Attitudes and Practices of Educators Toward Refugees in Schools: Creating a Support System of Inclusion and Well-Being

By

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Abstract

The following qualitative research study examines the question: How do teacher’s attitudes and practices affect the learning needs of elementary-level refugee students? The data for the study has been collected through semi-unstructured interviews with two Ontario Certified Teachers working in Ontario public schools, who are currently working directly with refugee students. These participants have been selected through convenience sampling. Through the data collection process, three main themes emerged: in-class strategies, in-school support systems and community inclusion. The findings of this study suggest if teachers are not adequately prepared to welcome a large number of refugee students, then these students suffer and are put at a considerable disadvantage. Recommendations of this study prescribe actions at a provincial and federal level, as well as a local level for administrators and teachers.

Keywords: Refugee, integration, challenges, strategies, support, teacher perspectives
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0. Research Context

Children come to Canada from all regions of the world, and the countries of origin that constitute the majority of newcomers are always changing. Canada has an admirable history of welcoming refugees, such as those of the Vietnam War, the Iranian Revolution, the Yugoslav Wars, Romani refugees, as well as many others (George, 2006). Recent global events, such as the migrant crisis in Syria have brought considerable attention to the incredible struggle for asylum. Canada’s past in welcoming refugees is admirable, but the experience of those refugees cannot be equated with the suffering of the Syrian people today. Canada has taken in many Syrian refugees, in no small part owing to the private sponsorship model and good will of its citizens. The next stages of the settlement operation are now unfolding, and Canada must determine how it can support the success and well-being of its embattled newcomers.

1.1. Research Problem

Young refugee children are especially vulnerable through the migration and resettlement process, affecting their ability to be successful in schools, both academically and socially. Not only do they carry with them unique personal narratives haunted by strife and tragedy, they also face linguistic and cultural barriers (Feurverger, 2011). These linguistic and cultural barriers are found throughout the school system: list a few examples here. Such barriers are debilitating to the educational success and mental well-being of a refugee child if little or no attempt is made to reconcile them with their learning needs. Efforts vary in addressing these needs, whether by actions taken on the ground or through policy and legislation.
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The psychological well-being of a refugee child is affected by various stressors, which develop long before their arrival to a new host country. As Medley (2012) points out, refugee children experience trauma because of violence and war in their countries of origin, as well as throughout the process of migration and resettlement. Stressors they may include direct violence and combat, a loss of home or family members, poor health, detention or torture (Birman, Batia, Ho, Pulley, Everson, Ellis, & Gonzalez 2005). This list is not exhaustive, and any of these factors can affect a child’s mental and physical health (Beruman, 2014).

The social challenges in meeting the needs of refugee students are rooted in cultural sensitivity and attentiveness. The psychosocial realities faced by refugee children feed into academic challenges (Kanu, 2008). They may be unfamiliar with academic skills often taken for granted, or they may discover that academic expectations they are faced with differ widely from their preexisting knowledge. Kanu (2008) believes this can lead to frustration and lack of willpower to acclimatize. Additionally, the language barrier is one of the most immediate challenges when acclimatizing a refugee student to the Canadian school system (Simich, Beiser, Stewart & Mwakarimba, 2005). Finally, there is consensus among researchers that access to funding and resources to support refugee students is in woefully short supply (Hurley, Medici, Stewart & Cohen, 2011).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

As researchers in education, we must ask about what has worked so far, and examine measures of preparedness and confidence in meeting the unique needs of refugee students in our schools. There is a need for a deeper understanding from which educators can enhance their professional development and better prepare for the
integration of refugee children within the school system. The needs of refugee children may be addressed broadly through legislation and policy: the former through government, and the latter through school boards. However, the immediate responsibility of educators must also be clarified. While the responsibility for supporting refugee students isn’t exclusively reliant on teachers, clarification of their place within a larger system of professionals, policy and legislation is useful in achieving success throughout the refugee settlement operation.

It is difficult to ascertain a sense of the current conditions regarding the educational success and well-being of refugee children. In examining the current literature on refugees and education, I aim to pinpoint the needs of refugee students and the myriad ways of addressing them from the perspective of teachers. Further, I aim to learn about the attitudes and practices of educators towards refugees’ experiences, in particular from the perspective of elementary-level teachers. By examining the teaching experience vis-à-vis semi-structured interviews, I am able to better understand the experience of teachers dealing with refugees in Ontario schools, and how the system might be improved for teachers and refugee students in the future.

1.3 Research Questions

Presently teachers are facing a multitude of challenges, and will likely face more in the future (Dachyshyn & Kirova, 2011). These challenges can arise from cultural unawareness or inexperience, and the insecurity this inexperience may provoke. Teachers may worry about inadvertently disrespecting their refugee students. The primary question being pursued through this research project is: How do teacher’s attitudes and practices affect the learning needs of elementary-level refugee students?
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Following that, a variety of sub-questions help to unpack this main question: do teachers’ attitudes and practices favour certain needs over others? How do teachers sort out the cultural complexities of elementary-level refugee students? How are teachers’ attitudes and practices informed by school policy and legislation? By considering these overarching questions, more lines of inquiry present themselves. How can the needs of refugee students best be met? What are the challenges faced by teachers in addressing these needs? Within a more specific context, how could teachers improve and foster communication between parents at home and teachers at school? Would enhanced professional development and qualitative fill the gap between rhetoric and practice? This study has taken a qualitative approach in attempting to answer these questions. I conducted semi-structured interviews with two teachers who helped to address the complex issues of meeting the needs of refugee students in Ontario schools.

1.4 Background of the Researcher

My interest in this research problem stems from a worldview cultivated through my undergraduate studies in media and communications. These studies intensified my critical thinking and concern for social justice. Particularly, I learnt how institutions, technologies, and content inform the development of society and culture and influence our activities and behaviour. In particular, I navigated my degree with a mind towards the media in its relation to the public interest. I studied and reflected upon issues of communication and social justice issues, such as democracy, equity, class, race, and gender. I am interested in the political economy of global communities. Mill (1994) states political economists are concerned with political ideology, economic structure, human interaction, human nature, and theories in philosophical thought—broadly, the allocation
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of resources in a world of infinite needs, and finite resources. To me, this includes equitable access to education and sustaining individual wellbeing.

I see the refugee crisis as one of the principal global issues of today, and I believe Canada is not exempt from the responsibility of making positive changes to address this crisis. I acknowledge my positionality as a student with little qualitative research background, and as an individual with an upbringing who cannot materially relate to the refugee experience. It is the lack of experience I have not only as a teaching candidate, but also the bias of a middle-class Caucasian Canadian that may prove to be an impediment in pursuing my research topic. I will scrutinize and maintain transparency regarding my positionality as middle-class Caucasian Canadian, so that I may avoid harming the dignity of refugee children and their families.

1.5 Overview

This chapter introduces the research purpose, key question, background of the researcher as well as an overview of the entire research project. In particular, this research study responds to its questions by adopting a qualitative approach that includes three to four interviews with teachers on their attitudes and practices in addressing the learning needs of elementary-level refugee students. In chapter two, I present a review of the current literature, intending to identify the barriers faced by refugee students, to clarify the responsibilities of educators, to deliberate challenges to educators, both present and hypothetical, as well as teacher beliefs and challenges. In the third chapter, I describe the research design, data collection methods, participants, and ethical review procedures. In the fourth chapter, I report on the interview process and the research findings extracted from it. In the final chapter I highlight my insights and their
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implications for the educational community, as well as reflect upon areas of potential study for the future.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Overview

Throughout recent history, refugees have come to Canada from all regions of the world, and the countries of origin that constitute the majority of newcomers are always changing. At the beginning of the 1980s, more than 60,000 refugees found safety in Canada after the Communist victory in the Vietnam War (Government of Canada, 2015). Between 1992 and 1999, Canada resettled approximately 5,000 Bosnian Muslims to escape the ethnic cleansing in the Yugoslav Civil War (Government of Canada, 2015). Currently, there are over 5,200 Romani people in Canada who have immigrated to escape persecution, the vast majority of whom arrived with refugee status (Statistics Canada, 2011). The current migrant crisis emanating from Syria has brought significant attention to the incredible struggle for asylum, and the desperate need for resettlement.

Young refugee children are especially vulnerable. Not only do they carry with them unique personal narratives haunted by strife and tragedy, they also face linguistic and cultural barriers. Kanu (2008) maintains these linguistic and cultural barriers are patently apparent within the school system. Such barriers could be debilitating to the educational success and mental health of a refugee child, if little or no attempt is made to reconcile their learning needs (Kanu, 2008). It is difficult to ascertain a sense of the immediate situation in Canada, with regards to the educational success and well-being of refugee children. However, in examining the current literature on refugees and education, the needs of refugee students can be identified, as well as effective ways of addressing them. Through reviewing the literature, this project has three central objectives: to identify the barriers faced by refugee students, to clarify the responsibilities of educators, and to deliberate challenges to educators, both present and hypothetical. Accordingly,
more research must be conducted from the perspective of teachers. We must ask about what has worked so far, and examine measures of preparedness and confidence in meeting the needs of refugee students.

2.1 Barriers Faced by Refugee Students

According to the Geneva Convention, a refugee is someone who has been forced to leave a country because of war, or for religious or political reasons (United Nations, 2007). Consistent with the research gathered for this project, the needs of refugee students can be broken down into two broad categories: psychosocial and academic. The following will examine these categories in detail.

