

**The Educational Experiences of Refugee Youths in Greater Vancouver Schools:
Parents' and Teachers' Perspectives**

by

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The Experiences of Refugee Youths in Greater Vancouver Schools: Teachers and Parents' Perspectives

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Abstract

This master's thesis is a report of the analysis of the refugee youths' educational experience in schools in the Greater Vancouver area from the perspectives of their parents and teachers. On an international scale, when people have been forced to leave their home country, the United Nations (UN) defines them as refugees. Based on the 1951 Refugee Geneva conference, a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of war, racial persecution, gender identity, religion, nationality, political opinion or/and environmental catastrophes and has crossed international borders to find safety in another country (UNHCR, 2019).

This thesis looks at what has been said in previous studies about refugee students' experiences in classrooms and integration into the new host society. While some studies have explored the behaviour of refugee children in classrooms and their integration with the school community, they have often focused on the teachers' perspectives. Thus, there appears to be a lack of studies that involve the voices of refugee students' parents about their children's educational experiences in Greater Vancouver schools. Hence, the reason for my decision to explore parents' and teachers' perspectives of refugee youths' educational experiences in schools within the Greater Vancouver region of British Columbia, Canada. At the core of the exploration about the topic is the interplay between one's national home culture and the Canadian culture, the school's multicultural/ multi-ethnic environment, the development of friendship across cultural borders, and the role that social class plays in the integration of refugee children in the school community.

Lay Summary

In this research I interviewed four parents and three teachers. The parents were from different countries, including Syria, Nicaragua, Burundi/ South Africa, Ethiopia/ Kenya. The teachers were from Canada but also from different ethnic backgrounds such as Caucasian, Indian, and Indigenous. Using the interview data I analyzed the perspectives of refugee parents and teachers. Due to the fact that there were seven participants who had witnessed the experiences of multiple children, I would argue that this research explored the educational experiences of approximately 18 refugee students. The interviews allowed them to express how their children or students perceived and encountered the British Columbian school system. The results showed that refugee students usually tend to integrate well into BC schools systems. More generally the thesis introduces the complexity of the refugee crisis, and invites the reader to think about ways that school administrators and policy makers could create a welcoming environment for anyone one from a different cultural background than the majority of the student body.

Preface

This master's thesis is original, independent and unpublished work of the author, Ammaarah Fakim. I have used data from interviews where the participants have given consent and agreed that their words could be shared. This research required ethics approval and the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) number is: H20-02292.

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To those that lost hope in education, be inspired by refugees' stories

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Biographical statement

I am passionate about refugee youths, their integration into a new host society and their education. How do I relate to them? When I was a child, I had to move to a different country with my family because of my father's job. Integrating into the new schooling system was quite challenging, as I did not always find my place. In some ways, through my experiences I identify with similar challenges refugees may face (e.g., potential loss of cultural identity, culture shock, different schooling system, and language barrier). Even though I am not a refugee, I can still relate to them to some extent as I have had to adjust to different cultures and social norms. Additionally, in 2017 I worked at a refugee camp in Greece, where I had a lot of contact with refugee children. This has given me eyes and a heart to see them as human, when they are often overlooked and perceived as victims and powerless. Furthermore, the outcome of my privileged experience has given me the opportunity to learn more about refugee youth, which has made me realize I want to create a platform where their voice can be heard, and where they can be seen as powerful individuals. This research is not only important for academia and for the creation of new knowledge, but it is also important for me as refugees have a special place in my heart since 2017 when I worked at the refugee camp.

1.2: Introduction

Forced migration, civil wars and dangerous conditions have made individuals leave their country and seek asylum elsewhere (Bhabha, 2004). On an international scale, when people have had to leave their home country, the United Nations (UN) defines them as refugees. Based on the 1951 Refugee Geneva conference, a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of war, racial persecution, gender identity, religion,

nationality, political opinion or/and environmental catastrophes and has crossed international borders to find safety in another country (UNHCR, 2019). More recently there are prevalent situations of internally displaced people due to similar conditions or factors. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 26 million refugees in the world and 52% are children. This has been the largest population of displaced people since World War II (UNICEF, 2020). Most of these children are separated from their families, moving country to country and deprived of formal education (Bhabha, 2004).

Moving from a global point of view to a national perspective, Canada has a long history of giving refuge to immigrants who needed it since the 1900s. Canada's history of welcoming refugees started in 1969, when Canada acceded to the United Nations' 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol (Foley et al., 2018). The Immigration Act of 1976 gave a special status to refugees and facilitated their resettlement (Foley et al., 2018). Since 1980, Canada has accepted over 1 million refugees, and has created a Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program (Ahmad, 2016). In response to the Syrian refugee crisis, Canada has allowed over 40,000 refugees to find asylum. In fact, in 2018 Canada accepted more refugees than any other country in the world (UNHCR report, 2019) and in 2021 they are looking to accept 36,000 refugees into Canada. Canada opens its borders to different nationalities, cultures, gender and religions. Canada has established a multicultural foundation since the 20th century with the Multiculturalism Act. Canadian multiculturalism can simply be explained by the fact that Canada resides on inclusion, acknowledgement and respect of all and any cultures that were brought by legislation such as the Multiculturalism Act of 1988.

Multiple guidelines, education institutions, non-governmental (i.e., MOSAIC) and governmental associations (Vancouver School Board) have put in place programs in order to facilitate the integration of refugee children into the Canadian schooling system (Yu et al., 2007). However, in academia, there is a lack of emphasis on how those education institutions participated in integrating and shaping their experiences in Canada as refugees. How does one behave in school? Is it different from how they behave at home? Preparing teachers by providing guidelines is important but does that prevent refugees from being bullied for being different or for coming from a war-torn country? (Kumsa, 2006).

Children do not bear responsibility for the bombs, the attacks, and the conflicts but they are still affected tremendously by the situation. All humans deserve a safe environment. Parents around the world wish for an education for their children, but millions of children around the world flee their country due to conflicts and wars, which makes it at times difficult for them to receive an education. In 2017, I went to a refugee camp to work and volunteer. During my time there I soon realized that a lot of refugee youths did not have an education and did not have basic school classes. Although all refugee camps are different, and logically at a small temporary refugee camp it is hard to provide constant education, the right to education still remains a fundamental right for all – including refugees.

Why is education at a young age important for refugees? Education is important for all of us. Education can be seen as a vehicle helping the refugee students build their confidence, their personality, and allow them to integrate into the new host country and being able to have the basic requirement to have a job in the future or go to university and have more education. Providing an education to everyone including refugees will allow everyone

to have a brighter future as they are the next generation and deserve the right to be empowered. The United Nation Refugee Agency Canada mentions that:

“[i]ntegrating refugee issues into the classroom allows teachers to introduce concepts of diversity, respect, understanding and tolerance. Our teaching tools and resources help illustrate the difficulties refugees face from the moment they flee their homes to the time they are settled and have adapted to a new country. They also bring awareness to the notion of difference and the importance of welcoming new people. Teaching children about the plight of others empowers them to become global citizens and contribute to a brighter future for all.” (UNHCR, 2020).

My research is important for two main reasons. (1) This research is important because it was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and takes this factor into consideration when exploring the educational experiences of refugee youths. During the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever before, rules have been stricter than before. Not only have borders been closing and only citizens (or family members) of the country have access to re-entry, but educational resources for refugees, newcomers and immigrants have been reduced (e.g., for instance prior to COVID-19 there were reading programs held by the VSB but when the pandemic started the programs discontinued due to the fact that schools and VSB were trying to limit the exposure to the virus). Online-schooling has also negatively impacted refugees (e.g., parents have mentioned that students stay on their laptop all the time and they tend to be more distracted as well. Students also have less one on one time with the teacher during online school.) (2) In addition, this research is also extremely important because it touches upon power dynamics, power control, education leadership and most importantly the impact education and social encounters have on one’s integration into a host country and formation

of identity. As Foucault would say, education is not only knowledge, it is also power, since knowledge is power (Rouse, 1994). The type of education one receives will shape how one sees and create one's experience in the host country. It is well known that refugees carry trauma; thus, stability within the new environment is crucial. UNHCR mentions that education is one of the most grounding and normalizing things a child can have after facing multitude of trauma from fleeing their home, to violence during the travel to arriving and adapting to the new country and new culture. However, education is sadly not the first priority to refugee children, in fact it is a privilege and a luxury, yet it is important for us to remember that education is a basic right that needs to be honoured and provided to anyone when possible. Education is incredibly important yet it is not one of the top priority of humanitarian funds, on average 3% of global humanitarian aid (Hans, 2021) goes to education. Education for displaced children is most of the time underfunded, but thankfully in Canada education for permanent residents is free at a public school (Benefits of being a permanent resident of Canada, 2019). When the government of Canada finally approves refugee claims, refugees are given a protected status, after that they are allowed to apply to become a permanent resident which might take two years or longer. Consequently after that process when they have permanent residency they are able to also receive a free Canadian education until they are 18 (Government of Canada, 2020).

At a societal level and at a school level, most of the time refugees are portrayed negatively, they are usually seen as a burden to society, or seen as victims and powerless (Baker et al., 2005) (Ryu et al., 2018). They are usually portrayed as lacking something rather than focusing on their qualities and strengths (Ryu et al., 2018). In this research I want to give a voice to the refugees, and hear about their educational experiences in Canadian

schools, and their perspectives. Parents and teachers are stakeholders that are very influential and impact the educational experiences of refugee students. To find alternative perspectives and ways to empower refugees, I decided to interview four parents in order to hear their experiences and three teachers to hear their observations of refugee students. The four parents were from four different countries, (1) Syria, (2) Nicaragua, (3) Burundi/South-Africa, (4) Ethiopia/Kenya. The three teachers were Canadian with different ethnic backgrounds, (1) Caucasian, (2) Indian, (3) First Nations. The nationality of the parents and the teachers were not chosen but accepted voluntarily. The educational experience of refugee youths, in this study, are given through the eyes of the parents and teachers. The interviews were conducted online due to the pandemic and lasted for about 1-hour. This study took place in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic and looked at refugee youths' integration and educational experiences in the Greater Vancouver area, in British Columbia. This research focused on answering: **How do the refugee youths' parents and teachers perceive the educational experiences offered to refugee youths in the Canadian education system while preparing for life in Canada? What do the parents and teachers consider to be the key factors influencing the integration of refugee youths in Canadian schools?** In this research, rather than perceiving integration as an idea of unification or homogenization, it is perceiving integration as acceptance, inclusivity, acknowledgment and respect. In this specific context, I am referring to integration as the idea of refugee youths being involved and included in the school community, having friends and not being bullied because of cultural differences or linguistic differences. Additionally, integration in this case is considered multifaceted and a two way process, requiring refugees to be prepared to enter the host community but also the host community to include, accept and respect them. This

research is looking at factors that show to have an impact on the educational experience of refugee youths, based on parents' and teachers' point of views. This research is also critical of the integration process, raising questions to the reader to think about - is the integration process truly inclusive of all refugees and effectively including them into society and the school community? In my opinion, the weight of the integration process can sometimes fall heavily onto the refugee family and the refugee student rather than equally between the refugee and the host society, due to lack of preparation from the host society and the teachers. This unevenness might sometimes lead to negative educational experiences. I want to uncover the strengths and weaknesses within our Canadian education system with a view to provoking a debate as to how education can play a role in removing the stigma that portrays refugees as victims and powerless. As well, the proposed research aims to underscore the fact that while refugee youths could be in charge of their future destiny (have agency) they also have parents, teachers and school programs that determine how their school experience will turn out. Furthermore, the goal of this research is to explore what goes into one's educational experiences and integration. More importantly, it will show that since Canada is a multicultural country, refugees tend to be exposed to multiple cultures starting at the doors of their home and of Canadian institutions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework:

2.1 : Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the available literature on refugee education by critically examining studies that have been conducted and other publications on the school experience of refugee youths. This will provide important background to framing new studies such as those that aim to explore the positive and challenging experiences refugees encounter during their journey to integration into new, host communities. Perspectives are personal constructs that are in part influenced by the social, community, experiences both historical and contemporary as well as cultural. Hence for this study, I will draw largely on social constructivism complemented by socio-cultural theory to interpret the parents' and teachers' perspectives of refugee children's educational experiences in Canadian schools.

Based on the 1951 Refugee Geneva conference, a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country (or their town/ city: internally displaced individuals) because of war, racial persecution, gender identity, religion, nationality, political opinion, ethnicity and environmental catastrophes and has crossed international or internal borders to find safety in another country or region (UNHCR, 2019). However, it is important to note that not all refugees like to be referred to as refugees. In fact Arendt (2017) mentions that during WWII Jewish people did not want to be called refugees but rather preferred the term newcomers. Kumsa (2006) adds to this discussion and mentions that some individuals believed that negative connotations can come with the word refugee.

The world's refugee population continues to grow, and more and more countries have had to open up their borders to asylum-seekers. According to Statistics Canada (Prokopenko, 2018) "Canada, for its part, has accepted roughly 115,000 resettled refugees between 2005

and 2014, who make up, on average, 4% of new permanent residents annually (IRCC 2015). In response to the current global situation, the government resettled a record 46,700 refugees in 2016 alone (UNHCR 2017)”. Additionally, in 2011 (Caring for Kids New to Canada, 2020), 20% of the refugees that came to Canada were children. With Canada’s multicultural approach, refugees are able to practice their cultures in Canada. In fact, refugees are allowed to receive permanent resident status. This process can take up to 21 months, before the refugees receive the Canadian permanent resident. During this time refugees are protected and can apply for work permits. Although this process can take longer than 21 months, it is still shorter than the European process for refugees to obtain citizenship. In fact, in Germany, refugees have to reside in the country for about six to eight years before applying and obtaining citizenship.

The Canadian scholarly and political context about immigration could be summarized in three peculiarities (1) immigration has been present in Canada for a couple of centuries (NIS, M. M., 2000). (2) Canada has been founded on multiculturalism formally since 1988. Canadian multiculturalism can simply be explained by the fact that Canada embodies inclusion, acknowledgement and respect of all and any cultures recognized or protected through legislation such as the Multiculturalism Act of 1988 (Day, 2000). In my opinion, although this statement is true, one needs to remember how Canada treats the First Nations, in order to have the full picture of the situation. (3) Immigration and newcomers’ integration has financially cost Canada (IRCC) millions of dollars. Integration in Canada is not something linear but a mosaic of several models of integration. All provinces and the federal government had an input into what it means to integrate into Canadian society, as they all had different views on immigrants, east coast versus west coast and liberal versus

conservative parties. Although financial input into immigration and refugee programs, and policies might help them integrate more, it is not the only way of successful integration. For instance, looking at the success of refugee youths in schools, meaning their level of adaptability and academic success, will show how well integrated refugees are in the Canadian society (Wilkinson, 2002), because schools are the first sites where refugees learn societal norms and Canadian culture and are welcomed into society.

The literature highlights the importance of preparing and equipping teachers to include, facilitating and respecting refugee children. The United Nation Refugee Agency, Canada recommends that: “[i]ntegrating refugee issues into the classroom allows teachers to introduce concepts of diversity, respect, understanding and tolerance.” (UNHCR, 2020).

