MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR NEWCOMER YOUTH:
Fostering resilience and compassion among refugees and their peers

By

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Master of Arts 2016
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Abstract

Refugee youth represent one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population. Upon resettlement, post-migration factors can have severe impacts on mental health and wellbeing. In Ontario, schools are relied upon to support integration and manage the reception of newcomers, yet children continue to face struggles that impede upon wellbeing. Social exclusion, discrimination, and a lack of social support are amongst these issues.

A postmodern framework is employed to explore the social, historical, and political implications of the refugee experience within the Ontario public school context. A hermeneutic approach is used to interpret curriculum documents, policies, policy guidelines, and other texts that shape the Ontario elementary education system.

Based on my research, I propose that a holistic, mindfulness based curriculum be integrated into Ontario education in order to enhance resilience among refugee youth while fostering compassion and support among their peers.
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Chapter One</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiographical Context</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Chapter Two</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Postmodern Framework</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chapter Three</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hermeneutics</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Chapter Four</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Context</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chapter Five</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Context</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Chapter Six</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodern Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mindfulness Education</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Chapter Seven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Autobiographical Context

My Path to Here and Now

My interest in working with and supporting the refugee youth population has developed over time and through various life experiences. It is rooted in my family’s heritage, was sparked by exposure to other cultures early on in life, and has cultivated out of empathy from the struggles I endured in my own life. It evolved through travel and seeing other ways of life and has been shaped with compassion through my professional and volunteer work. Making sense of my own connection to the refugee community has involved bringing together the pieces of my life’s puzzle. Expressing this connection will require me to divulge details about the path that has led me to here and now.

Heritage

I grew up feeling a strong connection to my Jewish heritage and faith. I recall the burning of the candles, the faint taste of wine on my lips, and the melodic blessings on Sabbath nights. My grandmother would wave her hands over the flickering lights and sing the blessings. On Saturday mornings my family and I attended synagogue. I can see the jewel-toned stained glass that lined the walls of our temple, depicting stories of faith. The cantor sings a hymn and the congregation sways to and fro, connected as if one organism. We sing our reprise in harmony, allowing the sweet sounds to wash over us, and I have an overwhelming sense of the present moment and a deeply spiritual connection to something greater. All at once I feel mystified and at ease. It is as though peace has been kindled within each of us. We are one people, and I embody traditions that transcend generations.

The Jewish faith was extremely important to my upbringing. I grew up in a home that kept
Kosher and upheld the customs and traditions of the faith. For the first few years of my formal education, I attended a Hebrew private school where the day started with the singing of the Israeli national anthem. Hebrew was my second language, and biblical stories were a conduit for life’s most valuable lessons. Life’s greatest markers were not only the day I lost my first tooth or when I learned to ride a bike, but my first Siddur ceremony and my Bat-Mitzvah.

Being Jewish has offered me a particular lens through which I interpret the world. It has meant more than just sharing a faith. It has meant celebrating a lineage of hope and miracles, yet learning of misdirected hate and countless struggles. It has meant growing up hearing stories of love and victory but also of oppression and torture. As if part of the collective conscience, I acquired an awareness of unfounded hate early on in life. Persecution, war, torture, and exile have been familiar concepts since I can remember, and were told to me not just as distant stories, but as stories of my family, and therefore stories from which I came into the world.

My mother’s grandfather, Zaide, was the cantor of a synagogue in the Bronx. He and my great-grandmother, Bubba Fannie as I knew her, moved to New York from Austria right before the Second World War erupted. They were cousins by marriage, but eloped upon arriving to the United States because of their need for each given the political turmoil and their harsh circumstances as Jews. Soon after Zaide and Bubba Fannie immigrated to the United States, Zaide learned that his parents and only sister were killed in the Holocaust. How he must have suffered to lose everyone who meant anything to him. And yet, upon moving to New York, he was determined to start a new life while maintaining a strong devotion to his faith. My grandmother, their daughter, would tell me stories of what it was like growing up with immigrant parents, the joys and the struggles, and the feeling early on in life that she carried the weight of their wellbeing on her shoulders.
My father’s side of the family also suffered persecution because of their Jewish heritage. My great-grandfather escaped Russia during the pogroms. When the Russian Cossacks stormed his home, he and his brothers hid behind the house, only to find after the soldiers had left that his father had been murdered. His mother, who had been very sick with a fever, was unaware of the events that had ensued. Her sons had to inform their mother of her greatest loss. After that, they fled to New York where their last name was changed from Kopipsky to Cohen; an identity erased. My great-grandfather went on to run his own department store, “Cohen’s,” embracing his new life, a life that afforded opportunity and freedom from oppression.

Being Jewish and knowing the story of my heritage has always made the notion of refuge ever-present in the foundation of my being. I think of my family and how I am no different. I was only fortunate to have been born at a different time. I am a link in a chain that has survived exile, war, persecution, and adversity. As a third generation Jewish woman, I represent a lineage of survival.

**Foreign Family**

Early on in life, I was closely introduced to the idea of assimilation. From the time I was only a few years old, my siblings and I were raised by au pairs. Women came from around the world—Israel, Jamaica, Mexico, and Brazil—to cook, clean, and care for us. Exposure to the languages, foods, stories, and cultures of the “other” became woven into my childhood in ways that soothed and nurtured me. Cida, who was from Brazil, was the last au pair who lived with us, and the one with whom I developed the closest bond. From the time she came to live with us, Cida raised me like her child. She would do my hair before school and make me tea and toast when I was sick. She would share stories of Brazil, and my imagination would create colorful, vibrant villages, tropical beaches, and exotic people laughing and dancing. I was intrigued by her foreign life and the way everything seemed new and fascinating to her. I recall the way her foreign words embraced me. I had grown up feeling comforted by the “language of
strangers” (Feuerverger p. 17) and Portuguese in particular seemed to wrap itself around me like a blanket. Cida and I came to trust each other. She would tell me longingly about her own family, her son and daughter, and how she missed them terribly. It was hard to imagine that we were not her only family. Over time, she couldn’t bear being away from her children any longer. Afraid to lose her from our lives, my family invited her daughter and son to the States to live with us. Cida, Juliana, and Christiano, became an extension of our family, and Juliana in particular became like an older sister to me. She could barely speak any English at first, but I was excited to help her assimilate. Since their family of three had been sharing one small room in our house, I invited Juliana to move into my room. We got ready for school together, spent holidays together, grew up together.

I was incredibly curious watching Juliana and Christiano adjust to their new home. They had moved in with us during the summer and began attending school in the fall. They were both enrolled as ESL students where they took classes with other ESL learners and were encouraged to make other ESL friends. I was intrigued even then by the way their lives seemed to carry on separate from the rest of the school. Fortunately for Juliana, she learned to communicate quickly. She would come home and share stories about school, the friends she had made, and the interesting cross-cultural comparisons she had observed. It was more difficult for Christiano. I could see that he felt isolated. He struggled with his English and would become apparently frustrated when he couldn’t express his thoughts. Juliana would tell me how the other students would tease him, in part because of his poor English skills, but mostly because of his “foreignness.” Perhaps because of all of these difficulties, Christiano preferred not to speak about school, and eventually it seemed that he preferred not to speak at all. He seemed depressed, and I could tell he longed for his own home in ways I couldn’t understand.

For the years that they were with us, I got to watch their lives unfold in ways that fascinated me, but also led me to questioning my own privilege. I was becoming increasingly confused by my
entitlement and my fortune to live in circumstances that did not require my family to seek opportunity far from home. I began to realize that on one hand, Cida’s family was my family; the “language of strangers” had become part of my language and their story had become part of my story. On the other, Cida was working for my family. Their family unit was still their own, and they relied on our very being to support their being. I knew then that these thoughts would incite a lasting curiosity about social privilege and assimilation within me. In the meantime, I found comfort in their world despite my confusion.

Mental Health

When I was nine years old, my parents separated. The years leading up to their separation were tumultuous; tension and volatility were all too familiar. But it was the family I knew, and I felt secure in its wholeness despite its dysfunction. When my dad left, it felt as though the already rocky foundation set during childhood had been shaken to its core. A week after my dad left, Cida and my mother got into a volatile argument, and then Cida and my Brazilian family were gone too.

In a matter of weeks, my life had become totally unfamiliar to me.

My parents’ divorce was hostile and unyielding. They fought over every detail of the life they shared together, including me and my siblings. Eventually, I stopped speaking to my father to avoid conflict with my mother, a decision that haunted me for years to come.

Home with my mother became the only sanctuary I had. It was safe and comfortable, and I didn’t have to explain myself. We spoke the language of the family, and I began to believe that we were different from most families—more insightful, more complex. However, what started as comfort led to isolation. Eventually I felt as though no one else could possibly understand me. I believed that I was too complex, too troubled, and too aware of myself for the average eleven year old. I stopped spending time with friends and chose instead to stay home with my family. As I became increasingly isolated from the
rest of the world, my insecurities silently mounted. I tried to make myself unnoticeable—I hunched when I walked, took small quiet steps, crossed my arms in a lonely embrace—and not only neglected my body, but loathed it. I began binge eating to fill the void of my father and distract myself from pain. I had become severely self-conscious about my appearance, so I wore baggy clothes to hide myself. In a sense, it was as though I was growing divorced from my body.

I was depressed and anxious. I felt as though my soul had been squeezed out of me, and nothing could help ease the hurt. I struggled to get out of bed in the morning, and I was constantly sick. The somatic symptoms of my hurt and anxiety were becoming a constant burden. At school, my sense of exclusion seemed to escalate, and I began to accumulate a critical number of absences. School no longer provided me with a sense of safety and community, so I stopped going. Judaism no longer provided me with the solace it once had, so I stopped believing. I felt as though my roots had been dug up; I was disconnected from myself and the world at large. Life felt fragile. The hurt I internalized was so constant it was numbing. At night I ruminated over the events that had transpired and the choices that I’d made that had led me here. For nearly three years I felt disconnected, disembodied, lonely and lost. And although I never intended to take my life, I often considered what it would mean to no longer exist.

My life immediately changed as I began visiting my father again. It became apparent to me that my father was not to blame for their divorce, nor was he the source of my pain and suffering. He let me into his life, and we quickly reconnected and developed a close and supportive relationship. Eventually I moved in with him. My mental health gradually improved as I dealt with the circumstances of my past and looked to the present and the promise that lay before me.

Although I’ll never understand what it means to be a refugee, I empathize with loss, isolation, and the mental health struggles that can ensue as a result of hardships. I understand what it means to
be uprooted and to feel completely uncertain about what the future holds. I was forced to reassess my identity, reinvent myself in a new context, and build new relationships in an environment that was suddenly “home.” It took years before I was able to truly absolve myself of guilt and feel comfort and pride in my decision. But uprooting my life was just that: my decision. I arrived in my new context of my own volition, and I was prepared to make the changes necessary in order to thrive. I feel deeply compassionate for those whose lives are uprooted against their will, who have struggled not to thrive, but to survive, and I am awed by their resilience.

My experiences as a child and my compassion for others led me to studying Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. University offered me wonderful opportunities to reflect on myself, gain insight into mental health, and explore the complexity of the human experience. I became particularly fascinated with human development, social psychology, and cross-cultural studies. This knowledge would provide a foundation for life and learning to come.

**Foreign Lands**

My interest in the infinite possibilities of being was cultivated early on in life, and as soon as I had the opportunity, I began to travel to explore that interest. At seventeen I went on a month long summer tour through Africa, which invoked an awakening within me that would forever change my outlook on my self, my relationships, and my connection to the world. It is in Africa that I began to understand the concept of tradition, a concept that has since become easier to express given my study of hermeneutic philosophy. Tradition, as Hans Georg Gadamer (1998) discusses, is a way of being from which we emerge that shapes our existence and our presence in the world. In Africa I experienced what David Smith describes as a ‘moment of consciousness’ when I realized that we are all born into a particular tradition, and the traditions from which we are born exist in relation to one another (Cooper & White, 2015c). I began to recognize who I was in relation to who I was not and realized that I must
respect and appreciate both in order to invite other traditions into my understanding of and 
appreciation for the world and others. As Smith provides, “Every tradition opens onto the horizon of 
another tradition.” In Africa, I began to grasp that in order to move forward in our encounters with 
others and advance in our pursuit of knowledge of those traditions from that which we do not emerge, 
we must ask, “How shall we proceed together?” (Cooper & White, 2015c)

In Namibia, my tour group visited a small primary school, Epukiro Post, where we were the 
subject of a school assembly. This excerpt from a journal I was keeping during my trip describes this 
sentiment based on an encounter with students of a small primary school in Namibia where my tour 
group was the subject of a school assembly:

We walked across a platform in the middle of the courtyard. I looked out at the sea of monochrome faces, and they 
stared back in disbelief at the array of shapes, sizes, and colors that stood before them. We introduced ourselves, and 
the children seemed awestruck as they repeated our names and origins. We stood before each other feeling worlds 
apart. After our introductions, they swarmed us, eager to introduce themselves. Young girls clutched at my side, 
stroking my eyelashes and running their fingers through my hair. We played soccer, sang songs, and danced. In this 
moment, I felt both fascinated by the cultures that divided us and comforted by the feelings that connected us. These 
interactions are powerful beyond words. Our contact is crucial. We must experience each other and connect with 
one another in order that we should know ourselves and pursue our lives with meaning, purpose, and unity.

I continued to travel whenever possible throughout my time in university, opening myself up to 
other traditions while reflecting intrinsically on my own situation. I studied abroad for a semester in 
Barcelona and traveled around Europe during breaks. I also had the wonderful experience of visiting 
Israel on a “Birthright” trip, where I was able to reconnect with the stories of my childhood as an adult. 
Finally, upon graduating from university, I moved to Seoul, South Korea to teach English at a private 
school.
In Korea, I was not simply visiting a foreign land—I was part of its pulse. Living in another country and acclimating to a different language, culture, and way of living proved to be quite challenging at first. I struggled to communicate and felt constantly misunderstood. I was unfamiliar with simple customs, and felt awkward each time I forced a bow or tended money with one hand under my elbow. By this time in life, I was used to living with relative independence, but in Korea I was forced to depend on others to meet even the most basic needs. I required others’ help to purchase a phone, open a bank account, fill out government forms, and fulfill other necessities of life. Even the simplest of tasks like getting directions and ordering food often were obstacles and took significantly longer than I would ever anticipate.

At times, being alone in this foreign place felt isolating. I was constantly surrounded by a language that buzzed meaninglessly around me and signs with messages I could barely interpret. For others this was home—they had families, friends and networks of which I was not included. I felt like an outsider and questioned whether I belonged. Could I ever truly be an integral part of this society? I had entered into these circumstances by choice, and yet overcoming these challenges felt daunting. Regardless of my uncertainty and self-doubt, I was eager to explore my new home and determined to adjust. Eventually, challenges were met equally with rewards. However, I often contemplated what it must be like for those who are forced into other circumstances, strangers in strange lands, with no plan of return.

Teaching presented its own obstacles. During the first week of class, I tried to introduce basic sounds and concepts to my kindergarten class but was met with a room full of blank stares. My students needed someone with whom they could communicate and were left constantly frustrated and confused by my lack of understanding. I quickly realized that in order to create an effective learning environment, our communication would have to transcend the conveniences of a common language. I
became acutely aware of the basic needs for trust, support, and compassion within the classroom. I also began to see how influential students are to each other’s learning. I watched as they relied on each other to understand when I couldn’t, and to speak for each other when they needed help with the words. They understood each other and cared about one another, and I began to realize how important this connection is to learning and development.

**Youth and Personal Development**

My work at Fiver Children’s Foundation confirmed my interest in working with youth of various background and abilities. As the program’s Learning Center Director, I had the opportunity to work with children of underserved communities to promote and enhance literacy. Although I was never informed explicitly as to my campers’ citizenship statuses, I knew that a large majority were immigrants.

At the start of my very first class, a group of eight-year-old boys walked in, and I asked them to take seat on the rug. One boy refused to join his peers, and I asked again that he please take a seat. For no apparent reason I was met angrily with a kick in the stomach and profane remarks. Hurt and confused, I demanded the child leave the classroom. After a few days and several disruptive and aggressive encounters with other staff members, the boy was sent home. Despite that decision, I questioned my actions and wondered if there was anything I could have done differently. I worried also about what else to expect. For days after I questioned whether I could handle the job. Although, as it turns out, he was the only child who was ever physically violent with me, he wouldn’t be the only child to verbally aggress and to talk back to me. Despite my self-doubt, I decided to continue my work. I was unsure of what my classes and I could achieve together, but I was determined to get through the summer.

In one of the lessons most memorable to me, we read a story called “The Arrival,” a wordless graphic novel by Shaun Tan that depicts the life of a refugee man who leaves his family and home to find
peace and shelter in a strange, imaginary world. As a class we discussed what it means to be an immigrant and to seek refuge. During part of the lesson, I encouraged the children to share stories of their families’ migration to the United States. I approached the topic delicately, and offered that anyone who did not feel comfortable telling their story did not have to, but every child participated, and most were excited for the opportunity to share something personal about themselves.

We took turns pointing out our families’ countries of origin on our wall-sized world map and discussing the circumstances that led to these migrations. We noted themes that emerged among us: the reasons for leaving—poverty, war, persecution, oppression, poor quality of life; as well as reasons for arriving— opportunity, safety, family, a better education, better jobs, a better life. Many of the children empathized with the man in the story, expressing that they too had struggled to adjust to their new home in the United States, and that at times they felt confused, lonely, misunderstood, and excluded. They described their parents’ hurt and feeling responsible for communicating their family’s needs. They discussed their own struggles with making friends and adjusting to a new school environment. They shared stories of discrimination, bullying, and even violence.

I suddenly recognized my biggest flaw, a mistake I’d made from the time I started the position: I hadn’t recognized the possibility of their experiences. I had been angered by disrespect instead of concerned. I had been frustrated by misbehavior instead of empathetic. I realized then that just because some children are quiet does not mean they are uninterested. When a child hits it’s not because he is bad, but because he is hurt. When a child swears it’s because she doesn’t have the tools to express herself. When a child shows anger outward, it’s because she is hurting inside.

I stopped reacting and started reflecting. It became clear that the kids who resisted me the most were generally the ones who needed the most support. Instead of seeing children as the collective that had entered my room, I saw each child individually, realizing that each one deserved to be
understood, listened to, and valued. I tried not to become overwhelmed and frustrated by misdirected anger, but compassionate and understanding. I also started trying to introduce healthy ways of coping into the classroom. I encouraged quiet reflection at the start of each lesson. When the class would become rowdy, I’d ask my students to close their eyes for a few moments to help them get centered. If I noticed a child becoming frustrated or unable to express him or herself, I would encourage them to slow down, take deep breaths, or when necessary to go for a walk. Promoting appreciation and inclusion of every child in the classroom became my goal, and I began to consider other ways that a sense of connection could be developed.

Piecing it Together

Given my background, my personal experiences, and my professional interests, I had become fascinated by the refugee population. My interest in the idea of acculturation had been nurtured early on, and I wondered how refugee children coped with such transitions. My own struggles with mental health made me empathetic to those who are inflicted with suffering and must also cope with their wellbeing. My experience as the ‘foreigner’ made me compassionate to those who may be considered ‘foreign’. It became my priority to learn more about the experiences of refugees and to work with the community in whatever way possible.

I moved to Toronto in 2014 to pursue graduate studies in education at the University of Toronto and began volunteering at Romero House, a nonprofit organization and centre for refugees. Since becoming involved with Romero House, I have become deeply immersed in the newcomer community and have developed supportive and meaningful relationships. I have learned about their histories and the lives they were forced to leave behind. I have heard their stories of loss, suffering, sadness and fear. I have felt the injustice of their circumstances and the anguish of their uncertainty about what lies ahead. I have watched families struggle to make Canada feel like home and face obstacles that impede
the transition. But I have also experienced their joys and feats. I have watched families come together
and feel a sense of belonging and community. I have seen children learn a new language and make new
friends, and I have witnessed individuals become Canadian citizens and cry with gratitude for their
freedom and safety.

During this time I have become particularly drawn to refugee youth. I have become curious
about refugee children’s experiences with resettlement and their feelings about acculturation. As an
educator I began to question how refugee youth are integrated into the Ontario education system and
how the Ministry of Education has sought to support the population. I have also come to understand
that mental health is an important concern for newcomers, and that children can develop positive
coping strategies to ameliorate mental health concerns and promote resilience. I began to wonder
whether the Ministry prioritizes these skills and, if so, how they are nurtured within the curriculum.
Eventually, the direction of my research became clear and my questions began to take form.

My research questions emerge as follows:

- How has the Ontario primary education curriculum addressed refugee students historically and
  how are refugee students addressed currently?
- What types of mental health concerns are prevalent among refugee youth in Ontario primary
  schools, and what resettlement factors contribute to these concerns?
- How does the Ontario curriculum support integration and promote mental health and wellness
  among refugee primary school students?
- What can be done to better support the refugee youth population within the Ontario public
  school system?
As the Canadian landscape changes and the nation continues to welcome more newcomers into its border each year, the systems that seek to protect, serve, and integrate newcomers must shift as well. In order to better understand what is needed to support the population, we must allow compassion and concern to guide us and to enable our situation within the research. We must look to the past and trace that which has led us to present. We must recognize the circumstances involved in refugee resettlement and the conditions that can threaten or support mental health. And we must consider the education system in Ontario as it enables the integration of newcomer youth while shaping society and the state of the province. It is my goal to offer comprehensive insight into the needs and circumstances of a population that requires greater attention and to offer a hopeful outlook for the possibilities of what the future of the Ontario education system may bring.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

To organize and guide my research, I draw from Cooper and White’s (2012) theoretical framework involving the Five Contexts of qualitative research: the autobiographical, philosophical, historical, political and postmodern. Their framework enables thorough exploration of a topic by addressing the multitude of perspectives and ways of understanding that shape research. It encourages the “unlearning [of] social construction” (pg. 5) and provides researchers of education and other disciplines with a framework for conducting, understanding, and interpreting research.

Autobiographical

The first context of Cooper and White’s (2012) framework is the autobiographical context. Integral to the autobiographical context is the notion that within research there is no one truth, but rather several ways of understanding reality. Individuals’ realities are shaped by their experiences, interactions, circumstances, and the ways in which they interpret meaning within these conditions. As a result of the numerous factors that impact perspective, individuals will shape, study, and analyze their research in particular ways. For this reason, the subjective nature of research is important to observe as both the researcher and reader. Cooper and White (2012) highlight the importance of situating oneself within the research through the autobiographical context. They state, “The situation of oneself with respect to the research at hand, particularly research of the qualitative kind, is essential to the understanding of the researcher’s position with regard to that research, the assumption held, and the suppositions examined” (pg. 45). To explore the value of the autobiographical context, Cooper and White (2012) refer to the work of Dr. William Pinar, a professor of phenomenology and scholar of the autobiographical. In an interview with Pinar, Pinar emphasizes the importance of the autobiographical context within research.
Pinar proposes a multidimensional method for gaining biographical insight and a reconceptualization of the research in his method of *currerre* (2012/1975). *Currerre* involves four steps including the regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical, which, when applied in total, is designed to enable the mindful cultivation of the autobiographical context. The first step, the regressive, is when “one returns to the past, to capture it as it was and as it hovers over the present” (pg. 35). During this step, one must recognize that the biographic past contributes complexly to the biographic present in a seemingly constant, habitual way. In order to free oneself in the present and allow for a restructuring of one’s self-awareness, one must loosen oneself from one’s past. To do this, one must locate the past and identity those parts of the past not ordinarily seen. Pinar cautions that it is not effective to interpret what you observe in the past as this “interrupts presence in the past” (pg. 36), but to simply “bring the past to the present” (pg. 37) and conceptualize it through words. Following regression, one returns to the present, open to move forward in the next step, the progressive. In the progressive, one must acknowledge the way in which the future shapes the present moment by looking at what “is not yet the case, what is not yet present” (p 37). One must mindfully bring to attention an imagined future state for an extended period of time in order to reflect “lasting anticipations” (p. 37) about how the present may prospectively unfold. The next step, the analytical, involves “describ[ing] the biographic present, exclusive of past and future, but inclusive of responses to them” (p. 37). In other words, one must interpret and describe the self, the present being, including intellectual state and emotional condition via conceptualization of the past, present, and future. In the final step, the synthetical, one is placed together by the formulation of self-knowledge. In order to place oneself together one must “look at oneself concretely” and evaluate, “what is the meaning of the present?” (p.
One then questions how one’s scholarly contributions impact one’s field, encourage movement, and reflect a deeper connection to and conceptualization of the self, psychologically, physically, and biographically.

By divulging an autobiographical context for one’s work, one is encouraged to engage honestly with oneself, enhancing both self-awareness and self-discovery. Through self-reflection the researcher is empowered to validate their interests, goals, and humanity and to make sense of their place within the research. By sharing their story, the path that has guided the researcher to their research becomes clearer to the researcher herself as well as the audience. Readers of the autobiographical context are invited to connect intimately with the researcher and thus to experience the research in a more genuine and cognizant way.

In trying to piece together the autobiographical context of my own research, I initially struggled to find the connection between myself and my research interest. Before engaging in exploration and the writing process, I felt the immediate need to justify my interest in the refugee population. Given that I myself am not a refugee, my parents were not refugees, and my grandparents were not refugees, I questioned: what gives me the right to explore the questions I have with respect to refugee mental health promotion and education? Who am I to offer suggestions for systemic improvement to support a population I do not personally identify with? I began to doubt myself; I shied away from my topic and my voice within its sphere. Yet when considering what research I would choose to pursue in its place, I could not separate myself from my intrigue. I had to be honest with myself and explore the idea that interest could be had without awareness of reason. However, reason was there, and I would discover it through self-reflection and an openness to unravel my past experiences, present interests, and future hopes and expectations. As Pinar advises, I would accept my topic and allow the reason for “why” to unfold organically, with existentiality and with mindful awareness.
I put pen to paper without judgment nor immediate interest in validation. I did not press for reason, but rather considered my biographical self. I began to answer Pinar’s most fundamental question: “what has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?” (p. 35). Slowly, my life’s path and connection to my research became apparent. I may not be a refugee, as can be evidenced from my autobiographical introduction, but my interest in supporting the population stems from something deeper than concern alone; it stems from the interconnectedness of my experiences and the compassion that has manifested through my life’s story. I looked to the past and found my cultural roots in Judaism; I saw myself as part of a lineage of persecution, escape, and survival. I saw the Brazilian members of my family striving to assimilate, and myself trying to make sense of our similarities and differences. I saw myself, a girl who in the face of adversity struggled with her own mental health and isolation, and I watched myself grow and to feel deeply empathetic towards those who struggle to cope with their own hardships and to adjust to new environments. I looked to the future and watched myself working with children, helping them to find peace and connection to themselves. I looked within my present self and recognized my compassion and dedication to guiding the meaning and direction of others’ journeys. I bring together these elements in order to contribute meaningfully to the conditions of education and the opportunities for mental health promotion in refugee youth.

