

From Recognition to Knowledge Creation: Education of Refugee
Youth Learners in Alberta and British Columbia

by

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Abstract

Educational success for many refugee learners in the Canadian education system has been a difficult if not challenging achievement. Educational institutions mirror the values and practices of the larger society. Similar to the values and practices nationally and internationally, in educational organizations refugees as a specific group of learners have been largely disregarded. The invisibility of refugee learners in educational institutions has resulted in limited academic success of these learners (Kanu, 2007; Keddie, 2012; Ngo, 2009a; J. Rutter, 2006; Stead, Closs, & Arshad, 2002; Taylor & Sidu, 2012).

Through multiple case study analysis, this research examines the underlying reasons for the low educational achievement of refugee learners in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. Under the framework of race equity and social justice, this study presents a detailed document analysis of Alberta's and British Columbia's educational policies as they relate to refugees. Further, through interviews with various stakeholders, such as educational policy makers and policy implementers in schools the impact of policies and existing practices for refugee learners are explored. Analysis of data identifies the underlying causes for refugee youths' failure to succeed as a lack of recognition and cognitive justice as pillars of policy design and enactment. This study concludes with recommendations to improve refugee youths' educational opportunities by enhancing policy design and implementation based on the conscious recognition of all students' histories and knowledge. As well as an awareness of epistemic understanding of self and recognition of power relations.

Preface

I designed and conducted this study prior to the election of the Liberal government in Canada. Given the intensity of the media attention on the plight of Syrians in 2015, especially on Syrians who sought refuge in neighboring countries or Europe, the issue of refugees became one of the major topics of the Canadian election. During the election campaign the Liberals pledged to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees and thus changed the narrative on refugees from Others who cause terror to a humanitarian cause. Although the Liberal government's promise of resettlement was delayed by a few months, it fulfilled its promise. The Liberal government revised the previous Conservative government's policies and role-modeled the practice of inclusion of some of the most vulnerable populations globally within the safe spaces of Canadian society. The change in narrative from fear mongering to inclusive practices deserves acknowledgement and praise. However, the settlement of refugees has proven more difficult and extensive than the Liberal government originally anticipated because of the impact of the civil war and their displacement on the mental health of the refugees. Their limited fluency in English or French and their large family sizes were unanticipated hurdles during the integration process. The need for more resources to resettle refugees has been a constant theme in leading newspapers and social media, and governing agencies have had to reevaluate their promises and take action. Further, nationally and internationally, the larger society's attitude is changing to anti-migrant; in particular, Muslim refugees. Kanji (2016) wrote that an online petition "asking government to stop resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada has garnered almost 50,000 signature" (para. 3). Kanji and other reporters have outlined the increased anti-Muslim movements

in Canadian society, similar to those in Europe and United States. Although the Canadian government and many Canadians have welcomed Syrian refugees, the perception of them as Other is still largely predominant. The integration of those who are different from mainstream society is a historical hurdle that affects all minorities. Henry and Tator (2002) explained that minority status results from the lack of power and privilege in relation to the majority group. It is therefore important that the government draft and implement policies based on social justice to ensure the equitable participation of all members of society.

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GLOSSARY

Administrative regulations: The steps and practices required to implement policies and designate responsibilities for the administration of the policy.

Educational policy implementer: People affiliated with education districts who are involved in the daily activity of establishing and enacting educational practices within the policy framework to learners in educational institutions; more specifically in this study, principals and teachers.

Educational policy makers: Individuals who are responsible for creating and establishing a learning atmosphere in which all learners can thrive and become independent and engaged citizens.

ESL/ELL: English as a second language/English language learner; used interchangeably depending on the context; refers to students whose first language is neither English nor French or to programs designed for students whose first language is neither English nor French.

Narrative: In this study, narrative is defined based on Elliot (2005) definition, she stated that narrative can be “understood to organize a sequence of events into whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to the whole” (p. 3)

Policy: The specific decisions and actions that those in positions of power take to address specific problems.

Refugees: Migrants who have entered Canada through either government or private sponsorship as refugees according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2010):

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

Stories: Descriptions embedded in narratives that promote further explanation or illustrations; they can include comments and recommendations on the topic under discussion. Stories further clarify concepts, sometimes help to explore new associated topics that have not yet been discussed, and help to remember events and important components and elements that might have been forgotten.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Positioning the Researcher

My passion for and devotion to this research are rooted in my life journey. It began with my early educational experiences, which were so vastly scattered around the globe, due to political instability, war and societal problems such as gender disparity. Very early I learned that educational systems are not equipped to understand the complex social structures that govern our globe. Further, I learned educational institutions lack interest and willingness to understand their students' circumstances and explore their stories. As a young learner in Canada, coming from a minority background with English as a second language, I was placed with a wave of new migrants labeled as language learners and streamlined into language learning classes. With the failure of schools to recognize my existing academic knowledge, my values, strengths and weaknesses, it was easy to lose one's identity and become disengaged with learning. I believe that, if it were not for support from my family and the understanding of occasional educators, I could not have survived the demands of my early educational years and eventually succeeded.

Global geopolitics led to my family's continuous migration for over a decade and the consequence of my family's migration was instability in my educational life. However, in the midst of constant migration I had the benefits of my family's strong human capital. Having strong family support, I was encouraged to override the lack of recognition by voicing my concerns and demanding my proper placement. By becoming my own advocate and working harder than most my counterparts, I succeeded in establishing my academic credentials. However, I also faced many negative biases and obstacles. Therefore, it is very difficult to deny the influences of those early years; my

eyes were opened to the societal realities of racism, a class system, and hard work. Many years passed, I feel privileged to have had these experiences, and I *almost* understand what it means to be an outsider, to feel ignored and almost nonexistent.

More than a decade after my graduation from the school system, I volunteered in one of Edmonton's inner-city schools. I came to know some of the students and their stories; theirs are the faces and the stories that I will never forget. Soon it became clear to me that our education system still fails to take into consideration the complex global politics that shape the lives of some of the students enrolled in it. I witnessed how our education system was failing to address the needs of newcomers, but particularly refugees who, unlike myself, did not choose but were forced to leave their homes and seek a new place to call home. The subject of refugees and the fact that millions and millions of people are labeled refugees is a very complicated social dilemma. However, I believe that as global citizens we need to pay closer attention to this crisis and that as concerned citizens we need to address their needs and issues. Educational institutions are the best medium through which to address the needs of refugees, and particularly refugee youth. Education can offer them the proper support to enable them to realize their potential and create better lives for themselves and for those around them (Kanu, 2007; Rutter, 2006; Winthrop & Kirk, 2008; Yohani, 2010a).

My inability to effect social change for refugee youth as a volunteer, with my limited knowledge and power, drove me back to academia. Although academia refers to institutions that perpetuate social class and order, they also contain within them spaces where ideologies and organizations can be challenged, contested and renegotiated (Mayo, 1999). In the academic world I was introduced to Gramsci's (1971) 'war of position' and

Freire's (1998) belief in opening spaces inside the system to allow the external and the internal to work together. Their readings have made me realize that effective policy design and implementation make transformational change possible. In this research study I utilized critical document and content analysis within the framework of race equity and social justice theories to evaluate the inclusion and success of refugee youth in Alberta's and BC's education systems. Further, based on my findings, I make recommendations to enhance the educational experience of refugee youth with the anticipation of educational success and a steppingstone to the betterment of our society.

Social Problem: Being a Refugee in Canada

At a time when over 60 million people globally are displaced from their homes, many others have been blinded by the constructed myths about refugees. The term *refugee* signifies groups of people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of overriding politics and the resulting conflicts. Factors that contribute to forced migration include the continuing consequences of early globalization, the dominance of neoliberal economic provisions and, more recently, environmental changes. These factors will be discussed in depth in the following chapter. It is important to understand that the majority of the displaced population have neither contributed to their unfortunate fate nor planned to become refugees. While the term refugee has always been synonymous with derogatory and discriminatory terms, during recent times the term refugee has become interchangeable with non-citizens and terrorists. Further, the majority of the limited assistance to refugees occurs within the discourse of charity rather than social justice and human rights. The predominance of charity model has allowed for the existence of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from a 3 year mandate

in 1950 to its current stance. Charity model doesn't consider the root causes of forced migration and vulnerability and allows for continuous perpetuation of forcibly displaced population and poverty. In contrast, approaches based on social justice and human rights would consider and question entitlement, exclusion, access and equity to ensure reciprocal recognition and authentic and extensive engagement of all individuals as citizens and equitable distribution of all goods and burdens within society (Shultz, 2007).

Once refugees are uprooted from their homes, lands, and countries, their identities and histories are also simultaneously erased. They are described as a burden globally, particularly in the Western nations, although the majority of the displaced population—over 30 million—has become internally displaced. Addressing the plight of refugees does not include a discussion of why this population became migrants and needed to flee their homes and seek refuge in foreign lands. There is no desire to learn their histories, experiences, and accomplishments, or to uncover their goals and dreams.

As a signatory to the United Nations 1951 conventions, Canada annually allows small groups of refugees to make Canada their second home. Upon landing on Canadian soil, refugees assume a debt to the government for their travel expenses and must repay it with interest within a year. Forcibly displaced populations flee their homes without having adequate time to collect the credentials that they need for employment. Often, they also need to acquire a new language, English or French, to be able to communicate and find employment, which makes the road to settlement and economic prosperity challenging. Refugees face an array of challenges that effectively impede their integration into mainstream society; the major hindrances are their lack of familiarity with the predominant culture, the language barrier, and the lack of proper documentation.

Not only has the education of some refugee youth been interrupted, but others might also not have even basic skills in their own languages or familiarity with the proper behavior required to attend formal educational institutions (Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008). Refugees leave their homes in crisis and do not have important documents such as birth certificates, school transcripts, and their credentials with them (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). A major unrelenting societal issue in Canada that refugees face is the rampant racism and its negative consequences. The combined challenges make navigating the Canadian system difficult; this leads to low-paying employment and family income and the inability to access essential services such as health care and education, which further drive this vulnerable population to the periphery of society.

Refugee youth and their families highly value educational institutions and processes, but the Canadian education system has failed to retain refugee youth within its institutions, to meet their needs, and to maintain their interests in schooling (Ngo, 2009a). Given the high dropout rates among students for whom English is a second language and a multitude of other factors such as discrimination, poverty, the inability to access resources, and peer pressure, their tendency to join gangs and commit criminal behaviors is high (Kanu, 2007). It is therefore crucial to redefine the role of schooling and the process of education for refugee youth to help them to fulfill their potential and lead secure lives. Although myriads of social factors influence the effectiveness of education for refugee youth, in this study I focused specifically on the importance of educational policies and programming. Proper education helps refugee youth to develop a sense of self and return to normalcy (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008); it helps them feel that they belong to a community, while enhancing their confidence in their ability to learn and critically

analyze, evaluate, and grow in a manner that best suits and benefits their life and surroundings.

Refugee Youth Education and Policy Design

Refugee children and youth constitute the most vulnerable population in the world. Because of their special circumstances, several United Nations declarations and guidelines specifically address the rights and needs of refugee children (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2011). Canada, among developed nations, is one of the most highly involved countries in the resettlement process of refugee populations. Studies have demonstrated that refugees have a vast potential to contribute to their adopted country, and over the long term their various societal contributions benefit Canada economically and intellectually; refugees also enrich the cultural fabric of society (Wong, 2002). Research has also indicated a positive correlation between the ease of refugees' integration into mainstream society and their constructive involvement in society (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). However, Pumariega, Rothe, and Pumariega (2005) concluded that, without significant social and economic support, recently settled refugee children and youth are especially vulnerable and become more susceptible to an unsuccessful pattern of integration. Economic barriers, societal issues, and psychological issues that arise from their traumatic experiences are important factors that impede the success of refugee youth in their new home country (Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008; Berry, 1997; Yohani, 2010). On the other hand, personal resources such as maturity, resilience, and self-understanding, as well as positive social factors such as the lack of systemic discrimination and access to support networks, are factors that contribute to the success of refugee youth in their new home country (Rutter, 1999). Educational institutions can

enhance students' personal resources and provide the social support networks such as communities of learning that the youth need to develop the skills to flourish in the larger society and succeed on their chosen path. However, currently the educational success of newcomer youth and, more specifically, refugee youth in the Canadian educational system is dismal. Roessingh and Field (2000) reported a high school dropout rate of 60% to 95% among beginning ESL learners in Alberta, many of whom are African refugee students. Given the growth in the number of refugees and refugee youths' lack of success within the Canadian education system, Canada needs to ensure that it is well equipped to welcome refugee youth and children, address their needs and rights by providing suitable educational services and opportunities so they can reach their full potential, and successfully integrate into mainstream society.

Policy Problem: Refugee Youth, Children's Right and Educational Policy in Alberta and British Columbia

Policies have been essential elements throughout history that ensure the values of human dignity and safety of the majority, as well as maximize human potential and individual productivity both for personal fulfillment and to best meet the needs of the larger society. Confusion arises in trying to understand the underlying need to design and utilize policies; i.e., whether policies were designed as human inspiration to serve the purposes of peace, respect for human dignity and values, and to enhance social progress, or whether they emerged in the face of deterioration of the peace, respect for human dignity and values because of human self-interest and greed. Although it remains difficult to speculate the causal need for the first human rights declaration by King Cyrus upon his "peaceful conquest" of Babylon (Farsinet.com, 2011), it is not difficult to

acknowledge that the oppression of nations and violation of the rights of individuals and children continue to this date.

Refugees' rights have been violently dismantled, and international agencies such as the Office of the UNHCR have tried to establish basic rights for refugees to enable them to build their lives once again. Rights, are further extended to refugee children and youth under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Convention on the Rights of the Child provides every individual under the age 18 with rights to protection, provision and participation; these rights "apply to all children at all times, without exception" (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.). The rights of protection provide children and youth protection from abuse, neglect and the rights to special protection in times of war; rights of provision ensure every child has the right to access education, grow his or her abilities and talents, learn to respect others, live peacefully, and protect the environment; and rights of participation allows for children to express their opinions and be heard, and participate in religious, cultural and political matters (UNICEF, n.d.). Due to their circumstances refugees are a high-needs group who require extensive support from their host country; it is crucial to ensure, rights as outlined by United Nations and agreed upon by majority of nations, are resorted to all refugees including refugee children and youth.

A review of the literature on Canada's policies on refugee populations places Canada as one of the best host countries globally (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2013). Although this is an achievement of which to be proud, it is important to consider the lack of attention paid to refugees globally and the limited competition with regard to support and care for this displaced population. A general overview of policies on refugee support

in Canada is limited and at times confusing. To begin, it is difficult to reach a consensus on the number of refugees in Canada because the numbers vary significantly; for example, in 2009 the number of resettled refugees in Canada ranged from 10,000 to 33,227 (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2008; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2011; Teachingrefugees.com, n.d.). It is also important to note the discrepancies between government promises and actions. In December 2011, Canada announced a 20% increase in the number of refugees to be resettled in Canada. However, in 2012 the number decreased by 26%, the lowest number of refugees in the past 30 years (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2013).

Additionally, the policies that address refugees are limited, and they are usually aggregated with the immigrant population, with the main focus on language acquisition and job training. Policies with regard to the psychosocial needs of refugees, while extensively researched and described are limited in numbers and scopes of practice. Although family reunification is indicated as a basic human right and a major foundation for the success of refugee youth, in practice, family reunification is very limited (Canadian Council for Refugees, n.d; UNICEF, n.d.). Similarly, education is considered a cornerstone of refugee youths' healing process and integration into mainstream society (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009), but Canada has few comprehensive policies for refugees nationally, and Alberta has very limited educational policies addressing the needs of refugee learners. The lack of educational policies and proper programming to address the needs of refugee youth is a prime reason for the neglect of refugee youths' rights. Schools have been recognized as essential centers to provide the needed care to promote the healing process and development of children; however, in practice, learning

institutions have not created a space to foster the growth and empowerment of refugee youth (Rutter, 2006; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Winthrop & Kirk, 2008).

Why Focus on Education?

Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has articulated and researchers have demonstrated that education is a vital element in refugee students' healing process (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 2015). Refugee youth have been dislocated from their communities and families, and education centers can be the starting point to build new communities to promote children's well-being (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Education will not only result in academic knowledge, but also help students regain their sense of self and identity to help themselves, their families, and their communities. Various approaches to education, such as the educationalist approach, in which the main focus is on education and children's viewpoints, are rarely incorporated into their education. At the other end of the spectrum is the child-protection approach, which focuses primarily on children's perspectives (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). However, they all promote education as having a positive impact on children's well-being in conflict situations. The collective understanding among various school approaches to education is that education (a) results in a return to normalcy, (b) serves as a means of socialization, (c) creates a nurturing environment, and (d) acts as a medium for coping and hoping (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008).

The most common argument for the need for education in conflict zones and to protect children from conflict zones is a return to normalcy. School attendance creates a predictable routine for students amidst the chaos that has become part of the lives of refugee families. The main focus of this argument is the sense of stability from school

attendance and not necessarily the learning that occurs while students attend school (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008).

Socialization is the second most common argument for the need for education for refugee students. The proponents of this argument emphasize the beneficial effects of positive social interactions among teachers, students, and their peers: “These encounters allow students to develop appropriate social behaviors to form positive relationships and to cope more effectively with difficult circumstances” (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008, p. 640). Although there is a strong basis for both the normalcy and the socialization argument, arguments tend to overemphasize positive relation building and overlook the high risk of the exploitation of children. Researchers have conducted studies in refugee camp settlements as well as refugees’ adopted countries on the importance and impact of education on refugee youth. Some have revealed the mistreatment and abuse of students in refugee camps by adults involved with organizations that offer the youth educational opportunities (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004). In the case of refugee youth in their adopted countries, which is a focus of this study, the difficult socioeconomic circumstances of many of the refugee youth and the problems that the education system faces in properly including these youth, such as assessment and placement issues, the lack of cultural understanding, difficulties with language, and varied social issues such as racism, have the potential to cause students to have negative experiences and feel worthless and devalued as citizens. The above concerns, hand in hand with the general tendency of the larger society to make the refugee population feel inferior, create the conditions for students to feel neglected and/or ill-treated. Regular attendance and

socialization can also occur in settings other than educational centers, such as religious or community centers.

The third argument on the importance of education for refugee youth focuses on the role of schooling as a nurturing and learning environment (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). The emphasis of this category is not only on the learning that occurs, but also, and more specifically on the process of learning and the empowerment that learning fosters.

Education for refugee students also serves as a medium for coping and hoping (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Educational researchers have demonstrated that refugee youth refer to educational institutions as centers where they can deal with their difficulties and find reasons to believe in a better future (Yohani, 2010b). The belief in a better future will help children to cope with their difficulties and begin to hope. Education programs restore normalcy, create social opportunities with peers, and offer nurturing environments that support students' well-being. Therefore, the responsibility of governments is to ensure that the primary concern of education is in the best interests of children (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 2015). Proper education is a right of children and has the potential to present them with myriad of opportunities and benefit the larger community in which the children reside (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009).

Research Questions

Studies have shown that holistic social policies are the most effective in retaining refugee students in schools and closing the achievement gaps, but specific educational policies have also proven to play an important role (Kanu, 2007; Keddie, 2012; Ngo, 2009a; J. Rutter, 2006; Stead, Closs, & Arshad, 2002; Taylor & Sidu, 2012). Designing and implementing educational policies that promote the proper inclusion and growth of

all learners, including refugee youth, is essential. Considering the special needs of refugee youth, it is important to understand the current guidelines and their effectiveness as well as to develop specific programming and policies to address these needs. In this study I employed a multiple case study method under the framework of race equity and social justice to answer the following three questions:

1. What are the underlying reasons for the systemic lack of educational policies that address the learning needs of refugee youth in Alberta and British Columbia?
2. What is the impact of current education policies upon the educational opportunities of refugee youth in Alberta and British Columbia?
3. What new education policy initiatives are necessary to effectively respond to the educational needs and, by extension, the social well-being of young refugee learners?

Research Presentation

Through social-justice and race-equity discourse, in this research study I examined how educational policies and practices shape learning institutions and impact learners. One of the difficulties that educational institutions face is to provide safe and meaningful learning opportunities for all students. Therefore, in providing all students with a meaningful education regardless of their histories, socioeconomic status, and weaknesses and strengths, social justice and race equity are the best framework to ensure that all students, whether in the mainstream or at the margins, are considered, acknowledged, and cared for. To answer the research questions, I used a multiple case study research design. The case study sites were Alberta and British Columbia. The

variable in the study included educational policy documents relevant to refugee learners. Also, I also identified various sites in Alberta and British Columbia with higher numbers of refugee learners and interviewed policy implementers such as principals, teachers, settlement workers, and ESL consultants. Further, I contacted the corresponding school districts and interviewed policy makers such as school trustees and school district representatives to better understand the role policy makers play in shaping policies and practices for refugee learners. Interviewing policy makers also provided a better understanding on how policies are currently shaped and what elements are needed to enhance policy design and implementation. Subsequently, I analyzed the data through the understandings of critical constructivism.

In the study I identified refugee learners as an unrecognized and neglected population on the periphery of educational institutions. This oversight and attempt to better integrate refugee learners in our educational institutions is despite the wealth of knowledge in scholarly communities and advocacy groups for refugees. The structural invisibility cultivated in societal structures is a result of the predominant ideology, which emphasizes the similarities and chooses to ignore the differences. Therefore, one of the findings of this study was the lack of recognition of refugee learners in our educational institutions. The lack of recognition of any group, circumstances, or realities creates an environment that is not conducive to their growth and nurturing. The non-recognition of refugee youth prevents their presence and participation in decision making and hinders their identity development; furthermore, it discourages the larger society from valuing different social groups and appreciating the benefits of diversity to the society.

I also concluded that the systemic avoidance of giving English language learners the tools and environment that they need to ensure their integration into core subject matter is the result of a lack of cognitive justice. The devaluing of knowledge such as students' native languages, the unwillingness to assess students' needs based on their existing knowledge, the emphasis on evaluation of Eurocentric knowledge, and the determination to create hegemonic knowledge further place refugee learners on the periphery of learning institutions and society. Based on existing knowledge in the scholarly and policy documents, as well as, the experiences of policy makers and implementers in the study, I discuss the two controversial and competing paradigms of targeted vs. non-targeted policies to explore the best route in creating a positive learning environment to be recommended specifically for refugee learners.

In the literature review chapter, I discuss 60 years of research on refugee learners and their educational endeavors to provide a basis for this study; this body of research helps illustrate the gap in the existing knowledge about the refugee learners' education upon their settlement in Western nations in general, but more specifically within the Canadian context. In chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical framework, race equity and social justice, that I used in this study. In Chapter 4, I explain critical constructivism, the methodological framework that I utilized for this research, as well as the multiple case study methods that I used to guide the research design and analysis for this study.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 constitute the findings from this study. Chapter 5 discusses the factors that influence policy design and implementation. Chapter 6 focuses on the findings from the analysis of policy documents from Alberta and British Columbia, respectively. Chapter 7 addresses the interview findings from the Alberta participants

and the status of the education of refugee learners in Alberta. Chapter 8 is the findings from the interview participants in British Columbia. In chapter 9, the discussion chapter, I strive to create a “thicker description” (Ryle, 1971, p. 498) of the role of policies or lack of policies in education of refugee learners. Gilbert Ryle stated that descriptions of actions need to be thickened “before it amounts to an account of what the person is trying to accomplish” (p. 498). Therefore, my goal in chapter 9 was to produce a thicker description of the role of policies and their impact on refugee learners to better evaluate current circumstances but most importantly to lay the foundations for future policy and research in this area. Chapter 10, the conclusion chapter, summarizes the purpose of this study, the literature review, and the methodology; as well I reflect on the findings and discussion chapters. In the last chapter, chapter 11, I make a number of recommendations and practical elements that I believe need to be introduced into our existing educational policies to help refugee learners succeed as newcomer youth in the school system and positively integrate into their new adopted home.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theorizing Refugee Population

Canada as a signatory to United Nations Conventions, and in keeping with its humanitarian traditions, has implemented a process that protects people who fear prosecution if they return to their countries or need protection because of global geopolitics. The majority of people, who are forcibly removed from their homes and nations because of larger overriding politics and the resulting conflicts, are collectively labeled as refugees. The language used to define and categorize refugees has become politicized, derogatory, and discriminatory. Therefore, it is essential to understand the terms used to describe refugees to better assist this population in their resettlement process. It is also important to distinguish between refugees and other migrants such as immigrants or temporary residents. According to the United Nations, a refugee is

a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 2010, p. 16)

Given the negative attitudes and reactions prevalent in mainstream society toward the refugee class, it is important to identify the factors that cause forced migration. Improved comprehension of the status of the refugee population as a result of globalization and its varying impact can serve as a positive effort in changing the discourse of classifying refugees as deserving and capable citizens rather than “human waste” (Pinson & Arnot, 2007, p. 399).

This chapter begins with an outline of the factors that contribute to the creation of displaced populations. I define refugees according to the United Nations' definition and describe the challenges that the convention refugees who are entering Canada face. Further, in this chapter I review the existing educational policies in Alberta and British Columbia, as well as the literature on the education of refugees in the two provinces. The chapter ends with a description of the initiatives that students and community organizations in British Columbia have undertaken to include the voices and concerns of refugee and immigrant youth in designing and implementing policies.

Factors That Contribute to Forced Migration

Historically, populations have moved from their homelands in the face of fear for their survival because of religious or political prosecution, diminishing resources, and lack of security. The global migration intensified with the emergence of the Industrial Revolution against the backdrop of imperialism. Therefore, early globalization, which encompassed colonization, industrialization, and nation formation based on ethnocultural attributes, led to the increased forced mobility of the population (Castle, 2003). Further, the adaptation of neoliberal economic discourses by developed nations attributed to increase in the number of forcibly displaced population. As, I will discuss further in the next section, neoliberal discourses contributed to the trade imbalance between the North and the South, mainly with Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. The economic weakening of Southern nation states meant limited access to resources for the population of those nations. The limited resources, in addition to the historical or manufactured divisions based on race, class, and religion, led to internal turmoil. This turmoil benefited the Northern nations in that they could more effectively gain access and dominate the

natural resources of the Southern nations (Castle, 2003). Additionally, a large number of refugees are emerging under the banner of environmental refugees. These are individuals who cannot sustain their livelihoods because of a variety of environmental factors such as drought, soil erosion, deforestation, and desertification, among others. Such environmental damage is attributed mainly to developing projects, industrial accidents, and the deliberate dumping and destruction that occurs in developing countries, which have the least economic and political power (Mann, 2005). The increased refugee population after the Second World War led to the formation of the office of the UNHCR in 1950 as a small organization with a three-year mandate to assist in the resettlement of the European-displaced population (Cutts, 2000). The UNHCR of the 1950s with its three-year mandate has now grown to meet the demands of the increasing refugee population estimated at 60 million in 2016 (UNHRC, n.d.). The following section will explore the impact of neo-liberal policies, as the most modern adopted economic ideology globally, on creation of refugees.

Impact of Neoliberalism on the Creation of the Forcibly Displaced

The dominant ideologies, or modes of thoughts, of the time have shaped the social order of humanity as well as the policies that have emerged. Therefore, ideologies and policies impact the foundation of human rights and frame the means through which citizens explore and experience life. Ideologies also guide the distribution of wealth and accessibility to knowledge and health care, among other social benefits. As Hyndman (2000) noted, refugees were created as a class and received assistance from Western nations after World War II. Therefore, given the centrality of policies with regard to the creation of refugee populations and their eventual resettlement process, it is important to

understand the philosophy and ideology that govern the conception and fruition of policies.

Neoliberal ideology became prevalent in the Western world during the late 1970s and a more dominant force during the 1980s as it percolated into every aspect of governance and the social arenas. Critical theorists (Dei, 2006, 2008; Hill & Kumar, 2008; Klees, Samoff, & Stromquist, 2012; Klein, 2007; Stiglitz, 2002, 2012) have defined neoliberalism as the resurgence of political and economic liberalism in response to the unremitting wariness of the welfare state and a commitment to the central value of individualism; it is a philosophy that holds that citizens are motivated only by self-interest. Therefore, there the governing agencies means of governance was modified. Osborne and Gaebler (1992) have defined government roles under the neo-liberal discourse as “steer rather than row” (as cited in Osborne, 2010). In its new role governing agencies set goals and are not involved in implementation process. In terms of economics, governments were encouraged to abstain from regulating market economy (Gamble, 2007). Neoliberal economics are understood in terms of a free market, which “naturally balances itself via the pressures of market demands; a key to successful market-based economies” (Shah, 2010, para. 17). The objective of a self-regulated economy is to create sustainable growth and improve the economic progress of nations. Economic globalization under the banner of free trade and competitiveness, free of government interference, would remove the inefficiencies of the public sector and is assumed to create a just platform for the allocation of resources among the world’s population (Thorsen & Lie, n.d.). Although the past three decades have witnessed unprecedented innovation and growth in the history of humanity, they have come with

the heavy cost of sharp global inequalities. Half of humanity, about 3 billion people, earn fewer than \$2 a day; and 86% of the world's resources are consumed by 20% of the world's wealthiest (Shah, 2010).

Globally, neoliberal ideology is translated into free trade, free circulation of capital, and freer international investment (Shah, 2010). However, in the implementation of neoliberal ideology, the discussion of power is generally absent. The questions of who influences trade and whose benefits and concerns are considered in a global market are conveniently set aside. Joseph Stiglitz, former World Bank Chief Economist and Nobel Laureate in Economics, contended that neoliberal ideologies and “globalization in its current forms risk exacerbating poverty and increasing violence if not checked” (as cited in Shah, 2010, para. 23). Consequently, one of the byproducts of developed nations' adoption of neoliberal economic discourses has been the forced mobility of populations and increased numbers of refugees (Dei, 2006, 2008; Dumenil & Levy, 2011; Hill & Kumar, 2008; Klein, 2008; Stiglitz, 2002, 2012). Neoliberal ideologies along with many forms of collective oppressions throughout the past decades have created 60 million refugees during the past 60 years, and children constitute half of that population (UNHCR, 2015). With regard to the refugee population, the drafting of policies, have not ensured their full enforcement and optimum benefit. Further, policies that address refugee populations have been delayed, are sporadic in nature, and difficult to enforce, if they are enforced at all. In many instances the human rights of the displaced population are not upheld during the resettlement process; by extension, children's welfare and best interests, although stated to be of prime importance, in practice are not taken into consideration (Crowe, 2006).

Refugees in Canada

The majority of the refugee population resettles internally or in neighboring countries. According to the Internal Displaced Monitoring Center (2015), 38 million refugees considered internally displaced population. Among developed countries, Canada is the fifth major destination for refugees, and Alberta has the fourth highest number of refugees among Canadian provinces (Teachingrefugees.com, n.d.). Some of the terms that the Canadian government uses to describe and categorize refugees include *convention refugees*, *asylum seekers*, *resettled refugees*, *stateless persons*, and *environmental refugees*. These are mainly legal terms that denote the background and underlying assumptions attached to certain groups of refugees. This study will focus specifically on refugees who enter Canada under the category of *government-assisted refugees* (GARs) and *privately sponsored refugees*. GARs are individuals who meet the United Nations definition of refugees and are sponsored by the federal government to enter Canada.

Privately sponsored refugees include the Convention refugees abroad class and the country of asylum class. A Convention refugee abroad is any person who (a) is a Convention refugee; (b) is outside Canada; (c) is seeking resettlement in Canada; (d) does not have the prospect of another durable solution within a reasonable period of time; that is, that person cannot return to his or her country of nationality or habitual residence, cannot integrate into the country of refuge or the country of first asylum; and does not have another offer of resettlement from a country other than Canada; and (e) will be privately sponsored or assisted by the government or has adequate financial resources to support himself or herself and any dependents (UNHCR, 2010). A member of the

country of asylum class is a person (a) who is outside his or her country of citizenship or habitual residence, (b) who has been and continues to be seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict or who has suffered massive violations of human rights, (c) for whom there is no possibility of finding an adequate solution to his or her situation within a reasonable period of time, and (d) who will be privately sponsored or who has adequate financial resources to support himself or herself and any dependents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012).

The Canadian government assists individuals selected under the category of GAR by providing accommodation upon their arrival as well as financial and nonfinancial services. Financial support includes travel expenses and the most basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing to those who meet the requirements. Financial assistance is offered for a maximum of a year or until refugees become financially independent, whichever comes first. GAR clients also receive orientation services, such as language and job services, to ease their integration process. It is important to note that refugees are obliged to pay the government back for these financial services. Individuals who enter Canada through the Private Sponsorship Program are usually not eligible for financial assistance; however, in some cases cost-sharing arrangements can be made between the federal government and the private sponsors of refugees. The federal government also provides some financial assistance to refugees for their initial settlement. Privately sponsored refugees can also benefit from social programs such as language and job-search programs that assist with the resettlement process.

According to Immigration and Citizenship Canada, Canada annually resettles 10,000 refugees under government and private sponsorship, and 25% of the refugees are

under the age of 18 (Crowe, 2006). It is important to note that the refugee population is not homogenous, and, depending on the global geopolitics, varying nations see an influx of refugees. For example, Alberta hosted refugees from Yugoslavia during the late 1990s, whereas in the early 2000s the majority of refugees were from Iraq and Afghanistan. In the late 2000s, Somali refugees formed the majority of the refugee population in Alberta. Each population brings with it its own stories, challenges, and backgrounds; therefore, it is essential to continue seek an understanding of their experiences, knowledge, and histories to best ensure their meaningful integration in their host country. However, because refugees have been forcibly removed from their homes and nations, they have faced extraordinarily stressful circumstances. This in turn creates further challenges in their resettlement process. Although it is essential to emphasize the vast experiences and human potential of the refugee population, it is also important to understand the challenges that they face in order to better meet their needs.

Challenges That Refugees Face in Canada

The challenges that refugees face fall into four categories that need to be discussed and considered to best develop policies to help refugee youth: (a) the experiences and traumatic events that refugees and, in particular, refugee youth had to face because of geopolitical, economic, and environmental reasons out of their control; (b) the issues that refugees face during resettlement because of their disadvantaged position; these issues are exacerbated by the bureaucratic and organizational problems that they face in their newly adopted home; (c) the unrelenting and troubling societal concerns; and (d) the deficiencies within the education system with regard to refugee youth students. The discussion that follows outlines some of the traumatic experiences

that refugees face, as well as the resettlement and societal challenges. Given that the focus of this paper is the study of educational policies in addressing the needs of refugee youth, I will discuss this particular challenge in more detail in a separate section dedicated to policies or the lack of policies with regard to the education of these youth in the context of Alberta and BC.

Emotional challenges that young refugees face. Refugee youth enter Canada having faced extraordinarily stressful circumstances such as war and violence, the death of a close family member, threats to their own lives and/or the lives of close family members, separation from their social support and community, harsh living circumstances, and uncertainty for prolonged periods of time (Kanu, 2007; Ngo, 2009b; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Stewart, 2007; Wortley & Tanner, 2007). These past experiences can result in mental health and behavioral issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can hinder their adjustment to a new life in a foreign land (Yohani & Larsen, 2009). Further, PTSD and trauma can impede children's learning (Ngo, 2009b). Adults with PTSD might not be able to give their children the emotional support that they require to deal with the trauma that they have experienced as well as the adjustments needed to adapt to their new home (Yohani & Larsen, 2009).

Some refugee children, youth, and adults did not have an opportunity to attend formal education because of extreme poverty, war, or the need to live in refugee camps. Not only has the education of some refugee youth been interrupted, but others might also not have even basic skills in their own language or be familiar with the proper behavior required to attend formal educational institutions (Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008; Ngo, 2009b; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Wortley & Tanner, 2007).

Challenges of resettlement. The lack of proper documentation is another factor that hinders refugees in Canada. Refugees usually leave their homes in crisis and do not have important documents such as birth certificates, school transcripts, and their credentials with them when they arrive (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Lack of documentation adds to the complexity of students' placement and impedes their access to the assistance that they need in other social arenas.

The unfamiliarity of refugees with the predominant culture in combination with a language barrier can be major hindrances to the integration of newcomers into mainstream society. It will also prevent refugees from accessing essential services such as medical care and education. The inability to properly navigate the Canadian system and appropriately access social assistance in addition to the lack of documentation and/or the lack of recognition of their credentials will lead to low-paying employment and, as a result, low family income (Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008; Ngo, 2009b; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Wortley & Tanner, 2007). Refugee youth might therefore have to take part-time or, in some cases, full-time employment while attending school (Lund, 2008; Ngo, 2009b; Yohani & Larsen, 2009).

Lack of familiarity with the predominant culture can also lead to miscommunication between the newcomers and the residents of the country. For example, the parents of refugee youth might be unaware of school expectations with regard to parental involvement and parental outreach programming (Kanu, 2007; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). In more serious cases, it can lead to cultural conflict. Wortley (2003) described the cultural conflict model as one in which newcomers engage in cultural and religious practices that inadvertently breach the Criminal Code of Canada. Furthermore,

the faster rate of acculturation of refugee youth than that of adults can cause cultural dissonance among family members, which in turn can cause conflict between parents and their children (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009).

Societal challenges. According to the Conference Board of Canada (2009), Canada rates consistently below average among the developed countries with regard to child poverty. One in five Canadian children from racialized families lives below the poverty line (Canada Without Poverty, n.d.). Many low-income children exhibit reduced motivation to learn, delayed cognitive development, lower achievement, less participation in extracurricular activities, lower career aspirations, interrupted school attendance, lower university attendance, an increased risk of illiteracy, and higher dropout rates (Donnelly, 2010).

Another major unrelenting societal issue is rampant racism and the negative consequences of racial aggression. Canadian research and studies conducted in Alberta have demonstrated that people of color and Aboriginal people live in a disadvantaged position in every sphere of our society: housing, justice, employment, and education (Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, 2004). Further, a preliminary study in 2014 by The Twitter Racism Project, revealed the link between the racist attitudes and ethnic make-up of the city (Twitter Racism Project, 2014). For example, Edmonton and Winnipeg with a greater Indigenous population had more derogatory terms towards this ethnic population. Educational institutions reflect similar societal behaviors. Research has demonstrated that racism exists in multiple forms in Canadian educational institutions (Antone, 2003; Cui, 2015; Guo, 2015; Henry & Tator, 2006; Li, 2010; Schroeter & James, 2015; St. Denis Hampton 2002). Racism within educational institutions

contributes to further social marginalization, lower achievement and educational success expectations, unfair treatment and even denial of basic human rights (Zinga & Gordon, 2014).

Canadian schools are faced with an unprecedented number of students entering their institutions from diverse backgrounds, including refugees. Critical educational theorists have established that educational institutions and policies and practices that drive institutions are spaces where social norms are reproduced (Abdi, 2007; Apple, 2000, Giroux, 2003; hooks, 1994). Although educational institutions mirror the structures and politics of redistribution, recognition, and representation that are present in society at large, they are also influenced by national and global political and economic issues. Therefore, schools are spaces where intersectionality between historical, political, economic, and societal issues occur and need to be negotiated. To acknowledge the importance of the impact of larger social policies on educational policies, educational practices, and measures within institutions, it is important to review the policies on educational practices that impact refugee students. Therefore, in the following sections I review policies and practices that impact refugee learners within our educational institutions in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia.

Policy Issues in the Education of Refugee Youth in Alberta

Neoliberalism and Education in Alberta

The introduction of neoliberal ideology and minimal government involvement in social aspects of governance also meant reduced government expenditure on social services such as education (Wotherspoon, 2009). In Alberta, Ralph Klein's Conservative government of the 1990s reduced this expenditure. The visible outcomes of restructuring

the education system included a 12.5% cut to education, centralized funding, the drastic elimination of school boards and trustees, reduced kindergarten funding, the introduction of charter schools, reduced teachers' salaries, the elimination of various positions within Alberta Education, and increased standardized testing (Taylor, 2001). The visible public changes led to invisible changes in the structure of the governance of Alberta's education system. It is important to note that similar structural changes were also being implemented globally as part of the neoliberal ideology. Although governments were reducing their expenditure on education, they also needed to increase their global competitiveness in terms of educational attainment and the ability to meet local and global market demands (Ball, 1998). Therefore, the need to maintain or create educational excellence further led to the accountability framework and the generation of market choice within education. Educational leaders armed with accountability on one hand and an array of school choices on the other portrays a system in which parents have a voice in their children's education. They also indicate that school leadership is accountable to society through a detailed and specific system of assessment that is publicly reported. The co-existence of choice for parents and students, and schools' performance measurements breed competition among schools to attract the largest number of students and, preferably, the best and brightest students (Davies, 2009).

Although neoliberal ideology promotes less government involvement in the economic sphere, because the ideology unfolds in a conservative setting, the role of government becomes essential in promoting proper values and goals that governments deem essential for society to achieve. Therefore, educational institutions funded and governed by a neoliberal conservative government are encouraged to produce learners

who uphold similar values and belief systems (Ball, 1998). Moreover, government interference and the insertion of ideal values and standardized testing in education ensure hegemony in society, a quality required for the viability of neoliberal ideology (Apple, 2000; Taylor, 2001). Further, educational ministries through centralized funding, presumed market choice that allows parents to enroll their children in schools that are the most suitable for their children's needs, and a clear ranking system among and between schools, have shifted the blame for low educational attainment from the education bureau to schools and parents. Under the platform of neo-liberalism, educational institutions are not responsible for the welfare of their population but for the maintenance of free market. Therefore, learning centers emphasize competition and assessment and require all students to understand, behave, and reproduce knowledge similarly. Such educational outcomes, regardless of consideration for students' social, financial, and lived experiences, marginalizes pupils who have additional learning needs. Their educational needs are relegated to the periphery of the educational agenda (Hursh, 2010; Torres, 2002).

Alberta's Educational Policies Impacting Refugee Learners

Given the important role of education in refugee self-development and successful integration into mainstream society, it is important to locate policies and statements that address the needs of refugee youth and to evaluate their success within Alberta's education system.

A literature search on educational policies related to refugee youth yielded several documents: *English as a Second Language [ESL] Guide to Implementation* (Alberta Education, 2007), *School Act* (Government of Alberta, 2015), *Alberta Assessment Study*

(Government of Alberta, Education, 2009), *Funding Manual* (Alberta Education, 2009), *Policy Resolutions May 2007* (Alberta Teachers' Association [ATA], 2007), *Submission to the Minister of Education Regarding School Act Review* (ATA, 2009), and *Teaching Refugees With Limited Formal Education* (Teachingrefugees.com, n.d.). A close examination of the documents revealed that ESL education; the honoring of multiculturalism, respect, and diversity; and assessment and funding are topics discussed in relation to migrant students. I will explore the implications of each policy in relation to refugee youths' educational undertakings.

ESL Education in Alberta

Language is one of the main barriers that refugee youth and their families face in their adopted country. It is therefore important to review the document designed to guide English-language education for English-language learners. A review of the documents on English-language education revealed a detailed documentation of the need, importance, and means of delivering proficiency in the English language to learners. *English as a Second Language [ESL] Guide to Implementation* (Alberta Education, 2007) provides information on various types of learners and their backgrounds. Descriptions of the different kinds of learners help educators to better understand their students, their backgrounds, and their purposes for migrating to Canada. This will help educators to better accommodate the learning needs of diverse student populations. It is important to note that some learners migrate to Canada with extensive resources and educational backgrounds to take advantage of the better educational opportunities, whereas other learners with minimal formal education migrate to Canada due to the need for security and lack of access to basic human rights. The ESL guide discusses various means of

delivery of ESL education at varying points in learners' education. Given the diverse background of ESL students, it is essential to offer various modes of educational delivery to meet their needs. Alberta Education has set out ESL benchmarks for each age group and grade level. Documentation also points to the importance of bilingual programming and teacher training and lists the resources for educators to utilize in the educational setting (Alberta Education, 2007).

The *English as a Second Language [ESL] Guide to Implementation* (Alberta Education, 2007) very briefly discussed the research findings on the benefits of bilingual education. However, it offered no guidelines or recommendations for the delivery of bilingual education to newcomers who do not benefit from bilingual programs such as those in established communities in Alberta, such as German, Chinese, or Ukrainian. Dei and Rummens (2010) among many other scholars have identified language as a major barrier to the educational endeavors of newcomers. The English language used in schools features a highly specific form of language. It includes ways of behaving—how to be a student—which comes with many years of prior knowledge and understanding of cultural expectations. Language acquisition is also a complex process, and in optimum circumstances it takes three to five years to develop oral-language proficiency and four to seven years to gain academic-English proficiency (Brodie-Tyrrell & Prescott, 2010; Cummins, 2001). When students' schooling has been interrupted and they are in disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances, it can take up to 10 years for them to acquire academic proficiency (Brodie-Tyrrell & Prescott, 2010). These are huge challenges for students to overcome for success in educational institutions. As La Bianco (as cited in Brown, Miller, & Mitchell, 2006) stated, "We cannot leave English as a

Second Language students' right to participate fully in their education to osmotic process and blind faith" (p. 3).

