ANGLICA

An International Journal of English Studies

SPECIAL ISSUE
Social-Emotional Learning in English Language Education: Mapping the Landscape and Reflecting on the Way Forward

33/1 2024

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Anglica 33/1 2024
ISSN 0860-5734 (Print)
ISSN 2957-0905 (Online)
DOI: 10.7311/0860-5734.33.1.04

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Fostering Social-Emotional Learning during Resettlement: Learning with a Multilingual Refugee-Background Family

Abstract: Studies have shown how adopting social-emotional learning (SEL) approaches can help support newcomer multilingual learners of English in language classrooms. However, little is known about the role of SEL in supporting refugee-background families in out-of-school contexts. Framed within critical mindfulness and critical peace education, this study addresses this gap by asking: What role does SEL play in supporting two refugee-background parents' resettlement and language learning efforts? and How do two refugee-background parents' values influence weekly English tutoring sessions? The study documents different ways through which participants engage with SEL practices to negotiate their tutoring sessions and introduces "mujamalah" as an SEL practice in line with peace education. Findings underscore the importance of incorporating SEL approaches to support multilingual refugee-background families.

Keywords: refugee, mindfulness, social-emotional learning, peace education, multilingual families, values, tutoring

Americans are afraid of us. I want to learn English so I can communicate with other people, so I can express what is in my heart. I want to tell people that I am a Muslim and that they should not be afraid of me.

– Omar (all names are pseudonyms), a husband and father of three

1. Introduction

Why should we care about what is in Omar's heart? How does this relate to social-emotional and English language learning – the focus of this thematic issue? We, the authors, have known Omar, his wife Maria, and their three children since 2016. They fled the civil war in Syria to Turkey, and from there, they were granted refugee status and resettled in the United States (see Karam et al. 2021 for more information on the family). During those early days of resettlement, we visited the family at least once a week to assist with various resettlement issues, including but not limited to language learning. Despite spending at least two hours per visit, we felt like we were always racing against time. There was homework to be completed – both for the two parents attending adult English literacy classes at a local organization, and the children attending elementary school. During almost every visit, the parents would have questions about resettlement issues such as driving licenses, doctor visits, financial matters (e.g. credit/debit cards), questions about correspondence from the children's schools, or mail that they wanted to inquire about (e.g. mail advertising certain services such as insurance). We also followed up on weekly visits by supporting the family over the phone and via text/voice messages through WhatsApp whenever possible.

In short, there was much to cover during our visits, and we felt a sense of urgency to address these requests in addition to maintaining the regular English tutoring sessions when we worked on developing linguistic and communicative skills and completing homework assignments. With such pressure on time, it was difficult to attend to socio-emotional aspects of learning, and it was definitely challenging to be mindful – or practice the act of slowing down, organizing one's thoughts, and keeping the big picture in mind (Pentón Herrera 2020). Working with Omar and Maria helped remind us of the big picture of how language learning is not a mere autonomous and technical task. The excerpt from Omar, for example, reminds us how language can be a tool for expressing language learners' identities, their values, and what matters to them. This is particularly important in the case of refugee-background individuals and families who often face the challenge of having to learn a new language in their new country of resettlement, and also navigate changes to their identity, values, and beliefs – a process described as the "search for a sense of self" (McBrien 2005, 339). As such, there is an onus on those who work with multilingual refugee-background families to be mindful of these complexities; to slow down and learn more about what matters to these families, how language is interrelated with their values, and how they 'do' life in resettlement contexts.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the need for adopting social-emotional learning (SEL) approaches to support the needs of multilingual learners of English (MLEs; see e.g. Pentón Herrera et al. 2022; Pentón Herrera and Martínez-Alba 2021). This becomes increasingly important for refugee-background MLEs, who

often experience interruptions in their formal schooling, traumatic experiences, and discriminatory practices both before and after resettlement (Pentón Herrera et al. 2022). A few studies have shown how adopting SEL (e.g. values-based approaches) can help support newcomer MLEs in language classrooms (Karam 2021a; Pentón Herrera 2019), but we know little about the role of SEL in supporting refugee-background families in out-of-school contexts. As a field, we know even less about how the values that refugee-background families carry across transnational contexts shape their resettlement and language learning experiences. This ethnographic study addresses this gap by asking: *What role does SEL play in supporting two refugee-background parents' resettlement and language learning efforts?* and *How do two refugee-background parents' values influence weekly English tutoring sessions?* To address these questions, we adopt a social-emotional lens as our theoretical underpinnings, with a particular focus on mindfulness (Langer Primdahl 2022; McCaw 2020) and peace education (Hajir and Kester 2020; Martínez-Alba and Pentón Herrera 2023) as these two vital SEL approaches hold significant promise in supporting multilingual refugee-background families.