In many ways, Pinar’s method of curerre encompasses many of the goals and tools underlying mindfulness practices. Mindfulness, which can be described as subjective inner focus and a keen awareness of oneself within the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), can enable clarity and help guide one in a natural and purposeful direction. Pinar describes the importance of introspection to connect oneself to one’s present. He compares the literal, concrete present in which one is in tune with the essence of the moment—what one sees, hears, smells, etc.—to the conceptual present of being and thinking abstractly without being grounded to the present moment. Pinar explains that “the extent one dwells in a conceptual present, and in the subjective present, is the extent to which one dwells in the
past” (p. 36). He offers that present awareness is essential for opening oneself up to honest research and restructuring problems in a clear, connected way. Even throughout the steps of currerre, whether one is exploring one’s past or creating lasting anticipations for one’s future, the individual is reminded to be present in the other dimension and then to return to the present moment with new collected data on the self and a new sense of self-awareness and connection.

Some of the language that Pinar uses to describe such explorations is also similar to that used to describe mindfulness practices. For example, during the progressive state he advises that one close their eyes and focus on the breath in order to relax. Focus on the breath has been described as the core way to engage in mindfulness. The cultivation of my autobiographical background through the application of Pinar’s method of currerre reinstated what I have experienced from my own personal engagement with mindfulness practices. I will discuss the benefits of mindfulness and its potential for a healthful culmination of the self, particularly with regard to the refugee population, later on within the postmodern context. It is my belief that mindfulness in education can enhance the abilities of refugee students to cultivate their own connections to themselves and their narratives while fostering a sense of compassion in and amongst student peers.

**Historical**

The second context offered by Cooper and White’s (2012) framework, the historical context, emphasizes how crucial it is that one position oneself within a historical time. In our postcolonial era, it is apparent that history, as it has been told, lacks a range of critical perspectives. The subjectivity of history is inevitable, with certain histories being valued and favored over others. Cooper and White (2012) acknowledge the difference between colonial and postcolonial research and demonstrate such with the following proverb:
Until the lion has his own historian, the hunter will always be the hero (p. 52).

It is clear from the above that traditionally, history has been recounted by those who have held power in society. In our modern, post-colonial context, research seeks to give voice to the oppressed whose perspectives have been neglected and withheld from historical representations. In order to do so we must recognize the involvement of the researcher within the research as well as the responsibility the research has to recounting those neglected histories. Participants of research are no longer seen as the “objects of cultural studies” (Cooper & White, 2012, pg. 52) but are rather deemed integral to the research process. The primary purpose of the historical context is to encourage researchers, as voice representatives and instruments of societal change, to position themselves within historical times. Researchers must “interrupt history” by exposing the moments that speak to a social condition and by informing readers of past mistakes and political inconsideration. By revealing past circumstances, researchers can place themselves meaningfully within the research. They are then granted the ability to restructure history and empower readers to see themselves as “agents of the future” (p. 61).

To build on their notion of the historical context, Cooper and White (2012) introduce the work of Denzin and Lincoln, authors of The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, 3rd Edition. The authors divulge some of the issues that manifest within the historical context. They break down the historical progression of “moments” that have shaped the way that qualitative research has been conducted and understood, and how these moments have impacted historical representations. These “moments” move us from the colonial, Traditional Period in which objectified, positivist accounts dominated research, to the post-colonial, postmodern future in which we must continue to dismantle and deconstruct that which has shaped our understanding, and develop new methodologies and representations for qualitative research that bind us more meaningfully to history and research. Our
ability to contribute meaningfully to postcolonial research depends on the criticality of our historical consciousness.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe issues within research as crises of representation, legitimation, and praxis. They explain that researchers have historically been influenced by their own political hopes and ideologies, and they quash the notion that history and epistemology can be actualized without subjectivity. They offer how sociopolitical objectives, ideologies, and aspirations have created popular perspectives of the “Other” which have contributed to the political, economic, social, and cultural way in which ‘othered’ populations such as immigrants have been treated and integrated into their host societies. It is such views of estrangement that have shaped history and must be observed as being rooted within the present context that seeks to embrace in inclusivity. For change to occur in our present context, recognition of the past as it has led to the present is crucial, and active historical reflection is key. In an interview with Norman Denzin, Denzin explains that we must experience history actively and recognize our presence within historic moments.

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Denzin provides that passively acquiring knowledge of history is not enough. Researchers must not accept histories as they have been recounted, but rather, they must actively situate themselves within history and develop a critical awareness and personal connection to the past. By doing so, they can discover their interpretations of reality and reshape their approaches to current circumstances.

In our postmodern, poststructuralist era we are encouraged to deconstruct our assumptions, prejudices, and expectations as passive observers of ethnographic history and apply a critical lens to historical texts. As Denzin and Lincoln explain, we must address historical relativity and actively revisit
and engage with history in a direct and personal way. It is also important that as producers of
knowledge we recognize that our own version of the past will influence our current and future
knowledge and understanding. As part of the ever-evolving present it is impossible to separate oneself
from one’s time. Our views are, to some extent, shaped by our own historical and contemporary
understanding as well as our individual interpretations and life experiences, as discussed previously
within the autobiographical context. However, it must be our goal to actively explore and write history
with knowledge of our connection to the historical, as it is always occurring, in order to shape its
dynamic transformation.

As I explore the history of refugee integration, I will assess the dynamic interplay among global
initiatives, federal policies, and provincial regulations to support and protect refugees, and more
specifically, how these entities have addressed the needs of refugee youth. I will look at the global
circumstances that have lead refugees to seeking asylum in Canada and explore how Canada has
responded to victims of global crises over time. I will look at the emergence of Canada as a growing
world power and a safe haven for refuge and investigate the various changes in policy and regulations
that have been made globally and within the country in response to the influx of refugees. In order to
address the perspectives that have dominated history with regard to resettled refugees, I will look at
popular theories of assimilation and policies that have guided Canada’s integration of refugee youth into
society. Through historical accounts and policy development I will observe refugee integration within
the context of Ontario specifically and interpret how it has set and adapted provincial regulations to
manage the increasing refugee population. I will also introduce the role of the school to refugee youth
integration in Ontario. I will observe reports, board-wise initiatives, and curricular changes to show how
schools have adapted their approach with regard to the rising number of refugee students in schools.
Multiple perspectives of teachers, administration, parents, and students will also offer a historical
description of how those affiliated with the school system have felt about and responded to refugee
youth integration. Curriculum documents, as they serve to standardize certain principles and expectations across Ontario, will help determine the current views of refugee youth integration in Ontario classrooms and whether the distinct needs of the population are addressed within the curricular framework.

**Political**

The third context offered by Cooper and White (2012) is the political context. To impart the value of the political context, Cooper and White include the work of Dr. Henry Giroux who emphasizes the political nature of education, research, and language. During his interview with the authors, Giroux articulates that education is a moral and political practice given the inherent struggle over agency that ensues within its discourses. He explains that because of the numerous stakeholders that have a vested interest in affecting education, including governments, corporations, and other entities, educational research has been produced and reproduced to reflect capitalist agendas and social inequalities in society. Giroux believes that it is our responsibility to conduct educational research that challenges dominant social forces and deconstructs societal structures and norms in order to promote academic freedom and democracy.

Giroux proposes in his article, *Theory and Resistance in Education* (1983), that a new theory of radical pedagogy involving a new language and set of critical concepts is necessary to conceptualize and shape education. According to Giroux, educational theories that have emerged have failed “to provide an adequate basis” (p. 75) for understanding the power of human agency to influence education (Cooper & White, 2012). Traditional educational theory has presented schools as mere “instructional
sites” that do not consider larger relations of the school to society and issues of power such as control and domination (p. 74). Radical educational theorists, on the other hand, have overstated the relations between schools and society, with some criticizing the structure of the classroom as simply reinforcing capitalist ideologies and reproducing social inequalities. Giroux argues that education must be shaped by research and practice that helps individuals to realize their potential to self-emancipate and to produce new versions of history. He believes that critical education is crucial to this endeavor. We must recognize the links between education, capitalism and social change, and feel empowered to insert ourselves, as educational researchers, into the present struggle for democracy. By employing a critical lens to education, educational communities can develop new “modes of analysis” (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 75) for understanding and transforming schools and society at large.

Giroux also highlights the existence of an “elaborated code” that privileges members of the dominant society while marginalizing those that have not acquired knowledge of the language, gestures, and symbols of the dominant society. Educators must acknowledge the existence of this code and critically identify how policies, curriculum, teaching, and learning interact with the code. We must ask: How do these factors reinforce the privileging of certain members of society? What is the political nature and agenda of the policies and curriculum that shape education? And, do our practices reflect the needs of society to promote wellness, growth, and inclusivity?

In contextualizing the political dimensions of refugee youth resettlement I will apply Giroux’s views of the political to guide my research on that which shapes refugee youth education. I will use policies and curricular documents to examine how such factors have been used to marginalize and exclude refugees, specifically with regard to education, as well as how they may strive to achieve inclusivity and personal growth. I will expose the tension between the pull for immigrants in Canada in contrast with prejudice views of refugee status—specifically how views of inferiority have contributed to
oppression and marginalization within the school context. For example, I will demonstrate how research about refugees in school has reflected popular discourses about refugee integration as an “issue” and how this has influenced the way schools respond to their refugee students as a result.

School has played a key role in the assimilation of refugee youth. Current school policies reflect views of refugee youth and integration, and shape how integration looks in primary school settings in Ontario. I will critically examine the ways that the Ontario curriculum has organized and prioritized the educational needs of the population and how it has been changed to respond to the growing number of refugees in classrooms. I will look at the different perspectives on how schools should be integrating their refugee students, and how research has supported these perspectives. I will also discuss the role and responsibility of the school to promote equity and incite broader social change.

School has been regarded as an essential site for mental health promotion and integration among all students, and can be particularly beneficial for those learners in vulnerable circumstances. The school community is important to both individual human development and larger social transformation. Schools therefore have a responsibility to promote inclusivity and wellness within the community. In order to address mental health promotion, I will look at the universal stages of migration that refugees undergo, and the impact of such circumstances on mental health and wellness. I will look specifically at how refugee youth cope with migration and resettlement. I will include research on the risk and protective factors of mental health and the research on the role of education in supporting/inhibiting protective factors.

I will also address the role of primary schools in Ontario in supporting the mental health needs of refugee youth. I will explore the extent to which the promotion of mental health and wellness to foster inclusivity and resilience is currently present within Ontario policy and curriculum documents. I will demonstrate how the curriculum has been altered to address diverse refugee populations, and I will
discuss whether such practices have considered the promotion of mental health as being important to learning and acculturation. I will also look at what areas of learning and growth are highlighted within policy documents, and demonstrate how those areas reflect support or a lack of support with their regard to the needs of the whole child. Finally, I will question how mental health and wellness have been incorporated into the focus of the Ontario primary public school system in general and how this has or has not contributed to a more supportive schooling environment with regard to the refugee population.

Throughout industrial history, the mission of schools to “educate” has taken precedence over the job of schools to encourage individualized growth. That is not to say that teachers have not done their part to inspire positive development. It is simply to note that policies and curriculum reflect a privileging of comprehensive, academic skills over personal development and spiritual growth. This has impeded different types of learning that are important for socially and emotionally competent citizens and a compassionate, inclusive society. While creating structures for learning that are conducive to meeting diverse needs and fostering self-growth is important, doing so superficially or simply to meet curricular guidelines does not suffice. These ideals must be embedded into the curriculum and translated into practice. I will therefore introduce the politics of compassion to support individual students and to create supportive classroom environments. I will include the responsibility of the whole school to support the needs of all students and foster individual growth and wellness in a holistic way.

Postmodern

The fourth context of qualitative research offered by Cooper and White (2012) is the postmodern. The authors build on the work of sociologist Dr. Zygmunt Bauman, who describes postmodernism in terms of the fluidity of moral choice and responsibility.
In his work, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (1995), Bauman describes postmodernism as the “fading illusion” (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 91), an illusion about morality that was offered through a pre-modern, religious understanding of the human condition and perpetuated by a governmentally-structured ethical code during the modern era. Before modernity, religion provided society with a belief in the universality of moral conduct. Within this framework, sin was not the focus of moral action, as the inevitability of wrongdoing was accepted. Instead, repentance was encouraged in order to absolve oneself of sin and to restore redemption and balance to one’s moral state of being.

Following the pre-modern era, modernity emerged with the notion that sin could be omitted from the equation entirely. The foundation of modernity was that, by the elimination of wrong choice and the enforcement of obedient participation, evil could be prevented. Legislation would rebuild humanity by prescribing an ethical code of absolutes for determining right from wrong and good from evil. During the era of modernity, boundaries of moral decision making were established, therefore alleviating the “moral actor” from the task of real choice and in turn absolving them of potential guilt for wrong choice. Legislation filled in the blanks of human uncertainty with regard to the “Other.”

Within the postmodern context, we shift from an ethical code to moral fluidity in which we must recognize the ambivalent yet existential nature of moral choice. Bauman explains that humans are, by primal nature, moral beings. If faced with the challenge of the “Other,” we feel an inherent responsibility for the “Other’s” being. Morality in itself does not distinguish good from bad, but holds the individual responsible for their freedom to make choices that effect the Other and society at large. “Taking responsibility for one’s own responsibility” is, by Bauman’s definition, the sole meaning of morality (Cooper & White, 2012). To have and to exercise choice is to participate and to have purpose.
To not have or exercise choice is to not contribute to society and to not give credence to one’s existence. Such responsibility is burdensome, as the consequences of moral actions cannot be predicted and therefore cannot be prescribed. There is, therefore, no one truth or correct action to a given issue, but rather a gamble of moral choice. To further complicate the predicament of moral choice, we must recognize that our perceived choice has undoubtedly been cultivated and compromised, to some extent, by those with a vested interest in outcomes. While the corporatization of morality emancipates the individual from self-scrutiny, it additionally forces limits upon moral action. We are forced to bet, based on ethical patterns that have emerged with promise, on that which may have positive consequences.

It is with recognition of the ambivalence of moral choice that I propose mindfulness as an approach to wellness and mental health promotion for all students, with particular focus and concern for the refugee youth population. Mindfulness can be described as a particular focus on the self within the present moment. Paying mindful attention involves an awareness of moment to moment sensations, and a presence of mind that does not judge, worry, or dwell, but rather reflects inward on the current state of being. Mindfulness has been shown to reduce negative mental health concerns while fostering resilience, developing social and emotional skills, and enhancing compassion for the self and others. It is my belief that policies and curriculum in education do not reflect the utmost need to develop this sense of personal connection within and among students. While Ontario promotes respect and inclusion within schools, it does not address how to meaningfully establish connection and personal growth among students. Additionally, while character building is built into the curriculum, it is done so in somewhat of a contrived, superficial way. The curriculum encourages that knowledge of what it means to be a good person be transmitted in lesson-based forums; it does not necessarily advocate for these traits to be embedded into daily practices and the school structure at large. As a result, the cultivation of a deep and meaningful connection to the self as an essential part of human development
has been lost within the mission of education. This becomes particularly detrimental for vulnerable student populations such as refugees.

The focus of refugee integration, as is reflected within Ontario policies and curriculum, has centered largely on language acquisition. While language is an important protective factor for well-being among refugee youth, it is only a small piece of a complex puzzle. Research has shown that refugees face inherently traumatic obstacles that have detrimental consequences to their mental health. Since schools are such an integral part of refugee integration and human development in general, schools are important spaces for the mental health promotion of these individuals. Not only have mindfulness ideologies in schools enabled positive changes in individual teachers and students, but they have enhanced whole classrooms and whole schools environments, fostering greater social tolerance, compassion, and inclusivity among students.

While I refer specifically to mental health and wellness of refugee youth, mindfulness can yield broader consequences that can transcend the refugee population alone. I outline an approach that does not serve to segregate the refugee population with regard to policies and provisions, but rather includes refugees and all students alike in its scope. Mindfulness encourages a contemplative orientation to teaching and learning that harnesses self-reflective ways of being which all students can benefit from. Mindfulness is an inherently personal practice, that when introduced at a whole classroom or even whole school level can foster acceptance, compassion, and inclusivity. In terms of the mental health benefits, it can alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression. From a promotional standpoint it can enhance social-emotional competencies such as resilience and self-regulation. Although I have exercised moral choice for the “Other” by proposing an educational approach to enhance social and emotional conditions, I have chosen a method that serves to empower the individual at a personal level. Refugee youth that are educated with a mindfulness orientation may not only demonstrate improved
mental health and social-emotional competencies, but may be able to understand, represent, and advocate for themselves in ways that enable them to experience healthier ways of being.

Philosophical

The fifth and final context offered by Cooper and White’s (2012) framework is the philosophical. The authors demonstrate the philosophical underpinnings of education by honoring the work of Maxine Greene. In an interview with the authors, Greene emphasizes the importance of the continuity of education. She describes learning as a life-long journey in which the quest for knowledge is never complete.

In her interview, Greene notes the existential roots of her philosophical perspective and her hope that education should enable students to become critical thinkers who possess a love for the arts and who are capable of outrage. She also notes the distinction between education and schooling. She explains that while “education helps individuals to grow and become,” schooling treats students as passive recipients of knowledge and constrains them to becoming “proper servants of a technocratic society” (Cooper & White, 2015b).

In the first chapter of her book, Releasing the Imagination (1995), Greene also discusses how visions and interpretations of the school context can shift the impact of education. To convey this notion, she distinguishes the impact of seeing the world as “small” versus seeing the world as “big.” According to Greene, seeing the world as small implies viewing education from a technical standpoint and observing its functionality and efficiency through systemic modes of interpretation. Seeing the
world as big involves recognizing the qualitative nature of education and seeing each student as a unique, individual being. While it is important that we consider the unique qualities of individual parts, we must also recognize their connections as they comprise the whole picture. We must see the connection between actual students and real schools to a society that privileges “ideologies relating to system of power” (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 111) and promotes the standardization of education to serve its perceived demands. Therefore it is essential to view the world in balance, as both small and large, with its fragments comprising a whole substantive experience, and to recognize the complex, ever-evolving nature of things.

Greene notes that educators must be able to move back and forth between the “large” and “small” in order to position themselves meaningfully within the present context of education. They must unleash their imaginations in order to navigate the multiple discourses that shape education and to have an impact on the future. They must break those barriers that confine education and enable openings for ambivalence and unknowable learning outcomes. Ultimately, imagining things as being different enables the restructuring and reformation of education. Greene explains that “…it is disruptive to look at things as if they could be otherwise. There is tension in this looking; there is a blank resistance for a while. But then resistance, imagination, open capacities, inventiveness, and surprise are shown to be joined somehow” (p. 110).

Cooper and White (2012) explain that the philosophical context “bind[s] the previous contexts together in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with engaging in qualitative research” (p. 121). As I consider the scholars that have helped shape my conceptual framework, I recognize the importance of critical literacy. Given the conceptual nature of my research, I will be basing my understanding of the current state of education on the guidelines set forth by policies, curriculum, and research. It is crucial that I employ a critical lens to the interpretation of texts as I
engage with my research. It is essential to note that the texts I interpret will inherently be filtered through my own personal lens. Introspection and the ability to place myself within the research, as Pinar advises, will become crucial to this process. Furthermore, being able to consider texts in relation to a greater whole will enable me to gain a broader perspective and understanding of how these documents reflect current history, politics, and education. It is with a keen awareness of the postmodern framework that I will apply a hermeneutic approach to my research on the mental health promotion of refugee youth in Ontario primary schools.

Hermeneutics involves a particular way of reading and interpreting text. According to David Smith (2010), “the basic assumption of all hermeneutic endeavor is that there is always a difference between what is said (the surface phenomenon of language) and what is meant (the fuller range of possible meanings contained within the surface phenomenon)” (p. 433). Hermeneutics assumes an inherent connection between the written message and the way the message is interpreted. As we make sense of text, we must recognize that texts can never fully convey a whole, intended message given the ways by which interpreters individually engage with and derive meaning from texts. Additionally, the text, despite intention, speaks beyond itself. It reflects part of a greater whole, grounded in a given context and created in a system of power relations, which has inevitably influenced its production.

Because curriculum is mediated through language, it is inherently subject to interpretation. Curriculum documents and school policies are in themselves philosophical texts as they seek to address the questions pertaining to education, such as: what is education? What is its purpose? Who should be educated? What are schools responsible for with regard to educating students? What should be learned and how? Curriculum documents are also historical and political texts as they emerge out of a given time and in response to a particular issue. They represent the contexts from which they have emerged and the ideologies and ways of acting on education at a given time. I then ask, as the
curriculum currently exists, does it include refugees within its scope, and does it promote mental health and wellness in ways that can sustain a healthful and equitable society? Through critical analysis, I will observe how certain conditions and ways of doing education have been shaped by power hierarchies and maintain the production of an inequitable society. I will also observe how political, sociological, and economic circumstances have impacted these texts as they represent ideas as well as practices. As Barbara Comber suggests, I will read “the world as well as the word” (Cooper & White, 2015a), recognizing the texts as parts of a much greater whole.

With regard to textual interpretation, I will heed Greene’s philosophical advice. I will not be bound by that which already exists, but instead I will strive to see the spaces and opportunities in that which does not. And I will not simply read between the lines, for that implies that more is being said by the source than that which has been provided. It does not account for that which the producer of the text itself might not have recognized, nor the larger social context, nor the meaning that the interpreter extracts from the lines. Rather, I will read the text with awareness of the autobiographical, historical, political, and postmodern factors that have influenced the text. I will see the words as they lay against a backdrop of my own hopes and expectations. I will employ an imaginative perspective, as Greene advises, that will allow my vision to illuminate that which exists and shine through to spaces where ideas have not yet taken shape. It is within the tradition of critical literacy and a hermeneutic approach to text that I will be guided through the postmodern context and call for action to be taken. As Freire notes, it is critical awareness of one’s social reality and a responsive action to that awareness that enables conscientization. Ultimately, praxis, in which critical reflection and action are adjoined, leads to transformation (1993). I believe that through conscientization we can nurture our own sense of empathy and transform the current conditions of education. We can shift from a focus on the self to a focus on the Other. We can act with and for the Other in meaningful, socially responsive ways. Finally, we can focus on education for growth versus education for production. We must apply a critical lens, an
imaginative head, a compassionate heart, and a willingness to act in order to create conditions for change in our postmodern times.
Chapter 3: Philosophical Context

Hermeneutics has been subject to various meanings and applications; however, the commonly accepted definition that emerges across the field of qualitative research is that hermeneutics is the art and theory of interpretation (Laverty, 2003). The word ‘hermeneutics’ is derived from the ancient Greek term ‘hermeneutike,’ which translates to interpretation (Smith, 2010). ‘Hermeneutike’ can also be referred to the Greek God Hermes who in Greek mythology and religion is the divine messenger of the gods (Kakkori, 2009). Hermes brings the message of destiny to humankind. As an expositor of the message, Hermes must not only interpret the message, but translate and deliver it to mortals. The message inherently undergoes interpretation by the messenger as well as the recipients of the message. As Martin Heidegger notes, hermeneutics must be thought of not just in terms of the interpretation of a message, but the bearing of the message as well (Heidegger, 1982).

At the heart of hermeneutic inquiry and communication in general is language. Palmer (1969) states, “of all the variegated symbolic media of expression used by man, none exceeds language in communicative flexibility and power, or in general importance” (p. 9). Language is arguably one of the most powerful components of interpersonal communication and is the only component relied upon to convey a textual message. In turn, it is at the core of interpretation. It is, as Gadamer posits, “the universal medium in which understanding occurs” (1998, p. 389). Philosophers refer to the word ‘logos’ to describe that which is conveyed by language or speech (Heidegger, 1962). The suffix ‘ology’ as in ‘phenomenology’ finds its roots in the word ‘logos’ which suggests that the very function of speech is a phenomenon. Smith explains that ‘logos’ involves letting things manifest as they are and allowing words to speak beyond themselves (Cooper & White, 2015c). In other words, we do not project meaning onto the word or the world, but meaning shows itself to us, and we reinforce meaning cyclically. Through language we are told of the world and with language we continue to tell of the world (Bennett-Hunter,
Language then is in itself the human experience, and the human experience is indeed language. As Martin Heidegger notes that “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells” (1978, p. 217).

Literary hermeneutics emerged with the advent of the written language. Before the written word, thoughts and ideas were solely conveyed by and connected to a speaker (Smith, 2010). The source and context of a spoken, interpersonal message can be relatively transparent, and in most cases, deriving meaning from interpersonal exchanges is a natural process that can be understood and assimilated with relative ease. Certain elements of an interpersonal exchange such as body language, expression, tone and other signifiers allow the interpreter more comprehensive insight into the context of the message and its intended purpose. Written language, however, can be more difficult to decipher as it removes the speaker from that which is said. With the advent of the written word, it is no longer necessary for the speaker to be present in order for a message to be communicated, eliminating other facets of communication that help guide the interpretive process.

However, written words must not be considered a limitation to understanding. Indeed, written words have played as much a part of our understanding as interpersonal dialogue (Gadamer, 1998; Heidegger, 1962; Palmer, 1969). Words are engrained in our experiences. They shape our very being and our individual way of experiencing the world. They also allow us insight into that which we cannot or have not otherwise experienced. Written words endure time; a text can allow for the possibility of interpreting history. In essence, hermeneutics is about being within the text and bridging the gap between the past and the present context (Schwartzman, 1993). Although it is impossible for us to physically experience the historical gap between the creation of the text and our present being, through hermeneutic investigation we can transport ourselves across horizons to another time and context and arrive at a more lucid meaning of the text in the present.
The nature of hermeneutic inquiry is highly personal. The interpretation of any text is particular to the interpreter, and anyone who engages with a text is applying hermeneutics. My hermeneutic journey will inevitably look different from that of others given the individuality of my self, my culture, and my particular position in time and space. However, the subjective nature of hermeneutics must also not be thought of as a limitation, as it allows for bountiful and authentic possibilities for interpretation. Where spoken words may be heard and experienced once by select recipients of the message, written words may be read and experienced countless times by an indefinite number of interpreters, within an infinite number of contexts. As a result, a limitless number of interpretations may be cultivated, all real to the knowledge and experience of the interpreter. As we constantly move forward in time, the meaning of a text too will continue to evolve.

Origins and Early Theorists

Historically, hermeneutics has been associated with exegesis, or deriving meaning from theological texts such as the Holy Scripture of the New and Old Testaments of the Bible, the Talmud, or the Quran (Kakkori, 2009). The meanings embedded within such texts were deemed somewhat inaccessible to the majority, therefore requiring interpretation. Through hermeneutic interpretation the meaning of religious texts could be distilled and relayed to a wider audience by those with grammatical and linguistic capabilities. A mastery of language became the prerequisite of hermeneutic inquiry, a requirement that is still emphasized today (Smith, 2010).

Friedrich Schleiermacher, who is widely regarded as the father of modern hermeneutics, has been credited with extending the focus of hermeneutics to include the interpretation of any text (Palmer, 1969). Schleiermacher believed that meaning could be discovered from a text by considering the author’s mental process and the language he or she used to reflect their thoughts. By trying to locate the origins of the author’s thoughts within the historical context, one could try to make sense of
that which led to the creation of the text thereby reconstructing its meaning (Palmer, 1969).

