Piloting a Literacy Development Program for Refugee Youth to Survive and *Thrive* in Nova Scotia Schools

PRESENTED BY

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AGENDA

Christine Doe

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OUR TEAM

Research Team
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- Sara King, PhD MSVU
- Melissa McGonnell, PhD MSVU
- LeeAnn Brownell, HRCE
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Instructional Team
- Eman Atwi, MSVU
- Dina Mohammad, MSVU
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- Weam Ibrahim, MSVU
- Bonnie Petersen, MSVU

BACKGROUND

- Limited programming for immigrant youth with literacy skills in Nova Scotia

- Refugee youth experience higher rates of school resistance (truancy, dropout, and lack of engagement) than other immigrant youth (Nakhaie, 2021)

- May take up to 10 years for students with a refugee background to acquire English language skills needed before being able to fully participate in academic studies (Collier & Thomas, 2017)
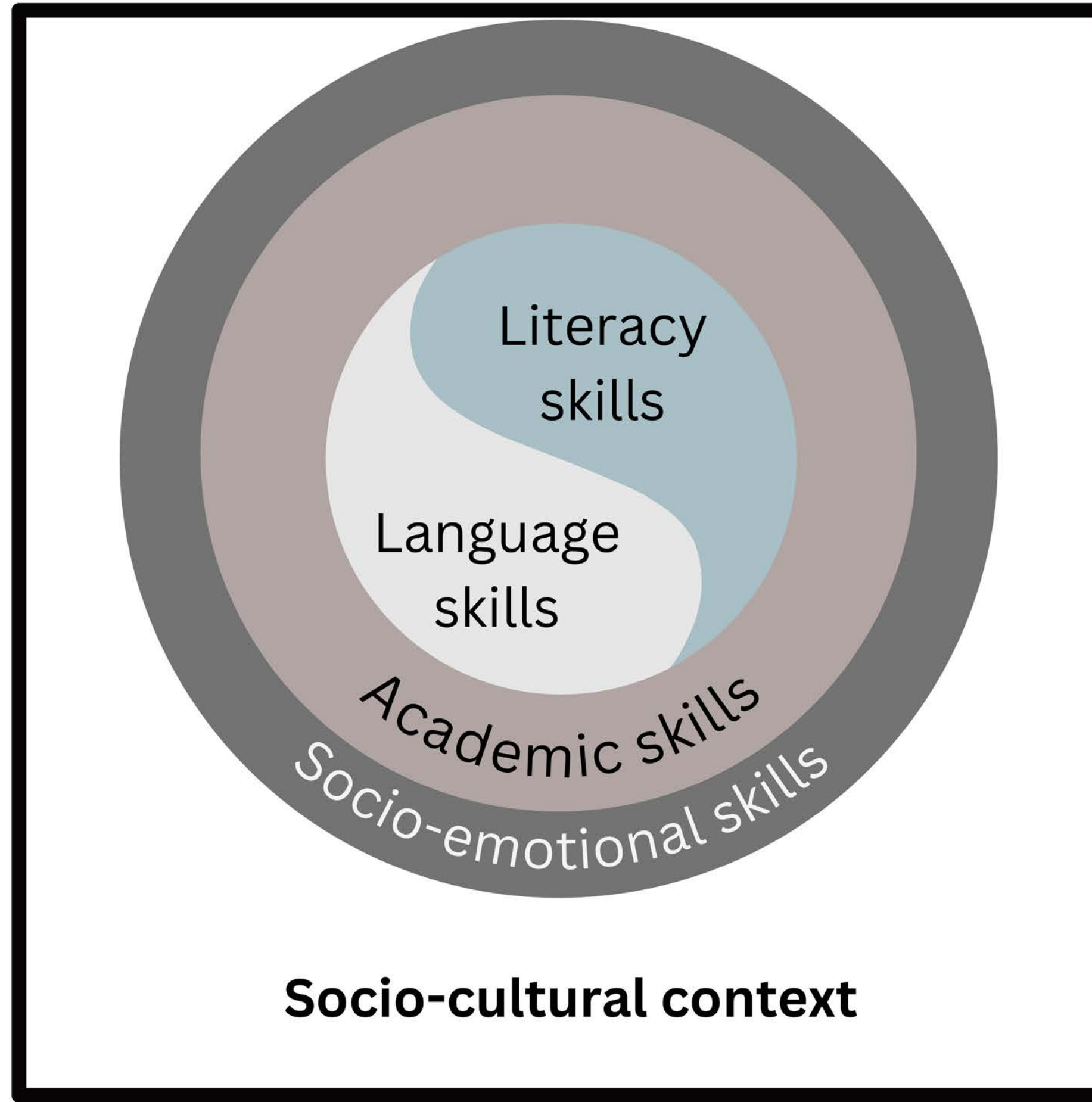
Refugee Youth with interrupted Education