The foundation of Canadian schooling and education relies upon policies of integration, multiculturalism among other things. This allows us to understand whether Canadian foundations actually accept, acknowledge and include refugees or any other immigrants. It is important to look at the roots of the subject to fully understand the reasoning behind stakeholders’ perceptions of educational experiences of refugee youths.

2.2: Possible Challenges

When coming into a new country, some refugee youths might face some challenges, ranging from linguistic difficulties, economic instability, to psychosocial challenges (Ryeburn, 2016). The challenges faced by refugee youths in schools are not only about the curriculum but also the psychological impact of school from the way the school administrators and teachers treat them when for instance they expose their language difficulties as well as evocation of cultural shock in attempt to integrate them into the multicultural system of the school (e.g., mispronouncing their names, trying to find alternative names because there are too many kids with the same name, or the fact that other

students are quick to answer questions while refugees are still translating the question). In fact it has also come to my attention that with the COVID-19 pandemic being present, schools have had to change the way they teach. They now have to do it in a quarter system, which means that the teachers have to cover more in less time, resulting in leaving behind students with learning disabilities including language difficulties. In fact, it has been shown that refugee students' psychological challenges consisted of lack of trust and due to the stigma coming with the word and label "refugee" (Anisef et al., 2003). Additionally, refugees have shown a decrease in the sense of belonging since they have had to adapt to a new country, and sometimes have a loss of identity and loss of culture (Anisef et al., 2003). All of this including post traumatic experiences have had an impact on their education and academic achievement. The literature says that academic challenges refugee students faced were not only limited to traumatic experiences but also included a lack of comprehensive programs, disrupted schooling, and limited skill assessment. Most refugee students stated that a lack of diverse pedagogical approaches used by teachers impeded their integration process (Anisef et al., 2000). A difference in pedagogy between the students' old schools and the new school was a big challenge as well.

It is important to know that refugee education experiences in Canada are not only based on their personal behaviours but also on their interactions with their teachers, parents and friends. These external interactions play a significant role as it can reinforce negative sentiments if teachers or parents behaviours are disrespectful (as mentioned above mispronouncing names) (Mendenhall, 2020). Suárez-Orozco (2017) mentions that in fact it would be a danger if teachers did not have access to the proper teaching, causing exclusion and perhaps to some extent discrimination. It is important to create a pedagogy of hope and

not one based on ignorance and discrimination. According to Suárez-Orozco (2017) schools that predominantly serve immigrant students have a culture of low teacher expectations and that teachers value more student compliance than curiosity and student cognitive engagement.

“Classrooms and schools typically sort students into those who are thought to be talented versus those who are thought to be less so. These expectations may be made based on impressions of individual capabilities, but **are often founded upon stereotyped beliefs** about their racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well (e.g., “Asian students are smart and hard-working;” “Latino students are social.”) Students are well aware of the perceptions that teachers have of them; well-regarded students receive ample positive feedback about their capacity to learn and thus are more likely to redouble their efforts.” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2017, p. 528).

Under these prejudicial circumstances only the most resilient children remain engaged.

Teachers' impressions and actions have a tremendous impact on how the students experience school, and how they feel integrated (Mendenhall, 2020).

British Columbia Teachers' Federation (2016) has written an article and mentioned that although there were clear guidelines and teachers presented qualifications to take on refugee children, there were still mistakes that were made.

“It is not only the already existing students and their parents who may need to develop more welcoming attitudes toward newcomers. Gulalai Habib, assistant manager of the Monthly Resettlement Assistance Program with ISS, explains that even teachers can get caught up in communicating a bias against immigrants from the Middle East.” (Ryeburn, 2016, paragraph 7).

Wilkinson (2002) and Tavares and Slotin (2012) said that Canada placed a significant number of immigrants and refugees in lower level programs and specialized language programs (e.g., ESL/ ELL and summer learning programs). Although these programs are very helpful and supportive, they are often too small and are only available to some refugee students. Due to the lack of adequate support for all students, this creates problems because some refugees may be ineligible to go to post-secondary school due to incomplete secondary courses (Wilkinson, 2002). In fact, “many youths who enter high school as ESL students, including many refugees, will not complete school or go on to post-secondary training.” (Wilkinson, 2002, p.176). Occasionally there are some refugees that are put in lower grade levels than they are supposed to because their academic level does not match the Canadian one. This occurs because they have missed school for a couple years or a couple months.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that all refugees have different sets of skills and backgrounds and thus will prosper differently and have different academic outcomes and different integration experiences (Bloch and Hirsch, 2017 and Suárez-Orozco, 2017). Refugees have different identities and thus will react to things differently (Beauregard et al., 2017).

“Youth's personal and social identities affect how our young people see themselves, how they are perceived by educators and school peers, how they engage with schooling, and how they produce knowledge about everyday experiences. Social exclusion based on shared identities disproportionately affects youth whose "otherness" is most apparent.” (Dei and Rummens, 2010).

On one hand some refugee students with their dual frame of reference have shown to be more successful than native born, as they are more dedicated, optimistic and have more

positive attitudes towards school (Suárez-Orozco, 2017). On the other hand, many immigrants have faced discrimination such as racism, and challenges such as linguistic difficulties (Suárez-Orozco, 2017, and Bloch and Hirsch, 2017), as a result they struggle to find their place in the school and in society, since almost all societies stigmatize minorities. This according to Suárez-Orozco (2017) “sends clear signals of who belongs and who does not, undermining the child’s sense of social belonging and identity during a formative stage of development.” (Suárez-Orozco, 2017, p. 527).

It is important to note that even if their academic resources are the same, refugee students often do not have the same parental, economical and societal resources (Bloch and Hirsh, 2017).

When trained properly, teachers can be very influential and helpful to the integration of refugee students. Integration through education can be very positive on students’ mental well-being (Kia-keating et al., 2007, Tavares and Slotin, 2012 and Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). According to Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) even if students are willing to learn, make their parents proud, and excited to obtain the power of being in charge of their life, teachers’ opinions and behaviours continue to weigh a lot in the equation of their integration into the host country and academic success. On one hand, teachers and programs made for student refugees can allow for the reduction of challenges they may face. On the other hand, studies have shown that sometimes schools can follow policies for their needs and their own benefits, which to some extent can be pejorative for the immigrant students. “Nevertheless, by enacting policies and practices noxious to their needs, schools are in too many cases conferring disadvantage, perpetuating parental disempowerment, and revealing a studied

indifference to authentically and successfully engaging our newest future citizens” (Allen & Reich, 2013).

Additionally, Wilkinson (2002) shows that ethnicity continues to be a major contributor in the success of refugee youths. White proximity allows students to be more integrated and perhaps more successful academically, non-white individuals are less likely to be doing well in school. This statement was made due to the fact that Caucasian students are given more privileges as they are not a minority. In this statement we can see a power hierarchy and implicit institutional racism.

“Ethnicity has the strongest influence on educational status. Controlling on other relevant variables, youth from the former Yugoslavia are more likely to be ‘on-track’ compared with their counterparts from other countries. Mainstream absorption theory would suggest that, since the cultural practices and ethnic background of most former Yugoslavian youth are similar to that of mainstream (white) Canadians, we would expect them to do better in school. Alternatively, youth from ‘different’ cultures and races are less likely to be doing well at school. This may be due to their greater familiarity with a ‘western’ school system. However, this finding may also reflect institutional racism, systematic discrimination, and the less subtle and more personal forms of racism including polite racism and subliminal racism.” (Wilkinson, 2002, p. 186)

2.3: What has the government of BC and teachers done to mitigate challenges that refugees have encountered?

2.3.1: British Columbia’s approach

The government of British Columbia (2017) affirms that the province is very diverse, with people from different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This diversity is

transferred and mirrored in British Columbia's schools. Some students in these schools come from refugee backgrounds or are refugees themselves. They have come with obsolete barriers, trauma and perseverance, and still face challenges when going into a new schooling system. The Government of British Columbia adds “Like all school-age students, students who are refugees should be offered an education program that follows provincial curriculum and graduation requirements.” (2017). In my opinion this statement shows that schools are diverse because they have students from different ethnicities and different nationalities. However, I would like to point out a question: are the Vancouver schools truly diverse, in terms of their pedagogy and curriculum, what other cultures and history are being taught at schools? Are the students given the chance to be critical thinkers, or are we taking the easy path in terms of educating them? As individuals, do we believe we can learn from other cultures, or do we believe that the students can only learn from the Canadian history/ curriculum? These issues are complex and cannot be simplified; it involves how one defines multiculturalism, and how the curriculum should implement it. Additionally, the way current teachers teach students plays a role, for instance with problem based learning and inquiry based learning the students are constantly able to engage and be critical. With the analysis of the collected interviews in chapter 4, we see that some of these issues come up and we address them more in-depth.

2.3.2: British Columbia policy

In order to understand how teachers and refugee parents feel about the educational experiences of refugees, it is important to review the foundational policies surrounding this topic and the tools given to teachers to teach refugee students.

At the provincial level: British Columbia and school district levels such as the Vancouver School Board (VSB) including local organizations like the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) guidelines on refugee education, and multiple policies in relation to education for refugees are given, alive and working. The legislation policy of public schools in British Columbia, focusing on the clause that talks about "Students Who are Refugees" mentions that "School-age students who have refugee status or are refugee claimants, live in British Columbia, and enrol in a B.C. public school are eligible for publicly-funded education and may also qualify for English Language Learning (ELL) services." This means that refugees should all be eligible to receive ELL services. But does this truly happen? Following this policy, the BCTF provided a guide called "BCTF- Students from Refugee Backgrounds: A guide for Teachers and School". This allows teachers and school administrators to understand refugees' experiences (e.g., being immigrants, being labelled a refugee, traumatic experiences, psycho-social repercussions on them etc.). Furthermore, it talks about their resilience and their schooling (e.g., cultural diversity, welcoming community, school community etc.). The teachers are expected to understand the importance of involving and respecting the parents and cultural differences. This BCTF guide also provides examples to the teachers in how to adequately support the children and adult refugees.

Additionally, non-profit organizations like the Canadian Council for Refugee will keep provinces accountable by contacting each one of them to make sure that all students with the appropriate age are able to go to school free of charge. To some extent, we cannot truly control whether they are contacting the provinces, the public does not know how and if the government is tracking the progress.

2.3.3: Guidelines

Additionally, one way that Canada has tangibly executed something for the refugees' resettlement is through the formation and diffusion of important guidelines and questions that allow Canadians, such as teachers, to best support refugees. A study of the guidelines will allow us to understand what kind of tools are being given to teachers, and thus will allow us to understand their reasoning and perspectives.

BCTF (2016) mentions that in order to facilitate and reduce the likelihood of chaos happening, it is important to (1) create a safe space, (2) know their stories, (3) support their relationships, (4) have a buddy system, (5) provide opportunity for them to rise and (6) invite and engage with parents.

Canada has created special programs made for refugees by governmental education institutions like Vancouver School Board, and the BC Teachers Federation. But how do teachers, school administration and students regard refugees and refugee programs?

Canada has created guides such as Kids New to Canada in order for teachers to learn what to expect (they are being taught the process of application and approval of the status of refugee) and how to proceed. There is an emphasis put on integration, adaptation and acculturation. Teachers are taught that newcomers (newcomer is an umbrella term where refugee also falls under) might have a difficult background in terms of culture shock and traumatic events from the past. Allowing newcomers to tap into their strengths permits them to find solutions for challenges they might encounter, recognition of differences allows for preparation. Due to their pre- and post-migration experiences, refugees can have a list of challenges followed by post-traumatic stress (Bloch and Hirsch, 2017) as mentioned in the previous section.

International, national and local guides and NGOs allow for proper preparation in hosting refugees and supporting them by understanding their background. Most of those guidelines promote the idea of diversity and acceptance of diversity. There is in fact an idea that in order to be integrated into society most refugees will need to conform to some social norms, for instance learning and being fluent in one of the official languages of Canada. Although there are Canadian social norms like such that refugees need to follow, Canada has allowed multiple governmental (e.g., Vancouver School Board - VSB) and non-governmental institutions (e.g., MOSAIC, CCR) to have special ELL (English-language learner) or ESL (English Second Language) programs for refugees. These programs have allowed refugees to find communities where they can feel at home and support and practice their own culture while still learning the Canadian culture.

While some individuals might say that these are subtle acculturations, others might say that Canada is becoming more and more multicultural and inclusive. It has allowed for the creation of groups and programs that permit refugees to find their communities, practice their own cultures, and also learn together how to integrate best in the Canadian culture (Mata, 1994).

It is important for them to have a community outside of school, because sometimes the students at school bully them because they are refugees. “The newness of the refugee is not only marred with negative connotations but it also inflicts the violence and pain of exclusionary practices” (Kumsa, 2006, p. 240). Although refugee youths might have a challenging schooling experience, it is crucial that they allow themselves to go to school to integrate the Canadian school system. They are able to learn social norms and embrace the ‘Canadian experience’, which later will allow them to get employment that pays more than

their parents (Wilkinson, 2002 and Mayhew, 2018 and Bloch and Hirsch, 2017) .

“Essentially, newcomers who reject the mainstream culture are relegated to the lower social strata with the accompanying low wages and high unemployment rates.” (Wilkinson, 2002, p. 178).

Unfortunately, in some cases education can also reproduce inequalities, societal divisions, structural inequalities including race, gender, social and residential status (Bloch and Hirsch, 2017 and Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). Mayhew (2018) and Bloch and Hirsch, (2017) show that school is crucial to adaptation and integration because it creates a set of social norms and routines.

“Quick adaptation is more likely to result in healthy self-confidence, social competence and positive school performance. A child who did well in school previously may perform poorly in Canada because of language difficulties, racism or other factors. Identifying a child’s specific adaptation challenges is important. Children with special needs face the added difficulty of being assessed in a new language and culture. It is helpful to ask both a parent and the child specifically how they are adapting to the school system, and to identify their most challenging issues. Offer contact information for school and community services that can support adaptation and school success.” (Mayhew, 2018, paragraph: Adapting to their challenges in Canada).

2.3.4: Parent-teacher-student nexus

Parents play an integral role in refugee youths schooling experiences. Mayhew (2018) mentions that refugees and newcomers in general all face a set of challenges such as language, employment, income disparity, gender roles, climate, school, social norms, sense

of security, child protection, housing and racism. Even if students are not directly impacted by those criteria through school, the parents might be explicitly impacted which as a matter of fact will have implicit outcomes on the children (e.g., housing issues might mean that the student does not have a proper place to sleep, and thus when they go to school they might have difficulty focusing). In fact, Bloch and Hirsch (2017) talk about second generation refugees and their success at school and integration into Canadian society. Bloch and Hirsch (2017) mentioned that another important factor to perceive how well refugees adapt to the host society is: the experiences of parents; especially if their parents were refugees and immigrated to Canada. All of the research studies mentioned above, have done a great job at educating the public on refugee's story. They have mentioned the challenges that refugee students may face when arriving to a new host country, for instance the mispronunciation of their names, or the fact that the refugee youths feel pressure to do well because their parents were not able to receive what they have. Additionally, through the exploration and analysis of the BC policies we have seen that some programs and some tools are given to the teachers in order to help welcome and teach refugee students. However, the current literature lacks the perspective of parents. It is important to look at teachers' perspectives but one should not scrutinize the point of view of parents as they will be able to tell us about refugee youths' past, their interaction at home with their national culture and the juxtaposition with the Canadian culture. In order to have the full understanding of refugee youths without explicitly talking to them; one should talk to their parents in order to see how they behave at home and to provide a background on their story. Additionally, one should also speak to their teachers as they will be able to provide insight into how refugee students are treated in Vancouverite

schools. My research takes into consideration the point of view of teachers and parents in regards to refugee youth educational experiences in Greater Vancouver.