Schleiermacher also emphasized the role of the interpreter in this process noting that one must creatively engage with that which one does not know in order to arrive at understanding (Smith, 2010).

He considered interpretation a creative process in which a creative leap of understanding or act of imagination is needed in order to overcome misunderstanding and to see possible meanings.

Throughout his career, Schleiermacher focused his efforts on trying to establish a universal methodology for interpretation, a project which eventually deemed implausible and abandoned (Palmer, 1969).

However, Wilhelm Dilthey later claimed the task, the focus of which would be to inform the humanities.

Wilhelm Dilthey aimed to establish a separate approach to the investigation of the “human sciences,” or Geisteswissenschaften, from that of the natural sciences (Dilthey, 1977). He believed that hermeneutics could provide the foundation for such a method. According to Dilthey, literature and other such works were objectified expressions of lived experience, and by interpreting the work one could gain insight into the human condition. He developed a formula, ‘experience-expression-understanding,’ by which he argued that in order to derive meaning from the object, one must interpret the “expression of inner life” of the creator as manifested from their inner human experience.

Fundamental to this process and considered to be perhaps one of Dilthey’s greatest contributions to hermeneutic theory was the notion of historicality. According to Dilthey, all understanding is historical and involves the temporality of lived experience (1977).

Martin Heidegger’s theory built upon Dilthey’s emphasis on historicality but integrated the fundamental role of existence itself within the hermeneutic endeavor. In what is considered to be his greatest contribution, *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger incorporates the phenomenon of “Being” or “Dasein” into his hermeneutic theory proposing that recognition of the self as “being in the world” is an interpretive process and therefore hermeneutical. According to Heidegger, existence is intrinsically
situated within the individual’s historicality and the possibilities they foresee of their future. Daily practices are embodiments of that historicality, including the heritage from which one emerges and makes sense of the world. The ontological condition makes it impossible for us to remove ourselves from our culture and the temporality of our existence (1962). As David Smith explains in reference to Kantian philosophy, “We cannot gain access to the world ‘in itself’ because the things we know are already interpreted and schematized by our prior experience of them” (2010, p. 434). Therefore, individual interpretations materialize as we have evolved from our past and continually project our being into the future.

In terms of textual interpretation, Heidegger posits that we come to new understandings by integrating a new encounter or work into our interpretive frame and comparing it to that which we already know (Dreyfus, 1984). Deriving meaning involves a dialectical interaction between the individual, an unfamiliar part of the text, and our whole understanding of the text. Both the part and the whole act in reference to each other and give one another meaning. Understanding is therefore cyclical as each part of the text informs the broader meaning of the whole text, and the whole text informs the meaning of its parts. This process has thus been referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Dreyfus, 1984; Kakkori, 2009; Palmer, 1969). According to Heidegger, our hermeneutic positionality shapes our understanding of both the ‘unknown’ part and the understood whole itself; we arrive at both the encounter and our understanding of it in relation to our situation (Dreyfus, 1984). Since Being is itself an interpretive awareness of the self, everything we encounter too is ‘always already’ an interpretation (Palmer, 1969). Simply existing in the world is an interpretive process.

Given our reliance on individual interpretive frames and contexts, Heidegger (1962) argues that it is impossible to derive one universal meaning from anything. Like other philosophers before him, he quashes notions of metaphysics which seek to encapsulate existence with a single scientific definition
(Smith, 2010) and instead proposes that definitive meaning and linear causality are impossible to deduce, as no single explanation can possibly represent an event nor encompass the infinite range of possible interpretations that can be derived from that event. The meaning of anything, from life to the written text, is therefore indeterminable; it is irreducible to one definition and depends wholly on individual Being and interpretation. Heidegger’s work on Being paved the way for future theorists of hermeneutic philosophy, perhaps the most influential of whom was his own student, Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Gadamer is considered one of the leading figures in the field of hermeneutics. He is credited with expanding hermeneutics from discourses of methodology and epistemological theory towards a philosophy. In his monumental work, *Truth and Method* (1998), Gadamer describes the ontological phenomenon of understanding. He echoes Heidegger’s emphasis on the nature of being and historicality, but incorporates greater emphasis on the role of the interpreter and the intersubjective nature of understanding. Like most hermeneutic philosophers before him, Gadamer denounces the idea that human beings enter the world as blank slates (tabula rasa) as John Locke proposed, and argues that we do not and cannot approach any encounter or text in such a way. Rather, we emerge from what Gadamer calls a ‘tradition’ in which a set of pre judgments of ‘prejudices’ have been nurtured within us (1977). For Gadamer, prejudices are not necessarily wrongful misjudgments and should not, for sake of clarity, carry the negative connotation that has become attached to word (Smith, 2010). Instead he proposes that, “Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world” (p. 9). They are the “horizon” from which our understanding emerges and shapes the way we interpret our experiences and make sense of our world. Although awareness of our prejudices is crucial, subjection to our prejudices is not a requisite of hermeneutic inquiry (Schwartzman, 1993). One must appreciate the place of the text within its own historical context while still being critical of its place and application within one’s own hermeneutic world.
Gadamer (1977) describes understanding as a “fusion of horizons” in which the past and present are constantly and transmissively entered and mediated by the interpreter. The meaning one arrives at is not merely a product of subjectivity, but the result of a constantly evolving relationship between the interpreter’s present, their understanding of the past, and their ability to continually navigate both. As we engage with a historical text, Gadamer advises us to consider that the past itself cannot be thought of as an object for investigation of truth but rather as a source of possibilities of meanings in which the present and all present possibilities of meaning have come to exist (Dreyfus, 1984). He argues that we must consider texts not as historical relics, but rather in terms of our present participation with what was written then and continues to exist as record now (Schwartzman, 1993). We must also reflect on our hermeneutic situatedness as it constitutes our very being and requires us to question our experience with a text. There are certain conditions of situatedness, including time, culture, and prejudices, that will have an inevitable impact on interpretation (Schwartzman, 1993). Careful recognition of the presence of these conditions is needed to uphold the integrity of the text and prevent unfounded distortion, biases, and misinterpretations. Gadamer refers to the awareness of one’s situation and its influence on interpretation as “effective historical consciousness” (1977; 1998). In order to gain effective knowledge and awareness, the interpreter must locate the historicality and context of the text and strike an interpretive balance, or a fusion of horizons, to draw insight into its meaning.

**Questioning the Text**

Hermeneutics involves trying to uncover the question that led to the creation of the text. It requires acknowledging the potential purpose of its composition and locating that which the text seeks to take up or resolve. Gadamer (1977) refers to this process as the “logic of question and answer” in which we are encouraged to ask ourselves, “What is the question for which this (event, text, saying) is the answer?” (Smith, 2010, p. 433). Put differently, Collingwood (1983) states that ‘In order to find out
his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer’ (p. 31). To locate the question, we must interrogate the text and open up its possibilities in order to imaginatively reconstruct the past. As in the hermeneutic circle, the object of the discourse will inevitably shape the reconstruction of the question, and the recovered question will lead to the unraveling of the answer. It is inevitable that the question we ask will lead to the answer we receive (Hogan, 1987). The interpreter must therefore consider the question and answer with careful sensitivity and a ‘fusion of horizons.’ As readers we must immerse ourselves in the historical context and the knowledge that has been yielded on the subject matter and develop an effective historical conscious so not to distort the question and the subsequent intention of the text as an answer. We must also be self-reflexive and willing to see our place within the text as well as our influence on its meaning.

**The Dialogic of Interpretation**

Hermeneutical research is dialogical by nature. It involves an interaction between the reader and the text, and presupposes a particular subject matter that is understood by both parties involved in the exchange (Gadamer, 1977). Just as in an interpersonal conversation, both members of the literary hermeneutic conversation must be reciprocally involved in the dialogue. The reader must not infer meaning or presume to understand a text without allowing the text to speak for itself. As Linge notes in the introduction to Gadamer’s work, “the hermeneutical conversation begins when the interpreter genuinely opens himself to the text by listening to it and allowing it to assert its viewpoint” (1977, p. xx). Linge proceeds, “It is precisely in confronting the otherness of the text...that the reader’s own prejudices are thrown into relief and thus come to critical consciousness” (p. xxi). It is not about asserting one’s own interpretation, nor is it about trying to recover the author’s meaning. Understanding involves a reciprocal relationship in which both the original intended meaning and the present interpretation are
altered. As Gadamer explains, understanding is about “being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.” (1977, pg. 375).

Given the dialogical nature of hermeneutics, the reader is considered as important to the message as the text itself. Words are symbols of a message, vehicles used by the writer to convey a message to the reader. However, words do not derive meaning—people do. Meaning is interpreted by the reader and is subject to the life context of the reader. Words are filtered through the lens of the interpreter and take shape as meaning. The practice of deconstructing assumptions and deriving new meaning is then subject to individual interpretation. Two people can read a text and have an entirely different relationship with it. The text may also take on a different meaning and function to the individual at different points in their life. What we understand to be shapes our interpretation, and our interpretation shapes our understanding. Understanding and interpretation are therefore bound together in an ever-evolving, dynamic process that will continue to shape the interpreter and the interpreter’s experience with the text and with the world. As the individual engages with new experiences and integrates new information, her understanding is constantly developing and forcing her to reconsider that which she “knows.” What may be considered truth then is merely the perception of the individual as the interpreter. It is important to recognize that hermeneutics is not about seeking universal truths; indeed this would go against the very foundation of what it means to pursue hermeneutic research.

**Methodology**

Hermeneutics as a methodology involves the text as data and the researcher as the reader (Laverty, 2003). It does not require a set of procedures to follow, but instead must be thought of as a “creative approach to understanding using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter” (2003, p. 16). In any research, the results are incumbent upon the researcher. In
hermeneutic research, however, the findings are implicitly drawn from the lens of the researcher and are described in terms of her interpretation. The subjective nature of hermeneutics is at the very core of the interpretive findings and is therefore integral to the results. In fact, a hermeneutic approach assumes that biases and assumptions are inherent to interpretation. Use of this methodology requires the ability to be self-reflective and aware of oneself within the research. One must be insightful with regard to interpretation and sensitive to language. One needs also to be open to new experiences and willing to engage fully with oneself and the text (van Manen, 1997). The researcher must develop an effective historical consciousness and be as present and transparent in the interpretation as possible in order to uphold the integrity of the text and yield meaningful findings. Furthermore, readers should be made aware of who the researcher is, how she has been led to the research, and subsequently how her findings have been filtered through her interpretation and generated for the reader audience. Finally, the work of hermeneutics should be considered as reflection of a textual experience rather than a conclusive finding or a proposed “truth.”

Hermeneutic researchers seek to uncover the function of a text as it continues to influence circumstances over time. In applying a hermeneutic lens, the researcher may see the inadequacy of a text’s function in our present context. She may recognize its failure to address that which has emerged within our own horizons. She may also be able to explain the evolution of a text and its subsequent meaning and application over time. As time influences the development of a text, the text too influences developments over time. The researcher must be able to engage in the duality of this relationship and contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the text and its larger implications. Knowledge yielded from hermeneutic inquiry has the potential to offer new insights for the next reader to integrate into their interpretive frame. Eventually, it can lead to the creation of a new text as is needed to improve its function and to better suit the present context. As time moves us forward and
circumstances change, new hermeneutical insights will be needed to continue to processes of adaptation and evolution. The cycle of hermeneutic work is therefore never complete.

**My Approach**

Through the autobiographical context I have been able to ground myself within the research and offer readers insight into my positionality. As I engage with the other theoretical contexts, it must be reiterated that it is my own interpretative lens has led to the culmination of this research as well as th my proposition for what may be done to improve the current state of education. Since the hermeneutical endeavor requires a strong foundational relationship with history, I must ground myself in the historical context of refugees in Canada and more specifically Ontario in order to broaden my scope and harness an effective historical consciousness. By submerging myself in the texts that have been born of Canadian history and that have shaped the present context of refugee resettlement, I will gain clearer insight into how education and the mental health support of refugees have developed over time. I will also read that which has been written about history as such introspection facilitates knowledge and contributes to understanding. In deconstructing texts and imagining a reconstruction of the past, I must also recognize the contributions of those histories that have not been told or are not as easily accessed. Those perspectives that have been thrust to the margins of society, those voices that have been halted to a whisper, and those stories that dwell in the shadows of dominant discourses are often the most telling of history. I will try to imagine their presence in my own imagined reconstruction of history—not in spite of their absence, but because of it.

Hermeneutic philosophy tells us that a text is the product of a space, time, and tradition. The political nature of space and time must also be brought forth with regard to textual interpretation. As I explore the political context, I refer to those policies and political structures that have emerged from history and have subsequent, cumulative effects on the present and future circumstances of society.
focus specifically on curriculum as an inherently political set of guidelines that calls for the proceeding of a particular trajectory. I address educational curriculum with my own belief that curriculum serves two basic functions. First, curriculum is designed to address that which society deems important for children to learn now. To rephrase, the curriculum reflects how society feels its youth should act and participate at present in order to maintain or enhance its current state. Second, curriculum is designed to reflect that which society believes is important to be learned for the future. In other words, given our current state, the education system is designed to anticipate what will be needed in the future in order that our children should be nurtured to develop as such. In order to yield a comprehensive understanding of the current state of education, I will interrogate curriculum, policies, and other such texts within the historical, political, and postmodern contexts of my theoretical framework. I outline the following to guide my line of questioning:

- Who wrote the text?
- When was the text written?
- Who/what is the text about, and who/what isn’t the text about?
- Who is it for, and who isn’t it for?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What were the intended outcomes?
- What were the actual outcomes?

It is with a hermeneutical philosophy that I frame my research on refugee youth in the Ontario public school system. I am interested in the types of mental health concerns that arise for refugee youth as a result of migration, but more specifically as they manifest upon arrival and resettlement within the host country and within the education system. It is my goal to understand how the curriculum, as it exists as a product of the Ministry of Education, and as it shapes the education system
and student trajectories, is designed to support the social inclusion and support of refugee youth in order that mental health be both safeguarded and promoted.

As I have come to a personal understanding of hermeneutics as a philosophy and as a method for conducting research, I have also come to recognize the mindful nature of the hermeneutic endeavor. Hermeneutics requires a connection to the self. It calls for presence in the moment and a state of total self-awareness. Like hermeneutics, mindfulness also involves compassion for oneself and for the Other and requires allowing the Other to speak for himself. It involves recognizing our biases, and by accepting them, allowing them to slip away. As David Smith states, “Understanding one another and the world is largely a matter of empathy rather than reason” (Smith p. 434). Also like hermeneutics, mindfulness involves recognizing identities, or the traditions from which we emerge, and seeing ourselves and our understandings as parts of a whole. Finally, it involves personal transformation and the understanding that we are ever-evolving. It is my hope that this research is transformative not only for me personally, but for the future of the Ontario education system.
Chapter 4: Historical Context

Canada is considered one of the leading refugee resettlement countries of the world. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are about 16.7 million refugees living in the world today (2013). Canada resettles 10,000 to 12,000 people annually, or one out of every 10 refugees resettled globally (CIC, 2011), a considerably large number compared to other nations that host refugees. For nearly a hundred years Canada has prided itself on its commitment to humanitarian action and services to refugees. In 1986 the “people of Canada” were even awarded the Nansen Medal by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to recognize their outstanding services to refugees (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998). Canada continues to provide sanctuary to thousands of newcomers each year, more than half of whom resettle in the province of Ontario (Chuang & CISSA, 2009).

A significant number of refugees who resettle in Canada are children. In 2004, about 51,000 immigrants to Canada were children under 15 years of age. Of those, slightly more than 14% (about 5,200) were refugees (Chuang & CISSA, 2009). By 2010, 52% of the refugees received into Canada were children under 15 years of age (Shakya et al., 2010). Refugee youth arrive in Canada either with their families or unaccompanied after being forced to flee their countries. Upon arrival they have already faced considerable adversities and traumas as a result of their circumstances and will continue to deal with varying obstacles as they strive to acculturate into their new host society (Beiser, 2009). Given the inherency of education in these children’s lives (United Nations, 1989), schools have been looked upon as a primary institution to integrate refugee youth into the host society and to address concerns of wellbeing (Ehntholt et al., 2005; Fazel et al., 2009; Hart, 2009; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Pinson & Arnot, 2010; Rousseau et al., 2007). It is crucial to note that newcomer youth are not a homogenous group; rather, they are a diverse population faced with varying challenges and experiences during the process
of integration into a new society and a new system of education (Shakya et al., 2011). The threads that bind resettled refugee youth together are the fundamental need to seek refuge, the process of migration and resettlement, and the presence of school in their lives.

As Bacáková (2011) notes, "Much has been written on the importance of education and the school environment in the process of successful integration of refugees" (p. 163). Schools play a critical role in culture and child development and are heavily relied upon, across cultures, to socialize children (Mosselson, 2006). Additionally, schools have become important spaces for addressing psychosocial issues and promoting social-emotional wellness (Birman & Chan, 2008; Ehntholt et al., 2005; Fazel et al., 2009; Rousseau et al., 2007). As critical readers of this notion of "successful integration," we are forced to consider the following: what makes integration successful? Who determines success? What have schools done in the past to integrate and support refugees? And how has that impacted wellbeing? In order to begin to answer these questions and gain insight into the role of schools in resettling refugee youth, we must consider the ways in which refugee youth have been integrated into society by way of the school system historically. By providing a brief historical foundation for refugee resettlement and education we can begin to recognize the underpinnings of our current model of refugee youth integration and school support.

Key Terms and Definitions

The definition of ‘refugee,’ as internationally approved at the Geneva United Nations Refugee Conference in 1951, is someone who has a “well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR, 1951). Although this does not account for certain circumstantial and social factors, Canada has expanded its definition to incorporate persons persecuted for reasons such as gender as well as those displaced because of events such as natural disaster (CIC, 2011). A refugee is different from an immigrant, in that
an immigrant is a person who chooses to settle permanently in another country, while refugees are forced to flee (Berry, 1988). Despite the stark differences in their reasons for immigrating, history has generally deemed the two types of migrants indistinguishable. In fact, refugees as a separate category of immigration did not emerge until 1976 with the passing of the Immigration Act (CIC, 2011). Because of this, much of the research on the history of the refugee population is embedded in the history of immigration in general. The lack of acknowledgement reflects the notion that refugees as a group needed not receive special attention and treatment from that of other immigrants. As I divulge a greater history of resettlement, this will become increasingly apparent.

‘Resettlement,’ is difficult to define given varying interpretations with regard to the time it takes to resettle and the extent to which one is expected to assimilate into their new context. Some have described resettlement in terms of legal refugee status (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011). In other words, asylum seekers petition the right to be recognized as refugees in hopes of ‘resettling’ in another country. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) uses the term ‘resettlement’ to describe the legal process of bringing refugees from the country where they have sought protection to Canada to live as permanent residents (CIC, 2011). However, resettlement relies on more than just the legal process or status documentation alone. Being granted refugee status does not in itself imply resettlement; it simply invites the possibility of resettling. Resettlement is a process in which various factors and conditions can help, hinder, or mobilize the process. The way in which societies have developed to enable integration via policies, attitudes towards newcomers, and approach, and the way in which refugees work to self-integrate have more to do with the process of resettlement than status alone. Therefore the definition I have chosen to reflect the process of ‘resettlement,’ as provided by Gray and Elliot (2011) of the Refugee Resettlement Research Project, refers to the “acclimatization and the early stages of adaptation” to the host country (p. 2). This definition implies that resettlement is ongoing and varies significantly for individuals.
Many victims of such persecution seek asylum in Canada given its presence in the international community and its prominent refugee resettlement program. Such victims escape their ‘source countries’ or ‘countries of origin,’ terms used to refer to the countries from which refugees escape, and make Canada their new ‘host country’ or country that they are hoping to settle within (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). Canada has resettled and granted asylum to refugees from more than 140 countries (CIC, 2011). The source countries have varied over time depending on global circumstances. As history unfolds, the reasons that individuals escape their circumstances will inevitably vary, often in unpredictable ways. Global and national crises, oppressive governments, environmental conditions, and war are some examples of the reasons people are forced to seek refuge. As mentioned earlier (but worthy of reiteration), refugees are not a homogenous group and should not be regarded as such. Refugees come from different countries, socioeconomic classes, and educational and religious backgrounds (Stewart, 2011). Several other factors shape the ‘refugee experience’ not only for particular social groups but at the individual level as well. It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss the multitude of origins and circumstances from which certain refugees have arrived and how Canada has sought to integrate these groups specifically; although it is important for educators and society in general to recognize how circumstantial differences contribute significantly to the acculturation and education of refugees. Rather, it is my intention to draw a brief history of Canada’s role in integrating refugees, specifically children, and to demonstrate how the Ontario school system via curricular documents and practices has sought to address the specific needs of refugee students. I will make mention of certain ethnic groups as they become relevant to historical shifts in approach, attitudes, and policies that affect the refugee population, however I will not focus explicitly on the experiences and treatment of these groups individually.

A Brief History of Resettlement
In order to recognize how and why Canada has become an international leader in refugee resettlement and how schools have been used as an apparatus for integration, it is crucial to explore the history of refugee resettlement and education within Canada and to recognize how the nation has become situated within the global context. As we explore the historical context, it is important to note the various histories and perspectives that have shaped and continue to shape our individual understanding of refugee resettlement and education. I apply a critical lens to the research drawing on Denzin and Lincoln’s work on the historical context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) to frame my interpretation of circumstances that have led to the present state of refugee education. I have used various texts to inform my research including curriculum and policy documents, writings of historical interpretation, books, journal articles, and other such materials. In doing so, I have allowed the texts to act as a vehicle by which I have been able to actively situate myself within the historical context. To deconstruct the meaning of each text, I have read each word as part of a whole text and a greater context in order to yield a personal understanding of the historical framework of refugee resettlement and education in Ontario.

**Open Doors**

Citizenship and Immigration Canada recognize the influx of Quakers during the American Revolution in the 1770s as the first wave of refugees to Canada, and more specifically, to an area that is now southern Ontario (CIC, 2012). Many Quakers escaped from England because of religious persecution. Resettlement in Canada offered them the opportunity to exercise their free rights and practice their beliefs, which are founded in pacifism and social justice. The foundational support of the Quaker mission likely plays a significant role in the perception of Canada not only as a safe haven, but as an entity that encourages the work of social justice, acceptance, relief, and other ideals that the Quakers brought with them. However, when considering this movement, it is important to recognize that
Canada was still technically a British colony, and therefore thrived on immigration as a means to enhance its population. Although providing sanctuary to victims of persecution is deemed generally honorable, the tactical nature of Canada’s welcoming stance can be seen over the several waves of refugee migration that followed.

The next notable wave of refugees came in the mid-1800s during the Civil War when fugitive American slaves escaped to Canada along the Underground Railroad (CIC, 2012). About 30,000 African Americans sought asylum in Canada, a majority of whom made Ontario their final stop. Canada’s role in this endeavor gained widespread attention and reaffirmed its reputation as a sanctuary for the oppressed. While its protective response deserves mention, it is important to reflect on the greater circumstances that inform this period of migration. First, at the time of the Civil War, Canada and Britain were negotiating terms of judicial sovereignty. These discussions eventually led to Canadian Confederation in 1867 at which point Canada was formed as a dominion independent from the British Empire (Library and Archives Canada, 2006). During the time leading up to and following Confederation, Canada had a close economic and political relationship with the northern, Union colonies. As a result of the United States’ Civil War, there was a huge market for Canada’s agricultural and manufactured goods, most of which went to the Union (2006). Preserving an economic relationship with the Union colonies was important to the nation as such ties could help Canada to position itself well for eventual economic independence. This relationship may have contributed to its willingness to extend its borders to ex-slaves escaping the southern, confederate colonies.

Ironically, the Canadian government had only just abolished slavery within its own borders less than thirty years prior to the American Civil War. In a recent account by historian Marcel Trudel entitled *Canada’s Forgotten Slaves: two hundred years of bondage*, Trudel debunks the long upheld myth that slavery was not a real problem in the nation by exposing proof of the prevalence of slavery in colonial
Canada, and especially in Quebec (Everett-Green, 2014). He exposes archival records of thousands of slaves and discusses a culture in which slave ownership as a symbol of status. Interestingly, Trudel first published his accounts, entitled *L’esclavage au Canada français*, in 1960 while working at the University of Laval but his work was met with backlash, and it never received its due attention. Furthermore, Trudel was ostracized by his colleagues because of his work, and eventually felt it necessary that he leave his position at the university (2014). It took over fifty more years to have his accounts translated into English. Historians and politicians have long preferred to ignore the nation’s guilty past in favor of preserving its unscathed image of innocence, tolerance, and compassion. However, records such as Trudel’s force society to reconsider the nation’s history and in turn to renegotiate its conception of how we arrived at the present.

Despite its objectifying response to the Other in the past, the nation declared itself a safe haven, and invited the opportunity for growth and development. During the years following Canadian Confederation, the new government adopted an open-door-policy of immigration to stimulate the economy, settle sparsely populated but abundantly agricultural western lands, and bolster Canadian nationalism while securing national sovereignty. Resettlement as a means to increase economic productivity became deeply embedded within Canada’s culture of immigration and can be seen over the course of its history.

**Canada and the World Wars**

During World War I, despite the large number of asylum seekers, resettlement was highly restricted (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). Although the nation prospered during the war, towards the end of the war it saw a short but severe recession (Apramian et al., 2009). There were no regulations in place to facilitate entry of displaced persons as refugees, and those refugees who were admitted were able to enter because of lobby groups and organizations in Canada (Kaprielian-Churchill
& Churchill, 1994). The Minister of Immigration could, at their discretion, allow such individuals entrance into Canada under special humanitarian case provisions, however, these exceptions were fairly rare in comparison to the number of refugees seeking asylum (1994). Although senior civil servants recognized that there was a humanitarian call to intervene, they claimed that “Canada was not in a position to take in the destitute of the world.” Refugees were viewed as the “beggars of society” (p. 24) and were rejected for fear that they would become a financial burden to the public (1994). Between 1919 and 1939 only twenty to forty thousand refugees were admitted into the country.

World War II also saw a number of refugees seeking asylum within Canada’s borders. Many accounts of history look straight to the noble efforts of the Canadian government to immigrate many of these refugees, particularly the large number of Ukranians that were admitted (CIC, 2012). However, such histories neglect to address the failure of the Canadian government to resettle Jewish refugees during the war (Abella & Troper, 2012). Indeed, it must be noted that Canada was still suffering the profound aftermath of the Great Depression, which resulted in high levels of unemployment, personal insecurity, and a sense of isolationism from the rest of the world as it focused inward on its own economic deficiency and social upheaval. Arguments have been made as such that the nation was perhaps too consumed with its own self-interest to prioritize foreign oppression and to incorporate the global tragedy into its scope (Dirks, 1983). However, this alone does not account for the prejudice and scapegoating used to deny the Jewish people entry into Canada’s borders. Canada’s immigration policy during World War II was extremely rigid and reflected the anti-Semitic sentiments that pervaded much of Canadian society at the time. Perhaps most influential to Canada’s intolerant response was Director of the Immigration Branch from 1936-1943, Frederick Blair. In their book, None is Too Many (2012), a title that has come to epitomize Canada’s political stance towards Jewish refugees during the war, Irving Abella and Harold Troper expose the blatant racism that inundated the Immigration Branch, at least in part as a result of Blair’s direction. Blair’s anti-Semitic nature can be best captured by his 1941 annual
report, in which he wrote "Canada, in accordance with generally accepted practice, places greater emphasis on race than upon citizenship" (2012). Despite his power and influence, Blair alone cannot be blamed for Canada’s unfortunate refusal of Jewish immigrants. Anti-Semitic discourses at the time were being reflected across the globe. In Canada, not only were such sentiments prevalent amongst politicians, bureaucrats, and the authorities, but across the general Canadian public as well.