- Students aged (13-21)
- Students with interrupted formal education
- Students may have a range of language, literacy and academic needs
- Small portion of refugee students, but represent the highest needs

Jowett, N., Silvius, R., Ahmed, A., & Depape, N. (2020)

Conceptual Framework

Literacy skills

Language skills

Academic skills

Socio-emotional skills

Socio-cultural context

LANGUAGE SKILLS
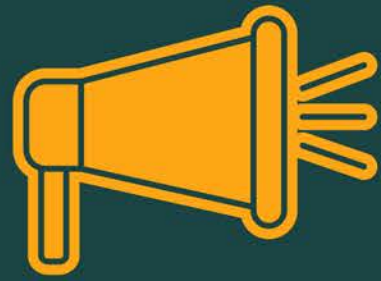## (LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING, & WRITING)

Social
- High-freq irregular words
- High-Context (gestures, visuals)
- Oral
- Anglo-Saxon

Academic
- Low-freq words
- Multi-syllabic words and complex sentence structure
- Low-context/content specific
- Written
- Latin/Greek

Cummins (1979); Cummins & Early (2015)

Literacy Skills

Phonics

Vocabulary

Morphology

Comprehension

Gates, Jacobson, Degener, & Purcell-Gates (2009)

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

1

Develop case profiles of refugee youth literacy and language development

2

Document structured literacy instruction for refugee youth

Guiding Research Questions

What strengths and assets are demonstrated by refugee youth, with interrupted education, when engaging in structured literacy instruction?

What are the language and literacy needs of refugee youth with interrupted education?

Case Study Design

Limited to no Literacy skills
Learning letters/sounds
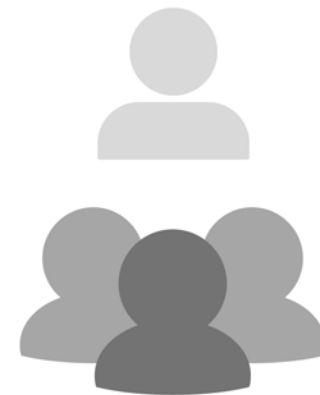Learning short vowel sounds
CVC words

Beginning Literacy Skills in English
Identify most to all letters/sounds
Recognize, read and write simple words
Practice writing
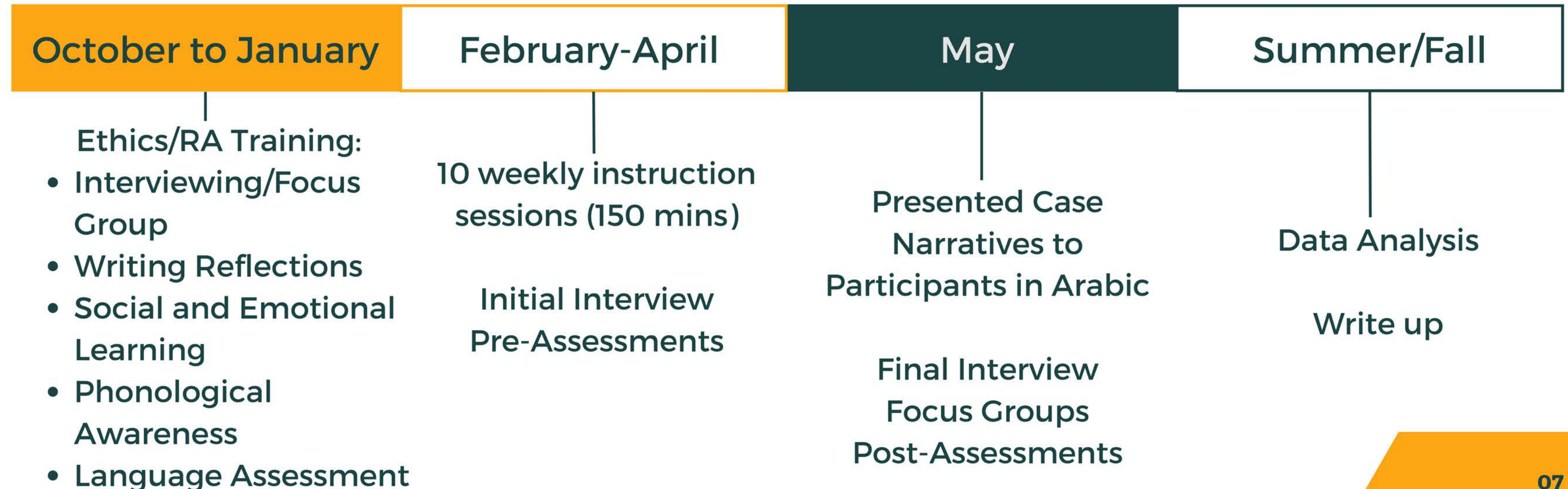
Case Cluster A