2.4: Education as Mode of Integration: its importance

For refugee youths, having an education is more than just making their parents proud, it is about having the power to do what their parents were not able to do. For instance, Bloch and Hirsch (2017) interviewed a young girl that witnessed the sadness of her mother, because her mother was not able to attend her dad's funeral, due to the lack of visas and financial support. The interviewee said that she wanted to have an education to make her family proud but also to be able to succeed and be powerful in the world. Suárez-Orozco (2017) mentions "Immigrant students are remarkably resilient and bring their own agency and assets to their lives." (p. 526).

Kratesva and Brown (2013) mentions that education as a mode of integration is seen as empowerment that is expressed in the child-centered pedagogy. They mention that in general the emphasis is put on intercultural teachers and the teacher-pupil-parents nexus. Education integration is seeing a dynamic approach to positively respond to students' diversity and seeing individuals' differences not as a problem but rather as a learning possibility. Kratesva and Brown (2013) touch on the relation between interculturalism/multiculturalism and education, which is a similar case that Canada is founded upon. Interculturalism is the idea of public expression of ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences between students and the school, and thus the responsibility to encourage them (Kratesva and Brown, 2013). Interculturalism and multiculturalism acknowledges and respects diversity observed within the school (Kratesva and Brown, 2013). This diversity is seen through different types of clothes, religion, culture, gender identity, but is also supported through teacher training and intercultural mediators. Teacher training is

crucial in the sense that they have to prepare Canadian students into behaving respectfully when talking to refugee students.

2.4.1: Multiculturalism: Canadian multiculturalism and Education

In a world of globalization emphasizing immigration and also economic success, where does Canada stand? Since the multiculturalism policy of 1971 and the 1988 Multiculturalism Act, Canada frames most of its action and contexts as multiculturalism. The Act of 1988 ought to protect cultural heritage of Canadians, reduce discrimination and encourage the creation of multicultural programs. According to the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* acknowledged that multiculturalism was one of the main foundations of Canada and that it would influence its future. Canada's multiculturalism came out of cultural differences, where the two solitudes: Anglophone/British and the Francophone/French (Quebec) (Day, 2000) could not agree on one specific culture that should be used (Kunz and Sykes, 2007). According to Will Kymlika, Canada's main four aims with this policy is "to support the cultural development of ethno cultural groups; to help members of ethno cultural groups to overcome barriers to full participation in Canadian society, to promote creative encounters and interchange among all ethno cultural groups; and to assist new Canadians in acquiring at least one of Canada's main official languages." (Kylimka, 1998, p. 1). In the Canadian context the government says that "multiculturalism sets a vision for Canada and a framework for intercultural relations within a single society. [...] most Canadians understand multiculturalism as a policy to facilitate the integration of non-European newcomers and their immediate descendants." (Kanz and Sykes, 2007, p. 3). In fact, Mata (1994) says that since 1991, 15 percent of Canadians had a first

language other than English and French, and about 16 percent of them were born outside of Canada and Mata predicted that by 2016 there would be an increase of 5 percent in diversity among the school-aged children. The Multiculturalism Act, emphasizes the principle of inclusiveness and respecting diversity, since Canada itself was founded on two different nations: the French and the British (although the Indigenous existed, they were never included in the equation). Indeed, by establishing the Multiculturalism Act, the Canadian government has shown that there is a recognition of diversity in terms of race, nationality, culture, ethnic origin, colour and religion.

In theory what is multiculturalism exactly? Academia has long debated what multiculturalism means. Kymlika (1998) has developed one of the most influential theories of multiculturalism. He explained this concept by combining liberal values of autonomy and equality with an argument about the value of cultural membership. Many researchers (e.g., Vertovek) until today make reference to this hybridity of ideas.

In contemporary society, the idea of multiculturalism, in politics, is about how to comprehend, prepare and resolve challenges associated with cultural (nationality, ethnicity, racial, and religious) diversity. Throughout years, integration has meant many different things, starting from integration as a form of assimilation, where the individual has to assimilate and take on the culture of the host country and have a collective identity (e.g., Melting pot). It is fair to say that proponents of multiculturalism reject the prospective claim that multiculturalism is referred to as a melting pot. Multiculturalism in the 21st century has evolved and became a contemporary concept where diversity is acceptable. Metaphorically speaking it was referred to as a mosaic in Canada, where in case of immigration, individuals can practice their own cultural identity (Kunz and Sykes, 2007). Linguistically speaking the

term multicultural, literally means many (multi) cultures (cultural) living together. Thus, multiculturalism is about finding ways to respect one another and also allows for integration. However, despite the open-mindedness to diversity, this new trend was at times considered very naive and ignorant, as it was merely referred to as ‘celebratory’ multiculturalism. Celebratory multiculturalism means that people and nations defined themselves as multicultural because they had different friends from different cultures and ate a variety of different cultural/ethnic foods (e.g., Pad Thai, Nasi Goreng, Quiches, Poutine). One can ask: is Canada truly inclusive and effectively integrating refugees or do they simply appear to be inclusive solely on a superficial level?

Multiculturalism continues to evolve and have an on-going debate in determining what rights must be given to these individuals, treating them equally and giving them recognition and positive accommodation, especially to minorities (Kymlicka, 1998). Recognition according to Charles Taylor (1994) is something that can be contrasted with the rise of multiculturalism. Recognition means being acknowledged and/or being known, this means that you can be recognized when you have accomplished something outstanding, or you can be recognized by your race and be pulled over by a police officer. In relation to multiculturalism, this means being recognized in terms of your identity (e.g. what defines you? What are your fundamental characteristics as a human being?), because multiculturalism is predominantly rooted in identity politics. People tend to emphasize their value and the distinctiveness of their cultural identity. Taylor (1994) mentions that identity is ‘partly shaped by recognition or its absence’, then ‘Non-recognition or misrecognition can cause harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being’ (p. 25). Taylor in relations to multiculturalism affirms that there

should be an equal recognition. This means an equal recognition of all the different cultures living together. It is not only about learning from those different cultures and giving equal opportunities to the individual with a different culture, but also to be civically integrated and embracing diversity (Kunz and Sykes, 2007) rather than creating ghettos where different cultural groups do not interact with one another.

Contemporary multiculturalism is different from celebratory multiculturalism, because nowadays there is rather more an emphasis made on ethnicity, culture and religion, and that entails re-arranging the curricula but also how to properly allow for the integration of immigrants in the 21st century (Banks, 1993). Rummens and Dei (2010) mentions that racialized visible minority youth have noticed the ethnicity of teachers, and that it is important for them to see diversity in teachers.

This explanation of multiculturalism allows us to make sense of why the Canadian government allows refugees to integrate and practice their own cultures and identity. The Canadian government based on the 1988 Multiculturalism Act recognizes the beauty of diversity. In fact, Canada is so dedicated to helping refugees that in 2017-2018 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) invested more than \$690 million (outside of Quebec) to support the settlement of refugees (Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative – Looking to the Future, 2019).

British Columbia and other provinces have created numerous Cultural Centers, which allows integration and creation of communities outside of school. Some of them are for specific cultures and some of them are specific for refugees and are intercultural centers (e.g., CCR, and Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees (VICCIR) in Victoria, BC.). If you visit their website: “ccrweb.ca/en/members”, there is a list of all the organizations that

allow refugees to be members. These governmental and non-governmental organizations all recognize the fact that refugees can have different identities. The existence of these organizations show that Canada is open to helping refugees and especially in relation to cultural identity (Mata, 1994). Canada has allowed organizations (cultural or religious) to help refugees integrate. Additionally, the fact that there are cultural centers and programs specifically made for refugees, really emphasizes the politics of recognition evoked by Charles Taylor, mentioned previously. In my opinion, if most incoming recent refugees are Syrian refugees; and that when a refugee that is governmentally sponsored goes to live with the same community, it means that they are able to have a Syrian community, or another community that has similar cultural values. Furthermore, to some extent they are able to practice their cultural identity.

Additionally, from my understanding Canada is taking on refugees and giving them “a permanent resident” status (considered by many as a proxy for political integration (Mata, 1994)) while allowing them to live in communities that will be able to support their transition, meaning other refugee groups that have experienced the same events. This means that refugees are somehow able to have multiple identities: their refugee identity (given by the UN and the state of Canada), their cultural identity (where they were born, places they might have lived in camps), and their “Canadian-ness” (given their permanent resident status).

However, Bhabha notes that simply embracing diversity in a classroom fails to address the underlying “power relations that maintain a system of inequity and marginalization that immigrants and indigenous encounter” (Johnston and Richardson, 2012, p. 116). Bhabha continues their criticism by saying that although there is consent on cultural

differences, there is also a containment (Johnston and Richardson, 2012). The host country gives norms while saying that all “other cultures are fine, but we must locate them within our grid” (p. 119).

This conflict in ideas is something that lacks in the discussion found in the past literature review. This current research will hopefully fill that gap in knowledge.

2.4.2: Theoretical Framework

The study reported in this thesis uses a confluence of Henry Giroux and Paulo Freire’s notion of critical pedagogy, which largely employs a child centred approach and an interpretivist lens that is grounded in the socio-cultural theories of knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978; Kozulin, 2003; Kozulin et al., 2003) as a theoretical framework to interpret the perspectives of parents and teachers of refugee students’ educational experiences in Canadian schools. Central to critical pedagogy is looking at issues of oppression and power. This research looks at how refugee students in Vancouver schools are treated by teachers and by their peers. It looks at whether multicultural environments are truly multicultural or rather superficial with continuing structural oppression being implemented implicitly.

Critical Pedagogy: Child-centered Pedagogy

Henry Giroux (Giroux et. al., 2014) says that there needs to be an erasure of what schooling is now, and to create a new type of teaching that includes education and culture. A type of critical pedagogy that would involve identity politics: representational pedagogy and pedagogy of representations.

“A pedagogy of representation focuses on demystifying the act and process of representation by revealing how meanings are produced within relations of power that

narrate identities through history, social forms, and mode of ethical address that appear objective, universally valid, and consensual. [...] central to a pedagogy of representation is providing students with the opportunity to deconstruct the mythic notion that images, sounds, and texts merely express reality.” (Giroux et. al., 2014, p. 47).

This means a type of teaching that values the students and that does not treat them as inferior and one that allows for the exploration and formation of their identity. Henry Giroux emphasizes the importance of representational pedagogy and the politics of representation. He affirms that children from different races and ethnicities should be given the choice to explore their history, their beliefs in order to build their identity. Representational pedagogy is a way of being transparent and not ignorant. This process of teaching about identity politics should also be taught to white/citizens of the country, in order to remove the likelihood of discrimination (Giroux et. al., 2014). Freire (1996) closely connects his idea with Giroux and says that education is not about domination but rather about liberation and freedom. Additionally, the idea is to remove the dominant culture versus the other culture, most of the time individuals and cultures are compared to white people and culture. It is important to draw a line and let refugees have their own voice, and not be dominated.

The fact of the matter is that teachers need to re-think what child-centered teaching truly means. Freire insists that the banking concept, meaning just teaching the children as if they were ignorant/inferior, should be removed from pedagogy. Instead, teachers should learn to include the students in the learning process, giving them the space to contribute and empower themselves (Freire, 1970/1996).

Although representational pedagogy puts the [refugee] student at the center, it is important to remember that refugee youths have been in traumatic experiences and that sometimes probing them to share might not be helpful. In fact, they like that other people are interested in their culture and experiences, but sometimes they are shy or scared of frustrating the teacher, thus they repress their emotions (Tavares and Slotin, 2012). In order to understand a refugee student it is important to look at their relationship framework. The microsystem (part of that framework) is composed of the individual and the immediate setting in which they live (e.g, family, teachers, friends, child care facility, and sport groups) (Stewart, 2011). Child-centered pedagogy does not only mean schooling wise but also involves parents for instance. Sometimes this also means looking at a broader spectrum: the exosystem, meaning the broader community, in order to see how well the students are integrating.

Representational pedagogy emphasizes the fact that history of the refugee, of different race and ethnicity needs to be learned so that they are able to form their identity (Johnston and Richardson, 2012). However, it is as important for the refugees as it is for the Canadian students, as they need to know the background history of the refugees in order to be respectful and acknowledge their differences and similarities (Tavares and Slotin, 2012).

In fact to honour the immigrants, there was an attempt to create a curriculum that is relevant to the diverse body of students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2017). Schools in the United States and in Canada generously provide academic support to the students, for instance, Vancouver School Board also created a similar program called the VSB Reading coach. It is a group of volunteer individuals that want to help immigrants with their language difficulties. Sometimes the students are grouped with individuals from their same culture, friends even if

they have different English levels. This allows for a smoother negotiation of cultural transitions (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2017).

Critical pedagogy is necessary when exploring the subject of education for the discriminated ones, in this case the refugees as it is crucial for them to feel empowered. Multiculturalism allows inclusion for all in education and critical pedagogy guides multicultural beliefs into how to approach the teaching practices for refugee youths.

These works of Freire, and Giroux offer insights and understanding into how we might critically analyze the select stakeholders' perspectives on the educational experiences of refugee youth's educational experiences within the Canadian Education system and how it impacts their self-identity and overall Canadian experience. This will be argued from the premise that Canada prides itself as a multicultural nation (welcome and respectful to different cultures) since the Act of 1988: Multiculturalism Act, hence why I believe the use of critical multiculturalism is crucial. This research is critical in regards to what type of education refugees receive.

The current literature shows that there is a correlation between an environment that is more diverse and culturally inclusive and well-integration on refugees' part. This hypothesis found does not mean that every inclusive and multicultural environment will provide integration to refugees. Multicultural environments can also bring contradictions in relations to integration, for instance the possibility of having race hierarchy, or a social class discriminations.