By the end of World War II, Canada had emerged as a middle power (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). The country had proven itself and its significant contributions to the war effort, and was therefore looked upon to take a more active global role. Additionally, the economy was growing as a result of the resources and materials it had supplied to the war, and there were several vacancies to be filled in factories and other businesses after the war (Harzig, 2003). The nation needed hardworking, cheap labor to support the growing economy and job market. Liberalizing the immigration policy would prove mutually beneficial for the country as well as new immigrants. Refugee admittance was based primarily on the prioritization of this interest as asylum seekers were selected on the basis of their perceived capacity to settle “successfully” and to be absorbed economically (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994), a tradition that remained for the next several decades. Although many migrants came from professional backgrounds, they were hired as unskilled and manual laborers to support the growing economy (Harzig, 2003). Canada’s response to post-war industrialism was not unlike that of many other Western nations. In fact a similar theme of selective resettlement as a means to support economic growth could be seen across the world over. A larger history might not only broaden our scope of the human tendency towards such prejudice but allow us greater insight into the patterns of resettlement.

A Shift towards Recognition
In 1951, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established and the Geneva Convention was held to determine the status of refugee and the basic responsibilities of nations to support and protect their newcomers. Interestingly, despite Canada’s developing role in resettling refugees, the nation did not initially sign the Convention, nor did it sign the 1967 Protocol by which nations agreed not to return a person to their country of origin if that person had grounds to fear persecution (UNHCR, 1968). Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill (1994) posit that Canada’s hesitation was likely linked to questions of sovereignty and a tradition of linking immigration to the economic needs. Finally, in 1969 Canada signed the Convention and Protocol, committing to a refugee policy that prioritized the rights and protection of distressed people over the needs of the Canadian economy (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2015). This marked a turning point in Canadian refugee resettlement history, as Canada now had a legal and binding responsibility to accept refugees into its borders. The country had to meet certain immigration quotas and regulations which were revised periodically to meet global demands (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994).

After 1970, Canada developed several federal policies supporting a multicultural national identity, marking a shift from an earlier commitment to assimilation and conformity to a more integrative approach. These policies afforded new levels of recognition for immigrant culture and rights (Kymlicka, 2003). One policy in particular, the Immigration Act of 1976, focused specifically on the rights of refugees (Government of Canada, 1976). Until 1978, when Parliament ensured the Immigration Act, Canada dealt with refugees on an ad hoc basis (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). The category of refugee did not exist within immigration status, and policies and regulations were formed as deemed necessary to meet crises abroad. With the signing of the Immigration Act, the status of refugee was placed in a category separate from immigrant. The Act required that Canada fulfill certain international legal obligations with respect to refugees and to uphold a tradition of humanitarianism (Government of Canada, 1976). In abidance with the Act, the government set up procedures for determination of
Convention refugee status and established measures to assist in the initial settlement of asylum seekers (Stewart, 2011). Refugees were no longer held to the same rigorous process of selection as they had been under immigrant status. They were given priority and faced with much less rigid selection criteria. Additionally, by way of this policy, Canada agreed that it would not deport an individual to a life-threatening situation (Government of Canada, 1976). These revisions in conjunction with major global events led to a significant increase in the number of refugees migrating to Canada as can be evidenced by the large influx of “boat people” arriving from Vietnam as well as other Southeast Asian refugees (Neuwirth, 1988). Since enacting this provision, refugees have become an integral component of Canada's immigration program.

**Ebbs and Flows of Resettlement**

Despite the passing of the Immigration Act (1976) and other such conditions designed to support resettled refugees, the number of refugees admitted into Canada in the 1980s saw a substantial decline as a result of both economic and political considerations (Neuwirth, 1988). It is worth noting that the performance of the Canadian economy deteriorated sharply in the 1980s with the average unemployment rate rising from 6.7 percent in the 1970s to 9.3 percent in the 1980s (Card & Freeman, 1993). According to Neuwirth (1988), this reluctance to admit refugees into the nation was also the result of “a general hardening of attitudes towards refugees as a result of, among other things, the increasing number of asylum seekers arriving directly in resettlement countries” (p. 27). During the 1980s, oil prices saw a sharp decline leading to a reduction in the cost of airfare. This allowed a larger number of asylum seekers to arrive in Canada and make their claims at the border (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). The nation, with a struggling economy and a deficient labor market was suddenly faced with the responsibility of hosting a growing number of refugees, a responsibility that lead many to viewing refugees as an economic and social burden (1994). As a result, despite the ostensible
humanitarian basis for resettlement, the types of refugee populations that would be resettled was based on national and foreign policy considerations and thus informed by a policy of ‘calculated kindness’ in which certain groups were more likely to be accepted and others bypassed (Loescher & Scanlan, 1986).

The 1980s also saw changes in the perceived psychosocial needs of refugees. As result of an earlier neo-liberal shift in the seventies from the bureaucratized management of resettlement by the welfare State to the privatized responsibility of local communities, social services, and nonprofit organizations (Foucault & Kritzman, 1988), the psych professions were looked upon to draw a clearer understanding of how to support the refugee population (Lippert, 1998). The unique ‘forced’ circumstances of the refugee experience were finally gaining recognition, and professionals were beginning to recognize the severe impact this could have on mental health (Beiser, 1984). Additionally, with governmental regulations now preventing the privileging of certain ‘absorbable’ refugees over others, systems had to be in place to ensure that newcomers could eventually become socially appropriate and mentally sound residents of the nation. Centers such as the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture in 1984 in Toronto emerged, emphasizing and addressing the mental health concerns that were presumed prevalent among the population, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, 1990). Researchers began pursuing and disseminating evidence-based knowledge of refugee resettlement to inform social services and adjust society’s views and perceptions of the refugee population so that the mental health and integration of refugees could be better supported (Beiser, 1984). Assessments were also used towards determination hearings to inform refugee status designation (Lippert, 1998). In 1986 the Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees was established to ensure that the particular needs of the populations were being actively pursued and psychological interventions were being afforded accordingly (Canadian Task Force, 1988).
Towards the end of the decade, Canada began to recognize a declining birthrate among its citizens with the population growing only 4.2 percent between 1981 and 1986—the lowest growth rate evidenced in the twenty-five years prior (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). High emigration rates also threatened Canada’s population. Additionally, the economy was beginning to see an upswing. These compounding factors eventually led to a pull for more immigrants, including refugees as well as the widely held view that “Canada is a country which needs immigrants” (1994, p. 1).

The 1990s saw the largest wave of refugee entering Canada, and more specifically Ontario, than ever before. The number of refugees in Canada jumped from 8,216 in 1985 to 28,165 in 1991 and continued to rise (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). Despite the vast growth in refugees, immigration policies at the time intended to restrict the number of newcomers entering Canada (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998). Several features of refugee resettlement reflected a generally negative response to the growing population, a sentiment true of other nations at the time as well. At the end of 1997, the UNHCR published, *The State of the World’s Refugees, 1997-1998* which presented a largely bleak overview of the world’s response to the problems of refugees as noted from an excerpt within the document (UNHCR, 1997):

Confronted with growing social problems at home, and claiming that many of these asylum seekers are actually economic migrants, the governments of the industrialized states have introduced an array of different measures intended to prevent or deter people from seeking refuge on their territory (p. 9).

Canada had in place the kinds of measures mentioned above. In fact, the Canadian government boasted its success in developing particular strategies that protected the nation from “illegal immigration” regardless of whether the immigrant qualified for refugee status. One strategy, established in 1995, forced all adult immigrants and refugees in Canada to pay $975 for the privilege of permanent residence, a highly excessive cost unmatched by any other country in the world at the time (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998). Another restriction involved limiting the number of family
members that could be sponsored by refugees whose status had been recognized by Canada causing families to remain separate for years. Furthermore, newcomers that were assigned a negative refugee determination were not granted the right to appeal the decision (1998). Despite being commended around the world for its refugee determination system, Canada failed to meet international standards in crucial ways. Critics have since argued that the nation’s large resettlement numbers have had more to do with adhering to international regulations than a humanitarian tradition (Beiser, 2004).

**Discrimination and Mental Health**

During the early 1990s, Canada was suffering the aftermath of an economic recession. Social assistance, health coverage, and other resources were cut, and refugees were forced to face the brunt of the national deficit. Unfortunately, the economic climate also had an impact on public perceptions of refugees. In a study conducted by Beiser (2004), 39% of Canadians surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that the refugees were using up more than their share of the country’s health and social services, despite his finding that “Neither their unemployment figures nor their use of public services suggest that the refugees became an economic burden” (p. 56). A report by the Canadian Council for Refugees (1998) also exposes the issue of the perceived economic drain caused by refugees, noting:

> A difficult economic climate [also] tends to have a chilling effect on public attitudes towards refugees and other newcomers. Certainly few politicians have been prepared to stand up and say that rights need to be respected. And some public figures have played into xenophobic fears, blaming newcomers for problems in society (p. 2).

The report goes on to address issues with media coverage states that, “Journalists, editorialists and other commentators regularly feel free to make unfounded allegations, grossly distort the facts and resort to demagogic xenophobia in discussing refugee and immigration issue” (1998). Beiser (2004) also noted issues with media portrayals, quoting a headline in a September 1999 issue of the Financial Post that proclaimed, "These refugees and immigrants can be deadly" (as seen in Beiser, 2004, p. 55). Fear-
mongering had even spread into the school system with columnist Diane Francis reporting that, "Somali refugee children have spread TB throughout schools in the Etobicoke and Mississauga areas where thousands live mostly in public-supported housing and on welfare" (as seen in Beiser, 2004, p. 55).

As public views were hardening, the prevalence of refugee mental health concerns was gaining widespread attention, with a particular emphasis on migration factors of distress being noted (Beiser et al., 1995; Pernice & Brook, 1996). Not only were researchers recognizing that pre-migration adversities can be detrimental to mental health but also that post-migratory stressors can have severe impact on wellbeing. It became clear that the characteristics of the receiving society are likely to impact the adaptive experiences of refugees. Discrimination in particular was repeatedly found to be one of the most crucial factors influencing psychosocial adaptation (Beiser et al., 1995; Noh et al., 1999; Pernice & Brooke, 1996). Studies showed that discrimination yields high symptom levels of anxiety and depression (Noh et al., 1999; Pernice & Brook, 1996), concerns that have since been noted within research (Beiser, 2009; Pinson & Arnot, 2010).

The mental health and wellbeing of refugee children also came into focus (Beiser et al., 1995). Earlier research had already demonstrated that stressful life events in childhood could lead to subsequent mental health problems (Rutter, 1983). With new emphasis on the plight of refugees, researchers began to recognize that the stressful migration experiences of refugee youth and the social and emotional upheaval that they had endured as a result made the population particularly vulnerable. It was becoming increasingly apparent that more needed to be done to support refugees and refugee resettlement. As Beisier (2004) notes, “A welcome mat at the door is not enough. Paying attention to the needs, aspirations and opportunities of newcomers after the door has been opened to them will pay dividends to refugees and receiving societies alike” (p. 56). Society was forced to respond not only to the growing number of refugees in the nation and to their needs, but to the public’s anti-refugee
sentiments pervasive “Othering.” To address the state of affairs, society turned to one of its most important institutions for problem-solving: schools. Schools were looked upon to address both the issue of new refugee youth in the country as well as the production of a more accepting, multicultural, anti-racist society. It is at this juncture that refugee education emerges as a growing field of study in Canada (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994; Yau & Toronto Board of Education, 1995).

**Schooling and Education**

Historically, schools have been called upon as one of the first institutions to integrate refugee youth into their new society (Brown & Krasteva, 2013). According to Burke and Milewski (2012), “The relation between social progress and public education has formed a central debate in the historiography of Canadian-English education” (2012, p. 2). Schools have been responsible not only for the assimilation of newcomers but for the production of adequate members of a thriving Canadian society. The ways in which refugee youth have been acclimatized within the school environment tends to reflect the greater views and expectations of the larger society. In attempting to piece together a comprehensive history of refugee education in Canada, I refer to Burke and Milewski’s (2012) notion that the history of Canadian education must be looked at not as a linear progression, but rather as “a story of exclusion as well as inclusion, of regression as well as progress...” (p. 2). I intend not to simply critique the former models of education, as periodic shifts in curriculum and policies already reflect the need or want to have done so. Rather, I will shed light on how curriculum and adapted policies have addressed the education of refugee youth, if at all, and perhaps equally as important, how they have integrated and promoted the notion of the Other among the general student population.

**The Early Canadian Context**

Since the early 19th century, educational leaders described by historians as ‘school promoters’, believed that schooling could ensure the maintenance of the established, inegalitarian social order of
society (Prentice, 2004). Before schooling became compulsory for all children, education was a symbol of upward mobility and success that supported the divide between the social classes. Those who were educated were deemed respectable and civilized and could, if they had not already done so, join the ranks of high society. Conversely, those who were uneducated were doomed to remain in the lower, poorer classes (2004). However, as certain ‘issues’ began to arise, schools were looked to in order to address and solve the problems of society (Burke & Milewski, 2012). In Ontario specifically, pro-immigration policies designed to enhance the population were leading to the substantial and constant influx of new residents, who in the eyes of Canadian citizens, posed a threat to provincial and national safety as well as the Canadian way of life (Prentice, 2004). Although adult immigrants were often deemed impossible to fully assimilate, it became the belief of many school promoters that through education immigrant children “…could be channeled into proper modes of thought and behavior.” (Smaller, 2012, p. 32). To ensure the preservation of a safe and civilized nation, cultural competency and character development became the main objectives of schooling. An assimilationist approach to immigrant education was maintained for several decades following, and can be evidenced by the curriculum that framed the goals of education.

**Ontario Curriculum**

Ontario curriculum documents have allowed me to develop personal insight into the dominant discourses and social standards and expectations of the time. As I interpret the curricular documents, it is important that I reflect on several questions, some of which include: Who are the producers of the text? Who is being represented within the document? Who is the document for? Whose education is being ignored? What does the use of specific language and words say about the values and ideals of the time? What assumptions does the text make? And what national and global events act as the backdrop for the text? In order to draw a comprehensive understanding of refugee education as is reflected in
the documents, I have carefully examined the words of the various texts as they comprise larger ideals set in a given time and context, as previously noted.

**Programming for Good Citizens**

In 1915, the Ontario Department of Education released the *Regulations Courses of Study and Examinations of the Public and Separate Schools* curriculum booklet outlining detailed regulations from the very structure of the building and dimensions of the rooms themselves to the prescriptive course of study and materials needed to carry out lessons (Ontario Department of Education, 1915). It is worth noting that by way of *The Public Schools Act* and *The Separate Schools Act*, “every person between the ages of five and twenty-one had the right to attend free the Public or Separate School in the urban municipality or rural school section in which he reside[d]” (1915, p. 27). It is also important to note that at this point in history Canada was involved in World War I. Although the number of refugees resettling in Canada at the time the document was drafted was low (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994), some refugee children did eventually immigrate to Ontario following the war and were placed in schools, thus likely experiencing the impacts of this document.

The very purpose of the education, as stated by the curriculum document, was “to enable the teacher to train his pupils to become efficient members of society” (Ontario Department of Education, 1915, p.36). This begs the question: what makes someone efficient in society, and who qualifies? It goes on to say, “The courses of study prescribed in the Syllabus below represent the typical experiences of the race that are worthy of transmission at this stage in the preparation of the pupil to become an efficient member of society” (1915, p. 36). The idea of a ‘worthy race’ speaks to the segmented, hierarchical nature of society at the time. Those who were able to successfully meet the demands of a Eurocentric curriculum were deemed more worthy of becoming efficient members of society than others. The statement explicitly demonstrates the valuing of some races over others and the notion
that those races should be amply prepared to contribute to society. The text does not speak for those that do not meet the prescribed criteria. Furthermore, the idea of ‘typical experiences’ suggests that those who are worthy of becoming efficient members of society tend to follow a certain, common trajectory as indicated by that of the Syllabus. This implies that those who do not meet the demands of that which is ‘typical’ cannot be transmitted and therefore cannot become efficient in society. The prejudice nature of this statement reflects the desire of society to perpetuate constructed social expectations including racial, gendered, and classist norms of the time. It also implies that in order to become ‘efficient’ one had to adapt to the outlined expectations and assimilate to the Canadian way of life.

Educational assimilation, as called for within the 1915 curriculum document, can be evidenced by the case of the “Georgetown Boys” (Apramian et al., 2009; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). Following World War I, 109 Armenian refugee boys, referred to as the “Georgetown Boys” were sponsored by the Armenian Relief Association of Canada to flee from the Armenian Genocide in Turkey and resettle in Georgetown Ontario. The goal of this sponsorship was to rescue these children from their defenseless, oppressive, and dangerous circumstances and to give them salvation in a safe country—a country that would teach them how to be “good citizens.” At the time, strict immigration regulations prevented the most immigrants from resettling, however, the case of the “Georgetown Boys” was an exception. It was the nation’s first humanitarian act of international scale at the time, and was thereinafter referred to as “Canada’s Noble Experiment” (Apramian et al., 2009). The boys were dispersed across farms across the province, where some were welcomed as foster children into their new homes, and others were exploited for cheap labor. Education was held primarily on the farm and focused largely on assimilation (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). The boys were expected to become good Christian farmers that could contribute to society. In retrospect, the forced migration of these young boys to remote locations likely presented challenges to general wellbeing and integration
given the traumatic circumstances they faced in their home country, their lack of knowledge of Canadian culture, their inability to communicate in English, and other such risk factors (Kaprelian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). This effort demonstrates the clear intent of the province to assimilate the refugee youth and reflects the general interest of education at the time—to produce efficient members of society.

In 1937, Ontario released the *Programme of Studies for Grades 1 to VI of Public and Separate School*, often referred to as “the little gray book” (Ontario Department of Education, 1937). The document marked a fundamental transformation in pedagogical discourse at the time, as it sought to shift elementary schooling along the lines of a ‘stages of development’ model of learning (Milewski, 2008). The ideology expressed within the curriculum document was that knowledge could best be obtained through experience rather than the acquisition of information. While this sentiment is often reiterated today, it does not account for the assimilative nature of the proposed experiences. In her article ‘The Little Gray Book’: Pedagogy, Discourse and Rupture in 1937, Milewski (2008) points to Historian Charles Phillips’ notion that the ‘pattern’ of change in Canada was, “based primarily on foregrounding the importance of ‘education as development’ and [was] aimed at ‘socially desirable qualities and abilities’” (p. 94, 95).

The curriculum states that the aims of education “should be to develop in the child his physical powers and to train him in their proper use and control, to awaken him to the fundamental interests of civilized life so far as they lie within the compass of childhood, and to encourage him to attain to the orderly management of his energies, impulses, and emotions which is the basis of desirable attitudes” (Ontario Department of Education, 1937, p. 6). For a refugee student arriving in Ontario, being expected to learn the “fundamental interests of civilized life” when life’s interests and expectations can vary significantly across borders may have presented challenges. Additionally, the “desirable attitudes” that
children were expected to demonstrate may have been difficult for refugee youth to interpret let alone to perform. Not only would linguistic and cultural differences contribute to deviations in self-expression but the potential effects of trauma may have played a role as well, since attentional difficulties, impulsivity, and bodily responses are some of the recognizable features of post-traumatic stress (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Despite the great potential for deviation from the prescribed guidelines, the curriculum fails to address those who do not fit into the dominant social order.

Although Ontario saw notable growth in the population of immigrants at the time, the curriculum does not seem to address differences in children’s backgrounds, cultures, or languages. For example, the curriculum notes under the subject English that, “It is of prime importance that children learn to speak and write their mother tongue clearly, accurately, and gracefully, and to use good books as a source of information and pleasure” (Ontario Department of Education, 1937, p. 23).’’ The text makes no mention of any language other than English, an omission upheld over the next several decades. This document and the seceding documents to follow than assume that all children in schools speak English as their native language and should deem English their mother tongue—a condition that was simply not the case. However, that is not to say that the program did not address other nations; it did indeed advise that in Grade 3 children’s curiosities of other lands be explored and that “a sympathetic understanding of other peoples” (p. 66) be developed. While such notions were unlikely ill-intended, the use of the word “sympathetic” suggests that others were deemed to be requiring of students’ sympathies. It privileges Canadian students in comparison to students of other lands, and it certainly does not invite the possibility of the Other into the dominant classroom.

The next Programme of Studies for Grades VII and VIII of the Public and Separate Schools (Ontario Department of Education, 1942) emerged during World War II and in ways seems to embody the national values and concerns of the time. The importance of group participation and its relevance to
social order are emphasized within the document as are the notions of ‘citizenship,’ ‘community,’ and ‘responsibility.’ The very first sentence of the *Programme* (1942) expresses that every person in society engages in activities that are “mostly in association with other people” (p. 5). It positions students and members of society amongst others and immediately gives the reader the impression that we exist in relation to each other. The very next sentence states that, “In order to pursue the ordinary concerns of living, people associate themselves in social groups of various forms” (p. 5). The idea that we situate ourselves implies choice. We are granted the opportunity to decide where in society we belong and with whom we want to associate with and be associated with. It goes on to state, “When we speak of a person as a “member of society” we think of his membership in such groups as well as his citizenship in the province and the Dominion” (p. 5). Nationalism and a commitment to membership within one’s society become crucial during times of war when notions of sovereignty, citizenship, and freedom of rights are threatened. The language of war is also woven into the document in more subtle ways as can be evidenced by the italicized: “The curriculum herein presented has been *drafted* to *serve* the needs and *enlist* the interest of children...” (p. 10). The words themselves reflect the language commonly used at the time and the need for national participation in the war effort.

It is interesting to note that although the document highlights the importance of respect and courteous manner towards others, it also states:

> It is not enough for him to be agreeable and to refrain from infringing upon the rights of his neighbors. The socially satisfactory person must refer his way of acting to what the others are doing, and make it fit in. The student must be cooperative in order to contribute to the democratic society (p. 5).

This provision encourages one to ‘fit in’ amongst his peers in order to contribute to society, an ideal that becomes essential in times of war. Cooperation and a unified set of values and commitments are crucial to achieving victory and maintaining democracy. Additionally, those who do not reflect the national standard, the Others, pose a threat to unity, a notion that also seems to reflect the
discriminative sentiments of the time. Assimilation is therefore essential to furthering unity and defeating the Other. A heightened sense of war and the need to preserve national security can further be evidenced by stated objective that, “The schools of Ontario exist for the purpose of preparing children to live in a democratic society that bases its way of life upon the Christian ideal” (p. 5).

A coherent field of refugee education emerged in the aftermath of World War II (UNHCR, 2011) with a global awareness of the importance and power of education. This notion is well-expressed by this preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO, 2004). It was then realized that not only was education essential for assimilation, but it was crucial for securing national control. Included in the 1951 UNHCR Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was article 22 which states that signatory states “shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education…. [and] treatment as favorable as possible…” (UNHCR, 2010).

While the importance of education was becoming well-understood, the type of education being offered for years after World War II still reflected dominant discourses and the privileging of a Eurocentric curriculum. The goal of education remained assimilative and did not seek to address the specific needs of differing populations. Rather, it sought to transmit the knowledge deemed necessary to become a good citizen and to contribute to society (Ontario Department of Education, 1960). The official curriculum was therefore enforced to ensure schools would teach children to be what the nation-state needed them to be. In order to be turned into national citizens children needed to “speak the national language, read the national literature, learn the national history and geography, and internalize the national values” (Osborne, 2000). This tradition remained for over a decade after and can be reflected by the Programme of Studies for Grades 1 to 6 of the Public and Separate Schools.
released in 1960 (Ontario Department of Education, 1960). Despite emerging during a time when Canada was accepting a growing number of immigrant populations of various cultures, languages, and religious beliefs, the document still demonstrated the democratic, Christian sentiments of years passed.

**Child-Centered Learning and Multiculturalism**

In 1968, the Ministry of Education released the Hall-Dennis Report, officially titled, *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario*. A key component of this report was the reinforcement of "the right of every individual to have equal access to the learning experience best suited to his/her needs, and the responsibility of every school authority to provide a child centered learning continuum that invites learning by individual discovery and inquiry" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1968). This report marked a major shift in the way curriculum was developed and managed within the province. It decentralized learning objectives, granting Ontario the flexibility to adapt learning outcomes to meet individual needs. Unlike prior curriculum documents, the Hall-Dennis Report (1968) emphasized the need for self-realization rather than fitting individuals for pre-determined economic or social roles. The shifting priorities of education can be noted by the language of the document:

> The society whose educational system gives priority to the economic over the spiritual and emotional needs of man defines its citizens in terms of economic units and in so doing debases them. There is a dignity and nobility of man that has nothing to do with economic considerations. The development of this dignity and nobility is one of education's tasks (1968).

The emphasis on the individual led to greater sensitivity to the needs of marginalized youth within the province and greater depictions of the Other. In *The Formative Years* (Ontario Department of Education, 1975b), a statement of curricular policy, the goals of the Hall-Dennis Report (1968) can be noted. The document highlights Ontario’s commitment to developing the worth, growth, and learning
of each individual student in the school system with an emphasis on respect for the individual, concern for others, social responsibility, and compassion. The development of curriculum was largely the responsibility of schools and teachers, with an emphasis on developing lessons for student-centered learning outcomes.

As a result of changes in demographics and a shift in educational goals and objectives, the curriculum of the time was beginning to demonstrate the presence of immigrant youth. The curriculum document, *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions* (Ontario Department of Education, 1975a) does for the first time incorporate the notion of non-English speakers, offering a subheading entitled “Learning a Second Language” (p. 59) and highlighting the potential for additional teacher supports. The section also suggests that children should be able to uphold their own customs traditions, an idea that reflects Canada’s growing multiculturalism. A document that accompanied *The Formative Years* (1975b) entitled *Multiculturalism in Action* (Ontario Department of Education, 1977) offered ideas for ways to incorporate diversity into the curriculum. The document encouraged that teachers view multiculturalism as a “good pedagogy” (p. 2) and a “necessary preparation for all children (not just recent immigrants) if they are to live in harmony in this multicultural society” (p. 2).