2. (Critical) mindfulness and peace education as vital SEL practices

Newcomers from refugee backgrounds bring with them a wealth of diverse experiences, some of which may be traumatic in nature, such as experiences with war and violence. Relocation to a new country does not erase those experiences. On the contrary, periods of isolation, lack of community support, and cultural differences further contribute to their social and emotional needs (Pentón Herrera et al. 2022). Such experiences constitute an important need for social-emotional learning, as newly-arrived individuals learn how to navigate life in a new country. SEL is defined as

> the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (CASEL 2023, para. 1)

SEL focuses on emotional awareness and management at the individual level and in relation to others (Pentón Herrera 2020). Pentón Herrera and Martínez-Alba (2021) emphasize the flexibility of SEL practices and the need to tailor these practices to students' needs. These student-centered approaches, which promote authentic learning beyond traditional educational institutions and meaningful interpersonal relationships between the teacher and the students (Pentón Herrera et al. 2022), ideally result in disrupting "traditional power structures and routines

in the learning space" (Pentón Herrera and Martínez-Alba 2021, 9). While the implementation of SEL in English language teaching (ELT) has been limited, two of the promising approaches that have been discussed in the literature are mindfulness and peace education.

2.1. (Critical) mindfulness

Pentón Herrera (2019, 8) defines mindfulness as "the practice of slowing down, organizing our thoughts, and reacting to our surroundings or situations while keeping in mind the big picture" and indicates that its most frequent implementation methods in schools include "yoga, meditation, mindful eating, and mindful breaks." In recent years, while limited, there has been some research on the effectiveness of mindfulness approaches in language learning in various countries, focusing on both students and teachers (Bai et al. 2021; Lucas and Kerr 2016; Suganda et al. 2018). For instance, Suganda et al. (2018) found that the integration of mindfulness approaches in a classroom of 32 seventh-grade students in Indonesia resulted in positive outcomes in relation to students' social-emotional competence, academics, and interactions with peers. Lucas and Kerr (2016) reported positive outcomes after incorporating a "Learning to Breathe" technique for emotional regulation with ten teachers.

While the implementation of mindfulness in classrooms has been studied mainly at the individual level, scholars have recently begun to critique well-intended, albeit inadequate implementations of mindfulness in education that reinforce oppression (Forbes 2019). Instead, Langer Primdahl (2022, 123) suggests critical mindfulness (CM), "a practice that is able to transgress and uncover the ideology of mindfulness in its neoliberal form, teaching students to develop a critical attitude rooted in suspicion." Returning to its founding principles in the Buddhist tradition, the same author (2022, 120) problematizes the instrumentalization of mindfulness as a tool to redirect attention from societal power structures to what they refer to as the "medicalisation of everyday life" in which individuals are not only pathologized for larger structural issues – they are also tasked with "curing" themselves. The same author proposes that "instead of being instrumentally subservient, mindfulness can ideally be conceptualized as a way to promote civic awareness and emancipation, allowing transformation of the structural conditions that made such practices necessary in the first place" (Langer Primdahl 2022, 122). In doing so, CM can result in critical consciousness that has the potential to challenge existing structural conditions and demonstrate its transformative potential, which is in line with the Buddhist tradition (Yeboah 2022).

In line with critical mindfulness, McCaw (2020) describes *thick* approaches to mindfulness (also referred to as transformative) that are centered on the notion of transformation and are rooted in ethical grounds that emerge from Buddhism. Thick approaches are to be distinguished from *thin* approaches that are focused

on the individual level and are presented as value-free self-improvement efforts. Similar to thick approaches are conceptualizations of revolutionary mindfulness, which center on emancipation from current conditions (Purser 2019; as cited in Langer Primdahl 2022). Yeboah (2022, 123) argues that CM can emerge from the adoption of "critical attitude rooted in suspicion" – in which taken-for-granted assumptions are questioned. In this study, we examine participants' thin (surface level) and thick (critical) mindfulness practices as both were important within their resettlement experiences.

2.2. (Critical) peace education

Pentón Herrera and Martínez-Alba (2021, 72) situate peace education as an SEL practice that

> is involved with teaching students how to maintain social and global peace through nonviolence, de-escalating, and conflict resolution techniques. Peace education is also committed to cultivating values that promote societal cooperation, awareness of the planet, and global citizenship.

Recognizing that historical and current global conditions are characterized by multiple expressions of violence makes peace education of primary importance in language learning. This is especially true in the case of refugees who have multiple experiences with violence, ranging from witnessing war in their native countries, to cultural violence defined as "biased norms and social practices," and structural violence which refers to "unjust laws and institutional policies" (Hajir and Kester 2020, 122) in the country(ies) of their resettlement. An example of the implementation of peace education in ELT is offered in a publication by McNair and Pentón Herrera (2022, 196), in which they demonstrated how peacemaking circles as a process for conflict resolution "provide a safe space where students can heal, learn positive steps to grow emotionally, build relationships, and practice mindfulness." Such approaches to peace education are helpful in promoting peaceful coexistence without addressing structural inequities at the societal level and at times could be perceived as surface-level approaches.