Sociocultural Theories

These theories are interpretivist with regard to knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978; Kozulin, 2003; Kozulin et al., 2003) and as indicated above, provide a suitable frame

for interpreting and understanding the perspectives of parents and teachers about refugee students' educational experiences in Canadian schools. Consistent with these theories, I see the development of perspectives as occurring holistically and not in isolated contexts (Ausubel, 1963) and a dynamic process developed through experiences that are interpreted in the light of the perceivers' prior knowledge/worldviews or beliefs (Driver, Leach, Millar, & Scott, 1997; Hodson, 1998; Nashon & Anderson, 2004), attitudes, and personal background (Guerts, 2002; King, Chipman, & Cruz-Janzen, 1994; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Further, I take the view that an individual's worldviews have a direct impact on the ways in which they learn (Hodson, 1998). In fact, Vygotsky socio-cultural theory of learning shows that individuals learn from social interactions. Also, the learners' worldviews are key to influencing their perceptions, interpretations of experience, and ultimately the conceptions of their reality (Hodson, 1998). Moreover, the socio-cultural identities of individuals and cultural groups to which they belong determine the cultural ways of knowing that they use to make sense of the world (Bell, Lederman & Abd-El-Khalik, 2000; Nashon, 2004a, 2004b). Furthermore, I believe that people's ways of knowing rarely develop instantaneously, but rather, catalytic events that connect classroom events to the real world have the potential to gradually affect their worldviews of the educational experience over a period of time (Anderson et al., 2000). Thus, I consider worldviews as embellishing values and assumptions inherent in the development and interpretation of the educational experience (Bell, Lederman & Abd-El-Khalik, 2000; Kilbourn, 1998; Lederman, 1992; NSTA 2, 2004; Valerie, Abd-El-Khalick, & Lederman, 2000).

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1: Introduction:

Refugee parents invest their faith and trust in the power of education as a pathway to a better future for their children. They have dreams about who they would like their children to be and as such often have a special interest in what goes on in schools including the experiences their children get learning and integrating in the school community. Similarly the teachers who teach these refugee children among other students have perspectives on the experiences of these refugee students. Therefore, it was imperative to talk directly to a select parents and teachers through interviewing. This allowed me the opportunity to probe further and deeply on emergent perspectives that enlightened my research question further. While framing my interview questions, I was well aware of how any talk about refugeeness could trigger memories of undesirable experiences that made the parents flee their home country and as such I ensured a much friendlier child centered discussions as in my experience parents often want the best for their children and any promise of the outcomes being shared by those responsible for education while protecting the interviewees' identities was often a very cordial environment that allowed the refugee parents to speak freely. It is this sensitivity that further influenced me to choose to interview parents and teachers to have their perspective on how refugee youths are experiencing education in Canadian schools.

What I realized in doing this research is that the participants, refugee parents in this case, have been through a lot of challenges and carry around this baggage which might be filled with trauma. For instance, there was a refugee mother I interviewed that was physically abused by her husband. The realization that they might be carrying some trauma has made me more aware of how to phrase my questions and my comments.

I did not want them to feel pressured and judged by their previous actions, I tried to ask necessary questions in order to avoid unnecessary painful memories. The questions asked during the interview were thus open-ended questions so that they would not feel cornered to answer the questions in a specific way.

Although I was intentionally prepared for the worst case scenarios, interestingly, the participants did not show any type of distress based on their past but rather showed gratitude for where they were now. Furthermore, although the parents expressed feelings of contentment and happiness at the end of the interview, they preferred to remain anonymous, and so did the teachers. Parents and teachers were assigned pseudonyms.

3.2: Method of data collection

This research is based on qualitative methods. Qualitative methods means the data for this research was collected through one hour-long online interviews, in order to respect the COVID-19 regulations. I chose interviews because I believe it is a way for them to express themselves deeply and not feel pressured to only pick a number on a survey. Interviews in my opinion allow the participants to share their experience in full extent and for as long or as little as they want, and in their own words. Interviews allow for a depth of understanding.

Theoretically speaking, interviews are one of the methods used by qualitative research. In fact they are “amongst the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). For my particular research questions, the use of interviews was to seek to explore the perceptions of the research questions, and thus specifically the use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to understand the perspective of parents and teachers on the topic of education of refugee youths. In this case, semi-structured interviews are the sole data source. Semi-structured interviews are a set of questions that the interviewer usually prepares in advance. This means preparing some open-

ended questions in order to guide the conversation and then during the interviews the researcher can fine-tune the questions and add more details based on the conversation (Drever, 1995). These semi-structured interviews were scheduled in advance and at a designated time and virtual space. Before the virtual interview, all communications were done through a professional email thread. For instance the consent form and the Zoom link were sent in advance.

At the beginning of the interview I asked them if they had any questions or concerns about the consent form and if they signed it. All of them agreed to the consent form and mentioned that it was very straightforward and thus did not have any further questions. During the virtual interview, sometimes depending on the answer of the participant, I would ask them follow up questions or clarification questions. Hence, all the interviews started with the same questions but based on the conversations and their answers the interviews were slightly different. The collected data was analyzed using two types of techniques, (1) content analysis where I first analyzed the content of the interviews and (2) thematic analysis where I looked at the common themes across the data.

3.3: Research question and the purpose of doing interviews

The research questions are:

- How do the parents and teachers perceive the education experiences offered to refugee youths in the Canadian education system while preparing for life in Canada?
- What do the parents and teachers consider to be the key factors influencing the integration of refugee youths in Canadian schools?

The purpose of this research is to uncover the strengths and weaknesses within our Canadian education system with a view to provoking a debate as to how education can play a role in

removing the stigma that portrays refugees as victims and powerless. As well, the proposed research aims to underscore the fact that while refugee youths could be in charge of their future destiny (have agency) they also have parents, teachers and school programs that determine how their school experience will turn out. Furthermore, the goal of this research is to explore perhaps if there is a correlation between education experiences and the formation of one's identity. More importantly, it will show that since Canada is a multicultural country, refugees tend to be exposed to multiple cultures starting at the doors of their home and of Canadian institutions.

In order to fully understand the experience of the refugee youths whilst talking to teachers and refugee parents, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews.

3.4: Data collection: Recruitment of parents and teachers

3.4.1: Procedure and recruitment

The requirements imposed before recruiting any participants were that they had to be Anglophone and had to be either refugee parents with children in a Canadian school in Greater Vancouver, or a teacher that had experience teaching refugee students in Greater Vancouver. In this research I conducted 7 interviews: three teachers that had experience with refugee students, and four parents of refugee children. The process of finding these participants was very lengthy. After receiving the BREB approval and the VSB approval, I emailed the VSB Manager of the SWIS workers, and he was able to give me a couple names of parents that were interested in volunteering with me for my research. I received all refugee parents participants through the VSB Manager of Settlement workers. In terms of finding the right teachers, I advertised my research to John Oliver Secondary school but was not contacted by any of their teachers. I also advertised on informal platforms as well. I

purposefully did that because I had heard from my friends who are teachers that some teachers do not value what the administration gives them. I wanted my research to be accessible to the teachers, so I created a Facebook post and sent out emails to some of my friends and teachers that I knew. After a couple weeks, I finally received a few teacher participants that were willing to share the experience of the refugees with me. Teachers would spread the word and give me other names of teachers in different districts that were potentially willing to take part in my research, thus, creating a snowballing effect. The teachers that took part in the study were teachers that had experiences teaching and being around refugee students that knew about their background and that could speak to their educational background. The teachers taught middle and high schools.

3.4.2: Location

Due to COVID and the lack of responses from participants, I had to adjust my focus. Instead of looking at the city of Vancouver only, I decided to look at Greater Vancouver which included Richmond and Surrey as well. The teachers and parents' experiences came from different areas of Greater Vancouver: East Vancouver, Vancouver, West Vancouver, Richmond and Surrey. As we will see later in the analysis part, this allowed me to see some overlap and differences in the experiences. The parents came from different countries in the Middle East (i.e., Syria) and Latin-America (i.e., Nicaragua). The students in the teachers' classrooms also included individuals from Syria, India, Mexico and China. Although I wanted to add the schools names in my research I have found some people did not want to share the name of their school, thus I decided to keep everything anonymous, and this includes their name and their schools' names. Despite the fact they wanted to remain anonymous on paper, they all still allowed me to record the interview in order to review them

afterwards. All collected data was stored in a password protected laptop, where no one had access except me.

3.4.3: Characteristics of the population

The teachers were one male and two females, some were Caucasian and some were from different ethnicities (i.e., Indian background and First Nations), which was interesting to see as they presented and talked to me differently. The four parents were ones that had refugee children but that were also able to speak English. The parents had different countries of origin, but they were African, Middle-Eastern and South American countries (for example: Syria, South Africa, Ethiopia and Nicaragua). The total participants, teachers and parents included, was seven. This number was decided with the committee and agreed upon as more than that would be quite difficult to transcribe.

Table 1 : Participants’ names and nationality

	Name of the participant	Nationality of the participant
Parent 1	Sarah	Syria
Parent 2	Nancia	Nicaragua
Parent 3	Janette	Burundi/ South Africa
Parent 4	Mohammed and Noor	Ethiopia/ Kenya
Teacher 1	Antoine	Canadian (European background)
Teacher 2	Suzanne	Canadian (Indian background)
Teacher 3	Claudia	Canadian and identified as First Nation

3.4.4: Ethical considerations

All interviews were audio-recorded, as well as additional notes on paper taken during the interviews and conversations. Prior to starting the audio recording session a second consent form was given to the participants in order to make sure that they know what the further steps and procedures are, to be fully transparent. The participants were aware that they could leave at any time during the study. Additionally, benefits and risks of the research were all stated prior to starting the interview.

Based on the context and the number of participants, this research could show some limitations. Due to COVID-19 we were only able to interview seven individuals, which to some extent some individuals might say that it is not possible to generalize. To that I will say that refugee groups are not a homogenous group, not all their experiences have been the same and thus not all their educational experiences will be the same. However, this study is a window to their life, through this study we are able to understand their complex and powerful story.

Chapter 4: Data Collection, Analysis and Results

4.1: Introduction

Data collection was guided by the study's main research questions: How do the parents and teachers perceive the education experiences offered to refugee youths in the Canadian education system while preparing for life in Canada? What do the parents and teachers consider to be the key factors influencing the integration of refugee youths in Canadian schools?

The purpose of this research uncover the enabling and inhibiting experiences of refugee students' success within our Canadian education system. Therefore my research elicited perspectives from refugee parents and teachers that had experience teaching refugee children, in order to understand refugee youths' educational experiences in Canada. I recruited refugee parents with refugee children by contacting the Manager of Vancouver School Board (VSB) Settlement worker who provided me the contact information of a couple parents whom I in turn contacted. Four parents volunteered to participate in the interview as part of my study. The parents came from Syria, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, and Burundi. Most of them had lived in different countries before coming to Canada including Kurdistan, Kenya and South Africa. All of them were relatively new to Canada, their arrival ranged from five years ago to one year ago.

I also recruited teachers who had taught or were teaching classes that comprised some or a significant number of refugee children. Through a snow sampling mechanism, I recruited three teachers from different ethnical backgrounds (one male Caucasian, one female Indian and one female First Nations) and school districts in the Greater Vancouver Area.

After asking questions during the interviews, I collected all the responses and created summaries to express how the parents and teachers felt about the educational experiences of

the refugee students overall. I first created individual summaries for each parent and then compared them. Second, I did the same for the teachers, I created individual summaries and then compared teachers to one another in order to find common themes. Third, I compared the analysis of the parents' interviews and the teachers' interviews, which allowed me to find the main key themes.

Furthermore, due to COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place on the Zoom platform where the session was recorded and kept in a password-lock host device. The collected data was stored on my password protected computer and the participant parents' and teachers' identities had been protected by assigning them pseudonyms. Similarly, the schools where the teachers teach or taught have been assigned pseudonyms. All interviews were conducted in English.

4.2: Parents' and Teachers Interview Data and Analysis

4.2.1: Introduction

Each parent was interviewed for 1 hour and the interview was recorded. As indicated the interview was to answer the research questions above. Through the following guiding questions each parent shared their perspectives of their children's educational experience in our Canadian school system. All the recorded data were manually transcribed. Then each data was summarized as shown in this section, to highlight their main points that were prompted by the guiding questions. In the first section I will focus on the parents' data and in the second section I will focus on the teachers' recorded data. Analysis of the data has been such as examining individual parent data and comparing parental data to find commonalities and themes across the data sets. Teacher interview data were similarly analyzed. Finally comparison between the two sets of analysis outcomes are compared and common themes

that cut across are determined to interpret the study's main objective of eliciting teachers' and parents' perspectives of refugee children's educational experience in our Canadian Education system.

4.2.2 Parents

4.2.2.1: Introduction

There were four parents, in this section I am presenting the summarized version of the interviews of parents' responses that guided their explanation of the children's educational experiences. One out of four parents was Syrian and the rest were from African countries and one from South-America.

Interview with Sarah

Parent A has been assigned the pseudonym Sarah. Sarah was from Syria and had three sons ranging from 9 to 13 years old. This family was living in Syria when the civil war happened and one of the sons witnessed some atrocities. One day he was in the bathroom and he found a bullet passing through the wall. His trauma was a wakeup call for his mom and she realized that it was very unsafe for them to be there. They decided to move to Kurdistan and then moved to Canada 4 years ago.

During the interview the mother kept acknowledging how grateful they were and how welcoming and inclusive Canada was. In fact she said "even during the month of Ramadan, the school does not ask them why they fast. They do not judge my sons, they allow all religions here in Canada". However, she mentioned that they are boys, thus even if they are Muslims people do not really ask them anything because they are not 'visibly' Muslims, unlike girls that have to wear their hijab. Sarah further mentioned that in general Canada is very respectful of people's culture and religion and their language, and that she always receives help from the SWIS (Settlement Worker in Schools). Sarah is absolutely satisfied

with the type of education that her sons are getting, she feels like they are learning a lot and faster than how they would learn in Syria. She mentioned that here students learn how to read and write much faster than in Syria, she even mentioned that she preferred the Canadian System better than the Syrian system, that there is more structure and organization. The English barrier has been present for the two elder sons but for the younger one he came at such a young age that he was able to learn very fast. She did mention that ‘Syrians know how to speak English we are just not really good’. Sarah tells us that they used to take English lessons in Syria, but when they came they still received some help from the ELL (English Language learner/ English second language) teacher. Additionally she emphasized that English was not the most difficult subject but rather science was.

Additionally she mentioned that at the beginning her sons, especially the one who noticed the bullet in the bathroom, had a lot of trauma but through prayer he was able to feel better. Religion for them was very important in order to process the trauma and integrate well into a new society. In fact, even if the Vancouver school offered counselling, he did not need it, as he relied on prayers. This led to another point where she mentioned that her sons truly embraced their national Syrian identity. They do not actually see themselves as refugees. Sarah has also taught them to respect the Canadian culture and learn the Canadian culture because “Canada has been nice to them and gave us a home”. She said: “our hearts are big and we can love many things”. There is no pressure to act a certain way, they truly embrace and respect both cultures. She also mentioned that the teachers do not really treat them differently, they are not seen as refugees, they are just seen as another student in the classroom and the mom appreciated that and said “it wouldn't create any stigma, [or perhaps less], and they will be okay”. Nevertheless, although they loved their country, they were not

only friends with other Syrian friends. The mother said “not all Syrian speak the same language. My sons speak Arabic but the other Syrians do not speak Arabic actually, and some of them are not even the same age.” She emphasized that all of them can be associated with being Canadians, because they speak a different language. In fact, her sons were friends with Caucasian Canadians and students from different cultural backgrounds as well. Sarah mentioned that they were well integrated into the Vancouver school and that there was no sign of bullying. In fact, there was an emphasis on the fact that having friends really helps them improve their English. It was more helpful than simply watching English cartoons on television.