It is interesting to note some of the ideas that are presented within the *Multiculturalism in Action* (1977) manual. Some strategies do seem committed to engaging children in a common understanding of each other. For example, “The Human Experience” (p. 7) outlines developing a sense of the universality of the human condition such as recognizing similar thoughts and feelings of love, fear, pride, hunger and anger. However, other activities seem only to touch the surface of what it means to incorporate multiculturalism into the classroom. For example, the activity entitled “Project: Hair” involves inviting people from different ethnic groups to demonstrates hairstyles commonly associated with their national groups. Such a demonstration may actually serve to further stereotypes as one style
or way of doing something is used to reflect an entire race or ethnicity. Although schools may have found such activities to be helpful in exposing children to different types of people and circumstances and fostering a sense of connection and understanding, such activities act as add-ons to the main programming and do not reflect the embedding of diversity into daily practices and ways learning. Furthermore, superficial activities may lead students to overemphasizing their differences instead of recognizing their humanity.

During the remainder of the 1970s and early 1980s, most refugees originated from one or two countries within each school (Yau & Toronto Board of Education, 1995). Although refugee youth were not recognized as requiring a particular differentiated approach from other immigrant children, as can be noted within the curriculum (Ontario Department of Education, 1975a), the emphasis on child-centered learning may have enabled educators to recognize certain needs of their refugee children. While English-language attainment may have comprised the main focus of refugee education, teachers were empowered to address their students and guide their learning in ways they saw fit. However a shift in the model of education would change this dynamic over the next decade. Educators would soon have to work towards integrating these youth into a society that held a paradigm of global economic competition as a standard of reference for Ontario education (O'Sullivan, 1999). As noted in his 1987 report on Ontario drop-outs, George Radwanski described education, not as the training ground of citizens, but as "the paramount ingredient for success in the competitive world economy" and as essential to "our very survival as an economically competitive society."(p. 7). A new, economically modeled education system would have noticeable implications for refugee youth.

The Effects of Standardization

In 1983, a report by American scholars entitled, A Nation at Risk demonstrated the failures and weaknesses of the American public education system (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in
Education, 1983). It urged the federal government to focus on the standards of education rather than individual academic performance and personal growth, a philosophy that has since prevailed (Sherman, 2012). Soon after its publication, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada was charged with the task of bringing national standards to the nation. Power was taken from the local school board districts and placed in the hands of the federal government in order to see the goals of the report come to fruition. Standardized tests become an evaluative measure of intelligence, and a standardized curriculum was introduced that was aligned to meet the expectations of the test (2012).

As the nation advanced into the 1990s, a neoliberal shift towards economization, standardization, and globalization of society could be reflected in education. In Ontario specifically, a restructuring of power could be noted by the centralization of the provincial administration. Standardized testing was introduced to Grades 3 and 6 and a more prescriptive provincial curriculum referred to as *The Common Curriculum Policies and Outcomes Grades 1-9* was released (Ontario Department of Education, 1995). The curriculum is described as a holistic, result-driven guide designed to address “education in a changing world” (p. 6). It broadens the focus of learning to encompass all children and puts an emphasis on evaluations and student-outcomes. Throughout the documents, strategic language is used to ‘guarantee’ standard learning outcomes. For each grade and subject general and specific expectations are outlined and start with the phrase, “By the end of grade X students will:” (Ontario Department of Education, 1995). The language itself sets an expectation that all students, regardless of varying backgrounds and circumstances, will have particular knowledge and skills within a given timeframe, and it holds educators responsible for ensuring such outcomes. Although revisions of the document have since been made, the structure of the document and the standardized nature of its approach have remained.
The standardization of education has had important impacts for refugee youth. Supporters of a standardized curriculum believe that standards create equal opportunities for students of various backgrounds. Perhaps unsurprisingly, supporters tend to be backed by large businesses and corporations that have vested interest in the continued application of standardized materials. However, critics argue that standardized curriculum and testing put students at disadvantage since the knowledge tested does not address differences in English level learning, cultural knowledge, mental health concerns, and other such factors (Kearns, 2008). These discrepancies ultimately privilege the dominant society and further marginalize those populations that cannot meet the expectations of standardized education. As a result of standardization, refugee and immigrant students are often deemed “illiterate” despite literacy and cultural competence in their native languages and circumstances (2008). By standardizing the knowledge to be learned and maintaining a colonializing approach to schooling, certain students are put at risk for educational marginalization and inequitable opportunities for their learning and growth. Ultimately, standardization in conjunction with forced inclusion can further the feeling of exclusion that refugee youth experience in the classroom, pushing them further to the periphery of education and society. Furthermore, the discriminatory ways in which both teachers and students may respond to students that do not fit the “standard model” can be detrimental to the wellbeing of refugee youth.

In an effort to reduce issues of discrimination, documents such as the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993) were released and disseminated across schools. Within this document it is recognized that, “The value system of the dominant culture tends to become the norm and the only point of reference” (p. 13), and urges schools to establish a more balanced ethnic and racial perspective. The document also calls for a commitment to antiracism and insists that it is to be reflected within curriculum, amongst educators and leadership staff, and across the student body at large. While
policies that target antiracism are important for schools and student wellbeing as they promote an environment of tolerance, they do not necessarily foster compassion or appreciation. They ensure equity by providing repercussions for unwarranted behavior, but they do not focus wholly on supporting inclusion and enhancing positive reception. More is needed to support inclusion and promote wellbeing than antiracist consideration alone.

Recognizing Refugee Youth in Schools

In ten years, from 1981 to 1991, the number of refugees between the ages of 5-19 entering Canada nearly quadrupled from 1,526 to 5,411 (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). Additionally, an unspecified number of youth entered from refugee situations but migrated as members of the Family Class, as they were coming to join their relatives that had already resettled (1994). Although there was a lack of systemic approaches designed specifically for refugees, some schools did offer programs that benefitted the population such as in-school reception classes, integrated heritage/international language programs, team teaching with ESL teachers, and peer tutoring (Yau & Toronto Board of Education, 1995). However it quickly became apparent that additional attention and supports would be needed to address concerns particular to refugee youth. It was during this growth spurt that schools began to realize the importance of distinguishing refugees from immigrants.

One of the first books to address this need in Canada, written by Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994), was entitled “The Pulse of the World: Refugees in Our Schools.” Drawing from research that involved several school communities in Ontario, the book outlined some of the characteristics and circumstances of refugees, the factors that impact their school performance, and issues faced by educators in trying to meet their refugee students’ unique and imperative needs. In describing some of the struggles that refugee youth are faced with upon entering the school system, Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994) demonstrate the large role that language acquisition and ESL placement has played
in the integration of refugee youth. For example, they note that for some boards, “ESL classes have become ‘dumping grounds’ for illiterate students, for those with limited English, for those with learning disabilities, and for those suffering trauma” (p. 83). They also described concerns amongst the student body such as discrimination and bullying. In their conclusions, the authors recognize the special needs that are inherent to refugee youth partly as a result of the harsh, deprived, and often tragic circumstances from which they have arrived. They note that some refugee students may suffer trauma and grief because of their adversities and that disruption and upheaval of normal life can also have severe negative consequences on student wellbeing.

Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994) provide several recommendations for improving schools’ responses to their refugee students, most of which target the school administration and educators. For example, they suggest that teachers must be aware of the differences between refugees and immigrants in order to address their special needs, and they describe signs and symptoms that children with psychological issues may exhibit so that teachers may detect these signals and respond accordingly. They also suggest that refugee studies be added to the curriculum to promote understanding and a greater sense of humanity. While these recommendations are extremely relevant and set an important framework for the consideration of refugees in school, they do not account for issues that they had discussed as emerging at the student level such as discrimination and peer exclusion. Additionally, as readers we do not get a sense of what refugees are asking of their own education, nor do we gain insight into ways of empowering individual refugees to actively shape their own education.

Refugees in Toronto Schools

In Toronto, the school board saw a tremendous increase in the number of refugee students with the number growing from about 5,500 students coming from about nine major source countries in 1991
to 6900 students coming from a significantly larger number of source countries in 1994 (Yau & Toronto Board of Education, 1995). Within the elementary student population of Toronto about 5% or 2,000 students were refugees in 1991 as compared to about 10% of Toronto’s public school students in 1994 (1995). With a growing number of students also came a growth in diverse backgrounds. In order to better understand the situation of refugee students in Toronto’s schools and to examine how teachers and staff were managing their students an exploratory study was conducted by Maria Yau and the Toronto Board of Education (1995). The data collected included documented information such as claimant statistics and student registration records, as well as first-hand accounts including interviews with students and parents, focus group interviews with teachers and principals, and observations by a Local School Team.

The results of the report are indicative of some of the major issues and obstacles surrounding refugee education at the time. One of the greatest concerns involved students’ inability to access their rightful education. Because of discrepancies between the federal government and boards of education, students were held to differing requirements with regard to enrollment paperwork, an issue that led some students to not attending school at all, as can be noted within the report:

A young Tamil girl, who recently joined her parents and brothers in Toronto, was not enrolled in school for a few months due to the lack of permission papers from the government. Instead, the girl whiled away her time in the school yard of her brothers’ school until she was discovered by the school principal who contacted related government agencies and had the girl finally registered in school (p. 27).

Other students and parents reported not enrolling themselves or their children because they were afraid of disclosing their illegal status and being deported. The Ministry of Education has since declared that students do not need to present any documentation to be enrolled in school. Every child’s right to attend school is protected regardless of status and documentation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015b).
With regard to findings from the classroom, educators’ general impressions of refugees were that they were shy, withdrawn, quiet, and subdued. Most could not distinguish between immigrants and refugees with only some noting distinct behaviors and appearances. They noted that their refugee students tended to remain mostly unnoticed and were often mistakenly assumed to have no special needs other than the need for second language acquisition. Some teachers did report certain maladaptive behaviors of those students presumed to be refugees such as “creating chaos in classrooms,” “being aggressive and street-wise,” and “showing little respect for teachers,” (p. 43, however these behaviors were not described with concern for or recognition of mental health factors. Teachers also described how these students were not familiar with classroom discipline and had a hard time following regular school routines or knowing what to do in class. They noted that these behaviors contributed to refugee students being “unpopular with their peers, often the first ones blamed for a wrongdoing in the classroom” (Yau & Toronto Board of Education, 1995, p. 43). A majority of refugee students were aware of these negative feelings, reporting that they felt alienated from their peers, discriminated against, and rejected by other students. Furthermore, they reported that they had encountered racial incidents ranging from verbal abuse to physical abuse. Despite these concerns, no suggestions were made about how to foster compassion and acceptance among students.

It is clear from Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill’s book, The Pulse of the World (1994) and Yau and the Toronto Board of Education’s report, Refugee Students in Toronto Schools: An Exploratory Study (1995), that the special needs of the refugee population, particularly psychosocial needs, were gaining recognition in schools. In fact, in the Toronto report, Meyers (1993) is quoted as saying:

The personal, psycho-social responses that each refugee child develops to their particular memories and experiences do not disappear upon their arrival at the door of the school. This emotional and social baggage is carried with them and educators must consider these issues as we learn to deal more effectively with all their needs (p. 21).
However even this statement seems to place the responsibility of integration, wellbeing, and learning solely upon the shoulders of the school educators and does not focus on the role of other students as well as the refugee students themselves to support this objective.

**Towards Holistic Education**

As we move forward into the current state of refugee education, it is apparent that a greater focus on the mental health and wellbeing of all students, particularly refugees, is being prioritized. Curriculum documents, policies, and other guiding tools reflect a shift towards the promotion of more holistic approaches to learning and growing. Inclusion and multiculturalism have become provincial standards, and support for students with particular concerns and/or needs is embedded into protocol. However, despite some of the major advances schools in Ontario have made, support for refugee youth is still addressed as a separate concern from the rest of the student body. Although curriculum and policy documents reflect changes in approach towards the population, such changes may be deemed ‘extra’ or ‘superficial.’ They do not account for a whole-school commitment to integration, nor do they reflect the embedding of practices that support the wellbeing of all students.

The means to achieving a truly inclusive and supportive school environment lies not solely with educators but among students themselves. Refugee students can actively shape their own wellbeing if given the opportunity to connect within and navigate their own educational experience. The student body can help support refugee integration and wellbeing if given the opportunity to build compassion, kindness, and a deep sense of personal connection. A connection to others can be cultivated through a connection to oneself; each part of the whole must be addressed in a meaningful way. There is great potential in the benefits of such an ideology not only for refugee students but for all students, the school body, and society at large.
Today Canada is considered one of the leading nations of refugee resettlement in the world. Although it boasts a tradition of humanitarianism and a commitment to compassion, it is clear from the examination of Canada’s resettlement history that resettlement was actually rooted in vested political and economic interests. While some asylum seekers were once denied refugee status because of perceptions they would generate an economic burden, others were denied because of national discrimination and exclusionary policies. Those refugees that were resettled were expected to assimilate into society and become good Canadian citizens. Eventually Canada emerged as a world power and became responsible for the resettlement of a select number of refugees. As the nation sought to address shifts in its population, schools were looked upon to address social concerns and integrate newcomer children into society.

Historically, the resettlement of refugee youth has depended largely on the school system. However, a system that has been designed with the very purpose of assimilation in mind has actually served to exclude and “other” refugee youth. For years the Ontario curriculum reflected the assimilative goals of society and a longstanding lack of regard for refugee students. Despite vast resettlement and social acknowledgement of the ‘refugee’ status after World War II, refugees did not become a focus of educational consideration separate from immigrants until the mid 1990s. As we have noted in the school context of the 1990s, while a more holistic, global focus was taking shape within the curriculum and school objectives, a shift towards a standardized model of education was also being enacted—a change that has proven to challenge a true model of inclusive education. Additionally, the public response to refugees reflected unwelcoming sentiments of the time. Research on the education of refugee youth has since demonstrated some of the challenges with regard to integration and wellbeing that can ensue, with issues of exclusion and discrimination amongst peers emerging as a particular area of concern. Despite these concerns, research has continued to focus on ways that educators should adapt their practices to meet refugees’ specific needs instead of promoting integration
and support for wellbeing amongst peers. Furthermore, information about refugee youth has continued to portray refugee students as passive recipients of their education. Research has neglected to demonstrate how refugee youth can actively integrate themselves into their school environment and support their own wellbeing.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the current circumstances in which refugee youth find themselves within the elementary school system and how politics has shaped these conditions. I will describe the types of programming and interventions that have been offered in Ontario to focus on refugee individuals and the impacts that such programs have had. I will also discuss ways in which the current state of education continues to address refugees as being separate or excess rather than an integral part of the whole school dynamic.
Chapter 5: Political Context

Children and youth living in immigrant and refugee families represent the fastest-growing segment of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2007). In order to accommodate the population, Canada has had to make changes to the nation’s systems and policies. Refugee status is in itself a political process by nature. An asylum-seeking individual flees from one nation of a given political system to another in hopes of resettlement. The reasons they have fled are often politically fueled or politically related as the individual has left because they feel unsafe, unprotected, oppressed, and/or fearful as a result of the circumstances within their country of origin. The governing body of the host country then determines based on laws, policies, regulations, and requirements whether to accept or deny the individual. While the case is reviewed by the governing system, the individual is privy to certain rights, freedoms, and protections. If the individual is indeed granted status, they are guaranteed further rights by the nation as are contingent upon the nation’s policies.

Once a refugee has been granted status, they must learn to adjust to a new political system and adapt to a new way of life. This is often challenging, as refugees have not only faced adversities and traumas as a result of their migration, but are also forced to cope with certain stressors upon their arrival and resettlement. The ways in which society perceives refugees, responds to their needs, and allows them to participate in society can have important implications for the mental health and wellbeing of refugees and can ultimately impact the wellbeing of society at large.

As we consider refugee youth, we must acknowledge the spaces in which youth should be supported with regards to acculturation, social integration, and mental health. Schools are fundamental, politically structured systems that are integral to refugee children’s mental health. In order to best meet the needs of the refugee youth population and to support wellbeing, we must be willing to see the faults in our system. We must acknowledge social inequities and recognize disparate
outcomes across student populations. We must also recognize the power of the student body to impact wellbeing and influence change. Only then can we recognize how best to nurture positive mental health and wellbeing.

The “Refugee Experience”

As I refer to the “refugee experience,” I must preface with the fact that not a single refugee individual has faced the exact same experiences. Differences in circumstances, contexts, time, and individual factors vary among refugees and will therefore have disparate impacts on integration and wellbeing. However, there are certain aspects of being a refugee that are common, which should be noted in order to draw a more comprehensive conception of refugees’ experiences and to better position ourselves to serve and support the population. Lustig (2010) defines the “refugee experience” as “a series of interrelated events, interactions, and challenges... [that] may vary widely... but are characterized in all cases by certain chaos-generating physical and emotional universals: deprivation, upheaval, fear, uncertainty, and loss" (p. 242). I use this term to inform a broader understanding of what it means to endure forced migration and resettlement as well as the impact that such life stressors can have on youth development and wellbeing. As we consider the “refugee experience” it should be noted that the processes of migration and resettlement are inherent to the trajectories of all refugee children and are therefore important components to consider within the context of psychosocial supports and interventions. With regard to the educational context specifically, it is crucial to recognize that refugee children “carry with them hidden but enduring scars that influence all aspects of their educational experiences” (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007).

Process of Migration
Refugees are faced with various obstacles, struggles, and adversities during the process of migration. By applying an ecological lens, we can begin to assess the resettlement experiences of refugee children. The displacement related events involved in resettlement can be broken down into three major stages: pre-migration, transmigration, and post-migration (Anderson, 2004; 2001; Miller & Rasco, 2004). Various factors and stressors can influence these processes and must be considered within each context of migration. The pre-migration stage involves forced migration or the decision to move as well as the preparation involved in relocating. Stressors and traumas associated with pre-migration vary depending on social, political, economic, and other circumstances from which refugees have fled. Examples include, but are not limited to: separation from parents, personal injury, internment in refugee camps, and the suffering or death of family members and friends (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011). The transmigration stage involves the physical relocation from one context to another. The time spent in this stage can vary between a short transition, such as a plane ride from country of origin to the new host country, and several years spent in hiding or in refugee camps (Anderson, 2004). Variables such as parental or family accompaniment, asylum status, and other related conditions and events can also influence this phase of migration (Miller & Rasco, 2004).

The post-migration stage involves resettlement and integration into a new context. Stressors related to post-migration may involve issues with asylum status and levels of support (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011), as well as acculturation, language barriers, identity struggles, discrimination, and parental distress (Beiser, 2009). It is important to note that stressors that occur within each of these phases cannot be considered in isolation. The transitional process at large as well as various experiences and subsequent responses that ensue play a significant role in development, wellbeing, and experiences with integration.

Ways that Refugees Resettle
People seeking refugee status arrive in Canada for different reason and under different provisions. Citizenship and Immigration Canada is recognized as “the lead federal agency on immigration matters” and therefore determines these provisions (CIC, 2011). The agency is responsible for developing and implementing the policies, programs and services that are concerned with refugee arrival, protection, and integration. After an asylum seeker submits their claim, the individual or family awaits the processing of their claim and their eventual hearing. Refugee status is ultimately determined by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB).

Those who resettle from outside of Canada fall into two classes. The Convention Refugee Abroad Class is for individuals who are outside of their home country and meet the criteria set forth by the UNHCR by which they cannot return “due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group, such as women or people with a particular sexual orientation” (CIC, 2011). The second class is the Country of Asylum Class in which case asylum seekers do not necessarily meet the convention criteria but have been and continue to be “seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or have suffered massive violation of human rights” (CIC, 2011). In both cases, the individual or family must be referred by the UNHCR or another organization or be sponsored by a private group. Asylum seekers can also claim refugee protection from inside Canada if in case they fear that by leaving Canada they face dangers including “torture, a risk to their life or a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment” (CIC, 2011).

With regard to children specifically, the IRB outlines three broad categories in which refugee claims can be made (CIC, 2013). The first category is accompanied children who arrive in Canada either with their parents or within some period of time after their parents arrive. The second consists of children who arrive in Canada with people who claim to be members of the child’s family. Whether the child is considered accompanied or unaccompanied is then determined by a division of the IRB referred
to as the Convention Refugee Determination Division (CRDD). The third category consists of unaccompanied children who arrive without parents or anyone who claims to be members of the child’s family. Differences in the ways in which asylum seeking children arrive can have important and distinguishing implications for their experiences with acculturation (CIC, 2013).

**Acculturation**

Upon resettlement, refugees experience particular ways of acculturating into the host society. Cross-cultural psychologist John Berry (1997) developed a model to examine this process by which he outlined four types of acculturation: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. According to Berry, assimilation occurs when the refugee embraces the new culture and rejects the previous culture, while separation entails the rejection of the new culture and the embrace of the previous culture. Marginalization involves rejecting both the new and previous culture, and finally, integration involves embracing both the new culture as well as the previous culture. While this model is helpful in outlining how refugees may choose to adapt to their new society, we must also account for the ways in which the host society chooses to adapt to and integrate its new residents. Acculturation is largely ecological; it involves the interactions between the individual and his or her new environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This interaction is shaped in part by politics. While certain types of acculturation may be outlined by the policies of a host society, the attitudes of members within the host society towards newcomers may be embedded within the national structure or hidden within the cultural fibers of the society.

While it is generally understood that separation and marginalization are not ideal strategies for acculturation, it has been less apparent until recently whether assimilation or integration is more optimal. An ‘assimilationist’ approach to integration has generally been described in terms of a ‘melting pot,’ suggesting that immigrants assimilate by losing elements of their cultural identity and ‘melting’
Assimilation theorists support this approach, positing that immigrants generally prefer to abandon their heritage so that they may participate fully in the dominant culture. In other words, by becoming as much like native members as possible they can achieve social acceptance and eventual upward mobility. However, research has shown that assimilation may actually have negative consequences for refugees. According to Portes (1995), “there are circumstances at present in which assimilation does not lead to economic progress and social acceptance, but to precisely the opposite results” (p. 249). Assimilation may instead occur within the oppositional culture, especially for those with less human capital, which can lead to conditions of poverty and difficulty escalating in society (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Children also tend to assimilate more quickly than their parents which can create parent-child conflicts as parents feel a loss of control over their child (Vermeulen, 2010). Furthermore, the pressure on immigrants to adhere to cultural norms and give up elements of cultural identity can have negative effects on psychological health and functioning (Beiser, 2009).

The integration model, however, encourages that new immigrants retain elements of their ethno-cultural identity while integrating aspects of the new culture into their sense of self (Beiser, 2009). The approach supposes that by maintaining connection to their respective ethnic identities and communities, new immigrants have a greater chance of thriving in the host society. Some researchers posit that this is because preservation of one’s own group serves as a buffer against assimilation into the ‘under class’ thereby preventing social and economic inferiority (Portes, 1995; Vermeulen, 2010). Behavioral science theorists believe that integration allows new immigrants to adapt more easily to the host society. They propose that ethnic stability and a sense of belonging can lead to greater success and wellbeing in the host society than total assimilation allows for (Beiser, 2009). Despite reason, researchers tend to agree that maintaining contact with the native culture enhances the potential for positive adjustment, especially for refugee youth (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).
Multiculturalism

Since 1971 Canada has committed itself to a resettlement policy based on the principle of integration (Canadian Task Force, 1988), which in 1988 was legally instated with the passing of the Multiculturalism Act. The intended aim of the policy is to “preserve and enhance multiculturalism in Canada” (Government of Canada, 1988). It supports the full participation of immigrants in social, political, economic, and cultural life, while encouraging the maintenance of ethno-cultural identity, religion, language, and expressions of culture. At the core of the act is a “commitment to pluralism” which is seen as being “a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity” (1988). Although the policy highlights two official languages, it does not outline an official culture, thereby offering equal footing for any ethnic group or individual to be considered culturally “Canadian.” With this act, a degree of social equality is to be expected and discrimination abolished.

While the Act sets a good foundation for the pluralist expectations of Canadian society, there is still a clear gap between policy and reality. It has been argued that multiculturalism policies at all levels of governmental institutions are often ignored or fail to be enforced (Hayman et al., 2011). In many ways, the dominant view of Canada that pervades is that of a white, English speaking nation—its national identity increasingly secular and tolerant but still fundamentally rife with colonially hegemonic discourses (Adams, 2003). The inefficacy of multiculturalism can be demonstrated by the disparate economic circumstances faced by most refugees. Despite the Act offering full participation in the economy, immigrant and refugee children and families are often in lower socio-economic situations, and many live in extreme poverty (Beiser et al., 2002). In fact, 65% of immigrant families experience low income at some time during the first decade of post-migration with persistently low income particularly notable among refugees (Picot et al., 2007). This is due in part to the under-employment of recent
immigrants and the wage-gap that exists between those referred to as “Canadian-born” citizens and visible minorities (Adams, 2008).

A multicultural mandate in our contemporary society seems fraught with ineptitude. Although it refers to the presence of diverse people, it does not guarantee connection and interaction within and across cultures. While it encourages social, political and economic participation, it cannot promise equity or an inclusive response from society. As Knight (2008) states, “Over the years... multiculturalism has increasingly come to symbolize ‘others’” (p.88). Refugees are particularly vulnerable to being disenfranchised for their Otherness. As a society we continue to marginalize the refugee as the Other, perhaps in part because the Other threatens homogeneity and forces us to reconsider dominant discourses. Members of the refugee population may also position themselves as the Other in society. While we cannot assume that Canadian-born citizens will embrace pluralism, neither can we assume that new immigrants will feel comfortable or inclined enough to actively participate in ‘Canadian life’ or even identify as Canadian. Although resettlement brings safety and hope for the future, it also brings a new set of social, political, and economic obstacles to overcome. As the Other, not only have refugees been oppressed and/or rejected by their country of origin, but they are perpetually at risk for finding themselves at the margins of the host society. While overarching policies that support multiculturalism are important, society has begun to realize that more is needed to promote social equity and to foster compassion, connection, and a sense of oneness within Canadian society. As has historically been the case, when society recognizes fault and inadequacy within its current state, education is looked upon to reconstruct systems for the future.

**Educational Resettlement**

Schools are one of the first and most influential service systems that refugee youth come into contact with after resettlement (Bacáková, 2011; Hamilton, 2004; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). Because
education is a basic, universal right for all children (United Nations, 1989), schools also tend to become one of the most consistent points of contact with the host country for refugee children and their families (Anderson, 2004; Chuang & CISSA, 2009). As such, schools have an important responsibility to foster integration, protect safety, and promote wellbeing. They can support healthful psychological development by providing children with a sense of security, a supportive social network, and opportunities to develop and thrive (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). Schools are also important spaces for establishing a community where children can experience social acceptance and a sense of belonging (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). As Bacáková (2011) sums up well, schools in host countries have been found to "facilitate contact with members of local communities; reintroduce a sense of normality and routine; provide a safe environment; increase self-reliance and empowerment; and foster social, psychological and intellectual development" (p. 163).

Schools are inherently political institutions. Everything from the structure of the school system to the curriculum itself is influenced by politics. At the macro level, schools are situated within the politics of a given society and as a result tend to reflect the society’s values, perceptions, and attitudes. Schools are also looked upon to help youth establish a national identity and to foster the ability to contribute to society. At the micro level, schools must determine how to govern the school community in a way that adheres to national, provincial, and board level policies while addressing particular needs of the student population and promoting student achievement and wellbeing. Refugees in particular are in a highly politicized position within school and society given the circumstances from which they have fled and the conditions in which they have arrived. The very question of whether the refugee population should be targeted specifically with regard to their educational needs is politically charged. Perhaps the greatest indication of how nations, provinces, local communities, and schools themselves have recognized the needs of refugee children can be evidenced through policy. As we review educational policies in Canada and more specifically in Ontario, it is important to recognize that few
policies are developed that pertain solely to the refugee population. However, policies that have been developed for general population may indeed have intended implications for newcomer students.