2.1.1 Psychosocial barriers

The psychological well-being of refugee children is affected by various stressors which develop long before their arrival to a new host country. Refugee children experience trauma because of violence and war in their countries of origin, as well as throughout the process of migration and resettlement. Stressors they may have been subjected to include direct violence and combat, a loss of home or family members, poor health, detention or torture (Birman, Batia, Ho, Pulley, Everson, Ellis, & Gonzalez, 2005). This list is not exhaustive, and any and all of these factors can affect a child’s mental and physical health (Berman et al., 2005).

The needs within the context of the psychosocial are considered here by the past experiences they bring with them, and the current realities they face. Trauma can be understood as a reaction to a stressful experience wherein a person’s ability to cope is severely weakened (Medley, 2012). Medley states that behaviour, cognition, and emotion all manifest some effects of trauma. Medley notes that refugees may choose to suppress
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memories of their trauma or conceal it from others as a coping mechanism, or because they feel shame for being victimized.

Schools can act as a support network to help in the difficult transition to a new cultural climate and way of life. Feelings as inconspicuous as homesickness might be dismissed or ignored, especially as children may not choose to verbally express their emotions (Fantino, 2001). Medley (2012) emphasizes a need to explore the effects of trauma on the mind and behaviour in young refugee students. A prevailing theme that echoes throughout the research is the idea of school as a kind of sanctuary, a sentiment that I believe is essential for teachers to imbue if young learners are to cope with their newfound way of life.

Matanga, Freeze, Duchesne and Nyachoti (2008) indicate there is a need to develop better mental health services. In 2009, the Ministry of Education in the province of British Columbia released a guide about refugee students to its school boards. This document is a list of best practices, and helps to raise educators’ awareness of the psychosocial conditions of refugee children. It provides examples of symptoms within a school wherein the mental health of a refugee child might be reflected, such as: difficulty in concentrating and completing tasks, tiredness because of lack of sleep, avoidance of particular activities and situations, physical ailments, such as headaches, vomiting or stomach aches, irritability or hyper-alertness, impaired memory, exaggerated startle responses, preoccupation with violent events (conversations, drawings), unrealistic worries about possible harm to self and others, excessive distress upon separation or when anticipating separation from parent, or recollection of traumatic events (Archer, Boliuncic, Chan, Das, Friesen, Fung et. al, 2009 p. 18). Serious mental health conditions
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are likely to present a challenge to teachers, who may not feel rightly equipped to deal with such severe problems. It can also be hard to develop a singular framework of teaching methodology, since each individual student develops their own coping mechanisms to the circumstances which led them to flee their homeland (Feurverger, 2011).

Once refugees begin the resettlement process in Canada, their continuing psychosocial needs do not seem to receive as much attention within research. Nevertheless, there are sizeable challenges—issues such as extreme poverty and cultural acclimatization to Canada can be difficult and jarring (Kanu, 2008). Coping and finding a balance can be difficult. Familial responsibilities may put additional pressure on the student in balancing a school-home life balance, and support at home may not be present, even if for a lack of parental expertise in knowing how to best support their children’s education (Kanu, 2008).

2.1.2. Academic barriers

The psychosocial realities faced by refugee children also feed into academic challenges. One such indicator is what Kanu (2008), calls “acculturation stress,” a kind of unfamiliarity with academic skills often taken for granted, including note-taking, studying, academic writing, critical thinking, literacy and numeracy, and organizational skills (p.924). Kanu also references the idea of “academic cultural dissonance,” in other words, the realization by a student that academic expectations differ widely from their background knowledge (p.924). This can lead to frustration and lack of willpower to acclimatize (Kanu, 2008).
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The combination of limited English proficiency, along with cultural dissonance, both constitute major academic challenges. Kanu (2008), points out that academic gaps are extremely detrimental, and exacerbated by a fast-paced curriculum, distrust of authority figures or fear of speaking out. Additionally, the current practices employed with grade placement tests may not be ideal, as they are primarily given by age, rather than academic ability (Kanu, 2008). Hurley, Medici, Stewart and Cohen (2011), reason that cultural dissonance between home and school is a prime contributor to poor educational outcome, and that children are likely to suffer emotional upset aggravated by an inability to communicate.

2.2 How Can the Needs of Refugee Students Be Met?

In light of the challenges illustrated previously, the next step is to ask how educational institutions are currently addressing these challenges. The following will unpack the issues within the context of both large-scale and small-scale perspectives. One common theme throughout the current literature is need for teamwork. In comparison with the small-scale needs, the large-scale needs are explored in less detail, as the focus of my research question concerns the immediate attitudes and practices of teachers. That said, the large-scale efforts outlined here more than likely have a “trickle down” effect.

2.2.1 The role of government and school board policy

In December 2015, while greeting the newcomer Syrian refugee families to Canada at Pearson International Airport, Prime Minister Trudeau said the following:

We get to show the world how to open our hearts and welcome in people who are fleeing extraordinarily difficult situations. But it's not just about
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receiving them tonight. It's about the hard work we're all going to do in the coming weeks, months and indeed years to ensure that everyone who passes through here tonight and in the weeks and months to come are able to build a life for themselves, for their family and also contribute fully to the continued growth of this extraordinary country. (CBC News, 2015)

The primary way that these needs may be addressed at a large scale is likely through expedient legislation and policy—the former through government, and the latter through school boards. Dachyshyn and Kirova (2011) highlight the importance of an effective partnership among government and non-government stakeholders in addressing the needs of refugee children. Kanu (2008) argues for the need of psychological treatment programs, decent housing, better coordination of support services, and increased funding. Similar to Kanu, Hurley et al. (2011) emphasize funding as a priority, and that research efforts should be made to discover what practices could be put into place to better serve refugees. Hurley et al. (2011) specifically recommend the pursuit of qualitative research in collaboration with refugee families. Naturally, there are potential missteps in the creation of policy and legislation when considering the plight of refugees. Dachyshyn and Kirova (2011) warn of the danger of “internalization of the settler narrative,” and the potential “othering” and victimization of refugees, as well as the risk of encouraging settlers in “becoming as Canadian as possible,” thereby jeopardizing the preservation of their native culture (p. 230).

The challenges faced by school boards are chiefly rooted in a lack of resources (Hurley, 2011). The language barrier is likely the most immediate challenge when acclimatizing a refugee student and his or her family to the Canadian school system.
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Interpreters may be used in some circumstances. However, as Hurley et al. (2011) point out, interpreters are hard to find, schedule, and pay for. As a recent example, the efforts of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), in response to the influx of Syrian refugees, include tip sheets for teachers on class activities, advice on dealing with potential stressors, and information sessions (Ghebreslassie, 2016). Kanu (2008) says words aren’t enough; that schools must do more to match their rhetoric of inclusivity, and as one idea, suggests the establishment of prayer rooms in schools. One particular question that I have is whether superficially weaving such practices into existing teaching habits is sufficient, or whether deeper efforts through research and formalized training should be implemented.

2.2.2 Teachers as part of a team

In order to adequately meet the needs of refugee students, teachers must be aware that their role is one among many; they are not alone in their efforts but rather they are part of a team. This team may include principals, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, ESL teachers and Early Childhood Educators, even students. In a study of service provision for preschool refugee children, Hurley et al. (2011), posit that native students who form friendships with refugee students may gain much needed cultural perspective. Parents of refugee children too, must be encouraged to get involved. Refugee family members can become involved in the community, even acting as “cultural liaisons” for schools (Dachysyn & Kirova, 2011, p.228). For their part, teachers have various approaches by which they can equip themselves as more culturally responsive to the needs of young refugee learners. Combining these approaches forms a holistic
practice, which I consider here through three lenses: emotional availability, cultural awareness, and instructional techniques.

The emotional aspect is straightforward in scope. It includes an acknowledgment that the emotional state of the refugee student extends far greater than homesickness, sadness and culture shock (Ghebreslassie, 2016). David Goman, an educator working within the TDSB, says the key is to make refugee children feel welcome and supported, without singling them out (as cited in Ghebreslassie, 2016). Feurverger (2011) in documenting her auto-ethnographic experiences with refugees, regards school as a place to uplift the human spirit. Communication barriers may be significantly overcome through facial expression and school-appropriate gestures of affection. Even simple measures such as awareness of body language can positively influence a refugee’s psychosocial response to unfamiliar circumstances (Hurley et al., 2011). There is an idea that teachers may find the refugee circumstances overwhelming, or that perhaps the educational system is asking too much of teachers given their field of expertise (Feurverger, 2011). Addressing this concern, Feurverger (2011) encourages the notion of acting as a witness, and of considering oneself an advocate above all else. Retired Toronto ESL teacher Sheila Madaren, who worked with Vietnamese refugees dating back thirty-five years, also advises compassionate listening and acting as an advocate (as cited in Ghebreslassie, 2016).

2.2.3 Teachers’ practices

Researchers are in agreement that there is much work to be done regarding the cultural awareness held by teachers, and that cultural competence must become a higher priority (Hurley et al., 2011). The best practices document released by the Ministry of
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Education in British Columbia is a reasonable step towards improving the confidence and assurance teachers may lack in the task of addressing refugee needs. Education must be pluralistic, equitable, and culturally responsive (Feurverger, 2011). It is difficult to imagine such changes taking place with the implementation of tip sheets and information sessions alone. Kanu (2008) stresses professional development training is necessary to improve knowledge and attitudes. MacNevin (2012) agrees that improvements are needed with teacher training, resources, and inclusive practices. MacNevin (2012) identifies a need for ongoing professional development to prepare the teacher for a variety of challenges, including (but not limited to) teaching language, working with traumatized students, and encouraging positive social interaction. Policies on best practices in teaching refugee students should be developed at both the school department and Board level. Setting the tone of the classroom environment is integral—classroom atmosphere must not be culturally alienating or exclusive (Dachyshyn & Kirova, 2011). Matanga et al. (2008) mirroring the prescriptions outlined by Kanu and MacNevin, recommend an improvement in the educational provisions vis-à-vis enhancing professional development, and augmenting employment supports.