Allowing English-as-a-second-language children to take their native languages with them to school will help educational institutions to create environments in which the students feel welcome and their identities are valued (Kirova, 2008). The feeling of belonging creates an atmosphere in which all students believe that they can contribute equally and participate in activities, understand, and create knowledge. Research has shown that children who continue to learn in their native language develop superior linguistic skills and acquire the second language much faster because of their ability to transfer their prior knowledge of literacy skills to their second language (Cummins, 2001). Students gain the ability to process language better by gaining a deeper understanding of their native language and the means to use it effectively (Cummins, 2001; Dei & Rummens, 2010, Kirova, 2008). They will be able to compare and contrast the ways in which both their languages are arranged and utilized. Fluency in their native languages and mastery of the second language will help newcomer youth to acquire knowledge, form relationships, and participate in mainstream society. Therefore, language is key to locating their identity and unlocking their voice. Linguistic ability is vital to helping newcomer youth move from the periphery to the center.

The inability or difficulty of refugee youth to access the second language in terms of both the syntax and social meaning of the language or culture causes feelings of self-devaluation. Their failure to communicate hinders the formation of relationships with peers and educators, delays the learning process, and creates miscommunication. All these factors can create further distance between educational institutions and students and

impede parental involvement. However, mastery of the second language helps refugee youth to develop their individual identities and better identify with the mainstream population, which in turn enhances their language-learning acquisition (Zelasko, 2000). Therefore, the emphasis on language learning in the policies that I reviewed can prove to be a positive feature if educational institutions properly implement the programs.

Howard Research & Management Consulting Inc. (2009) revealed Alberta Education's lack of planning and resources to deliver ESL studies to their students. Furthermore, only 17.4% of the students, parents, and teachers whom they questioned in their study believed that schools have formal screening procedures to identify ESL students' needs. More than half of the respondents contended that schools rely on families' or individual teachers' requests to identify ESL students' needs. The review also indicated that 64% of ESL support comes from regular-subject teachers who, as the majority of the survey respondents reported, have no ESL training to enable them to support ESL students in their classrooms. The consulting firm concluded that the ill training of teachers to deal with ESL students and teachers' low expectations for refugee youth intensify the ineffectiveness of ESL training in Alberta. As a result, in 2006 the provincial test scores of ESL students in Grades 3, 6, and 9 were between 16% and 28% lower than those of other learners in language arts (Howard Research & Management Consulting Inc., 2009). Additionally, addressing ESL at the expense of other learning needs has not been effective. When students are placed in ESL classes, it fosters and maintains the isolation of these newly arrived students and neglects their educational training in other subject areas (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

Multiculturalism and Diversity in Alberta Education

The School Act (Government of Alberta, 2011) outlines the importance of diversity in education: “All education programs offered and instructional materials used in Schools must reflect the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta, promote understanding and respect for others and honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans” (p. 20). This statement refers to multicultural education and respect for diversity in Alberta education. The literature on multicultural education has criticized the delivery of education and alleged that it has not incorporated inclusion and respect for the “other” (Apple, 2000; Banks, 1993, 1996, 2008; Beairsto & Carrigan, 2004; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; James, 2001; Joshee, 2004). As Ghosh and Abdi explained, the difficulty with implementing multicultural education is that “the Multiculturalism clause for education is vague,” and the “lack of federal control over education, and provincial legislation in general, has limited federal ability to influence education in this direction to any meaningful degree” (p. 45). The ambiguity of multiculturalism in education has resulted in varying conceptual understandings among a number of groups who advocate for antiracism, antidiscrimination, human rights, and language and is an obstacle to pedagogical practice. Therefore, a gap exists between theory and practice in multicultural education (Kirova, 2008).

It is interesting to note that the statement from the School Act cited above refers to respecting the “*common* [emphasis added] values and beliefs,” whereas diversity brings with it diverse values and beliefs. Therefore, it is crucial to unpack the values and beliefs system that the Government of Alberta considers acceptable to be valued. Critics of multiculturalism have further argued that the insistence on identifying with a specific

cultural ethnicity can create difficulties in the identity development of students from minority backgrounds. Students are often forced to identify with one particular culture independently of their social context (Kirova, 2008). Critics have pointed to the difficulty of maneuvering through the particulars of mainstream and minority cultures. Identification solely with a minority cultural background results in segregation from mainstream society; on the other hand, utter identification with the mainstream culture creates dissonance among family members and networks of minorities.

Critical theorists have also criticized multicultural education as a means of masking political and social conditions (Giroux, 2001; James, 2001). They have argued that institutions base individuals' shortcomings on their lack of knowledge and utilize multicultural education as a tool rather than to implement the necessary societal changes to address inequalities (Giroux, 2001; James, 2001; Kirova, 2008). Multiculturalism portrays Canada as tolerant and accepting of difference, but it fails to address the inequalities based on ethnicity, class, and race. Emphasis on color blindness fails to acknowledge the large number of Black, Latino, and Aboriginal students in our learning institutions. Moreover, the lack of recognition of all students from different backgrounds with various needs fails to address the impact of inequalities and the fact that they lead to the designation of students as at risk (Dei, 2008). Reliance on multiculturalism and colorblindness prevents learning institutions from addressing and preventing inequities in a proactive manner. Evaluation of diversity in Alberta education reveals a general lack of cultural awareness in every segment of society, including curriculum development and implementation (Lund, 2008; Ngo, 2009a; Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Ngo (2009a) argued that the Educational Resettlement Project for Refugees reinforces only the incorporation

of the mainstream culture into the refugees' culture; no education is designed for the community or institutions to address the refugee population's cultures or their plight and needs. Students' and staff's lack of awareness of refugees' circumstances with regard to culture and the realities of racism further hinders refugee students' integration into the school environment. For example, refugee students' inability to resolve bullying through accepted means and their resorting to physical confrontations leads to repeated expulsions and exclusion, which unwittingly isolates refugee students (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Such segregation is a result of refugee students' lack of understanding of the school culture and of the unfamiliarity of mainstream society with refugee youth, their circumstances, and their special needs (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008).

Educational Assessment and Funding in Alberta

An analysis of the documents revealed that one of the most important deficiencies in educational policies with regard to refugee youth is the lack of planning for the evaluation and placement of refugee students (Kanu, 2007). In the Alberta Assessment Study, under the heading Fairness and Equity, Alberta Education, (2009) questioned the validity of the existing assessment of refugees and special-needs students. They recognized the dire need to design and implement policies to assess refugee students. The government document notes the lack of progress in supporting at-risk children in the context of ESL, refugee, and special-needs student populations: "Our assessment practices should be effective for all students, special needs and ESL. We need to focus on them as well" (p. 41). Baha, Dwering, Mulder, and Northcott (2001), in their study of refugees in Northern Alberta, established that over 50% of refugee youth aged 15 to 18 years who had arrived in Canada were placed in inappropriate grades.

In its business plan, Alberta Education (2011a) consistently articulated its principles or discourse on responsiveness, accessibility, equity, and accountability. However, an examination of the funding allocation for immigrant/refugee youth services reveals a lack of priority for support of refugee students (Crowe, 2006; Ngo, 2009a; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). A review of the *Funding manual for school authorities* (2009) specified the allocation of limited continuing education funding only for refugees enrolled in high schools who have filed proper refugee claims (Alberta Education, 2009, p. 18). This allocation does not include refugees in Grades 1 to 9, asylum seekers whose claims have not yet been processed, and high school refugee students who are enrolled in home education or blended, outreach, or online programs. Such regulation has the potential to exclude some refugee students. Given the low socio-economic status of refugee families, the youth often need to work to contribute to their family income, but their work might hinder their regular attendance in classes. Therefore, other options such as access to online programming might be an effective means for refugee students to continue their education.

The lack of funding is also evident in the limited number of programs and services that target refugee students. Examples of deficiencies include the limited number of settlement workers allocated to a small number of schools and the elimination of popular school-to-work and community-based augmented academic-support programs (Ngo, 2009b; Yohani, 2010a). The *Submission to the Minister of Education Regarding School Act Review* (ATA, 2009) and *Policy Resolutions May 2007* (ATA, 2007) both identify a lack of funding to meet the needs of refugee students: “The Alberta Teachers’ Association urge[s] the Department of Education to create a funding code to address the

needs of refugee students with limited formal schooling” (ATA, 2007, Resolution 7.B.31). It is important to emphasize that funding for these services has not increased in proportion to the government’s increasing acceptance of high-needs applicants from refugee camps (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009).

Teaching Refugees With Limited Formal Schooling in Alberta

Alberta Education in collaboration with the Calgary Board of Education has designed best-practice programs to address the needs of refugee students with limited education (Teachingrefugees.com, n.d) in terms of language training and the effectiveness of bilingual education and community support. The programs are not based on any purposeful framework that reflects the principles of equity, inclusion, and participation for all citizens; nor do they have clear goals and objectives, activities, or targeted outcomes that address the needs and issues of refugee youth in the context of youth development and acculturation (Ngo, 2009a, 2009b). Ngo, further argues the programs have no coherent delivery and teaching strategies. The benchmarks included reflect the assessment strategies that Alberta Education already utilizes, which, as I have already discussed, do not meet the special needs of these students (Government of Alberta, Education, 2009). Additionally, the government does not address effective placement evaluation or the best means of transition from ESL classes into other subject areas. With regard to the integration of youth into mainstream culture, the programs address only the early stages of acclimatization and adaptation. To help refugees to deal with discrimination and encourage a higher level of citizenship, more in-depth programs are needed that address issues of social justice. As I will explain in detail in the Methodology chapter, social justice is a central concept in this thesis. Ensuring human

rights for all members of society is not possible without equitable opportunities for all to participate in the economic, political, and social aspects of society. Further, as Ngo (2009a) stated, not only do programs need to be designed within the framework of social justice, but, for programming to be meaningful, the programs must also be implemented in the context of social justice. Therefore, leaders need to embrace the framework of social justice (Ngo, 2009a).

The psychological needs of refugee youth and their classification as high risk are the only differentiating markers between them and other migrant students. Psychological discourses that inform educational policies on the issue of refugee youths' shortcomings in education further contribute to their marginalization (Berry, 1997; Harry, Klinger, 2014). These psychological discourses have been criticized for being grounded in European epistemologies that strive to control the differences among students and encourage participation in the social and cultural reproduction of a hegemonic society (O'Loughlin, 2002). Additionally, psychological models universalize and normalize the refugee experience without taking into consideration the heterogeneity of the refugee population—their diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds (Mosselson, 2011).

An analysis of the documents on educational policies in Alberta affirmed the lack of targeted policies to address the needs of refugee youth in Alberta's educational institutions. Additionally, refugee youths' lack of success in educational institutions attests to their invisibility in educational policies. In Rossiter and Rossiter's (2009) study, a criminal justice representative in Alberta attested that the educational system is not prepared to offer the education and services that refugee youths need: "Education—I think that's where we're failing right from the onset" (p. 418).

Policy Issues in the Education of Refugee Youth in British Columbia

Neoliberalism and Education in British Columbia

BC's education system, similar to that of other provinces in Canada and other nations around the globe, has not been immune to the inexorable spread of globalization and neoliberalism. A movement under the brand of efficiency, choice, and accountability has brought forward "trans-national homogeneity" (Schuetze, Kuehn, Davidson-Harden, Schugurensky & Weber, 2011, p. 43), standardization, competition, and privatization to British Columbia. Historically, BC's public education has been secular. Much like other provinces in Canada, parents have the right to choose their children's education based on the preferred first language, English or French. Like Alberta's educational reform in the 1990s, BC had to face major financial cuts to education as a result of reduced federal transfer funds from the federal government. This in turn led to less government support and a more prominent role for the market, one of the main features of neoliberalism (Ball, 1998; Taylor, 2001).

BC, unlike Alberta, has experienced a number of different political parties since 1975, from the neoconservative governance of Social Credit to the Social New Democratic Party. Additionally, BC's public education has made a clear move towards privatization in that BC funds more private schools than the province of Alberta does. The Social Credit government of the 1970s modified the School Act while still maintaining elements of constructivist theories, but the Act was heavily influenced by economics. The government introduced a 10% cut to the teaching force and reduced services, thereby creating larger class sizes. However, the major change under the Social Credit government was the transfer of funding from public schools to private schools and

the creation of what later became known as private/independent schools. Throughout the 1970s the enrolment in private/independent schools was 3.7% of the total student population of the province, but the enhanced funding of these schools increased their enrollment to 13% in the 2006/2007 school year (Schuetze et al., 2011).

Upon gaining governing power, the New Democratic Party changed the school funding system by curtailing school boards' funding powers and centralizing school budgets with the intention of making it more equitable for all schools. The New Democratic government also reformed the School Act by taking an outcomes-based approach, originally with the intention of better understanding the populations who were not being served well (Fallon and Poole, 2014). However, the idea was used to rank school systems based on students' performance on standardized testing. The Liberal government of early 2000 made further cuts to education funding. Although they seemed to give local administrators more control, they increased the monitoring of school systems through accountability and standardized performance measurements (Schuetze et al., 2011).

Schuetze et al. (2011) have outlined several reasons why neoliberalism has increased the privatization of schools in BC. As I mentioned earlier, government funding of independent schools is one of the major contributing factors for increased privatization of schools. In 2006, public schools obtained a 2.35% increase in funding to cover the next three years, whereas independent schools received a 10.4% increase. The commoditization of education in the globalized market is another factor that has contributed to the increased number of independent schools. International students who attend independent schools in West Vancouver are charged twice the tuition that the

government provides for Canadian students. As well, the marketization of education has allowed school district businesses to offer BC's education system in other nations around the globe. They provide BC's curriculum and education for a profit through teachers who have teaching certificates from the province, with the intention of turning over the profit to the public school boards. However, Fallon and Paquette (2009) revealed that most of the school district businesses have operated at a loss.

Other government initiatives have allowed the increasing incursion of private education into public education. For example, the Liberal government in 2007 passed legislation allowing students in public schools to take courses or programs in independent schools for credit or to use independent schools' mentoring programs with the intention of improving the academic scores of poorer students. However, these programs have met with a great deal of criticism. One of these is that students are allowed a passing grade in lower-quality independent schools, whereas they are unable to pass the same-grade examinations in public schools (Fallon and Paquette, 2009).

The British Columbia School Act states that its goal is "to ensure that all its members receive an education that enables them to become personally fulfilled and publicly useful, thereby increasing the strength and contributions to the health and stability of that society" (BC Ministry of Education, Governance and Legislation Branch, 1996, p. 11). However, the school-performance measurements such as the Fraser Institute's ranking system constantly reveal higher educational outcomes for schools with better socioeconomic resources. Therefore, it is essential to further study the impact on all students of current educational policies that stem from neoliberal ideologies.

British Columbia's Education Policies Impacting Refugee Learners

A literature search on educational policies related to refugee youth yielded several documents: the School Act (BC Ministry of Education, Governance and Legislation Branch, 1996), *Policy Document: Students Who Are Refugees* (BC Ministry of Education, n.d.-b), *Policy Document: English Language Learning ([ELL] BC Ministry of Education, 2012)*, *English as a Second Language: Policy and Guidelines* (BC Ministry of Education, 2009b), *Policy Document: K-12 Funding-Newcomer Refugees* (BC Ministry of Education, n.d.-a), *Policy Document: Students From Refugee Backgrounds: A Guide for Teachers and Schools* (BC Ministry of Education, 2009c), *Fresh Voices From Long Journeys: Insights of Immigrant and Refugee Youth* (Vancouver Foundation, Representative for Children and Youth, 2011), and “*Promising Practices*” of *Early Childhood Education for Immigrant and Refugee Children in British Columbia* (Nabavi, 2011). Initial examination of the policy documents pertaining to refugee youth identified policies on funding, enrolment, and teaching guides specifically designed for refugee youth. However, the majority of educational regulations and activities categorize refugee youth as ESL students, along with other migrant students. The documents discuss ESL education, multiculturalism and diversity, assessment and funding, and multi-voice and youth connections in relation to migrant students. I will explore the implications of each policy in relation to refugee youths’ educational undertaking in the following section.

ESL Education in British Columbia

The policy document *English as a Second Language: Policy and Guidelines* (BC Ministry of Education, 2009b) is not a new document based on current knowledge and understanding, but a consolidation of two 1999 language policies: *English as a Second*

Language Policy Framework and English as a Second Language Policy Guidelines. The English Language Learning policy appears to be comprehensive in several ways. It values the current knowledge and ability of all British Columbians, including the newcomers to British Columbia. However, it also acknowledges the importance of competency in the English language for students to be able to fulfill their potential in the province. Educational institutions as partners in learning have an important role in supporting students' achievement of their potential. Further, the language policy outlines the services provided to all non-English speakers, including those who speak different English dialects and French. It identifies various student backgrounds, includes observations on the increasing numbers of refugee students and their particular needs given the challenges that they face. The document was designed to consider several crucial principles that underpin ESL delivery. These are: delivery of the program with the success of students as its goal, differentiation between cognitive academic language proficiency and language proficiency, respect and value for students' first language, acknowledgement of enhanced learning abilities with confidence in more than one language, recognition of the crucial role of language and culture in negotiating identity, and the importance of partnerships with parents. The policy also clearly stresses the importance of students' assessment upon arrival. The assessment identifies students' proficiency in English as well as their oral and written proficiency in their first language. Placement is recommended upon assessment, but it is important to note that placement is fluid rather than and it is based on students' learning and abilities. Funding for students' language learning has a 5-year cap; however, it might be discontinued earlier if assessment indicates no further need or continued ESL funding based on students' needs.

The document also identifies the importance of teacher training and experience, as well as a sense of accountability and responsibility from boards, schools, and teachers.

Although *English as a Second Language* (BC Ministry of Education, 2009b) is very comprehensive and encompasses the process of inclusion through respect and value for all, with the host nation taking the responsibility and being accountable for providing the proper means of education, once the document is placed in the context of larger policy documents such as *English Language Learning* (BC Ministry of Education, 2012) or the framework of *Language Education Policy* (BC Ministry of Education, 1997), challenges arise in implementing the English-as-a-second-language policy guideline. One of the objectives of the *Language Education Policy* is “to ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve proficiency in the English language” (Policy section, para. 1). According to Bourdieu and Thompson (1991), such objective legitimization of the knowledge of English reinforces the value and power of the English language in educational institutions. Further, the policy offers discrete values to French-speaking students: “Children whose parents qualify under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms have the opportunity to be educated in French” (BC Ministry of Education, 1997, para. 5). It is interesting that, whereas students of Aboriginal ancestry are recognized as a group who should have access to their first language, the government of BC does not offer Aboriginal students assurances that are similar to those that French-speaking students receive. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education needs to determine the feasibility of offering other languages and approve their delivery. Therefore, although the guideline discussed above indicates value for first languages other than

English and outlines the benefits of maintaining the heritage language, the implementation of a second-languages curriculum is actually not feasible.

In terms of ESL students' success, Toohey and Derwing (2008) argued against the claims of BC's Ministry of Education that ESL students in BC's high schools outperform students whose native language is English. Toohey and Derwing demonstrated that although the success rate of ESL students in BC is higher than that of their counterparts in other areas of the country, many ESL students fall through the cracks of the system. Their success rate is lower than that of native-English-speaking students in BC. With regard to ESL students' identification with ESL programming, Gunderson, D'Silva, and Odo (2012) demonstrated the inadequacies of ESL services to 35,000 ESL students from a variety of national origins and socioeconomic levels. Students from a higher socioeconomic status identified ESL classes as places for second-class students, those who have little chance of going on to university. They additionally felt that ESL classes are best when students learn academic subjects. McCarthy and Foxx (2001) viewed the 5-year cap on ESL funding as an "example of a systemic, structural barrier to equitable treatment" (p. 6).

Multiculturalism and Diversity in British Columbia Education

BC's School Act (BC Ministry of Education, Governance and Legislation Branch, 1996) articulates that

the purpose of the British Columbia school system: [is] to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy. (p. 11)

To achieve this purpose, school systems must strive to ensure that differences among learners do not impede their participation in school, their mastery of learning outcomes,

or their ability to become contributing members of society. Similar to the *English as a Second Language* document (BC Ministry of Education, 2009b), the School Act's articulation of equity and accessibility also emphasizes the value of diversity. The School Act additionally focuses on the importance of responding to the educational needs of diverse social and cultural communities. Beairsto and Carrigan (2004) acknowledged the rapid demographic change in BC's schools and school administrators' and staff's inability to support students culturally. They reasoned that multiculturalism can create two different kinds of problems. The first is that in identifying the mainstream culture as dominant, administrators and staff believe that their decisions and actions are the norm because they are not influenced by any culture. Such a belief is dangerously false and can push marginalized students further into the periphery of education. Second, multiculturalism confuses the supposed celebration of diversity with color blindness and therefore treats all students the same. Treating students equally can be as harmful as racial prejudice, "because by denying differences we also deny students' unique needs and abilities which makes it impossible to respond constructively" (Beairsto & Carrigan, p. 3).

Textbooks have been considered tools to disseminate dominant cultural norms and create hegemony among students (Schissler, 1989; as cited in Bromley, 2011). Providing textbooks in the Canadian education system that both address and respect the multicultural nation and enables the creation of a national identity for diverse students can be challenging. Bromley argued that BC textbooks make it possible to create a national identity while maintaining individual identity. She identified four elements of such textbooks that support her conclusion: (a) They frame human rights and

multiculturalism as part of the national identity, (b) they promote multiple perspectives, (c) they celebrate social and scientific figures, and (d) they draw on “exogenous sources to affirm state legitimacy” (p. 10). However, Bromley also pointed out that various areas still need improvement. For example, she outlined the persistence of the problem of textbooks that disseminate and favor the dominant culture. She finds that although the curricula for Grade 8-10 social studies is designed “to demonstrate respect for human equality and cultural diversity” (BC Ministry of Education, 1997, para. 1), the textbooks do not offer the outlined curricula. Bromley also addressed the language of power and differentiation in textbooks that distinguishes between us—those within Canada—and them—the others outside Canadian borders. Additionally, some books have also described minority groups inside Canada as “un-Canadian” (Bromley, 2011, p. 160).

Educational Assessment and Funding in British Columbia

The literature on refugee youths’ educational attainment has consistently referred to assessment as an important stepping stone on their educational journey (Cummins, 1984; Dei, 2010; Gunderson, D’Silva, Odo, 2012). The *English Language Learners* (BC Ministry of Education, 2009a) policy document outlines the in-depth process of evaluating English-language knowledge. The policy as written takes into consideration students’ cultural background and values the knowledge that they already possess. Additionally, migrant students undergo Math and French assessment if students and their families put in a request. However, literature indicates lack of proper assessment and evaluation of students entering BC’s school as English language learners (Gunderson, D’Silva, Odo, 2012). The document *Students from Refugee Backgrounds: A Guide for Teachers and Schools* (BC Ministry of Education, 2009c) lacks educational guidelines on

student assessment and placement. The only assessment recommended is a medical examination for vision and hearing, which, although crucial, should not be the sole focus. As well, a section on placement evaluation is included only in the appendix of the document as a necessary practice, however, without the necessary directives. It is important to note that there is no data that indicates the success rate of the assessment process in BC. The BC report *A New Start* (Lozano & Friesen, 2011) also indicated difficulty in balancing student placement based on capabilities and age appropriateness. Additionally, *Gang Prevention for New Immigrant and Refugee Youth in BC* (Sersli et al., 2010) indicated that one of the challenges that contribute to the gang involvement of refugee youth is the unavailability of culturally sensitive tools for evaluation and assessment. Staddon (2009) outlined educators' difficulties with the assessment process: "Educators also commented on the length of time it took to identify the refugee learners in their schools, and the limitations of existing assessment instruments to assess these students' needs" (p. 14). Staddon recommended the creation of appropriate, designated centers for assessment services for newly arrived students and their families as a potential solution to the complexities of assessment that refugee youth and educational institutions face.

In the *K-12 Funding: Newcomer Refugees* policy document, the BC Ministry of Education (n.d.-a) discussed funding based on the date of enrollment and eligibility. Newcomer youth who arrive between September 30 and February 29th of the school year are eligible for 50% funding, provided that the students fulfill the requirements for refugee claimants and have reportedly enrolled in a continuing-education or distributed-learning school. Similar funding procedures are in effect for francophone schools. Some

refugee youth might also be eligible for English Language Learner (ELL) funding with a 5-year cap if they meet the criteria during the 5 years. The policy and supplemental documents do not clarify the criteria for enrolment or for the continuation of funding.

Wayland (2006) explained that the majority of programs designed to support refugees in general and refugee youth in particular such as resettlement assistance programs for youth are funded through nongovernmental organizations or other humanitarian programs such as the United Way. Staddon (2009) therefore proposed that various government agencies collaborate on funding to increase the resources and programming to keep refugee teenagers in school. He also suggested that the funding be devoted to enhancing current successful programs such as after-school and summer programs and initiating new programs such as “pre-literacy curriculum” (p. 28).

Students From Refugee Backgrounds: Teaching Manual in British Columbia

Students from Refugee Backgrounds: A Guide for Teachers and Schools (BC Ministry of Education, 2009c) is the only handbook or guideline for teachers and school administrators that describes refugee students’ challenges during the pre- and post-settlement process and explains how they are distinguished from other students. The document describes the stages of cultural adjustment such as emotional trauma and its possible triggers and briefly outlines the importance of sensitivity to cultural communication. The final section of the guideline discusses organizations and sources that provide assistance to refugees and their children. This document offers general information on refugees. Yet much like Alberta’s policies and guidelines, it lacks clear statements on goals, objectives, activities, or targeted outcomes that address the needs of refugee youth and the issues they face in the context of youth development and

acculturation. The guideline has no program design, delivery, or teaching strategies and does not address students' placement and evaluation. Similar to Alberta's best practice document, the integration of youth into mainstream culture addresses only the early stages of acclimatization. The guidelines are heavily based on Bronfenbrenner's (as cited in Mosselson, 2011) psychological model of the ecological system theory of human development and other psychological discourses. Educational policies informed solely based on psychological discourses only highlight refugee youths' shortcomings and create a trauma based learning environment. As I discussed earlier, such psychological models normalize the experiences of refugee youth without considering the existing diversity among these youths.

Inclusion and Respect for the Voices of Youth, British Columbia

Fresh Voices from Long Journeys: Insights of Immigrant and Refugee Youth (Vancouver Foundation, Representative for Children and Youth, 2011, 2013) are unique documents that I located through a literature search on the experiences of refugee youth in BC. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond (as cited in Hyslop, 2011), the representative for children and youth, who has witnessed the difficulties of migrant youth in the process of integration and education, noted that "in British Columbia, we do not have a lot of opportunities to listen to young people; we haven't built it into our systems very well" (Young People Teach Us a Lot: Turpel-Lafond section, para. 3). In response to the ongoing struggles of refugee and immigrant youth, Vancouver Foundation, in collaboration with youth, initiated the first conference on the voices of youth. Their goal was to help immigrant and refugee students to voice their concerns to policymakers and politicians on the issues that they face as newcomers to BC. The conference consisted of

80 youth and their leaders who, in the presence of 60 policymakers and politicians, led discussion panels on the issues of school inclusion, equity for women and girls, sexuality and identity, youth programs and services, family expectations, English-as-a-second-language, and academic experiences. Turpel-Lafond contended that

these young people can teach us a lot about how do you work together across really large differences, in terms of their culture, their origins, their experiences, but still, they're here working together. And I think we need to tap into that and really understand how we're building communities in BC. (Hyslop, 2011, para. 5)

The conference generated a report called *Fresh Voices Report 2013* (Vancouver Foundation, Representative for Children and Youth, 2013) that was based on the dialogue of the preceding conference and discussion in response to the educational gaps that newcomers face on their educational journey. Students value the education and services available to them; however, newcomer youth also felt “disconnected, undervalued, misrepresented and discriminated against by the very systems intended to help them” (Vancouver Foundations, 2013, p. 5). The report indicated that students took an active role in shaping their future and addressed means of mediating the educational gap. The report contains 16 recommendations, some of which include counting ELL towards graduation; ensuring that ELL testing, assessment, placement, and academic guidance is consistent across BC; implementing special credit programs for languages spoken at home; training teachers and staff on anti-oppression and anti-racism and including the voices of newcomers on school boards and committees; increasing the number of immigrant-facilitated dialogues that focus on the school setting; and inviting government officials to participate in and listen to these conversations. These are important recommendations which need to be considered if English language learners in our

institutions are going to succeed both in terms of their educational journey and developing their sense of self and identities.

Further, the Make-It-Count campaign endorsed support for the recommendations of the report. The campaign was deemed a success because it generated support from various organizations, including Vancouver's City Council (Bhatia, 2013). A follow-up conference in 2014 echoed the recommendations and prompted discussions among policy makers and students. This conference, which began in 2012, was held with the promise of continuing every two years. It is important to acknowledge the significance of the collaboration among immigrant and refugee youth, the Vancouver Foundation, and BC's Representative for Children and Youth as an important step not only to give voice to marginalized students, but also to ensure that policy makers and politicians hear their concerns.

The Fresh Voices from Long Journeys conference is an example of the recognition and representation of a marginalized population. It creates space for groups commonly considered invisible youth, involves collaboration among various agencies to create social change and disrupts the hegemony of knowledge. Creating a welcoming environment and inclusive and holistic programs in the face of the negative political and media representation of refugees and asylum seekers requires exemplary leadership and advocacy skills. The literature stressed the importance of leaders advocating for refugee youth and their social and human rights (Ngo, 2009b; Taylor, Sidhu, 2012). School leaders and administrators can advocate for refugee youth in schools through supporting and taking the initiative in schoolwide programs, such as supporting teachers' initiatives to address the challenges that refugee youth face. As Taylor and Sidhu (2012) stated,

leadership roles are demonstrated through variety of ways “sometimes guid[ing] and sometimes coerc[ing]” (p. 49). Given the extensive needs of refugee youth, school leaders must form relationships with varying agencies not only to maintain and supplement the support that refugee youth receive within schools, but also to extend the support beyond the educational setting. Effective leaders require assistance from governmental and legislative bodies in the form of human and capital support to properly implement policies and programs.

Conclusion

The review of the literature on policies related to the education of refugee youth indicates a lack of targeted policies for refugee learners. One overarching policy homogenizes all migrant learners and students with varying needs. Further, data from the literature on the education of minorities and refugees in Canadian educational institutions indicate that the intentions of inclusive and diversity policies are not realized. A review of the research on the education of migrants in Western countries and, more specifically, within the Canadian context indicates a wealth of knowledge on the marginalization of minority students in schools, language acquisition, identity development and limited research on the needs of refugee learners. However, there is an evident a gap between policy design and the existing literature specifically in regards to refugee learner education. Therefore, my intention in this study is to fill the existing gap and create more awareness of the education of refugee learners as a distinct group of learners.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Refugee Study Under the Framework of Race Equity and Social Justice

This chapter details the theoretical framework chosen for the study, race equity and social justice. Not only is the refugee population one of the most vulnerable population globally, but there is also a lack of value placed on refugees. Bauman in his positioning of refugees within the global population refers to them as redundant and “human waste of globalization” (as cited in Pinson & Arnot, 2007, p. 76). Further, the lack of value is evident through the sparseness of public policy with regard to refugees in general and their lack of educational journey in particular. Therefore, questions in regards to refugees in this research study need to be examined under the framework of race equity and social justice. The theories underlying race equity are informed through the understanding of race by Frantz Fanon and social justice theories are informed by studies of Nancy Fraser.

Abdi and Shultz (2010) suggested that any meaningful understanding of citizenship and participation within the society should address the concerns with entitlements, exclusion, access, and equity. Further, they argue based on the definition of human rights, and those rights extend to children under the Convention of the Children’s right, justice entails equitable redistribution of both goods and burdens within society, engaging in processes of reciprocal recognition and extension of authentic and inclusive processes of engagement. One of the rights under the Children’s right Convention is the right to education, however, as Uptin, Wright and Hardwood (2014) described the right of many refugee children to access education is severely limited. They identified the “percentage of children under the auspice of the UNHCR that are not attending school”

(p. 7); as more than 24% between the ages of six to 11 years old and more than 79% for youth between the ages of 12-17 years old. Hathaway (2005) noted that the lack of access to education is due not only to limited financial resources, but also to the deeply grounded fear of increased migration of refugees into host nations. Therefore, indicating and establishing of rights only serves a symbolic purpose and doesn't create the equitable distribution of goods, services, recognition or participation within the society.

To generate a true understanding and meaningful change in the larger society's perception of refugee populations, ability to evaluate the current policies and practices in place to educate refugee youth and to uncover best means to integrate newcomer youth into the Canadian society, utilizing race equity and social justice allows for identifying the root causes that have led to forced migration and provides a platform to address the multi-factorial societal issues that impact the education of refugee youth. I therefore believe that to better resolve the issue of the resettlement of refugee populations and to overcome the structural societal barriers that contribute to the marginalization of refugee populations, observations, analyses, and conversations need to occur through the lenses of race equity and social justice.

Race Equity and Social Justice

Race equity and social justice will inform the study to address the issue of the invisibility of the refugee population in the larger society. The framework is built upon the earlier work of critical theorists: Race equity is inspired by the work of Frantz Fanon, *The White Mask Black Skin*, (1967), and social justice on the work of Nancy Fraser (2008).

Race Equity

Fanon's (1967) work involved the experiences of the colonized during the European colonization; his work to this day can inform the societal inequities based on race. For Fanon, race was not defined based on genetic disposition but as a political and historical construction mediated through culture. "For not only must the black man be black, he must be black in relation to the white man" (p. 90). Further, he discusses the creation of the black man through culture when he states, "the white man who had woven me out of the thousand details, anecdotes and stories" (p. 91). In his analysis, Fanon describes the misuse of race through power relation and creation of the Other that is objectified and therefore inferior.

Fanon also acknowledges the relation between race and class, he contends creation of the inferior race, the colonized, is directly linked to the class of lower economic status (Hussain, 2006).

Production relations under modern capitalism have historically remained race relations in such a way that race itself comes to constitute class, and that, thus, one cannot sufficiently account for class formations without considering race as a determining factor. (p. 129)

Fanon (as cited in Hussain, 2006) stated, "In the colonies the economic subculture is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (p. 134). Fanon underlines the intersectionality of becoming oppressed, its impact on identity development, cultural devaluation and economic impediment. Therefore, objectifying the other creates a class of citizen who have become less capable of social participation or disengaged from citizenry.

Literature in education and specifically education of students from minority backgrounds have identified the negative relation between race and success in learning

institutions. Racism in schools has been attributed to social marginalization, devaluing of students' knowledges and experiences, low expectations for student achievements, streamlining students to non-academic routes and improper placement (Guo, 2015; Henry & Tator, 2006; Kanu, 2007; Zinga & Gordon, 2014). The crafting of the narrative of the Other goes even further for refugee learners as they are characterized as victims, traumatized and affected by disrupted schooling (Kusma, 2006; Uptin, 2014). The phenomena to which Fanon referred as creation of his narrative by the colonizers through "the stories and anecdotes" is similarly being played in the school systems where stories of students based on their ethnic lines, race and class is predefined. The consequence of practices embedded in stereotypes by the host country is the limited educational outcomes for students from minority background and perpetuation of marginalization of communities based on race and ethnicity.

Educational outcomes of students are dependent upon many societal factors, including race, socio-economic and culture. However, race plays a significant role on educational and identity development of youth within the learning centers. Cui (2015) in her study of Chinese students in rural and urban Alberta uncovered that racialized minority youth felt marginalized and "still regarded themselves as outsiders even if they were educationally successful and economically included" (p. 1155). In their study Zinga and Gordon (2014) established that while minority students were acknowledging the existence of racism but downplayed the issue and attempted to fit in with the mainstream school population, "minoritized individuals often repress their race to fit in with white majority contexts due to the difficulty that individuals face in discussing race and racial issues" (p. 3). Fanon described Black individuals' internalization of White values as

epidermalization, a process of devaluing one's own behavior, language, culture and internalizing the values of the White to be accepted as an equal, thereby accepting and internalizing inferiority based on race and ethnicity.

Given the important role race plays in the society and specifically in identity development and educational attainment of youth one of the pillars which inform the theoretical framework of this study is recognizing the impacts of racial inequities and thriving towards race equity. In order to do so, it is important to challenge racism and disrupt the existing prescribed narratives and labels directed towards students from ethnic backgrounds. Further, I find the work of Fanon to be particularly suitable for this study as in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, he expresses hope for the possibility of overcoming the barriers as set by race as defined in power relations.

I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it. . . . I seriously hope to persuade my brother, whether black or white, to tear off with all his strength the shameful livery put together by centuries of incomprehension.
(p. 5)

Another inspiring element which comes across in Fanon's analysis of race is that it is possible to move beyond construction of the Other if White and Black, people of all ethnicities, are willing to go understand the other and go through recognition and "authentic communication" (p. 180) between the races.

Social Justice

Social justice theories were developed to outline the means through which achieving human rights of all members of society can be accomplished. Throughout history various philosophers, politicians and scholars have provided varying definitions and means to achieve social justice. In this study social justice will be defined based on

the definition provided by Nancy Fraser (2007, p. 20), the basis of social justice as defined by Fraser is accessibility to social needs and arrangements for all members in order for all to participate on par on matters concerning their society, she refers to this concept as participatory parity. In order to achieve participation parity she has developed a three dimensional model of; recognition, representation and redistribution, referring to it as *post-Westphalian democratic justice* (Fraser, 2007, p. 19).

Fraser (2007) emphasized the dimension of redistribution because members of society can be denied full participation due to economic impediments or maldistribution. Parity of participation can also be denied when the status of members based on their culture is devalued and they are misrecognized. Hence, there need for recognition based on culture and race as one of the dimensions to achieve social justice. In inquiring whether justice requires the recognition of groups or what is distinct about individuals, Fraser argues both universalist recognition or distinctiveness of individuals can be utilized to redress the injustice as the case requires.

Fraser (2007) added the third dimension, representation, to her understanding of social justice later. Representation dimension underscored the importance of political inclusion, who can be represented. In her discussion she explained that, while economic and culture are political as they are impacted by power relations, representation dimension constitutes a more specific definition of politics: “I mean political in a more specific, constitutive sense, which concerns the constitution of the state’s jurisdiction and the decision rules by which it structures contestation” (p. 20). According to Fraser (2007) all three dimensions are equally important and interlinked in order for parity of

participation to be possible, “no redistribution or recognition without representation” (p. 23).

The *representation* dimension of social justice as Fraser described it is “grounded in a specifically political mode of social ordering” (p. 21). She described the social ordering in two levels of boundaries. Boundary being the degree to which the claims of public are heard and are adjudicated. Fraser labeled the first level as ordinary political misrepresentation; this includes injustices that occur for those who are considered included, and “their membership is wildly assumed to be settled” (Fraser, 2009, p. 62). However, justice has failed to ensure their participation on par; examples include gender parity on electoral ballot, sexual minority rights, and demands for finance campaign reform. She further conceptualized another level of injustice within the representation dimension, meta-political injustice or misframing. Misframing occurs “when community’s boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from the chance to participate at all in its authorized contests over justice” (Fraser, 2009, p. 62). In identifying who should be included, Fraser writes, “all those who are subject to a given governance structure have moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it” (Fraser, 2009, 65). In identifying the *who* she elaborates, the *who* is entitled to receive justice should be case specific and should be determined by both state and non-state agencies as in the globalized world various agencies are involved in governance.

Race Equity and Social Justice Framework

The framework is comprised of four pillars (Figure 1), the first of which consists of the economic, cultural, and political factors that influence social justice. The second

pillar is concerned with the question of citizenship and inclusion. As Fraser stated, inclusion or not based on membership

is amongst the most consequential of political decisions. Constituting both members and non-members in a single stroke, this decision effectively excludes the latter from the universe of those entitled to consideration within the community in matters of distribution, recognition and ordinary-political justice. (p. 19)

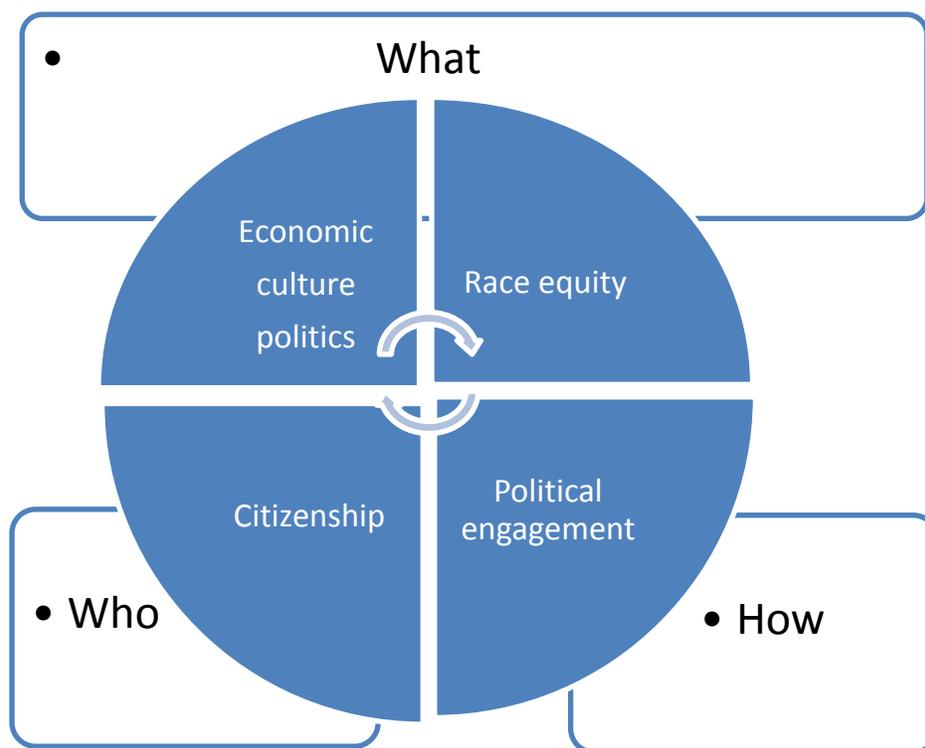


Figure 1. Race equity and social justice.

Given the stateless position of refugees and their lack of citizenship globally, the second pillar is an important element in ensuring refugees access to their rights. The third pillar that informs the study is the process of social justice: who should become involved in voicing the injustices. Fraser (as cited in Hölischer, 2014) asserted that those “who already enjoy parity of voice will need to engage in critical reflection and dialogue”

(p. 25) with the goal of ensuring social justice for all. The fourth pillar of the study, race equity, particularly focuses on the lack of race equity within Canadian educational policies. The literature in the area of race and educational policies within Canada has acknowledged the power of “whiteness” (Carr, 2008, p. 5) and, on the other hand, the need for an equitable educational system. Therefore, I must ensure that I conduct the study while valuing and considering the importance of race equity.

Although it is tempting to believe that racial inequities are features of the past and that humanity has progressed to an understanding of others based on their essence rather than the color of their skin, daily events and documented studies outlined earlier reveal otherwise. Additionally, statistical data consistently reveal a correlation between race, wealth, social integration, and educational success. Thomas (2012) in his review of rethinking inclusive education referred to “relational poverty” (p. 6) and its consequences. In his review he outlined the findings of various epidemiologists such as Keating and Hertzman (1999), as well as social scientists such as Willms (1999) and, more recently, Chiu and Khoo (2005), Chudgar and Luschei (2009), and Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) to demonstrate how a gradient effect, which is defined as “the extent to which social differences exist between members of a population” (p. 6), contributes to an imbalance in physical and mental health as well as various developmental stages and behavioral outcomes, including educational achievements. The researchers indicated that the larger the relational poverty, the greater the gap in students’ educational achievement. The increase in economic inequality in recent years and the added aspects of race and otherness from the larger society places refugee youth in a disadvantage position.

Further, as I mentioned earlier, Canadian research and studies conducted in Alberta have demonstrated that people of color and Aboriginal people live in a disadvantaged position in every sphere of our society: housing, justice, employment, and education (Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, 2004). Such a disadvantaged position within society perpetuates the marginalization of families and communities. Children in many low-income families exhibit a reduced motivation to learn, delayed cognitive development, lower achievement, less participation in extracurricular activities, lower career aspirations, interrupted school attendance, lower university attendance, an increased risk of illiteracy, and higher dropout rates (Donnelly, 2010). Therefore, utilizing a race-equity and social-justice framework that encompasses culture, politics, and economics helps to uncover the injustice and the perpetuation of inequities based on race and calls for changes to ensure equal participation and the integration of all, regardless of the socially constructed realities (Abdi & Richardson, 2008; Fraser, 2008; Giroux, 2003; hooks, 1994; Keddie, 2012).