Critical Peace Education (CPE), similar to critical mindfulness education, aims to redirect attention from the psychological level of the individual to the societal one and, in so doing, to "disrupt asymmetrical power relationships and unpack their political, economic, social, and historical roots (Hajir and Kester 2020, 518). Through approaches such as individual and collective critical reflection and dialogue, CPE "interrogates invisible and taken-for-granted notions and assumptions" (Zakharia 2017, 47) and promotes social transformation. Ramezanzadeh and Rezaei (2023) conducted a study with 20 English language professors in Iran and identified that the transformation of unequal power relations in the curriculum was achieved by

challenging the dominant narratives and providing opportunities for participation. Moshe Grodofsky (2012) connected peace education with community-based human rights advocacy practice of social workers in Israel through a two-year training program, while Liddle (2021) focused on the challenges that teachers face when trying to address sensitive topics, such as terrorism in the U.K. when the country was involved by sending troops. At the same time, Zembylas (2012) highlighted the role of emotions in peace education, making a clear connection to SEL while attending to the politicization of emotions in the public sphere in Cyprus, and the strong emotional connotations that are associated with the term 'refugee' in Greek. The same author called for critical emotional reflexivity to be central in peace education, in which both teachers' and learners' (negative) emotions are analyzed and problematized. He suggested that teacher workshops should include a multidimensional analysis of the emotions associated with the refugee experience. At the level of the classroom, and while the connection to CPE was not explicitly made, Karam (2021a) provided examples of how a teacher questioned power structures along with their students in a multilingual classroom. According to Bajaj (2015, 155), "critical peace educators emphasize that anchoring the learning process in local meanings and realities offers the best way of enabling student agency, democratic participation, and social action."

While we find that there is some overlap between critical mindfulness and peace education, we argue that CM focuses on the moment in which an experience occurs in a given context and under given circumstances. While a deeper connection could be made to societal structures on the spot, the focus is on the moment of an interaction or event. For instance, while recognizing and naming one's emotional reactions in relation to an event that is in progress can be perceived as a mindful practice, situating it in its larger power context (e.g. Islamophobia), and finding ways to navigate it, could be considered an expression of CM. Being keenly attuned to how wearing the hijab is perceived in the context of the U.S. could influence how a woman who wears it may respond to looks and behaviors from others, by ignoring them in some contexts and problematizing them in others.

In contrast, critical peace education assumes a broader conceptual lens, engages in social critique, and integrates an analysis of societal structures that may span from the local to the global levels. For instance, reflecting on experiences of structural and cultural violence and ways in which one plans to advocate for themselves and for others in non-violent ways, could be considered a foundation for CPE. We theorize that attention to these two levels provides a lens to the integration of (critical) SEL approaches in tutoring practice with newly arrived MLEs. In the case of our focal participants, we discuss (critical) mindfulness and (critical) peace education from the level of the informal curriculum generated by the learners themselves, within the context of weekly tutoring sessions. Further, we propose that examining CM and CPE provides a lens to the recognition of not only social-emotional needs but also social-emotional strengths that newcomer

refugees have, promoting an asset-based grounded approach that refrains from romanticization.

3. Methods

This study adopts an ethnographic design (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), drawing on longitudinal data that we started collecting in early 2017. More specifically, we immersed ourselves into the family's lives through our weekly visits,

> watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts—in fact gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry. (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 3)

We were particularly focused on how the family negotiated life in the U.S. resettlement context and the role that language played in facilitating or hampering the family's social and academic adjustment (see Karam 2021b; Karam et al. 2021 for additional details).

3.1. Participants and context

This study took place in a mid-sized city in the western part of the United States. After the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval, the first author (Fares) explained the research objectives to the family in Arabic and English and the family signed consent/assent forms. Due to the longitudinal nature of the research design, participants reconsented in 2023 to continuing participation in this project, as per IRB's recommendation. The current study's focus is on the two parents, Omar and Maria (self-selected pseudonyms), as we have addressed the three children's tutoring and language learning experiences elsewhere (Oikonomidoy and Karam 2020; 2022; 2023).

