaptation of secondary-level ESA students. My respondents had access to resources—personal and familial—that helped them manage the stresses of loneliness, adaptation, and pressure to excel. For others

the challenge was not so easily met. The moral challenge that arises from this study is how best to support these students, and the educators who work with them, without further perpetuating inequities in a system where not everyone has equal opportunity or access.

The study was limited in both depth and breadth. Onsite observations, as outlined in my original pre-Covid research design, would have provided a more nuanced and complex understanding of classroom interactions between teachers and students. Moreover, studies of ESA experiences in less diverse contexts, in Ontario and other provinces, would enhance our understanding of the role of context, particularly material and situated contexts and professional culture, and the impact of ESA students on those schools and the educators who teach in them. As well, more work needs to be done to explore the experiences of struggling and vulnerable students, as only successful students self-selected for my study. Finally, assuming that the practice of recruiting and hosting fee-paying students is not going to abate, we need more discussion about the impact of the initiative on publicly funded education and the issues of access and equity.

Epilogue: Returning to Ilya's story

I will end where I began, by returning to Ilya. This young man was similar to the other students in my study, and yet unique. Intelligent, articulate, and ambitious, Ilya enjoyed many privileges but worked very hard to achieve his academic goals. He was supported, at least initially, by a family member who helped him adapt to life in an unfamiliar urban context. His disrupted year and a half of study was far from normal, but like many of his peers he met the challenges of adjusting to a new environment in a second language and then pivoting to online studies. Ilya described a few of his teachers as kind; however, he suggested that most could be more helpful to ESA students. In hindsight, he acknowledged the wisdom and support of his

guidance counsellor, whose advice he initially rallied against. To a large degree he carved his own path to success.

Ilya was enthusiastic about the multicultural community at Ravenswood but was not able to participate in it to the extent he would have liked; initial shyness, the demands of his schoolwork, and then the isolation and anxiety brought on by the global pandemic made it difficult to do so. However, after a year and a half he had begun to form a community of friends from several countries, including Canada. His was an intercultural experience in a superdiverse context, to be sure, but not as a direct or necessary consequence of being a fee-paying ESA student.

There are many factors that contributed to the making of his Ilya's story; however, international education policy does not seem to have had as much impact as the local context, the intervention of a few caring educators, and, importantly, his own agency and ambition.

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Appendix A. Interview Protocol: Students

Name

Background

- Country of origin, age, grade, length of time in Canada, length of time at school
- Future plans (postsecondary and beyond)

Life at home

- What was school like in your home country? Did you like it? What subjects did you like/not like?
- Do you have any brothers or sisters? Where do/did they study?
- What interests/activities did you like outside school? (were you interested in sports, music, art, reading, etc)?
- How do you parents feel about your studying in Canada? Where did they study? What do they do? Do they both work?
- Did you study English? Where? How long? Did you like it?

Coming to Canada

- When did you come to Canada?
- Why did you choose Canada (rather than another country)? Did you think you would stay in Canada or go back when you finished school?
- Do you know if your parents had someone who helped them find the school (and the city)? Was it someone they knew or a businessperson (recruiter)?
- Why did you choose Toronto/the TDSB?
- Were you excited about coming to Canada? How did you feel about leaving friends and family? Had you been away from them for a long time? <u>What did you think it would be like? (expectations)</u>
- Did you know anyone here (friends or family)?

Accommodation

- Where do you live? (have you been in one place the whole time)?
- What are details of home arrangement? How many other students or children? What ages? Where do they study?

- Have you been in the same homestay (or other arrangement?) the whole time? Tell me about the changes.

- How comfortable is/was the home? Do you share a room or are you by yourself? Are there other students?

- (if homestay) Do they provide meals? Do you eat together? Do you spend *social* time with them?

- Are there house rules that you have to follow? (e.g. chores, curfew, access to technology)

- How far was your home from the school? How do you get to school?

Custodianship

- Tell me a little bit about your custodian. Is it the person you live with?
- (If not)? How did your parents find the custodian? Is the custodian paid?

- How often did you talk to them? Do they follow your progress in school? Do they check up on you? Did they ever speak to your teachers? What do they do if they are concerned that you are not doing well?

- Do they have a relationship with the school? Do they speak to your teachers? Do they go to parent-teacher night?

- Are you the only student they are responsible for?

- How often do they speak to your parents?

- If you are sick or worried about something would you go to them for help? Or would you feel comfortable asking your homestay? Or would you speak to your parents?

Starting School

- Let's go back to your first few weeks of school in Canada? When did you arrive? Did you choose your school or were you assigned? Did you start at the beginning of the year?

- Do you remember the day you spent at the assessment centre, when you were assigned a math and ESL level? Can you tell me about that?
- Was it hard? Were you nervous? What were the teachers like?

- What level(s) were you assessed at? Did you think that was a fair assessment (was it the right level)?

- When you started school, do you remember what your first day was like? Who did you meet first? Did someone show you around the school?

- How did you get your timetable? Who helped you choose your courses? Were you able to understand the guidance counsellor?

- Can you remember what your timetable was the first semester? Were you happy with the courses and the level? (probe for details)

Academics

- Let's talk about those first courses. Overall, how helpful were your teachers? Did you feel welcome? Did you feel supported? What was the biggest challenge (Probe: language, style of teaching, getting to know other students)?