Policies designed under the framework of race equity and social justice foster the success of all students, regardless of their race or income. Institutionalized barriers such as racism and societal barriers are under scrutiny through the lens of an equity and social justice framework that calls on all stakeholders—administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members—to examine individually and collectively the deeply held assumptions on race and the effect of race and racism in our educational institutions because of our policies, behaviors, and attitudes. The race-equity and social-justice framework shifts the blame to societal barriers from students' race. Therefore, policies

designed under such a framework will override the social injustice with the expectation that all pupils will succeed (Arnot & Pinson, 2005).

The framework of equity and social justice fills the gap created by liberal multiculturalists who, on one hand, have argued that there is only one human race without considering the existing differences and, on the other hand, have marginalized students who are the most dissimilar to the mainstream culture. Currently, some of the most prevalent assumptions about students' lack of success are about their lack of fluency in English, the lack of parental involvement, and cultural differences. An equity and social-justice framework opens the dialogue on the differences within our educational institutions, such as ethnicity, class, and spiritual affiliation. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997, as cited in Shields, 2004) reminded us that "being color-blind is a hegemonic practice that only White people have the luxury of believing" (p. 120). Such dialogue acknowledges the presence of diversity and creates a space for diversity to truly become part of the educational experience through inclusion in curriculum, appropriate evaluation systems, student support, and students' socialization experiences within schools. Therefore, policies designed under the framework of race equity and social justice ensure equity of access by making programming available that meets the cultural, social, and academic needs of all students by including their lived experiences. A policy framework of equity and social justice ensures "equitable sustainability" (p. 123): that the dropout and completion rates of students from various groups are comparable and that all students have an equal opportunity for academic success, to fully benefit from their educational experiences, and to lead successful and fulfilling lives (Shields, 2004).

Conclusion

Creation of a forcibly displaced population is a result of complex interplay between geo-political, economic and cultural circumstances, but above all it is an unimaginable breach of justice for those who have been uprooted. Therefore, any action taken to remediate the grave injustice that has brought on to the refugees needs to be within the framework of social justice. As such the frame work of race equity and social justice informs this study to not only fill the existing knowledge gaps within the canon of knowledge but creates that knowledge within the framework of justice.

CHAPTER 4: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Methodology Framework

Merriam (2009) explained that in qualitative research (a) individuals interact with their social world; (b) the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection; (c) fieldwork is involved; (d) existing theories are not tested; rather, theories are constructed; and (e) the product of the study is richly descriptive (pp. 6-8). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argued that qualitative research does not have a distinct methodology, but encompasses a variety of methodologies such as constructivism, feminism, and Marxism, as well as other cultural and ethnic studies. Similarly, qualitative research has no set method because it utilizes phenomenology, ethnography, hermeneutics, interviews, and case study, among other methods. Denzin and Lincoln contended that the tools and methods of qualitative study cannot be determined prior to the study; they are shaped based on the question, and the question is based on the context. Therefore, the researcher has to be open to the possibility of various methodologies and methods in conducting research.

Defining the nature of qualitative research depends upon the researcher's worldview or belief "about the nature of reality" (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the researcher's chosen framework and methodology is a basic belief that represents a worldview that defines for its holder the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships. The researcher's belief or understanding of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological question defines inquirers' paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The three fundamental dimensions are an interrelated web of practice and thinking that shapes the theoretical framework and

guides the nature of inquiry. Ontology and epistemology reflects one's worldview and reality. This research is based on the belief that reality is relative and locally and specifically constructed; critical constructivism is a methodology of choice under the framework of racial equity and social justice in this research. Based on this framework, I employed a multiple case studies method to guide this study.

Critical constructivism was suitable as a methodology for this study because it helps to understand that all knowledges are socially constructed, and it questions the role of power in knowledge construction, as well as emphasizes the centrality of understanding the epistemological location of both the researcher and that which is to be known. Critical constructivism helps to understand knowledge production, what is to be known and what is to be socially constructed. Therefore, acknowledging the influences of culture, politics, and the economics of the society on the understanding and creation of the knowledge. Critical constructivism helps researchers to be conscious of how multiple realities shape and create knowledge and the process through which certain information becomes validated as knowledge whereas other information is disproved or invalidated. Therefore, critical constructivism is interested in "exaggerated role power plays in this construction and validation process" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 3). Further, as Kincheloe stated, "Nothing represents a neutral perspective—nothing exists before consciousness shapes it into something perceptible" (p. 8). Therefore, in critical constructivism multiple social theories and groundings help to understand information and create knowledge. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) identified qualitative-research multiple methodologies as *bricolage* and stated that bricolage—multiple methods—adds "depth, breadth and rigor to any investigation" (p. 2). The goal of this research was to foster a better understanding of

the current educational challenges that refugee youth face and offer recommendations to enhance refugee youths' educational experience through pragmatic and meaningful change. I believe that the use of a constructivism as a methodology provided the guidelines to merge the existing knowledge on learning theories and refugee studies to construct knowledge from the perspectives of all stakeholders—administrators, teachers, and refugee youth—with the goal of assuring refugee youth success in educational institutions.

In this study I used an exploratory multiple case study method because of the types of questions to which I sought answers in the study: What are the existing policies? How are they being implemented? How do they impact students? Also, Yin (2009) explained that “the case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (p. 11). The research topic in this study is contemporary, and policies and practices cannot be manipulated or controlled. The cases under study involved analysis of policies and practices related to refugee learners in Alberta's and British Columbia's educational institutions. Each case included two embedded units of analysis: educational policy documents on refugee learners and the interviews that I conducted with policymakers, school administrators, and teachers. The goal of this study was to search for policies on refugee youth education to determine their impact and to explore how the positions of refugees as members or nonmembers of society have influenced their accessibility to basic human rights. To best explore the research questions methodically, I referred to racial equity and social justice to address the location of refugees as a collective and the impact of policies in ensuring their basic human rights. Further, critical constructivism, given its views on realities, the belief that

everyone has knowledge, the valuing of that knowledge, and the opening of space for all to participate and question the power relations, was an appropriate philosophical complement to address the issues of educational accessibility and proper inclusion in educational institutions. In the following section I present background information on critical constructivism from an educational philosophy perspective, as well as my detailed understanding of the multiple case study method and how I utilized it collect and analyze the data.

Constructivism: Philosophy of Knowledge Creation

John Dewey believed that knowledge is created within a naturalistic transactional framework. According to Dewey, organisms, through their innate or self-guided activities, interact with the world and create their experience; and through their sensory systems, they create integrated and coordinated responses or reflections and actions on the experience. From such responses, knowledge is constructed. Dewey did not view knowledge as a passive perception “created by systematic and logical placement of elementary experiences; rather knowledge is of or about the objects in the world” (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 49). Based on Dewey’s interactionism theory, knowledge does not exist apart from the knowledge seeker, but includes the habits and language that we gain through the process of experimental learning. Therefore, according to naturalistic transactionalism, the best educational learning occurs when learners can engage with the material and be active participants in their own learning.

Dewey’s creation of knowledge through experience evolved into the theory of constructivism, a knowledge-theory epistemology that holds that groups or individuals create knowledge based on the interactions between experiences and ideas (Bentley,

Fleury, & Garrison, 2007). Researchers have argued that constructivism theory was developed in response to the prevailing ideology of the time; social efficiency theories, which were based on scientific management; and time-studies models of industrial efficiency. In a historical context, two eminent views of knowledge creation based on Dewey's understanding of knowledge creation as interaction between learners and their context (constructivism) emerged: Piagetian (Piaget, 1955; as cited in Scott & Palincsar, 2009) constructivism, which emphasizes education for individual cognitive development; and Vygotskian (Vygotsky, 1978; as cited in Scott & Palincsar, 2009) constructivism, which emphasizes education for social transformation.

Piagetian constructivism is a child-centered learner approach, with a focus on the subject of the study, the student, and his or her cognitive development. Therefore, the emphasis is on the child's individual cognitive development through negotiations between his or her existing experiences as a student and the knowledge that teachers present. According to Piagetian constructivism, knowledge is created from within and is independent of the social milieu. Therefore, it can be argued that, with internal development as the core of the theory and without consideration of social, historical, and power relations during the learning process, the cognitive development model is based on a biological process. As Murray (1983, as cited in Richardson, 1997) noted, "Piaget's epistemic subject has no social class, sex, nationality, culture or personality" (p. 23).

Social constructivism, developed by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, is a theory of human development that considers learning from within a sociocultural context. Individuals construct knowledge based on existing experiences, but through a process that involves the individual and his or her environment. The subject of study is the

dialectical relationship between the individual and the social and cultural milieu (Richardson, 1997). This approach takes into consideration the domination of formal knowledge and historical and cultural influences in the manner of presentation.

Therefore, social constructivism contends that, to accomplish social transformation, the context of education must be deconstructed to create a learning environment to address inequalities and engage all students. Further, social constructivism does not view maturation as a precondition of learning; rather, it views learning as an integral process of development. “Thus learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions” (Vygotsky, as cited in Scott & Palincsar, 2009, p. 33).

Constructivism Theory

Constructivism is not a particular pedagogy, but a theory on how knowledge is constructed. Many constructivist theorists, such as Ernst von Glaserfeld (1991), preferred to refer to constructivism as a theory of knowing rather than a theory of knowledge. The potential for constructivism theory to transform learning has led to the vast growth of literature on constructivism and, as a result, the creation of various branches of constructivism. The six core paradigms of constructivism include cognitive, social, radical, cultural, and critical constructivism, and constructionism (Dougiamas, 1998). However, the six paradigms are composed of central underlying notions. The main argument in constructivism is that learners construct all forms of knowledge, all learners come with experience, and all knowledge has history; therefore, constructivism as a learning theory can be utilized in the formation of all forms of knowledge. Constructivism is different from dualism between mind and body; knowledge is not

created solely in the mind, but as a participative response of the whole individual, both in a temporal and a cultural context. Constructivists do not view knowledge as objective because of the contextual element of knowledge creation (Scott & Palincsar, 2009). Each branch of constructivism places a greater emphasis on a particular sociocultural context. I have already described cognitive and social constructivism in my exploration of the history of constructivism, and I will now briefly discuss the remaining paradigms of constructivism.

According to radical constructivism, unlike social constructivism, society is not a given; rather, society must first be analyzed as a conceptual construct before it can play a role in the construction of knowledge (von Glaserfeld, 1991). Cultural constructivism considers culture in a context in which knowledge is mediated; therefore, in a setting with different cultural understandings, different realities can be constructed. Cultural constructivism goes beyond social environment and encompasses cultural practices, biology, race and languages. Consequently, it is important to be aware of the importance of cultural backgrounds and understandings to knowledge creation (Hutchison, 2006). Constructionism is an educational theory that Seymour Papert (1980, as cited in Ackermann, n.d.) developed based on constructivism theory. Similarly to constructivism, constructionism holds that learners create their own knowledge; however, constructionism followers believe that knowledge is best gained through the construction of meaningful product (Ackermann, n.d.). Critical constructivism, as Bentley (2003) defined it, is a “theoretical stance in education related to developing in students an understanding and disposition about knowledge that furthers democratic living” (p. 1).

The effectiveness of constructivism as a learning theory in various subjects such as math, physics, chemistry, language arts, and social studies has been supported in various research studies (Bentley et al., 2007; Jofili, Geraldo, & Watts, 1999; Seiler & Abraham, 2009; Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998). In constructivism, learners are active partners in the learning process because existing experience is considered the essence of productive learning; and learners, as owners of their experience, build upon their new knowledge. Therefore, students become engaged with learning at the starting point of the process. They have to reflect on their past experiences as well as consider their current stances and how their experience is changing. This process makes learning active, and students are empowered when they develop their own knowledge and understanding. As students become expert learners, they transfer the learning process to various settings and become lifelong learners. In many instances constructivism is context bound, and knowledge is created by sharing ideas, communicating experiences, and articulating, negotiating, and reflecting on the new knowledge. The learning process thus moves beyond the simple intake of knowledge and shifts to the realms of critical thinking and learning.

Critical Constructivism

Kincheloe (2005) emphasized the importance of understanding critical constructivism as “a worldview that creates meaning on the nature of human existence” (p. 8). Therefore, Kincheloe viewed critical constructivism as a unifying theory that encompasses the epistemological, ontological, and cognitive dimensions of research and learning theory. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) claimed, “The aim of inquiry is understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer)

initially hold” (p. 113). Critical constructivists do not view knowledge as objective because of the contextual element of knowledge creation. Rather, they consider knowledge partial, imperfect, provisional, and dependent on the cultural and social milieu. Constructivism rejects the Western definition of knowledge as a monolithic, knowable world that is authenticated by positivist or even postpositivist philosophy. Further, constructivists view knowledge creation as learning based on the social grounds of diverse theories: “Multiple knowledges can coexist, . . . depending on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors that differentiate the interpreters” (p. 113). Critical constructivism recognizes that the knowledge constructed is contextual and value laden; it also acknowledges the relativism and the importance of the learners’ culture and background, the influences of the current learning culture and society, and the importance of experiential learning.

Kincheloe (2005) used the term *consciousness of complexity* to describe the realization of the contextuality and complexity of knowledge creation. Consciousness of complexity therefore raises consciousness and creates a higher level of awareness. The knowledge that emerges from critical constructivism questions the role of power in the kind of knowledge that is being produced (Kincheloe, 2005). Critical constructivism questions whose knowledge is being produced and why it is being produced. The concept of knowledge as passive information is not tolerated, and the knowledge produced is culturally, socially, and historically based and therefore has the potential to be anti- or counter-hegemonic. Upon realization of the meaningfulness of the knowledge created based on critical constructivism, knowledge seekers attempt to produce systems that support contextually produced knowledge. For example, Kincheloe gave the

example that “teachers with a consciousness of complexity can design rigorous and creative forms of assessment that go far beyond the grading system and standardized-test-based school assessments not being used” (p. 31).

The complexity of consciousness also questions how hegemonic knowledge, or valued knowledge within the system, is perpetuated (Kincheloe, 2005). Therefore, the question of power is extended to the larger educational institutions and societal structures:

Power regulates discourses; discursive practices are defined as a set of tacit rules that regulate what can and cannot be said, who can speak with the blessing of authority and who must listen, whose socio-educational constructions are scientific and valid and whose are unlearned and unimportant. (p. 36)

Educational policies designed and implemented within critical constructivism with redistribution, recognition, and representation in mind. Representation and recognition bring marginalized knowledge to the center of learning.

Critical constructivism also acknowledges the role of power in relation to language. Therefore, any reading through a critical constructivist lens rejects the neutrality of language and passive agreement with the description as reality. A critical constructivist reading of text examines the historical, cultural, and political roles in relation to the creation of text. Further, it identifies whose interests the text is promoting and how it intends to shape the consciousness of the larger population. Kincheloe (2008) asserted that when language is used in a “dominant power-driven imperializing manner” (p. 123), it creates social ordering and a hierarchy of knowledge and promotes a single ideology for all to adopt. Therefore, within the methodological framework of critical constructivism, researchers are conscious of the role of power and representation that is embedded in any form of language, spoken and heard, written and read.

Research using critical constructivism as a methodology encourages “new ways of thinking and being intelligent, and producing knowledge” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 124). The urge to explore alternative discourses and create different knowledges is two pronged. First, the value assigned to social, political, and epistemological differences results in a willingness to encourage new ways of thinking and being. Critical constructivism suggests that recognizing, valuing, and embracing the differences can bring positive social change. Second, understanding and valuing the differences and knowledge created based on differences counters the hegemonic narrative of hierarchy of knowledge and exposes the role of power and politics of difference.

Why Critical Constructivism?

The benefits of engaging in critical constructivism as a methodological approach are manifold. Because consciousness influences knowledge, understanding the factors that shape perceptions or consciousness is essential. Therefore, critical constructivism focuses on the production of self. Individuals evolve as they become aware of their social, political, gender roles and their religious beliefs, as well as the influences of the dominant culture and the subculture. In addition to self-knowledge, critical constructivism initiates a reflective process as a cultural and educational critique. This demands that researchers step back and view the existing knowledge and perceptions that they construct based on linguistic codes, cultural signs, race, gender, and hidden power relations, among many other factors. Therefore, it is important that researchers reflect upon self and the issues that influence education and educational institutions before they attempt to address the following questions in relation to educational shortcomings: Why do the existing challenges and problems exist? Why are the voices of the marginalized

population not heard? What purpose do educational institutions have in the lives of those who live on the periphery? Most important, how can existing knowledge be deconstructed and reconstructed to challenge the barriers that marginalized populations face?

Critical constructivism, with its critical view of the existing structural differences and substantial gaps among members of society, seeks an understanding and control of such consequences from the perspective of the oppressed: “This view of objective paradigm from above gives rise to views from below” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 14). Additionally, the value of critical constructivist epistemology in the contextualization of knowledge is that it eliminates the reductionism of knowledge, which in turn eliminates the separation between research and the researched. Therefore, issues such as the dominance of race, class, gender, and socioeconomic gaps in academic standings become nonissues. This process of knowledge creation values the marginalized population’s view of socioeducational matters and creates valued knowledge based on authentic, trustworthy data. Another pillar that strengthens the outcome of research products that follow critical constructivism is the emphasis on ethical practices and considerations during the research process. The critical quality of critical constructivism raises the consciousness and increases the importance of being conscious; as a result, more value is given to ethical practices and reflections.

Critical constructivism as an epistemology, with critical consciousness at its center, as well as value for all perspectives, is counter-hegemonic and therefore can be a threat to the dominant values and ‘official knowledge’ (Apple, 2000). Empowering the knowledge of the marginalized and allowing the reconstruction of knowledge from their

perspective uncovers the assumptions and knowledge construction of the ruling class in educational institutions. This process of empowerment through valuing lived experience opens the space for all to create knowledge and questions the 'claims of rightness' of the curriculum, teaching methodologies, and invisible rules of the classroom. The purpose of critical constructivism is to increase the personal and social consciousness of researchers, teachers, and students.

Method

Case Study

Case study is one of the identified methods of qualitative research. Case studies help researchers to study various disciplinary orientations and intents, such as individuals, small groups, organizations, partnerships, communities, relationships, decisions, and projects (Yin, 2009). Creswell (as cited in Merriam, 2009) defined case study as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes" (p. 43). Merriam identified the delimiting object of the study as the most important characteristic of the case: "The unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes a case study" (p. 41). The case might be a program, event, or activity bounded in time and place. Yin (2009) identified further characteristics of case study as a method: (a) the form of the research questions: They answer what, where, and how; (b) the inability of the researcher to control behavioral events; and (c) the focus on contemporary events.

Qualitative case studies can be further characterized as particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Particularistic means that the case study focuses on a particular event or situation, because the case itself is important for what it reveals. Descriptive means that the case under study is described in rich detail, including descriptions of as many variables as possible and their interactions. Heuristic or exploratory case study advances the understanding of the particular topic under study. Inductive case study refers to the form of reasoning that the researcher uses to make generalizations or identify the concepts that emerge from the data (Merriam, 2009). Although this study contains elements of each category because it focuses on a particular situation, policies, or lack of policies that impact refugee youth education, it is descriptive because I have described the case study under investigation and inductive because I have identified concepts that will enhance the learning experiences of refugee youth. However, this study is mainly a heuristic or exploratory case study because its purpose is to explore the policies that apply to the education of refugee learners and to understand the impact of those policies on refugee youth in the education system.

Case study facilitates the in-depth study of the phenomenon of interest, various variables, and interactions among the variables within a defined context. Therefore, case study results in a better understanding of micro events in a macro environment. Researchers have used case studies to make more implicit “attempts to relate such micro-studies of school processes to more traditional macro-concerns for the relationships between schooling and the broader structural features of society” (Yin, 2009, p. 194). The case study method of research has also resulted in a new wave of evaluation of educational processes and has made possible in-depth study of the process of education

with regard to particular curriculums or programs. This method of study replaced traditional behavioral, objective, and experimental psychology, which blamed the failure of educational systems on the behavioral problems of pupils or the incompetency of teachers. As Stake (1976, as cited in Crossley & Vullimay, 1984) argued, “If the evaluation only focuses on the terminal behavior of the learner, it may fail to detect desirable or undesirable side effects which may be of major significance to the program” (p. 194). Additionally, case studies offer insight into and add value to unfolding experiences and practices rather than to written documents and policies.

Multiple case studies. Multiple case studies involve the study and analysis of more than one case and “can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or subcases embedded within” (Merriam, 2009, p. 49). The cases used in a multiple case study have an underlying commonality and are somehow “categorically bounded” (p. 40). In multiple case study the researcher explores each case for itself; further, it facilitates the cross-case analysis that makes generalizations or comparisons possible. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that including more cases increases the precision and stability of the findings and enhances the external validity. It is important to note that multiple case studies can be challenging because researchers study more than one site, and the collection and analysis of the data can become a daunting task. Bogdan and Biklen (2007, as cited in Merriam, 2009) recommended conducting one fieldwork at a time because “the first case study will have provided a focus to define the parameters of the others” (p. 50).

The case study method can involve one case or multiple cases; each case can include one unit of analysis (holistic) or more than one unit of analysis (embedded case

study). Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a unit of analysis as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). This study was an embedded multiple case study because educational institutions in Alberta and British Columbia were the cases, and the educational policies comprised one unit of analysis and data from the interviews on practices and policies comprised the second unit of analysis.

Strengths and weaknesses of case study. Case studies allows for investigation of complex social matters, as more than one unit and multiple variables can be studied. Therefore, case studies are more contextually based and data obtained can illuminate more concrete findings. Researcher involvement with particular case or cases provides the means to create a rich and thick understanding of the subject under the study, as Stake (2005) states, “readers can learn vicariously from an encounter with the case” (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 51) through the narrative. Further, given the in-depth description of case study, readers can relate and add to the knowledge; therefore, case study can be used for knowledge transfer.

The qualities that strengthen case study can also weaken the case-study research design. Undertaking a detailed study might not be feasible because of limited time or finances. Moreover, rich description and detailed study might prove to be too demanding for officials and practitioners to read and analyze. Guba and Lincoln (1981) discussed the role of researchers in case study research and noted that it helps them to present their data selectively and shed light on only certain issues. Case study has also been faulted for its lack of generalizability; however, case studies are conducted because they are case specific, and the purpose of the researcher is to study a particular phenomenon.

Data Collection

Bhattacharya (2007) pointed out that the quality and extent of the data collection in a study depend upon the relationship between the researcher and the participants. I therefore ensured that I established an atmosphere of trust and collaboration with my study participants. I participated in several events within and outside schools, and I prepared for my case-study data collection by reading the available literature on my research topic and preparing the open-ended questions, not only to seek answers to the research question, but also to understand the overall experiences and understandings of the participants with regard to the topic of study. In preparing my questions, I designed them to inform the whole-part relations and explore the stories of the participants. In preparation for the study, as Yin (2009) recommended, I also conducted a pilot study to ensure that the questions would flow well, and I became aware of areas in which I needed to improve my interviewing skills. I anticipated difficulties that might arise, such as potential participants' declining to take part in the study, and attempted to be adaptable and flexible during the research process while maintaining the dignity of and caring for the research participants. During the data-collection process I consciously reviewed and reflected on the interview process and the data that I gathered.

Interviewing in qualitative research study studies. The interview process is integral to the data collection; therefore, it is essential that researchers enter the process armed with background knowledge on the topic of the study as well as best interview practices to obtain data that best answer the research questions. Weber (1986) warned against interacting with research participants as “mere informant[s]” (p. 65) and encouraged researchers to embrace their participants with genuine interest. Weber also

suggested that the interview process should help to develop trust, commitment, the growth of new human relationships, and a deepened understanding. Mishler (1986) asserted that the data must include the details needed to make the information meaningful and that researchers need to build trust in the relationships and share control of the interview process. Therefore, as scholars such as Ellis (2009), Mishler, and Weber advised, the interview process should be a dialogue or a “joint reflection on a phenomenon” (Weber, 1986, p. 70) that facilitates “seeing the between” (p. 70), because it is the “between that reveals the information” (p. 66). It is important that researchers create opportunities for their participants to “recall, share and reflect” (Ellis, 2009, p. 484) on past events. The interview questions should encourage the participants to convey their stories, understandings, and knowledges. In addition, the research methods, including the interview process and the data collected, should inform researchers about the context in terms of both the specific site and the background of the participants’ experiences and the societal issues as they pertain to all of the participants.

Participants and sites. The goal of this study was to recruit participants who were involved in the design and implementation of educational policies in the provinces of Alberta and BC. The study participants were recruited through snowballing method. The study participants were policymakers and implementers in various education-related associations involved in the design and implementation of Alberta and BC educational policies. Additionally, I contacted policymakers located within provincial and federal governing agencies who were responsible for the delivery of services to refugees. A limited number of policymakers and policy implementers had knowledge of refugees in general or had worked with refugee learners and were aware of the needs of refugees and

refugee learners. Many of the invited research participants declined to participate on the basis of their limited knowledge on the topic. Further, some study participants were initially concerned about the intentions of this research. However, when I described the purposes of the research and my reasons for undertaking it and gave the study participants the questions prior to their interviews, we developed relationships and trust. The research participants shared their experiences and information with me, were willing to search for information that they did not know or to which they did not have access during the interviews, and informed me that they would be available to answer follow-up questions at a later date if the need arose. However, their initial reservation about participating in research on policy that affects refugees indicates the high level of politicization and sensitivity of the topic. The study included a total of 18 participants, 12 female participants and 6 male participants; only 5 came from minority backgrounds. Eight study participants were policy makers such as school trustees, school board representatives, and a federal-government multiculturalism representative. Three of the study participants were school principals, another 2 were teachers in ESL classes. The study had 3 consultants, one of the consultants was a settlement worker and the other 2 participants were English language consultants. Two of the participants represented community organizations.

Policy implementers. To gain a better understanding of refugee youths' education endeavors in Alberta and BC, I chose educational institution sites in areas in the two provinces that are most heavily populated by refugee youth. They included schools from K-9, with an emphasis on junior high students. In Alberta I included two schools in one education district that were in close geographical proximity. I conducted

interviews with the policymakers and administrators in Alberta at locations that they preferred. The interview sites for the principals, based on their preferences, were their offices on the school grounds. However, the educators chose to participate in the interviews off the school grounds in preferred coffee shops.

Similarly, I targeted areas with high refugee populations in BC. According to the literature (British Columbia Teacher Federation, 2012), Metro Vancouver School District hosts the largest population of refugees in BC. Therefore, I targeted schools in that area. The sites in BC included two districts that were in close geographical proximity and had a high proportion of minorities and students of lower socioeconomic status. I conducted interviews with a school principal, educators, and a school board representative over the telephone. However, I had an opportunity to visit the school during the research and received permission to talk to any interested educator or student as well as to observe the classrooms, interactions among students, and interactions among students and teachers.

In both provinces, with the approval of the districts, I was permitted to contact educators in more schools than the number who participated in the study. Those who agreed to participate did so immediately upon the first request and were eager to share their experiences with educational services in schools with higher numbers of refugee learners and the challenges associated with meeting the needs of these students. However, other school employees did not respond to my e-mails requesting interviews, did not return my telephone calls, and were not available when I personally visited the schools several times. In metro Vancouver, all but one district that I approached gave me permission to conduct the study in its schools. A representative from that one district claimed that no refugee students were enrolled in the district, although this argument is

debatable based on information in the available literature and statistics. Although the majority of the districts I approached for this study approved it, some stipulated that I was not to request interviews with their superintendents as a condition of their approval.

All of the study participants had long-term career experience with working specifically with refugee learners. The educators' compassion for all English learners in general and refugee youth in particular was very evident when the interviews evoked various emotions that included tears of sadness, or anger because of some of the misdirected beliefs and practices with regard to refugees. The insights of the school principals and educators in reference to refugee learners were directly linked to the number of years that they had worked in the schools, as well as their personal experience of working with minority communities. All of the principals acknowledged the steep learning curve that they faced upon placement in schools with a higher number of vulnerable students with various cultural, First Nation, and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Policymakers. In Alberta the contacted population included education ministers, deputy ministers of education, school trustees, members of the Alberta School Boards Association, and representatives from the Alberta Teachers' Association. Other related agencies that I contacted were the justice ministry, provincial and federal immigration branches, and various community organizations involved in the settlement of refugees. Various positions within the ministry of education such as the deputy education minister are key providers of essential information to the minister because they are involved in the decision-making process. Therefore, given this role, the views and experiences of the deputy minister with regard to the inclusion of refugee youth in Alberta's education

system could have been important to this study. Further, provincial ministries stipulate an overarching ideology that shapes and molds policies and practices; therefore, obtaining insights from provincial representatives could have shed light on the predominant ideologies of the government. However, representatives of the Alberta ministry of education declined to participate in the study on the basis of their limited role in the design of specific policies, the management of funding, the low numbers of refugees in schools, and the limited concerns about refugee learners in the education system; the Education minister of the time indicated that during his time in office no one had brought to his attention any concerns about refugee learners.

Similarly, I endeavored to recruit the minister of education in BC, as well as other members of the provincial legislature involved in refugee settlement and services. The response from the provincial government of BC was similar to that of the government of Alberta, and there was no participation at the provincial government level. The BC policymakers who participated in this study were also affiliated with the school districts. Other participants included representatives of community organizations who were directly involved in the settlement of newcomers to BC with regard to education. However, I was invited to participate in a conference at which the deputy education minister, several trustees, and various educational policy members were present. I had an opportunity to listen to their presentations on the education of refugee and immigrant learners in schools and to converse with them about my specific policy questions and concerns.

Seven of the eight policymakers who participated in the study were directly involved in the education system in their capacity of school board representatives or

school trustees. Therefore, they were key players in formulating and implementing policies in the Alberta education system, and presenting their voices was imperative to this study. Additionally, I included in this study representatives of various community organizations engaged in refugee and immigrant settlement and partnerships with the education system who could offer their views and describe current practices as well as the challenges of providing essential services to vulnerable populations.

I also contacted federal government representatives from Citizenship and Immigration, as well as the minister of Multiculturalism, but I received no response to my invitations to participate in this study. However, a recently retired federal government representative from Citizenship and Multiculturalism participated and served as the much-needed federal-government representation in this study.

Interviews. I invited the study participants to participate in an interview process. The interview questions were open ended to capture their understandings of, expectations for, and experiences with the inclusion of refugee youth in their school programs. I designed the questions with the intention of encouraging the participants to recall their experiences and reflect on the topic of interest. As I mentioned earlier, because the goal of the study was to uncover the parts to be able to understand the whole, I designed the questions with this final goal in mind. Given the sensitivity of the topic in terms of human/children's rights issues as well as the political ideologies of the governing body, I paid particular attention to the language that I used in the interview process. Further, given the sparsity of Alberta and BC education policies that address the needs of refugee learners specifically in their educational endeavors, I anticipated that not all of the study participants would be involved in policy design particularly for refugee learners.

Therefore, in asking the questions, I was open to discussion to identify best practices for formulating and implementing policies for any minority groups. I recorded the discussions, telephone conversations, and e-mail correspondence in relation to this study; made observations with regard to emotional, temporal, and other factors that could influence the interview process; and took them into consideration in the analysis process. I conducted follow-up interviews or answered follow-up questions via e-mail as the need arose after I analyzed the data to explore new stories and paths for the study. All but one participant whom I contacted with follow-up questions responded.

Data Analysis: Relying on Theoretical Propositions

The analysis of collected data is an important step in the researcher's description of current policies as well as the participants' understanding of policies and practices and connecting the understandings to the lived realities of educators and students. According to Yin (2009), analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed aspects of case study and is highly dependent on the "investigator's own style of rigorous empirical thinking, along with the sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations" (p. 127). As I explained earlier, the success of case study as a research method is dependent on the identification of bounded case(s) and unit(s) of analysis. As Figure 2 indicates, I identified cases as Alberta's and British Columbia's educational systems and units of analysis as (a) educational policies and documents and (b) interviews with policy makers and policy implementers within the education system.

Yin (2009) identified four strategies for data analysis in case study methods:

(a) relying on theoretical propositions, (b) developing a case description, (c) using mixed

methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data, and (d) examining rival explanations.

As stated by Yin (2009), reliance on theoretical proposition was the preferred strategy:

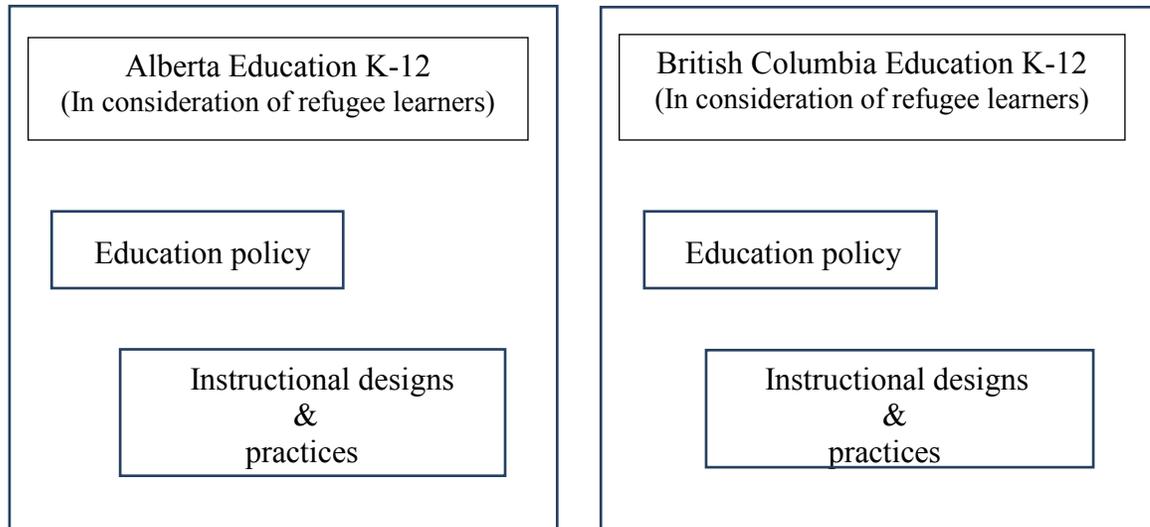


Figure 2. Multiple case study: Contexts and the embedded units of analysis.

“The original objectives and design of the case study presumably were based on such propositions, which in turn reflected a set of research questions, reviews of the literature, and new hypotheses or propositions” (p. 130). Therefore, I analyzed the data based on my understanding of critical constructivism as Kincheloe (2005) described it:

- Critical constructivism counters the reductionism approach to data analysis nothing represents a neutral perspective (p. 8).
- Knowledges, understandings, and actions cannot be separated from the location of individuals in the web of reality; therefore, awareness of historical, social, cultural and political contexts is crucial (p. 25).

- Influence and the role of power in constructing pedagogical process create a hierarchy of knowledge, cultural normativity, and hegemony of knowledge (p. 60).
- Critical constructivism ensures that the researcher is aware of the role of power as a researcher while collecting and analyzing data (p. 119).
- Critical constructivism encourages and makes it possible to create “unique ideas and alternative discourses” (p. 124).

Analysis of multiple case studies. Similar to single case studies, in multiple case studies the researcher also needs to develop themes, patterns, and categories. However, given the sheer volume of data collected in multiple case studies, it is important to organize the material to make the data easily accessible, which Yin (as cited in Merriam, 2009) called creating a “case study data base” (p. 203). According to Yin, multiple case study analysis involves two stages: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. Similarly, to single case studies, each case must be analyzed independently, the stories narrated, and themes developed. Once within-case study analysis is completed, the second phase, cross-case analysis, begins: “A qualitative, inductive, multicase study seeks to build abstractions across cases” (p. 204). Case study interpretations are characterized as rich descriptions of units of analysis. It is important to note that, similarly to single case studies, multiple case studies also require attention to the backdrop of the group, institution, or any other research unit. It is essential to describe the value, culture, routine, relationships, goals, and challenges of the research participants to better understand their experiences.

Analysis in action. Based on the theoretical propositions, I analyzed the data to unravel and comprehend the participants’ understandings of policies, minorities, the role

of policies, and practices specifically with regard to refugee youth. As Merriam (2009) stated, data analysis is not linear and begins when the study process begins. The analysis involved a complex process of meaning making by “moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). Therefore, I began the analysis early and continued until I had completed the data collection. The continuous process of data collection, analysis, and reflection based on the theoretical framework of the research guided the study’s direction.

Analysis of documents. Educational policy documents contain important information about the goals set for a society’s education directives. The documents evolve over time and describe the historical location, ideologies, and guiding principles of the governing bodies. Therefore, the documents mirror the society’s beliefs and value systems. Analysis of the documents helps to understand underlying government ontologies, the social function of the documents, and the interpretation and effects of and uses for the documents. The documents that I used in this study included educational policy documents from the two provinces of Alberta and BC. I searched these documents or regulations and guidelines to find information on refugee youth. However, I found a limited number of documents that specifically addressed refugee learners. Therefore, I also analyzed more general documents on various groups of learners, including refugees.

The analysis of educational documents had many purposes. As I mentioned, one of the aims was to identify the historic evolution of policies, the governing bodies’ ideologies, and the goals and impacts of the policies. Educational policy documents are easily accessible, and it is possible to examine their progress through time and with

various governing bodies with no restrictions on the study from agencies or organizations. Also, the documents that I examined depicted the context within which the participants work on the policies and that closely guides their future actions. The research participants were agents of the educational organizations and participated in the creation or enactment of the documents, therefore, studying and analyzing the documents provided context for conducting and deciphering the interviews with policymakers and policy implementers. The document analysis also informed the interview questions, because I was able to identify gaps in the ability to meet the educational needs of students or between policies and practices (Goldstein & Reiboldt, 2004). The documents added supplementary information to the study that otherwise would not have been possible to obtain from other sources.

Given the importance of the documents in directing the educational aims of the two provinces, I assumed that the documents were original, reliable, and trustworthy. I utilized pattern-matching techniques (Yin, 2009) to analyze the documents. I read them thoroughly, identified passages related to the topic of my study, and separated them for more in-depth analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I then critically examined the policies based on the theoretical propositions of the framework to determine their evolution, purpose, impact, and gaps in the text with regard to meeting the needs of vulnerable learners. For each policy under study I explored how they were developed and progressed, the messages remitted to the larger society, and the impact of the policies as they currently stand.

Analysis of interviews. To ensure the consistency and transparency of the data-analysis process, I developed and followed guidelines. First, I established pattern

matching based on the themes that emerged from each interview and then among the interviews in each case study. I identified the themes as a segment of a transcript that in concrete terms communicated similar ideas, beliefs, or explanations that occur during the decision-making or implementation process of policies. I then developed themes from each interview and placed all similar themes into the same category. Some categories remained throughout the analysis, and some I changed or eliminated as the analysis continued. For example, because funding and the issues related to funding were constant points of conversation in all of the interviews, I assigned *funding* to a category. However, as the analysis progressed, it became clear in many instances that funding was more closely associated with assessment, placement, labeling, or standardized testing. Therefore, I eliminated funding as a category and allowed themes and theories to emerge from the data.

Second, I explored the subcategories embedded within each category. The embedded categories or stories facilitated more specific explanation, description, illustration, or recommendations. Bal (1997) noted that themes can be linear or include interconnected subparts. For example, several participants discussed the importance of translation services. However, while some of the participants referred to the offering of translation services in a linear manner as a means of bridging the school community with newcomer families, others referred to many important subparts, containing wealth of information. Offering translators means more than translating language: It also implies access to the cultures of schools and communities; the need to co-opt certain schools to use translator services, whereas other schools weave translation services into other services that they provide. Other subparts inferred and deliberated in reference to

translation services included: the establishment of networks and relationships between school districts, schools and communities; as an evidence of support or lack of support granted by the district; the community's response to the use of translation services; and the community-specific bridging of communication with schools. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to the manner in which information is presented. Information provided can provide insight into the understanding of research participants and their experiences. In addition, linear and interconnected themes provide different kinds of information to the researcher.

Finally, I analyzed each category that emerged from the pattern matching. According to advice from Boostrom (1994), as the analysis of the data progress, analysis need to transform and became more critical and in-depth. I thematically organized the data that resulted from the analysis to ensure that the themes would inform the guiding questions. The aggregation of themes into more similar categories and further analysis of the themes and subthemes resulted in a more in-depth understanding of the topic. For example, the contradiction between the need to give newcomers the tools to help them to resettle and the simultaneous emphasis on normative stereotypes and hegemonic practices resulted in a more in-depth discussion based on the contradictory statements or limited or missing policies and initiatives.

Because the study involved two case studies, once I had analyzed each case study and gained a rich and descriptive understanding of each, I cross-analyzed the cases to further uncover similarities and differences between them to better inform the recommendations for best policies and practices for refugee learners in the Canadian education context. As Polkinghorne (1995) suggested, the result must be a portrait of

each case, with its themes and categories, with the aim of configuring “the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose” (p. 15). The analysis of the data from the two provinces yielded very different results. For example, the participants in AB discussed privilege only once in their interviews, whereas all but one of the interviewees in BC referred to the role of privilege and power in their educational context. However, the data contained essential commonalities as well, such as the importance of language learning, the need for compassion and understanding for refugee populations, and the study participants’ concerns about the refugee population’s debt to the government for transportation upon landing, among many others. Among the themes that emerged from the data, I explored the overarching issues that result in the disproportionate educational success of refugee youth. Therefore, it was also important to emphasize the similarities between the provinces in a number of themes to discuss social vulnerability and direct social links between educational outcomes and refugee youth’s remaining on the periphery of society. The analysis of the interviewees’ knowledge based on critical constructivism helped me to understand more deeply the policy process and educational policies and practices concerning minority youth and, more specifically, refugee learners. Analysis of the emerging themes revealed that the focus of the study could not remain on a comparison of the policies and practices between the two cases, AB and BC. There is a need to develop means to enrich the learning experiences of refugee youth.

The data analysis yielded an understanding of refugee youths’ current educational paths and the implications of current policies and practices for the educational journey of refugee learners. Further, it helped to identify gaps in the policies and practices and

highlight the needs of refugee learners; therefore, the data analysis resulted in pragmatic recommendations to enhance the educational journey of refugees in the Canadian education system. Finally, as Stake (1995) and Packer Addison (1989, as cited in Ellis 1998) recommended, I evaluated the findings based on (a) their coherence, (b) their relationship to external evidence, (c) consensus among the inquirers, and (d) the utility of bridging the findings into future understandings. Most important, during the analysis of the data and my evaluation of the study, I was aware of the need and careful to demonstrate that an understanding of the concerns that motivated the inquiry has been advanced. Finally, I triangulated the data sources by combining my analysis of the documents with the interview data and my observations “to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28), which have added credibility to the study.

Limitations and delimitations

To create a focus for my research, I delimited my study to practices and policies that focus only on migrant students, whom the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR] 2010) defined as refugee youth. The 1951 Refugee Convention that established the UNHCR described a refugee as someone who,

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (para. 3)

One of the limitations of the study with regard to the educational policy documents is that, although they were trustworthy and easily accessible, they provided insufficient details to facilitate the implementation process. The policies are overgeneralized and composed in a manner that satisfies the larger society. Therefore,

the means of implementation and data on the impact of the policies are missing from the available documents.

Another limitation is the limited number of schools to which I had access in each province. It is important to point out that permission to access schools is usually based on school administrators' priorities. I believe that the schools to which I was able to gain access were those that are concerned about the integration of refugee learners into their mainstream population. Therefore, the school administrators had taken initial steps in the integration process and were more open and willing to discuss the plight of minority youth within their schools. Therefore, the study participants and their institutions might not be representative of the whole province.

Further, the integration of refugee youth into their new host country involves various organization; however, because this study focused on the educational endeavors of these newcomers, the study did not represent all of the policymakers in provincial and federal agencies involved in sponsoring refugees in their new host country. Additionally, because one of the intentions of the study was to identify the gap between the existing research and current policies, the study included policy makers and policy implementers, and I did not fully explore the perspectives of youth and their families.