The father, Omar, completed his elementary education (i.e. 6th grade) in Syria and had limited exposure to English. In the United States, he worked several jobs (e.g. washing cars at a local dealership). At the time of this publication, Omar was working as a taxi driver. He reported working long hours (a minimum of 12 hours per day) to make ends meet. Maria, the mother, completed her secondary education (i.e. 12th grade) in Syria and learned English as a foreign language in secondary school there. She completed her pharmaceutical assistant certification in the United States, and at the time this paper was written, worked at a local drug store. The first author (Fares) mainly worked with the parents, while the second author (Eleni) worked with the children. The parents attended different classes (associated with different English proficiency levels) at a local adult language learning center, and

as such, they had different homework assignments. As previously mentioned, both researchers helped the family with homework (whether the parents' homework from the English as a second language (ESL) adult learning center or the children's homework from school) – in addition to other matters related to resettlement.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Data collected for this study included fieldnotes from our weekly observations, semi-structured interviews with the participants, and artifacts collected over the course of our study. Audio recordings were also available for most of our weekly visits, and these were helpful in capturing the rich conversations we had with the parents. While it was a routine practice to turn the audio recorder on for each visit, some visits did not have audio recordings due to the dynamic nature of these visits. For example, some weekly visits entailed leaving the apartment to assist with such issues as doctor visits, lease signing, and other matters. Data for this study were collected over a period of four years, from 2017 to 2021.

To analyze the data, we adopted a reiterative deductive and inductive approach (Bingham and Witkowsky 2021). We first reduced the data by selecting all the excerpts from the tutoring sessions and weekly visits pertaining to the two parents. We further narrowed down our data set by coding the data based on priori (Saldaña and Omasta 2022) codes that involved social-emotional learning, looking for general SEL competencies (CASEL 2023) and more specific SEL practices that were documented in TESOL contexts (e.g. bibliotherapy, mindfulness, peace education, and restorative practice; see Pentón Herrera 2019). We then immersed ourselves in the data and coded each excerpt inductively to identify emerging patterns within any SEL practices that the family engaged with during our weekly visits. While some evidence of restorative practices (e.g. promoting empathy) were documented, we noticed that two salient SEL practices in our data were relevant to mindfulness (30 excerpts coded) and peace education (24 excerpts coded).

To further support our coding process, and in line with our ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), we reached for the relevant literature on these two specific SEL practices. For example, we noticed both surface-level and deeper, more critical mindful practices within our data set. This was supported by the relevant literature pertaining to CM describing thin and thick mindful practices (McCaw 2020) that corresponded to our inductive analysis. Similarly, in relation to CPE, we found references to violence (i.e. actual war, cultural, and structural), which were coupled by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions (Zakharia 2017) that aimed to promote peaceful co-existence and/or portray agency and advocacy (Bajaj 2015). Through this reiterative deductive and inductive approach (Bingham and Witkowsky 2021), we were able to consolidate our codes into two main themes that described the role of SEL in supporting the family's resettlement and language learning efforts.

3.3. Positionality

We identify as transnational and multilingual scholars. Both of us have worked with refugee-background participants from diverse backgrounds and in various contexts both in the United States and beyond. Through our teaching, research, and service, we endeavor to challenge dehumanizing representations of refugee-background individuals and promote asset-based (Shapiro and MacDonald 2017; Karam et al. 2021) perceptions of their unique experiences and identities. We believe that learning is bidirectional when working with refugee-background families. As the findings from this study will demonstrate, Omar and Maria helped us develop a more mindful approach to support them and to reflect critically on our understanding of our role as part of their support system.

4. Findings

To answer our research questions concerning the role of SEL in the family's resettlement and language learning efforts, we present our findings under two themes: 1) social-emotional learning through (critical) mindfulness, and 2) social-emotional learning through (critical) peace education. As the themes indicate, our findings revealed how the two vital SEL approaches (mindfulness and peace education) were central to the family's resettlement and language learning efforts. In addition, we share how we, as researchers, learned more about the family's values through such SEL approaches that we were able to both observe and participate in with the family.

4.1. Social-emotional learning through (critical) mindfulness

Mindfulness was an essential SEL practice that emerged during our tutoring sessions with Omar and Maria. The mindful practices observed went beyond surface-level conceptions of mindfulness to include critical and transformative practices that sought to "uncover, challenge, and transcend how our thoughts, feelings, and actions are conditioned by unhealthy cultural practices and social institutions that (re)produce greed, meanness and delusion" (Forbes 2019, 206). We argue that both types of mindfulness were beneficial to Omar and Maria. To support this argument, we present data that describes how the participants engaged with both thin and thick mindful practices (McCaw 2020), and how such practices shaped our English tutoring sessions and time with the family.

As previously mentioned, we tried to make our tutoring time with the family as productive as possible. Omar and Maria would often have their homework ready on the coffee table in the living room for us to work on. However, on several occasions, the participants practiced their agency to engage in mindful practices that promoted self-reflection and present-moment awareness. Omar,

for example, would voice his concerns over his ability to concentrate and engage with our tutoring sessions after a hard day's work, reflecting on the overall status of refugee-background parents such as himself and his wife who are expected to learn English and provide for their families. Omar would often agentively suggest taking breaks from our tutoring sessions, and he would let Fares know when he was tired. Our breaks often included drinking traditional Syrian coffee and talking about diverse topics such as religion, life in the U.S. context, and news about our families in both Syria and Lebanon (where Fares's family resides). These coffee breaks were also an opportunity for Omar and Maria to show their value of hospitality which was essential to their identities. "We, Arabs, are a very hospitable people," Omar emphasized.