Overall, Sarah said that the experiences of her sons have been quite successful. They have some issues with the English language, but all in all they have well integrated into the Vancouver school and have made some good friends that have allowed them to speak more English and get better. She emphasized that the younger one was like a Canadian and struggled less with English. Their religion and culture is respected. However, COVID-19 pandemic and online classes truly have disrupted their progress, she mentions that since everything is online and on the laptop they end up doing other things on their laptop.

Interview with Nancia

The second parent was given the pseudonym of Nancia, she is from Nicaragua and her son is 17 years old. They came to Canada a year ago. She mentioned that at the beginning they were welcomed and all the parents met all the teachers and all of them expressed what the requirements were and what needed to be done in order for their children to graduate and do well in university.

Even though they spoke a bit of English that they learned from Nicaragua, it was still a bit hard because there is a different accent here and different words. The son had to repeat one class and thus was put in a lower grade because his English was not good enough. The beginning was really hard for the son to integrate into the community because it was hard to find friends. Nancia mentioned that most of the students at the school in Vancouver were Asian and her son was Latino American and thus they would stay in their group and not include her son, until the teacher had to ask them to integrate him. The son did not want to go to school for a while, and he was very sad because he did not have any friends and felt like no one wanted to be friends with him. Nancia said: "He felt like a stranger at the beginning, sad and lonely. When you come here you feel strange, everything is different and the school is different". Additionally, his school did not have a uniform so there was a culture of fashion and having a lot of clothes, but the refugee boy did not have a lot of clothes. He mostly wore one jacket with a Nintendo on the back and his mother said that he would be called 'Nintendo'. He felt a bit insecure because his clothes were not the best whilst the other students would have fashion designer outfits. "It is very difficult to make relationships here because everyone stays in their friend group especially if you don't have the same culture or language".

However, after a while he adapted better and there were more activities where he met other students. In fact, he became friends with this Bangladeshi student and for a while they were really good friends until the Bangladeshi parents did not want him to be friends with a refugee/ or someone from a different culture. Months passed by, and one day the refugee kid went to a Latino-American event where he met a boy from Mexico, they were able to speak the same language and understood each other's culture. The mother mentioned that there was

some sort of culture shock at the beginning because the Latino culture is very friendly and social and she said that she noticed “that people here, especially Asian people were quite competitive and focused only on school, they did not want to help my son”. “My son told me: ‘Nobody talks to me, nobody approaches me, and I’m just like a stranger’”.

Nancia also mentioned that it was hard for him at the beginning, not only because of the lack of friendship but also because he is so young and went through a lot of trauma that he is usually stressed about the future, “Everything is new and it is not easy to adapt, it takes time”. The lack of friendship, and the trauma were not the only factors that caused him pain and feeling of sadness and feeling like a stranger’. The fact that he was put in a lower grade made it very hard for him to find friends because he only wanted friends his age. Thus, he continued to keep in touch with his friends in Nicaragua and after a while he was also able to make friends his age, here in Canada. When his friends graduated in Nicaragua and in Canada he felt very sad because he was still in school and had to take more classes to graduate. In fact, his mom was actually scared that he would not graduate on time.

On another note, Nancia, the mother, said that the school is *multicultural*- literal meaning of multicultural, meaning an environment that is inclusive and diverse to all cultures- but because there are not a lot of Latino children, their culture was not represented during the cultural fair. She mentioned that the son was surprised but at the same time he was very curious about the other culture, thus, it did not bother him.

Although his educational experiences were very hard, he is really loving the Canadian culture and introducing some traditions into his lifestyle. For instance, at home in Nicaragua they used to wear shoes and now he does not wear shoes at home, with this action one cannot conclude that it means the son likes Canada, but rather it means that he appreciates some

Canadian cultural norms. The mother also mentions that he is very proud and very grateful to be here. "He feels free to be whom he wants and to express what he wants, he feels like he has a future here, he feels proud and secure here". Overall, the mother said that even though it is a bit hard to integrate at the beginning and to make friendships, he feels like the school is very safe here, secure, organized and healthy. The teachers are very helpful and supportive.

Interview with Janette

The third parent was assigned the pseudonym of Janette, she was from Burundi but moved to South Africa where her 2 daughters were born, and then they moved to Canada a year ago. Her daughters and she were abused by her husband. In fact one of the daughters, the 12 years old daughter, still has a lot of trauma and fears about that experience. She has nightmares and in class is not able to focus too much because of the trauma and the fears. She is seeing a counsellor and is getting as much help as needed. The second daughter, the 10 years old daughter, is autistic and has some issues at school. For instance, she likes to remove her clothes in class and be naked, said Janette, and she likes to pee herself and scream. Due to autism, the mother was recommended by the doctor and decided to only use one language at home. Janette decided to only use English and stop speaking the two other languages that they used to speak, because she did not want her daughter to be confused even more. They used to speak a lot of English already in South Africa so that was not problematic for them when they came to Canada.

The 12 years old daughter is very successful in class, and she is becoming more Canadian than South African. Janette mentioned that "For instance, her clothes arrived from South Africa, and she didn't want to wear them anymore, because friends at her schools don't really wear these clothes". At the beginning they used to reminisce about their friends in South Africa and how they missed them, but now they have adapted and taken on the

Canadian identity, they have forgotten about the South African culture a bit and the mother said “you know children forget fast and they learn fast as well”. Additionally, they like Canadian food and the Canadian culture. When I asked how she feels about them forgetting their South African culture? She said “It's okay because it is important to have one identity and one culture to follow so that they do not confuse themselves, especially my autistic daughter. If you start mixing things you might become inflexible and say things have to be this way, and then you start comparing them, and they are still young, so I personally do not think it is good, they should not be confused so I let them be who they want to be”. The same thing happened with food, the autistic daughter eats everything but the elder daughter wants to only eat Canadian food “because that is what she eats at school”. Janette is very supportive of the daughter having a Canadian identity, “she has the right to decide what she wants to become”.

According to Janette, both of the daughters believe that they are having a good education here and that they have a lot to learn here. Janette said that the daughters are seen as normal students and not as refugee students. I asked for clarification and by normal she means that they are not singled out and excluded and treated differently. The mother is especially very content about the experience of the autistic kid because she is taken care of and is having a lot of support. However, when she was in South Africa the teachers used to beat her a lot and she would have a lot of scars. Janette mentioned that their educational experiences are much better here in Canada, she illustrated this with an example: in South Africa in order to have access to the bus to go to South African school they had to have a South African citizenship, thus this was not accessible for everyone. Additionally, if you had a child with a disability they would be treated really badly and excluded. However, she says

here in Canada people do not discriminate against you if you do not have the Canadian citizenship.

In terms of their culture being represented, the mother mentioned that their specific culture is not represented but she does not want them to be forced to do it. There is no racism but the mother does not know if the Vancouver school is multicultural. She described them as “they are all white but they could come from different countries”.

Overall despite the few issues that all teenagers face, the mother is very satisfied with the way the school is treating them and how they are performing overall. Janette believes that her daughters are adapting very well to the Canadian culture. “In school they are doing well, they are good, they are fine, and they are comfortable, there are not any problems with school”. - Janette

Interview with Mohamed and Noor

The last parents were assigned the pseudonyms of Mohamed and Noor. They were a couple from Ethiopia that moved to Kenya and then were moved here to Canada through UNHCR. They have seven children, in terms of citizenship there are technically five Kenyans and two Canadians. Their ages ranged from 16 years old to 1 year old. In Kenya they all learned how to speak English and in fact the father said “you know Kenya is a colony of Britain, so they speak really well English, their English is better than Canada”. In fact, his children are not taking any ELL classes. Mohamed and Noor are very satisfied by their children’s academic performances, however COVID-19 has made it hard on their children’s learning. Yet despite the COVID-19 difficulties, the children are still very grateful to be in Canada, they are not bullied at school and the Vancouver school is multicultural, meaning there were multiple observable ethnicities. The parents have acknowledged that they have never experienced any sort of racism here in Canada unlike in the US.

The father mentioned that when the kids arrived in Canada they identified as Canadians, especially as time went by they slowly forgot the Kenyan and Ethiopian culture because they were so young when they arrived in Canada. The parents said that they do not really identify as refugees especially in school when the teacher treats them the same as regular students and does not exclude them. The elder remembers a bit but he was 12 years old when they arrived in Canada, now he is 17 years old. Noor still cooks traditional food at home and she still tries to teach them about the Ethiopian culture at home. Additionally, the parents add that prior to leaving their country for Canada they received some guidance in Kenya. In Kenya, the Canadian Embassy instructed them about the Canadian culture and gave them some resources in order to succeed and integrate well into the society.

Overall, the children have integrated well into the Canadian schooling system. The parents are content with the grades that they are getting and the friendships that they are making. However, they mentioned that COVID-19 has made it difficult for the children to progress more, they preferred it when the kids were in class in person.

4.2.2.2: Comparing the summaries of parents interview data

After I summarized the parents interview data I found 2 key common themes:

1. Refugee parents perspectives of their children's school experiences are manifested in the interpretations of the children's preferred dressing

It becomes overwhelming for the refugee children to enter a Vancouver school that has a lot of rich students or perhaps students from different ethnicities. In fact almost all parents have mentioned the importance of clothing. This claim can be explained through two examples: the Nicaraguan child and the South African child.

The Nicaraguan boy wanted more trendy clothes to fit in with the other students from his school in Vancouver. As mentioned above, he only had one jacket with a Nintendo on the

back and the students started to call him 'Nintendo'. He started to feel more and more insecure especially because according to the mom the other students would wear designer branded outfits. Nancia told him that "clothes are not everything and I like your clothes". The mom explained that they could not afford more clothes, but that multiple times the son would still ask for different clothes because he wanted to integrate and have more friends. He felt like a stranger and that people did not talk to him much, so he thought that having better clothes would allow him to have more friends.

The South African girl did not want to wear traditional South African clothes and preferred to wear Canadian school clothes like her friends. Her mom said that as soon as the clothes arrived from South Africa she did not want to wear them because "the other kids were not wearing that". The mom said "she likes to dress like a Canadian and I let her, that's how her friends dress here".

In this case we can see that clothing is a way that facilitates social integration, so that the other students do not see them differently.

2. Refugee parents' perspectives of their children's school experience are manifested in the perceptions of fluency in English, and the inclusion of cultural backgrounds

Most parents said that their children integrated well into the school except the parent from Nicaragua. She mentioned that the difference in ethnicities and the inability to speak well English impacted the interaction of her son and the other students. She said "it was difficult for him to make friends". She also mentions that they came from a low social class and that the rest of the students were wealthier and would have multiple clothes, while her son did not. Additionally, from the children that had positive inclusive experiences, one out of four parents were Syrian and the rest were from African countries, which are both

minorities and they were well integrated. This rules out the factor of proximity to whiteness. In addition, all three parents did not mention any financial difficulties like the Nicaraguan parent did. This could perhaps show that social class plays a role into the successful social integration of the refugee children. In fact, Bloch and Hirsh, (2017) mentions that every refugee has different parental, economic and social resources and thus they will have different educational experiences. Vancouver can be a very expensive city to live in and a lot of people here are very wealthy and enjoy dressing up and if the refugee students like the Nicaraguan boy, feel pressured to conform to the Vancouverite societal norms. It is then, when it becomes problematic and possibly impacting their integration negatively (for example the Nicaraguan boy was not really accepted within the Asian friend group).

However, in the case where the child already knew how to speak English, it was easy for them to fully integrate the school community. For instance, the South African daughter already knew how to speak English and even though “she was the only Black kid at her school” according to her mom, she still had a lot of Caucasian friends. In this case she had a very different experience than the Nicaraguan boy. One of the main differences in these two examples is that the school the South African girl went to was economically more closely related to her family than the Nicaraguan boy that came from a low social class but attended a wealthy school. The second main difference is that the South African girl knew how to speak English well since she learned it in her country, but the Nicaraguan boy had a bit more difficulties with the language.

Additionally, Sarah mentions that her sons knew how to speak English well and were able to have friends that were Canadians, and not per se Syrian. She said that “not all Syrians speak Arabic and my sons speak Arabic”.

Thus, overall parents noticed that when their child knew and felt comfortable in English they would integrate the school community better and faster than if they had language difficulties. Being able to speak well English allows the students to find friends and continue to speak English and progress in that, it is a positive cycle. Additionally, the parents also noticed that when their children did not know English well prior to arriving in Canada, the younger sibling was usually the one that would learn the language the fastest.

Unfortunately the parents noticed that their English fluency was negatively impacted when the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2.3: Teachers

4.2.3.1: Introduction

Three teachers volunteered to be interviewed. There was one Caucasian male, one Indian woman and one First Nations woman. They taught in Greater Vancouver schools and had a lot of experiences teaching refugee students. Below, I will summarize their answers to the interview questions.

Interview with Antoine

Teacher A has been assigned the pseudonym Antoine. Antoine is a middle-age white man. This teacher was intentionally explicit about where he was working. He only mentioned that he was a teacher at the welcome center in Surrey. It is a program under the school district where all refugee students, newcomers and immigrants come to and have an assessment of their English and receive help if they are struggling with English. The students there follow a 10 week program before going to regular school in order to have all the resources and the basic English tools to succeed and integrate well into the Canadian society. Antoine also mentioned that although they might be ready to integrate sometimes it can be hard as there is already an established community at the school. “It is a hard experience,

because they don't speak the language and they don't fit in the same way a kid that was born here would fit in" and "It is very hard to break into other groups, when you have a different culture". The class is very small and most students have the same English level, thus there is less judgment and more confidence, said the teacher. Antoine said that when the students arrive into the program they are "just like a deer in the headlight when they come here, they are very shocked". In this case the teacher is referencing the culture shock that is visible when refugee students first arrive in Canada. "At the beginning it is hard and they feel lost, but that happens to anyone that goes to a new country and doesn't really speak the language". Antoine mentions that as time goes by, having a better grasp of English gives them more confidence and they feel less shy. Antoine always emphasizes to each student that they are capable of achieving anything no matter who they are and where they come from.

Evidently, not all students come from the same country, and even when they come from the same country it does not mean they are the same person. It is important to understand that every child is different and has had different experiences, said Antoine. For instance, during an activity where the students had to draw their flag.

"They are all very proud of their country, even the most war-torn countries, so it was not a difficult assignment. Yet here you see these two kids from Syria drawing the same Syrian flag but with different colours. One of them drew it with green and red and one drew it with black, green and red. I asked the Settlement worker what it meant and he said one represented the government and one represented the rebel group."