**Educational Policies in Canada**

Refugee children are guaranteed certain rights as mandated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a universal rights-based framework which stipulates that every child, with regard to diversity and without discrimination, has the right to a quality education (United Nations, 1989). Canada became a signatory of the treaty in 1990. While establishing global frameworks for the inclusion and protection of refugee children is important, Taylor & Sidhu (2012) argue that frameworks such as the CRC have a limited impact on policies and practices within nations and tend to serve a more “symbolic function” (p. 42). However, Canada’s commitment to the provisions set forth by the treaty can evidenced by the formation of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of the Child as well as the development of policies designed to protect the rights of refugee youth. The overarching policy that guarantees the right to education and school attendance in Canadian primary and secondary schools is the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (Government of Canada, 2001). It states that, “Every minor child in Canada, other than a child of a temporary resident not authorized to work or study, is authorized to study at the pre-school, primary or secondary level” (subsection 30.2).

Education in Canada has been within provincial jurisdiction since the passing of the Constitution Act of 1867, which assigned education “in and for each province” (Government of Canada, 2015). Provincial governments are directly responsible for funding, legislating, regulating and coordinating education. Unlike many other developed nations, Canada does not have a federal office of education. Despite this condition, there are certain policies that are set forth at the federal level which must be upheld provincially. For example, the Constitution Act of 1982, which amended the Constitution Act of
1867, is supreme law in Canada, and therefore all provincial education laws must abide by the terms of the Act (Government of Canada, 2015).

**Educational Policies in Ontario**

Ontario is comprised of four separate publicly funded school systems: English public, English Catholic, French public, and French Catholic. Ontario's public schools are managed by district school boards and school authorities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a). Schools in Ontario are shaped by policies set forth by the Ontario Ministry of Education as well as those enacted at the local board level. In certain instances, guidelines for policy development are set forth by the Ministry of Education, and boards are expected to comply by developing policies or revising existing policies to respond to additional needs. Education in Ontario is governed by the *Education Act* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). The Act mandates that all children between the ages of six and eighteen must attend school. It states, “A person who is otherwise entitled to be admitted to a school and who is less than eighteen years of age shall not be refused admission because the person or the person’s parent or guardian is unlawfully in Canada” (section 49.1). In a program memorandum to clarify the terms of the *Education Act*, the Ministry of Education included the following:

“...no children should be refused admission to school solely because of their or their parents' inability to produce any of the following:

- proof of immigration status or application for legal immigration status
- a work permit or social insurance number
- health documentation that is different from that required of all other children
- other documentation not required of other children seeking admission to school”

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006)

Despite policies designed to guarantee school attendance for refugee youth, inconsistencies regarding enrollment procedures have been evidenced across Ontario. In one case, four non-status children attending schools in the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) were apprehended by
immigration officials over only forty-eight hours and subsequently deported along with their families. This led to feelings of severe anxiety and fear for non-status immigrants across the province (Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2008). To ensure the safety, security, and right to education for children, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) developed its own policy for children without legal immigration status. Referred to commonly as the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy, the policy states that TDSB schools will welcome all children regardless of immigration status. Furthermore, it posits that schools will not share information about children or their families with immigration authorities. Although the name of the policy suggests otherwise, the issue of whether boards can in fact ask for date of entry into the country and ask to provide documentation is still in contention, since boards argue that they need to know a child’s immigration status in order to evaluate whether ESL funding can be offered or international fees charged (Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2008).

To examine the effects of the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy, a study conducted by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (2008) sought to provide a snapshot of the current accessibility of non-status immigrants in Toronto. Seventeen participants were interviewed regarding barriers to accessing schools. It was found that fifteen participants were asked to reveal their immigration status, and four children were even denied enrollment as a result of their status. These circumstances can cause extreme fear and uncertainty among refugees, posing a threat to mental health and making it extremely difficult for families to integrate into the host society. Advocates of the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy continue to fight for its enforcement at the provincial level.

**Impacts on Mental Health**

The stressors that refugee children face as a result of migration and resettlement can have considerable impacts on mental health. Not only must newcomer children cope with the circumstances involved in forced migration, but also the typical stressors of childhood, and the traumatic effects of
displacement (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011). As a result of these stressors, research studies consistently find increased rates of mental health problems among refugee children as compared to the general population (Ehntholt et al., 2005). The most prevalent of the mental health problems faced by refugee children include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Fazel & Stein, 2002; Heptinstall et al., 2004).

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that involves the development of certain characteristic symptoms following exposure to a severe traumatic event (CAMH, 2014). Children who suffer from PTSD may re-experience traumatic events they have encountered in the form flashbacks, recurrent dreams, or other forms of prolonged psychological distress (APA, 2013). Other symptoms of PTSD include negative mood or cognition, avoidance of activities that may induce traumatic memories, and arousal such as aggression, self-destructive behavior, and sleep difficulties. These conditions can alter perception and memory and can make it difficult for children to concentrate (CAMH, 2014). There have been some concerns with assessing for PTSD given variations in cultural expression of symptoms, and evaluative differences; however, regardless of clinical diagnosis or symptomatic response, trauma can have serious impacts on individual mental health and wellbeing.

Depression is a mood disorder that involves persistent feelings of sadness and despair (APA, 2013). Children who are depressed may seem withdrawn or disinterested in activities of daily life. They may feel hopeless, irritable, and fatigued, and often have trouble concentrating or remembering things. In severe cases, depression can involve thoughts of suicide. Depression may be expressed somatically among children, with some sufferers feeling constantly sick for example (2013). Other problems that are found to arise in refugee youth include anxiety disorders, other somatic complaints, sleep difficulties, and behavioral problems (Fazel & Stein, 2002).
Research has demonstrated that different types of psychological responses exhibited may be directly related to experiences faced during a particular phase of migration. For example, studies have shown that symptoms of PTSD are often associated with pre-migration traumas. Some of the strongest pre-migration factors and predictors of PTSD include exposure to war and combat (Fazel & Stein, 2002), torture (Lindencrona, et al., 2008), and the violent death of a family member (Heptinstall et al., 2004). Such tragedies can have devastating effects on the ability of both children and adults to cope. Higher depressive symptoms, on the other hand, are more often correlated with post-migration stressors that occur on a day to day basis such as financial hardship (Heptinstall et al., 2004). That is not to say that trauma cannot ensue after arriving in the new host country. Issues directly related to immigration, such as insecure asylum status (Heptinstall et al., 2004) as well as exposure to discrimination (Pynoos et al., 1999), social exclusion (Betancourt & Khan, 2008), and other such issues have also proven to yield trauma-inducing effects.

Children are in a particularly vulnerable position as they depend on adults not only for physical survival but also for their psychological and social wellbeing (CAMH, 2014). Parental factors can therefore have a strong influence on children’s mental health and wellbeing. Children tend to look to their parents for guidance on how to respond to a life threatening event and how to manage their own emotions (CAMH, 2014). When parents suffer from mental health problems such as PTSD or depression, children are more susceptible to these issues as well (Fazel & Stein, 2002). Parents suffering from distress or feelings of helplessness may also be less able to care for their children appropriately (CAMH, 2014).

For various reasons, refugee parents may be reluctant to seek mental health services for themselves or their children. Acknowledging mental health concerns and seeking out help may go against their cultural norms, or they may worry that the treatment may not be culturally sensitive.
Refugees may also fear being stigmatized or marginalized for their mental health problems. In some cases, parents may underestimate the stress levels of their children. In other cases, refugees may not realize they have access to such services or may not know how to navigate the systems of the host country. Regardless of the reasons, by not having their mental health needs addressed, children are put at greater risk for poor mental health outcomes (Fazel & Stein, 2002).

It is important to note that not all refugee children will develop clinical mental health symptoms; however they have all experienced some form of trauma. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH, 2014) notes that when children with mental health problems are not supported appropriately they become more vulnerable and less resilient as they approach adulthood. Clinical symptoms can manifest over time at developmental stages or with significant events. It is therefore important to develop coping strategies for ameliorating the effects of trauma early on.

Mental health and mental illness are not mutually exclusive. They can each be considered as a separate continuum, in which mental illness can range from serious to no symptoms, and mental health can range from poor to optimal (CAMH, 2014; CMHA, 2009). Based on the continuum, an individual can have a mental illness and still experience optimal mental health, while another may not have mental illness but may suffer from poor mental health. Mental illness is defined as “collectively all diagnosable mental disorders” or “health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning” (Mental Health, 1999). Mental illness may be described or labeled in terms of a diagnosis which in Canada is based upon the criteria of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual, a guide published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and used by clinicians and health care professionals in Canada and around the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work
productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2001, p. 1).

As I discuss the impacts of resettlement on youth development and wellbeing, I focus on the enhancement of mental health rather than the clinical treatment of mental illness. Diagnostic processes and clinical treatment can certainly be important for addressing and improving particular mental health concerns for refugee youth. However, I am more interested in the social determinants of mental health and the concept of mental health promotion as a social responsibility. While it is important that refugee children with more severe mental health problems be referred to appropriate treatment, it is my belief that more can be done within non-clinical social systems to promote optimal mental health and wellbeing for all refugee youth, regardless of where they lie on the mental health continuum. Although we cannot change the pre-migration events that refugee youth have already faced, we can address the post-migration factors that may contribute to or protect against mental health concerns. By identifying such factors, we can continue to work towards a better understanding of what is needed to create an optimal resettlement environment in which to nurture positive mental health and wellbeing.

**School Struggles for Refugee Youth**

As I have discussed, one of the most influential systems in which to address the concerns of refugee youth is the school environment. Researchers and social service systems have argued that schools can, and indeed must play a central role in the resettlement of newcomer children to support their healthy development and wellbeing (Bacáková, 2011; CAMH, 2014; Hamilton, 2004; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Stewart, 2011). Although schools present refugee youth an important means of integration into their new communities, they may also present a multitude of challenges. Adaptation to an unfamiliar school environment can be overwhelming for any child; however this transition can be particularly difficult for refugee youth (Hamilton, 2004). Refugees often come from vastly different
cultural frames of reference, and the schools from which they have arrived may look considerably different from those of the host society. The formal nature of school systems in Canada may feel strange and unfamiliar and may make it difficult for refugee children to transition into a new daily routine (CAMH, 2014; Chuang & CISSA, 2009). Children who have never participated in a mainstream Western classroom may find it hard to adapt to sitting still in school for several hours at a time each day. Styles of instruction and expected learning outcomes of which children are accustomed may also be quite different from that of Canada. Additionally, contrasting rules and behavioral expectations may cause uncertainty and distress over how to respond or act appropriately. In some cases children may be penalized or may feel embarrassed for their lack of understanding and compliance with the normative system. As a result, many students prefer to remain reticent and isolate themselves from the rest of the classroom (Stewart, 2011). Furthermore, forced displacement and time spent in transmigratory circumstances such as refugee camps can interrupt learning and often result in large educational gaps. Disrupted learning can further difficulties with integration into the school environment (CAMH, 2014).

**Language**

For many refugee children, one of the greatest obstacles they face within the school context is the inability to communicate in the host language. Many refugee children have little or no knowledge of either official language in Canada upon arrival. Although typically young newcomers only take about two the three years to learn basic interpersonal communication skills of the host country, the language proficiency that is necessary for successful academic learning in a mainstream classroom takes about five to seven years to develop (Cummins, 2000). This delay in language competency can contribute to difficulties with integration. Although it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the language acquisition of refugee youth specifically, language plays an important role in determining how children go through the education system and what services they are provided with. Schools tend to utilize
language attainment programs as a means to integrate their refugee students and address their various needs, despite researchers noting that these supports are often not enough (Loewen, 2004). Studies have shown that teachers tend to agree that they feel under-qualified to address some of the major issues and concerns faced by their refugee students (Yau & Toronto Board of Education, 1995).

It is important that we briefly consider the impact that being a non-native speaker can have on wellbeing. First, a lack of competency in the native language or languages of the host country can lead to shyness, exclusion, and feelings of isolation (Peguero, 2009) as well as marginalization (Hyman et al., 2000). Newcomer students may struggle to keep up with their Canadian peers and suffer from feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Although many refugee children are literate in their native language, a deficit perspective is often taken towards English language learners. Some may even perceive English language learners as lacking intelligence or as having lesser academic potential despite their native abilities (McDonald, 1998). These perspectives can have detrimental impacts on social identity and group membership. Eventually these issues can lead students to experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Loewen, 2004). Unfortunately, refugee students may have difficulty voicing their thoughts and feelings which can make communicating their mental health needs that much more difficult. Additionally, students who are English Language Learners may feel intellectually stigmatized because of their lack of English (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007).

In the case of Ontario, the English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures manual (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) is one of the few documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education that addresses the refugee population specifically. In the manual, newcomers are described as “children who have arrived in Canada as a result of a war or other crisis in their home country, and who may have left their homeland under conditions of extreme urgency” (p. 9). It goes on to say that “these children have often suffered traumatic experiences, and may also be
separated from family members. They may have been in transit for a number of years, or may not have had access to formal education in their home country or while in transit” (p. 9). No more is said about the migration factors and concerns of refugee students in this particular document despite other issues influencing English language learning and communication.

In Ontario’s elementary schools, English language learners, including immigrants and refugees, are generally placed within an age appropriate classroom instead of on the basis of academic level and ability. While the purpose of this is to help foster social inclusion and integration, not all refugee children have had their birth dates recorded accurately upon arrival within the host country. It is therefore worth noting that some students are placed within a group that is of a slightly different developmental level than their own (Stewart, 2011). Some Ontario school boards have newcomer Reception and Assessment Centres that can help students find schools with specialized services or language support and help families adjust to the school system (COPA, 2012). Separate programming within schools may also be provided as needed to help promote language attainment. Children are slowly introduced into the mainstream classroom as their host language proficiency improves, until eventually they become fully integrated into regular programming (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Eventually, these children are meant to integrate fully into the mainstream classroom. There are several benefits to inclusive classrooms including the ability to engage with students who speak the host country’s language, as well as access to the main curriculum, which can be crucial for acculturation. Although the English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures manual (2007) refers to the importance of inclusion, it emphasizes the benefits of such on academic success and neglects to describe how a common language can help newcomer children to build peer relationships and foster resilience.
Although language is important, it is only one piece of a complex puzzle. A common language has important implications for refugee students as it can lead to a greater sense of security and belonging and a stronger ability to communicate needs and build relationships. It can also impact the ways in which non-native language students perceive and understand their native language peers. However, language alone does not assume connection, integration, or wellbeing. The ability to communicate may not necessarily lead to students’ mutual respect or the inclusion of refugee peers. This condition is noted within a study of Roma students in Toronto (Walsh et al., 2011). The study revealed some of the challenges children faced in integrating into the host society, specifically difficulties with learning to speak English and struggles with social relationships in the school setting. Within the report, one mother states, “So at first it was that the kids didn’t speak English, thank the Lord they pick up very fast. They simply didn’t have any friends. Nobody would play with them. I know it because I went to speak with the teacher [on] more occasions” (p. 605). Unfortunately, difficulties with integration and acceptance can be more than just a matter of language.

Peer-related Struggles

Peer relations are a fundamental component of education, integration, and wellbeing. For school-age children, ages 6-11 years old, peer relationships and the school environment are crucial to healthful growth and development (CAMH, 2014). Positive peer relationships among refugee youth specifically has been associated with greater self-esteem and social adjustment (Lustig et al., 2004). Resettled students often report confiding in their peers and relying on their peers for emotional support. They have also described how peer relationships have provided them with a sense of acceptance and belonging (Stewart, 2011). Higher levels of peer support have also been associated with fewer mental health problems (Betancourt & Khan, 2008). Friendships can therefore serve as protective functions for mental health and wellbeing (VFST, 2011).
While peer support can enhance wellbeing, peer-related issues can have some of the most profound effects on refugee mental health. Several studies have demonstrated that a lack of peer support and negative peer interactions can cause a range of social and emotional issues and concerns (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Betancourt & Khan, 2008; McBrien, 2005; Noh et al., 1999; Oxman-Martinez et al. 2012; Pernice & Brook, 1996; Pynoos et al., 1999; Stewart, 2011). In a report released by the Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario entitled *Mental Health Promotion in Ontario: a Call to Action* (2008), the work of Keleher & Armstrong (2006) is highlighted in which the three most significant determinants of mental health are indicated: freedom from discrimination and violence, social inclusion, and access to economic resources. For our purposes, I will discuss in more detail the issues relating to discrimination and social inclusion, which, in accordance with the report, emerge within the research as being some of the greatest issues faced by refugee children (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2012; Pernice & Brook, 1996; Stewart, 2011). These areas, though informed by overarching societal factors, are largely dependent upon peer interactions within the host society.

It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss access to economic resources, as schools may not have a direct and immediate impact on this facet of life for young children (although they may be able to connect parents with services to support their economic needs). However, it can be noted that children whose inclusion and wellbeing is supported within the school context may experience greater educational attainment (Sznitman, et al. 2011), which can lead to increased opportunities for future employment and potentially greater access to economic resources. Conversely, those who have a negative educational experience risk feelings of disempowerment and significantly poorer educational outcomes. A large proportion of refugee children even drop-out of school as soon as they are legally able (Stewart, 2011). Such risks are associated with poor long-term prospects in terms of employment and overall socio-economic status (Block et al., 2014).
Discrimination

Discrimination refers to “actions taken to exclude or treat others differently because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and/or disability” (CMHA, 2008). Examples of discrimination include expressions of hate, teasing, experiences of rejection, shunning, name calling, and bullying (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003). Discrimination creates a hostile and stressful environment which can lead to the severe psychological distress of victims. In a study conducted by Pernice and Brook (1996) of Southeast Asian and Pacific Island refugees in New Zealand, the daily experience of discrimination was found to be the crucial post-migration factor associated with high symptom levels of both anxiety and depression. Other research has revealed that discrimination can lead to feelings of exclusion and social isolation, elevated stress, lowered self-esteem, and other behavioral problems (McBrien, 2005; Noh et al., 1999; Szalacha et al., 2003).

Discrimination and bullying can also contribute to the effects of trauma. Factors such as being teased or harassed due to race, ethnicity, or religion can function as traumatic reminders (Pynoos et al., 1999), which can be particularly detrimental for those who have fled a country due to persecution associated with their ethnic or religious identity (Ellis et al., 2008). Furthermore, the mental health symptoms individuals may exhibit as a result of their traumatic experiences and migratory hardship may further the stigmatization they experience (Open Minds, 2011). Stigmatization of mental health issues can increase mental health struggles faced by refugee youth.

School is one of the first places youth may encounter discrimination (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003). In a study conducted by Oxman-Martinez et al. (2012), 1,053 children aged 11-13 living in Canada were sampled using the New Canadian Children and Youth Study. Of these children, 25% reported being treated unfairly by peers and 14% by their teachers. The data revealed that the ethnic discrimination they perceived, both by peers and teachers, was negatively related to their senses of social competence.
in peer relationships. Another study of immigrant youth in Ontario found that prejudice and discrimination by peers in the school context was one of the most significant barriers to settlement (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003). In response to growing awareness about the impacts of racism on wellness and education, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a document entitled Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993). The document was provided in order to direct school boards on how to develop an antiracism ethnocultural equity policy. The document recognized the limitations of the “Eurocentric perspective” within education, noting issues with power imbalance and conditions that can prevent diverse and valuable contributions at school in and the classroom. It reflects a commitment to “eliminating racism in schools and in society at large by changing both individual behavior and institutional policies and practices” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b, p. 11). Although antiracism policies and educational programs have been proven effective in reducing certain issues such as teasing and bullying, they do not necessarily account for issues of social exclusion and peer isolation. A focus on racism does not encompass other issues for which children are ostracized. Additionally, anti-bullying education, while important, fosters connection in a way that highlights a negative experience rather than a positive one.

Social Inclusion

The level of acceptance and social support that refugee children perceive in their host community plays an important role in their psychological adjustment and wellbeing. Social inclusion is protective of mental health. As humans we are dependent on a feeling of “social embededness” (Søndergaard, 2005) or a sense of belonging. For children, a sense of belonging is especially important for social, emotional, and psychological development and health (Berk, 2007). Being a part of a social network can provide children with opportunities for support, attachment, companionship, and a sense
of security (CMHA, 2008). Social connection can also help children to gain a greater sense of identity while enhancing self-esteem and a sense of value. For refugee youth specifically, social inclusion and a sense of belonging within the school context have been shown to reduce symptoms of depression while enhancing feelings of self-efficacy (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007). Ultimately, feeling connected to the host society is important to fostering conditions for resettlement (Save the Children, 2004) and for promoting wellbeing and positive mental health (CMHA, 2008).

Conversely, children who are not accepted or supported by their peers may be subject to social exclusion. Social exclusion can cause children to feel meaningless, misunderstood, not seen, socially threatened, and deprived of dignity (Søndergaard, 2012). Peer isolation and a lack of social support can have serious implications for mental health and have been shown to contribute to symptoms of PTSD, depression, and other mental health problems (Betancourt & Khan, 2008). In some instances, peer isolation has lead children to experiencing Student Alienation Syndrome, a condition characterized by powerlessness, helplessness, low self-confidence, and introversion (Hyman et al., 2003). Fear of social exclusion, which Søndergaard (2012) describes as “social exclusion anxiety,” can also manifest in which children who are expected to become members of a community doubt their belonging and fear being marginalized or judged as unworthy of group membership. As a result, they may shy away from their peers and try to remain isolated in order to protect themselves from possible hurt and rejection.

Unfortunately, social exclusion is common among refugees. In a study conducted by Oxman-Martinez et al. (2012) of a sub-sample from the New Canadian Children and Youth Study, about twenty percent of children reported feeling like an outsider at school, and more than ten percent were socially isolated and reported never participating in organized activities. Children who feel excluded by their peers and detached from the school environment are at greater risk for negative educational and mental health outcomes. Feeling excluded also prevents individuals from fully participating in the
society in which they live. Sadly, those who experience social exclusion among peers tend to also be subject to larger, more complex social problems and inequalities in society, perhaps in part as a result (Byrne, 2005). Contrarily, children who feel a sense of inclusion and belonging to the school environment have an enhanced opportunity for positive social and emotional development. Such factors are connected to future prospects of inclusion and participation in other social, economic, and political domains of the host society (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2014).

The Ontario Ministry of Education recognized the shortcomings of its antidiscrimination manual as it failed to address issues surrounding social exclusion, and in 2009 it released the first Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation, which has since been revised (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). The manual is designed to offer school boards a framework for developing their own policies with regard to equity and inclusive education.

The manual states:

We believe that Ontario’s diversity is one of its greatest assets – both today and for the future. Embracing this diversity and moving beyond tolerance and celebration to inclusivity and respect will help us reach our goal of making Ontario’s education system the most equitable in the world. Everyone in our publicly funded education system – regardless of background or personal circumstances – must feel engaged and included. Realizing the promise of our diversity is a continuous process grounded in actively respecting and valuing the full range of our differences. Providing a high-quality education for all is a key means of fostering social cohesion, within an inclusive society where diversity is affirmed in a framework of common values that promote the well-being of all citizens (p. 6).

It is clear from the above stated that not only is diversity valued by the Ontario Ministry of Education, but it is seen as being fundamental to education. The importance of equity is emphasized, the focus of which is described in terms of both social cohesion as well as individual wellbeing. The manual also seeks to alter some of the traditional ways in which diverse education has been viewed and implemented historically as it refers to a move “beyond tolerance and celebration to inclusivity and
As I have discussed, social connection has been associated with positive development and enhanced social and emotional wellbeing. The manual recognizes that inclusion and equity are associated with positive mental health, and in fact states that, “All children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices” (p. 7).

While “inclusivity” is used to connote a sense of connection and the encompassing of the Other, I still find trouble with the word itself. The very notion of “inclusivity” implies a power dynamic in which there exists those who do the including and those who are to be included. We can assume that those who do the including are part of the dominant, mainstream society, and those who are to be included are those who have historically been excluded. As noted within the historical context, refugee students fall under the latter. For me, the word still arouses a conditional—a sense of invitation contingent upon certain other factors rather than an innate sense of belonging; it still “Others.” I prefer terms such as “connection,” “togetherness,” and “oneness” to “inclusivity” as such words offer equal footing and neutrality with regard to power and control.

In considering “inclusivity,” it is important to consider who is included within the reading of the document itself. We must ask ourselves: who is invited to read the document and who is privileged to its meaning and subsequent implementation? From my reading and interpretation, it was apparent that the manual is intended for an adult, English-speaking audience. Although young readers may indeed be able to read the document, the language may be hard to understand and the concepts difficult to interpret. These conditions are made even more difficult for children who come from different countries, languages, and contexts. It can then be inferred that adults, especially English-speaking adults and more specifically school leadership and educators, are responsible for carrying out the goals of the manual. The question can then be posed: whose inclusion is truly being addressed, and by not
inviting that population’s participation in drafting the document itself, is the population not being excluded in a sense? Ultimately, who is accountable for inclusion?

The document provides that it is the responsibility of schools and school boards to implement policies and strategies that promote equity and inclusion. School leaders and educators are noted as being particularly important to this process. Under the area of focus entitled “Accountability and transparency” it is noted that “The whole-school community has a collective responsibility to foster student achievement, well-being, and success” (p. 33), and goes on to state that, “School leaders facilitate this process by listening to and acting upon community feedback and by engaging others to work in the best interests of all students (p. 33).” School leaders are described under the section “Shared and committed leadership” and include system leaders, school leaders, and student leaders. The section that explains the role of “Student Leaders” is the only one in which students are described as taking an active role in establishing conditions for inclusion. Unfortunately, certain students, such as refugees, are less likely to take a leadership role given their new relationship with the school environment, language barriers, and other inhibiting conditions. Furthermore, this holds only some students accountable for establishing an inclusive environment. This leaves us to question, what is the role of other students in ensuring an inclusive environment?

Although the document is technically student centered, it is not student-action oriented. It suggests that most students should acquire and model inclusive behavior as it is taught and instilled. The majority of students may then be considered passive recipients of an inclusive school ethos rather than active participants in its establishment. Indeed strong leadership is critical for establishing an equitable, inclusive, and antidiscriminatory school environment, but the student majority is equally important, if not more so. Students have a strong influence on the whole-school culture including the extent to which children feel included in the school environment. They are also perhaps the largest
population for whom conditions of inclusion and equity are meant to be enacted, yet students are not addressed directly.

Issues of exclusion and discrimination continue to emerge at the student level. In many cases, a reactive approach to correcting negative behaviors is still applied. A certain protocol as set forth by the school board and schools themselves is followed in which children who bully or overtly exclude their peers are reprimanded. The document states that boards will “put procedures in place that will enable students and staff to report incidents of bullying, discrimination, and harassment safely, and that will also enable the board to respond in a timely manner” (p. 29). This may indeed be necessary to protect the victimized student’s safety and wellbeing. However, a reactive approach still does not target those students who are perhaps indifferent about their “othered” peers. It does not target those who are not necessarily prejudice or exclusive but are also not compassionate or inclusive. A more proactive approach to fostering student compassion and connection could be instilled not only to prevent exclusion but to support a sense of oneness. It is important that these feelings are understood and nurtured not just by educators, but by students themselves.