CHAPTER 5: EDUCATIONAL POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

There is very limited research on how policy makers and implementers understand the impact of policies and practices on refugee learners in Canadian learning institutions. The purpose of this study was to bridge the gap between the existing knowledge and scholarly findings on refugees and the implementation of actions and practices within educational institutions. Reviews of academic literature reveal the inability of schools to engage refugee youth with their educational endeavors, even though the reviews unpack who refugees are and how to create an engaging learning atmosphere for them (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Crow, 2006; Dei & Rummens, 2010; Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008). This study therefore focused particularly on describing how policy makers and policy implementers might better understand the location of refugees from the point of view of those who have been traditionally known as holders of power. This thesis explores how those given the privilege of power locate refugees, how they view policies in general and their understanding of the impact of these policies on refugee youth in particular. In addition to informing current practices and their impacts, the findings of this research will add to the understanding of the state of refugee learners in the education systems of the two Western Canadian provinces.

In this study I analyze the educational context of refugee learners, policy and practice. This chapter focuses on the role of educational policies, policy design, and, more importantly, the way in which various agents and actors within the system understand them. These agents and actors include policy makers at different levels of governance and policy implementers such as principals and teachers. In this chapter and

the following chapters in the Findings section I analyze the policies and the enactment of policies into practice in the two provinces within the framework of social justice and race equity. This chapter focuses on the role of policy in the delivery and practice of education, with particular attention on the education of refugee learners. I present an overview of educational policies and how they are initiated or modified. Further, I discuss how various agents in learning institutions understand educational policies. The findings include the existence of a hierarchy within the policies the fact that some policies such as accountability are emphasized and valued more than others such as equity policy. Resistance towards new practices and policies from various levels within the education sectors is another finding from this study.

Policy

In this study I have used Pal's (2010) broad definition of *policy* as "a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a given problem or interrelated set of problems" (p. 2). More specifically, educational policy is defined as collective agreements and principles based on government ideologies and developed by educational stakeholders to administer the operation of education systems. A research participant in this study defined policy as "a broad, overarching kind of motherhood statement" (School board representative 1). Although individual operating school boards adhere to varying definitions of educational policies based on their specific mandates, such as faith-based belief systems, all school boards draft their policies according to the guidelines provided in the provincial School Act (Government of Alberta, 2015). They are designed to guide the responsibilities of educational stakeholders with regard to students' learning and growth as a primary focus of the policies.

Policy makers are defined as individuals who are responsible for creating and establishing a learning atmosphere in which all learners can thrive and become independent and engaged citizens. Policy makers can be mandated through their professional bodies, such as superintendents, assistant superintendents, or individuals responsible for research on and creation or evaluation of policies and practices within the school districts. Policy makers also include elected members such as trustees, who represent their constituencies and advocate for the particular needs of their communities. School trustees are also known as the “owners” of policies within school districts (School board representative 1). Policy implementers include members affiliated with education districts who are involved in the daily activities of delivering educational practices to learners in educational institutions such as principals and teachers. It is important to note that delivering education is a multifaceted and complex system of organization that involves various participants, including those outside educational institutions and districts. Important stakeholders in education include students and their parents or guardians, as well as community organizations. The latter supplement or deliver various aspects of education and meet the basic needs of learners in collaboration with schools and school districts. Therefore, policies are initiated, drafted, and implemented within and throughout a network of interlinked populations. The central focus is on providing the best educational policy frameworks to advance students’ learning and well-being. To understand the impact of policies, it is important to be aware of how school boards create policies and the role of these policies in governing the educational practices of the district. Also, it is important to recap that the data from this study is analyzed under the framework of race equity and social justice. Therefore, the goal of the analysis is to

achieve equitable learning atmosphere and educational pedagogies to ensure educational success of all learners regardless of their racial and historical backgrounds.

How Are Educational Policies Created?

In this study the research participants describe the generation of policies as a democratic, labor-intensive, and time-consuming process that involves various stakeholders and knowledge holders. As a member of a school district reported, the need to draft policies generally emerges from two sources. The need for policy can be initiated from concerns expressed by educational stakeholders to a member of a board of trustees. School boards can also directly inform the board of trustees upon identifying the lack of a policy to address a particular need. In either of these circumstances, a subcommittee that represents the school board and trustees is set up to draft policy. Each member of the committee engages stakeholders such as researchers, community organizers, and various interest groups for their opinions, views and knowledge. The input of all of these stakeholders is then brought together to create the policy. Some policies require intensive negotiations and discussions with various members of communities, whereas others require more concentrated effort to collect and analyze data. Upon agreement on and approval of a drafted policy, the members of the subcommittee present it to

the full board of trustees for public debate. Once the board decides that they believe that they accept that policy, they will often go to a Web location where stakeholders will have input via Web on whether they have issues with this proposed policy. (School board representative 1)

After public consultation on the policy and necessary adjustments and modifications, the committee takes the second draft back to the board of trustees, and usually after the third reading the board recommends that the policy be passed. The important distinction between the role of the board of trustees and the role of school boards is that, whereas the

board of trustees passes policies, school boards develop administrative regulations and practices. Administrative regulations involve definition of the steps and practices needed to implement policies, as well as designation of responsibilities for the administration of policy. To evaluate the impact of policies and ensure their continued success, the policies are reviewed and evaluated every three to five years.

How Do Policy Makers and Policy Implementers Understand Policies?

To evaluate the impact of policies, it is important to understand how different agents within the organization conceptualize policies. Policy makers in school districts draft, analyze, and evaluate policies based on their responsibility to deliver education to meet the needs of students, but they also have to be responsive to the internal politics of their organizations. Additionally, they have to be responsive to external factors such as provincial and federal government ideologies and various advocacy groups. Moreover, policies need to reflect the beliefs and ideologies held by public at large. Therefore, policies created need respond to certain needs or problems and but they also need to maintain a certain level of consistency across educational institutions, governing agencies and public interests. Pal (2010) explained that “before problems can be defined they have to be recognized or sensed. This is a primordial stage in problem definition in that it usually involves just a first tremor that something is wrong” (p. 111).

For policy makers, the first tremor can arise from any sources. Examples for external sources include the math literacy crisis within Alberta education in 2013 that arose from parental concerns, the discrepancies in evaluation policies that the media exposed to the public in 2013, and the need to ensure the success of First Nations students within the education system. Although First Nations education has been a

concern for many decades among policy implementers and stakeholders such as First Nations Elders and First Nations populations, the issue was not addressed until larger political shifts occurred at all levels of governance in Canada, as is evident in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. Therefore, important factors required to frame the need for a policy or policy modification include larger political concern and strong advocacy to continue the promotion of the need for change and advancement of the cause. The study participants, particularly policy makers, did not discuss the need for policy change or policy design based on established societal needs. Therefore, important issues such as social justice and existing inequities, unless specifically advocated for are not considered as causes for initiation of policy design or change. Change or the process towards change that ensure equity happens only where there is a shift of minds within the larger society.

Once a need to administer new policy or make changes in existing policy has been identified, practical steps are initiated to begin the policy making process. Scholars such as Ball et al. (2012) and Pal (2010) noted that the agents and forces behind the tremors will also inform how the policy problem is shaped. Therefore, advocates and influential groups will play a role in shaping and directing the policy draft or modification. However, while policy implementers might share some of the concerns to create or modify directives, their specific regional circumstances can have an effect on the kinds of issues raised, the framework of the problem and the steps to be considered to solve the issue at hand (Honig, 2006). As such there might be a disconnect between how policy makers and policy implementers define the problem and foresee potential means of addressing the challenges.

After the approval of policies, school boards prepare regulatory documents on how to implement them. In order for the implementations to be meaningful and context specific, it is important to ensure the drafting of “motherhood statements,” or regulations for carrying out essential policies in collaboration with policy implementers. However, the analysis of the province of Alberta’s inclusive-education policy in 2014 is a recent example of the failure to include teachers throughout the process of policy creation, implementation, and evaluation. As stated in the Blue Ribbon Panel Report, “Once the Government of Alberta response was released, this team [teachers, advocates and community organizers] was disbanded. While a few teachers and staff from central offices were involved in the consultation process, the vast majority of teachers were not” indicating lack of meaningful involvement of educators with creation and development of policies (Alberta Teachers’ Association [ATA], 2014, p. 25).

Approved policies are communicated mainly to school principals through regulation documents. This creates a disconnect between policy makers and policy implementers and was evident throughout this study. A member of a school district stated, “Schools have no clue about policies; they don’t know the word *policy*” (School board representative 2). Accordingly, in relation to policies and policy implementation, school principals have acknowledged the top-down approach of policy and regulatory decision making: “There are policies around many different things, and we use them as much as we can live within those policies” (Principal 1). Moreover, sometimes the channels of communication with school principals with regard to policies are not effective: “We send out the information; . . . you have a 50% chance of it staying in

school. Sometime the secretary throws it out even before the principal sees it” (School board representative 2).

Under the current means of implementation, policy makers create and draft policies but they have no claim or control over how the readers of the policy decipher and actualize them. Equally, policy implementers receive the policy in the form of regulations. They have no control over its design and creation. Further, the implementation of policies requires that school administration and teachers have specific abilities in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude, as well as resources, to execute the policies (Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006). Additionally, it is important to recognize that educational institutions do not enact policies in a vacuum, that they already have cultural values and beliefs. Schools have their own culture in which they define problems and their own histories and knowledge to resolve the problems. Thus, not only do policy makers have no control over how policy implementers interpret the policy, but they also have no control over the acceptance of, adherence to, and eventual realization of the text (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Thomas & O’Hanlon, 2007). Therefore, it is imperative to involve policy implementers in the decision-making process as well as the dissemination of the decisions:

Practitioners do not confront policy texts as naïve readers; they come from histories, with experience, with values and purposes of their own; they have vested interests in the meaning of policy. Policies will be interpreted differently as the histories, experiences, values, purposes and interests which make up the arena differ. The simple point is that policy writers cannot control the meanings of their texts. Part of their texts will be rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood, responses may be frivolous, etc. (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992; as cited in Thomas & O’Hanlon, 2007, p. 105)

Hierarchy of Policies

Another confounding factor in the implementation of policies is the adverse effect that one policy might have on the implementation of another policy. Pal (2014) also talks about the horizontal consistency of policies. For example, funding policies govern the operation of schools, and their specified budgets will not allow schools to enact all practices and regulations that were drafted to achieve the goals and missions identified in school board policies. Therefore, although school boards endeavor to achieve certain goals by drafting policies, schools might not necessarily be able to so implement them because of the lack of monetary or knowledge resources. School districts view schools as independent entities in terms of determining their budgetary allocations. Schools receive funding from school boards. They can allocate up to 94% to staffing and the remaining budget can be used for supplies. Therefore, school boards view each school as autonomous. Schools determine how best they can meet their needs while ensuring policy implementation. A school board representative stated that

within those two categories they [principals] can spend the money however they like. So, if they need 50 ELL [English language learner] specialists and they can afford them in their own budget, they can do that. If they decide to hire one, that's up to them. They get local autonomy at their site based on their student population. (School board representative 1)

Policy makers deem policy implementers autonomous to best execute necessary policies within their educational institutions. However, they fail to acknowledge varying restrictions which can impede the enactment of policies. As such policymakers disregard the negative impact of top down approach to policy creation.

The enactment of inclusive learning practices and funding policies are instances of such contradictions. School administrators with experience in diverse schools have

acknowledged the importance of teaching and classroom environments in which the teaching staff understands all students' cultural experiences and histories. However, inclusive education remains unrealizable due to certain factors outside the control of school administrators. These include teachers' lack of training in cultural competency, the limited number of knowledgeable educators in curriculum instruction, and the standardized measurements of students' academic achievements. The Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools (ATA, 2014) also confirmed this outcome in its recommendations. The 15th recommendation to the Minister of Education was to ensure that school funding effectively supports students' needs (p. 44).

Additionally, policies can be formulated into several regulations or practices, which school boards have acknowledged. However, they have also argued, "governance ensures that they don't conflict with each other ever" (School board representative 1). The high priority placed on certain policies and the impact of their outcomes on the ability of schools to operate hinders the actualization of other less measurable policies. The emphasis on standardized testing and the outcome of the testing under the umbrella of accountability is an example of how this policy undermines the inclusive learning policy. The accountability pillar encourages schools to direct their limited teaching time and resources to teaching expected mainstream knowledge, in opposition to the school board policy on the inclusive-education system. The latter is a "way of thinking and acting that demonstrates acceptance of, and belonging for, all students" (Government of Alberta, Education, 2009). Although the school administrators did not consciously acknowledge the collision of policies, they were aware of the conflicting outcome of the policies on student learning and growth.

There is a payback for that in terms of their ability to acquire language quickly, but it also is very costly. As the principal you are weighing what gives you the biggest bang for your buck in terms of school reputation, student engagement, and how you are going to factor in the accountability pillars, so that provincial accountability pillars do not necessarily take into consideration the number of ELLs you may have in your population. (School board representative 2)

Equally, educators and administrators were conscious of the incompatibility between complying with diversity policies and standardized testing. In response to teaching philosophies that value and welcome students' diverse backgrounds and cultures within the framework of standardized testing, a school principal conceded that

standardized testing really encourages homogeneity of the approach because not everyone comes from the same background or has the same experiences. And I have been around the block often enough to know sometimes culture plays a huge part in how kids are able to respond to that standardized test. (School principal 1)

Given the importance of standardized testing and its implication for enrollment and receiving of funds, school administrators and teachers are placed in the difficult position of ensuring the highest possible achievement on standardized testing while including all students based on their needs and abilities. The accountability pillar as a hindrance to inclusive education is re-iterated by Hodkinson (2010), "This system of accountability should be perceived as one of the most serious challenges that inclusive education is facing" (as cited in ATA, 2014, p. 40).

Further, it was easy to detect the frustration of the principals over the selective implementation of certain policies by the district and other schools within the district. This selective implementation of policies such as the funding equity policy further marginalizes schools with vulnerable students. The school principals indicated that, in preparation for the Provincial Achievement Tests, schools in high socioeconomic areas of the city receive "exactly the same funding for their classroom as the funding for the

classroom here, which, for a lot of lip service given to equity—and equity doesn't mean that everyone gets the same—really, in practice it is” (Principal 2). Another important example in relation to ELLs is that, although policy makers are armed with the knowledge that ELL students' success comes with full fluency and proficiency in the English language, school boards fund ELLs for a period of only 5 years. This is regardless of whether or not the students have achieved English language proficiency and without taking into consideration the decades of research that has demonstrated the need for 7 to 10 years of language training for students with no formal or limited formal education background (Cummins, 2001).

Pushback a Common Theme

Education as it is currently practiced is a complex matter operating within a complex system. Various stakeholders are responsible for designing and delivering education in the hope of meeting the needs of a very diverse group of learners and of society. Therefore, it is not unrealistic to expect resistance to policies at every level of policy making and policy implementation. This was a common theme evident in the responses of the interviewees in this study. The complexity of drafting and implementing educational policies in the extensive network of educational institutions, in addition to general resistance to change and competing interests, can indeed create pushback at different stages of policy creation and implementation. A vast amount of literature exists on policy and resistance (Apple, 1982, 2002; Buchanan & Badham, 2008; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997; Giroux, 1983). The purpose of this section is to highlight the issue of resistance to equity policies and illustrate the obstacles that various groups face in their effort to change the status quo or to create an engaging and safe learning atmosphere.

Resistance and pushback arise within a system for several reasons: the need to maintain the status quo within the education system to perpetuate existing social structures (Apple, 1982; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997), the lack of a thorough understanding of the situation, the dearth of empirical evidence to identify student needs, and the dearth of comprehensive and unbiased research and feedback on the topic. Other important reasons for resistance include the lack of resources, monetary, human, or to do with knowledge capital which prevents the actualization of policies and, finally, purposeful acts of resistance are committed in the face of injustice.

As Covalleski (1994) stated, analyzing the system within which educational activities are undertaken is central to our understanding of the concept of resistance in education: “It is a system [that] militates against certain sorts of reforms being successfully adopted” (p. 1). Since educational institutions are operated centrally, changes and reforms that are introduced are generally systemic in nature, intended to improve the system as a whole. Historically, systemic changes have been far more difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish because they face more resistance. For example, educational institutions are managed and maintained through the systemic evaluation of predesigned concepts such as standardized testing. However, in this study, policy makers within the system acknowledged some of the problems associated with such management and have welcomed implementation of alternative means of management. However, they have also contended that major structural change is beyond their capabilities.

The policy makers in this study were aware of issues with standardized testing and its implications for individual schools such as those with low enrolment and reduced

funding. They also showed awareness of its impact on vulnerable populations within the system. This includes the lack of the kind of educational services that these students need, the projection of these schools as poor, and the stereotypical assumptions about poor and low-achieving schools and populations. As a school trustee affirmed:

Parents are using the PISA results. You have a high number of First Nations, high number of immigrant children, and they rank so low on standardized tests, and the schools look like a poor school. They look like poor in so many different lights. They don't look at all the complexities of the population that attend there.

The trustee explained that the PISA score is an unrepresentative scoring system and that it ignores societal complexities and systemic societal issues that have an impact on educational achievements. Standardized testing such as for PISA not only identifies successful learning centers, but also constitutes deeply rooted educational governance; for example, it is the basis for school funding. The study participants recognized that dependence on such evaluation mechanisms hinders equity within educational institutions and that equity is important if all students are going to have a positive schooling experience. However, they argued that such evaluation practices are so entrenched in the governance of learning systems that resistance to an alternative form of evaluation and funding distribution is expected.

Covaleski (1994) further argued that the vagueness of policies can lead to resistance from school administrators and teachers. The document "Inspiring Action on Education," drafted by the Government of Alberta (2010), identifies 20 factors in the literacy and numeracy goals that nurture wholesome learners. Among these are competitiveness and collaboration. Enacting a curriculum of studies that fosters the growth and development of learners, and inspires them to become both competitive and collaborative, presents school administrators and teachers with a confusing mandate for

the creation of their educational materials. Additionally, scholars such as Ball (1994), Cohen and Hill (2000), and Weiss (1989) discussed the importance of considering the “cognitive frame” (Spillane et al., 2006, p. 47) of policy implementers in successful policy execution. For school administrators to implement a policy requires that they have complete knowledge of the underlying issues that created the need for the policy. Policy implementers also need knowledge and understanding of the means to achieve the goals of the policy. Additionally, they need to be aware of the intended outcome of the policy and have a full grasp of the impact of the policy to ensure that it achieves its intended goals. However, policy implementers interpret policies through their lived and experiential circumstances and implement these in the context of educational institutions. Therefore, policy makers’ presentation of broad, general, and vague policies confounds the nature of cognition: “New information is always interpreted in light of what is already understood” (Spillane, Reiser, Reimer, 2002, p. 394). The outcome might be resistance or the failure to implement the policy even though the policy has been realized from the perspective of the policy implementers.

Other forms of pushback and resistance originate within the larger society and the deep-rooted belief systems or specific beliefs of powerful groups and organizations. These kinds of resistance are usually towards policies that not only threaten and question the status quo, but are also intended to change existing practices and perceptions. One such current policy is gay-straight alliances (GSA) in Alberta’s schools. All policy makers in this study, who were involved in creation of GSA policies, discussed the difficulty of and resistance to drafting and implementing the policy. They recognized the need to develop a safe space for all students to learn, including those who identify as

sexual minorities. The policy emerged from the push by students who felt that they needed safe spaces within schools to learn and grow. Students were also supported by advocates from community, educational institutions and policy makers. The policy makers disclosed the difficulties they faced in creating the policy from the initial stages of community involvement and the resistance from various groups based on religion, safety, and the rights of students, among other objections. The supporters were fighting for the rights of all students but certain dominant groups in society were resisting the creation of a policy for sexual minority students to feel safe and accepted within schools. The policy makers faced not only resistance to the policy, but also personal insults and death threats. As one policy maker stated:

My job is to make sure that kids are protected. . . . I can speak from the voice of our sexual minority groups and gender identity policy. It gets pushed back when you have targeted policies, because there are always people that are not in agreement with this for whatever reason that they may have. I think that was an important policy that came forward and I supported. (Trustee)

Additionally, although the resistance to the policy development was very intense, the road to its implementation proved to be equally difficult. The policy makers acknowledged the importance of teaching and monitoring practical steps in the implementation of the policy, but they also talked about the reluctance or unwillingness of school administrators to actualize the policy.

The policy makers and implementers agreed on the areas of resistance within educational institutions. The policy makers, school administrators, and teachers whom I interviewed acknowledged that several stakeholders lacked awareness and understanding of the minority youth within their schools or in their communities. The policy makers identified the inability of school administrators to recognize the upcoming demographic

changes within society and their eventual representation in schools in a short period of time:

The pushbacks have been difficult. I often say to schools, “You need to plan for these children coming,” and schools are very apprehensive to do that as they want to plan for who they see in front of them today. (School board representative 2)

Further, as the policy makers stated, the pushback is heightened when policies are drafted, but they lack funding and knowledge support from the districts for the implementation of policies:

I think that we have to do a better job of helping our teachers understand the competencies involved in helping kids discover the language, and we are not there yet at the district; we still have some pushback around that. (School board representative 2)

The community organizations that participated in this research also discussed the pushback and resistance within schools in terms of the roadblocks to providing the required learning spaces for refugee learners. Although the community organizers praised the efforts of some schools and their leaders, they acknowledged the difficulties that some school leaders face in maintaining care for their students. Community organizers pointed out that some of the staff within the schools resist implementing practices that school leaders and community organizations have developed to better meet the needs of their students.

[A particular school] is not without its problems. There is a huge disconnect between the desire of the school, and there are some teachers there who are just horrible . . . in terms of creating an environment where discipline is positive as opposed to punitive and negative. (Community organizer)

Further, the pushback and resistance from organizations and agents within them are not solely towards policies, but as community organizers contended, also towards external

agents. The latter are individuals who view themselves as partners in the educational endeavors of newly arrived students. The community organizers acknowledged that schools value their partnerships with communities. However, community organizations have also experienced pushback and resistance with regard to administrator's and teacher's views of their roles within the schools. All of the interviewees from school boards and the school administrators discussed the important and supplementary role of community organizers in meeting the needs of students. From the point of view of educational institutions, community organizers and agencies play an important role in bridging cultural differences within the schools and meeting the needs of students and their families through before- and after-school programming. However, the community organizers believed that they should be recognized as partners in all aspects of students' educational journey. As Chrzanowski, Rans, and Thompson (n.d.) explained, with regard to the benefit of community organizers, when

both the school and the community contribute directly to the strengthening and development of each other, [they] can provide a firm foundation for both educational renewal and community regeneration. To achieve this important goal, creative education and innovative community builders must begin to work together to discover new ways to mobilize the many and varied resources of local schools as essential components of on-going community development efforts.
(p. 6)

According to community organizations within Alberta, there is an important disconnect in how schools and community organizations collaborate on the education of students. A community-organization manager commented:

For us to be successful there, a few things need to be in place, and one is a principal that understands the value we bring. And I just say, I am not always convinced the answer to problems in the school is to add more partners, . . . refugee and immigrant communities. If the school doesn't view us as the partner

to the education of their children—not the recreation of their children, but the education—then we can’t really do a lot. I am not always sure schools get that.

Therefore, resistance to changes and policies within educational institutions results from individual beliefs, larger political changes, and societal governance. The education system is a complex network of associations and agents. Although all sectors work towards the same goal of creating the best learning environment for all learners, they each function at distinct levels and in separate contexts. To design and deliver policies effectively, it is important to understand the complexity and interconnectivity within the organization. To ensure the creation of safe, caring, and purposeful learning environments for all stakeholders, learners and their families, community members, policy makers, and policy implementers have to be meaningful partners. Most important, all stakeholders need to feel recognized and valuable. One of the study participants recommended that policy implementers have the space and flexibility to interpret the policy and implement practices in a way that is meaningful in their context:

Sometimes having a more flexible approach, a less formalized approach, gives more latitude to people to figure out what are some of the practical solutions that work. The risk of having that more ad hoc, fluid approach is that sometimes people make bad decisions, but it does allow for flexibility for the democratic process to work out what kind of accommodation is reasonable. (Federal policy advisor)

This interviewee gave the example of the Ontario government’s intention to introduce Sharia law as a separate legal system; however, as a result of public opinion, not only was Sharia law not established, but Jewish family law as a separate legal system was also abolished to create consistent rights for all members of society. The freedom to make choices can be particularly beneficial to educational institutions, as this interviewee stated: “In education it is easy to serve at the macro level, what should be done, but the

real decisions are made more on a practical basis” (Federal policy advisor). This study participant made important arguments with regard to ensuring that policies are implemented with the least resistance and the values of the democratic society as a whole are maintained. However, it is also important to recognize that policies and practices that accommodate those who have been historically marginalized will usually face opposition. Therefore, it is important for policy makers to be cognizant of the context and location of the implementation of the policies and for policy implementers to be supported through education, advocacy, and preservation to open up the spaces for those who have been traditionally marginalized. Policy implementers also need to be recognized as valuable members of educational institutions to implement the policies and regulations in a way that will best meet the needs of all students and community members.

Conclusion

Policies are understood as written documents based on negotiations among major stakeholders to ratify a problem or address a need that advocacy groups or invested organizations identify. However, as Ball et al. (2012) stated, policy is more than negotiated and agreed-upon texts by interested parties; policy should also be understood as “discursive processes that are complexly configured, contextually mediated and institutionally rendered” (p. 3). As the findings in this study demonstrate, policies can become contested matters among policy makers, policy implementers, and the public at large, as policies for sexual minority students in Alberta have demonstrated. Actors within the network of educational institutions can also interpret and understand policies differently. Therefore, they become context dependent from the beginning and remain context dependent throughout the implementation process. The need for policy is

different in different spaces and location. For example, refugee learners constitute a small proportion of students within the education system as a whole, and only learning centers in areas that are highly populated with newly arrived students will identify with the need for special programming for refugee learners. Further, for policies to be effective, they need to involve representatives of all stakeholders at all stages of policy design and implementation. Most important, policies follow the societal values and belief systems. Although major societal demands and political circumstances can influence the direction of policy design, policies are designed mainly to meet the goals of a neoliberal society and by extension the needs of the labor market. Therefore, if educational policies are going to be drafted and implemented in a way that ensures that all students, even those on the margins of the education system such as refugee youth, succeed, the framework for addressing the issues needs to shift. The shift needs to be made from an economy- and labor-market-based framework to a framework of human rights and social justice.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS OF MULTICULTURAL AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES

In this chapter I examine specific educational policies, including multicultural education and inclusive education, that affect refugee learners as the research participants discussed, understood, and implemented them. I analyze these policies as they impact on the educational outcomes for refugee learners based on the race-equity and social-justice framework. The two provinces of Alberta and BC are governed by different parties and have designed their own policies to meet their particular local needs. When I collected data for this study, the Conservative party governed the province of Alberta, but the New Democratic Party came to power while I wrote this thesis. It is important to note that, although the political ideology of the current government differs vastly from that of the previous government, there has been a minimal shift in the existing policies and an even more limited shift in educational practices. Changes in policies and practices to meet the educational needs of refugee learners were minimal for several reasons. Whereas the governing ministers have changed, the majority of the members responsible for designing and delivering policies and teacher education has remained unchanged. Further, it has been easier to communicate with the NDP education ministries, but very difficult to evaluate any increases in funding for refugee learners, particularly given the increased number of refugees arriving from Syria. Most important, still critical conversations such as power relations and the lack of economic and racial equity within educational facilities and the larger society are mainly absent. Therefore, current changes in the governance of the province have not created noticeable changes in the education of refugee learners in the province of Alberta.

It is also interesting to note that, although the Liberal party governs the province of British Columbia, their views are considered right leaning. Further, as noted, some of the Social Democratic Party's changes were considered right leaning, or right-leaning institutions such as the Fraser Institute used them to further meet the neoliberal ideologies of society. As has been the case with the standardization and evaluation process. Therefore, the policies, their objectives, and the outcomes are similar between the two provinces. I will therefore discuss the educational policies of the two provinces together in the following section.

As the literature-review section of this study illustrated and as the interview process confirmed, in the two provinces, no policy specifically targets refugee learners with the exception of funding. Further, in the interviews, the participants in Alberta consistently referred to the multicultural education policy and inclusive education policy as guiding platforms to achieve the educational needs of refugee students. In BC, the participants discussed the *Special Education and Diversity in BC Schools* documents, which highlight multicultural policy. The participants in both provinces addressed ELL learning and some specified coding and funding for refugee learners. Therefore, it was critical that I analyze these policies in depth to gain a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, their delivery, and their outcomes. The process would help me make meaningful recommendations and develop a framework for the education of refugee youth in Alberta and Canada.

Multicultural Policy

The policy makers in Alberta identified multicultural education as a policy that addresses the needs of immigrant and refugee students:

We recognize that what we are really talking about is diversity, so we have a policy that deals with the diverse nature of our student population. We don't have one that specifically says immigrants vs. refugees because, in effect, it talks about respectful and welcoming environment and what does that look like. . . . Our policies are actually designed, again, for teaching and learning purposes, so they are designed to tell us what the environment must be for optimum teaching and learning. If you wear that hat and say, "Okay, it is not about the political so much as it's about making effective teaching and learning happening," then that's the policy, and that's why it is written the way it is in the multicultural policy. (School board representative 1, AB)

A representative from a BC school board reiterated similar statements with regard to policies that inform the education of refugee youth: "Really, everything about our students is about all students, not about specific students related to minority."

School districts have created policies and regulations to facilitate the education of diverse student populations based on the School Act policy on diversity and shared values (Government of Alberta, 2015, p. 16). For example, Edmonton Public Schools (2009) has created a multicultural policy that is divided into eight sections that outline the delivery of education in schools. The goal of multicultural policy is for "all members of our diverse community to be welcomed, respected, to feel a strong sense of belonging and to participate fully in the District" (para. 1). The policy lists 14 steps to achieve the mission and goals of the multicultural policy:

- Creating learning environments that support all students and their families to develop a sense of belonging.
- Ensuring students learn about the values and culture of Canada.
- Having high expectations for achievement and providing a range of supports to promote continuous growth in student learning.
- Providing responsive programming that includes the use of resources to reflect diverse cultural perspectives.
- Creating opportunities for students to share and celebrate their cultural heritage.
- Using culturally appropriate assessments to inform programming.
- Ensuring that racial and cultural issues are appropriately addressed.
- Using a proactive approach to student conduct.

- Enabling parents and families to be involved in and make informed decisions concerning their child's schooling.
- Attracting and retaining qualified staff from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Working collaboratively with community members and groups to increase intercultural appreciation and understanding.
- Working collaboratively with other educational institutions to promote successful transitions for students and improved pre-service training for staff.
- Providing professional development to increase intercultural appreciation and understanding of staff.
- Working collaboratively with community partners and other levels of government to advocate for the development of services to extend learning opportunities and supports. (para. 5)

These processes emphasize important concepts involved in achieving the goals of welcoming, valuing, and respecting all members of society. Some of the processes include developing a sense of belonging for all students, having high expectations for all students, developing proactive approaches, enabling parental engagement and community organizations, as well as addressing the diversity and qualifications of staff.

Multiculturalism in BC is one of the four supporting concepts in human rights, employment equity, and social justice that promote diversity in schools in the province.

The BC Ministry of Education (2008) identified the goals of multiculturalism as follows:

- developing cross-cultural understanding to create sensitivity to and respect for difference;
- eliminating racism; . . .
- eliminating systemic and attitudinal barriers that prevent full and equitable participation in community services, employment and education;
- developing culturally responsive services to meet the changing needs of the communities they are intended to serve, rather than expecting clients and consumers to adapt to prescribed services as they exist. (p. 9)

The glaring difference between the documents from the two provinces is the explicit requirement for the development of culturally responsive programs, which encourages two-way integration in the province of BC. The BC document supports development of programs that “meet the changing needs of the communities . . . rather than expecting

clients and consumers to adapt to prescribed services as they exist” (p. 9). However, the Alberta document (Edmonton Public Schools, 2009) emphasizes the one-way integration of minority students into Canadian culture. For example, although the first point in the document addresses “support [for] all students and their families to develop a sense of belonging” (para. 5), the statement “ensuring students learn about the values and culture of Canada” (para. 5) immediately follows. As such educational practices follow teaching students values deemed important to assimilate students and their families into their new homes. Accordingly, scholars have argued that the curriculum and school practices heavily encourage one-way integration of ESL students into the mainstream culture in Canada (Abdi, 2007; Aoki, 2005; Cummins, 2009; Y. Guo, 2012; Y. J. Lee, 2013).

Multicultural Education as a Two-Way Model of Education

Banks (2008) envisioned the most imperative objective for multicultural education policies is “to provide all students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to function within their community cultures, within the mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures” (p. 2). Multicultural policies are designed to meet the needs of cultural minority students and overcome barriers such as the racism that these minorities face in school. However, Banks also discussed the importance of multicultural education for mainstream students. He argued that students within the mainstream population fail to fully achieve self-realization and self-reflection on their culture because of cultural blinders. Therefore, to fully take advantage of the positive benefits of multicultural policy, multiculturalism has to involve two-way integration. It is meaningful not only for newcomers to Canada to understand Canadian culture and values, but also for Canadian students to understand various other cultures. Although,

two-way integration has been discussed in the literature it has never been fully defined and outlined as to how achieve this goal. The purpose of the two-way integration model is to remove the burden of understanding and fitting into a society only on immigrants, as the system currently exists. The value of the two-way integration is for various communities to share culture and value system in order to create a shared identity. Integration cannot be systemically engineered through pre-determined timelines and skill-testing examinations. Integration occurs when newcomers feel valued and develop a sense of belonging. In learning centers, sense of belonging can be fostered through recognizing students' histories, cultures and knowledge.

As Banks emphasized, two-way integration will help students “to gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspective of other cultures” (p. 2). Also, the two-way-integration model of multicultural policy will help minority students to develop a sense of belonging in their educational communities. This will in turn help them to benefit from their schooling and utilize the learning and tools necessary to function and participate successfully in their communities. Therefore, multicultural education as a two-way-integration model will benefit all students. Mainstream students will gain a better understanding of their culture through the lens of others, and minority students will observe their values being acknowledged and regarded within the school setting.

One of the elements that school boards have identified as an important step in supporting student learning is “providing responsive programming” (Edmonton Public Schools, 2009, para. 5). One of the challenges to the success and integration of newcomers is students' inability to identify with the curriculum because programs and

curriculum are designed from a Euro-centric lens (Banks, 1993; McLaren, 1994). Scholars who study multicultural education have emphasized the importance of developing curriculum and programming responsively rather than reactively. From the point of view of multiculturalism, scholars such as Banks (2008) have identified responsive curriculum as a “transformational curriculum” (p. 39) rather than an infusion of programming. Banks defined transformational curriculum as one in which “students and teachers make paradigm shifts and view American world experiences from the perspectives of different racial, ethnic, cultural and gender groups” (p. 39). One of the main purposes of education, also embedded in multicultural policy, is to instill Canadian values. Therefore, curriculum is designed and delivered from a Eurocentric viewpoint, which, according to Banks, can, again, be harmful to both mainstream and minority students. Curriculum based on Eurocentric views robs mainstream students of the richness of education that the perspective of other cultures can bring to their lives. The Eurocentric curriculum also alienates minority students from school and creates cultural dissonance among them.

In Canadian education systems, programming has been more aligned with curriculum infusion, or the creation of “opportunities for students to share and celebrate their cultural heritage” (Edmonton Public Schools, 2009, para. 5), instead of curriculum transformation. For example, the teaching of the history of First Nations people in Canada continues to be from the Eurocentric perspective, with the dispersive history of First Nations infused into school programming and restricted mainly to social studies (Donald, 2012). It is crucial to point out that providing multicultural education through a transformational curriculum that discusses and deliberates multiple perspectives benefits

both minority and mainstream students. It also contributes to the success of students because it helps them to attain the skills necessary to become “engaged thinkers and ethical citizens” (Alberta Education, 2011b, p. 2).

Students who graduate from school must be competent to compete globally. Educational content from a multicultural perspective will prepare them for careers within the global context. Culturally competent students engage with societal problems critically and ethically and can be more productive citizens in the communities in which they live (Banks, 2008; C. D. Lee, 2007). Moreover, multicultural education from a multicultural perspective eliminates the negative impacts of cultural dissonance and helps students to function in society as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens. As research has shown, individuals who face cultural dissonance and are not able to identify with any group find it difficult to become “fully functioning and self-actualized citizens and are more likely to experience political and social alienation” (Banks, 2008, p. 4). Therefore, it is important to ensure students develop their identity in a manner that helps them to achieve self-actualization and connect to both their home culture and the larger society. Such identity development will foster the growth and progress of the society in a positive direction that both meets the needs of individuals and is in the interests of political democracy.

Impact and Evolution of Multicultural Policy

According to Ley (2007), “Multiculturalism is associated with equality, a sense of identity, acceptance of diversity, ethnic understanding and harmony, while discouraging social and spatial exclusion bias and hatred” (p. 5). However, scholars have contended that the understanding of the meaning of multiculturalism has changed and become

contested at times, but it has “moved away from ideals of liberations and social justice” (p. 5). The high dropout rate among ESL students in Alberta and the increased number of dropout rates in BC during the last 15 years suggests that Canadian educational institutions are not meeting the needs of these students; these students neither feel that they belong nor that they are accepted within the school setting (Y. J. Lee, 2013; Toohey & Derwing, 2006).

McLaren (1994) argued that multiculturalism unfolds within the spectrum of political parties. Although the mission of multiculturalism is to be welcoming, respectful and to create a space for all, in its enactment, schools’ multicultural policies follow the evolution of the federal government’s definition of multicultural policy (see Figure 3), as one of the research participants in the study explained:

When the Conservatives came in, they were concerned, rightly or wrongly; they believed there was too much emphasis on the accommodation side and not enough of integration. A large part of language and policy changes was really to stress the importance of integration, importance of interaction, importance of not just the barriers between mainstream and minorities, but also focusing on barriers between and among the visible minorities, between and among different ethnic groups. . . . Change was more explicit—change towards integration—although I would always argue that multiculturalism. . . was always to help people participate and integrate into Canadian society. (Expert on federal government multicultural policies)

The attitude towards integration is evident in the goals of multiculturalism policies and the school district’s emphasis on “ensuring that all students develop an understanding of Canadian values and culture” (Edmonton Public Schools, 2009, para. 5). The rhetoric of Canadian values and “an appreciation of the contributions of a diverse community” (para. 2) are similar to what Griffith (2013) described as changing federal government policies from 1970s to the present time (Figure 3). Therefore, similar to the federal interpretation of multiculturalism, in provincially directed educational

Multiculturalism Policy Changes

	Ethnicity Multi (1970s)	Equity Multi (1980s)	Civic Multi (1990s)	Integrative Multi (2000s)	Social Cohesion (present)
Focus	Celebrating differences	Managing diversity	Constructive engagement	Inclusive citizenship	Social cohesion
Reference Point	Culture	Structure	Society building	Canadian identity	Canadian values
Mandate	Ethnicity	Race relations	Citizenship	Integration	Cohesion
Magnitude	Individual adjustment	Accommodation	Participation	Rights and Responsibilities	Responsibilities and Rights
Problem Source	Prejudice	Systemic discrimination	Exclusion	Unequal access, “clash” of cultures	Faith and culture clashes
Solution	Cultural sensitivity	Employment equity	Inclusiveness	Dialogue/Mutual Understanding	Shared values
Key Metaphor	“Mosaic”	“Level playing field”	“Belonging”	“Harmony/Jazz”	“Conforming”

Adapted from Fleras, A. and Kunz, Jean (2001). *Media and Minorities: representing diversity in a Multicultural Canada*. Toronto: Thompson Education Publishing. reference

Figure 3. Multiculturalism policy changes (Griffith, 2013).¹

policies, emphasis is placed on one-way integration. Although education is a provincial responsibility, Joshee (2004) reported that the federal government has maintained its control on multicultural aspects of education delivery. For example, the federal government is responsible to directly provide education to children of First Nations and armed forces personnel, influencing curriculum development, and maintaining its influence in areas that fall under national interest. National interests encompass multiculturalism and citizenship. Therefore, changes in the federal government’s interpretation and understanding of multiculturalism (Figure 3) have an impact on education policies related to multiculturalism.

Joshee and Griffith both noted that social cohesion became the focus of multiculturalism in the 2000s and remains so to this day. The study participant reiterated

¹From *Policy Arrogance or Innocent Bias: Resetting Citizenship and Multiculturalism*, by Andrew Griffith, 2013, Ottawa, ON: Anar Press. Copyright (2013) by Andrew Griffith. Reprinted with permission.

the importance placed on cohesion within the context of multiculturalism and stated “The conservative narrative [of multiculturalism] was more to stress common points. Also, the other thing that the conservative narrative has done is downplaying barriers, downplaying equity, downplaying racism and discrimination” (Expert on federal government multicultural policies). Jenson (1998) commented on the emergence of social cohesion in response to neoliberal policies. Jenson (1998) argued neoliberal policies created tensions both in social and political arenas. As such social cohesion was introduced to strengthen the national identity of the country as a whole. As Joshee (2004) states social cohesion was introduced “as a corrective measure that can help to increase social solidarity and restore faith in the institutions of government” (p. 147) without calling into question neoliberal policies and their impact. The important feature of social cohesion in multiculturalism compounded by neoliberal policies, according to Jenson, Bernard, and Joshee (1999), is that although the social cohesion framework addresses inequality, it has eliminated or reduced “the state’s role in addressing inequality” (p. 147). Therefore, the responsibility for addressing inequality has fallen on various community organizations, and these inequalities are consequently under the framework of charity rather than social justice. The heavy reliance of schools with high numbers of vulnerable populations on community organizations is a prime example that various community organizations are meeting the needs of schools, whether for food for students, mentorship, cultural liaisons, or parental engagement.

Inclusive Education

Although many scholars value inclusive education, some have criticized it for the lack of a clear definition, the lack of identification of policy targets, and what constitutes

the goals of inclusive education (Bank, 2008; Battisti, Friesen, Hickey, 2012; Dei, 2008; Sokal, Sharma, 2014; Thomas, 2012). Inclusive education has traditionally emphasized the educational needs of students with cognitive or behavioral disabilities, and during recent times it has also highlighted the needs of ESLs/ELLs. Further, attention is now focused on newcomers who have had traumatic experiences prior to their arrival. This study focused on ESL/ELL learners in the analysis of inclusive education. However, given the wealth of research on inclusive education for students with disabilities, it is prudent to review the literature on and analysis of the changes in funding models. Additionally, the impact on education of students with disabilities is the best parallel model for students with varying needs.

Evolution of the Inclusive-Education Policy in Alberta

The evolution of Alberta's inclusive-education policy began in 1993 when Alberta Education began to modify policies to achieve the goal of integrating all students with varying needs into "regular" classrooms. The document "Standards in Special Education" (Alberta Learning, 2004) identified the main goal of the inclusive-education policy: "Educating students with exceptional needs in regular classrooms in neighborhood or local schools shall be the first placement option considered by school boards, in consultation with students, parents/guardians and staff" (p. 10).

Since 1993, inclusive education has undergone several revisions and modifications. According to the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools (ATA, 2014), the final modifications to the inclusive-education policy resulted from the greater increase in the number of students with severe disabilities than in the overall population, the increase in the number of newcomer families without knowledge

of the English language, and the increase in mental health issues among children and youth. Further, Gilham and Williamson (2014) identified one of the major motivations for change to Alberta Education's inclusive-education policy in 2008 as economic reasons. Winzer and Mazurek (2011) reported "an increase of 64% in identification of students with severe disabilities and an increase of 140% for students with mild/moderate disabilities, compared to a general increase in the school population of 5%" (as cited in Gilham & Williamson, 2014, p. 556). In 2007, the drastic increase in the number of students with severe disabilities prompted Alberta Education's review of *severe disabilities profiles*, which revealed that 16,000 students were being coded for severe disabilities and that \$16,645 in grants in the form of block funding was targeted to providing the needed services for these students. However, as Alberta Education revealed, 48% of the files did not conform to its criteria and standards of severe disabilities (Gilham & Williamson, 2014). The outcome of the review prompted the ministry to redefine the inclusive-education policy and its implementation:

The review results suggest that there is inconsistent application of special education severe disabilities coding criteria across the province which raises questions about the interpretation and application of mild and moderate coding [as well]. Given the magnitude of these concerns, the results of the severe disabilities profile review are a catalyst for thorough examination of the overall special education framework. (Alberta Education, 2008; as cited in Gilham & Williamson, 2014, p. 557)

Evolution of the Inclusive-Education Policy in BC

Inclusive education in BC is guided by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom (Government of Canada, 2015a), *Diversity in BC Schools* (BC Ministry of Education, 2008), and *English Language Learners* (BC Ministry of Education, 2009a). Froese-Germain (2005-2006) defined inclusive education as the integration of all students

into a regular classroom “through the provision of supports and instruction tailored to their needs” (para. 4). However, educators and scholars believe that inclusivity is a journey that educational institutions in BC have not yet achieved (Naylor, 2005, 2013). The lack of success of the inclusion of all students is due to the high dropout rate of minority and low-income students, the lower academic achievements of certain groups of special needs students, as well as the increased number of low-achieving students (Battisti, Friesen, & Hickey, 2012; Fallon & Poole, 2014; Naylor, 2005, 2013). Several factors have caused the lack of success in achieving inclusivity in schools. Some of these include limited funding and changes to the funding for special education, privatization and inequity in access to needed programming, competing discourses of accountability and inclusivity, the limited focus on inclusivity education for preservice teachers, as well as limited education and professional development programming for in-service teachers.