Case Cluster B

Case Cluster C

Case Cluster D

TIMELINE OF STUDY

October 2022 to Summer 2023

October to January	February-April	May	Summer/Fall

Ethics/RA Training:
- Interviewing/Focus Group
- Writing Reflections
- Social and Emotional Learning
- Phonological Awareness
- Language Assessment

10 weekly instruction sessions (150 mins)

Initial Interview
Pre-Assessments

Presented Case Narratives to Participants in Arabic

Final Interview
Focus Groups
Post-Assessments

Data Analysis

Write up

PARTICIPANTS

Halifax High School

- 15 joined the study (2 Female; 13 Male; ages 15-21)
- Spoke Arabic as home or additional language

- 8 completed the study (received $150 gift card)
  - 4 formally withdrew/stopped attending school
  - 3 missed all of the instructional sessions because of truancies or suspensions
  - 47% withdrawal rate

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FOR REFUGEE YOUTH

1 Group - No Literacy

- **Phonics** (short vowels, digraphs - sh, ch, th, bossy e)
- **Morphology** (3 s)
- **Vocabulary** (matching)
- **Comprehension** (oral questions)

3 Groups - Beginning Literacy

- **Phonics** (bossy e, contrasting consonants/vowels, digraphs - ee, er, ea, sh, ch, th, ck)
- **Morphology** (3 s, -ed, ing)
- **Vocabulary** (matching, fill-in-the-blank; oral use; writing)
- **Comprehension** (5 ws, oral questions, cloze, sequencing)

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Data Collection

- Initial Interview (in Arabic) (Using collages made)
- Ongoing weekly reflections by the tutors/instructional team
- Weekly learning tasks

- Narrative Case Profiles (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

- Focus Group (member-checking - Arabic)
- Final Interviews (member-checking - Arabic)

Measures	What is it measuring? Time taken to complete.	What will the participants do?
Literacy Measures		
1. Letter-Word Identification (WJ-WID)	Identification of letters/words (5 min)	The test starts with identifying only one letter per item, and gradually shifts into identifying one word at a time (Woodcock et al., 2001).
2. Pseudoword reading (WJ-WAT)	Phonetic decoding (5 min)	This test starts with the identification of 2 to 3 letter string nonwords with an increasing difficulty level (Woodcock et al., 2001)
3. Word Reading Fluency (TOWRE)	Word/non-word reading rate/accuracy (90 sec)	Participants will be given 45 seconds to read as many items as possible in each subtest (Torgesen, Wagner & Rashotte, 2012)
Phonological Awareness Measures		
4. Elision task (CTOPP)	Ability to isolate and/or delete phonemes (5 min)	Participants repeat a word without saying one part/sound of the word (CTOPP2; Wagner, Torgesen, Rashotte & Pearson, 2013)
Oral language skills Measures		
5. Vocabulary (EVT)	Ability to name the objects shown in pictures (10 min)	Participants are shown a picture of an object and they have to name the object shown (EVT; Williams, 2018).
Phonological Processing Measures		
6. Phonological Processing (RAN-Letters and Digits)	Ability to quickly name letters and digits (2 min)	Time to name letters/digits and number of errors determines phonological processing skills (CTOPP2; Wagner et al., 2013).