- Language demands, support from teachers, interaction with students, support for language? Do you remember other strategies or things that they did to help make it easier to understand the language? Did you get extra time for tests/assignments?

- What were your ESL classes like? How were they similar or different from your other classes? Did they help your English get stronger? Was your first language allowed/encouraged? Could you use a translator?

- Did you learn anything about Canada and the other cultures in your classroom? How did the students from all the different countries interact in this class?

- What did your teachers do, specifically, that you found *helpful?* Was there anything they did that *made it difficult for you?*

Other classes

- Tell me a bit about the rest of your academic journey? What were your grades like? Did your plans change (did it take longer, did you change your plans for after school?). What courses were the most challenging?

- Generally speaking, how were your classes different from school that you took at home? Is school harder or easier here?

- Did you feel that your own culture was respected in class? Do you interact with students from other cultures?

- Did the teacher encourage that interaction? Did you feel that you learned about other cultures? Or ways of doing things in your class?

ESL/ENGLISH transition

- How long did it take you to finish your ESL program? How was the TRANSITION to regular English?

- Did you take English or any other credits at a school other than this one? Why or why not? Do you know others who did the same thing?

- Lets talk about writing the OSSLT. When did you first learn about it? When did you write it? Did you want to write it then? Did you feel prepared? What did the school do to help you be successful? Did you pass? (If not, discuss OLC)

- Did you have to write IELTS or TOEFL? Lets talk about that a little (support, challenges)

Other school supports

- Other than your teachers, were there other adults who helped you out while you were here?

- What was your relationship with guidance like? Who was your counsellor? What sort of things did they help you with?

- What is your impression of office people (principal, VPs, secretaries, hall monitors, etc)?

Social aspects of school?

- Did you find it easy to make friends? Who were your first friends? Were they from the same country as you? How did you meet them?

- Did you join any clubs or activities? Did anyone encourage you to do that?

- How did your friendships or involvement with social activities change or develop after you were there for a while?

- Did you start to make more friends from other countries? Other international students? Other ELLs? Students who were born in Canada/native English speakers?

Life outside school

- What kinds of things do you do when you are not at school?

- How easy was it for you to learn your way around Toronto?

- Do you spend much time doing things in the city? Have you become more comfortable with Toronto the longer you have been here?

- What do you like about Toronto?

- Outside school, are most of your friends from the same country as you?

Links to home

- How often do you talk to your parents? Other family members? Friends back home? How has this contact changed over the time you have been here?

- How often do you go home? Summer; Christmas? Have your parents and family ever visited you here?

Social/emotional well being

- I want to talk to you a little bit about the "ups and downs" of your time here. Overall, would you say this has been a good experience? If you had to give it a letter grade, what would it be? Thinking back to what you expected before you got here, how did the experience meet your expectations? Do you think it was an "international" experience?

- Did you ever feel "homesick"? Did you ever feel stressed out? What were the sources of stress? What did you do to help you through those difficult times? Did you call home? Did your homestay/guardian help? Was there an adult at school you could go to? Did your friend help?

- How would you rate your experience as an international student? Do you think most international students are happy with their experience here?

- What advice would you give to teachers? Other students? Administrators

Appendix B. Interview Protocol: Educators

Demographic Information:

Name:
Years teaching:
First language:
Languages spoken:
Length of time working at school

Familiarity with policy context (external, situated)

1. I would like to start by asking you to share your perceptions of the policy framework for International Students. (probe for understanding of provincial strategy, board level policies, school level policies)

2. Why do you think there has been so much growth in International Students?

3. Why do you think ESA students choose Ravenswood or why are they placed here?

4. What responsibilities does/should the board/school have for these students?

5. How has the presence of IS changed the culture or dynamic of your school or your classroom?

6. What is your perception of the students' expectations and readiness to study here?

    - Academically (adjustment to methods of teaching, curricula, subjects they find difficult)

    - Linguistically (ESL support, use of first language, pressure to pass OSSLT, or other language tests)

    - Socially/culturally (integration in class, loneliness/disengagement, integration outside class).

7. What sort of strategies do students use to navigate these challenges?

Professional context

8. How do you see your role/responsibility in terms of supporting them? What kinds of things do you do to meet their needs? What sort of supports do you have in this role (from department, school wide or board)?

9. What other supports does the school provide for them? The board? Do you believe these supports (or others) should be provided? Are they adequate to meet the needs of these students?

10. Other supports/relationships (home stay, custodial, familial)

11. Do your students ever talk to you about what it is like for them in their homestay (or other accommodation) environment? What sorts of issues come up (e.g., food, transportation)? Do their hosts ever assist them with school work? Does this create issues for you? How do you respond?

12. Are there emotional issues that come up that you associate directly with their developmental stage, that is, being adolescent youth far away from home and loved ones? What do you do to support them? What supports are available?

13. What, if any, communication does the school have with students' family members? Are there matters that arise where you feel the need to contact either the student's custodian or parent/primary caregiver (e.g., health issues, program of study choices)?

Appendix C. Beta Map of Initial Coding (Student Interviews)