Schools have faced decreases in funding allocations since the 1980s, when the government began to allocate funding to schools for basic education programs and programs that supplemented and targeted the specific needs of pupils (Fallon & Poole, 2014). Government funding for school districts would cover only basic educational needs, and schools that offered supplemental programming had to request extra funding. From the 1980s to 2000, governing bodies adapted various models of payment to schools. However, underfunding of education services within the province remained consistent and resulted in the phenomenon that Malcolmson and Kaiser (2009) termed *structural shortfall*. Structural shortfall describes a circumstance in which “revenue lags consistently and chronically behind that which is required to pay for the delivery of publically [*sic*] mandated programs and services” (Fallon & Poole, 2014, p. 315).

In 2002, Bill 34 was introduced as the School Amendment Act (Legislative Assembly of BC, 2002) which allowed schools to establish for-profit companies to generate revenue for their districts. Although the neo-liberal economic discourse was unfolding globally and governments opted to reduce expenditures on social services to maintain control over the services that they provided, BC remained the only province in Canada that has allowed school districts to establish for-profit business models to fill educational funding gaps. Therefore, the role of the government has shifted from the assurance of educational equity to “equal opportunity for school districts to pursue individual financial self-interest” (Fallon & Poole, 2014, p. 316).

The marketing model for funding for education undermines the possibility of equity in education for all students because financial support for services for the most vulnerable population in particular becomes insecure. The BC Ministry of Education reported that urban and metropolitan districts generated seven times more funding per student than those in remote areas (2012; as cited in Fallon & Poole, 2014). As Fallon and Poole suggested, difficulties with generating revenue are not restricted to the geographical location; it is more difficult for school districts with higher numbers of minority students, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and students with special needs to generate funds. The ability of school districts to generate funding allows them to promote the programming that they deem important and necessary, which demonstrates neither equity in educational opportunities nor equity in the power to choose and benefit from programming. It is difficult to imagine the realization of inclusion in educational settings in which the foundational pillar of inclusion—equity—does not exist in practice.

As I discussed in an earlier section, the hierarchy of policies and the accountability pillar further erode the principle of equity. The accountability pillar is based on academic excellence, which is determined by standardized testing that targets mainstream knowledge. The outcomes of standardized tests result in the ranking of schools against one another, which creates competition among schools that was initiated on unequal grounds. Conducting standardized testing as a means of determining funding for schools in a marketized education milieu inversely serves students who need more services and benefits from public education.

Evaluation of the Inclusive-Education Policy in Alberta and BC

The goals of the conceptualized inclusive-education policy that both provinces implemented were to integrate and place as many students as possible within regular classrooms and to provide support and preparation for teachers and professional development. Other goals of the inclusive-education policy included implementing early assessment and intervention, and to provide guidelines for class sizes for classrooms with special-needs students, students whose first language is not English, and vulnerable and at-risk students (Alberta Education, 2011a; Battisti et al, 2012). Battisti et al. (2012) revealed that in BC, the funding modifications and the elimination of supplemental grants in 2002 resulted in lower designations for students with moderate behavioral disorders and mild mental illness, as well as for gifted students. The authors suggested that the decrease in the designation of special-needs students might have been a response to capped funding within the province. Further, they found lower achievement scores for students in the *gifted* category, but no significant decline in the achievement of students in the *disability* category. Battisti et al. believed that the outcomes were influenced more

by the lower number of students in the disability category who wrote exams than by the quality of the education that they received. This hypothesis is consistent with statements from other scholars and administrators who have contended that schools discourage students whom they identify as low scoring from taking tests to prevent a decline in the schools' rankings (Darling-Hammond, 2007). In relation to recent developments in special education and inclusion in BC, Naylor (2005) reported finding lower designations of students in special education as well as reduced ESL staffing at a time when the number of students whose first language was not English had rapidly risen:

By closing the Special Program Branch they also gutted the Ministry of Education's capacity to offer systemic support to teachers and school districts through web publishing and other knowledge-dissemination means, . . . which articulates statements that the focus of the Ministry of Education is on system accountability, not system support. (p. 23)

In Alberta, the steering committee's framework for achieving the goals and providing consistent support at all levels from jurisdiction to classroom included capacity building, collaborative practices, and communication (Alberta Education, 2011c, p. 5). However, according to the authors of the Blue Ribbon Panel report on inclusive education in Alberta (ATA, 2014), although ministries of education always accepted all of the steering committees' recommendations, "it is debatable whether the policies have been implemented" (p. 13). The outcomes of the inclusive-education policy according to the 2014 report are that not only have teachers not seen any improvement in the education of students with exceptional needs, but support for teachers and classrooms with students with special needs has also been reduced. The lack of support for the implementation of the policy has in turn alarmed teachers because students with special needs have been neglected (p. 11). Parkin's (2012) finding of a lack of support for the

implementation of the inclusive-education policy in schools concurs with that of the Blue Ribbon Panel. Parkin speculated that this lack of support is a result of the determination to implement inclusive-education practices as a dual model of education: the provision of differentiated instructional programming for mainstream and special-needs students. Parkin contended that the current status of the inclusive-education policy is that it fosters the continuation of the dual model of instructional learning because of the lack of clear implementation procedures and support for classroom teachers. Most importantly, the Blue Ribbon Panel found a lack of correlation between the ambitiousness of the inclusive policy and its increased complexity in the classroom, and the funding, resources, and support that educational institutions receive (p. 22). An ATA member best described the intentions for the development and delivery of the policy:

In many ways, the history of progressive inclusion in Alberta is a history of the tension between equity and excellence, between the choices posed by the Worth Commission (a “person-centered society” or a “second-phase industrial society”), between “humanistic ideals, epitomized by individual self-actualization . . . and continued industrial development, focused on an abundance of goods and services. (ATA, 2014, p. 14)

The current inclusive-education policy is accessible online, accompanied by videos and possible resources that teachers can use in their classrooms. However, as the Blue Ribbon Panel (ATA, 2014) reported, not only has the policy failed in its implementation stages, but if such plans were even in existence, “they certainly were not shared with those doing the actual implementation, nor were they developed in consultation with stakeholders” (p. 15). The panel agreed that the majority of the directions proposed to the ministry were not implemented or were implemented superficially. They further suggested that few structural changes have occurred and that “most teachers do not know about or have the time to navigate the documents and

resources posted” (p. 15). As Shields (2004) outlined, for educational institutions not to marginalize a large proportion of their students, foster the academic success of students, and challenge existing beliefs and practices, education needs to be delivered within the framework of social justice. The inclusive education policies in Alberta and British Columbia are designed and drafted to ensure the inclusion of all students regardless of their challenges. However, since policies are derived within neo-liberal ideologies and an environment based on competition and assessment, meaningful inclusion of all students is not possible. Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions to be based on the framework of social justice and to design, deliver and implement policies based on equity and social justice ideologies.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the main goals of the inclusive policy was to prevent excessive or inaccurate labeling of students to obtain funding. Funding solely based on labeling students with not oversight and proper evaluation purposes, resulted in excessive assessment and inaccurate placements and evaluations. However, because the policy was not implemented, the findings of the Blue Ribbon Panel’s report (ATA, 2014) were similar to the findings of this research study. Principals, teachers, and even some members of the school district were unaware of the changes in criteria for funding. The participants often brought up the model of coding and funding during the interviews, and one principal stated, “There is always the labeling piece. Right now for us, the special needs is connected to funding, which gets the resources that will help the kids. But sometimes it’s a lot of hoops to jump through.” It is interesting that the purpose of the modification of the inclusive-education policy was to eliminate the association between coding and funding: “Many people still believe that coding triggers funding, though this

has not been the case for two budget cycles. In addition, many school jurisdictions have retained the old model of coding and funding for distributing inclusive education funds internally” (ATA, 2014, p. 44). Therefore, because inclusive education was not properly implemented, it is still based on a student-deficit model which is contrary to the definition of inclusive education according to the ministry of education: “making differences ordinary so that all students have a place, feel valued and welcomed, and are equipped for success” (Alberta Education, 2011c).

Moving away from the deficit model and labeling, in addition to the obvious benefits of curtailing the negative impacts of labeling on students, would have allowed schools to meet the needs of all their students. The schools would have been able to manage their learning without having to be bound to restrictions on how to spend the funding grants and determining which students qualify for funding. Further, less reliance on the limited number of school psychologists for assessment would have allowed educational psychologists and other consultants to work alongside teachers in the classroom to help with the delivery of the course material and with classroom management. A school superintendent in the Blue Ribbon Panel’s report (ATA, 2014) explained that the proper implementation of the policy would have allowed instructional programming to assist students when there is a need. It would also strengthen students’ foundational skills through early interventions to ensure their success:

Now the shift is “Hey, let’s put an early intervention in place, and if reading is an issue”—as an example—“let’s actually make sure we provide extra assistance and direction to help them overcome that obstacle,” so that it’s not about labeling them with a deficiency that then stays with them for life. . . . We can provide assistance, early intervention, address it, and then as you move them through the system, you can pull support away because you’ve actually resolved the issue, rather than having to continue that support all the way through the system. (p. 39)

Block funding is favorable for learners and educational institutions because it lacks labeling and facilitates the autonomy of schools as educational entities to provide the needed support for students. However, it is important to put in place monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure that schools receive the required funding to realize the programming envisioned for their schools. According to the report on the inclusive-education policy (ATA, 2014), because the provinces do not monitor the needed funding, there is a chronic shortage of funding within schools to meet the needs of students whom the inclusive-education policy specifically targets. In BC, according to Naylor (2013), the increased number of students who need special education but do not meet the eligibility criteria and are therefore not funded has resulted from “the shift into block funding at a time when districts were (and still are) under huge financial pressures because of consistent and pervasive underfunding by the provincial government” (p. 11). I found in my research that the heavy reliance of schools on community organizations to both provide the knowledge-based resources and deliver the program is evidence of the lack of financial and information support from school districts. As the Blue Ribbon Panel concluded, unfortunately, “this inconsistency will continue until policies, regulations and regular assessment of inclusion happens in the system. The Government of Alberta must pay whatever it takes to provide the education all students deserve” (p. 45).

A positive element of the inclusive-education policy is the identification of the target population in both Alberta (Alberta Ministry of Education, 2010) and BC (BC Ministry of Education, 2011), which includes newcomers who do not speak either of Canada’s official languages as their mother tongue and families who face challenges in

supporting their families, have faced trauma, and suffer posttraumatic disorders. These characteristics correlate with newcomers from refugee backgrounds. However, the lack of planning for the proposed policy means that there are no assessment procedures or directions on how to ensure the academic success of students from refugee backgrounds. As Gunderson (n.d.) stated, “One of the foundations of good instruction is having valid and reliable assessment measures” (p. 40). Research in Alberta and BC has revealed a lack of consistent, representative, and curriculum-based assessment that is easy to interpret (Gunderson, n.d; Y. J. Lee, 2013).

One of the major concerns of the study participants in this in regards to refugee youth learners who arrive in Canada during their high school years was the youths’ inability to fulfill their academic goals and enter postsecondary institutions. BC ESL Assessment Consortium recognized that, because of the age of students who enter secondary schools as ESL students, they are at risk of not graduating and that proper assessment is a factor in their timely graduation from high school: “Locally developed, large scale valid and reliable assessment measures” (Gunderson, n.d., p. 49) are tools that will ensure students’ integration into the school learning environment. In Alberta, the Blue Ribbon Panel’s (ATA, 2014) recommendation was to ensure that the “learner assessments required by Alberta Education do not create barriers of access to postsecondary education or entrance to the workforce” (p. 47). The educational consultants who worked with the school districts and participated in this study reported that a higher percentage of refugee youth learners are labeled and coded for cognitive and behavioral disorders than the rest of the student population. Therefore, an inclusive-education policy with no proper assessment procedures, lack of provincial support for

classroom teachers', and emphasis on the accountability pillar challenges the creation of inclusive learning environments.

In Alberta, school districts have identified means of ensuring entrance to the workforce for students for whom achieving the academic criteria for postsecondary school is an unrealistic goal. Knowledge and Employability courses are designed to provide opportunities in selected occupations or trade programs for students who may not succeed the academic rigor of schooling. The criteria for students' placement in such a program is the age of 12 years and 6 months or older and performance at two years or more below their grade level. This program maintains engagement in the school for students who are not motivated to pursue academic courses but wish to pursue trade opportunities. However, many students, including refugee youth who are not fluent in the English language, perform below their grade levels only because of their lack of proficiency in the language. Therefore, under the inclusive-education policy, these students are streamlined into the Knowledge and Employability stream without providing any alternative programming to ensure that students can pursue an academic stream if they choose. Without assessment procedures to ensure student progress and the provision of alternative programs, it is difficult to imagine how streamlining students simply because of their late arrival in Canada and the lack of programming can be regarded as inclusive education. As a school board member explained:

Sometimes, if you come in in Grade 7, you will not have enough years to achieve that [the completion of a diploma], and we know that, so there has to be a policy that enables you to have extra education to get you through your high school graduation.

Given the understanding of difficulties faced by students who arrived in Grade 7 by both policy makers and policy implementers, it is imperative that education institutions ensure

that students have employment opportunities. Additionally, the education system must also have alternative programming designed for those in pursuit of postsecondary education. This will enable the removal of barriers to assessment and access to postsecondary education.

As my analysis of the work on inclusive-education policies in Alberta (ATA, 2014; Gilham & Williamson, 2014) and BC (Naylor, 2013) has indicated, in both provinces the inclusion policies are well-written documents. However, they lack clear direction, planning for implementation, financial and knowledge support for schools and teachers. Inclusive education is valued when its goal is to meet the needs of all children and provide them with an education that ensures their learning and growth during their educational journey. Concerns with the policy arise when the means of reaching its goals is to mold students who are considered special needs into “normal” students. Therefore, while some recommendations such as the report by the Blue Ribbon Panel highlights the importance of funding, knowledge transfers, and providing classroom assistance to teachers and schools are crucial for achieving an inclusive classroom, inclusive education cannot be achieved unless all students and knowledge are valued. Inclusive education, with respect for different being and cultures at its center, can only be accomplished if different knowledge and knowers are valued and education is not designed to perpetuate and prioritize certain knowledge and ways of being.

It is also important to be cognizant that the same learning environment might not meet the needs of all students. For refugee youth with no formal education or interrupted education, entering learning institutions with an unfamiliar culture and language means that they need to acquire many skills as well as become familiar with the culture and

learn the language in a very limited time. It is therefore questionable whether initially placing these learners with peers who have not shared their life experiences, creates the best learning environment for all students. Consequently, it is important to question whether placing each group of learners in the best learning environment for them is contrary to the goals of the inclusive-education policy or whether other means of achieving the goals of the policy are required.

Conclusion

As the multicultural policy reflects, best practices for the inclusive-education policy are attained when educational institutions begin to recognize all their students. Recognition must involve the designation of learning environments and instructional programming to avoid the traditional bimodal approach to education, which maintains a disconnect between mainstream and special-needs students. Further, bimodal programming continues to privilege certain beings and knowledge over other. Such practice counters inclusive education policy goals, as Parkin (2012) stated: “Inclusive education is about making a difference for all our children so they grow to become citizens that are concerned, tolerant, accepting and diverse. Learning to embrace your own individuality and accept others opens up the door of possibility” (p. 20). Creating structural changes so that invisible students become recognized members of the school community and are represented in a meaningful way in the curriculum and school activities will ensure social justice to meet the educational needs of all students. Structural changes, transformations, and modifications to various aspects of delivering education are the key to ensuring that all students are recognized and can successfully meet their educational goals. Effective inclusive and multicultural education policy is not

attained only by curriculum modification; there is also a need for deeper behavioral changes, the creation of new understandings, and the development of new norms.

Banks (2008) identified a successful learning environment as one that encompasses several qualities: content integration, knowledge construction, equitable pedagogy, reduction of prejudice, and empowerment of the school culture and social structure (p. 35). Banks pointed out that although integrating knowledge from various cultures is essential, multicultural and inclusive education needs to go beyond and explore how that knowledge is constructed. Knowledge construction helps students to investigate how the subject matter that they are studying was developed. It opens up the discussion on cultural assumptions and creates new frames of reference for learners. Banks acknowledged that such learning is possible through equitable pedagogy. He referred to increasing the repertoire of instructional programming and teaching methods as equitable pedagogy to ensure different means of learning for all students. Facilitating such learning environment comes with the underlying assumption that all students can learn and achieve educational goals. Therefore, this eliminates the existing deficit model for all students who do not fall within the mainstream of society. As such educational setting becomes less dependent and organized on stereotypes and preexisting notions. Educational policies and a framework that is based on valuing all students and steers away from the hidden practices of deficit models eliminate bias and create a school culture that empowers all.

CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS OF PRACTICES IN THE EDUCATION OF REFUGEE LEARNERS IN ALBERTA

In this chapter I discuss the data that I obtained from the interviews with the study participants in the province of Alberta. I interviewed policy makers such as school board representatives, school trustees, and community organization representatives, and those who enacted policies, such as principals, ESL consultants, and cultural brokers. The participants were involved in and familiar with the education of refugee learners in the province of Alberta.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I discuss the location of refugees within the education system and how policy makers and implementers in learning institutions understand refugee learners. In the second section I explore the reasons for the emergence of the Transition Program, which was initiated and conducted as a pilot program that targeted the refugee youth in Alberta. Additionally, in the second section, based on the findings from this study and the limited literature available on the Transition Program, I evaluate the program and its impact on refugee learners. In the third and final section of the chapter I discuss the key issues that emerged in the conversations with the interviewees in Alberta: the role of refugee families in the education of their children, the important functions of assessment and placement in education, and how they are utilized to evaluate refugee learners. Another important finding is the significant role of language in education, both in terms of educational success and the identity development of youth, and the need to establish programs that value students' heritage languages, such as multiliteracy language programs. Finally, I discuss the importance of promoting teaching philosophies based on social justice and

enhancing teacher training to ensure that educators have the needed skills and knowledge to teach diverse classrooms.

Refugee Youth Learners in the Province of Alberta

According to the school board representatives in Alberta who participated in this research, 20% of students enrolled in the district are ELLs, and over 500 students are documented refugees. However, the research participants acknowledged that “[the statistic] doesn’t tell the real story, because many students are not coming as documented refugees, but their experiences in their former country are those of a refugee student” (School board representative 2, RS). Although representatives of the school districts and the school administrators both acknowledged that they have a large population of refugees among their students, neither group knew the actual number of refugee learners in their schools. One of the members from the school district stated, “I currently run a report that tells me about refugees as English language learners in our district, and I would think this is the first year that anybody really pays attention to it, because the numbers have doubled in all of the ELLs in the last five years” (School board representative 2). Special coding indicates the status of refugee learners who claim refugee status and are able to successfully support their claim after entering Canada. However, they are not tracked separately and are included in the same category as other newcomers, ELLs. School district representatives in this study claimed that 98% of all of their schools have ELLs, but the majority of the refugees are located in the same geographical area of the city, usually in low-income areas where more low-income housing and other social assistance are available. Therefore, the schools located in these areas have a majority of refugee youth as learners in their schools. According to the

literature and as re-iterated by research participants in this study, refugee learners require additional help and support throughout their schooling (Crow, 2006; Kanu, 2007; Ngo, 2009b; Pinson, Arnot, 2007). As a school principal stated, “Most of the kids [referring to refugee learners] are struggling,” as current resources and practices within the schools cannot meet the needs of refugee learners.

Refugee learners’ inability to succeed in the Canadian educational institutions appeared to be an expected outcome among the study participants. Some study participants were conscious to avoid homogenizing the refugee population and blame students for their lack of success. However, the participants attributed refugee learners lack of success to the students’ past experiences and the current barriers that they and their families face. One of the most important factors that contributed to refugee learners’ lack of success was their interrupted or lack of schooling experience, a reality that one of the school principal’s labeled “a lack of the language of schooling.” However, other factors described as barriers to refugee learners’ success, included high parental illiteracy, lack of parental engagement with the school, students’ behavioral and cognitive issues, as well their country of origin:

It depends where they [refugee learners] come from, right? It really does. The Karen [refugees] have had a very different experience than Somalis, and it has to do with . . . a 30-year-old war as opposed to shorter time in camps that’s part of it; a unified community as opposed to a community that has 22 community agencies trying to support them. (Community organization representative)

invisible, I noted that they used the word *invisible* to reflect not only on society’s perception of refugee students and refugees in general, but also refugee students’ identification of themselves. Another significant factor for the lack of success of some refugee learners that I identified in this research study is the issue of invisibility. Several

of the research participants who worked closely with refugee students referred to the “students’ feeling invisible.” Upon further questioning of the research participants on how and why refugee learners feel. Most of the research participants pointed out that the refugee population is invisible within our society and that they have been abandoned by various groups and factions in their native countries and now in their newly adopted home. As one of the school board representatives stated, refugee populations have no representation because they cannot vote and are not economically established. Further, the federal government representative on multiculturalism acknowledged the diminished resources and the federal government’s previous support for refugees. The community organization representative also echoed the inability of refugees to participate on par with mainstream society and their marginalized position:

Invisible is fair. Part of that invisibility, I think, is, the government has this refugee-sponsored program where they help refugees for one year. And maybe when people were coming from Eastern Europe where the language issue was related language, you learn quicker, you come with skills, you come with education; maybe one year was fair. But when all of that changed, the government didn’t respond to that change. We know it takes seven years to learn a language, so that probably means it takes seven years to settle because language is power, and they get one [year], and then they become invisible. And even in that one year they are given income-support levels, but they have the transportation fee to pay back, so they are in debt right off the bat. (Community organizer)

Invisibility is also used to define how refugee learners identify themselves: as having limited options and lack of opportunities because of traumatic experiences and the lack of mentorship. As the community organizer stated, refugee kids can only imagine limited choices for themselves, “One guy told me, ‘I either want to be a soccer player or a sheik.’ In his imagination, those were his two choices for something respectable.” Students create their narratives and identities through their own experiences, including

the way in which others perceive them. Their traumatic experiences of becoming a refugee have violated their sense of security, and to be able to resettle, they have to join a new collective as part of a refugee population. Being a refugee has many negative connotations both locally and globally. It suggests the existence of the Other among us who is different and can be dangerous (Ahmad, 2000). Refugees are viewed as different and as a threat to security and the nation's values (Bauman, 2004). Refugee youth have to negotiate their own identity and experiences with what society has projected onto them as the Other. According to the settlement workers in schools, some refugee youth describe going to schools as "going to war all over again" (Community organizer). Other scholars, such as Kusma (2006), also stated that students' narrative of being a refugee is also partly based on the reactions of society which conceives of them as stupid, ignorant, poor, uncivilized, and misfits. The literature review, in chapter 2 support the findings of this study that refugee youth are falling through the cracks. Their needs are not met and they are not encouraged to become lifelong learners and achieve their potential (Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). A representative of a school board stated:

I think we need more people asking questions about immigrant and refugee students, particularly refugee students. I look at the Sudanese students who came here during the last 10 years. It's a lost culture. They will be homeless forever because they didn't get a strong foundation, a strong start in school. We are making more of an effort to support ELL students, but it is not enough.

The data from the study participants support researchers in the literature who argued that refugee learners in schools are at best invisible and at worst portrayed negatively. It is important to utilize the existing knowledge on refugees in the literature and in combination with the experiences of educators and learners to create changes in educational institutions and help these youth to grow and develop to their full potential

and to highlight the welcoming features of Canadian society. In the following section I discuss the Transition Program, which was initiated as a pilot project for refugee learners in selected schools in Alberta, and the different aspects of the program; I also evaluate the delivery and significance of the program.

Transition Pilot Program

In 2005 an influx of refugees arrived in Edmonton from Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. These newly arrived migrants had faced long periods of instability in the form of war, staying in camps and living in transient accommodation. As the Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2010) outlined, these newly arrived students were “now more commonly experiencing high levels of emotional stress. In some cases, parents had made the difficult decision to place them with relatives or friends in order to meet the family size immigration quotas. Once they arrived in Canada, there was no guarantee that families would be reunited” (p. 2). The school principals explained that these students need particular and additional resources, and, in collaboration with community organizations and the support of the school board, they introduced the Transition Program. It is interesting that one of the main driving forces for the creation of this program was the issue of discipline. Refugees in general are identified by the traumatic experiences that they have faced and their low economic circumstances. The combination of these has given rise to what is being labeled as refugee youths’ *survival skills* and the negative consequences of such skills. A former government affiliate and an expert in multiculturalism described the society’ and educational institutions’ understanding on refugee youth as follows:

Kids are coming from quite often traumatic circumstances. They have been through civil wars; kids haven’t had their education, may have emotional trauma,

PTSD, or anything like that; and there are some poverty issues too. . . . I think, from an education perspective, a large part of the issues, but not all, will reflect the traumatic experiences that refugees have gone through, the children of refugees have gone through, and the gaps in education, plus the strained economic circumstances that refugees find themselves in. . . . And they have probably incredible survival skills that were suited for an environment where there wasn't a rule of law. Everything was arbitrary, everything was capricious, and there was no sense of what is legal, what is not. But from the behavioral perspective, I suspect there are lots of problems with refugee kids when they go to school. It's not the camp that they have to fight for every scrap, so they are more combative.

Therefore, there exists an incompatibility between students' lived experiences and educational institutions approved behaviors and capability to understand and integrate these newcomer youth.

A community organizer reflected on the Transition Center and described discipline as an initiating factor in one school's operation of a transition center:

The principal was an amazing guy. So [the school] had been an Aboriginal school, and all of a sudden these immigrants came in, and he wasn't prepared for that. And if I have the story right, there was a kid who had never ever been to school. At the end of the first day they [the school] called the cops on him. He was in Grade 3 or something, and this was a principal—I give him so much credit—who realized very soon that he had done it really wrong. And he wanted to learn, so we became an ally with him.

Stakeholders in learning institutions often face situations that are unfamiliar to them and they have had no prior experience managing. Refugee learners, given their extraordinary experiences, have presented such circumstances in schools. As the example above demonstrates, neither were the students prepared to enter a learning environment in which only the status quo is maintained, nor do educators have the tools to address the very diverse and unanticipated needs of students. Therefore, learning centers and programs to facilitate their integration can be highly valuable because they help both educators and students to grow.

A principal also commented on the integral role of the Transition Program in addressing disciplinary issues among refugee youth:

One of the big issues prior to that program was that kids that were coming into school were often being suspended for discipline issues that had more to do with their upbringing and their background and their ability to understand how things are different here.

The traumatic experiences, survival skills, and behavioral concerns that lead to disciplinary issues were major factors in initiating the Transition Program and continue to be major sources of problems for schools, community organizations, and, probably the most important, students and their families. A school principal explained that “these kids are coming to Edmonton and are being sent straight into a typical classroom” (School principal 1), but the Transition Program was a good resource for them:

Where they could land and learn readiness skills and learn the language, and also there is a lot of skills in schools that kids who go to school typically acquire, such as the ability to sit throughout the day and to handle scissors, crayons. These are things that kids typically learn in kindergarten, but if you don’t have those experiences, you don’t learn. So the idea was to help and support and integrate families.

Further, a member of the school board identified the Transition Program as a

three-year pilot project in which sites were identified to provide intense language support to refugee students. The Transition Program went beyond language instructional support, and provided services to help deal with trauma that the children were experiencing. Also classes were small in size which gave both students and educators the opportunity to interact on a one-to-one basis, providing better learning atmosphere for students.

In the Transition Program, students were placed “broadly by age, but not strictly but grade” (School principal 1). The placement was slightly differently at all of the chosen sites. Whereas one site opted to place Grades 4, 5, and 6 students together and

junior high students together, another site opted not only to group similar-age students together, but also to place different-age students in close proximity so that they could recreate the family support with which they were familiar at home. One principal noted that the program's placement was not intended to isolate refugee or ELL learners from the larger population within the school: "As students settled, they started going out to other classes as well, so they were learning to interact with the broader population as well" (School principal 1). The main feature of the program was that the language support included instructional language training for the three major languages that the students used, in addition to English-language support. An English teacher and three assistants who spoke the three main languages that the students in the school used, delivered the program (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2010). The language program initially began as an early learning program for three- and four-year-old children and then expanded to all students, including the junior high students in the school. The program was designed to ensure the smooth transition of students into regular programming within the school or another school in the catchment area,

but it had no set time; it was based on the adaption of the child and the academic progress, because if you are in Grade 7, you have lots of math and reading to catch up with, so that was really critical, the flexibility, smaller classroom.
(Community organizer)

The Transition Program focused on the major barrier that ELLs face, the language barrier, but it also addressed other issues of concern with migrant families, such as engaging parents and building foundational skills.

The Transition Program focused on another issue integral to students' success: parental engagement. Through collaborative support from various community

organizations, the program focused on encouraging parental engagement in the school.

Additionally, the program offered the teaching staff training and consultation:

There were . . . a number of consultants that worked with teachers to train on the job, and teachers that were placed on the job always had a background in ELL. We had consultants around behavior, around ELL, around math and those kinds of things that typically a teacher training doesn't include. I mean, it includes math, but how to teach an older child math is very different than a younger child. What are the key skills in math that will allow the child to be successful once they go to regular math? (School principal 1)

The Transition Program was designed to ensure refugee learners are provided with foundational skills to enroll in mainstream classes (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2010). The program provided both heritage and English language support, focused on ensuring students' emotional well-being and provided schools with resources to assist teachers and administrators in meeting the refugee learners' educational needs. However, the pilot project did not materialize as a permanent program within the school system and a formal review of the program was never commissioned. Given the rarity of initiating programs for marginalized students, particularly those from refugee backgrounds, it is important to learn from the Transition Program and to establish an initial understanding for use in the future development of programs and policies for refugee learners.

Evaluation of the Transition Pilot Program

For any policy or program to emerge as an enduring addition to existing programs and curricula requires formal evaluation of the successes or failures of the program. The lack of such a formal report for the Transition Program further highlights the lack of attention and significance placed on the learning experience of refugee learners in learning institutions. The evaluations of the Transition Program in this study are based on the participation of individuals who were involved in the program and were part of the

school system during the data-collection phase of this research study. The majority of the participants in this study believed that the program and its various components were successful:

I think the lesson learned from that was the very positive experience for the students. . . . In fact, I saw a student just two weeks ago that had been in the Transition Program, and his English was strong, and his engagement with school was very, very positive. I would attribute that to the early successes he had in the Transition Program. (School board representative 2, RS)

The language programming in the Transition Program included teaching students their native languages, which was aligned with recommendations from research on language literacy. Many years of research has demonstrated the importance of fostering first language, not only to enhance students' English-language acquisition, but also to acknowledge students, respect them for who they are, and allow their identity development to flourish (Cummins, 2000).

The school principals commented on several positive outcomes of the program.

The first important issue was better management of discipline issues upon establishment of the program:

My first year when the program started, we had a young student only 13 years old who came to school from Iraq from a refugee situation. On his first day he was in the program, but even there, on the first day he threatened somebody, and they were about to fight; but because of the program, we were able to intervene. We were able to bring him into my office, and with the help of an individual from the Mennonite Centre who was involved in the program as well, we were able to speak with him. . . . This boy was talking to me, and I didn't understand him, so of course I was going to hit him, as if it was the most natural reaction in the world. And where he came from, if you didn't understand him, then he wasn't your friend. (School principal 1)

Further, the program allowed teachers to tailor the teaching program specifically to the needs of the students to build a solid foundation of learning for them:

The outcome was good, very positive, very positive. One thing is that teachers want to teach, and to do that they need kids that have [been] taught the skills and ability to sit at their desks and understand how the school day works. It is difficult for a teacher that is not used to doing that, especially when it is an older child. . . . So the teacher that has that mindset can teach that as part of their lessons if they are doing a class for those kids. (School principal 1)

The community organizers also commented on the positive impact of the program on students and their families in terms of parental engagement. The schools, in collaboration with the community organizations, successfully reached out to parents by removing some of the cultural and logistical hurdles:

A lot of cultures don't think their input is needed or necessary or even appropriate, because the school does their thing and we do our thing, so that's the first hurdle. . . .

Then, of course, the other thing is the transportation or work schedules or languages: Is there going to be anybody there to translate for me so that I can understand what is going on? So we played a huge role in many schools in getting people out, but we only do that if we are part of the planning.

(Community organizer)

However, not all of the participants agreed on the success of the Transition pilot project. Some community organizations expressed disappointment with the program. Although they acknowledged that they had been invited to participate in the initial focus groups and consult with the school board and other community organizations, they were not satisfied with the design and delivery of the Transition Program. Therefore, the community organizers saw their current role within their own community as pivotal to their community's success as they believed that their organization provides programming tailored to the specific needs of the students within the community. Similarly, a school board member was not eager to declare the program a success because of a lack of evidence:

I can't tell you if it was successful or not. We had a Transition Center; that in itself is intangible evidence; testimonies of people who say that they couldn't have done it without you. And that's what would get you funding for the next year, if you can prove, "Look at this evidence. Look at what we did."

Given the neoliberal ideology is the system in which schools have to operate within and values such as assessments and accountability play significant role in the neoliberal system, it is difficult to understand how an initiative such as the Transition Program was designed and implemented without proper evaluation of the outcomes. Three years after the Transition pilot project began, the project ended without any report or data on the program. The two major reasons cited for the termination of the program were transportation and funding. Families found it difficult to provide the needed transportation for their children to access the program. More importantly, and as stated by the community organization representative and one of the school principals, district chose not to renew the Transition Program because of the cost. Schools were therefore left to bear the costs and were not able to provide "that optimal service anymore" (AB School district representative 2). Thus the schools that were part of the pilot project are no longer able to offer the extensive language and parental-engagement programs that they used to offer refugee learners and their families. Some of the schools have learned from their experiences with the Transition Program and are trying to provide similar programs, particularly in the area of discipline and parental engagement, in collaboration with various community organizations. Although schools with larger populations of refugees are trying to meet the needs of these learners, both policy makers and policy implementers identified areas where further work is required. In the following section I discuss areas that the interviewees identified that require further attention, including the

development of parent engagement with schools, placement and assessment, language learning, and teacher training.

Points of Consideration to Enrich the Education of Refugee Learners

Parental Engagement

Parents as partners in education are an integral element of students' success in education (Vincent, 1996). The parents-as-partners discourse relies on the engagement of parents with schools, as recipients of information, for the best educational outcome. Schools want parents to receive information on the programs that schools offer, their academic standards and their evaluation mechanisms in order for parents to become educated, involved and knowledgeable partners in the schooling of their children (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996). The traditional means of creating and engaging knowledgeable partners have been bringing parents into schools to learn parenting skills and about early-childhood education, giving them opportunities to volunteer, and involving them in their children's learning, such as in parent-teacher conferences (Epstein, 1995). Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy (2009) argued that these approaches target the middle-class mainstream population. As such, these traditional forms of parental engagement have failed to involve parents of immigrant and refugee students, who are typically not the middle-class mainstream population:

I am thinking of families and parents. There is a real disconnect between our traditional idea of how parents can support their kids and what parent engagement looks like and what our reality is. I don't know how much is that parents are understanding, because, depending on where you have been and what your experiences are, that may not be a parent role. (School principal)

Parental involvement with their children's learning was discussed and addressed differently by different research participant based on their own perspectives and

experiences. The consensus was that there is a disconnect between the parents of refugee students and the school system. However, the study participants understood this disconnect and interpreted it differently, depending on their location in the society and their personal knowledge and experiences.

The school trustee stated her uncertainty of the role that parents or even communities can be expected to play in bridging the gap between schools and communities.

Given the personal challenges that families face during the resettlement process and the political clout and leadership required to create any lasting change, how much families can engage is problematic. They have organization within the city, . . . a leader, but do they do a good enough job rallying their people and helping their people and communicating with their people? . . . But what I do know? And I'm sure you know this as well: that if they are struggling to pay their debts to the government, Mom working three jobs, where do you find the time to further engage with your community? You are just surviving; you're doing everything you can just to survive; you have nothing left to give after.

However, although the school principals were cognizant of the circumstances of refugee families, they saw the need for parental involvement in schools to enhance the educational experience of learners. They acknowledged the difficulties of involving refugee and immigrant families and the need to collaborate with various organizations to successfully engage parents in communication with the school and encourage them to participate in school programs. The study participants who worked directly with students and/or their parents had witnessed the struggles of students and their families and the negative impact of the struggles on the education of refugee youth. Therefore, they emphasized the importance of overcoming the disconnect between schools and parents to improve students' growth and educational achievement:

Many parents come here believing they have no role or responsibility; the school says all and does all, and you are just a bystander. So to help them understand the importance of that engagement and that it's appreciated and welcomed is something new. We talk about updating your operating system. There is a new cell phone out every six months, and we always get updated on the kinds of skills you need to operate your cell phone properly, so it's the same thing with welcoming new parents: How do you welcome them? What are the things you need to know about their former country, their former culture, and the culture that they are bringing here now? And how do you celebrate that? (School District Representative 2)

The teachers, school administrators, and policy makers concurred about the failure to update operating systems: "Our definition of parent involvement really hasn't been changed over a long time. . . . There are lots of parents, the best they can do is to get their kids to school on time, and they are fed, and that's it" (Principal 2).

Furthermore, although the community organizers who participated in this study also agreed with the school and school district representatives about the lack of parental engagement, they blamed the minimal communication on schools' insistence on maintaining the Eurocentric view of schooling and cultural preferences. According to the study participants, from the perspective of schools, the main goals of involving migrant parents in schools include to familiarize them with the mainstream's expectation of parenting, to assist them with resettlement, to ensure that they inform the schools of their children's medical and educational backgrounds, and to ensure that they become informed parents on the importance of assessments and their procedures. As the research has shown and the study participants affirmed, the vast majority of the goals of parental engagement involve the integration of parents into the Canadian mainstream. Limited or no programs are available to encourage parents to provide their input and to promote the two-way integration of newcomers into Canadian society rather than the assimilation model.

Understanding and updating the operating system, according to school board representative 1, makes a difference in how teachers and school administrations as agents in direct contact with students and their families can positively influence the relationship between school and families. One of the school principals involved in the Transition Program explained the ways that schools try to engage parents from refugee or immigrant backgrounds:

We have refugee families with a great deal of challenges coming to new culture and new language. I would say the majority of our refugee parents are also illiterate, so it adds another layer of complexity. . . . School has focused on supporting those families as a way we do things at the school. . . . What we typically do in September is, we take some information from the parents in terms of “Here is the information on what we like to talk about over the course of the year. Also let us know what you are interested in.” And from time to time we have individuals from the community who offer programs. We also offer during the day and after school programs that include English-language classes, citizenship classes, computer classes, sewing; we have a collective kitchen. And so that is just a matter of opening the school to agencies outside the school that offer those kinds of programs.

According to the school and community organizations, this particular school has successfully maintained parental engagement, and the program has generally succeeded in its goal:

Parent engagement in the school is positive because parents see, they probably learn, in the programs that they are attending, they are learning to assimilate and to cope with some of the cultural differences. But it also gives them a chance to see the school to be in the school during the school day, to see how their kids are interacting with other kids to see how schools in Canada function. Because it is very different from schools where they come from and in many cases parents haven’t been to school and kids haven’t been to school prior to landing in Canada and they don’t have a context for what schools really contain. (School principal 1)

As the school principal acknowledged, schools can play important roles in building a bridge between the school and students’ home support through various programming.

The two most important elements that have contributed to the success of the program have been the request for parental input and the creation of opportunities for parents to become involved in the school. The community organizers emphasized that successful parental engagement requires two-way communication between the school and parents, and the parents need to recognize that their input is valued. As a community organization member pointed out in reference to a school with the Transition Program:

The parents said, “We want to have our own meeting with the principal, and we want to meet every month and tell him what we need.” And he said okay. So we bring out food; we bring the parents; it’s all translated. That is how it started, so that’s seven years ago or so. I just did a reflective evaluation with a lot of the parents and at the school, and they said, “This year wasn’t a good year. Nobody asks us what we need. Last year was better.” So parents know right away, they can tell right away if people are telling them what they need, and they hate that. Immigrants hate being told what they need; they want to tell us what they need and then to tell us how to meet the need too. They want to have an input. I think it’s fair enough; I think we’re all like that: I know what I need, and I know how to get there; I need help to get there; just listen to me. (Community Organization Representative)

It is interesting to note that as demonstrated through the interviews the school principals who valued parental engagement beyond the usual school practice and school-district requirement were those who came from minority groups or had faced the challenges of being a minority family in a foreign land. Reflecting on those experiences motivated these principals to not only acknowledge the importance of parental engagement, but also go beyond and build relationships to motivate and encourage parents so that they would participate in school activities. Conversely, although some of the school administrators recognized the importance of parental engagement, they had no personal experience with or could not relate to the experience of minorities. They also found it more difficult to connect to parents on a deeper level. In those learning

institutions the community organizations that work with schools bridge the relationship between schools and parents:

There is Boys and Girls Club, they call it [a school club]. They have a walking bus; they come to school [every morning] and at the end of every day. The parents have to sign, but then they [the club supervisors] take them to one of the housing units a couple of blocks away, and they do an after-school program till 7:00, and they also feed the kids. And there is a school-age one and right next door preschool, and so they have been a good connection with some of the families, because we might have four kids; they come to school in the morning, and they go there after school, and we never make contact with the parent. But the Boys and Girls staff do, so we contact through them. (School principal 2)

All of the principals, teachers, and community-organization members acknowledged the important role of parents in the school community. Therefore, it is important for various stakeholders to be cognizant of their own knowledge, role and power within their organization and ensure collaborations are made in a way that creates positive changes in students' educational journey.

Placement and Assessment

Refugee youths' first experience with the school system is the assessment of their language ability and placement at an appropriate grade level. Assessment and placement have been major hurdles for schools, students, and their families. The majority of students who enter school as refugees do not have the mastery of an English or French language. Additionally, because their schooling might have been interrupted or they might have had no formal education, they might not be fluent in their native languages either. Schools utilize the assessment procedures that school districts make available to them to evaluate students and place them at an appropriate level of education. As I noted earlier, the tests only evaluate language ability, and students are benchmarked for English classes. In elementary schools, students are placed in grades based on their age and

pulled out of class for English-language instruction. Higher grade students enrolled in ELL classes are registered in option courses according to the age placement but are not placed in core subject classes until they have gained proficiency in English or French. This mode of placement and assessment results in complexities during students' education. As the school principal 1 indicated, current assessment procedures can be a major factor in students' lack of success from the onset:

We use the Canadian Test of Basic Skills as a reading assessment. Our staff has some training in oral assessment as well. . . . One of the great issues related to that is that kids are put in learning groups by age, and I know it is very difficult for our immigrant parents to understand. It also makes it that much more difficult in classrooms because the range is huge. Let's say a child comes in at Grade 4 and has no English skills, and the research shows it takes seven years for that child to catch up, and all that time they are one of the lowest kids in the class. That affects the person's self-image, and we know that one of the things that research strongly points to it is that, if kids believe they are not going to be successful, they are not going to be successful; it is what students and teachers believe more than anything else.

Additionally, assessment focuses mainly on English-language ability, with the goal of gaining insight into students' comprehension, reading, writing, and listening skills. This provides schools with evaluative information on how well these students will perform in all subjects. However, as a teacher in the study stated, students, particularly at the early junior high level, might have much higher ability in arithmetic than in English. However, the lack of English knowledge prevents them from revealing their arithmetic capabilities. Therefore, assessment that focuses solely on English-language ability fails to determine students' background knowledge. Further, as the literature on language acquisition has demonstrated and according to school district policies, building on students' native language accelerates their English-language proficiency. Yet, no assessment is available to identify students' background knowledge in their own

language. One of the school principals explained that information on students' native-language ability is essential to better understand their particular learning needs:

I know we have one child that we were concerned about, and we told the mom, "Well, this is what she [the student] is doing here, and that is her second year with us, and we are not seeing improvement." And Mom was saying, "No, it is the same at home." And that's important to know, whether it is another language thing or if there are issues across the board, and that is a different issue.