The teacher did not know about their background, but now that it was exposed, there was a division that started to form, so the teacher moving forward decided to focus only on

landmarks. This teacher was very welcoming of their culture and encouraged them to speak their language and to be proud of their country. There was no sense of assimilation or acculturation put on the student. The teacher was truly embracing the mixture of the 2 cultures. However, at some point it became problematic because sometimes the students would fight with each other in their language and the teacher did not know what they were saying and what the teacher needed to do. “Anger and aggression towards each other (students), trauma will do that and they will get defensive and in survival mode, and sometimes the disagreement can become racist”. Antoine also mentions that there are some real success stories where kids have become friends across cultures, as they have the same interest. Overall, when they leave the program they are more equipped to go to regular school and have more tools in their bag.

Interview with Suzanne

This teacher was assigned the pseudonym of Suzanne. Suzanne is a middle-aged woman who is ethnically Indian. Suzanne’s school name was not recorded. Suzanne mentioned that refugee students integrated well into the school, because the school was multicultural and also had kids with learning disabilities. She mentioned that lower mainland schools are very multicultural and thus the social integration of the students is smoother, but if it was in a less diverse community then it would be very hard for them to integrate well. “Kids in the lower mainland are used to having kids from different backgrounds”. Additionally, she mentioned that not every refugee will be friends with their same ethnicities. “Not all Syrians are friends with other Syrians; they are all in different age groups”. Interestingly in this interview, Suzanne mentioned that if the student did not need help they would not receive anything but if they had learning difficulties they would receive help, which is something that other teachers have also mentioned.

Additionally, when refugee students would have difficulties understanding concepts and lessons in class, the ELL teacher or the learning specialist would use similar techniques that they used with students with learning disabilities (i.e., visual approaches). During the interview the teacher mentioned a case where the refugee was in class and could not comprehend anything that was said to him, so he decided to simply leave the room. Then when they asked the student why he left, he said that he did not understand what was happening so he thought he should leave, because he didn't feel like it was his place there. He felt like a stranger according to the teacher. Suzanne mentioned that when he started to gain more confidence in English he felt more comfortable to be at school, the teacher said "Once they learn the language they are pretty okay and feel more empowered". The teacher said that they are very fast learners. Suzanne however, emphasized "that the younger they are the better they cope".

On another note, the teacher does not know if the culture of the refugee students is represented at the school, but Suzanne mentioned that the refugee students tend to eat very traditional food and no one bullies them. In fact, the school usually is aware of some traditions, for instance some of them do not eat specific meats (for instance Halal meat for Muslim students) or have to pray during the day. Thus, even if there is not an explicit expression of inclusion there is also not an explicit expression of exclusion.

Interview with Claudia

Claudia is a young woman in her mid-20s, who identifies as First Nations. She worked at a multicultural school, in fact she said "In a class of 25 students there could have been perhaps 10 different languages that were spoken, so very diverse". Claudia adds that "Because the school was so diverse and had some many people speaking so many different language it was almost guaranteed that the new student would find someone that spoke their

language, one refugee student spoke Arabic and there was 3 other students as well that spoke Arabic, so that allowed better integration”, this made it easier at times when the teacher needed to know something or needed something to be translated, the other students would help a bit. She added and said “I think about the shy student that I had, if he was in a different school he might not have succeeded as well as he did at our school”. Tavares and Slotin, (2012) in fact mention that the students could receive the warmest welcome but they might still feel very shy to share their thoughts in front of the class.

Claudia worked at a school where there were about 6 refugee students. She mentioned that when the students needed help they were put in literacy programs and would have learning specialists help them, alongside having ELL classes. However, she mentions that in elementary school there are some learning specialists but not really ELL or literacy programs to help them, “I think the funding is just not there”. Claudia acknowledges that when the refugee students arrive in Canada they have to go through the welcome center which is a 10 week program (this is also addressed by Antoine), which they can greatly benefit from. She had a few refugee students in grade 6 that did not speak English very well which made it very hard at times she said “there is so much google can translate. How do you explain algebra to a kid that does not understand English well? It was very hard for the student, but he couldn’t be put in a lower grade because he already knew how to do all these things”. “Things would get lost in translation, but sometimes I asked the other Syrian student that spoke his language, to teach him a bit, but I didn’t want to rely on them too much. I wanted him to know by himself, but the language barrier was so strong, and when COVID-19 hit and we had to go online, it was so tough for him, a huge challenge”. In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of VSB programs such as Reading Coach VSB, were cancelled and thus the refugees,

newcomers, and new immigrants struggling with English had less and less resources due to the pandemic.

Claudia mentioned that usually students were not frustrated to have extra help to progress better academically. Most of the time the students actually enjoyed taking that break from class, the teacher mentioned that they never rolled their eyes at her, they were very grateful for all the help, if anything they were very shy. Although her focus was on English because she wanted the students to have a specific level so they would do well in high school and not fall behind, she mentioned that most teachers would emphasize the importance of keeping one's national language. They would mention how important it is to embrace one's culture. Claudia mentioned that to smoothen the transition and in order to bridge the two worlds, she would first focus on building connections and building friendships with the student and facilitating friendship in the classroom. She mentions that friendship is indeed an important key factor in helping the social integration of refugee students. For instance, there was this young Syrian kid in grade 5, and he was extremely shy at the beginning "he was very smart but sometimes he would get shy and wouldn't say the answer to the teacher even though he had the right answer, but as his English got better, he then started to feel more comfortable". Additionally, multiple times he wished he was back in the camp with his friends, but as time passed by he discovered that other boys in his class liked playing soccer just like him, so he became friends with another student, a Filipino boy. The teacher said "it took something not verbal for them to communicate and become friends".

Claudia also mentioned that not everyone was friends with people from different cultures. She mentioned "there was this one girl in grade 7 that would only stay with people that spoke her language, and I was scared for her academic success when she would go to

high school, because she did not practice English as much”. She further said that usually younger students tend to learn faster English and get more comfortable “sometimes the little kids get too comfortable in English and they start making mistakes and we have to go back to the basics, but if they could speak excellent English they would never stop talking”. Claudia also mentioned that although their English was not always strong, they were very smart children and in fact, one student from Mexico told her that school here was too easy and that she wanted more worksheets and less creative exercises. According to the teacher, every kid's experience is different because every past is different, some might have gone through trauma.

Furthermore one on hand, there was no discrimination against refugee students in fact they wanted to learn more about refugees since they had friends that were refugees. The class needed to pick a book for a class project and they picked a book about refugees.

Additionally, the teacher mentioned

“The context of the school really matters, I cannot imagine how they would feel if they were put in a school with all white kids. The government should focus more and be more intentional in where they place the kids, having a diverse multicultural school will definitely help more.”

In addition, she said that even though the school was a welcoming environment the refugee students would still struggle a bit with cultural cues and slang, which is normal when one arrives into a new country but sometimes it is difficult for the teachers to know what to expect (i.e., explaining residential schools, Japanese internment camps, Chinese head tax). On the other hand, a lot of the students experienced discriminations in that school not only the refugee students, in fact the students that were Muslim received a lot of hatred from the Trump era.

In terms of clothing, she mentioned that everyone from that school came from a lower social class, so there was no fashion clothing competition. In fact, almost all of them needed new jackets, so the refugee students were not singled out. In terms of cultural representation the teacher mentioned that

“The culture of the refugees were not per se represented, but because of the refugee students came from Syria, most of them were Muslims, so yes the Muslim culture was represented. In fact, some of them would pray at certain times of the day and it was normal and no one discriminated against them”.

In terms of gender, Claudia is the only teacher out of the three teachers that observed a difference. She said that there was a difference between girls and guys to some extent, especially when the girls have their period for the first time then they need to start wearing the hijab, the other students were a bit confused that one day she doesn't have to wear it and the next day she has to wear it. Claudia is the only one that mentioned the engagement of the parents. Parents would bring traditional snacks for the teachers and teachers assistant, to try.

4.2.3.2: Comparing the common themes in the teachers' interview data:

In the collected data obtained through interviews of teachers that have had experiences with refugee students, I have found some common key themes mentioned across the interviews.

- 1. Teachers' interview dataset showed that increased engagement and confidence in learning experiences at school is indicative of improved fluency and mastery English language.***

Antoine, Suzanne and Claudia all mentioned that when a refugee student was not able to express themselves or understand something in English they would withdraw and feel

uncomfortable in class. Antoine said that “refugee students come into Canada not knowing the language and the culture, they are like deer in the headlight”. There is a feeling of un-comfortability and uneasiness. Antoine adds that after a while the refugees are able to understand English better and start making jokes and talking more in class. Suzanne gives us an example of the refugee that was not able to understand the class and that stood up and left the classroom. She also mentions that as soon as he received the proper support, he felt more comfortable in English. As mentioned above the teacher said “Once they learn the language they are pretty okay and feel more empowered”. The teacher said that they are very fast learners. Claudia tells us that the Syrian refugee kid knew the answer but was too shy to speak in front of the class because of his English abilities. Suzanne and Claudia also both mentioned that the younger the student the easier it was for them to adapt to the school culture and learn the language. Teachers’ interview data showed that the ability of refugee students to adapt to Canadian school life is a function of age. Indeed, Suzanne mentioned that refugee students and children in general are very fast learners, but she noticed a difference in age. Suzanne emphasized “that the younger they are the better they cope”. Claudia additionally mentioned that sometimes the younger kids learned English faster, she said “sometimes the little ones would be too confident in English and we had to correct them a couple times. They are not shy, they are like social butterflies. Sometimes I worry about the kids that are in high-school and stay within their mother tongue group. It is good but I am scared their English will not be good enough for high-school”. Furthermore, according to the teachers, having the ability to speak English allowed them to make friends with students from other cultures.

2. *Teachers' interview dataset showed that common elements between cultures enabled cross cultural friendships among students.*

Students became friends across cultures. Refugee students would not always stay with people from their country because they do not all speak the same language or have the same age, according to Suzanne “Not all Syrians are friends with other Syrians; they are all in different age groups”. In fact, Claudia mentions that the Syrian boy became friends with a Filipino student because of their love for soccer. The teacher said “it took something not verbal for them to communicate and become friends”. Claudia also mentioned that some refugee students were Muslims and some non-refugee students were also Muslims, and they were able to become friends because of this common ground. Antoine also added that there were some successful stories of cross-cultural friendship because some students had the same interest (e.g., a sport in common). Furthermore, the teachers also added that in this case having the ability to speak English with their friends allowed them to have a better grasp of English and more practice, which is something that some parents also mentioned.

3. *Teachers' interview dataset showed that existing multicultural schools/ environments are helpful for refugee students' social integration.*

Suzanne mentioned that “kids from the lower mainland have seen a lot of diverse cultures and so they are used to having different cultures”. She mentions that it helped refugee students integrate faster because students did not bully them and the teachers did not single them out. Claudia also adds on to that and said that “The context of the school really matters, I cannot imagine how they would feel if they were put in a school with all white kids. The government should focus more and be more intentional in where they place the

kids, having a diverse multicultural school will definitely help more”. Claudia also mentioned that in the school there were around 25 students in the classroom and around 10 different spoken languages, which meant that when a new refugee kid arrived into the class there was a chance they would find someone that spoke their language. According to the teacher this allowed for a smooth transition and social integration.

4. Teachers expressed the need for refugee students to hold both home and Canadian cultural practices.

All teachers emphasized the importance of keeping and embracing one’s culture. For instance, Antoine mentioned that he encouraged the refugee students to keep and speak their mother tongue, when English was not required. Additionally, he mentioned that he would do some exercises and worksheets around the expression of their culture. For example, Antoine mentioned

“They are all very proud of their country, even the most war-torn countries, so it was not a difficult assignment. Yet here you see these two kids from Syria drawing the same Syrian flag but with different colours. One of them drew it with green and red and one drew it with black, green and red. I asked the Settlement worker what it meant and he said one represented the government and one represented the rebel group”.

Suzanne adds that “refugee students would eat traditional food and be proud of it and not be bullied”. Claudia also mentions that some students would stay in their cultural group and speak their language and the teachers allowed them. In fact, Claudia mentioned that “we did not want them to be ashamed of their country. We wanted them to be proud of who they are

and their national identity”. Claudia mentioned that the refugee students also learned about Canadian history and culture and respected it (e.g., they learned about Japanese internment camps, Chinese head tax and residential schools). The teachers mentioned that because they were in a multicultural school, it was easier for them to keep and be proud of their national culture and identity.

4.2.4: Emerging themes from parents’ and teachers’ interview dataset

Through the seven interviews conducted, we were able to learn the educational experiences of approximately 18 refugee children that are receiving an education in the Greater Vancouver area, this includes Vancouver, Richmond and Surrey. Based on the parents’ and the teachers’ interview dataset I was able to find some key themes that will allow us to answer the research questions about the educational experience of refugee students in Canada.

1. Teachers demonstrated that a multicultural environment allowed for a better social integration into the school community.

Indeed, the teachers mentioned the importance of having a multicultural environment for the student in order to facilitate the transition and inclusion more. Upon clarification, what the teachers meant by multicultural schools is the fact that the school was diverse and the body of students was very diverse culturally. Multiculturalism simply means the acknowledgement of different cultures, the respect towards diversity, and the willingness to live together despite differences. In a world of globalization emphasizing immigration and humanitarian aid where does Canada stand? Since the multiculturalism policy of 1971 and the 1988 Multiculturalism Act, Canada frames most of its action and contexts as multiculturalism. The Act of 1988 ought to protect cultural heritage of Canadians, reduce

discrimination and encourage the creation of multicultural programs. According to the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* acknowledged that multiculturalism was one of the main foundations of Canada and that it would influence its future. Canada's multiculturalism came out of cultural differences, where the two solitudes: Anglophone/British and the Francophone/French (Quebec) could not agree on one specific culture that should be used (Kunz and Sykes, 2007). According to Will Kymlicka, Canada's main four aims with this policy is "to support the cultural development of ethno cultural groups; to help members of ethno cultural groups to overcome barriers to full participation in Canadian society, to promote creative encounters and interchange among all ethno cultural groups; and to assist new Canadians in acquiring at least one of Canada's main official languages." (Kymlicka, 1998, p. 1).

All the interviewed teachers mentioned that most schools in Greater Vancouver tend to be multicultural where students already have experiences with children from different ethnicities and abilities/disabilities. Suzanne mentioned that "kids in the lower mainland usually have seen all types of cultures". Claudia also mentioned that the school knew about most refugee cultures. For instance the school knew about halal meat for Muslims and the specific prayer times. Additionally, Claudia mentioned

"The context of the school really matters, I cannot imagine how they would feel if they were put in a school with all white kids. The government should focus more and be more intentional in where they place the kids, having a diverse multicultural school will definitely help more".

Additionally, Claudia mentioned that in her classroom there were 25 students and there were 10 different languages spoken meaning that when refugee students arrived they would likely be able to communicate with at least another student.

2. *Teachers and parents emphasized the important role that friendship plays in the social integration of refugee students*

When asked during the interview whether or not refugee students stayed within their cultural group, teachers mentioned that refugee students were friends with people from other countries. For instance, Suzanne mentioned “Not all Syrians are friends with other Syrians; they are all in different age groups”. Claudia mentioned that her Syrian refugee student was shy at the beginning but then through his love for soccer was able to find some friends. He became friends with another Filipino student. The teacher mentions that soccer was non-verbal communication that allowed them to become friends.