In addition to coffee, there would often be an array of dates, nuts, and other snacks such as Baklava. On one of our tutoring sessions (fieldnotes, August 19th, 2019), Omar and Maria requested not to have a traditional tutoring session. Omar apologized and told Fares that he could not concentrate on learning English, but would just like to have coffee with Fares and chat. During that visit, we did not complete any homework. Fares listened to how Omar was let go from his job due to what he described as discriminatory practices. According to Omar, he was not allowed to take a break in between car washing shifts at the car dealership, while others were allowed to do exactly that. Maria had to quit her part-time job because she was being assigned shifts that lasted until 10:00 p.m., and she could not cope with these hours and having to take care of her family. It was the week right before the Muslim Eid al-Adha holiday, and both parents were unemployed. As such, they were not able to help their families in Syria celebrate Adha. Traditionally, Omar and Maria would send money to their families to feast (or have a meat-based meal, which was rare) with the neighbors and enjoy the holiday. We found such conversations with the parents extremely valuable as they provided us with a window into the family's values (e.g. hospitality) and helped us understand how such values informed Omar and Maria's actions (e.g. the Muslim value of helping others during Adha), especially during resettlement.

Although slowing down the pace of tutoring (whether a few minutes to drink coffee or skipping an entire tutoring session) could be classified as a surface-level mindful practice, it was important to our participants and us for several reasons. First, participants practiced their agency in requesting breaks when they felt they needed them, although these requests mainly came from Omar who needed them the most due to the long hours he usually worked. In a way, this was a self-care practice that the participants felt they needed. Second, it allowed participants to share their weekly news, the significant events that have occurred, and the challenges of navigating life in resettlement. It does not come as a surprise that Omar and Maria could not concentrate on learning English when they were unemployed during Eid al-Adha, for example. In addition, sharing these stories might have served a social-emotional need to communicate and share. Finally, such

conversations were important to us as researchers to learn more about the family and their values, what they were going through, and how we could help.

While these breaks were helpful, the parents' mindful practices went beyond these thin conceptions of mindfulness at the individual level to address more structural inequalities and issues related to the resettlement of refugee-background families, promoting reflection and increased critical awareness of the challenges of resettlement. For example, in the excerpt below, Omar critiqued the lack of support provided to refugees in the U.S. context.

> As if they [the government] are paying the rent for us and paying all our bills and expecting us to just focus on [only] learning English. If we can stay home and just learn, we can become like Dr. Fares, Drs. in language! But I work all day, and I am tired, dead, and I cannot concentrate. Inshallah إن شاء الله (if God wills it) when I get treatment [for chronic back pain], I will be able to concentrate and learn more. (fieldnotes, October 16th, 2019)

Omar highlights the fact that refugee-background families are expected to start earning income right after arrival to cover their bills. Omar and Maria were already making monthly payments to pay back the U.S. government for their airfare from Turkey to the United States. Both parents did not want to be a "burden" to their host government, and Omar emphasized how cheating the system by receiving aid and not working is against his Muslim beliefs and values. However, such obligations – in addition to essential expenses such as housing, food, and transportation – necessitate acquiring a full-time job (usually low-paying entry-level jobs; see Warriner 2007) as soon as possible regardless of any health conditions (e.g. Omar has severe back pain from manual labor he did in Turkey). It also leaves little time to pursue language learning. Despite such challenges, the participants were invested in learning English. They were attending classes at the ESL center and taking private tutoring sessions with Fares.

Besides the constraints on time to learn English, Maria also identified another important issue related to the quality of the ESL materials that she was given at the ESL adult literacy center. Here is an excerpt from our fieldnotes (September 28th, 2017):

> Maria brings her homework out, and it is a series of worksheets. She explains that every time she is absent from class (adult ESL center), the instructor assigns her homework. She shows me the handouts and wonders how this is helpful to her. "I need to go to a tutoring center to complete these!" Maria says. She tells me it is just fill-in-the-blanks like school children and that the exercises from one of the textbooks that I have given her were more helpful because they included situations that she can use in her life.