In terms of specific instructional strategies, there are a number of approaches expressed in some detail within current research. There is Berumen and Silva’s (2014) research on teaching strategies employing the concept of Culturally Relevant Teaching, or CRT. In addressing the language barrier, Hurley et al. (2011) suggest using alternative methods of communication, such as symbols from the Picture Exchange Communication System, or PECS. PECS is a unique system that teaches children to exchange a single picture for a desired item, eventually building sentences based on pictures with various
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attributes (Hurley et al., 2011). This approach, for example, might reduce the stress of language barriers, and facilitate basic communication until a more sophisticated development of language and literacy is reached. A different tactic is the idea of play therapy. Waniganayake (2001) in her research with refugee children in Australia, asserts that children have a fascination with violent play and war toys. She suggests that refugee children might come to terms with war and violence by exploring their emotions through this sort of play (Waniganayake, 2001). Although the notion of play as a strategy of reconciling experiences with conflict is intriguing, the concept of violent play and war toys is troubling to the author of this research paper.

The commonality in the approaches outlined above is the importance of creating and fostering a space for shared stories (Medley, 2012). The goal is the usage of instructional strategies devised upon a foundation of cultural awareness and emotional availability on the part of the teacher. The idea of closing the developmental gap with language is one of the foremost obstacles—however, research focusing on teaching strategies should also address behaviour management, and accommodation of multiple intelligences (Dachyshyn & Kirova, 2011). Current practices in initial assessment and placement of students should undergo continued scrutiny, and strategies of improvement with these practices should be explored (Kanu, 2008).

2.3 Confronting Existing and Potential Challenges for Educators

The challenges faced by professionals in education in meetings the needs of refugee children may be generally identified as social, and political-economic in nature. These challenges are not exhaustive, but they do serve as a foundation from which questions can be asked, inviting further research into the issue.
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The social challenges in meeting the needs of refugee students are rooted in cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness. Teachers would benefit from a deeper understanding of the milieu from which refugees are escaping, while respecting the integrity of the traditions and ways of life possessed within them. Issues with literacy and language development are ongoing, and there is little funding to address these issues (Kanu, 2008). How to improve and foster communication between parents at home and teachers at school? How do teachers sort out cultural complexities without feeling disheartened or overburdened? As well, Dachyshyn and Kirova (2011) suggest a “danger of internalizing the settler narrative” (p. 230). There is the risk of victimization and singling out through differentiated learning approaches—by effectively walking on eggshells, we risk damaging the dignity of those we are trying to help. Through a broad scope, there may be serious inconsistencies of knowledge and expertise with regards to the psychosocial needs of the Syrian refugee children in Canada. This inconsistency would not be simple to gauge. How does one measure the capability of educational professionals within a school board, a province, or the entire country?

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, more research is needed within each of the themes previously outlined—the barriers faced by refugee students, the responsibilities of educators in addressing these barriers, and the challenges educators face. At the very least, a move to update and adapt existing research to address the current Syrian refugee crisis would prove beneficial. For example, more research focusing on the trauma of very young learners in particular could help in addressing serious psychosocial needs. Furthermore, consistency across educational bodies is essential in devising a preparatory framework
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for educators. The document released by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia is a reasonable start, but should not be an end. Does the Liberal government’s resettlement program adequately support the needs of refugee students, and their teachers? Are tactics such as tip sheets and information sessions delivered by school boards for their teachers sufficient? Or, would deeper efforts through qualitative research and more formalized training fill the gap between rhetoric and practice? It would be beneficial to understand what strategies and teaching philosophies have worked so far with other refugee groups. By gauging feelings of preparedness and confidence, comfort or distress with confronting the realities that refugee children carry with them, a greater understanding of teachers’ roles in successfully establishing a much-needed sanctuary for young refugees is warranted.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

In this chapter, I explain the research methodology, identifying the motivations for my approach in lieu of the key research question: how do teacher’s attitudes and practices affect the learning needs of elementary-level refugee students? I discuss my research approach and procedure, and describe the main instrument of my data collection. I also identify the participants of the study. I list sampling criteria, and describe how the sampling procedures work. I also provide information on participants. I describe how I analyze the data, and relevant ethical issues are considered and addressed. Lastly, I speak about the methodological limitations of the study, while also acknowledging its strengths.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This study follows a qualitative research approach. It reviews existing pertinent literature, and incorporates data from semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with three to four educators. Creswell (2013) delineates quantitative method as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world” (p. 44). My process in conducting this research is not rigidly structured nor pre-determined, as it must be within a quantitative framework (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research is inductive; Bogdan and Biklen explain that the researcher does “not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (p. 6). In conducting my research, I do not feign to prove that educators are adequately nor inadequately meeting the needs of refugee students. As to
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what my informants share, I endeavor to preserve a tone of unprejudiced curiosity—as much as a qualitative researcher could hope to—in listening to their stories.

The manner of sampling conducted in qualitative research is small in scope, non-representative, and utilizes both convenience-based and snowball sampling approaches (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Conversely, quantitative research sampling is larger, more precise with its criteria, often randomly selected, and makes use of control groups. Qualitative relationships are based on empathy, trust, and are as egalitarian as possible. In quantitative research there is detachment, a marked distance between subject and researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research is conducted in such a way that the informants’ perspective is centrally considered, and that the framework from which to glean this perspective is as naturalistic and accommodating as possible (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen refer to qualitative research data as “soft, that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (p. 4). Bogdan and Biklen emphasize qualitative research and its use of authentic settings as the direct source of data; the researcher plays an inextricable role in the gathering and interpretation of the data. Consequentially, the outcome and understanding of the research is influenced as well. Qualitative research is descriptive, rigorous, and even minute details have the potential to be enormously important toward deeper understanding; it illuminates ways in which power is distributed in a society (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

I aim to learn about the attitudes and practices of teachers towards refugee experience; this methodology of qualitative research is suitable because I am interested in learning more about all aspects of the experiences of educators.
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3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The semi-structured interview format is advantageous as the main instrument of my data collection, because I am concerned with understanding behaviour from the informant’s own viewpoint. Within the context of research in education, the researcher is keen to identify how people such as teachers, principals, and students think and how they came to develop their own perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen maintain, “descriptive data are particularly important because qualitative methods enable researchers to study the assumptions people make, and the ways these assumptions and decisions propel them throughout their daily life” (p. 6).

Turner (2010) states interviews provide in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic, and adds each interview could be different, depending on how questions and answers are worded. Further, the opportunity to develop a rapport is possible. Considering the semi-structured interview approach, Turner says the researcher “remains in control, but flexibility takes precedence based on perceived prompts from the informants” (p. 756).

The semi-structured interview, as expressed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) is predicated on obtaining descriptions of the worldview of the informant, which are then interpreted. Kvale and Brinkmann say the end purpose of qualitative interviews are to produce knowledge, as a result of thoughtful groundwork and a carefully executed process. They emphasize that researchers “are normally seeking descriptions of how interviewees experience the world, its episodes and events, rather than speculations about why they have certain experiences” (p.18). Qualitative research is concerned with preserving authenticity whenever possible, and as Kvale and Brinkmann state, “even if
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Interviewers are generally interested in how people experience and act in the world prior to abstract theorizations’ they are actively interpreting the experiences and actions described in interviews (p. 20). Kvale and Brinkmann add it is also important to be open to multiple interpretations of what is said and done in an interview, and that “there is never one correct way to understand or practice a method or a technique” (p. 21). That this type of inquiry is naturalistic, embracing the researcher as an element of the process, speaks both to the richness and accessibility of the qualitative research method.

3.3 Participant Information

The following section explores participant information. Through it, the sampling criteria are explained, as well as sampling procedures and participant biographies.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The process of sampling for qualitative research differs greatly from quantitative research. The sampling size of the research conducted here is small, utilizing results from discussions with three or four educators. Convenience-based sampling is used for the intent of this research. In this type of sampling, the selection process of the informants is based on the judgment and abilities of the researcher, and differs from other more quantitative techniques such as random sampling (Coyne, 1997).

The informants are selected based on the following criteria: primarily, the informants will be teachers who are experienced educators, currently or recently working in the Greater Toronto Area. I specify this geographic area partly as a matter of convenience for the researcher, but also as the likelihood of experience with refugee students is higher in an area with a greater population, especially one as multi-cultural as Toronto. I will select teachers who currently have or recently had refugee students as
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members of their class. The movement of Syrian refugees into Canada and the Ontario public school system is a topical socioeconomic event. As such it would be beneficial to learn of experiences teachers have with Syrian refugees, but it is not a strict criterion for the informant selection. Indeed, refugees have been coming to Canada for many generations from differing ethno-geographic backgrounds, and continue to do so, and so cannot be discounted. Male and female participants will be selected. The research problem does not principally concern itself with gender, but gender may play a previously unanticipated role in how the needs of refugee students are being met.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures and recruitment

Random selection for qualitative research does not align with the objectives of this study, since such dedicated ethnographic research relies on specific, lived experiences. There is no need to have a control group, as I am not testing a hypothesis, as would be the case in quantitative research. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) emphasize that qualitative relationships are based on empathy, trust, and are as egalitarian as possible. Byrne (2001) maintains that it is obligatory for the researcher to “describe the sample in regards to relevant criteria so research consumers can understand how and why this sample was chosen” (p.498). I have contacted school boards and administrators, and have provided them with an overview of my research study. I will indicate the participant criteria and ask that my information be distributed to teachers who may meet my sampling criteria. As a method of sampling, I will employ a technique known as snowball sampling. Noy (2005) defines snowball sampling as occurring when:

The researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants. This process is, by necessity, repetitive: informants refer the
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researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer him or her to yet other informants, and so on. Hence the evolving ‘snowball’ effect, captured in a metaphor that touches on the central quality of this sampling procedure: its accumulative (diachronic and dynamic) dimension. (p. 330)

As an application of the snowball sampling technique, I will rely on existing contacts and networks to recruit additional participants. Byrne (2001) states the aim of qualitative research is to “increase understanding of a phenomenon as opposed to generalizing data extrapolated from the sample to the population at large” (p. 494).