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSES

Narrative Descriptions

Formal and Informal Educational Background

Literacy Profiles

Descriptions of Measures Tutors' Observations

Interview and Focus Group Data

Perceptions of Literacy Instruction Needs of participating in school

Broad Patterns

Theme and Pattern Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

RQ 1 - Strengths and Assests

RQ 2 - Literacy Needs

QUANTITATIVE PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Constructs	Measures	Means (SD)	Means (SD)	t-value	sig
Word reading	WID	27.13 (9.32)	40.25 (9.03)	9.245	.000***
	WAT	10.00 (5.29)	17.63 (6.45)	4.165	.001**
Sight word reading	TOWRE-SW	32.50 (18.58)	38.75 (15.25)	3.087	.018*
	TOWRE-PD	13.50 (12.78)	22.88 (12.92)	4.987	.002**
Phonological Awareness	CTOPP- Elision	10.17 (4.07)	10.33 (8.40)	.053	.960
Phonological Processing	RAN-Letters	32.51 (10.40)	30.47 (6.02)	.703	.505
	RAN-Digits	32.12 (8.11)	31.84 (8.12)	.109	.916
Vocabulary	EVT	21.13 (11.20)	27.75 (10.66)	2.77	.028*

Participants

ELENA

- Grade 10; age 17
- Reads and writes Turkish and Kurdish; less comfortable with Arabic
- Attended grades 4, 7 to 11 in Turkey
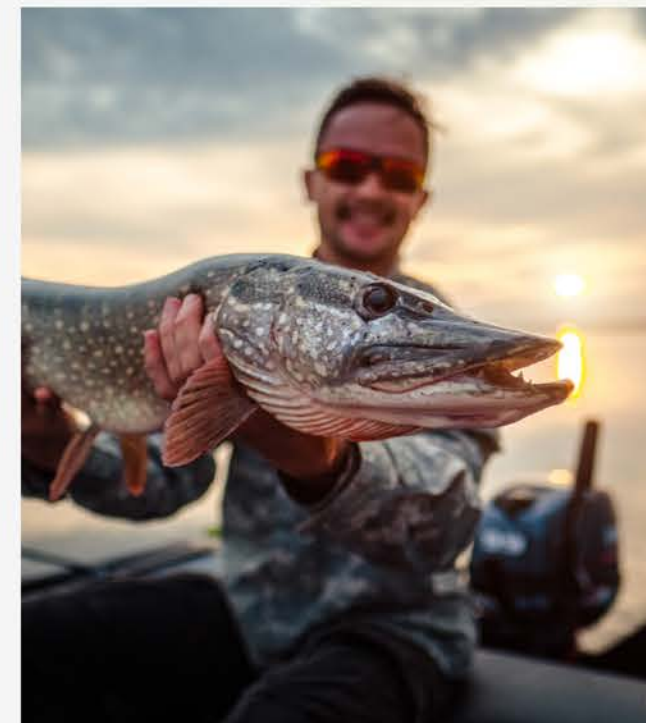- P.E., Math, EAL, Science, Business Technology

DLO

- Grade 11; age 18
- Reads novels Kurdish
- Attended grades 4-9, missing grade 7 to work in Kurdistan
- Science 10, Math, Agriculture and English,

HUSSAN

- Grade 10 & 11; age 21
- Read news/novels and write Arabic
- Attended grades 1-5 in Syria; trained with Jordanian Red Cross
- Taking Math, Music, and Environmental Science

FATTOUSH

- Grade 10; age 16
- Text in Arabic, overall struggles
- Up to grade 2 in Lebanon
- Career Development, Early Literacy, Math essentials, Agriculture

Participants

MOUDY*
- Grade 11; Age 20
- Read and write Arabic, used to read novels in Turkish
- Attended grades 1-4 (grade 4 in Turkey)
- Agriculture, Drama 10, English 10, learning strategies

AISHA
- Grade 10; Age 16
- Read and write Arabic
- Attended for a few years in Niger; someone came to her house in Libya
- EAL, Science, Career development, music

SALAMA
- Grade 11; Age 18
- Read and write Arabic
- Attended grades 1 in Syria; 11 years of school in Jordan
- Math, Physics, Calculus, EAL Literacy

FERAS*
- Grade 10; Age 16
- 5 years of school Syria/Kurdistan (Iraq)
- Spoken Kurdish/Arabic
- Biology, Drama, P.E., EAL, Math

*Has been attending school for 3 or more years

Elena

Elena is a self-starter. Within five months of moving to Canada, Elena started her own small business of fixing nails and doing eyebrows out of her house.