Through self-reflection, Maria critiques the filling-in-the-blanks (worksheet) approach, which made her increasingly self-aware of how she was treated like a school-child. She also highlights the lack of relevance of the materials, which makes it difficult for her (and others in her classroom) to engage with this content. Despite these challenges, Maria was still putting in the effort to complete her homework. To address these issues, Fares tried to draw upon the participants' interests and needs. For example, when they both shared that they liked Starbuck's coffee, Fares developed a lesson on how to order coffee and worked on it with Omar. Omar was excited to learn the vocabulary and language needed to be able to invite his wife for coffee. We watched a YouTube video of how to order coffee from the coffee chain they liked, explicitly went over some of the specialized keywords (e.g. tall, grande, and venti), and role-played the scenario together (fieldnotes, October 16th, 2017). We also practiced different variations until Omar felt confident enough to accompany Fares to the actual coffee shop and order a Mocha – his favorite. This time, he also asked the barista to make the coffee "extra sweet." The following week, Omar sent photos of him and Maria at the coffee shop to Fares, and he was proud that he, and not Maria, was able to place the order this time. In this activity, we combined language learning with their practice of taking coffee breaks. Drawing upon the participants' interests enabled us as tutors to support their evolving (linguistic) needs better. For example, at other times, we role-played conversations that Omar could potentially use as a taxi driver, helped put together a curriculum vitae, and drafted letters to advocate for a transfer to a new branch location at Maria's work.

4.2. Social-emotional learning through critical peace education

Practices related to CPE were evident throughout the data. The common denominator to all of them was the actual experiences with the war in Syria and the emotional aftermath for both Omar and Maria. These experiences, along with the resulting relocation to Turkey and then the United States, triggered an ongoing critical analysis and provided a foundation for challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves and others, engaging in a critical assessment of sociopolitical conditions, and resisting injustices through advocacy – all central pillars of CPE.

Not surprisingly, experiences with war violence were the topic of many discussions with Omar and Maria. These experiences impacted their emotional state and provided a foundation for their engagement in social critiques that spanned across chronological and geographic spaces. In one instance, Omar shared his experience witnessing armless peaceful demonstrators being shot in Syria. War violence took many forms during their time there and impacted the family. Here is another recollection from him:

> [d]uring the winter, [starts to cry]… We had no gas or anything. We used to burn cardboard to heat water. We did not have electricity or any source of power. In the winter, it was so cold. My mother would put the girls in her lap and wrap them up with a blanket. It was so cold. I used to wake up in the morning with no money on me to buy bread. Bread was so expensive. Even when you looked up at the sky, the sky was dark. Even the water turned black. (October 30th, 2017)

Reflecting on the difficult moments in his life in Syria during an interview resulted in tears for Omar. And while Fares offered to stop the interview, he mentioned that it was helpful for him to share, lending evidence to the argument that language can be a vehicle for making sense of traumatic events (Busch and McNamara 2020). Traumatic experiences and memories colored Omar's daily life in the United States, as certain objects and words triggered strong emotional reactions. For some time after resettlement, he would still try to hide at the sound of an airplane, which he associated with bombs in Syria. During one visit, he was drinking a power drink which included the term 'explosive power.' When Fares translated the term, Omar made a connection to explosives (imitating the sound "boom boom") in Syria. He then shared that watching his co-workers fighting, he jokingly recommended to them that they should go and fight in Syria.

Having lived in three different countries triggered an enhanced sociopolitical awareness. For instance, Omar indicated that he took the side of peaceful coexistence in Syria and refused to join the regime when he was asked to, while Maria critiqued some of the regime's practices in Syria in a social media post. Such a critique and rejection of violence in all its forms are central to CPE.

During one visit, Maria shared how "Americans think that all Muslims are Daesh [terrorist group]." This comment triggered Omar's suggestion to watch a YouTube video about Islam and Christianity, in which the Prophet's companions took refuge at the Christian King of Quraysh, despite some objections. Omar concluded that there are many similarities between the two religions. During a different visit, when talking about a Jewish client, Omar shared that Jewish and Muslim people are cousins and believe in one God. Finding common ground across different groups seemed to provide a foundation for building bridges that would connect one with others. Accomplishing this goal often involved the participants drawing upon their multilingual repertoires to facilitate such connections (e.g. Omar explaining that in English to his Jewish client) and the use of digital resources (Omar using YouTube to support his argument and share with Fares). This approach to 'perceived' conflict resolution is foundational to CPE. Omar does not seem to agree with the divisions between religions.

Critiquing one's own group and challenging boundaries was another strong foundation for engagement with others, both necessary elements in an increased critical sociopolitical awareness. On one visit, Omar shared that "Arabs are hypocrites." He supported this assertion by mentioning how the Imam from the

Mosque that he attended refused to help him and his family financially, stating that if he helped one family, he would have to help them all. Omar thought that this was contrary to the perceived role of an Imam. The offer to pray for the family was not considered sufficient by Omar. Critiquing a person in a position of power symbolized the development of a critical consciousness. At the end of another visit, while Omar was thanking Fares for his help, he shared: "You are truly the Muslim here, not us!" challenging taken-for-granted assumptions Omar had about Muslim and Arab people being the only ones aiding others. In these two examples, boundaries of insider/outsider status are being challenged as the Imam, who could be considered not only an insider but also a person in a position of power, was critiqued, and a person of a different religion is complimentarily called a Muslim.