Concerning the selection of informants, Cleary (2014) says participant selection must be congruent with the conceptual framework—that “participants should be likely to generate rich, dense, focused information on the research question to allow the researcher to provide a convincing account of the phenomenon” (p. 473). In scrutinizing for quality of communication with potential informants, Cleary stresses “verbal fluency, clarity, and explicatory and analytical abilities are central to the possibility of gathering in-depth information” (p. 473).

3.3.3 Participant biographies

The participants of my research study are both working professional in the field of education in the province of Ontario. They are both homeroom teachers at publicly funded schools, and have had at least five years’ experience working with refugee students. For the purposes of this research study, both participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Arnold is currently a junior-intermediate homeroom teacher in his twenty-seventh year of teaching. He is currently teaching sixth grade, and has had refugees in his
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classroom from varied regions of the world. Prior to teaching, he has experience at a youth crisis center in Toronto, and currently works within a publicly-funded Catholic school board in Ontario. His decision to be a teacher came from a desire to build lasting relationships with youth and make a difference.

Dolores is currently a primary-junior homeroom teacher in her twenty-fifth year of teaching. She is currently teaching first grade, within a public school in Toronto. As of early 2016, this public school has accepted a large number of Syrian refugee students. Her decision to become a teacher came from a desire to give back to the community.

3.4 Data Analysis

I analyzed the data from my interviews with particular consideration towards the work of Ryan and Bernard, in particular their approach to identifying themes. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003) analyzing text involves several tasks: discovering themes and sub themes, sorting themes according to importance, building frameworks of these themes, and accordingly linking these themes into theoretical models. Concerning the process of identification and interpretation, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state:

Interpretation is not an autonomous act, nor is it determined by any particular force, human or otherwise. Individuals interpret with the help of others—people from their past, writers, family, television personalities, and persons they meet in settings in which they work and play—but others do not do it for them. Through interaction, the individual constructs meaning (p. 27).

Ryan and Bernard (2003) maintain that some methods of data analysis are more suited to rich, complex narratives, while others are more appropriate for short responses to open-ended questions; some require more labor and expertise on behalf of the investigator,
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others less. As a graduate student at a Master level, my primary method of data analysis is organic, careful reexaminations and repeated listening of the interviews. Ryan and Bernard maintain themes come from the data, and also from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study—what they call an a priori approach. These a priori themes come from the “characteristics of the phenomenon being studied; from already agreed on professional definitions found in literature reviews; from local, common sense constructs; and from researchers’ values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88).

In analyzing data within the framework of qualitative research, Ryan and Bernard (2003) advise examining the information by examining it through several aspects; the first such aspect is repetition, or topics that occur and reoccur. D’Andrade (1991) says “anyone who has listened to long stretches of talk, knows how frequently people circle through the same network of ideas” (as cited in Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 89). The second aspect is categorization; Ryan and Bernard posit: “another way to find themes is to look for local terms that may sound unfamiliar or are used in unfamiliar ways. Grounded theorists refer to the process of identifying local terms as in vivo coding” and “ethnographers call this…schemes or cultural domains” (p. 89). A third aspect of data analysis is the use of metaphors and analogies, through which people often represent their thoughts, behaviours and experiences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Data analysis can also consider transitions. In the semi-structured interview format, investigators guide the conversation from one topic to another, creating transitions. Another aspect to look for in data analysis is the form of linguistic connectors: Ryan and Bernard suggest looking “for words or phrases such as ‘because,’ ‘since,’ and ‘as a result’ which often indicate causal
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relations” (p. 92). Additionally, time-oriented relationships are expressed with words such as before, after, then or next, and researchers can discover themes by searching for such groups of words and looking to see what kind of things the words connect. Ryan and Bernard also speak to the possibility of missing data; they posit, “instead of asking, what is here? We can ask What is missing? Researchers have long recognized that much can be learned from qualitative data by what is not mentioned” (p. 93).

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

When conducting interviews, Creswell maintains that researchers need to be sensitive to vulnerable populations, imbalanced power relations, and placing participants at risk, so beginning the study involves initial contact with the site, the individuals, and it is important to disclose the purpose of the study to the participants. Ethical issues must be reflected upon before conducting qualitative research. Creswell (2013) reminds researchers of what they must consider:

the ethical considerations involving the role as insider/outsider to the participants;
assessing issues that we may be fearful of disclosing; establishing supportive, respectful relationships without stereotyping and using labels that participants do not embrace; acknowledging whose voices will be represented in our final study;
and writing ourselves into the study by reflecting on who we are and the people we study. (p. 56)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) highlight two main issues when considering the ethics of data collection and analysis, particularly that “informants enter research projects voluntarily, understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved,” as well as “informants are not exposed to risks that are greater than the gains
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they might derive” (p. 49). In regards to this research project, the construction of the consent form and discussions with informants strongly reflect a consideration of these ethical issues. Bogdan and Biklen outline prudent recommendations for proceeding in an ethical manner, which include: avoiding research sites where informants many feel coerced to participate in the research, honouring informants’ privacy, conducting participant observation in public places, protecting the informants’ identities so that collected information does not embarrass or harm them, treating informants with respect and seeking their cooperation, and telling the truth when findings are analysed and written into the study (p. 50).

Additionally, there are a series of clearly articulated standards adhered to throughout the research study. All participants are assigned a pseudonym and they have been notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research study. Participants’ identities remain confidential, and any identifying markers related to their schools or students are excluded. There are minimal risks to participation in this study: given the research focus, it is possible that a particular question may trigger an emotional response from a participant, thus making them feel vulnerable. I minimize this risk by sending the interview questions to participants ahead of time, and by re-assuring them throughout the interview and in the consent letter that they have the right to refrain from answering any question that they do not feel comfortable with, as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation. Participants have had the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before I began data analysis. All data is in the form of audio recordings, which are stored on my password-protected mobile phone and computer, and will be destroyed after five years. Participants
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are asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. This consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications, and specifies expectations of participation (one 45 to 60-minute semi-structured interview).

3.6 Methodological Strengths and Limitations

That the aim of this study is to learn about the attitudes and practices of educators, the data for conducting this research project can only be substantiated through interviews with practiced teachers. Due to the ethical parameters observed by the author of this study, it is not possible to interview students or parents, or to conduct surveys or classroom observations. The limited number of teachers who have been available to be interviewed is a symptom of both the sampling technique, and the very nature of ethnographic research. While the findings can inform the topic at hand, they cannot generalize the experience of teachers to a broader truth.

In her discussion of presenting and evaluating qualitative research, Anderson (2010) outlines both the strengths and limitations of qualitative methodology. In speaking of strengths, Anderson maintains, “issues can be examined in detail and in depth. Interviews are not restricted to specific questions and can be guided or redirected by the researcher in real time” (p. 2). I would argue this is especially so given my research topic, as I cannot imagine adequately addressing the research question through the quantitative method. In discussing the limitations of qualitative research, Anderson (2010) posits that research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher, and more easily influenced by the researcher’s personal biases and idiosyncrasies. Rigor is more difficult to maintain, assess and demonstrate, and that the volume of data makes analysis
and interpretation more time consuming (Anderson, p. 2). Further, the researcher’s presence during data gathering is unavoidable, and may affect the informants’ responses.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the research methodology, and I identify the motivations for my approach in lieu of the research question. To reiterate the inquiry directing this research project, how can educators meet the needs of elementary refugee students? I have discussed my research approach and procedure, described the main instrument of my data collection, and identified the participants of the study. I listed sampling criteria, and described how the sampling procedures work. I also provided information on participants. I described how I analyze the data, and relevant ethical issues were considered and addressed. Lastly, I spoke to the methodological limitations of the study, while also acknowledging its strengths. In Chapter 4, I organize and explain the findings of my research, identifying common themes and connections across the areas of inquiry outlined through the purpose of this research. I discuss these findings in Chapter 5, offering comparisons and considerations against relevant literature, as well as the underlying research questions posed at the outset of this project.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

The following chapter presents the findings of the research interviews through data analysis and discussion. The data have been organized into salient themes, providing a clear framework with which to contextualize the findings. The purpose of this study is to address the question: How do teacher’s attitudes and practices affect the learning needs of refugee students? Two Ontario-certified teachers were interviewed, and are referred to here by pseudonyms. Connections are made between the responses of the interview participants and the relevant literature. Each theme is described and explored through the data. The first theme concerns in-class strategies, explored through the sub-themes of creating a welcoming classroom environment, addressing socio-emotional needs and behaviours, and cultural representation. The second theme concerns accessing in-school support systems. The sub-themes explored here concern the role of other staff in the school, professional development and material resources made available in the school. The third theme concerns community inclusion, which includes sub-themes about support from community members, clubs, teams and programs as well as fostering the role of the parent or guardian. Throughout all aspects of the findings, it is apparent that linguistic and cultural barriers may be considered the two predominant substructures to a variety of strategies, shortcomings and success stories concerning refugees who are new to Canadian classrooms.