Therefore, assessment needs to be undertaken for the purposes of understanding students' existing knowledge and possible developmental impairments. As such, assessments need to consider students' socio-cultural background. The ability of educational institutions to evaluate students in various subjects allows for schools to provide a purposeful and holistic programming for their students. Such placement procedures value students and demonstrate schools' commitment to ensuring students' successful learning. Further, identifying possible developmental impairments will allow for the formulation of programming which facilitates learning improvement. If proper assessment is not done, the potential learning inabilities of students due to cognitive or developmental issues can be attributed to their lack of fluency in English language.

In junior high and high school, migrant students with limited English language ability are placed mainly in ESL and optional courses until they have achieved a certain level of proficiency in English and can enroll in core subjects. This mode of enrollment for older students hinders their chances of obtaining their diplomas and the possibility of attending postsecondary education. One of the biggest concerns of the school teachers, social workers, and community organizers was the inability of ELL students in high school to obtain their diplomas and its negative impact on their sense of belonging. Also,

the barriers they face in receiving their diplomas create a disconnect between learners and schools and connection to schools.

Further, all of the participants at every level—school district representatives, principals, teachers, and community organizers, identified implementation concerns with the assessment procedures:

That is a big bone [assessment] that we are struggling with. We have a K-12 English proficiency test for new Canadians. We just spent the last two years trying to coach and teach teachers how to benchmark, [but] 18,279 students makes benchmarking onerous, so we need to come across some strategies that are not as onerous. So we are looking at electronic benchmarking; but, more importantly, we have to connect it to programming in curriculum instruction, and the two haven't been tied together necessarily. So the teachers are not using the results of the benchmarking in their instructional plan for these students. We are asking schools to do the benchmarking in the spring so they can plan their programs for the fall when they are going to have the students back. There are lots of pushbacks. (School District Representative 2)

Although all of the study participants were aware of English assessment tests, many were not familiar with the procedures and had requested that other school staff take on the responsibility for assessment. School principal 2 indicated that the tests are “extremely cumbersome. It’s a lot more work than valued by the teacher.”

Additionally, as one of the community organization member, the ESL consultant, and the cultural broker noted, a higher number of refugee learners are assessed for behavioral and cognitive deficits. These types of assessments complicate the relationships among schools, parents, and community organizations. Schools stress the importance and need for assessing students for behavioral and cognitive concerns to obtain funding for services to meet the students’ needs: “For us the special needs is connected to funding which gets the resources that will help the kids” (School principal 2). However, schools face challenges in administering the assessments on

several fronts. As the school principal 2 commented that accessing assessments through school districts is “getting more difficult,” and “you have to jump through many hoops.” On the other hand, parents do not always agree that assessments are necessary or that the outcome of assessments is accurate. Many refugee families, their larger communities, and cultural brokers affiliated with schools have claimed that children from refugee backgrounds are assessed at a higher level proportionally and are labeled for various cognitive and behavioral disorders. Thus families resist various forms of assessment. A community organization representative in this study acknowledged the distrust among families and schools regarding the assessment procedure. Thus, the community organization “took the lead in conjunction with schools” to create an assessment plan. Assessment includes “tools that were developed for parents to understand the process but also really to help the schools to understand a sensitive approach to assessment with newcomer families.” Further, the community organization representative stated that one of the conditions for conducting an assessment is that schools must postpone assessments for a given period of time. However, although the community organizer believed that the school district and schools have adopted assessment as a policy, no other study participant discussed or even acknowledged the existence of such an assessment policy.

Assessment and placement are the most fundamental stepping stones in the journey of refugee youth through the education system. However, as the study participants acknowledged, placement and assessment are also unresolved and unattended issues in the education of ELLs. The only document that addressed the need for assessment is one on ESL benchmarking (ESL Benchmarks, 2010), but the assessment has a multitude of problems. The teachers and principals pointed out that it is so

cumbersome that the teaching staff does not value its outcomes. The school district staff validated this statement and discussed the pushback against benchmarking and assessment. Further, the value of benchmarking is decried because no system is in place to date to track the progress of refugee youth enrolled in ELL programs throughout their education. The assessment procedure falls short in assessing students in all instructional programming and fails to assess students' knowledge in their native language. However, the most important deficiency in the current system of assessment is that the criteria do not address the larger question of the purpose of student assessment: Are students being assessed to determine whether they have the knowledge required to succeed in mainstream education, or are they assessed to determine their current level of education and to build new experiences and learnings?

Language

English or French language proficiency is one of the most important factors in ensuring academic success in Canadian educational institutions. However, gaining language proficiency is the major challenge that refugee youth face. Most students from a refugee background do not have the required proficiency in the English language. As a result, they are placed in ELL programs. Linked and interconnected with the issue of assessment is the major hurdle of language. According to provincial policy, ELL programming is funded and offered to students who are three years behind in their academic and English-language proficiency. Therefore, elementary students do not receive the funding that is required for ELL classes. One of the school principals in the study stated that it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher, along with ESL consultants and literacy staff, to ensure that students acquire the needed English-language

skills and vocabulary. Additionally, students are funded for a maximum of 5 years to meet their English-language needs, although research has clearly demonstrated that students with interrupted or no formal schooling require 7 to 10 years of training (Cummins, 2000). The limited number of years of available funding for English-language training was a topic of concern for all of the policy implementers because the training is usually insufficient to ensure these students' academic success. Moreover, students who come to Canada at the junior high or high school level do not have sufficient time to meet their graduation requirements:

There is a provincial policy; it basically says when you are in your first three levels of English language learning, obviously you don't have enough language to really partake in a discipline you are studying. For example, physics in a second language can be very challenging. But once you pass that level, and up to level 5, you are an English-language learner, but you have, in theory, enough language. Sometimes if you are in Grade 7, you will not have enough years to achieve that, and we know that, so there has to be a policy that enables you to have extra education to get you through your high school graduation. (School district representative 2)

The inability of students who enter educational institutions during their teenage years to meet the requirement for graduation and the limited opportunity to enter post-secondary schools was one of the concerns of cultural brokers and community organizations that work with youth. Students' inability to foresee their success in school creates distance between students and schools in terms of their engagement in school and their ability to identify themselves within the school community. According to the study participants, the lack of proficiency in the English language and the lack of value for students' native language also create distance between students and their school community in several ways. As I mentioned earlier, when students realize that they will not be able to graduate with the required credentials, they lose their motivation to

continue learning. Additionally, the lack of language ability prevents students from participating in school activities and culminates in their isolation and disengagement from their peers and school (Osterman, 2000).

The dependency of language learners on their ESL scores to enroll in core subjects has become a contested matter that further decreases students' sense of belonging in their school. Studies that have focused on the experiences of refugee youth learners in school have identified that the students value learning, but that persistence in the use of the English language as the only mode of knowledge transfer is a barrier to closing the educational gap between refugee and mainstream students (Cummins, 2001; Ngo, 2009a). Montero, Ibrahim, Loomis, and Newmaster (2012) explained that, "among linguistically diverse populations, monolingual language practices nurture individualism and competition, rather than community and collaboration, which may contribute to a students' poor sense of school belonging" (p. 14). Therefore, to enhance students' sense of belonging within a school, it is important to acknowledge their knowledge of their native language and utilize that knowledge as a resource to enrich the newly arrived students' learning experience in various subjects. Designing bilingual classrooms and co-teaching subjects with ESL teachers are some of the means through which students can begin to learn subject matter while improving their knowledge of the English language.

Furthermore, the knowledge and ability to communicate in English become a form of power for students and teaching staff who hold that knowledge. It creates an imbalance among native speakers and ELLs, because ELLs are unable to partake in learning and activities on par with other students. There already exists an imbalance of

power between teachers and students, and this imbalance is further broadened when students feel inadequate because of their lack of English skills. In turn, it creates a feeling of inferiority and even results in a deficit model for ELL students. In a study that focused on the experiences of minority students' sense of belonging in school, Shultz, Pillay, and Asadi (2016) found that the student participants noted the disapproval they faced from their peers and teachers if they spoke in their native language:

[In regular school] they make you feel different on purpose. We do geography and they say, "Oh, everyone is the same; everyone can speak their own language. But why can't I do [speak my language] Because no one understands me. So why do they tell me I can [everyone can speak their own language]?"

The literature on ELLs in school has demonstrated students' need to communicate with other students who speak the same language to support their educational needs. The students in Shultz et al.'s (2016) and Montero et al.'s (2012) research identified other students from their country of origin as important sources of information to manage the daily needs of schooling and for educational support. Also, as I mentioned earlier, because of their lack of proficiency in English, ELLs feel isolated and are unable to participate in school activities. As such their main form of socialization in school is with students who speak a similar language. Therefore, it is essential that students' native languages be valued and that these students benefit from the assets and knowledge that they already have while they build on and enhance their English-language skills. Value for heritage languages can be demonstrated by helping ELL to improve their heritage language if possible. Allowing students to communicate with others who speak the same heritage language and to read and write in their own language while they also learn the English language are means to demonstrating valuing heritage languages. Further,

promoting bilingual teaching instructions in classrooms establishes foundations for inclusion based on valuing all students.

As critical theorists and linguists such as Cummins (2000), Fairclough (1992), Norton (2013), and Toohey (2000) pointed out, language goes beyond descriptive words and includes the social, textual, and psychological aspects that originate in an individual's cultural and social context. This realization is emerging within the school system, but not everyone in the educational organization has fully embraced or supported it yet. A school board representative acknowledged the importance of a first language and understanding the cultural context of the language: "I reel against people who say its interpretation. It is not interpretation, translation we need for language. It is understanding the subtleties and nuances of a language" (School Board Representative 1). It is understanding the subtleties and nuances that can help to build a bridge between schools and families and enhance students' sense of belonging in the schools. Equally, if the school staff do not understand the subtleties of their students' culture and language, the students will become further disengaged from school. A school principal stressed the importance of making available cultural brokers and social workers to work along-side their staff. Schools utilize the skills and abilities of cultural brokers and social workers to create a better understanding of minority students for the staff and help students with their integration in a new environment:

Last year, for example, with a group of girls who were just having real difficulties getting along, it seemed to me and to the teacher like they were always at each other, very loud and angry and in tears. Junior high drama, but in Grade 5—you know that kind of stuff. So actually our family therapist—because she does some group work—did a weekly lunch, and there were definitely some issues. But a lot of what I was perceiving maybe as more of a conflict that they were—was partly a cultural piece around kids talk like their families. It's loud at home, and that's what we do. (School principal 2)

The study participants identified language as an integral part of students' success in their education. At the same time the role of language is complex. Language plays a crucial role in students' identity development, educational success and developing a sense of belonging. Further, funding, assessment and delivering English language lessons is very complex and involves multiple groups and agencies. Funding for ELLs is contested because of the power differential between those who can provide the services and funding and those who need them. Given the lack of familiarity with the new culture students who need English language training and their families do not have the necessary skills and tools to advocate for funding. Also, there is a lack of representation or limited representation from minorities in the governing bodies, therefore student concerns are not being heard or taken seriously. Therefore, it is crucial to be cognizant of the issue of representation and its impact and influence during the process of policy design.

Given that a quarter of the students enrolled in school are ELLs, school boards and schools are aware of the value of language training; however, they differ in how they envision the delivery of the programs. While some study participants maintained that funding shouldn't always be the rationale for providing services, others stressed that funding is an important element of the provision of services. Given the emphasis on and importance of the English language, students find it difficult to see themselves as accepted within the larger society and find it more difficult to integrate. Thus language, because of its power, has an impact on students' lives in various ways and is an important topic that needs to be considered seriously by all of the stakeholders in the education system. As Bourdieu and Thompson (1998) state, linguistic exchanges in all contexts mirror and display the social structure of the culture. Language use in all settings

demonstrates power relations between those who have skills in the language and its nuances and can benefit from them and those who do not. Therefore, power based on language and how it should be used is perpetuated constantly in all settings, whether through insignificant encounters or significant documents that specify which language should be used and its place in society.

In the following section I discuss a missing link that the study participants identified that is significant in the education of minorities: teacher education.

Teaching Philosophies and Teacher Training

Thus far I have discussed the areas of parental engagement, assessment, and placement, as well as the important and multifaceted role language plays in learning experience of refugee learners. One of the underlying factors that emerged from the interviews that I conducted in this study that has an effect on all of these areas is teaching staff's preparedness and teaching philosophies. Teachers act as frontline workers and the first point of contact for students and their families. They play an integral role in welcoming the students, assessing them, and providing them with the necessary resources and instructional learning. Teachers therefore require training to develop an awareness of the circumstances that refugee learners face and the ability to help these students to learn. Teachers need the skill to navigate students' existing knowledge and their educational needs. It is interesting that the research findings did not reveal a consensus among the policy makers or policy implementers in terms of teachers' preparedness and teacher training. Some of the policy makers believed that teachers are not ready in terms of awareness or training to provide the teaching that refugee youth need; other research

participants argued that the Universal Design Learning (UDL) that the school district developed will mitigate the deficiencies in teacher training programs.

A school trustee and a school district representative recognized teachers' lack of ESL training but believed that UDL has a number of components that teachers can use in classes with a large number of minority students: "Our teachers are taught to look for the positive aspects of the individual, the student, not dwelling on the deficit of the child" (School Trustee). However, in the interviews with the teachers and principals, they never mentioned the UDL document or its use. The teachers acknowledged the difficulty of teaching refugees who have no prior schooling, particularly students who are placed at higher levels based on their age. One teacher recalled a meeting she had requested with a mother of a newly arrived refugee youth to discuss the student's lack of knowledge of the multiplication table and the importance of helping the student with the concept of multiplication. The meeting began with the mother sharing the child's experience of witnessing authorities shooting his father beside their tent in their camp. After the disclosure, the teacher admitted her inability to discuss her concern with the mother. Although she was aware of the importance of multiplication as a knowledge set, she did not have the training or the resources to help the student who had witnessed such trauma. The principals echoed this concept; one suggested that teachers need further training to

gain more understanding around being trauma sensitive and understanding the long-term impact and what that looks like in kids. Lots of people interpret things as defiance or misbehavior, but it's really, they don't know what else to do. Kids are not capable of responding. (School principal 2)

Therefore, philosophies, training, and resources that would properly include refugee learners involve essential knowledge and skills for educators because they have the most interaction with and impact on these newcomers' educational attainment.

As the policy makers and policy implementers acknowledged, educational organizations lack diversity in their teaching staff. The study participants emphasized the importance of students being able to relate to teachers, classroom instruction, and the curriculum. Equally important is that all teachers and administrators need to be aware of and knowledgeable about their students' backgrounds and cultures. Further, the teachers, cultural brokers, and community organizations discussed the importance of mentoring for all students, but particularly for refugee youth learners. Currently, community organizations that support more vulnerable schools and communities are providing the needed mentorship and role modeling:

Our school here, I think it's improved a lot during the last years, largely because we had a stable population. Our teachers have done a lot of learning informally from working with our kids. One of our real great things here is that we have cultural brokers from various organizations who come in and support us, and so I think we've come a long way. I remember four years ago our Grade 2 class, their first theme was pirates, and our Somali parents were upset with us. To them, "Pirates are not Pirates of the Caribbean," they said. "Because we are Somalis, you think we are all pirates." And they saw pirates very much how Canadian parents would see terrorists as a theme in class. So that's probably where most teachers in Edmonton Public Schools still are at that level. (School principal 1)

The principals who participated in this study asserted that recent teacher graduates are receiving more training. However, the community organization representative believed teachers could benefit from further training in diversity, she added "the training that teachers require to teach their culturally diverse students "effectively" improves with the training that comes from spending time in schools and with students and cultural brokers." The school principals noted that the majority of teachers who stay in a school are passionate about working with the student population in that school. The principals preferred to hire teachers who are recent graduates, because they "are probably better off

than a teacher who came from a school that didn't have a lot of cultural diversity”
(School principal 2).

Another shortfall of schools' teaching staff that the principals and policy makers acknowledged is the schools' inability to hire instructional process specialists because of budgetary restrictions or lack of information. Instructional process specialist training goes beyond curriculum. Individuals who have gone through the training are cognizant of the demographic, cultural and technological changes within schools. Their training helps them to respond to demographic and technological challenges as well as to students' learning needs through a transformative curriculum design:

We hired curricular specialists; we didn't hire people that were instructional process specialists. So when it gets to decoding and understanding the acquisition of the language, we don't have specialists in our area, so it makes it really, really difficult for teachers to understand that they don't teach curriculum, but they teach kids, and they need to build that relationship. (School board representative 2)

As the study participant noted, education and the delivery of instruction are multifaceted and require collaboration among various educational professionals to build a comprehensive model for education and instructional delivery to meet the various needs of students.

Community organizations were the most concerned group about teacher training and its impact on student learning and engagement in school. A community organizer stated:

For the teachers, I don't think there is any mandated cultural competency, and we struggle. . . . How can you have a policy, because most of it is around compassion and empathy and curiosity and interest? And how can you legislate that? . . . But what I don't understand, there are a few things that could be mandated. . . . All university graduates, if they have to spend two weeks in a place like [name of school], living with us, that would already do something.

They do their student teaching, but they would have to do something in a school with a high number of immigrant-population shadow community workers. That's an idea that would groom future teachers.

The community organizers stated that cultural competency and the ability to understand pre-migration stories are crucial to enable teachers to build empathy. However, she argued that empathy must be two way: "we work with building empathy with kids, but if the teachers don't have it or model it, then there is a disconnect there." Learning institutions have a twofold responsibility in terms of education. They need to offer newcomer students learning opportunities to ensure that they can integrate into their new home country. Further, learning institutions must also be aware that they need to learn about their students and their students' life experiences both to grow as educators and to be able to effectively and positively educate and impact their students' lives.

The objective of education should go beyond knowledge transfer from teachers to pupils, it needs to enhance students' sense of belonging and encourage lifelong learning. As bell hooks (1994) points out education should be offered as a "practice of freedom" (p. 15), it needs to provide a space for students to feel safe to explore and become engaged learners and critical thinkers. Therefore, teaching philosophies and teacher training need to instill in teachers of the future their important role in students' lives and their connection to learning and their communities. As bell hooks stated, "To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (p. 13). The principals were familiar with such teaching philosophies, and one of them admitted that

I think it is not possible given the status quo in terms of the support schools typically get. So, for example, the early learning program I talked about. We

have the multicultural co-op, we have cultural liaisons who come in, and they teach kids from different cultures, not about culture, but they look for those things [cultural practices] and so forth. . . . I think the reality is that it is not going to happen without a great deal more support and complete shift in outlook on the part of the teacher as well. (School principal 1)

For preservice teachers to receive the education that hooks prescribed, they need support from larger societal institutions such as educational institutions, whether as students or educators, as well as from their colleagues. Teachers who embrace two-way integration and respect diversity have to be provided with resources and supported within their institutions.

Once again with regard to teaching philosophies and teaching practices, we face the issues of how policy makers create, understand, and enact policies. The policy makers and implementers agreed that teacher training programs generally do not prepare graduating teachers with the skills that they need to instruct and educate minority learners. Additionally, schools in general are hesitant to hire staff who are trained to adapt the curriculum based on students' needs and the gaps in the curriculum, due to limited funding resources. However, although some of the policy makers believed that current instructional policies such as UDL will meet the varying needs of teachers and students, the policy implementers contended that teachers alone, with their current training, will not be able to provide the instructional programming and effective education that students need. Therefore, the education of students becomes a community endeavor. It is important to involve community organizations in helping teachers to understand students' experiences and current struggles during settlement. Community workers and cultural organizations should help bridge the gap between students, their families, and their school community. Developing a two-way model of integration

between schools and newcomer youth and their families will bridge the gap, promote multiliteracy education, and provide the means for parents to become engaged in the school community. In addition, community members should become engaged in mentoring and training youth through after-school programming.

The research findings from this study indicate that educational organizations as a system value teaching philosophies that take into consideration students' knowledge and experiences and ensure that education goes beyond the transfer and sharing of knowledge to fostering the growth of the intellectual, developing sense of identity and belonging. However, the policy implementers claimed that under the current neo-liberal system, it becomes challenging for schools to adhering to their teaching philosophies. Policy makers and school administrators acknowledged the lack of diversity of the staff and minimal training and knowledge resources to guide the teaching staff in addressing the diverse needs of students. They also stated that achieving an effective educational environment is not an attainable goal simply with more extensive teacher training.

Data from the study identified several factors outlined by research participants as necessary for educators to be able to create a learning atmosphere to meet the diverse needs of students in their classrooms and be able to cultivate critical and engage learning. Factors discussed included: (a) a transformation in educational goals throughout the education system, (b) changes to the current standardized measurement of knowledge and processes of school rankings, (c) the realization that schools as lone entities are not able to meet the diverse and layered needs of students and their parents and that the priorities that policy makers set need to be changed, (d) collaboration with various governing bodies and organizations, and (e) the understanding of all stakeholders. The features

outlined above were points that the study participants raised as necessary modifications to educational institutions to ensure a meaningful learning experience for learners. The discussion emphasized the complexity of education system and the need for all stakeholders and facets of organizations to work towards the creation of learning environment where diversity of learners is accepted and all learners are valued members of the learning community.

Conclusion

Schools face having to educate diverse group of learners with different physical and mental needs as well as from different backgrounds and with different histories. Among this diverse group of learners are refugee youth whose needs must be addressed in learning institutions. Although diversity exists among students, they all must benefit educationally from schooling and feel empowered and belonged in the society in which they live. Refugee learners are among marginalized populations whose needs have not been thoroughly acknowledged and met. In Alberta, school districts have only recently begun to document the number of refugee learners and recognize their presence in schools. The school district that participated in the study had initiated a program for refugee youth that it established to meet the need for refugee youth to acquire foundational skills and to address other particular needs and circumstances. However, the program was neither evaluated formally nor continued to serve the educational needs of refugee youth. Policy makers and educators in this study who were involved in the program acknowledged that they gained valuable knowledge in educating and integrating refugee newcomers. The educational expertise and resources to integrate refugee learners

into schools is in its infancy in Alberta, and students, educators, and policy makers still have many obstacles and barriers to overcome.

Some of the important points of consideration that the study participants discussed that need to be resolved to create a better learning environment for refugee learners is the importance of establishing proper assessment and placement to place refugee learners at the appropriate level of learning and monitor their progress based on the knowledge gained. Language, its important role, and means of instruction are other crucial points that the study participants identified. As all of the study participants in Alberta acknowledged, English language acquisition is one of most important factors in the prediction of students' success. However, the issue of language is very poorly addressed, as it has limited funding, the limited number of ESL educators, and the ineffective modes of education. In terms of pedagogy, the study participants explored the important role of teachers in influencing not only the educational success of their students, but also students' sense of self. Thus, they recommended more training for educators to be able to teach students from diverse backgrounds. Further teacher training will be fruitful only if the underlying teaching philosophies are based on inclusion and acceptance.

Finally, the study participants debated the role of families in the success of their children's education and discussed how to establish links between schools and the parents of newcomer families. The majority of the discussion on parental engagement was based on existing and accepted Eurocentric models. However, some of the study participants acknowledged the necessity of modifying the traditional means of parental engagement. Education and its delivery are complex and multifaceted, and for all students to reach

their educational goals, policy design must address their needs. Important points of consideration in the education of refugee learners were raised in this study that need to be addressed as steppingstones for learners to begin to feel that they belong in a school system.

**CHAPTER 8: CASE STUDY OF LEARNING INSTITUTIONS
THAT WELCOME REFUGEE LEARNERS
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

The province of BC is home to a large population of newcomers. In a *Vancouver Sun* editorial in 2007, the author estimated that by 2017, one third of the students enrolled in schools will speak native languages other than English or French (as cited in Gibson & Mumford, 2012). I found no statistics on the number of refugee youth across the province, but the data available for 2001–2010 reveal an increase of almost 16,000 ESL students across the province. Ironically, as the number of students has increased, the number of ESL teachers has decreased from 1,015.6 to 687.5 (Steeves, 2012). As I explained in the methodology chapter, the schools in which I received permission to conduct my study were specifically designed to cater to the needs of migrants, particularly refugee learners, among their larger mainstream student population. The study does not claim that districts or schools examined in this research were representative of the schools in the province. However, the districts and the school can be considered as model schools that demonstrate the possibility of creating an engaging learning environment even in the most complicated of circumstances. As the case study described, creating a system of engaged learners is possible, if educators take the time to learn about their students, and understand that all students have the right to fulfill their educational desires. Moreover, in order to ensure that students achieve their educational goals, teachers were driven to create multiple means for them to achieve that goal. Further, I argue that although educators' passion, understanding, and compassion are essential to creating an engaging learning atmosphere, equally crucial are the

understanding and support of policy makers and engaged citizens within the districts. This chapter begins by describing the foundational philosophy for the program development and design. The three pillars upon which the program was based on are academic growth, social and emotional growth, and administrative support. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of the program.

Foundational Philosophy of the Programs

BC's education policies do not target refugee learners specifically as a distinct group of learners. Similar to other provinces in Canada, its policies are drafted and designed in general terms for all newcomer students. However, the practices and programs of the schools and districts that participated in the study are driven by the necessity to meet the needs of migrants since the late 1800s. The communities have historically served waves of newcomers from Scotland, Ireland, and England, to recent newcomers from Afghanistan, Rwanda and Iraq. In 2006, the newly built school in a low-income area with a high population of migrants faced many challenges, but the challenge that overrode all of the others was to provide a "meaningful and effective education" for the large number of refugee learners in the school (BC School principal). The school principal described this need as providing "as normal a school experience for our refugee students as we do for our other students." Further, he stressed the importance of such programming for refugee youth: "Because of lack of economic opportunity, feelings of hopelessness, many of these guys can actually be targeted by gangs because they know these kids, so we are going to prevent that, knowing what is going to happen." It is interesting to note that among all research participants in this study, the administrators in BC were among the few who were aware of the number of the learners

from a refugee background in their institution. The principal in British Columbia stated that at one point refugees constituted over 15% of the total population of the school, but the numbers have decreased as a result of the lack of access to housing for low-income families within the district. A School Board representative from another district, in a lower socio-economic area of BC noted that the number of refugee learners that it serves has increased to 15% of the total population. According to the policy makers and educators, the underlying foundation for successful programming is valuing children, their families, and the children's learning: "I think one of the things that is really important for us in our education, what we value, which is not necessarily a policy statement in BC in education, is that we really care about the students" (School District Representative BC). This representative elaborated on the practical aspect of valuing all learners:

Those awareness and understanding pieces are huge, and being patient and empathetic and letting people know they are cared for and you're welcome as parents who don't speak much English; it doesn't mean that they are not as valued as others.

The study participants were very clear about the value they placed on the students and their families.

Program Development

The inspiring factor in the design and development of programs specifically for refugee youth is the recognition of students who enter Canada as refugees: the similarities of their backgrounds because of their forced migration and, at the same time, the lack of homogeneity among newcomer students. As the BC school principal acknowledged the importance of diverse knowledge and languages:

One of the things we discovered long time ago was that there are fundamental differences between our ESL kids. While kids coming from China, Korea, Hong Kong, those places, may not necessarily have their English down, they are literate in the language of school.

However, the school principal continued, some refugee learners “are illiterate in English, but they also don’t know the language of school; they don’t know the unwritten rules of schooling.” Further, the school district representative explained that “different refugee groups seem to need partly different things.” Clearly, the development and implementation of the program takes into consideration the students and their particular needs. Recognition of the students is not limited to their past experiences, knowledge, and history, but listening, understanding and valuing students’ goals and their desired educational outcomes. Focusing on and connecting with students’ desires and goals is particularly essential to ensure their engagement with education. As Gunderson (n.d.) indicated, 61% of ESL students in Grades 10 to 12 disappear from the school system, and 20% return to complete their high school diploma. However, 40% of ESL students are unaccounted for when they drop out of educational institutions (Gunderson, n.d.).

Educators and administrators design and develop programs to meet the particular needs of specific groups as well as the demands of funding sources. In doing so, not only do they strive to meet students’ needs, but they also design the programs to align with their schools’ philosophies to meet the larger goals that school districts and governing agencies set. Given that education policies are being designed in a neoliberal context, the goal of education is to meet market demands (Shah, 2010; Taylor, 2001). Newcomer students were given the message that new migrants are welcomed to help alleviate the labor-market shortage, in a conference organized by immigrant and refugee students. The deputy education minister stated, “We want to encourage people from

other countries, particularly from key great nations, to come and work here; and it fits with our labor policy and programs.” The work-experience programs in the schools that participated in this study and their communities prepare students for the labor market. School-to-work programs focus on the skills that employees require to ensure that students will be successful in the workplace, such as time management, communication skills, and punctuality:

It [the program] gives them [refugee students] an opportunity to see what it’s like . . . when they get into the community. They realize they have to be on time—“If you’re late five minutes, they are going to dock your pay”—and that kind of stuff, so it is a good, real-life opportunity. (Educator, BC)

Given the barriers newcomer youth face in completing their high school requirements and entering into postsecondary institutions, focusing on preparing students for the labor market alone disregards students’ potential goals and abilities. Such practices signal to students that society does not believe that they can fully integrate into all levels of society. However, to create a meaningful welcoming atmosphere, schools also offered some alternative means to ensure that interested students can complete their education by bridging to adult education and thus enter postsecondary school.

The program also goes beyond teaching students skills for success in the Canadian workforce; it encourages them to discover their strengths and plan for success. Availability of programming that allows continuation of education creates an interest in students to engage with schooling. Students develop a sense of hope as they can envision the possibility of furthering their sense of self and realizing their goals. Educators and policy makers involved in the program recognize that its success depends on the acknowledgement of each student as a unique individual; therefore, their journeys, their strengths, and the meaning of success to each student vary vastly. The role of educators

is to offer students programming that will help them to reach their potential as they envision success. Therefore, one of the main features of the program is its focus on students who arrive in Canada during their later teen years and the student's connection to adult programming to ensure they can continue with their education,

because many of these guys can't graduate in a traditional sort of timeline. It was connecting them to adult grad and trying to do the best job we could to connect them; for, while we had them, we would do whatever that we could do with them, and then we would transition them to other organizations like college. (School principal BC)

In the following section I present details of the program developed in the learning institutions with high refugee and migrant learners in the two districts that participated in the study. The programs are designed with a focus on three main aspects: (a) students' academic growth, (b) students' social and emotional growth, and (c) administrative support.

Academic Growth

Students' academic learning begins by identifying their educational gaps, specifically in reading, writing, and numeracy. Most notably, the school administrators recognize refugee students as a distinct group of learners, but they further understand the lack of homogeneity among the refugee learners. As a district representative explained, "First of all is looking at how they get their education. So what kind of educational programs need to be provided to address any particular gap, if there are any at all?" The recognition of students as distinct learners with particular needs and strengths helps to develop programming that challenges them but still helps them to relate to the curriculum, the level of programming and to grow academically. The initial program offered to most students is intensive ESL, in which students are placed based on their

assessment results. In recognition of the fact that some refugee learners also lack the language of schooling, they additionally enroll in modified elective courses to fill the gaps:

Initially when school started, one of the things that we really noticed was that the kids simply didn't have any experience with things that we would take for granted, like computers. They are kind of elective classes that kids [nonrefugees or recent immigrants], they do fine in it because they have experience with it. Here they [refugee learners] just didn't have experience with computers, they didn't have experience with cooking in foods classes, so we ended up having to create electives to introduce them to that sort of stuff. (School principal BC)

For refugee learners to benefit from their education equally with other students, it is important that they learn and develop the same skills that other students have acquired. Educators and school administration must be cognizant of their students' needs and, with assistance from their district, adjust or develop programs to support their students' learning. Further, delivery of the program for students with special needs is important to consider.

Two teachers deliver the lessons, depending on the funding, in small classes that are capped at 15 students. Additionally, a youth and family worker, a work-placement coach, and "a psychologist who comes a couple of times a semester" (Educator BC) support the program. Students in a class range from 12 to 17 years of age.

Refugees' and vulnerable immigrants' placement in a program is based on an assessment of their skills. Students who advance to higher levels are further assessed. The multilevel electives are designed "to move towards personalized learning" (School principal BC). ESL training is capped at five years, and the students do not integrate into regular academic classes until they reach ELL level 3. According to the educators, the students have no specific timelines to finish each ELL level, and it depends on the

students' ability: "Some students whiz through the classes, and others struggle for many years" (Educator BC).

As discussed earlier, educational activities also focus on connecting students to the Canadian workforce. The classes include teaching them "how to integrate into Canadian culture, so we spend a lot of time talking about ourselves and recognizing our strengths and things we want to do once we leave the [school name]" (Educator BC). The educators, and school administrators explained that work-experience programs are necessary to develop students' positive sense of self, to ensure their positive engagement with society, familiarization with cultural expectation in their new home; and to address the possibility of students' having to assist their families financially. The literature and studies on the school-to-work transition or work-based education have further supported these claims (Cordon, 2000; DeLuca, Godden, Hutchinson, & Versnel, 2015; Ford & Smith, 2007; Versnel, DeLuca, deLugt, Hutchinson, & Chin, 2011). However, it is important to pay particular attention to the shortcomings of programs with emphasis on bridging schools to market. The majority of studies on school-to-work transition programs focused on Canadian-born students who, because of obstacles to the completion of their academic work or their inability to engage with the traditional school system, opt to pursue work-based education to gain experience for employability purposes as well as to attain enough credits for high school graduation (Cordon, 2000; DeLuca, Godden, Hutchinson, & Versnel, 2015; Ford & Smith, 2007; Versnel, DeLuca, deLugt, Hutchinson, & Chin, 2011). Very few studies address work-based programs specifically for newcomers to Canada (Wilkinson, Chung Yan, Tsang, Sin, & Lauer, 2012). Their findings address the underlying problems new comer youth, in particular, refugee youth

face in educational settings, such as grade placement, age caps, and language barriers (Wilkinson, Chung Yan, Tsang, Sin, & Lauer, 2012). Therefore, the transferability of these findings to school-to-work programs for newcomers who struggle with academics because of language barriers or gaps in their schooling needs to be carefully considered.

The majority of the studies supported the integration of work experience in vocational occupations into traditional schooling for at-risk students whose school performance is unsuccessful (Cordon, 2000; DeLuca, Godden, Hutchinson, & Versnel, 2015; Ford & Smith, 2007; Versnel, DeLuca, deLugt, Hutchinson, & Chin, 2011). For programs to be successful, they must focus specifically on the individual needs of at-risk youth, outline specific teaching purposes and be monitored by encouraging teachers and workplace supervisors (Lehmann, 2005; Versnel et al., 2011). However, as Lehmann pointed out, “The assumed advantage of youth apprenticeship is that learning is integrated into everyday process of workplace, rather than constituting a total pedagogic interaction” (p. 117). Therefore, many essential skills such as communication, leadership, and critical thinking are overlooked, and “more traditional workplace skills associated with punctuality, cleanliness and discipline” (p. 119) are emphasized. As I stated earlier, the teachers and administrators in the schools also highlighted employability skills such as punctuality. The study participants emphasized the importance and success of the school-to-work transition program for all students, including refugee youth. The literature showed that students develop a sense of agency by engaging with the community positively and becoming successful when they gain employability skills (DeLuca et al., 2015). However, although it is crucial to incorporate such programming for refugee learners, it is also important to ensure that individual

students' needs are met to achieve their larger educational endeavors such as entering post-secondary institutions. The purposes of the programming should not be to only view newcomer students' ability to succeed in the labor market and to alleviate the Canadian labor-market shortage by streamlining newcomer youth to labor markets. The deputy education minister in a conference organized by refugee and immigrant students stated: we're anticipating now in 2022 about a million people will leave the workforce in British Columbia. About 600,000 of those people will be retiring and/or moving away from British Columbia, and the remainder will be due growth job . . . So This is where I will really start talking about immigration and why immigration is so important to us for economic growth perspective. So we anticipate during that same period of time actually the same number, 600,000, in British Columbia's education institutions. In addition to that, there will be, give or take, 75,000 people [who] will be able to come to British Columbia from other parts of Canada. The remainder, we're going to need to look outside our borders for our labor supply. You will see that we will continue to be very focused on opportunities to come and live and work in British Columbia, to remain in key areas; in particular, the areas that are in demand to help us grow our economic agendas. So you should take a look at what is available through work and Seed programs; for example, they have a lot of data around that, and they have a good sense of what kind of carriers will be in demand and opportunities that will exist for you.

Newcomer youth should not be viewed as a means to meet provincial and national economic and labor goals.

The Deputy education minister's speech to refugee and immigrant students focused mainly on the role of newcomers in BC's labor market, the school

representatives who participated in this study acknowledged that many students enrolled in school and their families have other aspirations for their children. They also realized that students who enter Canadian educational institutions during their later teen years—16 and older—have less chance of achieving the traditional Dogwood diploma to be eligible for entry into postsecondary institutions. Therefore, these schools, in collaboration with postsecondary institutions, offer students bridging programs to provide some means for further education and an opportunity for students to pursue their goals:

[Name of the college] has a program where, if you have not finished high school yet, you can transition to [College], their high school, and then carry on to postsecondary. If you have not completed your high school graduation in British Columbia, the Ministry of Education pays for it. (School principal BC)

Although I did not conduct formal interview with students, in my observations and informal conversations with students during my school visits and attendance at the conference, it was evident that bridging programs to postsecondary schools have given students hope. Even though opportunities to enter postsecondary programs were limited, students were able to identify paths to postsecondary programs and envision converting their goals into realities. The combination of programs, school-to-work experience, and bridging programs offer students an opportunity to assist their families financially as well as improve their language abilities and academic skills to enroll in professional programs. However, some high school students remained skeptical about their success in the program and enrollment in postsecondary schools.

Social and Emotional Growth

With the recognition that education does not occur in a vacuum, additional programming has focused on students' social and emotional well-being to ensure their academic growth and success. Psychologists, social and youth workers, and staff in

schools are dedicated to meeting the resettlement needs of students and their families, and they support them on a number of fronts, from guiding them in applications for eyeglass prescription subsidies to managing school breakfast and lunch programs:

It's kind of a multipronged focus, is the attachment base theory stuff. We're also a community school, so we have access to a significant amount of resources that perhaps other schools don't have. So we have, for example, a breakfast program. We have a breakfast program where all kids can attend. They are also very careful to protect kids' self-worth and dignity when we do programs. The breakfast is open to anybody who wants it, although we have our targets. We tap kids on the shoulder, and we make sure the one who needs it goes. We have a hot lunch program, so we are subsidized for hot lunch. We have access to clothes banks. . . . I think it's mostly equity, right? It is not giving everybody the same thing; it's giving people what they need to get to the same place. (School principal BC)

Staff have initiated special programs to enhance parents' engagement with school as well as programs to address some of the parents' needs. Some of these are workshops to discuss and promote the physical and mental well-being of parents and their children and exploratory sessions to help parents with their children's education and related matters.

Administrative Support

Meeting students' social and emotional needs goes beyond providing them with an essential service; it includes ensuring that staff are trained and understand refugee youth's circumstances. For instance, managing behavior and disciplinary issues requires such understanding. According to the BC school principal, it is crucial to "understand who students are as human beings" to understand and manage students' disruptive behaviors. The staff listens to students' narratives and learns about their struggles and the obstacles that they face with their families in their new homes. The goal here is to ensure that students are successful in the school setting. This principal explained that the staff realized that they had a "completely backward" approach to the integration of these

students. Staff at this learning institution expect all students to adjust and adapt to the existing schooling structure, but when they learned about the students' histories and current struggles, they realized that it is the "system that needs to change":

Traditionally, if kids got into a fight, you've got limited kinds of ways to deal with it—detention, or you get suspended. So for kids who were struggling socially and emotionally, we looked at, how can you handle this differently? So kids get into a fight; we wouldn't send them home. We wouldn't send them home for a couple of reasons. We understood that they simply didn't have the ability to handle it the way we wanted to problem-solve and fix the issue. We were also aware that a lot of our families either go to school or they are working, so we made a real concerted effort to adjust. We would use art therapy for a lot of our kids; we would focus on really providing ways for them to experience as quickly as they can success in school. (School Principal BC)

Educators' use of guided learning opportunities through media that help students to absorb and engage with the material presented to them is the most consistent factor in students' success in school (Brophy, 1986; Harry & Klingner, 2014). In their book *Why Are So Many Minority Students in Special Education*, Harry and Klingner argued that school practices account for a large portion of students' success or failure in education: "School practices, such as limited opportunity to learn, present a powerful explanation for many children's educational outcomes. This explanation competes with the assumption of intrinsic or school induced cognitive deficits" (p. 77). According to BC school principal, School principal 1 in Alberta and the educators in this study, disciplinary programs that target vulnerable refugee and immigrant students should not be based on the deficit model of emotional or behavioral problems; rather, the programs should be based on "developing competence" (Settlement Workers in Schools, 2015, para. 2). Disciplinary programs that are multilayered and not punitive have educational value and create the welcoming atmosphere and feeling of being valued for refugee learners. The multilayer program includes; understanding students' histories and behaviors, as well as

the use of approaches that ensure success such as counseling and learning periods, rather than practices that make students feel inferior such as suspension. Such practices signal to students that their success is the prime concern of educators. Students thus become engaged with learning and school rather than falling into the vicious cycle of behaviors that call for discipline, detention, and disengagement from school.

The teachers and school administrators identified the support that schools receive from their districts as an important factor in the programs' success. The two districts of BC in which I conducted the study supported the programs, the districts approached the administrators of the schools to create a comprehensive program that would meet the needs of refugee and immigrant students. Further, the schools were designed with the purpose of connecting newcomer families to the existing communities to foster a sense of collaboration. Helping families to rebuild and integrate into their new homes in turn helps students to develop a sense of belonging and gain more from their education. The school principals acknowledged the support that they have received from the district, the district's openness to collaboration and the provision of the required services for students and their families. However, the school administrators were also cognizant of the district's budgetary limitations, and the importance of community organizations and services from nonprofit organizations to continue to offer and create the services that students need.

Additionally, the school administrators and teachers were open to change and flexible to ensure that the programs have a positive impact on student learning. Although the schools initiated the program with a set design and planning, the study participants acknowledged that they had to be flexible and ready to change, depending on the

outcomes of student learning and educational growth. In the words of the BC school representative:

Our district was really supportive. The problem comes back to dollars and cents; it was also a learning curve. We were aware we were getting sort of X, Y, and Z in terms of variety of students, but we didn't know exactly what that is going to be. So the first year was a real eye opener. What we would typically do wasn't working, so what do we do? At that time we had to be flexible, and we did have to do some work with the school district around how we can get some extra support around programming. Very different look of kinds of courses, or having one teacher with a long period at a time rather than changing as often as they do in high school. We brought in—a very first as far as we can tell—Reading Recovery with adolescents because we have so many adolescents who are still reading at about Grade 1 level. So just putting time and resources. The school district could partner up with other people. We had an evening program for families so you were working in partnership with family education centers. So it was really reaching out everywhere, wherever we could, within what was appropriate to get the funding for the people, the time, the food, to do kind of whatever we needed to do. (School District Representative)

The study participants who worked directly with refugee learners acknowledged their personal growth and learning within their field. All of the participants acknowledged their steep learning curve in working with refugee and immigrant students. Further, the school administrators and educators were open to accepting failure and willing to change practices and programming to turn failure into success with students' goals in mind. For example, the acceptance of the ineffectiveness and even negative outcomes of prevalent practices with regard to behavior and discipline made a difference in students' engagement with the school and had a positive impact on students and their families. The school administrators and educators not only changed their practices, but also changed their own perspectives on refugee and immigrant youth and their relationships with the students. Another example is the school staff's acceptance of students' circumstances and their willingness to focus on the needs of their students, whether they were food or means and options to be able to graduate and continue their education:

The big difference that I see is that, when we first started, we were kind of scrambling. They were saying, “Oh my God, these kids are not like other kids! How do we support them? I think what we have seen in the last three or four years is that we put in the work, and now we have got—the kids who come in with no school at 16, 17 years of age, with no English background, from refugee camps—we have a fairly seamless integration of them into school. We know how to work with them.