The area that focuses most explicitly on the role of other students in fostering inclusion is referred to as “school climate.” According to the document, school climate may be defined as “the learning environment and relationships found within a school and school community” (p. 29). It goes on to state that “a positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote and support positive behaviours and interactions” (p. 29). In order to establish a positive school climate, the guide calls on school boards to do the following:

1. Implement strategies to identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit engagement by students, parents, and the community, so that diverse groups and the broader community have better board-level representation and greater access to board initiatives;
2. Put procedures in place that will enable students and staff to report incidents of bullying, discrimination, and harassment safely, and that will also enable the board to respond in a timely manner (p. 29).

It is apparent that the focus of school climate is still on discrimination prevention. Action is described in terms of “Monitoring School Climate” (p. 30) and preventing negative interactions. It is not, however, described in terms of fostering connection and promoting positive interactions. While it is noted that clubs and organizations such as ‘Students and Teachers Against Racism’ can help to establish positive relationships, such activities are regarded as co-curricular and are not inclusive of all students and the whole-school environment. Additionally, despite an emphasis on relationships, no mention is made as to how students as peers can foster their own relationships and help to establish a positive school climate.

Peers are extremely influential to each other’s wellbeing. While healthful relationships can support positive mental health, negative peer interactions can threaten mental health. In order to truly address issues of exclusion and the impacts of such on wellbeing for vulnerable populations such as refugees, we must acknowledge the role that children play in each other’s development and mental health. We must empower children them accountable for nurturing positive relationships with themselves and others to support their growth. Removing discriminatory barriers is not enough; we must begin to recognize students as being integral and active proponents of each other’s mental health and wellbeing.

Mental Health Education

In 2009, Ontario released a document entitled, Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario to outline its goals for education. The framework builds on the previous three priorities set forth by the Ministry which included “increasing student achievement, closing gaps in student achievement and increasing public confidence in publicly funded education” (Ontario Ministry
of Education, 2009). The goals that were added include “Ensuring Equity” by which “all children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood” (p. 3) and “Promoting Wellbeing” so that “all children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices” (p. 3). It is clear from the adjusted framework that a more holistic approach to education and human development has been initiated.

During the past decade, the need for improved systems of mental health care in Ontario has gained widespread attention. In 2011, the Ontario government released *Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario’s Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy* to address the mental health concerns of the province. The strategy is the product of collaboration among the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ontario Ministry of Education. It calls for a person-centered, integrated systems approach to the enhancement of mental health services across sectors, including the education sector. The Ontario Ministry of Education endorses integration of the strategy as a means to transform mental health services for students within the school system. The general purpose of the strategy is to ensure that “all Ontarians have timely access to an integrated system of coordinated and effective promotion, prevention, early intervention, and community support and treatment programs” (Open Minds, 2011, p. 4). Some of the goals of the strategy involve improving mental health literacy and fostering the resilience and mental wellness of vulnerable populations including newcomers.

The very decision to discuss mental state of being in terms of “mental health” instead of “mental illness” is indicative of a new approach being taken with regard to social, psychological, and educational support. Over the years, researchers and human service professionals have exposed gaps within models of mental health care and have fought for a push towards improved services. Where a
deficit perspective once dominated social fields and furthered stigmatization and marginalization, a focus on mental health promotion and prevention has emerged. As a result of initiatives such as Open Minds, Healthy Minds, Ontario’s approach to mental health is gradually becoming proactive instead of reactive. Mental health resources are no longer focused solely on those with an illness or disorder; rather, investing in the mental health of all individuals has become a priority. A promotion perspective supports that everyone can benefit from services that foster personal growth, resilience, and self-awareness. As a result of a generalized focus on mental health concerns, a rise in mental health literacy can be evidenced and a commitment to further action can be seen.

The Open Minds, Healthy Minds (2011) strategy takes a long-term approach to transformation. It outlines that during the first three years of rollout, the focus of improvement should start with children and youth. According to the document, mental health problems begin early in life, and therefore childhood is a critical time for learning how to cope with stress. In order to improve services for children, the document emphasizes three key priorities: 1. providing fast access to high quality services, 2. identifying and intervening in mental health issues early on, and 3. closing the critical service gaps of vulnerable children. Refugee youth tend to fall into the third category, and are therefore targeted as a population of concern. The report offers several bulleted ways of achieving each of the abovementioned priorities. For example, it posits that early identification and intervention can be supported if educators are provided with manuals and mental health literacy trainings. Most of the other bulleted points for the three categories are clinically focused and include items such as “Hiring teams of mental health workers...” (p. 22).

While a genuine interest in the good of Ontarians may indeed be an underlying factor for the development of the strategy, other social, political, and economic factors play a role as well. Mental health issues can have a draining effect on the economy. People who suffer with their mental health
may qualify for disability and require social assistance and financial support. As discussed, refugees are a particularly vulnerable population. Not only are they deemed at greater risk for mental health issues, but they tend also to require assistance upon resettlement. Historically, a view of refugees as being financially dependent on government assistance has furthered issues of stigmatization of the population. From a socioeconomic standpoint, it has become apparent that more is needed not only to prevent mental health issues and promote wellness early on, but to address issues of acceptance and inclusion. The question of how to best apply resources in order to achieve the greatest, most lasting impact therefore becomes critical. As mentioned in the Ontario mental health strategy, childhood is a vital time for addressing mental health concerns and promoting healthful development. It is therefore not surprising that initial efforts have been focused on youth with particular emphasis on ‘vulnerable’ populations’ to support an improved general state of mental wellbeing for the future.

**Ontario Mental Health Curriculum**

The *Open Minds, Healthy Minds* (2011) strategy notes that, “Making further changes to the education curriculum to promote healthy development and good mental health” is important for early identification and intervention of mental health issues in youth. Ontario’s new *Health and Physical Education* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015a) curriculum document reflects this priority as it demonstrates that the Ministry of Education has made mental health integral to its approach. The curriculum serves as a holistic guide for nurturing healthy habits that can be applied in school as well as translated into other aspects of children’s lives outside of the school environment.

The Ontario *Health and Physical Education* curriculum (2015a) supports the notion that mental health is integral to wellbeing as it “touches all components of development,” (p. 5) the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical. As such, it is woven into the curriculum in a way that reflects its underlying influence on all other factors of health education. The expectations of health and physical
education are organized into three strands: Active Living, Movement Competence, and Healthy Living. Mental health and emotional wellbeing fall within the Healthy Living Strand. The Healthy Living Strand focuses on “understanding the factors that contribute to healthy growth and development” (p. 22). It is comprised of four health topics including: 1. healthy eating, 2. personal safety and injury prevention, 3. substance use, addictions, and related behaviors, and 4. human development and sexual health (p. 22). The document states that, “Learning about mental health and emotional well-being can be a part of learning related to all of these health topics, just as it is part of learning across the curriculum” (p. 22). In other words, mental health and wellbeing are not to be taught separately, but instead are to be incorporated as part of the other four topics as well as other areas of curriculum. The document provides that as mental health is discussed within each topic, the focus should be on “promoting and maintaining mental health, building an understanding of mental illness, and reducing stigma and stereotypes” (p. 39). By integrating mental health into each of the topics, it is the hope that students may begin to see that wellbeing influences different facets of life and different facets of life influence wellbeing.

The idea of mental health as something that can be learned feels counterintuitive. The very notion of mental health implies a positive state of being. It involves a connection to oneself and an awareness of one’s abilities. It is certainly the case that the four health topics described are closely related to mental health and should indeed include discussions and reflections on wellbeing as such. However, a state of mental health cannot truly be taught; it must be nurtured at the individual level. It cannot be learned, but rather it is experienced. Although understanding how mental health is involved in one’s life is important, the experience of positive mental health is personal and cannot be acquired through course content. It can, however, be influenced by the environment.
Like most curriculum documents, this document emphasizes the role that educators play in their students’ education. It states, “Teaching is key to student success” (p. 14) and goes on to describe how teachers are responsible for creating a positive, healthful classroom climate and fostering their students’ wellbeing and development. It states, “With a broader awareness of mental health, educators can plan instructional strategies that contribute to a supportive classroom climate for learning in all subject areas, build awareness of mental health, and reduce stigma associated with mental illness” (p. 5). The idea of applying “instructional strategies” to establish a healthful classroom feels more intellectual than experiential. Again, it suggests that health is a subject to be taught. It also puts the responsibility of creating a healthy environment in the hands of the teacher instead of the learners. It brings to mind transmissive approaches to learning and development as it states, “The learning in all strands is focused on individual skill development for healthy, active living, supported by knowledge of content and conceptual understanding” (p. 9). Health is somehow made to feel cerebral instead of existential.

Although the teacher is indeed the orchestrator of the classroom environment, the students as the orchestra itself are equally as important to establishing a safe and supportive learning environment. Student autonomy and the role students play in their own learning is described in the document:

Students’ responsibilities with respect to their own learning develop gradually and increase over time as they progress through elementary and secondary school. With appropriate instruction and with experience, students come to see how an applied effort can enhance learning and improve achievement and well-being. As they mature and as they develop the ability to persist, to manage their behaviour and impulses, to take responsible risks, and to listen with understanding, students become better able to take more responsibility for their learning and progress (p. 12).

It goes on to state, “Through ongoing practice and reflection about their development, students deepen their appreciation and understanding of themselves and others, and of their health and well-being.” It is clear from the document that students are not only expected to be held accountable for their own health, but should feel empowered to reflect upon and improve their own wellbeing.
Students may therefore be considered proponents of their own mental health. Despite their responsibilities to themselves, students are not described as being responsible for each other; they are not mentioned as being proponents of each other’s mental health. Although reducing stigma and stereotypes is described as being fundamental to mental health education, the role of peers to promote each others’ wellbeing is not discussed. Other supports are indeed mentioned. For example, the document explains that, “Health and physical education programs are most effective when they are delivered in healthy schools and when students’ learning is supported by school staff, families, and communities” (p. 9), but the support of other students is not included.

Despite the concerns I have mentioned, the document has begun to reveal the important role students play in their own wellbeing. The importance of enhancing resilience in order to cope with adversities is highlighted as being crucial to positive mental health. It is my belief that experiential learning and practice are perhaps the only way for mental health to truly be impacted. Practices that connect the individuals to themselves and to others are crucial not only to strengthening resilience, or the ability of children to cope with adversities, but to strengthen peer compassion and support. Ultimately, a feeling of oneness amongst peers is necessary for nurturing wellbeing. It can safeguard mental health and foster conditions for positive resettlement.

Towards the Future

Policies and curricular documents as they exist in Ontario do not truly address the struggles that refugee children are faced with nor the ways in which refugees are continuously “othered.” Policies to prevent racism and promote inclusion do not account for connection and a sense of belonging, and issues of discrimination and social exclusion still pervade and threaten the wellbeing of refugee youth. Additionally, while the mental health curriculum is an essential step towards wellness across the province, the document itself is not designed to encompass some of the fundamental issues faced by
refugee youth specifically. It does not address the role that other students can play in harming each other’s mental health as well as what they can do to promote each other’s wellbeing. As we consider the resettlement of refugee youth, we must also reconsider how we define education and its role in shaping the future of society. We must assess the political values of our current system and recognize its shortcomings. We must address the gaps as populations such as refugees continue to be pushed to the margins of society, and we must deconstruct what Pinson et al. (2010) refer to as “the politics of compassion and belonging.”

It is not my goal to target the refugee population as requiring a separate curriculum or set of policies that address their specific educational and mental health needs. In fact, it is my belief that this would only further the “othering” that still pervades the system. Rather, it is my goal to enlighten readers as to some of the concerns and issues faced by the refugee youth population and to expose the gaps in the current state of education as they pertain to the population specifically. We have come a long way in addressing what must be done to support students’ development and wellbeing. We must continue to improve our aims and broaden our scope, especially as it applies to vulnerable populations. We must adapt that which is regular in order to nurture the individual sense of belonging and wellness of each student as part of a whole school and a whole society. I quote Ben-Yosef and Yahalom (2013) who state, “A change of school priorities must ensue. We must shift focus from serving the system to serving the children: students’ personal, physical, emotional and social issues...” (p. 144). We must look to students as proponents of their own mental health and each other’s wellbeing. The curriculum must recognize the power and potential of students and their responsibility to each other and to society. The curriculum must offer ways to foster resilience while enhancing compassion and peer support to protect and nurture mental health. It must encourage students to harness a connection to themselves and to each other and in doing so it must anchor pedagogy to that which Yosef and Yahalom refer to as “our most common denominator—our humanity” (p. 142). This is how we will create true communities for
learning and growing. This is how we will enhance wellbeing for all students, refugees and their peers alike.
Chapter 6: Postmodern Context

Refugee youth are faced with numerous stressors throughout the process of migration. By nature of their status, they have endured obstacles that led them to seeking asylum in the host country and have undergone the process of migration including the steps involved in becoming a ‘refugee.’ Once they are granted refugee status, newcomers are confronted with the challenge of integration. Establishing a connection and a sense of belonging to the host country can be difficult for refugees. Not only are newcomer youth expected to acculturate to a new environment, adapt to a new educational system, and in some cases learn a new language, but they are forced to cope with past traumas and stressors which may have manifested in symptoms of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and other emotional and behavioral concerns. Unfortunately, such symptoms may only be made worse by adversities faced in the host society and often within the school environment. Some of the most pressing concerns that refugee youth face, as discussed in the previous chapter, involve discrimination and social exclusion. These issues can pose a serious threat to mental health and wellbeing and make it that much more difficult for youth to integrate into the host country.

It is clear based on the research that more is needed to foster resilience among refugee youth within the Ontario school context. Although the Ontario Ministry of Education has sought to address and prioritize mental health within its new Health and Physical Education curriculum, it is my belief that a greater focus on developing the self and harnessing a connection to others is needed. The current curriculum applies a similar approach to learning mental health as it does to learning other core subjects. It relies heavily on teacher facilitation to build knowledge and encourage application of that knowledge in real life. It also presupposes that the teacher has established a healthful, enriching learning environment in which to do so. Knowledge of mental health is important, as is the awareness of how one should apply such knowledge in life; however, the curriculum as it stands does not
necessarily support the development of coping strategies, resilience enhancing practices, and a compassionate and supportive peer environment. A state of positive mental health cannot be learned; it requires nurturing and practice. A separate curriculum or at least a dedicated portion of the Health and Physical Education curriculum is needed to develop an awareness of the self and a connection to others and society at large. It needs to encourage self reflection and emphasize the presence of being oneself in one’s environment. It is my belief that mindfulness education is invaluable for fostering exactly this type of connection to the self and others.

**My Introduction to Mindfulness**

I was first introduced to the concept of mindfulness as Program Coordinator and Instructor of a holistic wellness initiative called “Move to Work”. The 10 week program focused on helping adult individuals with varying disabilities to improve their health and wellness and find meaningful work within the community. In order to qualify for the program, participants had to have some sort of disability, which ranged substantially among individuals. Several participants struggled with mental illnesses such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Others had physical health concerns ranging from issues such as a back injury to mild Cerebral Palsy and cancer remission. About half of the participants had recently immigrated to the United States and spoke English as a second language, and the majority relied on welfare to support themselves and their families. Prior to the program’s start date, many of the participants expressed feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, and hopelessness regarding their prospects for the future. Through their life experiences they had been made to feel that self-sufficiency and contribution to society may be impossible. One of the main goals of the program was to foster a positive sense of self by establishing a connection between the mind, body, and soul within a safe and supportive environment. In addition to lessons that engaged participants in work-related soft skill
development, the program involved daily physical exercise and meditation to develop the whole person as an active and healthy individual. Mindfulness was a key component of the program.

Mindfulness, as a Western construct, refers to “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). A range of mindfulness techniques exists that encourage practitioners to cultivate a sense of connection between the mind and body. Initially these strategies were introduced into the “Move to Work” curriculum as ways of coping with stress, anxiety, and other mental and physical health issues. Each morning, we would meditate for about five to ten minutes before beginning the day’s lesson. In addition, for one week, I facilitated deep breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, Progressive Muscle Relaxation and visualization daily. It soon became apparent to us that mindfulness was not itself a tool for coping but a strategy for living. In teaching participants about these methods, it also became obvious to me that I could only be truly effective in teaching mindfulness if I actually engaged in such practices myself.

I began practicing various mindfulness techniques in order to enhance my ability to teach mindfulness, however, I quickly realized that these practices were benefitting me in my own life. Through mindfulness, I have been able to cultivate a deep sense of connection to my whole self—mind, body, and soul. As a child, when I stopped practicing Judaism, I lost my sense of spiritual connectedness during difficult times in my childhood as mentioned. Mindfulness has enabled me to nurture my spirituality and experience a sense of rootedness day to day.

Mindfulness practice has also enabled me to become a more mindful instructor. In the classroom, I noticed myself becoming more attentive with the participants, and seeing each of them as an integral part of our community. I employed patience and understanding in situations that would usually evoke feelings of stress and frustration. Ultimately, I began to see the big picture of each lesson
and the program at large. Growth and learning occurred not in the details of each activity but in the larger vision of the program and the meaningful participation of each member. I made adjustments to lessons and activities if they were not meeting their intended purposes. I also began offering more mindful learning opportunities within my classroom. I allowed more time for quiet reflection and regularly encouraged participants to pay mindful attention to their breath and body.

The benefits of mindfulness that I observed and that had been expressed by participants were vast. Numerous participants described using their breath to calm themselves in difficult situations. Several expressed feeling more “in tune” with themselves and more connected to the class at large. A few members described mindfulness as enabling them to relax and self-regulate during difficult mental health related struggles. Some participants even discussed using mindfulness practices to reduce their cravings to their chosen substances such as nicotine and alcohol. From an instructor’s perspective, I noticed participants becoming more supportive and inclusive of one another. It became progressively easier to get everyone’s attention and to manage the classroom. Participants seemed to listen more carefully to each other and to take their time to reflect on their own learning and growth as well as the wellbeing of their peers. Ultimately, I realized that mindfulness as a strategy within the classroom could have innumerable benefits for the teacher, students, and the environment as a whole.

**What is Mindfulness?**

In recent years, mindfulness has emerged as an invaluable practice for supporting mental health and wellbeing. Rooted in Buddhist ideology and other spiritual traditions, mindfulness has taken on new meanings and applications in contemporary, secular contexts. It refers to the particular way in which we pay attention to being in the world. It may be regarded as a mental state, trait, and/or self-regulatory skill that can be cultivated and strengthened through inner consciousness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Practitioners of mindfulness engage in subjective inner focus, allowing the brain to experience present
awareness through moment to moment sensations (Siegel, 2007). Rather than dwell on the past, worry about the future, or exist mindlessly on “auto-pilot”, mindfulness encourages full participation and appreciation of the present moment (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000).

Present awareness is achieved by directing one’s attention to a specific focus such as breath, a sensation, a feeling such as loving-kindness, or another attentional “anchor” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). A state of conscious awareness can be difficult to engage in given the “noisy” and complex nature of our minds (Flook et al., 2010). It is natural for the practitioner’s mind to wander from their attentional anchor towards other thoughts, memories, concerns, or images. For refugees dealing with various traumas and stressors associated with migration, it may be that much more difficult to focus one’s attention to the present moment. As thoughts spontaneously arise, the mindful practitioner is encouraged to accept this lapse in attention without judgment, and consciously redirect their focus to the attentional anchor (Flook et al., 2010).

Mindfulness can be strengthened by engaging repetitiously in certain formal practices such as meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, body scanning, guided imagery, chanting, and sensory awareness practices (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Body-centered movements and exercises such as yoga, tai chi, and qi gong are also effective in enhancing mindfulness as they allow for both the mind and body to engage in present awareness simultaneously (Salmon, 2012). These exercises have been shown to reduce stress, counteract negative emotional states, and enhance physical and emotional wellbeing (2012). Mindfulness can also be achieved informally by weaving mindful states of awareness into one’s everyday activities such as while brushing one’s teeth, showering, walking, or eating (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Miller, 2014). Given that mindfulness, at its core, involves achieving a state of present awareness, it can be fully and meaningfully integrated into all areas of the Ontario curriculum as well as into the daily lives of mindful practitioners (Miller, 2014).
Mindfulness and Mental Health

Mindfulness has been considered a particularly effective mechanism for protecting and serving as a buffer for mental health issues. The reason for this is not only based on observed improvements in the attitudes and behaviors of practitioners, but also on neuroscientific evidence of changes in cognitive health and psychological functioning. Studies using brain imaging and electroencephalography (EEG) have demonstrated that focusing the mind inward can actually allow for the restructuring of the circuitry of the brain. According to Siegel (2007), engaging in “top down” processes in which the brain uses past experiences and future expectations to create meaning “enslaves” the brain. It perpetuates automatic, engrained responses to stimuli and causes individuals to feel preoccupied and trapped in their thoughts and feelings. This is particularly apparent and detrimental for those suffering from mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, conditions of which are prevalent among refugees. Mindfulness allows for “bottom up” processing of stimuli, in which present awareness of sensations, thoughts, and feelings guides responses and creates new neurons and neural connections. Over time, mindfulness practices can change patterns of activity in the brain, allowing the individual to experience intentional states of brain activation and to develop a connected, positive state of being (2007).

Further neuroscientific studies have shown positive correlations between mindfulness and the thickening of cerebral cortical structures. In a study conducted by Hölzel et al., (2011), research on the effects of an 8 week MBSR training at the Psychiatric Neuroimaging Research Program of Massachusetts General revealed through neuroimaging that grey matter density increased in the hippocampus, an area of the brain considered central to learning and memory, as well as in structures associated with self-awareness, compassion, and introspection. Mindfulness has also been shown to improve structures of the brain associated with working memory, processing sensory input, executive function, self-reflection, empathy, and affective regulation (Hölzel et al., 2008). Additionally, reduced density has been noted in
areas associated with anxiety and stress (Davidson & Lutz, 2008). Through these findings, neuroscientific research has made a strong case for the potential of mindfulness to actually reshape brain structures and improve health, wellbeing, and quality of life (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Given the psychological nature of mindfulness practices and the apparent cognitive-behavioral effects that can result, mindfulness interventions have been deemed particularly valuable to mental health treatment in clinical settings. The types of mindfulness interventions that are used vary depending on the population and symptoms. For example, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) involves group meditation to alleviate stress, pain, and illness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), while Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is generally used among patients suffering from depression (Segal et al., 2002). Research on mindfulness-based interventions with adult populations has shown numerous positive outcomes including improved health, attention, and immune system functioning as well as reductions in anxiety, depression, substance use, and psychological distress (Frank et al., 2013).

Because of the positive impact that mindfulness-based therapies have had on victims of mental illness, including traumatized populations (Orsillo & Roemer, 2009), research has begun to explore the possibilities of mindfulness-based practices for refugee populations. In one study of Cambodian refugees, mindfulness was used as a culturally-adaptive mechanism to enhance the delivery of the primary Cognitive Behavioral Therapy treatment method (Hinton et al., 2005). The intervention involved 14 sessions of treatment and included instruction on multisensory mindfulness techniques such as visual imagery and auditory focus. At post-intervention, participants demonstrated reductions in the severity of their PTSD symptoms including decreased fear of anxiety related somatic sensation, panic attacks, and flashbacks, as well as reductions in anxiety and depression-related distress (2005). Researchers have also begun to make a case for the potential of mindfulness to reduce symptoms of anger while enhancing acceptance, compassion, and emotion regulation of refugee populations (Hinton et al., 2013b).
The positive findings of mindfulness-based therapies with various adult populations led researchers to considering the potential for such interventions with youth in clinical settings. Preliminary research on mindfulness with youth has yielded positive results including reductions in rumination and fewer symptoms of anxiety and behavioral problems (Biegel et al., 2009; Burke, 2010). As research has increasingly demonstrated the benefits of mindfulness with youth in clinical settings, a burgeoning interest in integrating mindfulness techniques into other fields, specifically education, has emerged (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

School-Based Mental Health Support

Primary schools have been deemed critical institutions for supporting the mental health of youth (Montañez et al., 2015). During childhood, the brain is more malleable, and as a result, children are better able to acquire certain skills and strategies (Bahnsen, 2013). For children, learning skills that support mental health, such as mindfulness practices, is like learning a language or an instrument; it is within the control of the practitioner and is best learned early on during critical periods in one’s life before the brain crystallizes and has a more difficult time of restructuring itself (2013). Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) articulate that practices that support the development of healthy forms of “self-regulation, malleable self-representations, and prosocial dispositions” (p. 54) can improve or prevent some of the mental health and school-linked problems that may arise around the transition to puberty. In addition, childhood may be a crucial time to experience prevention programs that address stress-related concerns, since the association between stressors and anxiety as well as other mental health issues is stronger for children than adolescents (Twenge, 2000). For those children who already experience mental health issues, as well as those whose mental and behavioral health are made more vulnerable as a result of traumatic experiences or adversities, such as the refugee youth population, early intervention
is ideal as it may strengthen resiliency and prevent greater current and/or future mental health concerns from arising (Greenberg et al., 2001).

In a recent report by the Canadian Teacher’s Federation on student mental health, authors Froese-Germain and Riel (2012) expose some of the major concerns and barriers of mental health on student wellbeing, learning, and achievement. The authors quote Dr. Ian Manion and Dr. Kathy Short, researchers with the School-Based Mental Health and Substance Consortium, who provide that “70% of adults living with mental illness indicated the onset occurred before they were 18 years of age; 50% indicated that it started before age 14” (2012, p. 3). These figures urge educators to consider how mental health awareness and interventions can be better integrated into the school system in more explicit ways (Montañez et al., 2015). Ultimately, research has shown that early intervention can improve psychological health later in life (Greenberg et al., 2001). As research continues to reveal the importance of addressing children’s mental health, there is a growing need for school-based interventions that enhance protective factors and foster resiliency among children.

**Mindfulness Education**

Mindfulness education is a holistic, process-driven approach to teaching and learning that integrates each individual’s “whole self,” mind, body and spirit, into the classroom (Byrnes, 2012; Roeser & Peck, 2009). In order to cultivate mindfulness within the school context, the present awareness of teachers, staff, and students must be elicited and practiced in a way that is integral to the classroom community and, ideally, the school ethos. Implementation of mindfulness can enhance sensitivity within and among students and teachers and can lead to a more attentive, engaged, and connected classroom and school environment (Jennings et al., 2013). Because it is inherently a personal practice, its use in the classroom encourages opportunities for self-integration, self-regulation, and differentiated learning outcomes (Roeser & Peck, 2009). In terms of its direct application to mental health support,
mindfulness education can be implemented into the curriculum not only to address and ameliorate mental health issues, but to reduce the likelihood of future mental health concerns from arising through the cultivation of coping skills, resilience, and wellbeing (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). When integrated meaningfully, mindfulness education can enable social and emotional learning and development, enhance cognitive function, and improve general health and wellbeing of teachers, students, and educational communities at large (Byrnes, 2012).