4.1 In-Class Strategies and Observations

Data gleaned from the interviewees suggest that the theme of in-class strategies and observations is the most influential and immediate manner of addressing newcomer
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refugee students. It concerns sub-themes of creating a welcoming class environment, experiences in addressing socio-emotional needs and behaviour, as well as balancing representations of culture. Both participants call attention to modelling empathy and compassion, and both acknowledge the importance of student involvement.

4.1.1 Class environment

Arnold and Dolores emphasized the utmost importance of creating a welcoming atmosphere for refugee students in their homeroom classes. Accordingly, a prevailing theme that echoes throughout the research is the idea of school as a sanctuary (Medley, 2012). Arnold noted the importance of communicating that the classroom is a place of acceptance, and made sure to “talk about Canada as a country, and that Canada is a country of immigrants.” The ideals of inclusion, multi-culturalism and acceptance weighed heavily within each of the participants’ responses. Both Dolores and Arnold spoke to the classroom as being a point of intervention. Arnold stated: “Teachers have a critical role to play in just developing that trust, I think, that kids feel comfortable and understand what the school's about.” Dolores reported that she was careful to gauge the comfort level of the refugee student, noting “If we see that anything is lacking we need to intervene and step in and not wait for someone else to notice. I think we need to be the ones that are proactive and advocate for those children.”

Both participants’ responses indicated that part of creating a welcoming atmosphere is to build a sense of community among the students. When outlining her own role, Dolores noted “It's our job as educators to teach the children how to be understanding of differences and patience.” Interestingly in this specific example of instilling values, Dolores had been referring to the non-refugee students. To her, coaching
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the non-refugee students to model an inclusive environment was integral to having the refugee students understand not only what is expected of them, but what they can anticipate in being a member of the class. Dolores stressed the importance of “giving our Syrian students a chance to learn instead of answering for them,” suggesting not only a sense of equitable community, but the ability of refugee students to have some agency, and take ownership of their position in the class.

When asked about her role as an educator as compared to other professionals in the refugee acclimatization process (i.e. counsellors, psychiatrists, social workers), Dolores responded “I think our role is to first and foremost make them feel welcome and help them to feel safe.” As found within the literature, Dachyshyn and Kirova (2011) maintain that setting the tone of the classroom environment is integral—it must not be culturally alienating or exclusive. Dolores clarified that she adjusts her teaching practice according to the perceived needs of the student, rather than simply prioritizing academic success. She reported: “My role is to find out what their level of knowledge is now and how I can help them to grow as learners. And if their needs need to be more in the social then we focus there, or the emotional. I have no idea what traumas they may have experienced before they’ve come.” This notion of discomfort or unfamiliarity is echoed in the research, as Kanu (2008) refers to “acculturation stress,” a kind of unfamiliarity with academic skills often taken for granted, including note-taking, studying, academic writing, critical thinking, literacy and numeracy, and organizational skills (p.924). He also references the idea of “academic cultural dissonance,” which is the realization by a student that academic expectations differ widely from their background knowledge (p.924). This can lead to frustration, and lack of willpower to acclimatize. In considering
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the emotions of a refugee student new to the class, especially negative emotions, Arnold stated “You want to reduce that preoccupation as much as you can. That you're really no different than anybody else here, we all come from somewhere.”

When asked about the role of other students in addressing the needs of refugees, both participants cited the importance of encouraging student involvement in the process. Dolores regularly states to her students “We're helping our Syrian students to learn and grow, and we need to give them the time and the space to do that.” By asking the students to give special consideration, to “demonstrate empathy and compassion and kindness and caring,” Dolores hoped this would create a welcoming atmosphere that would last. In a study of preschool refugee children, Hurley et al. (2011) posit that native students who form friendships with refugee students may gain much needed cultural perspective. Arnold noted that “do tend to be very accepting,” and gave an example of a Heritage Day at his school. During Heritage Day, “kids bring their story to school or they might study different cultures and where they're from,” Arnold remembered, adding “[they] come in and bring different foods that they might prepare as traditional foods.” For Arnold, allowing student involvement gave them a sense of ownership. He explained that “getting kids involved in that process… [they] would be able to direct you as to what is really helpful and what is not necessarily that helpful in terms of providing services for them.”

David Goman, an educator working within the Toronto District School Board, says the key is to make refugee children feel welcome and supported, without singling them out (Ghebreslassie, 2016). Dolores stated that she uses class meetings to encourage student involvement, as well as to review appropriate behavior. She also cited the use of Read-
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Alouds which specifically teach mindfulness, indicating that in her classroom behaviour is not only modelled by the teacher but embedded in classroom curriculum.

4.1.2 Addressing socio-emotional needs and behaviour

Both participants acknowledged the likelihood of trauma in their students, and trauma itself as a major contributor to behaviour in the classroom. Trauma can be understood as a reaction to a stressful experience wherein a person’s ability to cope is severely weakened (Medley, 2012). Medley notes that refugees may choose to suppress memories of their trauma or conceal it from others as a coping mechanism, or because they feel shame for being victimized. If trauma is suspected or evident, both participants reported that they adjust their pedagogical approaches accordingly. Of particular note from the interview process: in most cases, the background details of refugee students seem to be largely unknown. Dolores expressed one of her underlying assumptions, being that “because the Syrian kids come from, some of them, very violent, very disturbing situations, we don't know what kind of trauma they’ve experienced.” Arnold cited the need for external support in instances of trauma, noting that with his students who seem to be afflicted by it, he acknowledges they “need a lot of support there. If someone's experienced trauma, [I] try to find counselling that's available for them.”

Aside from outside intervention due to trauma, both participants described pedagogical approaches that empathize with the perspective of the refugee student. Arnold ruminated about understanding the situation from the student’s point of view: “I wonder, what is their perception of what's going on right now? What do they think about institutions based on what their experience is in their home country? The trust factor may be pretty low.” Dolores likened it to cracking a code or solving a puzzle. She attempts to
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decipher the child’s history, at which point she addresses “[issues] that are bigger priorities first” before focusing on academics.

Unlike Arnold, Dolores noted aggression as a prevalent socio-emotional response that she has observed in some refugee students. Dolores finds behaviour management to be challenging, not least because of language barriers. She noted “I think the toughest part I feel is how to get them to settle,” and “[some of them] are quite aggressive and we're trying to teach them how not to always resort to a physical response when they're upset. I think it’s just instinctual for them to react that way.” By way of a solution, Dolores mentioned teaching play strategies which avoid aggression, and that she was involving other non-refugee students in the teaching of these strategies. Specifically, Dolores referred to a PALS program, “where [teachers] basically have older kids who are play ambassadors and they will teach the younger kids games that they can play.”

Should playtime go awry, Dolores emphasized timely intervention so other students do not get hurt. Through the interview process, it became apparent that this has been an ongoing issue since a large number of refugee students arrived at the school. For Dolores, the use of a reward system has also been a useful strategy in addressing unwanted behaviour. She explained:

Sometimes they're resistant to doing what you ask of them, and we find that if they are working towards a reward we can have more success sometimes if there's something they really wanna do, like go on the playground, or play with the iPad, or visit a teacher from last year. We can work those in as rewards to get them to work on what they need to do in their classroom first.
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The literature suggests that such displays of unwanted behaviour may have deep, psychological triggers. The emotional state of the refugee student extends far greater than homesickness, sadness and culture shock (Ghebreslassie, 2016). Stressors they may have been subjected to include direct violence and combat, a loss of home or family members, poor health, detention or torture (Birman, Batia, Ho, Pulley, Everson, Ellis, & Gonzalez, 2005) This list is not exhaustive, and any and all of these factors can affect a child’s mental and physical health, which may manifest through behaviour such as aggression (Berman et al., 2005).

4.1.3 Representation of culture

Both participants’ responses spoke toward a delicate balancing act of honouring the cultural background of a refugee student, indeed of any student, while also instilling and demonstrating Canadian values and culture. Dachyshyn and Kirova (2011), warn of the danger of “internalization of the settler narrative,” the potential victimization of refugees, as well as the risk of encouraging settlers in “becoming as Canadian as possible,” thereby jeopardizing the preservation of their native culture (p.230). Though some consideration of native culture was apparent, it seemed that both interviewees emphasized access to, and acceptance of Canadian culture by the refugee students. Arnold called it an issue of inclusion, noting “for kids accessing the [local] language and the cultures is huge for them to be able to feel part of that community.” For both Arnold and Dolores, language and culture are the surest, most daunting barriers facing refugee students. When asked to how the needs of refugee students are different than other students, Dolores responded “this situation is different because they're [also] dealing with
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culture shock, they're dealing with language, just getting used to a whole new way of life here,” and admitted that there are probably major adjustment issues.