She would like to make English-speaking friends, but "I do not understand them, and they do not understand me." Because of the language barrier, she is unable to work and has not made any friends, so she doesn't go out. All of this makes her "very sad."

Immigration to Canada

"When I came to Canada, I couldn't believe that I was coming. When we were in Turkey, they used to tell me we would travel after a month or two, and I didn't believe it. My mom used to tell us that after a month, we will be heading to Canada, and I used to think something was going to happen that would not allow us to go. When we got on the plane while coming here, I still could not believe it." (Initial Interview)

"I don't like it here very much. Apart from school and the good (free) education I am getting, nothing is really satisfying." (Final Interview)

Language and Life Goals

Elena

Elena's current language goals relate to getting a job and making friends. After completing high school she wants to go to university to become a lawyer and then move back to Istanbul, Turkey.

At the end of study, Elena commented that does not see herself in Turkey anymore. She talked about how her friends and people who were very close to her had stopped talking to her and calling her when she came here, and she feels betrayed.

Experience in Academic Courses

When Elena was only 10 years old, she began working in various industries such as waitressing, sewing, and salon services.

After things improved for her family, Elena enrolled in school when she was 12, and she continued to work as a seamstress after school and on the weekends.

Language and Literacy Strategies

- Attentive
- Takes pictures and translates passages of text
- Self-monitoring and self-correcting
- Likes repetition
- Values being immersed in the language

Elena is attentive by carefully paying attention to what the teacher says, but also by self-monitoring and self-correcting when she is reading aloud or speaking.

Hussan

Husam wants to be a contributing member of society.
He wants to be included.

Hussan is determined to achieve his goals, as he said, "I am a person with a strong will."

"

I couldn't go to school for 10 years since the start of the events and we moved to Jordan. I couldn't continue my studies due to my health issues, schools were not equipped, and racism, especially to people with disability....

Can you imagine being rejected by all the schools due to health issues that you did not choose? For example, I used to sit by the school, so I can leave with the students and feel like one....

Until now, I suffer from this, I couldn't finish my studies or learn a language because of the lack of support. I am one war victim out of thousands.

Husan

Language and Life Goals

Husan wants to learn English so he can have longer conversations with people, but also recognizes the deeper implications of not knowing a language, pointing out that it "puts a barrier between you and society."

Hussan would like to work for a company where he can be part of a team and be respected for his position.

Experience in Literacy Program

Husan was consistently punctual and attended all sessions.

He was easily distracted, checking his phone regularly and listening to what is happening in other groups. Sometimes his mood would change during the lesson and then tune out of the conversation, and maybe even turn away from the table.