And not just that. We used to panic. We would say, “Oh my God, we have so little time to graduate! How are we going to pack it all in?” Now we don’t think that way any more. It’s like, “Okay you come in,” and we meet the parents: “This is what it’s going to look like.” Got the heavy focus on literacy, ESL classes. “Start going at the credits you need.” Generally speaking, they come in and they are 16 and 17; we know they are not going to have enough time to graduate when they are 18, when they’re in Grade 12. We have the ability to keep kids for six years. We keep something like 20% of our Grade 12 kids an extra year, and that can make all the difference in the world. (School principal BC)

Many factors have an impact on learners’ academic growth. One of the major factors in students’ learning success is the level of support and understanding that educators receive from the district and administrators (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Harry & Klingner, 2014). The involvement of stakeholders—who view refugee and immigrant students’ circumstances as a deficit or, at best, something that needs to be remediated creates obstacles to the education of these newcomer students. Further, the challenge is heightened when students’ progress is only determined by their advancement in Eurocentric curricula measured using standardized testing. As the schools in BC demonstrate, it is possible for students to be successful and achieve their goals in school if the district supports them. It is important that administrators and teachers believe students can succeed, and design and implement policies in a manner that will facilitate the positive growth and engagement of students within the school community. Integration can be best achieved when students are given tools where they can participate meaningfully in society without compromising their histories, educational goals and dreams.

The schools in BC that participated in this study were model schools in terms of integrating refugee learners into the school community as well as paving the way for the success of these students. In the discussion of the obstacles that refugee learners face, none of the participants from the schools in BC referred to students as having deficits or criticized their families for the lack of parental involvement in school. The school representatives recognized the distinct needs of refugee learners; however, they also recognized the diversity among refugee learners. To make their program successful, they were willing to examine their own understandings and relationships with the students. As Ball (2008) stated, the schools in BC were more successful in integrating refugee youth into mainstream society, because, “they organized their own specific rationalities, making particular sets of ideas obvious, common sense and true” (Ball, 2008; as cited in Ball et al., 2012, p. 121). This approach differs markedly from the prevailing deficit model upon which learning practices are based in learning institutions.

Moving away from the deficit model of learning, understanding the importance of students’ input in their education and readiness of school districts to provide support to schools for refugee learners are important components in recognizing refugee learners and establishing an educational framework based on race equity and social justice. The elements of recognition of refugee learners and cognitive justice are visible in some of the programming in the BC school. Further, when policy makers were discussing the education for minorities, there was an understanding of power relations and understanding one’s epistemic standing as a power holder. For example, a White male school trustee described his role as a leader and policy maker in creating an engaging learning atmosphere:

I decided to share some of my learning and reflect on the subject of privilege and its relationship to questions of leadership in pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable role. I think privilege and the power that comes with it that's built into the system are curtains that are being drawn back today—ones that really need to stay open if we are going to be successful in our work.

The involvement of policy makers, administrative staff, and educators who recognize students' particular needs, in addition to acknowledging and negotiating larger societal concerns such as poverty, race, equity, and privilege, helps schools to create environments in which students' meaningful engagement with education is the priority. When learning institutions focus on students' engagement, the goal becomes to support learners and establish creative programming that meets the needs of students. Programs that emphasize students' success steer away from the status quo programs and teachings that perpetuate the one-way integration of newcomers.

Limitations of the Program

As I outlined earlier, the program that I described was offered in schools that worked toward the integration of migrant youth into the schools. The participants had longstanding experience with working with newcomers and were aware of the issues that refugee learners face. Therefore, their program was not representative of all of the programs in BC. Rather, it was a model that other educational institutions could pursue. However, the abilities of the schools that participated in the study to integrate refugee learners was restrained because of overriding educational policies such as the five-year cap for ELL training as well as the funding models. The school administrators and educators were aware that a five-year cap does not necessarily meet the needs of some students for language training. Limited funding prevents schools from ensuring that students have the required educational experience; they therefore accept in-kind

donations to fill specific gaps within targeted programs. The inability of schools to raise similar amount of money, with the fundraising model, raises the concern of the lack of inequity in schools.

Another important limitation of the program is the lack of integration of students into the core subjects that students need to graduate and enter postsecondary schools. The programs that I described have successfully redesigned one of the core subjects, Planning 10. According to the educator in study, course is modified “to mirror the outcome of the Planning 10 class. When students complete our course successfully, they are granted credit for Planning 10.” A similar redesigning of core courses could allow students to participate in academic classes and meet students’ educational needs. The inability to fulfill ESL requirements and enter mainstream classes is a main concern of students and one of which educators and administrators are aware:

From my perspective, everything seems pretty integrated. If you ask the ELL kids, they really just want to get out of ELL; they want to be in a regular classroom. Sometimes people say you have a school within a school; I think it depends on who you talk to. (Educator BC)

As the educator’s comment indicates, if a program is going to engage students it needs to incorporate students’ input. Educators believe the program is cohesive and allows for creation of strong foundation upon which students can continue their learning. However, students find that programs designed for newcomers with limited English or French language abilities are very restrictive and create obstacles to their educational goals.

Newcomer students face many obstacles upon entering the Canadian education system; moreover, they fully understand the value of education and are aware of the detrimental impact of their inability to enroll in core courses. Refugee students whom I met at conferences and seminars understood the nuances of politics and the barriers to

their educational path that they need to overcome to be able to succeed in their education and become economically and politically engaged citizens. The students were astonished that governing bodies are committed to making major investments to form relationships with sister cities internationally, but that they are not willing to invest in ELL students in the province:

[The government] is putting a lot of money into promoting relationships with sister cities, but I was wondering—we have a reality in British Columbia where a lot of ELL students have the potential to join the labor force but are not meeting the basic requirement of graduating from secondary education because the system doesn't adequately support the next step of their [students'] which is graduating from secondary school. We have a potential population of students that can fill that labor force but are not able to go through the system. This is supposed to be open for all of us. (Student 1)

The students felt powerless to communicate their needs and demands to higher level policy makers as a student group without support and recognition from established community organizations. They wanted to be able to communicate their needs to education ministries directly and to take part in decision-making processes that have an impact on their lives. The students contended that their voices are not heard or considered:

There is no clear infrastructure within the ministry where we could direct our questions regarding ELL. It would make sense to have infrastructure in the ministry where we can direct our questions regarding what is going on with ELL. (Student 2)

We celebrate our allies and the support they have given us to promote our goals and give us that platform, but we are also saying it is difficult for young people to voice their concerns, . . . to create direct spaces for ELL students to have political weight in the districts and across the province. (Student 3)

Students were aware of the importance of representation and recognition, two of the major pillars discussed by Fraser (2008), within the governing bodies if their needs were

going to be met. While they identified their needs for their educational goals, they voiced their concern for their lack of representation and recognition. As they were conscious of the significance of representation and recognition in their successful integration into mainstream society. Given the top down policy approach of governing bodies, and their main concern with economic forecasts and building cohesive society based on Eurocentric values, it becomes critical for communities in the periphery of society to be recognized and represented among those crafting policies.

Conclusion

Schools in the study in the were striving to meet the needs of their refugee learners. They recognized displaced students as a distinct group and valued the students' and their families' voices during the program development. Those from British Columbia who participated in the study had not only devoted time and interest to establishing the program, but had also changed their perspectives in recognizing their role and their epistemic standing in the design of the program. It is imperative that the program continue to evolve to ensure that students are not isolated and trapped in ESL and option courses and that they can earn credits for core courses to graduate and enroll in postsecondary schools while continuing to receive the socioemotional support that they need. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the program encompasses two important elements of the social justice framework: recognition of students and an understanding of power relations among policy makers, educators, and students.

The data from the province of Alberta indicate that important concerns need to be further investigated and resolved to create a welcoming learning atmosphere for refugee learners. Policy makers and policy implementers were still grappling with the issue of

identifying refugee learners from other migrant groups. Further, although both assessment and placement are obstacles for school administrators in integrating students into their schools, no plan or discussion is in place to alleviate the major hurdle that they face. The school district initiated pilot projects specifically to address the following concerns that the participants raised: modes of language pedagogy, the need to teach staff to understand diverse learners, and the need for instructional programming. However, the program failed to permanently become part of the district's special program. More important, the lack of evaluation or a report on the program resulted in the failure to rebuild it based on previous experiences. Therefore, important questions are whether all students are recognized and valued equally within the school district and why, given the needs of students and concerns of the school administration, educators, and other stakeholders such as community organizations, the program was not renewed.

The educators and policy makers in the two provinces who participated in this study were cognizant of the issues that refugee learners face and their learning needs. Based on their understandings, and within their roles and limited power, all of the study participants were working towards creating a learning environment where all students can thrive. Education design and delivery is a complex web, and ensuring the success of all learners requires an underlying belief system that fosters commitment from everyone within the organization. Further, there needs to be a framework and access to the resources to provide education based on equity for all learners. In an educational framework based on equity, all students can achieve their educational goals if they have the opportunity and resources. Conscious instructional delivery based on critical constructivism provides the needed resources to all students according to their needs.

In the following chapters on race equity and social justice I discuss the findings from the study and make recommendations on how to meet the particular needs of refugee learners.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

In previous chapters I discussed my analysis of the research findings under the framework of race equity and social justice, as well as the factors involved in policy design and enactment, practices, and outcomes. I outlined the complexity of policy implementation that results from the multilayered and multifactorial aspects of policy enactment. To reduce the barriers common to policy design and implementation, it is important to ensure that all stakeholders are active agents throughout the process of policy design, implementation, and evaluation. A thorough understanding of the policy problem and the contexts of the problem is crucial in initiating policy design or modification. Further, the availability of knowledge and financial resources is essential to ensure the implementation of policies and regulations as intended. This study has demonstrated that, regardless of geographic location and individual school programming, several tenacious and entrenched factors are barriers to the educational endeavors of refugee learners. The factors include the importance placed on some policies such as the accountability pillar over other policies and practices such as equity funding. Other factors include limited teacher training, the lack of proper assessment, and placement practices for English learners. I explored possible practices—whether they were pilot projects or the practices of established educational institutions—that value students’ experiences and histories and build upon students’ existing experiences to foster their growth and learning with their goals and dreams in mind.

In this chapter, based on the learnings from the specific policies and practices that hinder or encourage the educational journey of refugee youth, I will answer the questions that motivated this study. I believe that the findings of this study and discussions with

the participants help to understand society's overarching values that have created an environment in which a large number of refugee learners has become disengaged from education and learning.

The lack of recognition of refugees in general and refugee learners in particular in society is one of the major factors that prevent the successful integration of refugees. Further, the emphasis on inclusive education in an atmosphere in which social justice is in tension with neoliberal ideals makes it difficult to create learning environments based on cognitive justice. Finally, I discuss the challenging concept of targeted versus nontargeted policies to help refugee learners in our educational institutions and enhance their educational outcomes.

Lack of Recognition

Refugees as displaced populations are noncitizens globally, and their status as noncitizens remains when they enter Canada. Noncitizenship status carries with it connotations that make their journey cumbersome; moreover, refugee status creates a haze of invisibility over their presence. Their lack of a voice has resulted in easy dismissal, and their inability to vote makes them unrecognized within the political arenas. Additionally, the current institutional structures limit their employment opportunities and access to the labor market, which further marginalizes this population because of their economic circumstances. The lack of political recognition also makes them invisible to society, and the lack of economic resources inhibits the development of a sense of belonging and a presence within themselves. As Goldring and Landolt (2013) stated, "For people living with different forms of precarious non-citizenship, the terms of process and access are largely beyond their control" (p. 4). Not only is the place of

landing for refugees who enter Canada prescribed, but the location of their residence also usually predetermines the resources that they can access. Refugees are generally viewed through a homogenized and deficit lens that is projected upon them. Furthermore, society is reluctant to recognize refugees as casualties of larger geopolitical circumstances and as individuals with histories and potential. The label of refugee given to forcibly displaced population and the stereotypical projection of being a refugee is the primary barrier to the resettlement and integration process.

Refugee youth, similarly to their parents and caregivers, have suffered from serious violence such as war, separation from family and home, the need to survive in a harsh setting, and even the witnessing of the deaths of close family members. In enduring such extreme experiences, youth usually develop survival skills that the Canadian education system neither welcomes nor accepts. This unaccepted behavioral pattern, in addition to the educational gaps and lack of mastery of English or French, makes these students different from mainstream learners and collectively places them in a disadvantaged position. These undesired qualities and the emphasis on, for example, linguistic or cultural differences creates a challenge to which Dei (1996) referred as difference as deficit. Once society begins to identify those who, due to events out of their control, have experienced great misfortune through deficient model, the purposeful misrecognition goes beyond invisibility and allows the society to disregard basic human rights for forcibly displaced population.

Recognition as a Pillar of Social Justice

Therefore, education framework based on social justice becomes vital if the goal of education system is to ensure success of all students. For refugee learners, success in

education is pushed farther due to their socioeconomic standing. Nancy Fraser (2000) noted that the two concerns of the lack of recognition and the inability to access resources are interlinked. The increased intercultural mobilization that has resulted from economic inequality, and in the context of those in power located at the center and those displaced, on the periphery, “often serve[s] not to promote respectful interaction within an increasingly multicultural context, but to drastically simplify and reify group identities” (p. 108). Frasers argues lack of economic resources in addition to the lack of recognition lead to further exclusion of the group and pressures the group to abandon their identities and conform to mainstream values. The interlinking of limited economic resources and the lack of recognition, or, at the very best, misrecognition, are perpetually evident in refugee status. As the story of Syrian refugees is unfolding globally, majority of nations have taken the road of inaction because of security concerns. Therefore, the terrorist stereotype that is engrained in the minds of the people and associated with this large displaced population has created an inferior collective underserving of access to safety.

Bauman (2004) stated:

Overgeneral, unwarranted, or even fanciful as the association of terrorist with asylum seekers and economic migrant might have been, it did its job: the figure of asylum seeker, once prompting human compassion and spurring an urge to help, has been sullied and defiled, while the very idea of asylum, once a matter of civil and civilized pride, has been reclassified as a dreadful concoction of shameful naivety and criminal responsibility. (p. 57)

The data from this study have validated the notion of the invisibility and lack of recognition of the refugee population in Canada. The federal-government study participants concurred with Bauman in terms of government policies for and philosophies on refugees:

Refugee reform reduced the number of refugee claimants arriving on our shore. . . . It has reduced the number of refugee claimants, arguably with reducing the number of fraudulent refugee claimants or reducing the number of economic refugees versus the genuine political refugees. So there is that in terms of government's overall policy.

I think where the government really started dropping the ball is that they haven't done anything with respect to Syrian refugees, and I assume it's driven by—I don't know whether it's ideological reasons—they don't like Arabs. It can't be that they just don't like Muslims, because there are lots of Syrian Christians. I don't understand what's going on there. There is something in that I would call a nasty streak in the government. You saw that in the health care—cutting access to health care for refugee claimants. You see it in a bill denying social assistance to refugee claimants. So . . . they are not very refugee friendly. [It is important to note that I conducted this interview prior to the federal Liberal government's election win and its promise to accelerate the process of refugee settlement in Canada]

The lack of recognition of refugees is evident in every segment of society.

Policies that target refugees are uncommon, and the existing but rare policies generally limit resources and accessibility for refugees. Similarly, refugees have very limited representation within society. However, this lack of recognition is nowhere more prominent, and, I argue, detrimental, than in the policies and leadership practices in education. Sixty years of research have demonstrated the impact of refugee status and educational trajectories on refugee youth. Scholars and researchers across the Western hemisphere have established that refugee youth fail to succeed in education (Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008; Rutter, 2006). Further, researchers have identified some of the limitations of educational institutions in meeting the needs of refugee youth. They have also advocated for possible practices such as multiliteracy to enhance the learning outcomes of English language learners. However, with the exception of a few institutions that have chosen to initiate programming based on demand, policies and programming to meet the needs of refugee learners have largely remained absent. Therefore, the continuation of the nonrecognition of refugee youth in our education system is more of an indication of the

unwillingness to include this population rather than the lack of knowledge and evidence of best practices:

They are probably not implementing because they are short of money; so, like any administration, they are making choices. You can argue whether they are making the right choice or not, but it is not because of lack of research or understandings. The issue is probably the lack of political will to redirect the resources. (Expert on multiculturalism)

Competition versus Parity of Participation

The systemic lack of political will to recognize and redistribute funding based on students' needs, which therefore perpetuates the inequity, begs the question of whether social justice exists in an educational setting. Educational policy makers and administrators have acknowledged inequity as a casualty of the broader goal of education: the goal of creating competitive and skilled individuals for tomorrow's labor market. The competition has been essentially woven into the mechanism of schooling and becoming schooled. As Connell (1994) argued:

Disadvantage is always produced through the mechanisms that also produce advantage. The institutions that do this are generally defended by their beneficiaries. The beneficiaries of the current educational order are, broadly speaking, the groups with greater economic and institutional power, greater access to the means of persuasion, and the best representation in government and in the profession. (p. 15)

The invisibility of refugees is consistent in policies and practices. I refer to the lack of statistics as an example of the failure of policies and practices to address the invisibility and presence of refugees. Limited but wide-ranging statistics are available on the number of refugees that Canada accepts annually; however, they depend on the source of the information and whose purposes the statistics serve. Similarly, provinces, school jurisdictions, and even community agencies that serve the refugee population have

limited statistics on these newcomers. In a society in which quantitative data are important sources for and initiate the provision of required and specified services, the lack of statistical data is a technical obstruction created not to shoulder the responsibility for serving the needs of this population, but also to create governing agencies' illusion of the nonexistence of this migrant group. As one of the community organization members who participated in this study noted, the limited reliable information available is of such importance to access to funding that those who have the data have monopolized access to them and therefore created tension and rivalry among community organizations that work to settle and integrate newcomers. Similarly, representatives of school districts in Alberta acknowledged that they initiated data collection on refugee learners in the 2013-2014 school year; the data include the number of refugee students, and the districts have followed their education achievement separately to gain a better understanding of their progress. Current available data on the educational attainment of visible minorities that schools or government agencies have obtained combine information on all newcomers, including international students, immigrants, and some refugees (Statistics Canada, 2011). This distorts the actual outcomes for each group because it shows higher educational attainment for visible minority youth than for nonvisible minority youth:

Virtually all immigrant-community educational outcomes of their children are strong. The NHS [National Household Survey] data in terms of educational outcomes of visible minorities is stronger than nonvisible minorities virtually in all communities; some communities are stronger than others. But I think the nonvisible minorities are at the bottom of the field because the parent expectations of immigrants is, they come here usually to give a better life to their kids and instill that drive in their kids, [but] now the kids of the kids may be slothful like Canadian kids. (Expert on multiculturalism)

Accurate statistics are crucial to be able to distinguish among various groups and meet the particular needs of distinct groups. However, as important as it is to provide

physical statistical data to identify various groups, better understand their shortfalls, and cater to their needs, by no means do statistics alone result in recognition and enable agencies to meet their needs. As is evident in the case of First Nations people, although widely available qualitative and quantitative data signify the urgency of education and infrastructure, among other basic rights for this population, governing agencies have taken no serious action.

Similarly, concerns with racism and its impact on the integration, development, and success of visible minorities have been well documented (Armstrong et al., 2012). Nonetheless, documentation and research in the area of racial equity have not mitigated discriminatory behaviors and practices. Recognition goes beyond the number of people, their strengths, and their needs. As Nancy Fraser (2000) indicated, to avoid nonrecognition or reification, it is important to value the status of individuals and all individuals as “full partners in social interactions” (p. 113). Therefore, recognition becomes complete only when institutions begin to value all humanity and the recognition of all becomes prominent in democratic process. Recognition of status mitigates the lack of representation and redistribution that contributes to social injustice. Opening the space for parity in social participation and the distribution of resources to various groups will occur only with reflection on actions and the impact of institutional structures on vulnerable groups within society and only once those in power are willing to distribute portions of their roles because success depends upon the meaningful sharing of power and resources. Therefore, recognition in its true sense will result from the recognition of not only vulnerable populations, but also one’s own actions, current institutional practices, and their implications for society and globally.

The intention behind establishing the public education system in Canada was to ensure that all students would have access to high-quality education; for example, with the inclusive-education policy. However, inherent hierarchical societal values and established practices ensure the sustenance of a hegemonic society and the concentration of power and resources within and among the powerful. The permanence of these values facilitates the design and implementation of policies, which continues to maintain the status quo and inequities in education between those who are represented and recognized and those who are deemed the “other.” Larson and Murtadha (as cited in Bates, 2006) explained, “many well-intentioned leaders maintain institutionalized inequity because they are committed to hierarchical logics that not only fail to question established norms but keep impoverished citizens out of decision making” (p. 146).

As Bates (2006) argued, “Social justice is central to the pursuit of education” (p. 153). Therefore, education needs to unfold in a context in which the social justice principles of recognition and redistribution are the indispensable parts of the organization and practice. Policy makers and implementers must be aware of these principles from the evolution of policy design to practice. Equally important, educators need to be trained in a similar environment to develop a belief system and cultivate a frame of reference for social justice frameworks.

Lack of Cognitive Justice

In the study I focused on educational policies in Alberta and BC as they relate to refugee learners in our education system and the outcomes of policy enactment in educational endeavors and the attainments of refugee youth. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that, although a few limiting policies specifically recognize refugees,

educational institutions in general have adopted politically correct language in addressing equity and racism in their policies. An important means of accomplishing that goal is by valuing the diversity of students and inclusive education practices for all students. The Alberta School Act (Government of Alberta, 2015) specifies that students are entitled to “welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self; valuing diversity and inclusion” (p. 13). Although the policies and mandates are formulated to ensure equity in access to education for all learners, research has indicated that the support systems and resources required to achieve equity are not in place (Meyers, 2006; Roeher Institute, 2004; Timmons & Wagner, 2008).

The lack of support and resources to achieve equity within educational institutions mirrors the inequity in the larger society. For many refugee learners, the inability to access equitable education is one of the many inequities, such as political and economic, that they have faced in their lives. Educational organizations, as part of the larger societal structure, reflect the values, practices, and power structure of the society (Apple, 1999; Cummins, 1997, 2006). Similar to other organizations, the dominant power defines the legislation and policies that address the goals of education, including curriculum and assessment. As Apple (2002), among other scholars, has argued, the administration of education has always been a contentious issue among power holders. Education is driven by the ideological, political, and religious views of the powerful. Therefore, as Apple (2002) argues the foundation of education is not necessarily “what knowledge is most worth [teaching]” but, rather, “whose knowledge is most worth [teaching]” (p. 32), which results in a lack of cognitive justice in educational settings.

Cognitive justice is a concept that Visvanathan, an Indian scholar, developed in response to the destructive role of the hegemonic power of Western knowledge in society; it calls for the need for diversity in knowledge and the equality of knowers (van der Velden, 2006). Further, other prominent scholars such as Odora Hoppers (2009) discussed cognitive justice with regard to reviving and appreciating Indigenous knowledge without having to conform to the standards of Western knowledge. In the context of this study, cognitive justice plays an important role in ensuring the predominance of social justice in the administration of education. For students to feel safe, to feel that they belong, to develop a sense of identity, and to become lifelong learners, their knowledge, experiences, and language need to be valued. However, unfortunately, similarly to the power relations that all newcomers encounter in the broader society, by treating difference as a deficit, students feel their knowledge and experiences are being devalued (Cummins, 1997; Guo, 2010). The unfolding of inclusive and multicultural practices in a context which is based on unequal power relations hinder schools from accommodating equity. Although the system strives to achieve equity, the absence of cognitive justice means that equity in the true sense is not an attainable goal. The school system has defined equity as the ability to access curriculum that is considered valuable knowledge. However, cognitive justice calls for opening the space and valuing different knowledges and ways of knowing. The inaccessibility of the goal goes beyond limited funding and support systems and is rooted in the lack of the political and cultural will to create learning environment and means of educational delivery that would ensure educational success of all students. Creating a learning environment where

all students succeed begins by acknowledging all students from different backgrounds and believing they all have the potential to learn and achieve their educational goals.

The imbalance in power and relations between the education system and refugee youth is evident in terms of the policy and practice that impact the education of refugee youth. The following are some of the policies and practices that have hindered and continued to create barriers to the education of refugee youth: (a) the emphasis on integration and diversity at the expense of cognitive justice, (b) the lack of policies that inform multiliteracy education, and (c) the lack of ESL training for educators as a mainstream subject.

Integration versus Cognitive Justice

Inclusive and multicultural policies are the main guidelines in Alberta and BC that inform the educational practices of school districts with regard to refugee youth. The inclusive policy is designed to prevent student segregation from the mainstream practices of academic and social learning. Meyers (2006) stated that “ELLs [English language learners] benefit from natural peer interactions and can improve English fluency and literacy skills within regular classrooms given the right approaches and supports” (p. 31). However, integration in the absence of the “right approaches and supports” has created more dilemmas and barriers to the education of English language learners. At a time when schools are enrolling the highest number of English language learners ever—almost 25% of the students in Alberta and up to one third in parts of BC—and when schools need the most support in terms of ESL teachers and language-training resources, both provinces have cut the number of ESL teachers. As a school trustee in BC noted, “Between 2002 and 2012 the number of ELL teacher positions has shrunk from 1015 FE

[full-time equivalents] to 673 across the province, despite the growing numbers of English-learning students.”

Integration without proper support hinders students’ language learning and creates disengagement from the classroom content. Teachers of traditional courses are expected to deliver the curriculum to a diverse group of students in classrooms in which they must meet the needs of students as well as the objectives of standardized testing. The objectives of standardized testing will be prioritized, as they fulfill the needs of funding and ranking. As such the needs of English language learners will not be met and they will further marginalized. Studies from the United Kingdom have demonstrated a high success rate for co-teachers—specific-subject teachers and ESL teachers—in diverse classrooms (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). Integration without support does not create an equal footing and learning ground for all students. Therefore, inattention to cognitive justice for all students only furthers the myth of integration as a magic bullet to learning the English language and assuring equity for English language learners. This is important for refugee learners in particular as a distinct group of English language learners who need appropriate support to succeed. Carson (2006, as cited in Meyers) pointed out that “a monolingual system of schooling serving a multilingual society unjustly requires all children to possess the dominant language but fails to guarantee that children can acquire that language to an equal degree” (p. 32).

Having acknowledged the existence of diverse students in schools, education boards have adopted a multicultural policy to integrate diverse learners into their institutions. Diversity presents opportunities to create a richer learning environment and foster race equity practices and behaviors. However, diversity also presents its own challenges, such

as the preexisting negative perceptions and stereotypes that students, teachers, and administration bring to the classroom (Banks, 2008; Stephan & Vogt, 2004). As I mentioned earlier, the ingrained racial inequity and power imbalance among various groups is based on cultural, socioeconomic, and religious differences. As educational scholars have reported, implementing curricula interventions and changing educators' behaviors and educational institution practices can mitigate the challenges that diversity causes. Peck, Sears, and Donaldson (2008) explained that both the public and scholars have debated and explored diversity and multicultural policies, and although areas of tension remain, they have achieved a general consensus and acceptance. However, little discussion and engagement on the curriculum and diversity and their mutual effect on education have occurred. Peck et al. examined Grade 7 students' understanding of diversity according to the curriculum assessment and found that the "students fell short of the standards for understanding diversity as laid out by the APEF [Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation]" (p. 81). The researchers argued that the curriculum had been "adapted from the United States with little debate or discussion in the Canadian context" (p. 68). Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect positive outcomes and an understanding of the values of diversity and multiculturalism among students when little attention is paid to ensuring that these values are embedded in the curriculum content (Bickmore, 2006; Cummins, Mirza, & Stille, 2012; J. G. Dei, 1996). The combination of the lack of attention to curriculum development, limited support for the delivery of content, and the high value placed on standardized testing leaves no space for cognitive justice. To reap the benefits of diversity, differences need to be presented not as foreign or undesired, but as integral parts of the fabric of society. As Guo (2012) stated, "A society without group

differences is neither possible nor desirable; recognizing the validity of social and cultural groups is essential for their identity, sense of worth and sense of self-esteem” (pp. 141-142). Peck et al. recommended that (a) inclusive policies begin with thorough consideration of the kind of diversity that we wish to promote in schools, (b) educators receive clear guidance and directions to deliver the curriculum content as intended, and (c) educators gain insight into students’ prior knowledge and understanding of diversity and multiculturalism.

Inclusion and diversity have become slogans that school administrators and educators use to portray progression towards the inclusiveness of all students and the move away from the educational hegemonic practices of the past. However, my interviews and analysis of policies in this study reveal that, whether willingly or unwillingly, inclusivity and diversity are being only superficially delivered by educational institutions. Regarding refugee youth, a school principal stated:

I think it’s a population that is very largely misunderstood, that there are more and more people who are willing to help, but they really don’t understand what to do, and the focus is very much on teaching them to fit in as opposed to reflecting their culture. Schools by and large reflect the mainstream culture, and so very much the assumption is that this person is working very, very hard to fit in, but [there is] very little understanding of the assets that those individuals bring in terms of their own background. (School principal)

Cognitive justice is lost when diversity is not practiced as including difference and is curbed by other prominent policies such as the accountability pillar. In his book *Wasted Lives*, Bauman (2004) argued that inclusion is introduced as a tool to sort people into those who fit because they meet the standards and those who do not fit and need to be deported:

The old Big Brother was preoccupied with inclusion—integrating, getting people into line and keeping them there. The new Big Brother’s concern is exclusion—spotting the people who do not fit into the place they are in, banishing them from the place and deporting them where they belong. (p. 132)

The means of assessment and placement in the modern education framework assumes the role of the “new Big Brother,” the excluder of those whose knowledge, including language, does not meet the expectations of the mainstream culture. Streaming those who do not fit within the periphery of the education system causes some to fall through the cracks and become disengaged from schooling.

Cognitive Justice and Heritage Languages

Multiliteracy education enhances students’ academic outcomes and even closes the achievement gap (Cummins, 1997; Kirova, 2014; Thomas & Collier 2004). Although this conclusion has been established for the past three decades and advocates for multiliteracy education have worked tirelessly for the development of such programs, with the exception of a few pilot projects throughout Canada, no programming has had a multiliteracy component. It is interesting that, despite the fact that language policies in Alberta and BC have acknowledged the importance of heritage languages, no policy has promoted the enactment of multiliteracy education. Cummins (2006) explained that “the core argument is that the absence of coherent policies within schools in relation to the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of student body risks compromising principles of equity to which all Canadian schools are committed” (p. 4). Education under race equity and social justice should allow and foster multiliteracy programming as part of valuing students and their knowledge.

Whether the delivery of education is based on social justice or critical constructivism or the findings of cognitive psychologists (Donovan & Bransford, 2005;

as cited in Cummins, Bismilla, Cohen, Giampapa, & Lioni, 2005) new knowledge and understandings are constructed upon existing knowledge, understandings, and experiences. Therefore, the dominant language of students is relevant to their education process and must be considered part of the curriculum. However, as Cummins (2010) noted, heritage languages other than English and French are, “at best, . . . treated with benign neglect and ignored; at worst, educators consider them an obstacle to acquisition of English or French and discourage their use in school and at home” (p. 5). This finding is similar to the finding of Shultz et al. (2015) that Somali students in Edmonton, AB, did not feel that they belonged in school because their peers and teachers did not accept their use of the language. Building their knowledge of their dominant language is essential to students of all ages but is beneficial particularly to students who arrive in Canada during the later stages of their schooling and have a limited time within which to graduate from high school. Multiliteracy education that meets the academic progress of ELL students while ensuring their language acquisition is important to their educational success, but it is also an important signal of the acceptance and valuing of all students from diverse backgrounds.

Language is also an important part of identity development. The failure to value students’ heritage language results in cultural dissonance and the feeling that they do not belong to either their home culture or the mainstream culture. Identity formation is a complicated process of understanding oneself and others. For refugee youth, identity development can become a highly contested matter. Their sense of identity has been violated and might be existentially threatened. Societal circumstances necessitate that they become part of a new collective refugee class with which they cannot identify at a

crucial developmental stage (Dei & Rummens, 2010). Their inability to access the new culture because of the language barrier further plays a negative role in the construction of their identity. Not only do refugee youth find it difficult to learn English upon arrival, which hampers their academic achievement, but they also cannot fit into the culture of their new adapted home, which makes them feel devalued. The lack of cognitive justice and value for their heritage language makes them feel ashamed of their language and culture (Asadi, 2014; Cummins, 2010; Cummins et al., 2005; Montero et al., 2012).

ESL and specific-subject teachers' co-teaching in classrooms with diverse students has been a key element in the success of both the pilot project in schools in Alberta and classes in BC. A school principal in Edmonton commented:

There was a consultant that worked—actually, a number of consultants . . .—with teachers to train on the job in terms of those skills, and the teacher that was placed in that always had a background in ELL. We had consultants around behavior, around ELL, around math and those kinds of things that typically a teacher, with the training that they have, doesn't include those. I mean, it includes math, but how to teach an older child math is very different than a younger child. What are the key skills in math that will allow the child to be successful?

The principals and educators involved in the daily learning process of nonnative English speakers emphasized the importance of identifying students' background knowledge and having the ability to adjust lesson plans to build upon their current knowledge. The school representatives were acutely aware that the majority of subject teachers are trained to teach mainstream students and do not have the ability to identify students' diverse needs and adjust their lesson plans. As a result, many students with limited English training cannot succeed in mainstream-subject classrooms. Because the failure of students is reflected as inability and a deficit, they are blamed for their academic failure (Banks, 1996; Budwig, n.d.; J. G. Dei, 1996; Stein, 2004). Even though the cause of

students' failure has been ineffective training rather than the deficit model, denying students cognitive justice on their educational journey reflects the persistence of deficit model and lack of cognitive justice in the education system.

Teacher Training for Cognitive Justice

Teacher training for both preservice and in service teachers is crucial to create a learning atmosphere that benefits all students. Despite the increasing number of students in Canadian educational institutions whose native language is not English, the number of teacher specialists with ELL certificates is decreasing. Further, mainstream teachers are not required to have an ELL certificate, although they are required to teach nonnative English-speaking students. Meyers (2006) contended that this practice has become the conventional means of educating nonnative English speakers, which leads to the belief that all teachers can teach ELL students. This predicament has created more difficulties for both teachers and students in the higher grades particularly because of the limited time that the students are in school, teachers' lack of professional development, and the defined curriculum. Teacher education programs do not require an ESL component in the certification program, but only limited hours of instruction on diversity education, which can include second-language learning, mental and behavioral issues, poverty issues, and Aboriginal issues, among others (Sokal & Katz, 2015). The preparation of educators to teach English language learners should be required training to help teachers to identify students with language difficulties, to deliver curriculum material to meet language learners' needs, and to be able to assess students' learning outcomes meaningfully (Meyers, 2006). Therefore, the failure to acknowledge the significance of multiliteracy within schools and to arm educators with the knowledge and resources that

they require to meet the educational needs of their students indicates a lack of value for students' knowledge and educational outcomes.

Various scholars have demonstrated the important role of teachers in student achievement and their educational success. Researchers have identified that learners' success in education is positively related to teachers' ability to teach, their knowledge base, and their perceptions of students and students' ability to achieve (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Mittler, 2003; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). As Forlin and Hopewell (2006) affirmed, the most effective way to change teachers' attitudes is by educating them on their influence on student achievement. It is also important to equip teachers with tools to effectively engage all students in classroom learning. Additionally, in their qualitative study of teachers' inclusive practices, Thompson, Lyons, and Timmons (2014) found that, although members of teaching associations have been aware of inclusive practices, "teachers have been advocating for additional training and resources to support inclusion since its inception" (p. 15). Given the existing research that has confirmed the important role of teachers in learners' educational success and educators' request for further training in inclusive-education practices, the lack of such programming is yet another indication of the persistent lack of cognitive justice in the education system.

Targeted Programming

Pro and Cons of Targeted Programming

Although school boards are open to pilot projects or the operation of selected programming in some of their schools, policies, and practices has in large part remained the linear practice of delivering standard knowledge to a standard groups of students. On the other hand, educational policy makers are also keenly aware of the increasingly

diverse student bodies and the need to meet their diverse needs. Historically, there have been ongoing tensions over and discussions of the pros and cons of targeted and nontargeted instructional programming. The proponents of targeted programming have contended that it offers a higher quality educational experience because it meets the specific needs of students who have traditionally been ignored or left behind. Further, targeted programming can be cost effective because it caters to the needs of only a portion of the population, and, given its preventive impact, the funds spent on targeted programming are beneficial (Barnett, Brown, & Shore, 2004; Doherty, 2001; Gracio, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008; Ingmire, 2014; Martinez et al., 2011). The literature has shown the need for targeted programming particularly for nonnative English speakers, whom researchers have identified as highly misrecognized and underrepresented groups (Campbel & Milton, 2010).

On the other hand, one of the major problems identified with targeted programming is the labeling associated with it and the stigmatization that results from labeling, as Wotherspoon and Schissel (2001, as cited in Wishart, Taylor, & Shultz, 2006) found:

The designation of risk poses a dilemma in the sense that, while it is necessary to identify specific segments of the school population for successful intervention, labelling of problem populations may create stigma, self-fulfilling prophecies or incorporate attention on certain individuals to the neglect of real problem.
(p. 293)

Another major concern with targeted education is that bringing attention to the failure of some students in mainstream programs can result in identifying the group as a problem population. In the case of youth who are at risk, Wishart et al. (2006) argued that streaming students into specific programming can be “double edged in that they both

respond and produce YAR [youth at risk]” (p. 294). Similar concerns have been raised about ELL students, because, once they have been streamed into ESL programming, they cannot access mainstream subjects until they demonstrate an acceptable level of language proficiency. This is an area of concern particularly for students in the higher grades who might not be able to enroll in mainstream subjects and graduate in time to receive a high school diploma.

Identifying and defining the population which the policy targets can pose another problem in delivering or lack delivery of the program to the eligible population. For example, with regard to providing low-income families with intensive early-childhood programming, the definition might be too narrow to include groups who would highly benefit, such as those of lower middle class status. On the other hand, the programs might be so broadly defined that they encompass half of the student population and lose their purpose of targeting specific groups of students who have particular needs. Further, targeted programming homogenizes the population without taking into consideration their unique histories and circumstances.

Targeted Programming for Refugee Learners

No policy or practice currently targets refugee youth specifically. All students who enter Canada are categorized based on their entrance permits and English-language competency. When I asked the research participants about the impact of targeted policies on the outcomes of refugee youths' education, similarly to the findings in the literature, they were divided on the need for and positive impact of targeted policies. It is interesting that the participants who considered the current overarching policies sufficient were higher ranking policy makers in both Alberta and BC who were generally removed

from daily interactions with students and teaching practices. They stressed the need to value all students as the focal point of any policy and to create a learning atmosphere that benefits all students:

I actually believe policy has a bigger value. Rather than getting into specifics, I came towards valuing all of our students and ensuring—no matter who that student is, whether they were born in Canada or they were born in another country, whether they are physically healthy or whether they have a physical disability, whether they go on and become prime minister, or whether they have developmental disability and their cognitive domain of autism—I think we really have to look at that sense of inclusion and what is it that we give for all our students. I think in terms of policy, it's far more general needs to be constructed around valuing all students (School board representative, BC)

Nevertheless, the study participants who did not endorse targeted policies pointed to the need for established regulations and practices to ensure that we uphold the values of diversity and inclusion:

This is the regulation that goes with the policy. It talks about what we have to do as an organization to make the policy happen. So it's a checklist of, if you will, Did we do this? Did we do that? So it's about ensuring a welcoming environment, training staff to recognize and respect cultural diversity, so it tells us as a group what our responsibilities are, and it's owned by administration. (School board representative 1, Alberta)

On the other hand, the study participants who were in daily contact with refugee youth and their families—principals, educators, and policy makers—recommended targeted policies. As targeted policy or program directly address the needs of refugee youth and should also encompass their families' needs as well, because students' educational success is positively correlated with their families' successful integration:

Yes, absolutely. Needs are very different, and providing that and identifying those groups. And we have to look at how we identify those groups. Right now, for example, immigrant kids are identified as refugee, as Canadian born, or as foreign born. In terms of those categories of foreign born and Canadian born, it really doesn't say a lot of the needs and the backgrounds of those kids. A child that is foreign born could come from a very strong educational background, a very

similar culture; could even come from an English-speaking home, for that matter. But that's very different from a family that has lived in poverty or that has seen a lot of violence or that kind of thing. With the refugee classification there is another layer of difficulty that is not recognized as a need until fourth grade, because to qualify for that kid's need to be three years behind [refugee learners qualify for English language support if they are academically three years behind]. The assumption, is that kids start from zero. We know that kids don't start from zero; there is lots of development that happens before school even happens. Also, it doesn't even address the needs of the family at all. It just assumes the child is going home to a family that's intact, that's coping well, that has employment, that has ways of getting their needs met. And that is certainly not the case. (School principal, Alberta)

Other principals and educators in both provinces articulated very similar sentiments to those above. Another impetus for targeted policy for refugee learners is that services for schools depend on the availability of funding. Funding attached to a specific policy is monitored in terms of the services provided to specific populations and the outcomes of services:

Targeted policy makes all the difference. It holds people accountable for their practice. You can only look at that now where the province has gone, working with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, where it is targeted. We have to account for our people and the money we spend. People will account for outcomes based on funding you received, what you did with it, and how successful it is. So you are getting evidence-based research to practice there and holding people more accountable for their practice. (School board representative 2, Alberta)

The research participants did not reach a unanimous consensus on the effectiveness of targeted policies, but they agreed that they need to value all students and provide them with safe spaces and learning opportunities. Some participants supported targeted policies, while others believed specific regulations and practices is sufficient to ensure the success of refugee youth.

A school trustee indicated, in the case of sexual-minority youth, a review of the policies revealed that the overarching policy of diversity and inclusion is not meeting the

needs of this particular group; therefore, the targeted policy was implemented because “the broad policy was not effective enough.” I believe, given the dismal success rate of refugee youth in the education system, it is safe to assume that students do not have safe spaces in which to learn and grow. Refugee youth at best are invisible or at worst are viewed through the lens of a deficit model. Therefore, defining spaces through targeted policies and developing instructional and emotional programming that specifically targets refugee learners is essential to change their educational course. This targeted programming is especially essential at a time when refugees are largely misunderstood within the larger population and need further support to be able to adjust and integrate into their new home. Data from this study and the literature review demonstrate that specific groups who are not succeeding in school for a variety of reasons need targeted policies. As the school board representative in BC stated:

We couldn't manage to do what we do if we didn't have that targeted funding, so I have to say I am an advocate for targeted policy, as long as it makes sense and it's not taking from the whole either, but if you have a group that is more fragile and they have a greater need.

However, any targeted policy must ensure that students are neither stigmatized nor trapped in optional courses, which makes integration into mainstream programming a barrier. In providing targeted policy and programming it is important to ensure concerns are heard and addressed. One of the policy makers interviewed in this study was concerned that targeted policy would ghettoize refugee youth learners:

From my perspective I don't mind having some targeting, but I would be very reluctant to start ghettoizing students in schools. In fact, I think that at the end of the day, if people want to succeed, they are going to have to succeed in the wider world. And I think, while we provide some extra help, extra coaching, some additional one-on-one efforts for certain communities who are having problems, I don't think you want to take them out of the main classroom.

Particular attention needs to be paid to ensure targeted programming doesn't trap learners but only provides the needed means to allow students acquire the needed skills and knowledge to be able to achieve their goals.

Collaboration among various governing agencies and service providers is another element needed in ensuring the success of the targeted programming. As many of the participants pointed out, for refugee families who enter Canada through federal sponsor programming, various levels of government need to be involved to ensure their effective settlement. For a targeted policy to be effective, it needs to be purposeful. For example, while the programs intend to serve the needs of refugee learners but it is important to have proper assessment and evaluation procedures to avoid streamlining and homogenizing all refugee learners into a pre-planned programs. Students need to be identified as refugees based on their background in terms of education and the circumstances of their migration must be understood. Therefore, purposeful policy recognizes students and values students' existing knowledges. The policy would provide impactful and foundational programs such as assessment, placement, disciplinary practices, and bridging programs, to ensure students are given the tools needed to succeed and integrate into their new country.

Conclusion

Social justice and race equity are the frameworks that guided the design and analysis of this research. I chose social justice and race equity because if governing bodies are to offer education that includes all learners, educational policies and practices need to allow all students to participate in knowledge creation and learning in schools. Policies and practices that stem from race equity and social justice take into consideration

the societal inequities and challenges that various groups of learners face. Further, this framework ensures that policy makers and policy implementers will discuss racial inequities, the difficult and rooted societal issue in Canadian society. Current designs of education do not mindfully represent all students enrolled in schools, and vulnerable groups therefore fall through the cracks of the education system and do not succeed in their education. The presence of all students needs to be recognized, and their knowledge and experiences have to be valued. Learning institutions have to begin dismantling the foundations of learning that lead to valuing certain knowledges. By incorporating cognitive justice into policy and practice, not only will schools begin to accept multiple knowledges such as languages, but the hierarchy of whose knowledge is more valuable will also end. Education can then unfold in social justice settings where all students can create knowledge and participate in learning activities equally with one another. Educational institutions based on social justice can be steppingstones to the recognition of all citizens of a nation, access to economic resources, and presence and presentation in social and political arenas.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

In the face of unprecedented migration globally as a result of the internal instabilities of nations and the constant external interference of powerful countries, economic impoverishment, and environmental calamities, meeting the obligation of ensuring basic human rights has become more challenging than ever. Refugee youth are among the most vulnerable populations globally, and for those who are fortunate enough to resettle in a new country, integration and the development of their sense of self and identity are yet other battles that they continue to fight. Refugee youth have a dismal rate of success in their educational journey in Canadian educational institutions (Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008; Roessingh & Field, 2000). Further, because of their inability to develop a sense of belonging and be successful in their new home country, they become marginalized and fall prey to gangs and criminal organizations (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). The inability of refugee youth to meet the educational standards of school systems and their low success rate lead to the basic question of why this group of learners finds it difficult to meet the standards of educational success and are driven to the periphery of society.