Both participants emphasized the importance of sharing stories, where appropriate. The importance of creating and fostering a space for shared stories is also echoed in the literature (Medley, 2012). The instructional strategies are devised upon a foundation of cultural awareness and emotional availability on the part of the teacher. Arnold advised bringing the child’s story into the classroom, if they are comfortable. He indicated that sharing stories could be done with the whole class, or in a one-on-one conference format. In either case, demonstrating interest as an educator seemed to be of primary concern. The social challenges in meeting the needs of refugee students are rooted in cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness. It appears that the interviewees echo the sentiment of the literature, agreeing that they would benefit from a deeper understanding of the milieu from which refugees are escaping (Kanu, 2008). Arnold noted “bringing the story to the classroom, I think those things are really helpful so kids can come in and share their culture and find ways to do that.” Arnold cited lessons in social studies and history as specific avenues through which to acknowledge different cultural values. Reflecting on the demographics of his students, he noted: “When I look at my classroom some years ago, man, we got kids from Poland and from El Salvador, and from Iraq, and from all over the place. That's a rich history lesson in itself.” This is also considered by the literature, which suggests cultural competence must become a higher priority (Hurley et al., 2011).

Arnold also gave an example of studying the federal election in class, and the ensuing discussion regarding the decision by the Canadian government to welcome a
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number of Syrian refugees into the country. Arnold spoke about attempting to maintain objectivity in most instances of political discussion, though he did feel it prudent to intervene with certain topics. In particular, one class discussion eventually shifted to American politics and Donald Trump, whereby Arnold interjected: “I would say, ‘Well, I don't agree with that. A lot of Canadians have different ideas about that and that this is not generally what we accept to be okay.’” For Arnold, making some of his own politics known and highlighting the differences between Canadian politics and that of Donald Trump, is “comforting for a kid to hear who doesn't necessarily know.” During the interview, Dolores also made note of the political actions taken by the Canadian government to accept Syrian refugees. She communicated her pride in Canada, and to her, the welcoming of refugees is a reflection of the nation demonstrating compassion and empathy. Interestingly, Dolores did add: “In retrospect, I think we needed to do more prep other than just rolling out the red carpet to receive them.” Such a reflection is one I have had myself as a researcher, and is partially the reason for embarking on this study.

4.2 Accessing In-school Support Systems

A second theme has emerged through the analysis process, which centers on helpful resources outside of the classroom, still within the school milieu, as identified by the interview participants. In particular, their reliance on other staff members, use of material resources, and professional development opportunities are explored through the following sub-themes.

4.2.1 Reliance on other school staff

Both participants seem to agree that other staff at school play an important role in meeting the needs of refugee students, and equally recommend that more specialized
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staffing would be beneficial. Dolores stated that a teaching candidate in her classroom has assisted her in understanding the cultural differences she encounters in her refugee students, and that the candidate “is helping me to understand why the children do certain things that to us in our culture seem unusual, but for them that's an everyday normal thing to do. Dolores also referenced an Educational Assistant at her school, working in the kindergarten classroom. Dolores described both the Educational Assistant and Teaching Candidate with great enthusiasm:

She speaks Arabic and she's been amazing. She has been our liaison between school and home. If a child has had an incident at school, she's the one that we would ask too call and translate so that the parent is aware of what has been going on. And now that I have my [teaching candidate], she's also writing notes in Arabic and clipping them in the agenda so that the parents know what's going on.

It appears that having extra staff who are trained and possess relevant skills is particularly helpful, not only with organizational tasks, but socio-emotional needs. Should the students develop a bond with a staff member and feel comfortable fairly quickly, Dolores stated “they can go to that person when they're feeling upset, or if they have lost control they'll settle down faster when they're around that person.” Dolores also added that the person may be another staff member, but “it can be an older student too. That also works I think as a means of intervention, too. If it's not a staff member, it can be a child.”

Conversely, it did not sound as though the staffing at Arnold’s school had been as effective. When asked about challenges in meeting the needs of refugee students, Arnold cited “the lack of responsiveness, or maybe awareness at certain times to the needs of a kid.” He explained:
Sometimes people don't always recognize that if the kid's not doing well at school at that point that there may be other factors there. For example, you don't think a kid might have a mild intellectual disability, when in fact they may just not be accessing a curriculum because of a trauma or because they don't completely understand the language. People need to really be aware of these things because at different times I felt like that wasn’t given enough consideration.

The perils of misjudging a refugee student’s needs are reflected in the literature, which have determined that academic gaps are extremely detrimental, and exacerbated by a fast-paced curriculum, distrust of authority figures or fear of speaking out (Kanu, 2008). Additionally, the current practices employed with grade placement tests may not be ideal, as they are primarily given by age, rather than academic ability. According to Kanu, these practices in initial assessment and placement of students should undergo continued scrutiny, and strategies of improvement with these practices should be explored.

Ultimately, both participants called for a greater amount of staffing to help address the needs of refugee students. Arnold emphasized an ongoing need for more early childhood educators who help out with getting kids into school and “feeling comfortable early on.” Dolores also reflected on the challenge in sufficient staffing. For her, “The best way we could be supported is to know more about the backgrounds of these children, and have more staff on hand to help them so that they can integrate faster.” Dolores also noted the involvement of other homeroom teachers, as most all of them had at least one refugee student in their classroom. She explained that they are exchanging ideas and resources on an ongoing basis, “sharing ideas on what's working,
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what's not working. We're a very close-knit staff that way, and we're very open with giving ideas and sharing materials.” Of particular interest through the interview process is the apparent variability of how staff members at a given school interact and collaborate, in that it may be very “close-knit,” or operating with a fair degree of independence.

4.2.2 Material resources

Both participants mentioned digital media as a useful resource in helping to address the needs of refugee children. Whereas Arnold mentioned these examples in a hypothetical sense, it became clear that Dolores had used a considerable amount of material resources, drawn from specialized areas within the school.

During the interview, Arnold ruminated about the benefit of showing films as a teaching tool. He wondered whether development was possible, of “short things you can show on video about what it's like to be in Canada, or in Ontario, and the education system and coming from a different culture, focused on inclusiveness.” Arnold spoke of the prevalence of digital media in society, and how youth seem to access such media easily, or at least respond strongly to it. The material resources Dolores mentioned were more comprehensive in form, incorporating not only digital media, but tactile objects which were otherwise reserved for special needs students. This is not unlike some recommendations found in the literature. Hurley et al. (2011), suggest using alternative methods of communication, such as symbols from the Picture Exchange Communication System, or PECS. In discussing language barriers, Dolores mentioned that her school was in the process of attaining dual track print books in Arabic and English, and pointed out the challenge in teaching Literacy to refugee students, as “their language [Arabic] is right to left and we're left to right, so [we’re] trying to help them to understand how English is
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different.” Dolores also mentioned her extensive use of visual symbols and pictures, to communicate basic instructions in the classroom, mostly behaviour-related. In terms of digital media, Dolores mentioned iPads and SmartBoards being employed in her classroom, although digital media has not always been successful. She explained:

I've tried Google's Translate on the iPads, but apparently from what I've been told, the dialect is a little different, so the kids don't necessarily understand the interpretation that the iPad gives. So I've tried to use that as a tool but it hasn't been necessarily effective as a translator. Human translation seems to be the best method so far.

Finally, Dolores also mentioned using tools normally reserved for students with special needs or attention deficit issues. Specifically, she noted using seat pads that have a textured side and a flat side, in order to help them sit for longer periods of time. Dolores explained further about the utility of tactile resources:

We're using stress balls when they feel upset about something that's happened and they're very tense, a stress ball can help them to calm down. I'm using Play Doh which is another kindergarten strategy which is tactile, so as many tactile activities as I can incorporate in my classroom I will because it's very calming, therapeutic.

Through an analysis of not only relevant literature but also participant responses, it has become clear that the efficacy and particular nature of material resources in working with refugee students is something to be explored further. It would be beneficial to understand on a deeper level why tactile resources are (or are not) effective with refugee students. It may be that there is an established rationale for its effectiveness with
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special needs students, yet it is the belief of the researcher that a more directed analysis with refugee students could prove insightful.

4.2.3 Teacher training

When asked about their interest in attending further workshops or seminars about addressing the needs of refugee students, the participants had distinctly opposing views. Arnold indicated disinterest, while Dolores seemed eager to expand her professional development vis-à-vis workshops. The relevant literature, almost universally, seems to argue for increased training. MacNevin (2012), identifies a need for ongoing professional development to prepare the teacher for a variety of challenges, including teaching language, working with traumatized students, and encouraging positive social interaction.

Despite this, Arnold spoke to the time constraints working as an educator: “There are just so many seminars and workshops and committees at schools. You're gonna find that people don't necessarily want more of that.” During our discussion, he considered attending a workshop should it occur during a Professional Development (PD) day, but otherwise he confessed “it just comes down to a huge time crunch.” Arnold also questioned the practicality of workshops as a development tool, stating “sometimes as great as a workshop is, sometimes it doesn't always translate to an impact in the classroom.” For Dolores, the sudden influx of Syrian refugees into her classroom was the main reason for wanting further training as an educator. She noted:

We were learning about how to integrate them [Syrian refugee children] at the same time as them coming in. We didn't really have an introductory period where we could prepare in advance for their arrival. I feel like as teachers we should
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have had far more training on how to integrate them in. I almost feel like there should have been some sort of program or something in place to help them merge in. If we had more training on what to expect, how to prepare, I think we probably could have received them a little better.