Furthermore, the ability of having friends from different countries allows the students to share their different cultures and be proud of it, but also it allows them to practice their English. Teachers and parents strongly emphasized the importance of building friendship, Claudia mentioned that before helping the student with school work, she would try to build friendship with them and encourage friendship in the classroom as well. When friendship was lacking, students showed more signs of sadness and loneliness. For instance Nancia said that at the beginning her son was not included in the friend groups at school, and that he felt like a stranger and that no one liked him. She mentioned that he felt much better when he started to find more friends, but it was a difficult process.

3. *Parents and teachers perceived the social integration of refugee youths through the acceptance and respect of their national culture and the Canadian culture*

Since coming to Canada parents have taught their children to be respectful to Canada since Canada has accepted them. Sarah in fact said that “our heart is big”, and they can love Canada and their own culture. Nancia also mentioned that she used to tell her son to respect Canada because Canada gave them a home. At home a lot of the parents emphasize their cultural traditions, for instance Mohamed said “my wife tries to teach them the Ethiopian culture at home”. On the other side of the spectrum parents have shared that their children forget their national identity and fully take on the Canadian identity. Janette shared “It's okay because it is important to have one identity and one culture to follow so that they do not confuse themselves, especially my autistic daughter. If you start mixing things you might become inflexible and say things have to be this way, and then you start comparing them, and they are still young, so I personally do not think it is good, they should not be confused so I let them be who they want to be”. She mentioned that she is flexible as long as there is respect for both cultures.

4. Parents' and teachers' perspectives of refugee children's school experience are manifested in the perceptions of fluency in English

Parents that had children with English difficulties mentioned that their child would not adapt fast to the school community. Nancia mentioned that her son was put in a lower grade because of his English. The fact that he was in a lower grade because of his English made him insecure and sad and it made it difficult for him to find friends his age. Additionally the mother said that a lot of kids in his school were Asian and they did not include him in their friend group because he had a different culture. Claudia mentioned that she noticed that when a child is not comfortable in English they tend to be shy in class and answering questions and understanding what the teacher says. She mentioned that sometimes

she has to refer to other students with the same first language to explain a concept or she has to rely on google translate, but it becomes very hard for the refugee student. Antoine also mentioned that at the beginning when the students do not have a grasp of the English language they are like a deer in the headlights, they are shocked. Antoine, Claudia, Suzanne, Nancia, and Janette have clearly mentioned that almost all their refugee children/ students tend to feel more comfortable and proud to be in Canada when they have a good grasp on English. Suzanne said “Once they learn the language they are pretty okay and feel more empowered”. Sarah, one of the parents, mentioned that because no one spoke the same language as her kid, they would progress in English faster because they had to speak in English with their friends. She said that speaking English with their friends is one of the main factors of how they improved their English. Additionally, teachers have noticed that when a student does not know how to speak English, usually the younger they are the easier it is for them to learn the language. However, they have also mentioned that if the student needs extra support it would be given to them. This means there would be ELL support, and literacy support among other things. According to Suzanne and Claudia sometimes teachers and EA would use techniques they use with students with learning difficulties.

5. *Parents found that clothing and social class played a role in the integration of their children.*

Last but not least, parents have mentioned that their children tend to use fashion and clothing in order to seek acceptance in the school community. For instance, Nancia mentioned that her son wanted to have more clothes so that he could fit better with the other students. He wanted to fit into a social class that he was not part of. He wanted to have more clothes because his other friends had more clothes. But the mother explained that he was not

able to have more clothes because they were financially unable to. Janette also said that her daughter would not wear the South-African clothes when they arrived in Canada and she wanted to wear more Canadian clothes.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1: Introduction

The main results and themes found throughout the parents' and teachers' interviews provide insights on the answer to the research questions: How do the parents and teachers perceive the education experiences offered to refugee youths in the Canadian education system while preparing for life in Canada? What do the parents and teachers consider to be the key factors influencing the integration of refugee youths in Canadian schools? Although the literature review showed that some scholars viewed refugee educational experiences as predominantly negative, the results of this research brings a different perspective, one where students in Greater Vancouver had relatively positive experience with the Canadian schooling system. This study is based on interviews with refugee parents from Syria, Nicaragua, South Africa and Ethiopia, and Canadian teachers that have experiences teaching refugee students. After interviewing parents and teachers and asking those questions about refugee youths education experiences in Canada, there were 5 key themes that arose. (1) Teachers have mentioned that the multicultural environment facilitated the integration of refugee students into the classroom, (2) which allowed them to make friends (3) and share and be proud of their cultural heritage and embrace the Canadian culture, a cross-cultural competence. (4) Additionally, the fact that there are different languages used in the student body, English becomes the main language that everyone knows. In order to make friends they are having to speak English, which means more practice. Indeed parents and teachers have found that fluency in English has a positive correlation in the integration of refugee students. (5) Lastly, along with friendship parents also noticed that clothing/fashion was a factor in helping refugees integrate into the school.

5.2: Discussing Factors That Play a Role in the Educational Experiences of Refugee Youths

1. The role of multicultural environment: Teachers mentioned that multicultural environment allowed for a better integration into the school community

To some extent the teachers know that the students are refugees but they still decide to treat them like the other students. Refugee students might receive more resources, yet they are not explicitly singled out in front of all the other students because of their status.

Additionally, the teachers refrain from treating them as victims. This teaching style creates an inclusive environment, where the refugee students tend to feel more “normal” and less like strangers. Suárez-Orozco et al., (2017) mentioned that schools that tend to serve immigrants usually have teachers that have child-centered pedagogy where the student is placed in the middle, which is what we see in the collected data. However Lems, (2020) mentioned that the Switzerland educational project for refugees meant to integrate refugee youths but in fact ended up creating more obstacles for the refugee students. Thus it is important to receive comments and amend programs until students are placed in the middle and empowered.

This research claims that when students are placed in the right environment, they are more likely to feel welcome in class and are more likely to engage with the lesson and the teacher. Their behaviours to some extent are socially constructed.

During the interview when the teachers were asked about the educational experiences of refugee students, all teachers made reference to either multicultural focus exercises or multicultural environments. Multicultural focus exercises looked like Antoine’s example of drawing your country’s flag. In my opinion, this exercise allowed the refugee students to

express their national identity and show the other students where they are from. By national identity, I mean the students expressed their political and cultural affiliation. For instance in Antoine's class, two students from Syria coloured the flag with different colours. The colours were representative of different groups, one was the government and the other colour represented the rebellious groups aiming to subvert the current Syrian government. In my opinion, Antoine's culturally inclusive exercise allowed the refugee students to express their national identity, and acknowledge and embrace others' culture as well. Antoine in this case put the child at the center of the focus. Teachers are sometimes considered frontline agents of integration, and although all the teachers have mentioned that there is a lack of training on how to teach refugee students specifically; some teachers like Antoine have been able to develop exercises that allow the students to talk about their cultures and country. This allowed the refugees to feel welcomed, included and proud of their country. Despite the fact that the teachers did not receive a special training for refugee students, they still followed BCTF (2016) guidelines. They applied the 6 main rules: (1) create a safe space, (2) know their stories, (3) support their relationships, (4) have a buddy system, (5) provide opportunities for them to rise and (6) invite and engage with parents.

According to Claudia and Suzanne a multicultural environment also helped them profoundly. In fact, Suzanne mentioned the point of view of the non-refugee students. She said that in fact, the students in the Lower Mainland are very aware of the diverse ethnicities, races, cultures, languages and religion. There is a cultural bound. Due to the fact that the non-refugee students ("regular students") had already been exposed to such diversity in the student body, the non-refugee students did not find refugee students as strangers or different. In my opinion, the mental awareness from the current student body allowed refugee students

to feel comfortable, which led them to integrate quicker. Suzanne also mentioned that refugee students would feel more comfortable talking to teachers from the same ethnicity or similar background.

Additionally, Claudia mentioned that refugee students would not have succeeded as well if they went to a school with all Caucasian students. Wilkinson (2002) mentioned that ethnicity continues to be a major contributor in the success of refugee students, and that refugee students that are closer to Caucasians are more likely to succeed especially if they are in a school that is less multicultural (for example we can see this in the Syrian boy's story mentioned above). That perspective is something that is socially constructed to some extent.

Having someone from the same country as you or someone with the same religious beliefs, or same language, makes you feel more comfortable. When coming into a new country with a new language to learn, having someone that speaks your mother tongue can be comforting. Thus, multicultural schools favor positive integration.

Another example of being open to learning about different cultures, Claudia mentioned that they had a class project to do and the students needed to pick a book, they decided to pick a book on refugees in order to learn more about their friends. Thus, this analysis demonstrates that it was not only superficial multiculturalism in terms that they only accepted someone from a different country, but it was deeper as they wanted to learn more in depth about refugees. In this case where the schools try to expose students to different cultures, the data analysis demonstrates that there is no sign of acculturation and forcing the refugee students to assimilate to the Canadian culture. However, it is important to note that not all friend groups are made based on country of origin or mother tongue, because not all refugees are from the same country and have the same age. This research is not saying that

the more diverse the school is the better the refugee students will integrate. Rather it is saying that the diversity of the school helps refugees feel more comfortable and less like a stranger; thus, being different becomes the new normal. I would argue that when students are in a multicultural environment they feel less that they are a stranger, because there are other students that may look like them or they might all be from different cultures (i.e., the Syrian student that arrived at Claudia's school and met someone with the same language as him versus, the Nicaraguan son that arrived in a school with predominantly Asian students and his mother mentioned that he felt like a stranger because they did not include him). Their diversity almost allows them to be in the same boat, which creates inclusivity within diversity. Additionally, although this study is showing that Canadian schools tend to be inclusive towards refugees, it is not saying that the whole Canadian society is inclusive towards refugees. Having an inclusive educational environment does not equate to them having inclusive experiences outside of the school, having an education intrinsically opens the door for them to have a prosperous future as they are able to speak English and acquire a well-rounded education.-

Interestingly, although all the parents and teachers mentioned the importance of multiculturalism in the integration of the refugee students -- almost all of the refugee's culture was not included or made aware of. For instance, the Nicaraguan family said that during the cultural fair there was no representation of Latin culture but that was because there were not a lot Latino students. Additionally, the parent from South Africa also mentioned that their culture was not explicitly represented but that she did not want to force them in case they did not have the correct resources. Claudia mentioned that the refugee culture was not represented per se but their religious culture was. Most of the refugee students there were

Syrians which meant that they were mostly Muslims as well so they would blend with the Muslims friends and have that representation but again it was not explicit, which is ironic because multiculturalism is the representation of diversity and different cultures but in this case some cultures were not represented.

In terms of multicultural environments, this research shows that some schools in Vancouver tend to have a pool of students with different ethnicities, race and cultural backgrounds, hence leading them to conclude they have a multicultural environment. However, that does not mean that they have a multicultural education per se, and that all cultures are represented in the school culture. For instance, we can ask ourselves and the teachers ‘when the multicultural fair ends, what changes? Did the school decide to add more topics/ lessons on the different cultures present in Canada? Or is the European Canadian history the main one that is still being taught?’. Teachers could potentially include different cultures by creating inquiry based learning. This could for instance look like having a science project where students have to look at how one scientific concept is looked at in one specific country, the students would be allowed to pick the country they want to learn more about. According to Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, we understand that children have as much to give as they have to learn and that they are not ‘empty vessels’ that can be oppressed.

Furthermore, although none of the parents expressed explicit racism I would argue that in some aspects there could potentially be some institutional racism in some Vancouver schools. For instance, when looking at the Nicaraguan interview we see that the Asian students did not want to include the Latino student into their friend group, and did not want to help him with school work. Education can be different from one culture to another, yet at

the same time this example shows that because the Latino was not Asian he could not receive help from his Asian peers. In this case do we need multicultural education or anti-racist education? Is there a collective or selective inclusion?

It is important for us to explore these questions because there are power structures within education and the role of education is ultimately to transform the lives of all learners. Are refugee students truly exploring their full potential and learning from all perspectives? Or are teachers being influenced by the banking concept that Freire talks about?

Vancouverite classrooms can appear multicultural due to the fact that the student body conveys multiple ethnicities, nationalities and races. Multicultural environments are able to create an inclusive atmosphere where refugees do not feel completely different and/or singled out. However, it is important to ask ourselves whether it is a superficial multicultural environment meaning that the class appears to be multicultural but in reality the content of the class is rather exclusive rather than diverse in terms of including different perspectives from different cultures and countries. From my understanding the government of Canada and especially the government of British Columbia forms the curriculum and thus wants a Canadian curriculum. With the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 we understand that Canada admires and respects all cultures, shouldn't that mean that all cultures that form Canada be included in the curriculum?

2. The role of friendship: Teachers and parents emphasized the important role that friendship plays in the integration of refugee students

The data corpus showed that refugee children feel better when they feel accepted, which implies creating long-lasting relationships and friendships. For instance, Nancia mentioned that her son had some difficulties integrating into the school community, because

he was not able to be friends with the kids in his school. Nancia reported that a lot of them were Asian and that they were not very welcoming to her son. This exclusion is something that Dei and Rummens, (2010) mentions in their research as well. Thus, due to that lack of friendship, her son ended up feeling unloved, felt like a stranger and sometimes did not want to go to school because no one talked to him. This shows that the lack of friendship can create negative emotions, and hence could possibly make the refugee student not want to go to school because they are scared of confrontation or rejection or/and loneliness. Thus, this is why I would argue that friendship plays a big role in integrating.

Another example mentioned by Claudia is that some refugee students are less fluent in English which makes their integration harder, and sometimes they have emotional trauma and family issues as well. Claudia mentioned that there was a refugee student from Syria that had some English difficulties and also was emotionally sad because he was missing his friends from the camp and his family members. To some extent these two factors slowed his integration process. However, Claudia the teacher was able to build a friendship with him and he also started to find other common hobbies with his classmates and became friends with a Filipino student. Claudia made sure that the child's needs and interests were taken care of which is the definition of child-centered pedagogy. Slowly as he focused on building friendship and started to feel comfortable with his English, he started to talk more in class. In my opinion, a sign of integration in this case is the fact that his thoughts about the past were less present, and he was more focused on the present and his new friendship. Another factor that shows integration is that because he has a friend in class and feels more confident in his English ability he is able to participate more in class. Class participation is a sign of integration too in this context, because if one does not understand the lessons or the

language, one would not be able to participate in class and would possibly feel like a stranger. “ELL students often interact less in the mainstream classroom, choosing instead to remain as far away as possible from the action of the classroom.” (Pappamihiel, 2002, p.328).

In the case where friendship was present, parents have also noticed that their children have integrated well into the school and started improving their language abilities according to Sarah (for example Sarah’s sons had to speak English to their friend that is how their English improved) and embracing the Canadian culture according to Janette (for instance Janette’s daughter prefers to wear Canadian clothes than South-African clothes).