Omar and Maria's peaceful engagement with others seemed to be guided by the practice of *mujamalah*. Mujamalah is "to say nice words that show much respect to someone" (AbuJarad and Hamadani 2019, 83) and is often translated as flattery. However, both Omar and Maria explained it as being courteous to someone and avoiding embarrassing them by tending to agree with what they were saying. For instance, while Omar believed drinking alcohol was haram (i.e. forbidden or unlawful), he saw the futility of trying to convince the passenger in his car otherwise, during a taxicab ride. Omar further differentiated between giving advice and mujamalah. He explained that if someone came to him seeking advice, he would not adopt mujamalah and he would tell them exactly what he thought about the topic.

When asked if she practiced mujamalah as well, Maria answered positively and explained:

> [m]ujamalah is, for example, when someone has a different religion, and you tend to agree with their beliefs although you may have different beliefs – just so that you do not hurt their feelings. The Quran even explains that one should respect different religions. Our Christian friend says that Muslims are cousins of Christians because we both believe in Abraham. But some people here do not believe in God and presume the world was created without God's intervention. This sounds stupid! One friend says she only wants to be a good person but does not believe in a god.

Maria added that although she did not contradict her friend who did not believe in God, she wondered how this world could have been created without God. Thus, practicing mujamalah did not mean that Omar and Maria did not have opinions on certain topics, but they adopted mujamalah to avoid putting other people down – especially when it came to contentious issues related to religion. However, it could also be possible that mujamalah was not only a tenet of Islam but also a mechanism that helped the participants avoid conflict – especially at a time when dehumanizing discourse toward refugees was prevalent in the United States. In this

sense, mujamalah served as an approach to conflict resolution or conflict avoidance connecting to CPE. In fact, both Omar and Maria experienced discriminatory practices and were in situations where mujamalah was not enough, and they had to adopt muqawamah – an Arabic word that translates as 'resistance' to counter oppression and discrimination. In both practicing mujamalah and muqawamah, the participants had to practice their agency and draw upon their multilingual repertoires to negotiate the complex interactions involved in both processes.

Resisting the instances of cultural and structural violence that Omar and Maria faced meant that they had to learn English to be able to advocate for themselves and transform the current conditions, connecting their actions to CPE. Omar made that very clear during one visit. He stated that he wanted to learn English "to explain about Islam and clarify misconceptions about the religion…. [he] reported that he is not a terrorist and people often look at him in a biased fashion because he is Muslim" (interview, October 30th, 2017). Racism extended beyond looks in some instances. For example, Maria recounted an experience with an old White customer who shouted, "Go back to your country!" I told him, shared Maria, "Go back to history. Where are you originally from?" He said, "I am a native American!" I told him, "Not you, but your ancestors. Were they born here, or did they come here?" He got more furious. I was speaking to him in English. I told him, Maria continued, "Go back to history, and you'll find this country is not yours as well. Your grandparents came here just like I did. America is a country of migrants. I was happy to serve you with a smile on my face; why are you talking to me like that?" Maria invoked the history of the United States as a country of migrants to challenge the customer's positioning of Maria as an outsider who did not belong in this country. Maria also shared how people were implicitly biased against Muslim women wearing the hijab, and how they did not openly admit that but resorted to implicit means to express their bias. Nevertheless, Maria's agency was explicit in the way she challenged the assertion.

Experiences of cultural violence like the above were coupled with additional ones that denoted structural violence. Omar mentioned that he wanted to learn English because his lack of proficiency in the language was the reason that was given to him by his manager, "blocking" him from getting a supervisor's job. Further, when he did lose his job, it was Maria who went to advocate for her husband because of her English language skills. Citing that Omar had three children and that both she and him were unemployed, she questioned his firing but was met with a cold response by the supervisor. This is yet another example of agency and advocacy on her part that was possible because of her ability to speak English.

Another instance of advocacy by Maria took place when her oldest daughter called from school crying to tell her that the principal had asked her to take off her hijab. Maria was very upset, and she called the school questioning the principal's reaction. At the time, Omar was unable to participate, but became quite motivated after the experience. Wanting to be able to advocate for his family, he requested a

tutoring session in English, with an urgent follow-up of "When can I start?" The response by Fares was the next day, and a meeting time was scheduled.