Dolores reflected on her sense of ill-preparedness, and challenging experiences, noting that she was constantly adapting, modifying or entirely changing her approach. She points to her inexperience with such a large group of refugees entering the school system all at once, as a motivating factor for extended training. She admitted: “This is the first time in my teaching experience with a group of twenty or more kids coming in at the same time and changing the way a school feels.” When asked whether she would like further training, she emphatically agreed to the idea, mentioning that the administrator at her school was currently tasked with seeking additional information about opportunities for professional development. She concluded by pointing out “we need all the help we can get to be as effective as possible.” Interestingly, in 2009 the Ministry of Education in the province of British Columbia released a guide about refugee students to its school boards. The document is a list of best practices, and helps to raise educators’ awareness of the psychosocial conditions of refugee children. Currently there does not seem to be an equivalent document in Ontario, at least to the same degree of detail and cited scholarly sources. Some realities that refugees face, such as mental health conditions, are likely to present a challenge to teacher who may not feel rightly equipped to deal with such severe problems. According to the literature, it can be hard to develop a singular framework of teaching methodology, since each individual student develops their own coping mechanisms to the circumstances which led them to flee their homeland (Feurverger,
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2011). There is an idea that teachers may find the refugee circumstances overwhelming, or that perhaps the educational system is asking too much of teachers given their field of expertise (Feurverger, 2011). Addressing this concern, both Feurverger (2011) and the participants of this study encourage the notion of acting as a witness, and of considering oneself an advocate above all else.

4.3 Community Inclusion

The third theme considers factors which occur primarily outside of the classroom, and school. Both participants spoke to the importance of community ties, whether it be through seeking help from members of the community, or facilitating programs outside of school. In addition, highlighting the importance of parental involvement in the school is evident through analysis of the data.

4.3.1 Support from community members

In considering the challenges posed to refugee families recently arrived to Canada, Arnold concluded that employment, dealing with trauma and housing comprise the greatest struggles. Arnold referred to the community response outside of his school to the current Syrian refugee crisis: “There are some things going on in the church groups and some non-specific fundraisers at the school or whatever, but there's certainly a lot going on in the community to support that type of thing.” Arnold also suggested that increased access to social work and funding would be beneficial, specifying “more social workers would probably help or more people who can help the entire family to access the things they need in the community.”

Dolores similarly considered the basic needs of refugee families as the primary concern, identifying some of these basic needs as sufficient food, sleep, and clothing.
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She maintained that academics cannot be considered without addressing these needs first, and gave an example of running a campaign during the holidays. Dolores explained:

We try and identify families in need, and we do hampers for them. That's donations from parents from our school and from staff and we make sure that it's delivered before we leave for holidays so that no family that is part of our school community will go without during the holiday. It can have gift cards, food items, clothing, toys, gifts, pyjamas, things like that, so that we know that they'll have as great a break as we would.

The importance of action from community members is also reflected in the literature. Matanga, Freeze, Duchesne and Nyachoti (2008) as well as Kanu (2008) argue for the need of psychological treatment programs, decent housing, better coordination of support services, and increased funding. As well Hurley et al. (2011) emphasize funding as a priority, and that research efforts should be made to discover what practices could be put into place to better serve refugees.

4.3.2 Clubs, teams and programs

The participants had differing ideas regarding the utility of extracurricular programs to help refugee students’ well-being and engagement with the community. Dolores suggested programs geared specifically for parents, rather than students. Specifically, a program that would communicate the importance of parental involvement in school, noting the utility of being able to work with parents collaboratively to clarify individual learning needs. Dolores concluded that “if the parents had something like that to attend, maybe as part of their English classes if they're learning to speak English, I
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think [the programs] would really help a lot.” Alternatively, Arnold was emphatic in his belief that extracurricular involvement is beneficial for refugee students. He noted:

A lot of the things that you might think are not that important are actually really important. For example, doing 'Meet the Teacher' nights, or barbecues, or maybe sports games, soccer games, plays, things like this that kids might become involved in that then draws the parents into a community and they start to absorb the culture from that point.

Arnold also mentioned the importance of physical spaces—whether referred to as family centers, play centers, or community centers—as being “fantastic opportunities” for students and parents. He emphasized that being part of a sports team is not required per se, rather there are many types of clubs being offered within his community. This sort of variety and availability allows for “access to the community and interaction with kids after hours.” For Arnold, building teamwork skills and social skills are deeply beneficial to the student in achieving success within the school system. Interestingly, he also highlighted the importance of the arts as having an equivalent potential to connect parents, and provide access into the community. Arnold also mentioned that a family center was being built as an attachment to his school. He praised the decision, explaining that “it's kind of becoming the hub for the whole community to come get information about nutrition or whatever, prenatal care and all kinds of things.”

Upon reviewing the literature, not much detail is apparent with regards to the effects of after-school programs, clubs and sports teams on the well-being of refugee students and their families. It is the opinion of the researcher that further insight into the experiences of refugee families and extra-curricular pursuits would be beneficial.
4.3.3 Fostering parent-to-school connection

Both interview participants stressed the importance of not only making refugee students feel welcome at school, but making their parents and guardians feel welcome as well. Dolores gave an example of welcoming sessions and clothing, toys and book drives held for Syrian refugee families that were held by her school. She noted the collection of “men's, women's clothes, children's clothes, baby items, all of that stuff and we just basically laid it all out, sorted and laid it all out and had families come to take things that they needed immediately.” Dolores emphasized the need to reach out to parents, saying she needed “to provide avenues that they can communicate with the school so that they don't feel isolated or secluded from what's going on in their children's lives at school.”

Arnold spoke to a challenge in parental involvement, namely that most refugee parents and guardians do not have access to language development in the way their children do. He noted: “I really think kids get to school, so then they hear the language and they catch on pretty quick, but sometimes parents don't have that same access to conversation and language.” As instilling trust in the classroom is influential, Arnold mentioned inspiring parents to trust the institution also, noting “[we are] here to help them and it's not something that they should be afraid of. They're still in control as parent.” In consideration of how refugee families can get involved in the local community generally, Arnold considers the school as an important gateway, by explaining: “We're really that link between the parents and the community as a whole. A lot of the things that are going to bring a family into the community are gonna happen through a school.”
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The realities of what refugee families may confront in connections to the school diverge here from what has been discovered in the literature. Particularly, the literature suggests problems may extend beyond a sense of isolation. Certain responsibilities may put additional pressure on the student in balancing a school-home life balance, and support at home may not be present, even if for a lack of parental expertise in knowing how to best support their children’s education (Kanu, 2008). Hurley, Medici, Stewart and Cohen (2011), reason that cultural dissonance between home and school is a prime contributor to poor educational outcome, and that children are likely to suffer emotional upset aggravated by an inability to communicate. However, there is some similarity between the data which emerged from the interview process and the literature: the significance of refugee families in sharing their culture. Refugee family members can become involved in the community, even acting as “cultural liaisons” for schools (Dachysyn & Kirova, 2011, p.228). Still, Kanu warns of the dangers of victimization and singling out of newcomer refugees can be exacerbated by current realities of the resettlement process (2008).

4.4 Conclusion

Through the analysis process, three themes have emerged. The first theme concerns in-class strategies, explored through the sub-themes of creating a welcoming classroom environment, addressing socio-emotional needs and behaviours, and cultural representation. The second theme concerns accessing in-school support systems. The sub-themes explore the role of other staff in the school, professional development as well as material resources made available in the school. The third theme concerns community inclusion, and includes sub-themes about support from community members, clubs,
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teams and programs as well as highlighting the role of the parent or guardian.

Throughout all aspects of the findings, it is apparent that linguistic and cultural barriers may be considered the two predominant substructures to a variety of strategies, shortcomings and success stories concerning refugees who are new to Canadian classrooms. Not all themes commanded equal relevance to the literature, and little insight was discovered about the role of policy in meeting the needs of refugee students. What is missing are the voices of the refugees themselves, and the other non-refugee students in their classrooms—while such a gap is unavoidable through the interview process, the author of this study recommends more qualitative research from these perspectives.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of the above findings, give recommendations and contemplate potential areas of further research.
Chapter Five: Implications

5.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

The present research study was designed to learn more about teachers’ attitudes and practices in meeting the needs of refugee students. The findings serve to support the extant literature pertaining to the socio-emotional and academic needs of refugee students and to tell us more about the challenges they face. This chapter summarizes the research findings, highlights the present study’s implications for various stakeholders, provides several recommendations, and suggests directions for future research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

Following interviews with two educators, an extensive analysis revealed three predominant themes: in-class strategies and observations, accessing in-school support systems, and community inclusion.

The first theme, concerning in-class strategy, is reflected by teachers emphasizing the idea of school as a sanctuary. As participants of the present study indicate, schools must be a place of inclusion and should champion the diversity of its student population. Both the data and the research assert that schools are primarily a place of instilling values and giving agency to students (Berumen, 2014). The findings also indicate that the pedagogical approach taken by educators must not single refugee students out, or give them cause to believe they are being unfairly segregated within the education system (Hurley, Medici, Stewart & Cohen, 2011).

Another aspect of developing in-class strategy is met through gaining an understanding of the personal history of the refugee student. Both the literature and the data gleaned from participants of the study are reminders that the likelihood of trauma
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experienced by a refugee student must be considered, and that impactful details of their background are largely unknown (Simich, Beiser, Stewart & Mwakarimba, 2005). According to the participant data, pedagogical practice should privilege empathy and compassion. Empathizing with a refugee student, regardless of an unknown background, can be an effective starting point for relationship-building in lieu of additional information. As participants of the study assert, showing compassion is not limited by a language barrier. Correspondingly, the theme of in-class strategy is chiefly concerned with the socio-emotional aspect of the refugee child as they integrate within the Canadian classroom. Aggression has been argued as a potential symptom of mental health issues, which are themselves likely a result of trauma (Dachyshyn & Kirova, 2011). According to the participant data, simultaneously honouring a refugee child’s native culture and instilling Canadian values is a delicate balancing act. Language barriers make for considerable difficulty in explaining complex aspects of Canadian society, according to the participants of the present study. Overcoming language barriers is crucial to making refugee students feel at ease in their classrooms. One participant of the present study increasingly finds himself addressing sentiments of Islamophobia heard in the media, and works in his classroom to distinguish Canadian politics and values as distinct from American, so that his students may feel secure and welcomed.