The lessons appeared to tire Hussan out or he was not able to fully engage, as one day, he indicated he was 'sad'.
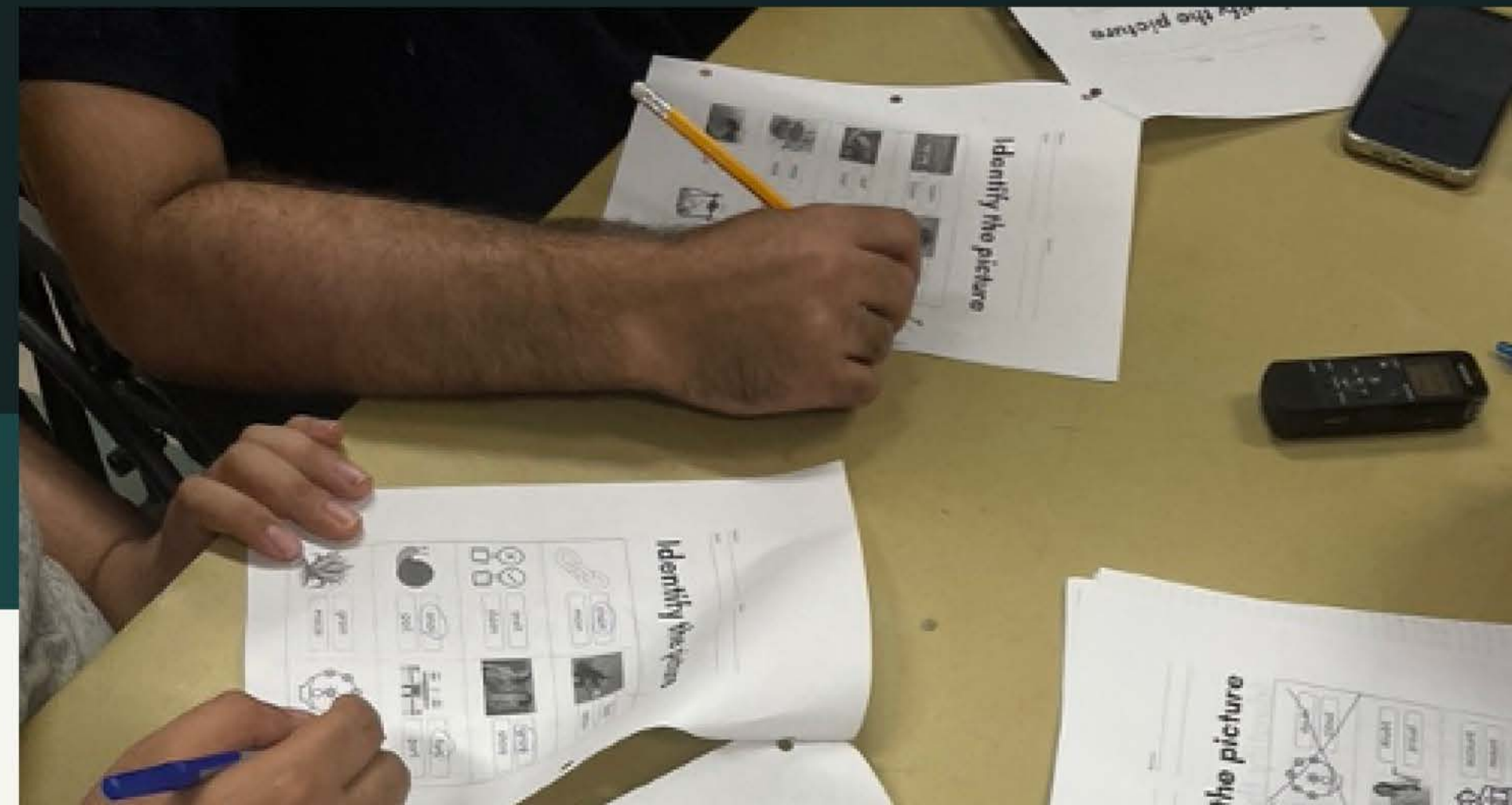
Literacy and language learning strategies

- Memorize whole words/sentences.
- Write Arabic with ease, but printing is childlike
- During the sessions, he would copy letters two letters at a time and focus on spacing

During the sessions, we observed that he was faster in writing in Arabic than in English. When he writes in English, he takes time to write each letter. If he is unfamiliar with the word, he tries to listen to the sound and spell it, but it is mostly incorrect.

Dlo

On the surface, Dlo is a typical young adult. He is particularly fond of football (soccer) and dreams of being a professional player someday.

Currently, he plays football competitively and enjoys watching it live or on TV, with Real Madrid as his favourite team.

When he watches soccer on TV, he watches in Arabic because he finds it to be more exciting. Apart from football, he spends time with his friends or girlfriend and works as a cook at a local restaurant.