**Teacher Mindfulness**

Educators play an important role in promoting positive mental health and establishing a nourishing learning environment for their students. When teachers feel stressed, distracted, or overwhelmed, it can have adverse effects on their interactions with students and their ability to manage and engage the classroom. They may feel unable to tend to the needs of each individual student, especially those whose concerns they feel unequipped to handle. This can have detrimental effects for refugee youth who have reported feeling ignored, misunderstood, and even discriminated against by their teachers (Stewart, 2011; Yau & Toronto Board of Education, 1995). Whether or not these circumstances genuinely reflect the teacher’s attitudes and behaviors is not the point. The point is that students may feel or perceive this to be the case, which in itself warrants greater effort to ameliorate these concerns.

Involving every student in the classroom and knowing students’ individual learning styles, concerns, and needs requires the mindful attention and awareness of educators. In order for a successful mindfulness curriculum to be implemented, the present awareness of the teacher facilitator is needed. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) provide that “mindfulness-trained teachers embody mindful behaviors and attitudes through their presence and interactions with students in the classroom” (p. 294). Teachers who are trained in mindfulness are provided with skills to cope with stress and manage
circumstances within their own lives as well as within the classroom. Since teachers may be provided with few resources and tools by which to manage the stressors and demands of the job (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005), mindfulness training is a cost effective intervention that encourages the maintenance of good executive function, reduced stress, and emotional stability (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Furthermore, researchers have posited that mindfulness enhances the creative thought, expression, and innovation of teacher practitioners, which can lead to more transformative learning opportunities for their students (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000).

The Garrison Institute in New York is a teacher development organization that seeks to promote a shift in the culture of education and wellness through teacher practitioner training programs and supports (Miller, 2014). Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) is the institute’s professional teacher development program that trains teachers K-12 in managing stress and effecting learning environments and outcomes (Jennings et al., 2013). The institute’s approach is based on the prosocial theoretical model which emphasizes that teachers’ wellbeing is critical to the development and maintenance of healthy teacher-student relationships, effective classroom management, social-emotional learning, and academic outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The program involves thirty hours of training presented over 4-6 weeks. It trains teachers on emotion-skills instruction, mindful awareness practices, and compassion building through various activities including reflective writing, group discussion, and mindful exercises (Jennings et al., 2013). To assess the efficacy of the CARE program, Jennings et al. (2013) conducted a study in which fifty teachers participated in the training and filled out self-report surveys before and after the duration of the program. The results of the study indicate that CARE does indeed have positive, significant impacts on teacher wellbeing, efficacy, burnout and a sense of time pressure, and mindfulness (2013).
Other programs are recognizing the benefit of mindfulness training at the post-secondary level for teacher trainees. The impact of stress among student teacher trainees has led to feelings of burnout before they have even begun teaching (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). In order to provide student teachers with practical skills they can employ during stressful times in their lives and throughout their careers, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto developed the Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE) course for teacher candidates (Poulin et al., 2008). A study measuring the efficacy of the program compared mindfulness interventions with general relaxation interventions. Both components included discussions, didactic sessions, experiential components, and home practice and application with differences in focus, approach, and practices. Although both programs yielded improved relaxation and life satisfaction, the mindfulness intervention additionally resulted in improvements of emotional exhaustion. The results suggest that mindfulness in teacher training programs holds tremendous promise as a practical approach for student to workplace transitions (2008).

Mindful Schools is an organization that promotes mindfulness education through its own professional educator training curriculum as well as the direct teaching of mindfulness to students in K-12 schools (Bahnsen, 2013). Through the educator training program, teachers are provided with strategies and skills for managing personal and school-related stressors. In addition to personal use, the organization encourages that teachers introduce mindfulness-based skills and practices directly into the classroom. According to the organization’s mission, in order to cultivate awareness amongst students and to create a generally positive classroom dynamic, it is important that both teachers and students shift their perceptions about what constitutes good classroom behavior and a healthful classroom environment (2013). For example, in typical Western classrooms students are often asked by their teachers, for various reasons, to be ‘silent.’ Because of the context in which the command is used, students who are familiar with the expectations tend to associate silence with being perfectly still.
Refugee students who are unaccustomed to these expectations may feel confused and unclear about how to behave. If they have never participated in a mainstream Western classroom they may find it hard to adapt to being still. In some cases refugees may be dealing with mental health concerns that make it difficult to remain still, such as trauma related attentional difficulties. For these reasons, some refugees and other students who have a difficult time being still might judge themselves for being ‘bad’ or fear being reprimanded. Silence in a mindful classroom, however, can actually serve as an effective restorative practice. Silence can allow for individual feelings of calmness, which can lead to a more collective experience of calmness in the classroom. Mindful Schools’ Program Director Megan Cowan explains that “Mindfulness is not about being still and calm, it’s about recognizing our experience, being with our experience, and noticing what it is” (Bahnsen, 2013). Mindful Schools believes that mindfulness should not be used as a disciplinary tool, but rather a tool for empowerment in which engagement is a choice. Cowan explains that when given the choice, students prefer to be engaged. Since research has demonstrated that mindfulness-based practices in students can enhance self-regulated behavior (Roeser & Peck, 2009), overall classroom conduct is likely to improve as a result of such practices, requiring different, less stringent approaches to discipline than traditional models of education.

**Student Interventions**

Mindfulness-based programming with youth typically involves mind-body practices designed to enhance focused attention, social competencies, and emotional self-regulations (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Additionally, interventions have been shown to improve mental health by reducing negative symptoms such as stress (Mendelson et al., 2010; van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012), anxiety (Semple et al., 2005), and depression (Liehr & Diaz, 2010), while enhancing positive traits such as compassion and resilience (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).
According to Kutcher et al. (2009), in Canada, “approximately 15 to 20 percent of children and adolescents suffer from some form of mental disorder – one in five students in the average classroom” (p. 44). In many cases, students with mental health concerns do not seek out help or treatment because of stigma, shame, or embarrassment (Froese-Germain & Riel, 2012), which for many afflicted students can feel more debilitating than the mental health issue itself (Stuart, 2012). Compared to other children, refugees are more likely to suffer adversities that threaten mental health (Hyman et al., 1996), yet they may be less likely to seek out mental health services (Beiser, 2009). There are several possible reasons for this. First, in some cultures, mental health issues are a source of shame, and individuals may be reluctant to seek treatment for their symptoms as a result (Furnham & Malik, 1994). They may also worry about being marginalized by the host society because of their mental health concerns. Another plausible reason is that refugee children and their parents may not deem the mental health services of the host society to be culturally appropriate and responsive. They may doubt that the Western system is equipped to interpret their symptoms, or they may question whether the treatment options are designed to support their particular beliefs and needs. Refugees may also not realize they have access to such services or may not know how to navigate the systems of the host country. Finally, other barriers such as language and accessibility may also contribute to a lack of participation. These barriers could be eliminated with the implementation of a mindfulness-based curriculum. A mindfulness curriculum would enable the promotion of mental health among those who might otherwise not access such supports. Since the curriculum would be implemented at the class-level, it would ensure that all students be reached regardless of their backgrounds or mental health issues; it would support enhanced mental health opportunities for all those involved (van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012). In essence, anyone in the school community can participate in school-based mindfulness programs and potentially benefit as a result.
There are several other practical benefits of promoting mindfulness in the school context. Mindfulness-based practices tend to involve inner reflection and do not necessarily rely on linguistic self-expression. This makes the involvement of non-native speakers that much easier to solicit. Also, the delivery of a mindfulness curriculum is cost-effective, and can be applied for preventative purposes instead of just remedial measures. Furthermore, unlike other approaches to mental health, mindfulness assumes a positive focus on health and wellness rather than a negative emphasis on illness and problems (Weare, 2013). This approach is more likely to elicit sensitivity, compassion, and positive views of wellness while preventing stigmatization and feelings of discomfort surrounding mental health concerns (2013).

Many risk factors can be addressed within the school context for managing and even preventing mental health problems. Psychosocial stress is a particularly important risk factor for internalizing issues, such as anxiety and depression, as well as externalizing, behavioral problems in children. Although stress can have critical, harmful consequences for children, the ways in which children cope with stress can serve as protective factors and can have important implications for their mental health. Research on mindfulness with youth populations has begun to demonstrate the potential of interventions to reduce stress and stress-related mental health and behavioral problems (Mendelson et al., 2010; van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012).

The MindfulKids program is a non-selective intervention for youth that addresses stress through mindfulness at the class level, allowing all children to benefit from the intervention. In a study conducted by van de Weijer-Bersma et al. (2012), the researchers evaluated the efficacy of the program, drawing from the data of 208 participants, ages 8-12, in three public elementary schools in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. During the intervention, a trainer visited each class for 12 thirty-minute sessions over 6 weeks and facilitated meditation practices focusing on nonjudging awareness of sounds, bodily
sensations, the breath, thoughts, and emotions (2012). The results of the study, yielded from self-, parent-, and teacher-reported questionnaires, demonstrated some positive effects on stress and mental wellbeing directly after training, and even greater effects at follow-up. This may suggest that the training had a prolonged effect. Interestingly, for those children who ruminated more frequently prior to the intervention, high levels of bodily awareness and attention to others’ emotions could already be demonstrated; however, as a result of the intervention, these children analyzed their emotions less.

These results are promising for students that struggle with rumination. Given the high occurrence of stress and rumination among refugee youth, a curriculum that incorporates similar practices could have valuable implications for promoting positive mental health. The results also demonstrate the feasibility of implementing mindfulness at the class-level, for all students to participate and benefit from (2012).

Research has also begun to demonstrate the impact that mindfulness interventions can have on the experience of stress among underserved youth populations. Mendelson et al. (2010) focused their efforts on the urban youth population who are more likely to experience negative psychological and neurological effects from chronic stress exposure. The study assessed a school-based mindfulness and yoga intervention program developed by the Holistic Life Foundation in Baltimore specifically for the urban youth population. Ninety-eight students in the 4th and 5th grade participated in the 12 week intervention. The main components of the program included yoga-based physical activity, breathing techniques, and guided mindfulness practice. The measures used at pre and post assessment show that the program was effective in reducing involuntary stress reactions including rumination, emotional arousal, and intrusive thoughts, all of which are prevalent concerns among refugee youth. These results provide evidence that mindfulness-based practices can enhance self-regulation by providing youth with skills to reduce stress and disengage from persistent or troubling thoughts (2010).
For young students suffering from anxiety, mindfulness has been shown to reduce symptoms while improving other important aspects of mental health and wellbeing. In one of the first studies conducted on the effects of mindfulness with youth, Semple et al. (2005) assessed the feasibility of a mindfulness intervention for childhood anxiety. Five children, ages 7 to 8, underwent a modified Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy course which took place in an urban school setting. Training sessions were held for 45 minutes a week over 6 weeks and were facilitated by the first and second author of the study who were also the group’s co-therapists. The program itself borrowed elements of MBSR (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) and MBCT (Segal et al., 2002) and incorporated age-appropriate sensory exercises, breathing meditation, and self-reflection. Each session followed a basic, routine structure with the main content focusing primarily on one of the six senses (kinesthetic, taste, sight, sound, smell, or touch). At post intervention, four of the five students showed high levels of engagement and requested that the program continue. Unfortunately, data was not collected for one of the students. In addition, teachers reported that the five participants all showed improvements in academic performance, attention, and behavior (Semple et al., 2005). Although greater generalizability of the findings cannot be inferred given the lack of control group, reliance on teacher reports, and the small sample size, the results still suggest the potential of mindfulness interventions with youth suffering from anxiety in school contexts. Since anxiety is a common problem among refugee youth, a multisensory mindfulness curriculum could prove particularly beneficial to the population.

Research on the impact of mindfulness on depressive symptoms in youth has also been promising. In a study conducted by Liehr and Diaz (2010), the effects of a mindfulness intervention on depression and anxiety was assessed with participants from a summer camp. Eighteen minority children, aged 9.5 on average, were recruited and randomly assigned to receive either a mindfulness intervention (MI) or a health education intervention (HEI). The MI program was designed by Mindful Schools and focused on attention to breath, mindful movement, and generosity. The intervention was
facilitated by an experienced teacher and consisted of ten 15-minute classes, one every day for 2 weeks. The results of the study were drawn from pre and post assessment questionnaires and showed a significant decrease in depressive symptoms at post intervention. Although both interventions saw decreases in anxiety, the MI group saw greater decreases than the HEI group. These findings provide further evidence that mindfulness can be an effective intervention for children experiencing sadness and anxiousness, which, as discussed, are notable symptoms experienced by refugee youth. According to the authors, mitigating symptoms through mindfulness “may have positive implications for outcomes like academic performance, social development, and physical as well as emotional health” (p. 70).

Social Emotional Learning

Emerging research on mindfulness has demonstrated the value of mindful practices on social and emotional learning. It has become increasingly recognized that children with positive social and emotional skills demonstrate resilience when confronted with stressful situations (Greenberg et al., 2003). Resilience is “the ability to manage or cope with significant adversity or stress in ways that are not only effective, but may result in an increased ability to respond to future adversity” (Health Canada, 2000, p. 8). Stressors, or risk factors, such as life transitions, times of cumulative stress, and significant adversity can pose a threat to mental health and can in some cases lead to more serious consequences (Stewart et al., 2004). As I have discussed, refugee youth are a particularly vulnerable population, as they are faced with numerous stressors and major life transitions during the process of migration and resettlement. However, social-emotional competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2013) can act as protective factors, enhancing resilience and allowing risk factors to be converted into challenges and faced in more healthful ways (Stewart et al., 2004). Ultimately, children with positive social and emotional competencies exhibit higher measures of psychological health both as children and later in life.
According to the Consortium on School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, it is the school’s responsibility to provide programming that enhances such competencies. The Consortium states:

“Schools are widely acknowledged as the major setting in which activities should be undertaken to promote students’ competence and prevent the development of unhealthy behaviors. In contrast to other potential sites for intervention, schools provide access to all children on a regular and consistent basis over the majority of their formative years of personality development” (in Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010, p. 138).

The Mindfulness Education (ME) program, a program developed by the Hawn Foundation which with recent revisions is now referred to as MindUP, is a classroom-based preventive social and emotional learning intervention that is designed to promote students’ social and emotional learning and general wellbeing through the learning and practice of mindful awareness (Miller, 2014). The program was developed by applying the current research on mindfulness and mindfulness theory in relation to wellbeing, positive psychology, and student social and emotional learning. The curriculum itself included a manual of nine lessons in which teachers guided students through activities that involved quieting the mind, paying mindful attention to thoughts, sensations, and feelings, managing negative emotional and thinking, and acknowledging the self and others. The lessons were taught once a week for nine or ten weeks, with each lesson lasting about 40-50 minutes. In addition to lessons, students were engaged in mindful practices in which they sat comfortably listening to a resonating sound instrument, such as a bell or chime, and practiced core breathing for a few minutes, three times a day over the course of the program (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

In a study conducted by Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010), the ME program was evaluated in terms of its effect on pre and early adolescents (4th-7th grade). The researchers were specifically interested in assessing how the program impacted optimism, self-concept, positive effect, and social-emotional competence among student participants. Twelve classrooms across twelve schools located in
a large urban, culturally diverse school district in Western Canada agreed to participate in the study with six classrooms acting as the intervention group and the remaining six designated as the control group. Ultimately, 139 students comprised the intervention classrooms, 47% of which were ESL learners. Teachers from the intervention classrooms underwent a 1-day training session and received biweekly consultation. In addition, they were asked to track their daily implementation of the core ME exercises in an “ME Program” diary. Mixed methods were used to measure the affects of the program. The results of the study show that students who underwent the ME program did in fact show teacher-rated improvement in social and emotional competence. In addition, teachers note improvements in attention and concentration. Students evidenced their own improvements in positive emotions, specifically optimism. Interestingly, measures of self-concept revealed a difference in outcomes between pre and early adolescents. While pre-adolescents showed positive changes to self-concept, early adolescents did not. The researchers propose that this may be the result of developmental changes that lead to increased focus on self-awareness and a more critical or realistic view of the self that occurs at this phase of life (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). It is my belief that other social factors including peer interactions and media representations also influence self-concept. This finding furthers the notion that the primary years may be an ideal and critical period for the implementation of social-emotional learning interventions that support children’s mental health.

The revised ME program, now referred to as MindUP, includes 12 lessons that place greater emphasis on self-regulatory skills, social-emotional understanding, and positive mood (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). A study of MindUP was conducted with 4 classes of fourth and fifth graders (N=99) in which classes were randomly assigned to receive the MindUP program or the Business as Usual (BAU) social responsibility program. Similar to the previous study, the classes chosen reflect the diversity of the Canadian city with about 40% in this case being ESL learners. Students filled out pre and post self-report measures and were tested for diurnal cortisol levels (a stress hormone) via saliva. Again, teachers
were asked to track their lessons and keep a daily diary. Those participants of the MindUP program improved more in cognitive control and stress physiology, empathy, perspective-taking, emotional control, optimism, school self-concept and mindfulness than those in the BAU program. They also showed decreases in symptoms of depression and a more regulated diurnal rhythm of stress regulation. With regard to peer reports, children demonstrated greater peer acceptance. They rated each other as being less aggressive and more trustworthy, kind, and helpful.

Positive Peer Relationships

Miller (2014) provides that another word for mindfulness is wholeheartedness, meaning that we must engage fully with ourselves and our experiences. Through mindfulness, practitioners can develop their whole consciousness, which can allow us to “reconnect ourselves with the world around us” (p. 40). A sense of connection is implicit to mindfulness. We connect ourselves to our breath, our senses, the earth beneath us, and the people that surround us when we engage in various mindful practices. As we develop a sense of oneness within, we can begin to recognize the oneness of all beings. Because of this, early on in the secular application of mindfulness-based practices, Kabat-Zinn (1994) suggested that mindfulness may lead to a greater sense of trust and closeness with peers. Research has since demonstrated the potential of mindfulness to harness positive interpersonal relationship. Studies have continued to highlight the connection between mindfulness practices and peer compassion, empathy, acceptance, tolerance, and support (Allen & Knight, 2005; Berger et al., 2015; Hinton et al., 2013a; Hofmann et al., 2011; Lueke & Gibson, 2015; Orsillo & Roemer, 2009).

Open-mindedness

Mindfulness encourages non-judgmental reflection towards the self and nurtures open-mindedness in one’s outlook and engagement with their experiences. Research has demonstrated that
mindfulness can actually enable us to decrease our reliance on pre-established associations including our prejudices. A recent study conducted by Lueke and Gibson (2015) demonstrated that playing mindfulness inducing audio clips before an implicit association test (IAT) reduced the likelihood of implicit age and race biases, which they claim is the result of a weakening in automatically activated associations.

Mindfulness has also been shown to invoke positive emotions, including a sense of safety, which may allow practitioners the ability to interact with others more openly. Fredrickson’s (2001) ‘broaden and build’ model helps to explain this phenomenon. He posits that positive emotions, unlike negative emotions, are not linked to threats requiring quick action. Therefore positive emotions broaden a person’s ‘thought-action repertoire’ rather than narrowing their propensity to respond with judgment in a particular way. As such, positive emotions actually allow for less focus on the self and greater empathy towards others. Those who practice mindfulness have an easier time disengaging from negative thoughts and assumptions and are better able to allow for present focus in the moment and greater compassion in their interactions with others (Allen & Knight, 2005).

In addition to enhancing positive emotions, mindfulness has been proven to reduce the experience of negative emotions (Coffey et al., 2010), including those associated with discrimination. In a study conducted by Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2014) the researchers looked at the impact of mindfulness on the relationship between perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms. Consistent with previous research, the results demonstrated that those who experienced greater discrimination were more likely to experience depressive symptoms. It also confirmed that mindfulness helps to reduce symptoms of depression. Additionally, the results showed that those with a greater sense of mindfulness experience a weakened relationship between perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms. This provides evidence that mindfulness may act as a protective factor against
discrimination. Although traits such as mindfulness can protect individuals from the negative attitudes and behaviors of others, it is more ideal to reduce the encounters of discrimination and enhance compassion to support mental health.

**Compassion & Loving-kindness**

Different forms of mindfulness are intended to elicit different types of responses. While some forms of mindfulness support nonjudgmental awareness by focusing on bodily or sensorial modalities, thoughts, images, or other affective states, other forms focus on nurturing feelings of connection towards others. Loving-kindness meditation and compassion meditation are two such forms that help nourish interactional and interpersonal engagement (Orsillo & Roemer, 2009). Loving-kindness meditation centers on love and kind concern for other’s wellbeing while compassion meditation focuses on alleviating the suffering of other beings (Hofmann et al., 2011). Both loving-kindness and compassion have been associated with increases in positive emotions as well as decrease in negative emotions. It has also been suggested based on neuroimaging studies that both practices enhance emotional processing and empathy (Hofmann et al., 2011). Experts on the subjects of compassion and loving-kindness meditation have described both practices as spiritual paths leading to transformation through greater awareness (Feldman, 2005; Salzberg, 1995).

*Loving-kindness*

Loving-kindness, or ‘metta’ as it is referred to in Buddhist terms, is a meditation that cultivates a feeling of love and connection with all beings. According to Sharon Salzberg (1995), practices of loving-kindness enable us to become “deeply aware of the suffering caused by separation and of the happiness of knowing our connection with all beings” (p. 6). She notes that, “The culmination of metta is to become a friend to oneself and to all of life” (p. 25). One form of loving-kindness meditation involves
wishing oneself to be well, happy, and peaceful, and then radiating these feelings outward towards other beings in all directions (Miller, 2014). One may choose to express these sentiments in order of relational closeness such as from those we know and love to all beings in the universe. One may also express these sentiments in terms of geographical proximity to oneself (2014). Ultimately, loving-kindness is a meditation on how we are connected to life, to others, and to the world at large.

Research has begun to demonstrate that loving-kindness can indeed support social connectedness. In a study conducted by Hutcherson et al. (2008) the researchers measured the effects of a seven minute loving kindness activity. First, participants were asked to imagine people close to them standing by their side and sending their love. Then they were asked to redirect these feelings towards a photograph of a neutral stranger. While looking at the photograph, participants were asked to repeat a series of loving-kindness phrases designed to bring attention to the other and to wish them health, happiness, and wellbeing. The study revealed greater explicit positive emotions towards the neutral strangers, demonstrating that even brief loving-kindness meditations can induce positive feelings towards others.

At the individual level, loving-kindness has been proven to reduce somatic complains while enhancing psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility is the ability to disengage or decenter from a current mindset, consider a more adaptive mindset, and then enact the alternative mindset in order to process and adapt more healthily to a situation. Psychological flexibility is an important skill that not only enhances positive emotions, but better equips practitioners to adjust to a new social, cultural, and linguistic context (Hinton et al., 2013b). These findings have led researchers to making a strong case for the application of loving-kindness techniques with traumatized refugee and minority groups (2013).

Compassion
Compassion is a basic human kindness that involves honing an awareness of others and feelings of empathy and concern for their suffering and wellbeing (Hinton et al., 2013a). It is both an outlook on life and a way of interacting in the world that involves demonstrating gratitude, generosity, and forgiveness (Feldman, 2005; Hofmann et al., 2011). It is not just about feeling sympathetic, but rather it involves a deep and caring orientation towards the self and others.

Feldman (2005) explains that through compassion meditation,

You can learn to attend to the moments when you close and contract in the face of suffering, anger, fear, or alienation. In those moments you are asked to question what difference empathy, forgiveness, patience, and tolerance would make. You cultivate your commitment to turn toward your responses of aversion, anger, or intolerance. With mindfulness and investigation, you find in your heart the generosity and understanding that allow you to open rather than close (pp. 141–142).

Research has begun to demonstrate the potential for the cultivation of compassion not only to enhance resiliency in youth but also to reduce stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory tendencies among youth (Berger et al., 2015). Dr. Roney Berger has developed two programs to enhance resiliency and promote compassion and prosocial orientation among peers. The Erase Stress Prosocial (ESPS) program includes 16 hour and half sessions to be delivered once each week as part of the ongoing school curriculum (Berger, 2014). The topics of the sessions include strengthening coping skills, dealing with negative feelings, developing empathy and compassion towards others, knowing one’s group biases and prejudices, and learning the meaning of common humanity amongst others. A quasi-randomized controlled trial of the program showed efficacy in reducing trauma-related symptoms and functional impairments in Jewish and Arab 4th & 5th grade students, as well as in reducing stereotyping prejudices and discriminatory tendencies toward each other (2014).
The second program, called the Class Exchange Program (CLP) involves six monthly meetings delivered by the homeroom teacher and designed to address negative attitudes between Jewish and Arab elementary school students and to cultivate tolerance and compassion (Berger et al., 2015). The program relies on prejudice reduction methods such as learning about each other’s culture, combined intergroup processes such as contact between classes, and strategies to cultivate compassion including mindfulness and other contemplative practice. A quasi-randomized controlled trial revealed that students in the CEP classes significantly increased their readiness for contact with students from the other ethnic group, expressed more positive thoughts about the other, and exhibited less emotional prejudice toward the other group (2015).

**Final Thoughts**

As we consider the refugee population, it is clear that more is needed to address mental health concerns and the social determinants of health that pose a threat to wellbeing. Although we cannot change the migration factor associated with psychological distress, we can address post-migration factors that can either serve as a protective function or a threat to mental health. Discrimination and social exclusion among elementary aged students is still an unfortunate reality. These conditions can be extremely harmful to wellbeing, as well as disruptive to development and integration. Although the current curriculum and policies do address the need for equity, inclusion, and mental health promotion, these guidelines do not necessarily address the need to develop the whole being and a spiritual connection to others. Educators are given instructions on how to teach mental health as a subject, but are left without a framework in which to nurture resilience compassion, acceptance, and support among all students.

A mindfulness education curriculum has the potential to enrich the mind, body, and spirit of students, teachers, and schools at large. Recognizing the value of the “whole self” within the whole
school community and harnessing present awareness in the classroom can lead all students, including refugees, to improved cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional health and wellness. As school authorities and boards of education continue to shift to more inclusive educational approaches, a need for programs that encourage full participation and enhance personal growth at the individual level has emerged. There is also a growing need to reduce social-emotional and behavioral problems for youth, particularly disadvantaged and underserved populations such as refugees while promoting greater acceptance and compassion for all students at the peer level. Mindfulness training for teachers has the potential to improve teaching strategies, reduce burnout, and foster creativity and a more connected classroom dynamic. A mindfulness curriculum can allow students to enhance their abilities to cope with adversity and to experience a positive state of wellbeing. It can help foster peer compassion, support, and inclusion while encouraging the embrace of all beings. It is the Ministry’s responsibility to ensure that students are met at their individual levels and engaged in experiential learning and development that can have positive effects on mental health, and mindfulness can help achieve this goal. These interventions also have the potential to eliminate certain barriers to inclusive education such as language disparities, learning difficulties, and issues with acculturation, as they can be adapted to meet the general needs of a population and can be personalized to meet individual needs. Given the invaluable psychological and social benefits that mindfulness has yielded in both clinical and schools settings, it is my belief that a mindfulness curriculum is essential to the Ontario education system.
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