The second theme concerns in-school support systems. The data suggest that educators benefit from a readily available team of professional support. The benefit of specialists, such as social workers or interpreters, is that their expertise can underpin the duties performed by the homeroom teacher in accommodating the needs of all students in the class. Having an interpreter helps overcome the language barrier, and as such students
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are supported both academically and socially (Kanu, 2009). According to the participants of the study, when specialized staff are available, students are likely to develop social bonds with these team members. Still, making use of available specialists is complicated by their inconsistency across schools. Both educators interviewed for this study and the relevant literature call for more staffing (Kanu, 2009). Besides integrating the participation of specialists, the data of the present study indicate that educators feel increasingly supported when there is a variety of material resources available. The utility of digital media, dual-language textbooks, SmartBoards as well as resources traditionally devised for Special Education is reflected through the participant data of the present study. Conversely, workshops and various similar forms of professional development have been met with diverging opinions. Some teachers wish for more professional development as they presently feel underprepared, whereas others feel it is asking too much of their schedules when time is already a scant and precious resource.

The third and final theme speaks to the role of the community. The data indicates that if there are not efforts made in increasing the amount of community support networks available, then teachers are limited in their ability to meet the needs of refugee students and their families. Also reflected in the data is the interest from teachers in understanding the potential socio-emotional benefits of refugee students’ involvement in social clubs and sports teams. In addition, the challenges of a language barrier are further complicated while educators attempt to foster relationships with family members of refugee students, in order to emphasize the school as a helpful point of access to community involvement.
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The following section discusses the implications of the preceding themes, both broadly for the Canadian education system and specifically for educators and refugee students.

5.2 Implications

The present study draws attention to serious implications for the education system now and in the near future, particularly as large numbers of Syrian refugees are being settling and integrated within schools across the country (Cheadle, 2015 November 25). Generally, the study serves as a reminder to the Ministry of Education, policymakers, and administrators that if teachers are not adequately prepared to welcome a large number of refugee students, these students suffer and are put at a considerable disadvantage. The present study is an additional voice to the longstanding issue of adequate staffing and funding, and policymakers should take heed of its continued necessity. Currently there is moderate support from specialized staff, but it is unevenly distributed across schools and would benefit from further proliferation. A critical review of the assessment and placement process for refugee students could safeguard an equitable approach, and avoid inadvertently disadvantaging young learners.

In addition, the present study demonstrates several implications specifically for elementary teachers who have refugee students in their classes. First, the current framework and depth of professional development for teaching refugee students is not sufficient. While some educators want more intensive pedagogical support and others want less, professional development that is further enhanced by updated research would assist the majority of educators in feeling prepared beyond “lunch-n-learn” sessions. As well, the perpetuation of language barriers inhibits the sharing of thoughts and
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feelings, be they positive or negative. These barriers are likely to intensify if adequate support staff such as interpreters are not readily available, and may surpass educators’ ability to meet the needs of their refugee students. Finally, the significance of the journey made by refugee students to a host country and the experience of acclimatization are not always readily apparent to an educator, especially in the early days of schooling. If teachers work to ensure that their classrooms are inclusive and welcoming, family members of refugee students may feel more at ease in accessing the school as a support system.

5.3 Recommendations

The implications of the present study give rise to four recommendations. Two of these recommendations prescribe a provincial and federal level of action, and two are relevant locally for school administrators and teachers.

The first recommendation is that the federal government move beyond rolling out the proverbial red carpet for the current influx of refugees who have arrived to Canada. The responsibility of support towards the continued integration and success of refugees in Canadian society falls largely to the Ministry of Education in each province. It is the recommendation of the researcher that the Ontario Ministry of Education both increase available funding and maximize its efficiency. Whether that is actualized in the form of an examination of current funding distribution (and subsequent redistribution), or drawing on external resources to increase the amount of available funding, adjustments need to be made in order that specialized staff are equitably dispersed in schools across the province.
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The second recommendation pertains to the provincial level, and it is to review the current assessment and placement process of refugee students with a critical lens. Research findings that are derived from refugee student experience as observed through the assessment process would benefit from a contemporary context, with respect to the current refugee crisis. In turn, an assessment process which has undergone extensive critical analysis can ensure an equitable starting point for refugee students, from which educators can then structure their approach. Further, an update of current professional development would benefit from a revised assessment process. Current professional development which is contextualized in respect to the current refugee crisis would enhance the rigour of such development, as well as hone educators’ awareness of the needs of refugee students as related to their own classrooms.

The third recommendation specifically concerns teachers. Teachers must recognize the needs of refugee students as distinct from other students, and the conflation of distinct exceptional needs should be avoided. Though there may be similarities in pedagogy for refugee students as compared to English Language Learners, students with exceptionalities or behavioural issues, teachers should avoid fusing distinct considerations into one universal approach. Teachers should not only be made fully aware of the resources and staff support available at their schools, but must also be purposeful in their use.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Inasmuch as the present study has served to expand upon the relevant literature, it has also highlighted the need for further study. In future research endeavours, it is
recommended that a greater emphasis be placed upon four areas of interest, as outlined below.

One area is to more widely gauge teachers’ feelings of preparedness and confidence in addressing the recent surge of refugee students who are arriving to Ontario schools. As indicated by the participant data, there is likely a disparity among the Ontario teaching population regarding a sense of preparedness in supporting refugee students who have recently escaped traumatizing and unstable living conditions. Another area deserving of research is the efficacy of support material currently used by educators. Is it beneficial to reallocate items used for Special Education, such as stress balls and floor cushions for use with refugee students? What digital media are suitable for use with refugee students? Another area of interest relates to the effects of participation in social clubs and sports toward the well-being of refugee students. Such research would prove useful in the construction of a holistic, child-centered framework specific to refugee students. Finally, a crucial gap in current research is an omission of the voices of refugee children. As reflected in discussions with participants of the present study, refugee students occasionally confide in staff and other students. Refugee children all have rich stories to share and complex socio-emotional needs to be met. Under careful ethical review and guidance, collecting ethnographic data which privileges their point of view may shed light on these stories and do them justice.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research project asks the question: how do teachers’ attitudes and practices affect the need of refugee students? The data for the study is synthesized through semi-unstructured interviews with two Ontario Certified Teachers working in Ontario public
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schools, who are currently working directly with refugee students. These participants have been selected through convenience sampling. Through the data collection process, three main themes emerged: in-class strategies, in-school support systems and community inclusion.

Although welcoming refugees is a longstanding facet of Canadian history, it is especially prescient now. As such, the present study is important because it emphasizes a consideration of the refugee crisis through the lens of education. Islamophobia is on the rise globally, and there have been efforts by the Canadian government to counter sentiments of fear and hatred with acceptance towards refugees from diverse or unfamiliar backgrounds. The participants in the study attempt to infuse their pedagogy with sincerity and empathy in order to better understand and support the experience of refugee students. To avoid a disservice to these refugee learners and be equitable in practice, a rigorous exploration of how to address their unique needs must be considered. The findings within this study are beneficial to teachers, who may be looking to enhance their approach in meeting the needs of refugee students, or relate their efforts and experiences to those of their peers within the profession.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Dear ___________________ , Date: ___________________

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am interested in studying teachers’ attitudes and practices toward meeting the needs of refugee students as a small-scale qualitative research study for the Master of Teaching program. I believe your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor and research supervisor who is providing support for the process is Angela Macdonald. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 60-minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications; a pseudonym will be used. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and course instructor. You have the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements. All data are stored on a password-protected digital device.

You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Heather Miles (heather.miles@mail.utoronto.ca)
Research Supervisor’s name: Ken McNeilly (kenneth.mcneilly@utoronto.ca)
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Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Heather Miles and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________
Name (printed): __________________________________
Date: __________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Introductory Script:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about the strategies, challenges and success stories of primary/junior educators in working with refugee students. This interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your experiences with refugee students in the classroom. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

Background Information

1. How long have you been working as an educator?
2. Why did you first become a teacher?

Teacher Practices

3. What is your experience with refugee students in your role as a teacher?
4. What are the learning needs of refugee students? How are the learning needs of refugee students different from the needs of other students?
5. What strategies have you used in addressing the needs of your refugee students?
   a. Are there any strategies you use to be culturally responsive to your refugee students?
6. Outside of academic learning, what types of struggles or difficulties are your refugee students experiencing?

Teacher Perspectives/ Beliefs

7. What is your assessment of the current approach toward refugee students and their inclusion within the Ontario school system?
   a. How does the current approach compare with past approaches?
8. What is the role of an educator, as compared to the roles of others, in meeting the needs of refugee students?
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Supports and Challenges

9. What issues or challenges have you encountered in your teaching practice with refugee students?
10. What resources support your teaching of refugee students?
    a. What resources do you wish you had access to, in order to better meet the needs of your refugee students?
11. Besides material resources, how can educators be better supported in meeting the needs of refugee students?
12. Has your school held fundraisers or external programming to address refugee issues?

Next Steps

13. Are any of your fellow educators involved in addressing the current refugee crisis?
14. Is there a role for students in bringing awareness to the experience of refugees?
    a. If so, could you explain what that role might be?
15. Would you want to attend workshops or seminars on meeting the needs of refugee students in the classroom?
16. Outside of workshops or seminars, what other programs (if any) would you like to see implemented, in meeting the needs of refugee students?

Thank you very much for your participation and responses for my research study.