Fattoush

Fattoush is a remarkable young Syrian man who loves to fish and dreams of obtaining a Canadian fishing license, so he can enjoy deep sea fishing again. When asked about his future dream job, Fattoush said that he wants to become an architect and that this is his motivation to finish his school and go to university.
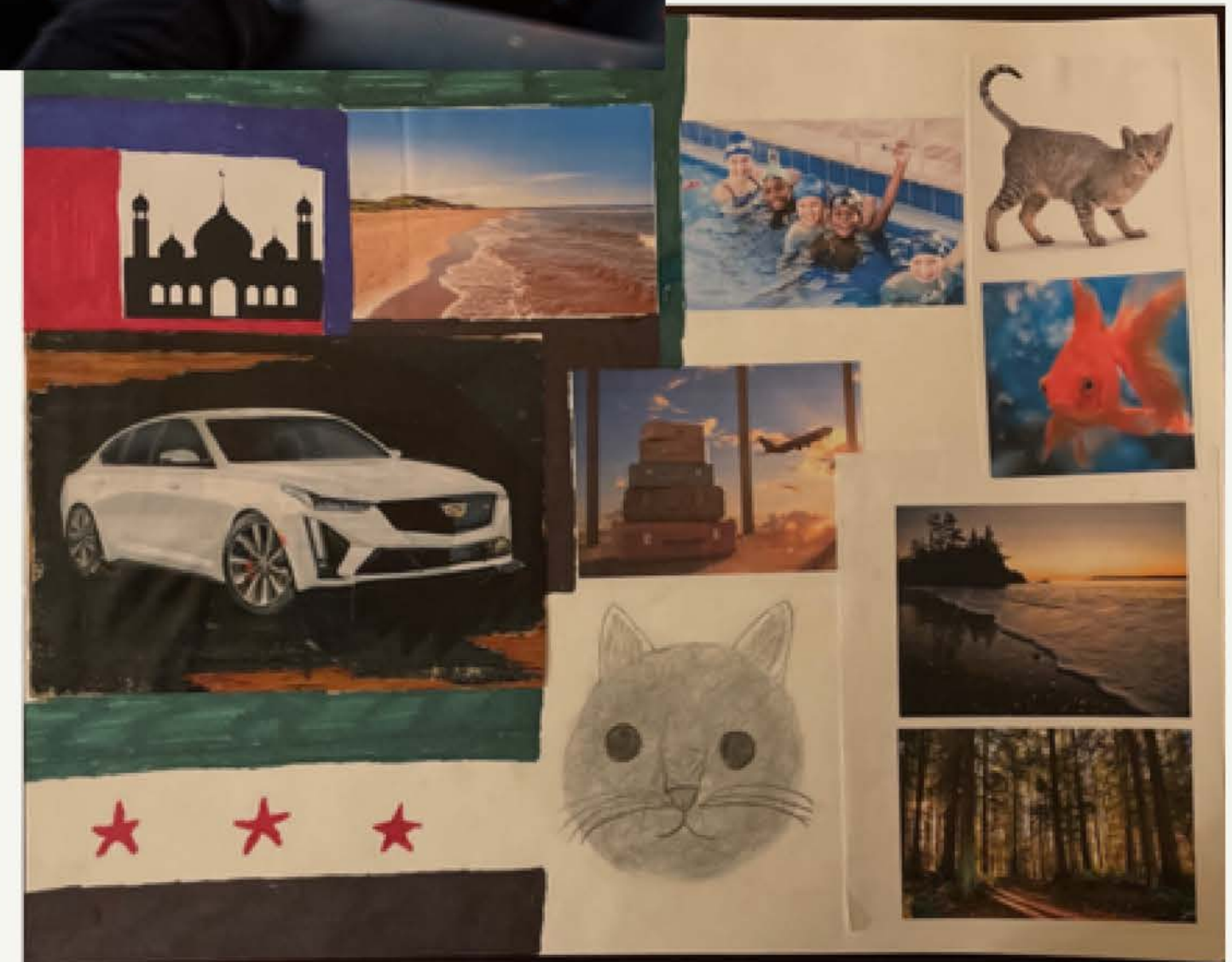
Preliminary Findings/Observations

- Students have remarkable stories and backgrounds, skills and strengths (Jowett, Silvius, Ahmed, & Depape, 2020).

- School Resistance is a major concern
  - This subpopulation of refugee youth is particularly vulnerable (Nakhaie, 2021)

- Direct Classroom Instruction was beneficial and appreciated.

LANGUAGE SKILLS
(LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING, & WRITING)

Social
- High-freq irregular words
- High-Context (gestures, visuals)
- Oral
- Anglo-Saxon

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- Low-freq words
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Thank You

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