In sum, seeds for CPE among the participants were based on the ongoing emotional toll of the war that marked their experiences in the United States. As they continued to try to understand their position in U.S. society, they questioned taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves and others. They also demonstrated a desire to avoid conflict when interacting with others, when possible. At the same time, when experiencing cultural and structural violence, they did portray agency and a desire to resist practices that aimed to exclude and marginalize them or their children. This desire provided strong motivation for Omar to learn English. Learning more about such experiences and motivating factors could provide a strong foundation for the development of culturally responsive CPE materials, curricula, and practices.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This ethnographic inquiry examined the role of SEL approaches in the resettlement and language learning efforts of two refugee-background parents. Our findings describe two key SEL practices in this process: critical mindfulness and critical peace education which informed the participants' actions. More specifically, the study documented how the two parents engaged with both thin and thick mindful approaches (McCaw 2020) to negotiate the weekly English language tutoring sessions. At a surface level, the participants purposefully adopted the mindful practice of slowing down the pace of the tutoring sessions in order to better address their learning needs and take breaks to better adjust to the long tutoring hours. Such a slower pace provided a window into the families' values (e.g. desire to be productive and help others). Through such opportunities, the participants had the chance to reflect about the inequities underlying language learning in resettlement and their role in negotiating (e.g. mujamalah) or resisting such inequities.

Although the participants did not explicitly label these practices using terminology that we (as researchers) are familiar with from a western-centered perspective (e.g. mindfulness or peace education), they critically engaged with these practices that emanated from their own identities, experiences, and values (e.g. mujamalah is one example of how the participants practiced CPE). These findings are in line with other studies that emphasize the importance of SEL in language learning (e.g. Karam 2021a; Pentón Herrera 2024). This study adds to this body of literature by documenting the role of SEL within the context of the resettlement of a refugee-background family, particularly in an out-of-school tutoring context. It also underscores how SEL practices, in this case mindful practices, are interlinked with the family's values (i.e. SEL is part of cultural knowledge and exists outside of formal schooling confines). For example, coffee breaks were a chance to show

the participants' hospitality and also an opportunity for them to share their values through the stories they recounted (e.g. helping their family in Syria on Adha).

Another contribution of this study is highlighting mujamalah as an SEL practice in line with peace education. As explained to us by Omar and Maria, mujamalah is inspired by their Muslim faith and calls for adopting a peaceful and respectful attitude toward others and avoiding judgment. At its heart, mujamalah calls for accepting others' beliefs and different ways of living without compromising one's own principles. Thus, mujamalah aligns with peace education as a nonviolent SEL practice promoting conflict resolution and societal cooperation. Moreover, how Maria and Omar practiced mujamalah challenged taken-for-granted assumptions (Zakharia 2017) and dehumanizing representations of refugees as security threats and Muslims as terrorists and proponents of violence. This adds to an emerging body of literature that adopts a critical, yet asset-oriented lens that amplifies refugee-background individuals' voices and experiences (Karam et al. 2021; Shapiro and MacDonald 2017). Although Maria and Omar mainly adopted mujamalah to avoid conflict, they also resorted to muqawamah (resistance) to defend their core values when needed. For example, defending their daughter's right to wear the hijab at school was evidence of how the family's values drove their actions and advocacy efforts in this case.

Beyond documenting the importance of such SEL practices as mindfulness and peace education, perhaps one of the most important findings is the fact that SEL was not something *we* taught Omar and Maria to practice, but it was something we observed and engaged in with them. They were already embracing SEL practices to negotiate resettlement and language learning. Although they did not describe their actions as explicit SEL practices, they agentively engaged in critical mindfulness and peace education practices (e.g. mujamalah, although not labelled as a peace education approach, is so in practice and emanates from the families' religious beliefs and practices) that informed their actions in negotiating their resettlement and language learning experiences. To a large extent, the participants reminded us to be more mindful as we rushed to finish homework, prepare their resumes, and address other pressing issues that resettlement brings. Together, we learned the importance of slowing down to have a sip of coffee, listening to Maria's and Omar's stories, better understanding the family's (Muslim) values, and learning how we, as researchers and advocates of refugee-background families, can be more helpful.

Toward that goal of supporting refugee-background families, we share a few practical implications. Through our work with Omar and Maria, we learned the importance of adopting a mindful approach to slow down and create a space to talk, listen, and learn with and from the family. At a surface level, slowing down to drink coffee and eat dates seems like a welcome break from tutoring; however, these spaces led to meaningful, critical, and sometimes difficult conversations. Allowing space for these more intense conversations is also important and can help refugee-background individuals to share their critical views and perceptions of the many injustices and inequities that underlie language learning and resettlement.

As researchers continue to examine the role of SEL in supporting multilingual learners of English, we call for special attention to and additional research with populations from refugee backgrounds in particular. Topics for future research may include the role of researchers and their positionalities in facilitating or hindering SEL approaches, the role of SEL approaches in various contexts of the refugee journey (not only in countries of permanent resettlement but also in countries of first or temporary resettlement), and SEL's role in helping refugee-background MLEs negotiate identities across transnational, multilingual, and multimodal contexts. For a population that is often described as voiceless and lacking agency due to the violent act of displacement, SEL approaches such as critical mindfulness and peace education can provide a small, yet powerful window for refugee-background MLEs to slow down amid the fast-paced life in resettlement, reflect on their emotions and values, and continue to work toward their future goals.

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