Research Overview

Sixty years of research have been unearthed on refugees as a displaced population, the narratives of their experiences pre- and post-settlement, the struggles and barriers they face as newcomer adults or youth, and the educational hurdles of English language learners in general, as well as refugee youth specifically. This leads to the question of why the research findings and understandings of the past decades have not been interpreted into policies and practices to improve the educational success rate of

refugee learners. To identify the gaps between research and practice, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the underlying reasons for the systemic lack of educational policies that address the leaning needs of refugee youth in Alberta and British Columbia?
2. What is the impact of current educational policies upon the educational opportunities of refugee youth in Alberta and British Columbia?
3. What new educational policy initiatives are necessary to effectively respond to the educational needs and, by extension, the social well-being of young refugee learners?

According to rights established globally and nationally, such as in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Responsibility, and the goals established in the provincial School Act, all learners have the right to benefit from an education that is responsive to their needs to fulfill their potential and become contributing members of society. However, as scholarly canons have established and this study has confirmed, the educational needs of some migrants and ethnic minority youth, including refugee learners, are not being met. Therefore, the theoretical framework that I used to guide this research study is social justice and race equity. I chose the provinces of Alberta and BC to study because they have different political climates, they have historically hosted different migrant populations, and their educational funding systems differ. Furthermore, Alberta has maintained the majority of its schools in the public school system, whereas BC has a variety of public, private, and blended schools.

I collected data for this study from educational policy documents and guidelines pertaining to refugee learners and interviews that I conducted with educational policymakers and implementers, as well as notes containing my observations and formal and informal conversations. I then analyzed the data by using critical-constructivism guidelines to make sense of the participants' knowledge, identify gaps, and create action for social change. The overarching and practical purposes of this research are to build upon the existing research and to facilitate the development of learning environments in which all students feel welcome and a sense of belonging.

It is important to point out that it was difficult to include higher level policymakers and gain access to schools, particularly in BC. Based on the replies to my invitation to participate in the study and informal conversations, I assumed that the difficulty in recruiting participants was the controversial political connotations attached to refugees and refugee settlement as well as limited knowledge of refugees and refugee settlement practices. Therefore, the schools, administrators, and educators who participated in the study had had experience and interactions with refugee populations prior to the time that I conducted my research.

Research Findings

Although neither province has had specific policies for refugee youth, both provinces use encompassing policies such as the inclusive-education policy and the multicultural education policy as guidelines to ensure that all students receive an equitable education. Both provinces have online recommendations to help educators to teach refugee learners in their classrooms. However, the educators in this study were not familiar with the online resources. The educational policies in both provinces are very

similar in terms of encouraging inclusive-education practices to achieve equitable and safe learning spaces for all students; as well, they offer practical guidance on benchmark assessments of English language learners. Although language policies outline the importance of heritage languages and the need to allow adequate time for the acquisition of academic language learning, in practice, refugee youth have limited opportunities to access their heritage language, and funding for English as a second language is capped at five years.

The Multiculturalism Act addresses the importance of valuing diversity in schools, but instead of acknowledging the benefits that students can gain from the differences that are naturally associated with diversity, the policy emphasizes the identification of similarities among various communities. Although school policies are crafted to appeal to the equity narrative and to serve as blueprints for equity and equal outcomes, the statistical data on the educational achievement of refugee youth suggest that minority youth are still struggling to maintain the educational standards that they need to succeed in Canadian educational institutions (Froese-Germain, 2005-2006; Naylor, 2005, 2013; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009).

The analysis of the data on educational practices for refugee youth in schools in Alberta and British Columbia revealed significant differences between the provinces in how they comprehend refugees and the practices of integrating refugee youth into the school system. Although all of the study participants in BC had insight into the struggles that refugees face, only a few participants in AB who worked closely with refugee learners and their families had the same level of insight into their journey and the continuing obstacles that they face upon settlement in Canada. Therefore, the

conversations in the interviews were very different in the two provinces. In BC, the discussion of best practices for refugee youth education was focused on issues that refugee youth confront. Whereas in Alberta, there were limited knowledge and practices on the issues faced by refugee learners, therefore, the majority of the discussions on best inclusive practices and policies referred to larger minority and marginalized populations such as First Nations and sexual minority youth. The participants in Alberta discussed multiculturalism mainly with reference to policies. It is interesting that in BC, although the participants discussed multiculturalism in terms of policy, they also referred to it as an environment that schools are striving to create. The principal in BC acknowledged that schools are “going beyond multiculturalism” with regard to students.

The analysis of the interviews that I conducted in Alberta indicated that discussions on the integration of refugees into the education system are still in the preliminary stages; they revolve around parental engagement, limited ESL funding, mental health, and disciplinary issues. However, the study participants in BC have dealt with many of the above concerns; for example, they barely touched on parental engagement as a concern because either the schools that participated in this research have resolved the issue of parental engagement by helping parents to enhance their language and life skills within the school, or educators and administrators have acknowledged that parents of refugee youth face so many hardships that they cannot afford to be in constant communication with schools. The schools in BC that participated in this study, are now actively grappling with offering their students educational opportunities and the means to continue to postsecondary education if they choose.

Representatives of both provinces acknowledged limited ESL funding as a negative factor in the ability to offer English learners opportunities to learn the language. In Alberta, given the success with providing public education to the vast majority of students, school administrators have limited options to provide funding to meet the language-learning needs of students. On the other hand, because BC's education system includes both public and private education, school administrators have more options for additional funding for English language learner students. Based on the participants from this study, Albertans have just begun to understand refugees and question practices, but the schools in BC that participated in this study has gone through the initial changes to better cater to the needs of refugees and other English language learners and are now implementing further changes based on their experiences. Schools in BC need to continue to maintain the current status and integrate students into all courses, including core programs, and bridge programming to postsecondary education. However, Alberta must begin to recognize this population in schools and be willing to integrate the youth in a meaningful way; otherwise, the situation will remain unchanged from past practices.

It is important to acknowledge one of the major differences between the two provinces that I identified in this study: An important factor in the integration process of refugee youth into schools is the level of support that schools receive from their districts. In the two school districts in BC where this study took place, the schools designed and initiated the program as a result of the large influx of refugee learners, but it was also possible for the schools to expand the program because of the support that they received from their school districts. Their flexibility with regard to program delivery was in part because of the support of policymakers and governing bodies. The program in BC is

very similar to the pilot project a school district conducted in Alberta between 2011 and 2013. However, the schools in Alberta did not benefit from the experience gained from the pilot project and have not moved beyond the concerns of the early stages of integration. Therefore, it is possible to meet the educational needs of refugee youth if school districts and provincial governing bodies recognize them as a distinct group of learners with specific needs. As I outlined in the discussion section, recognition is realized when students feel that their lived experiences and knowledges are valued. Further, for students to succeed, it is essential that educational institutions recognize the barriers that newcomer youth have to overcome to fit in as mainstream learners. Policy makers and implementers have to be conscious of the obstacles and design policies and practices to reflect the needs of all students and engage all learners.

However, the lack of recognition of refugee learners in educational institutions in both provinces is a fundamental concern that is evident in the institutions' inability to offer students heritage-language education to enhance their language learning abilities; nor are students who are not fluent in English or French being properly assessed (Campbel & Milton, 2010; Meyers, 2006). Also, because of the limited resources available in schools, they cannot proactively try different teaching methods such as co-teaching to allow English language learners to enroll in mainstream courses, benefit from the learning, and receive credits towards their diploma.

Although the number of migrant students in Canadian educational institutions has radically increased during the past 30 years, school systems have remained unresponsive and rigid in their education delivery. The emphasis on and prominence of standardized testing, funding means, and age caps have remained in effect without major changes to

include all learners. The number of English language learners has been increasing for many years, but schools and educators do not believe that they have the necessary tools to properly assess students upon arrival. Even though benchmarking for the English language is possible, many administrators and educators who participated in this study contended that the process is too cumbersome and time consuming and not worth administering. Additionally, very few teachers have the skills and proficiency to administer the language tests. Therefore, as school principals in both provinces stated, the decreasing number of staff members with ESL training, the lack of required teacher training to meet the demands of the increasing numbers of migrant students in postsecondary institutions, and the limited in service training that school districts provide hinder educational institutions' meeting the needs of migrant students in general and refugee youth in particular.

Research Analysis

The analysis of documents and findings from the interviews demonstrates a disconnect in the existing policies and practices. A wealth of research on immigrants and some on refugees has outlined the barriers that newcomers face and made an array of recommendations to remove the barriers and facilitate a successful integration process. However, educational policies that address the educational needs of refugees continue to be inadequate in support of newcomer learners and their educational endeavors. Policies and programs that foster culturally relevant support and intersectoral collaboration among organizations to address the support needs of immigrants and refugees are absent.

In this study I found that refugee learners have been largely disregarded as a distinct group of migrants. The poor performance of refugee youth in the school system

has been attributed to their language inabilities, gaps in their education, and their traumatic experiences pre- and post-settlement, which thus results in judgment of refugee learners through a deficit model. Refugee learners are perceived as students who do not fit into the universal model expected of learners in the education system and are not expected to succeed. The lack of response to the needs of refugee learners and engagement with their presence in school defies the many years of scholarly work that have supported valuing students' knowledge and building upon existing knowledge. Programs such as multiliteracy education, curriculum intervention, teacher training, and co-teaching practices are some of the ways in which all students and their knowledge can be reflected in schools.

Henry et al. (2000, as cited in S. Guo, 2010) described ideologies that prevent governments from making structural changes to the social, economic, and political order for marginalized population as *democratic racism* or *universalism*. Democratic racism is practiced in the education system through various modes, such as administering standardized testing. Evaluations that value only mainstream knowledge, and consider "English literacy as the only literacy" (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 23) contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of the existing system of inequity. The impact of current educational policies and practices has been persistently low academic achievement and high dropout rates among refugee learners and English language learners (Froese-Germain, 2005-2006; Naylor, 2005, 2013; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Policy makers need to know the histories and knowledge of those whom policies will serve. The research participants explained that policies that result in meaningful change need to be based on the needs of refugee youth and thorough research rather than on any imagined

political risk that might ensue from recognizing refugee learners and providing them with the services they need for resettlement:

What's really interesting to me in the system is, the minute you are risk oriented, the policies are not going to be in the interest of children. Then that is a cookie-cutter general approach, and that just doesn't work, just doesn't work, especially with refugees. (Community organization representative)

Furthermore, for policies to be responsive, areas of educational shortfalls and barriers that lead to lower educational achievement have to be identified. Policy design and implementation have to be based on available academic literature and experiential knowledge and utilize the services currently available from community organizations. As the schools in BC clearly demonstrated, for a policy to be effective requires resource and knowledge support during implementation. An Alberta school board representative remarked on the importance of support to implement policies successfully:

Developing the policy, showing the people the policy, helping people with the regs [regulations], and giving them strategies to ensure the implementation of the regs, [and] monitoring the implementation of the regs has made a huge difference in terms of the acceptance of the policy. . . . [It is important] to have awareness, showing the policy and how to implement. And one of the things we learned was that you have to have somebody in every school that has a vested interest in this.

Further, successful implementation of policies requires that expectations be outlined and interpreted, that support and assistance be offered, and that the implementation process be evaluated and monitored to meet the goals of such policies as inclusive education.

Equally important is that, to ensure effective educational practices, school districts have to give schools the space and flexibility to enact policies, review them to ensure that they are in the best interests of students, and further grant permission to modify, redesign, and even reimagine education to create the most suitable policies and educational

practices for refugee learners. Therefore, the following are important parts of policy design and evaluation:

- resource and knowledge support during the implementation phase;
- support and flexibility in the enactment and revision of policies and practices;
- close evaluation, enactment, and implementation of policies to ensure that they are in the best interests of students; and
- establishment of an independent, knowledgeable body to ensure that policies are enacted and evaluated and that follow-up recommendations are enforced.

Final Thoughts

Making policy recommendations within the framework of the system that I have criticized in this research creates a paradox of which I am aware and cannot ignore.

However, at the same time, it is not unique to this research. Thomson (2013) suggested that we have to work with and against policy because critiquing “allows for some of the lacunae of particular ways of thinking to be identified, and for particular logics to become more visible” (p. 180). Therefore, critiquing and working with policy are essential to challenge entrenched beliefs, values, and practices and pave the road for those who do not fall into the statistical norms of society.

The experience of educational failure and the inability to meet the demands of society push refugee youth to the periphery of society. The lack of cognitive justice has a further negative impact on the integration of these learners. The dominant powers in society establish ‘the correct way of being’ and promote a hegemonic culture in which newcomers’ culture and being do not fit into the category. Therefore, newcomers face cultural injustice because they are persuaded “to submit to the burdensome condition of

suspending—or permanently surrendering—what they naturally take for granted [their culture]. This means that, in reality, the subjugated person has no linguistic or cultural default drive” (Odora Hoppers, 2009, p. 605). This is similar to how current practices and expected outcomes in the education system undermine the experiences and languages of students who are different from those in the mainstream. For inclusivity to move beyond the toleration of different others, those in power also need to share the burden of understanding the unfamiliar. In the words of Odora Hoppers, the powerful also need to suspend “what they naturally take for granted” (p. 605).

The initial success of the refugee youth in the learning institutions in BC who participated in this study implies that it is possible to reverse the low success rate of refugee youth in the Canadian education system by recognizing students and their families and changing pedagogical practices in schools. Similarly, the pilot project implemented in several schools in Alberta to address the needs of refugee youth were designed to help students to succeed by valuing their knowledge and experiences. Valuing students and ensuring their success are the foundations of cognitive justice. For inclusion to be successful, cognitive justice needs to be ingrained in all educational policies and practices. Education based on social justice requires that educational policymakers be mindful of cognitive justice and the implications of its absence. Therefore, various communities of knowledge must be involved in the design and implementation of policies. As Odora Hoppers (2009) implied, cognitive justice “mandates a rethinking of the tenets and limitations of existing disciplinary arrangements, while for sector of ministries, it implies broadening the operational parameters of existing policies including the implementation strategies that accompany them” (p. 611).

Policy design through the lens of social justice and race equity acknowledges all learners and considers the underlying factors that influence students' educational outcomes, the context within which education unfolds, and the existing power relations among various agents in the learning organization. In the final chapter, based on the framework of the study, race equity and social justice, I make recommendations to respond effectively to the educational and social well-being of refugee learners in Canadian learning institutions. The recommendations are based on the findings of the study, the importance of recognition, and the critical introduction of cognitive justice as pillars upon which educational policies and practices need to be designed.

CHAPTER 11: RECOMMENDATIONS

Welcoming Atmosphere

Refugee youth have the potential to flourish and become contributing members of society, and although some succeed, for many, the right opportunities for learning are absent (Wong, 2002). The educational policies that I reviewed and analyzed in this study in very general terms touched on the importance of creating a learning environment in which all students feel safe and can grow academically and socially. However, as I explained in the earlier chapters, for a variety of reasons such as hierarchical policies, pushback from various stakeholders, and resource and knowledge gaps, inclusive-education policies are not enacted to their full potential. Therefore, outlining steps to make policymakers and implementers mindful of the process of policy design in a way that reflects refugee learners in our education system is crucial for policies to be of value.

Many policymakers and educators in this study referred to the collection of elements required for the resettlement of refugee learners as a *wraparound policy*. Policy should be situated in context, facilitate meaningful leadership from within and outside communities, promote holistic and target programming, and address systemic barriers to inclusion. It is essential that policy for refugee students be holistic and account for their social marginalization. Arnot and Pinson (2005) and J. Rutter (2006) concluded that the best practices to create successful educational experiences for refugee youth in the United Kingdom include a holistic model in a welcoming environment. The philosophy of a welcoming educational institution includes “an ethos of inclusion, celebration of diversity and a caring ethos and giving of hope” (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012, p. 45). The unfortunate prevailing attitude toward refugees is one of fear, and refugees are considered threats to

national security as well as added burdens to the economic well-being of the country. Therefore, targeted policies are needed to include refugees in a way that respects and values their presence in their new home country. Further, policies need to demand the incorporation of programming to include the education of the citizens of the host nation in a way that it creates an awareness of refugees and those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. The inclusion of such programming in policy results in a positive image of refugees and asylum seekers and is an important element in creating a welcoming atmosphere. Policies that promote the valuing of newcomers signify the benefits inherent in diversity and thus project refugee learners as important members of learning institutions. As Arnot and Pinson (2005) stated, if schools are to welcome refugee learners, we need to consider their presence in schools “as a gift rather than as a deficit” (p. 51). One aspect of a welcoming environment is the proper inclusion of students in the school culture, which emphasizes the importance of suitable evaluation programs. Further, the targeted policy addresses the purposes of resettlement and ensures successful transition into mainstream society; it is not a long-term policy that creates dependency and traps specific populations on predetermined paths.

The focus of this chapter is recommendations that policy makers and implementers can utilize to ensure that marginalized learners/refugee youth are recognized and included in policies. These recommendations follow the understanding of the theoretical framework that has guided this study: race equity and social justice. The chapter is divided into four sections: recommendations for policy process, recommendation for leadership, recommendation for pedagogy, and, finally, recommendations for teacher education and professional development. The first two

sections include recommendations to ensure holistic policies and recognition of all members of learning institutions. The recommendations are to create a framework for individuals to participate in the design and enactment of policies that are cognizant of the policy problem as well as the context within which the problem unfolds. Implementing the recommendations will also ensure that different knowledges are considered and valued in drafting or enacting a policy. The section on recommendations for policy process also focuses on the need for policy makers and implementers to recognize the power relations among and between all stakeholders. The last two sections include practical recommendation to create a welcoming learning atmosphere for refugee learners through instructional programming. These sections of the chapter include recommendations on enhancing pedagogy and professional development to create a welcoming atmosphere for refugee learners in Canadian learning institutions.

Recommendations for Policy Process

Addressing the educational shortcomings of any population and enhancing the learning outcomes of students through policy it is integral to recognize the context and governing ideologies within which the policy unfolds. Further, it is important to recognize and identify the groups who are impacted, the environment, and the factors that influence students' educational outcomes.

Recognition of the Context in Which Policy Unfolds

Educational policies come into effect within a preexisting framework of ideologies, values, communities, and experiences. As Ball et al. (2012) explained, "Policy creates context, but context also precedes policy" (p. 19). The underlying reason for the inconsistencies and conflicts between policies and practices is the neoliberal

environment in which educational policies are unfolding. As Rawlins, Hansen, and Jorgensen (2011) stated, “Under the neo-liberal axioms, where competition, rather than co-operation, became the key operator, the power dynamics changed to where managerial structures were imposed, administrative bureaucracy was increased and collegiality correspondingly decreased” (p. 171).

The competitive context within which policies unfold does not focus on the best interests of all students. It is crucial to recognize the interwoven discourses of managerialism in the design and delivery of education alongside the models of excellence that are the expected overall outcomes of education, because the system is designed only for those who are deemed fit and can meet the expectations of the system and survive. Therefore, it is important to be cognizant of the elements that govern society to override the market value attached to education and develop a policy that ensures the equal participation of all. It is therefore important to understand students’ socioeconomic backgrounds, lived experiences, and life histories, which impact their current learning circumstances. Similarly, the impact of policies such as accountability that emphasize specific learning and demand certain outcomes needs to be reviewed and assessed. Alternative means of learning measurements have to be designed and utilized to ensure equity in learning for all students.

Recognition of the context also includes the acknowledgement of differences among districts and schools. Thrupp and Lupton (2006) cautioned that the identification of the context of each school in terms of the complex social, cultural, environmental, and economic factors is essential to determine the best policies and practices for effective pedagogy. Principals and educators in this study understood the implications of the

context of educational policies: that education is delivered in neo-liberal market, competition driven market. They were also aware of the high number of socially vulnerable students in their schools and the limited resources available to them to achieve the standards of excellence that policies require. Acknowledging that policymakers are not cognizant of the context, principals and educators as policy implementers have normalized the low academic achievement of school populations, which has been a constant theme in schools that have high numbers of refugee youth, among other socially vulnerable populations. Such detrimental accommodations would not have been necessary if policymakers were cognizant of the context in which education takes place and its importance in the delivery of education. Policymakers' awareness of the context helps to ensure purposeful instruction, knowledge transfer, and resources for the successful implementation and enactment of the policy.

Recognition of the Problem

The study participants stressed the importance of identifying and acknowledging problems that contribute to the educational shortfall. In discussing the factors that contribute to low educational achievement, the participants deliberated on issues within educational institutions that create learning gaps among students, as well as societal issues that lead to students' low success rate. For example, the school trustee in Alberta discussed the historical circumstances that have led to the marginalization of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners. Another example of a shortcoming is the inability of students to feel safe and a sense of belonging in schools, as with sexual-minority youth. In other circumstances shortcomings are evident as a result of the inadequacy or lack of a policy. Therefore, before designing policy, it is important to have a complete

understanding of the problem and the associated circumstances through the lens of social justice.

It is also important to identify specific students' needs and develop policy and planning based on their histories and knowledge. Educational policies that are designed and delivered in reaction to problems are usually temporary solutions to rooted problems and therefore do not result in meaningful social change. Thus, policies need to be proactive to meet the needs of students, enable the evaluation of circumstances, and ensure that educational institutions have the capacity to help students to grow, learn, and develop to meet their potential and the future needs of society.

Recognition of What Constitutes Knowledge

In current times the market economy has influenced education and what is defined as knowledge. Thomson (2013) commented that “knowledge is seen as amenable to being parceled up in syllabus artefacts and delivered through transmission pedagogies or forms of coercive constructionism” (p. 176). Therefore, what should be defined as knowledge is predetermined and taught to students to ensure that all learners receive the same knowledge. However, such interpretation fails to recognize the possibility of ignoring certain knowledge that is valuable, and it privileges certain groups over others. Knowledge and the means of education are debated and chosen, and, as Horton and Freire (1990) acknowledged, no choice is neutral. They described their understanding of the neutrality of knowledge:

I started looking at that word *neutral* and what it meant; it became very obvious to me there can be no such thing as neutrality. It's a code word for the existing system. It has nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be—. . . . Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be. (p. 102)

Therefore, policymakers have to be cognizant of the knowledge that is being taught and who the knowledge seekers are. By acknowledging and recognizing learners, policymakers can envision how to guide them to reach their full potential, because, without knowing the students and envisioning and ensuring the process through which all students can reach their full potential, educational organization do not contribute meaningfully to the learning and growth of learners.

Further, in particular, policies on evaluation and assessment that are written as overarching guidelines have two hidden assumptions. The lack of recognition and the design of current policies on assessment and evaluation lead to the assumption that all students are similar. The assumption is that if students are presented with the same information, the educational uptake, learning, and knowledge creation will be similar. Such expectations do not consider students' varied backgrounds and learning needs. Further, given that one of the major objectives of the education system is to fulfill the needs of the labor market, it disregards students' varied desires from an education. In educational organizations, the higher ranked policymakers are removed from students and the everyday learning in classrooms. External and internal factors influence students' learning, such as income disparity and the negative stereotyping of certain minority groups. Policy makers' inability to recognize students' differences and their learning needs lead to policy designs or modifications that do not focus on addressing the root causes. For example, within a system that emphasizes assessment, any changes to the goal of improving student outcomes are focused on modifying the assessment process. Evaluation procedures rather than students and their needs with regard to the creation of knowledge and lifelong learning are prioritized (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti,

2005; Thomson, 2013). Recognizing student diversity, differences in modes of learning, and the eventual expectations from learning helps to create a society that steers away from valuing hegemony and utilizes the diversity of its population for the benefit of all citizens.

Representation of refugee youth and their families in policy process and program design

For policies and programs to be based on social justice, it is important to ensure that all pillars of social justice are upheld. Representation and parity of participation in policy process and program design is a crucial element if educational policy and programs are going to meet the needs of refugee learners. In order, for policies and programs to reflect the needs of refugee learners it is essential that refugee learners and their parents are active agents in policy process. Ensuring success of refugee learners is not possible without their voices and input throughout the process of design, delivery and evaluation.

Representation plays significant role not only in designing policies that are based on the needs of refugee learners but also it is a meaningful step towards overcoming systemic obstacles within institutions and organizations that hinder success of minorities. Systemic obstacles such as racism and educational delivery models that are based on deficiency as oppose to strengths of newcomers and minority learners. Further, welcoming and necessitating presence of refugee families in policy design ensures parental engagement with their children's educational activities and allows for building bridges between schools and parents. Moreover, in an environment where students

witness their voices are valued and their concerns are respected, students develop a sense of belonging and engagement.

Funding

Various levels of governing agencies are involved with refugee newcomers at distinct stages. The federal government is responsible for the sponsorship program and transportation of refugees to Canada. Provincial governments are responsible for providing essential services such as health and education. With grants from municipal, provincial, and federal governments, various districts and community agencies address the settlement needs of refugees. The disconnect at various levels of government and the invisibility of refugees within the political arena have created an atmosphere in which refugees are easily disregarded. Therefore, when the study participants discussed funding, they referred to the importance of the recognition of refugees at all levels of government. Service delivery to this population needs to come from all levels; furthermore, communication is required among all levels to address the needs of refugees and most effectively deliver services. For services to be effective requires sustainable funding from all levels of government to provide continuous programs and services to refugee newcomers. All of the research participants contended that, for students to succeed in the classroom, it is important to alleviate the social vulnerability of this population as a group, and several participants recommended a transition-model program:

I would like to see we had a government that is committed to bringing X number of thousands of people a year. I think we need to do a better job. I mean, education being a provincial responsibility, I think federal government needs to do a better job providing schools that have larger refugee population with additional resources. Don't get me started on having to repay plane tickets, stuff with interest! That just drives me nuts; I think it's strange. I know where the government is also falling short. It is pulling the adult funding for foundational stuff. They have cut back, so it's not enough just to bring somebody

over. I think what's required is, for that first couple of years, additional wraparound support; then you can slowly pull away, because you don't want to create a situation where people become reliant on the system. You start breeding second-generational poverty; that's the last thing you want. But I think you need to do a lot more in those initial two years for supports for integration and for language acquisition and stuff like that. (School principal, BC)

Some of the recommendations for enhanced funding to alleviate the societal barriers include the following:

- Eliminate the transportation fee that refugees sponsored by the government must repay.
- Offer suitable and continuous language training.
- Offer employment services.
- Develop multicultural programs.
- Offer credential- and skill-transferability services.

Creating a welcoming atmosphere is not possible without the dedication and acknowledgment of governing bodies and agencies. To ensure the proper implementation of policies to benefit all Canadians—both long-term residents and newcomers to the country—it is important that both the federal and provincial governments recognize the need for more intensified support for the refugee population. The literature identified leadership and funding as the two pillars required for the effective implementation of policies and practices (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Kanu, 2007; Lund, 2008; Ngo, 2009b; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; J. Rutter, 2006; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Given recognition of the need to offer holistic support to the refugee population, governments must ensure that agencies have the required funding for essential initiatives to ensure the proper integration of these newcomers into mainstream society.

Recommendations for Leadership

The study participants emphasized that, to initiate change, the actors who recognize the shortcomings and advocate for change play a crucial role in the success of the design and delivery of policy. With the recognition that policy is not enacted in a vacuum but within and among a network of organizations, it is essential to acknowledge the network of relationships and the power relations among various groups.

Recognized by Whom?

Policies are shaped by collaboration among various agents, groups, and organizations. According to policy network theory, the outcome of a policy can depend upon the relations among the collective actors (Bressers & O’Toole, 1998; Howlett & Ramesh, 1998). It is important to recall the injustice in the treatment of refugees as a collective and their lack of social parity (Bauman, 2004). As Fraser & Bourdieu’s (2007) model of social justice illustrates, marginalized populations—in this case refugee families—are not included in the community “of those entitled to make justice claims” (p. 21). Additionally, the study participants claimed that refugee families are further excluded from representation in political communities. They underscored the importance of representation by and advocacy from powerful and knowledgeable individuals. In identifying effective policies, a school board member described the importance of representation by powerful and knowledgeable individuals:

I can speak to the value of policy around [a specific minority group]. That was a policy we created three years ago with [the advocate] he is the guru, the guide. What it ensures is that you have intentional practices and support that the policy serves children. It just doesn’t happen by the by.

Further, the participants described power and advocacy as forces that can ensure the implementation and practice of policies in schools. A school board representative

described the power of representation in the face of the noncompliance of administrators and principals who call and inquire about the necessity of implementing policies: “I say only if you don’t want the minister of Social Services to call because she gave all the kids her phone number in the conference, saying, ‘If you have a problem, call me.’” The school board representative outlined the importance of the involvement of powerful actors such as the minister of Social Services. If schools do not comply, it is possible that their inaction will come to the attention of the minister, which makes school administrators responsible for the delivery of policy and their lack of action on policy implementation consequential. Specifically in relation to refugee youth, one of the community organization representatives mentioned that “what is really critical is for the superintendent to really understand the issue and to care about it.” It is very timely for those in power in education to begin to recognize the plight of refugee youth in the education system and to begin to represent this population as deserving and having the right to access equitable education within the larger educational systems and institutions.

Recognition of Power Relations

Embedded in recognition and representation by individuals or advocacy groups who hold power and are knowledgeable and passionate is the power difference between those who are being represented and the representative. In designing policy based on the social justice framework, it is important that the representatives recognize the power relation between themselves and those whom they are representing. Given that current educational policymaking and practice are based on the difference-as-deficit model and that they devalue students’ histories and knowledge and recognize only Eurocentric knowledge, it is important that policymakers recognize their epistemic stand. As Said (as

cited in Rawlins, Hansen, & Jorgensen, 2011) stated, “Power and knowledge are inseparable. As such, it is an individual’s epistemologies that will influence the degree of power they feel they have” (p. 171). If policy is to meet the needs of students and not perpetuate hegemonic practices, it is essential that policymakers recognize the relationships, the power imbalances, and their perceptions of reality. To appreciate and be cognizant of one’s reality, it is important to be aware of one’s privileges, knowledge, and understanding of others.

Further, policies are developed and implemented within an interconnected web of individuals and organizations. Because the federal government sponsors refugees, the study participants contended that the government must meet its obligations and responsibilities to this population. The study participants identified the building of relationships and development of trust as crucial for policymakers, educational institutions, and those whom the policy will serve. A study participant noted that building relationships based on trust to enact policies and meet the needs of vulnerable populations is essential:

I think a lot of the work I have been able to do has been based on relationships; schools don’t mind me calling them. I call and say, “Hey, how are you doing?” And then I say, “You need to do x, y, and z”; and 90% of them say, “Okay, [participant’s name], done deal!” But the next person in my chair, if they don’t have that relationship with people, it isn’t going to happen. So we need to have lots of advocates, and that’s what I talk to my staff about, is that “you have to have advocacy. You have to build that trust and relationship,” because with 18,275 kids, it can’t be one person. So you need to build capacity all across the level, and my goal is to try to get the upper echelon to see that this is important.

Therefore, to include students within the periphery of society requires recognition of their presence and support for the students through alliances and advocacy. Study participants emphasized that various agents within the institutions need to support the cause. Policies

can be introduced and modified once those in power have united with the cause and can be implemented effectively if school administrators and teachers recognize the value of the policy. To ensure parity of participation, power relations among various stakeholders also need to be recognized. Understanding epistemic standing and privilege can result in transparency in intentions and relations in an organization and ensure that policies are drafted based on the pillars of social justice.

Recommendations for Pedagogy

Proper evaluation of programs that focus particularly on cultural and social accuracy and attention to the implications of the evaluation procedures are needed. Rutter (2006) stressed the need for practitioners to refrain from homogenizing refugee students and the importance of targeting specific groups of refugee youth who need educational and psychosocial interventions. Evaluation programs must also pay equal attention to the proper assessment of language and other subject areas for students to benefit the most from their educational experience and for institutions to be able to create programming that best meets the needs of their students.

Schools in which refugee youth demonstrate a high rate of success emphasize language learning, but they also offer additional support to enhance student learning and transition students into mainstream classrooms once they have gained basic language proficiency. The transition of students into core courses must occur while the students are gaining English or French language proficiency. This transition is possible by adapting creative programming, such as using visual resources to provide information or teachers who have experience in ESL education co-teaching in regular classrooms (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Welcoming educational institutions recognize the special needs

of their students, and, to best ensure student success, they are willing to adjust policies to suit the best interests of the students. Extension of the education-completion period, particularly for older refugee youth (15 and older), is an important consideration.

Growing research is indicating the importance of students' proficiency in their native language. Researchers have argued the proficiency in their native language will help them to develop their identity and gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively (Roessingh & Field, 2000). Learning environments utilizing funds of knowledge approaches values the lived experience of all students and do not push students to the periphery. In an environment where students feel that their conceptual and experiential knowledge is valued, they do not need to search outward abstractedly for irrelevant knowledge to find answers. In this environment learners will begin not only the learning process, but also, and most important, the thinking process. Empowering learners and valuing their experience create a novel relationship between students and knowledge, and students will therefore gain social power when they understand the curriculum. This newfound social relationship between knowledge and curriculum, based on learners' understanding of reality and reflection on their own experiences in learning centers, will further empower students to recreate their standing and power relations within the larger society (Kincheloe, 2005).

Implementation of the following recommendations will help to develop meaningful school programming for refugee learners:

Educational Programming

- Develop assessment and evaluation policies and practices that help students to engage with school and lifelong learning.

- Offer newcomer parents information sessions on parental disengagement for the purpose of two-way integration communication, and offer information to parents to ease the resettlement process:
- Redesign the curriculum to create a more inclusive learning environment and permit knowledge sharing.
- Develop bridging programs for students to ensure accessibility to postsecondary institutions.
- Inform schools on various cultural understandings of certain school practices, and modify certain practices if needed:
- Modify disciplinary protocols by gaining an understanding of students' backgrounds and their families' current circumstances, and establish disciplinary practices that foster a change in behavior to positive action rather than a view of discipline as negative and punitive action, which leads to school disengagement and withdrawal.
- Make accessible extracurricular activities and programs available in which students from various backgrounds can participate.
- Make coaches and mentors available to support refugee students:

We also need to have coaches, mentors in the schools for refugee students, because their families at this time in their situation, given their experiences in Canada, may not be the most successful persons to help to do that. (School board representative, Alberta)

- Use various artifacts to strengthen diversity and differences in values (e.g. a multifaith calendar):

Language Training Program

- Restore the policy with regard to seven-year language-program funding.
- Develop multiliteracy programs for English language learners.
- Introduce reading recovery programs for students at higher levels of schooling.
- Develop literacy programming to help English language learners to enroll in core subject classes.
- Modify classroom practices to meet the needs of refugee learners:
 - Allow ESL teachers and subject-specific teachers to co-teach in classrooms.
 - Allow one teacher to remain in the classroom for a longer period of time:

[Name of the programs in BC] were created to . . . have more time with just a few teachers and to really create a sense of family within the school, so they are really being cared for, but also getting some fundamental learning, and to look forward. (School district representative, BC)

Building Relations with Community Resources

- Develop policies and guidelines with regard to working with community organizations:
 - to ensure that schools utilize the services and initiatives of community organizations for the benefit of students and their families;
 - to ensure that services are not duplicated;
 - to resolve the issues of access to personal information and the cohesiveness of various organizations and services that work together; and

- to create a position in schools for a person who is knowledgeable about all of the services that will benefit refugee families and refugee learners and who is present and available on the school grounds to accept newcomer students, provide needed support, and manage out-of-school service providers.
- Ensure accessibility to additional support staff with specific training such as cultural liaisons and family therapists on a regular basis:

Cultural liaisons play important roles in initiating the two-way integration of newcomers into the Canadian system. Cultural liaisons are not translators but need to have a deep understanding of the education system as well as the minority-student culture. Their role is to make students and their families feel welcome, give parents the information that they need to help their children to succeed, give the school information to help administrators and educators to better understand and educate refugee learners, and form relationships with various minority communities. (School principal 2)

- Ensure that family therapists deal with the emotional needs of refugee learners and are resources to assist educators with classroom management and lesson planning in a way that will benefit teachers and students and create better learning environments for all students.

Recommendation for Teacher Education and Professional Development

As I discussed in this study and much of the literature reported (Brophy, 1986; Cummins, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2000), teachers play a significant role in implementing policies and influencing the identity development of the students in their classrooms. Further, studies have shown the disconnect between teachers and minority youth, the lack of understanding and knowledge of how to create inclusive classrooms, the low requirements and expectations for teachers to have inclusive-classroom knowledge, and the even more limited opportunities for teachers to acquire the needed

knowledge and skills (Banks, 1996; Cummins, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Peck et al., 2008; Sokal & Katz, 2015). Therefore, enhancing teacher training in the area of inclusive-classroom management is essential for both preservice and inservice educators:

- Train teachers on inclusive education.
- Value ESL specialization as an area of concentration for preservice teachers.
- Offer training for the assessment and placement of ESL students.
- Ensure that in-service teachers have effective professional learning opportunities. Yoon, Duncan, Wen-Yu Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) demonstrated that efficient and effective professional learning occurs when educators receive 30 to 100 hours of training for 6 to 12 months. Further, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009, as cited in Sokal & Sharma, 2014) asserted that effective professional learning should be “intensive, on-going, [and] connected to practice, and should build strong relationships between teachers” (p. 67).

Refugee youth enter Canadian learning institutions after having suffered the harsh and difficult experiences of war, violence, forcible removal from their homes and homelands, and years in refugee camps or other transitory situations. Their entrance into Canadian schools is also a difficult transition because some students might not have had prior formal schooling and other refugee learners might have had their schooling interrupted. Students have to navigate their new learning atmosphere without being fluent in the language of instruction. The educational environment can make these newly arrived students feel isolated from the mainstream students. Moreover, other factors such

as low socioeconomics, lack of employment, and limited support from family, communities and organizations impact these students' learnings. Therefore, the need for a learning framework that would help refugee learners to succeed in their educational endeavors and to have parity in their participation with other students must be recognized. Based on the race equity and social justice framework, for students to have a fruitful educational journey requires a policy process that recognizes the problem and the context within which challenges exists. Strong advocate or advocacy groups are also needed to identify the existing learning circumstances that place refugee learners at a disadvantage. Based on race equity and social justice, advocacy groups as well as policy makers and implementers need to be aware of their power and the existing power relations within the education network and the broader society. Another recommendation to create a welcoming atmosphere and holistic programming is specific school programming to address the educational needs and inclusion of refugee learners. The final recommendation is for the enhancement of teacher training and their professional development to ensure that educators have the skills they require to meet the needs of diverse students in their classrooms.

Figure 4 is a list of recommendations for policy and program design for refugee students.

Future Research

The framing of forcibly displaced populations as refugees during the 1960s was a short-term solution to the influx of migrants as a result of war and postwar circumstances. The solution that has remained in place for the past 55 years does not meet the dire needs of refugees globally. An effect of becoming a forcibly displaced population is interrupted

Recommended Elements for Refugee Policy and Program Design

Recommendations for Policy Process

- Recognize context
- Recognize problem
- Recognize what constitutes knowledge, valuing of diverse knowledges
- Representation of refugee youth and their families in the policy making process
- Funding
 - Establish transition-model program

Recommendations for Leadership

- Recognition by knowledgeable, passionate advocate in position of power
- Recognize power relations

Recommendation for Pedagogy

Educational Programming

- Develop assessment and evaluation policies and practices that help students to engage with school and lifelong learning.
- Offer newcomer parents information sessions on parental disengagement for the purpose of two-way integration communication, and offer information to parents to ease the resettlement process.
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- Inform schools on various cultural understandings of certain school practices, and modify certain practices if needed.
- Modify disciplinary protocols by gaining an understanding of students' backgrounds and their families' current circumstances, and establish disciplinary practices that foster a change in behavior to positive action rather than a view of discipline as negative and punitive action, which leads to school disengagement and withdrawal.
- Make accessible extracurricular activities and programs available in which students from various backgrounds can participate.
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- Use various artifacts to strengthen diversity and differences in values.

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- to create a position in schools for a person who is knowledgeable about all of the services that will benefit refugee families and refugee learners and who is present and available on the school grounds to accept newcomer students, provide needed support, and manage out-of-school service providers.
- Ensure accessibility to additional support staff with specific training such as cultural liaisons and family therapists on a regular basis.
- Family therapists: Deal with the emotional needs of refugee learners and become resources to assist educators with classroom management and lesson planning in a way that will benefit teachers and students and create better learning environments for all students.

Recommendations for Teacher Training and Professional Development

- Ensure inclusive-education training.
- Value ESL specialization as an area of concentration for preservice teachers.
- Provide training for the assessment and placement of ESL students.
- Offer effective professional learning opportunities for in-service teachers. Yoon et al. (2007) demonstrated that efficient and effective professional learning occurs when educators receive 30 to 100 hours of training for 6 to 12 months.

Figure 4. Recommended elements for refugee policy and program design.

schooling in an era when accreditation achieved with a specific form of knowledge is the permit required in a competitive globalized market economy. Although there is a wealth of scholarly material on refugees in general and the education of newcomer youth in Western nations, more focused research on refugee youth in Western nations is required. Because globalization has facilitated more migration, it is important not to homogenize various groups of migrants and conduct research on newcomers as a whole. Further, it is crucial to understand that refugees come from different backgrounds and arrive for various reasons; therefore, refugees as a collective cannot be homogenized in research activities. Given the foundation of current scholarly work, future research needs to focus on various groups of refugees and their particular stories, experiences, and needs. With a specific focus on education, I make the following recommendations for future research to address the needs of refugee learners in Western nations.

There is a gap in the research with regard to the identification and analysis of long-term educational practices for refugee learners. The major reason for such a gap is the limited number of current programs and researchers' limited access to such spaces. Therefore, I recommend that host nations gain an understanding of how organizations such as schools and their governing agencies perceive refugees and the steps that are needed to mobilize change and integrate refugees to ensure that they are considered valued members of society. Further, there is a lack of knowledge of how best to incorporate core courses into English language learner programs and curriculums. Given the dire need for programming to bridge refugee learners into postsecondary schools, I recommend that future research focus on the concerns related to higher education for refugee learners and that steps be taken to overcome this major hurdle. Moreover, many nonprofit service providers work directly with schools, refugee youth, and their families on refugee settlement. I therefore recommend that the narratives of community organizations be heard to better understand them, the services that they provide, and their impact on the success of refugee settlement.

Closing Comments

Educational experience and the realization of education goals are the cornerstones for the successful integration into society of youth or adult learners. Given the centrality and impact of education on life, it is crucial that education systems ensure that all learners in schools benefit from their educational journey. To ensure the educational success of all learners, the educational environment, policies, and practices need to be based on social justice and equity. One of the crucial factors in education programming that will benefit all students that is currently missing from educational organizations is

recognition; they must recognize and acknowledge all students. Acknowledging students and thus understanding them, their histories, and their strength and weaknesses will ensure that they will be educated in a manner that will engage them and enhance their social and academic growth.

At no time has the recognition of refugee learners in the system been more essential than it is now. The ineffectiveness of education for refugee learners have been documented and studied within academia for many years, but governing agencies and policy makers have disregarded and overlooked refugee learners in the school system. The lack of recognition of refugees and the creation of this invisible population as a practice goes beyond schooling and educational structures and is systemic within all national and international structures, to the point that refugees have been included in categories identified in critical discard studies (Bales, 1999; Bauman, 2004; Beck, 2009; Desmond, 1971; Katz, 2008; Mbembe, 2011; Scanlan, 2005; Yates, 2011). The identification of populations who have been unwillingly forced out of their homes and live as waste products is abhorrent. The education system is the most appropriate space in which to stop this practice and to promote inclusion based on value for the diversity of humanity. Recognizing diversity, valuing students and their knowledge, and offering meaningful and targeted education to all students if they need it are principles upon which to build an educational environment for all students, including refugee learners.

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