Other studies have also shown that friendship directly impacts refugees’ positive feelings towards integration, as it allows them to feel part of something and a community rather than feeling like a stranger. Whitley et. al., (2016), in fact, conducted a study on the importance of sport and recreational activities on refugees’ integration and have found that:

“Therefore, perhaps there are benefits to programs which offer refugee youth the opportunity to interact and build relationships with peers from their own host countries as well as those with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, similar to the approach taken in the RSC. The feelings of belonging, friendship, and team membership achieved through the RSC mirror previous research findings about participation in sport and physical recreation leading to feelings of social inclusion for immigrant youth.” p. 186) .

Additionally, British Columbia Teachers' Federation (2016) has written an article mentioning that although there were clear guidelines and teachers presented qualifications to take on refugee children, there were still mistakes that were made.

“Lack of acceptance is another hurdle many students face. This may be a particular challenge in smaller communities where cultural diversity may be limited. It is not only the already existing students and their parents who may need to develop more welcoming attitudes toward newcomers. Gulalai Habib, assistant manager of the Monthly Resettlement Assistance Program with ISS, explains that even teachers can get caught up in communicating a bias against immigrants from the Middle East.”
(Ryeburn, 2016, paragraph 7).

This is a different context because in my study the parents were not explicitly biased against immigrants, newcomers or refugees from a specific country. However, BCTF developed a similar point found in my current research, such as acceptance in a new environment.

Overall, my study shows that friendship is one key factor that facilitates the integration of refugees into the school as it gives them community in Canada. On the contrary, this (my) study has also found that when friendship is lacking, refugee students tend to feel lonely, excluded and like a stranger, and are less likely to go to school as found in the example of the Nicaraguan boy. To some extent, when absent, friendship can negatively impact the integration of refugee youths. This is why placement into the right school is crucial.

Enrolling a refugee student that does not identify as Caucasian into a fairly Caucasian Canadian school will become a barrier for their integration into the school community friend group, as they might feel more like a stranger and excluded. This argument is not only valid

for Caucasian students but it is applicable to any other ethnicities that might be different than the one of the refugee student.

3. *The role of culture: Parents and teachers perceived the integration of refugee youths through the acceptance and respect of their national culture and the Canadian culture*

When talking about the integration of refugee youths, both parents and teachers have acknowledged culture. Concerning their national identity, (1) at home the parents tend to be traditional, meaning that they cooked culturally traditional food, spoke their language at home and some families taught their children the culture of their country of origin. (2) At school the teachers acknowledge their culture through cultural fairs, although not all cultures are usually represented, the school tends to try to represent all of the students. For class projects and assignments, the teacher tries to incorporate everyone's culture and the culture of a refugee in general as well, not solely ethnicities. For instance there was a class project that happened in Claudia's class and she mentioned that her students wanted to pick a book about refugees in order to know their friend's story a bit more. This exploration of refugees' culture through a book can be described as a practice using critical pedagogy.

In the book *Between Borders* (Giroux, 2014) Giroux, a critical pedagogy theorist emphasizes the importance of representational pedagogy and the politics of representation. He affirms that children from different races and ethnicities should be given the choice to explore their history, their beliefs in order to build their identity. He mentions that this process of teaching about identity politics should also be taught to citizens of the country, in order to remove the likelihood of discrimination. Freire (1996) closely connects his idea with

Giroux and says that education is not about domination but rather about liberation and freedom.

In addition to that, Antoine mentioned that there was an assignment made on flags and national identity, and he mentioned that all the students were proud of their country, even the most war-torn countries. All refugees are proud of who they are and their country. They are able to express their national identity even at school without being bullied for having a different language. Again in this example Antoine decided to include the refugee's story in the learning process. He was able to provide agency and freedom to the students to express themselves, which is at the basis of child-centered teaching. In fact, most of the time the students would find another person that also spoke their language which allowed them to bond and feel proud of their culture even more. The refugee students not only feel proud for who they are and where they are from they are also very grateful for Canada.

Concerning the Canadian culture, (1) at home most parents mentioned that they teach their children to be respectful of Canada, because Canada gave them a home. Sarah mentioned that "their heart was big enough" to love both cultures. Nancia mentioned that she always tells her son that "he needs to be respectful of Canada because Canada gave them a home". In fact she said that the "son is very happy to be here and feels very grateful to have an education here", she also mentioned that he is learning some cultural Canadian cues, for instance taking off the shoes when they are in their house, which they never used to do back in Nicaragua. Janette mentions that one of her daughters really enjoys dressing up with Canadian clothes rather than South African clothes and that she prefers to eat Canadian food rather than South African food. Janette said "my daughter really likes the Canadian culture

and has taken on the Canadian identity and I am okay with it, because it is her right to choose what she wants”.

(2) At school, the teachers teach them about the Canadian history which allows them to have a better knowledge and respect of Canada. Claudia mentioned that the students are taught about Japanese internment camps, Residential schools, and Chinese head tax. The teachers mentioned that all refugee students feel grateful to be in Canada and have Canadian friends and not only friends from their country.

Although at the beginning there can be a culture shock, the cultural transition is made smoothly after a couple months of adapting to the new country.

Additionally, Ryu et al., (2018) mentioned that refugees tend to recalibrate their refugee identity as voluntary immigration, which is something that my study also found. In my study most parents shared that their children do not always see themselves as refugees but rather as an immigrant from their country of origin. In fact, many scholars (Fantino and Colak, 2001, Arendt, 2017, and Kumsa, 2006) have mentioned that not every refugee defines themselves as “refugees”, due to the fact that it brings negative connotations. Kumsa (2006) notes:

1. “JABA: . . . [But] if somebody calls you a refugee it’s an insult.
2. IBSITU: Maybe it’s just that you don’t fit in
3. JABA: It’s like they say xifraam in Amharic [the official language in Ethiopia] ZEE:
That’s a big insult!
4. WARTU: What does that mean?
5. JABA: Uncivilized! Exactly, that’s what it means. You are uncivilized! . . .” (p. 242).

Through this extract we understand that not all refugees like to be titled refugees as it can bring negative connotations. Thus, refugees are primarily humans from a different culture and should not be seen as victim refugees that do not have a home. Since the word refugee can be pejorative to some extent, it is important to develop a different approach when addressing refugees, perhaps they should be looked upon as powerful humans in charge of their future rather than victims.

Furthermore, even if, to some extent, individuals that have had to flee their country need to be taken care of (by providing shelter, food and education), not all of them have the same background. Thus, having one word to define the individual that fled from their country because of war and someone that fled because of climate change, is not sufficient. Many of them do not like to be associated with this word because of its negative connotations. They still want agency and do not want to be seen as a victim or assimilated to others that have felt like victims.

In my current research, parents have also articulated another point that if the children were young they would not associate with the country of origin's culture but more with the Canadian culture. For instance, Mohamed mentioned that when his children arrived in Canada they were young and would not remember Ethiopia and Kenya. Janette also mentioned that "kids learn fast and forget fast too" when she was talking about them remembering their culture and country of origin.

Hence overall, parents and teachers have found that refugee students are able to express their national identity since they are given a safe anti-discriminatory environment. Refugee students have also shown a great appreciation and respect towards the Canadian culture which shows a positive smooth transition and integration, rather than an abrupt

process. Hence, the ability to express one's national identity shows inclusivity within the school system which allows them to feel less like a stranger. In addition to that the fact that most refugee youths feel content to learn and respect the Canadian culture shows that integrating well into the society; because if it was the contrary and they did not integrate well or did not want to integrate at, then they would not want to learn or respect the culture of the host country. Refugee youths were not forced to assimilate or asked to forget their national identity. Just like a sponge they retained their water in this case 'cultural/ national identity' and also 'absorbed'/ learned about the Canadian culture.

4. The role of language: Parents' and teachers' perspectives of refugee children's school experience are manifested in the perceptions of their English proficiency

Some refugee students arrived not knowing the language and in fact some teachers said it was a cultural shock. Antoine said that when they arrive they are like "deer in the headlight" Wilkinson (2002) mentioned that students from outside Canada would have more trouble in school due to the lack of familiarity with a western school system. Yet my research has found that although some refugees had difficulties with the languages, some refugees that already knew how to speak English prior to their arrival (for example the Ethiopian family and South African family) did excellent in school and their parents and teachers were proud of them. The transition was easy for some refugee students. Claudia recalled that one student from Mexico mentioned that school was easier here than in Mexico.

Furthermore, Suárez-Orozco (2017) and Bloch and Hirsch, (2017) mentioned that although refugees can bring a second set of perspectives they tend to have difficulties with the new culture and the new language. However, my research has found that although it can

be difficult in some cases, integration through education has been very positive on refugee students. For example, the Syrian boys were able to make new friendships which allowed them to work on their English, and resulted in building their confidence. Additionally Kia-keating et al., (2007), Tavares and Slotin, (2012) and Taylor and Sidhu, (2012) have also mentioned that integration through education can truly benefit their well-being.

There is a common theme that every student is able to succeed here in Canada, no matter who they are and where they come from (two teachers said that and the three parents acknowledged that too, Nicaraguan, Ethiopian, Syria, South African, and the Syrian boys). In fact, Janette mentioned that in order to go to school children most of the time had to take the bus; yet to be able to have a spot on the bus one needed to have a South-African citizenship. Thus, it was not accessible to everyone.

Auer (2018) shows that when refugees are placed in an environment where the language matches their first language then they have a higher chance of getting employed which means a higher chance of integrating the society and the labour market. Although this case is slightly different from my study, there is still a connection where language proficiency facilitates integration.

All in all, when students feel comfortable in English they are more likely to participate in class, excel in class which means not being placed in a lower grade, and make new friendships as well. Cross-cultural friendships additionally allows them to practice English as they do not speak the same language. Hence, English fluency has a positive correlation with refugees' integration into the school community.

5. *The role of clothing and money: Parents found that clothing played a role in the integration of their children.*

During the interview parents have mentioned that their children used clothing to be part of the school community. In my opinion the use of clothing for integration could be used in two ways: for cultural integration and socio-economic integration. An example of cultural integration is Janette's daughter who wanted to wear Canadian clothes rather than their cultural clothes that came from South-Africa. An example of socio-economic integration would be the example of Nancia's son where he wanted to have more clothes to fit in the school culture as everyone was wearing expensive clothes and had different clothes throughout the week but the Nicaraguan son only had one jacket where there was a Nintendo in the back and people started to call him Nintendo. In this case, this social stigma could have been removed if all the students were wearing uniforms. Due to the fact that Nancia was not able to provide additional clothing for her son because they were in the lower social class brackets, the son was often lonely and felt like he was not able to be accepted by the school community. Perhaps clothing in this case can be seen as a marker of social position, a marker of differences. Nancia was not financially capable of getting new clothes for her son. To some extent the need/ the anxiety to wear Canadian clothes can be due to the fact that they are seeking acceptance. Additionally, when one does not feel accepted in the school and one feels like a stranger it is hard to integrate the school community. In fact, Claudia mentioned that at her school everyone was in the lower social class bracket and they were all in need of more clothes. The school in fact procured them with additional jackets and clothing during the winter. She mentioned that in fact that did not single out the refugee students that might have been singled out at a wealthy school. The data corpus confirms that the appropriate placement of refugee youths is necessary in order to facilitate their integration. This means putting refugee students in schools where students are taught not to bully each other based on

lack or excess of clothes, and cultural difference. Schools should prepare programs about multiculturalism awareness and social class differences, prior to refugees arrival (or any immigrants), in order to reduce the likelihood of bullying. Thus, although the parents mentioned that clothing and fashion played a role in the integration of the student, to some extent I believe it goes deeper and is related to financial awareness and capacities. For instance, if the South-African family was not able to afford new Canadian clothes, then the daughter would have had to wear her traditional clothes. Indeed in this case, it was not only that the mother was open to her being more Canadian, it was also that the mother had the financial capacities and offered her daughter new clothes.

6. The role of the pandemic:

The global pandemic had repercussions on the life of refugees. Both parents and teachers acknowledged that the refugee's learning progress was negatively influenced by COVID-19 pandemic as a lot of the resources had to be removed, and classes became online for a while. Yet overall they have all shown a sense of gratefulness for being in Canada and receiving an education. All teachers and parents have mentioned that refugee youths are very grateful to be in Canada and receive an education.

“Sarah: My boys like it here, they are very happy and feel safer to be in Canada”

“The Canadian schooling system is better than the Syrian schooling system, it is more organized and make them learn faster”, “Nancia: at the beginning my son was very shy and scared, but now he feels very proud to be here in Canada, and sees that he has a lot of potential.”, “Janette: It’s only being one year but my daughters are very happy to be here, the education here is better for them, especially for my autistic daughter”, “Mohamed: When we arrived in Canada, my children really took on the Canadian

identity, especially the young ones, they were really happy to be here”. “Antoine: when the kids learn how to speak English better they feel more comfortable and proud to be here in Canada”, “Claudia: the kids never rolled their eyes at me when I took them out of class to take ELL lessons, they were very thankful to have a break from the big class and to have some help”.

Indeed, they have all expressed a feeling of gratitude. Some of them have even expressed a feeling of safety and protection when arriving in Canada (i.e., Syrian boy experience illustrated by the parent, Syrian boy 2 experience illustrated by the teacher, and Nicaraguan boy). It is important to note that although there was a genuine feeling of gratitude there were still cases where the beginning was difficult for a couple students. For instance, the Nicaraguan boy said “I don’t want to go to school, people don’t talk to me and I feel like a stranger”. For this particular refugee boy, it was very hard to integrate into the school because students remained in their friend group and stayed within their culture. It was a big cultural shock for him. Indeed two teachers mentioned that it is very hard to come to a new country and adapt, because everything is different. One of them said “it is hard for anyone that goes to a different country that speaks a different language”. Most refugee children and their parents felt grateful to be in Canada, however COVID-19 pandemic truly had a negative impact on refugee youths' education. The parents mentioned several times that the children's learning ability reduced as their attention span was reduced as well, the Syrian mother said “my sons are always on the computer because of school, but then they end up watching and doing other things on their computer” . In addition, the Ethiopian father said “they used to learn a lot, but now because of COVID-19 they are learning less and doing a bit worse”.

5.3: Critical Pedagogy approach

Critical pedagogy is necessary when exploring the subject of education for the discriminated ones, in this case the refugees. Multiculturalism allows inclusion for all in education and critical pedagogy guides multicultural beliefs into how to approach the teaching practices for refugee youths. From a theoretical perspective, the data corpus shows that the refugee children have been part of schools that have used a critical pedagogy approach to some extent, where they have embraced social justice and the inclusion of all, without discriminating one or the other. In fact, Claudia mentions that her school was focused on social justice which created an inclusive environment in the classroom for refugees. In fact, she led a class project where the students picked a book on refugees, because they wanted to know more about their refugee friend. This shows that there was an inclusion of the refugee culture and history, and that the other students could know a bit more about their past. Additionally, the same teacher mentioned that although one refugee culture was not per se represented, since most of the refugees were Muslims, there was an Islamic culture that started. During the Trump era they went through a lot of hatred and so the teacher used that experience to do a class project so that those students could share their experiences and others could know more about it. Henry Giroux emphasizes the importance of representational pedagogy and the politics of representation. He affirms that children from different races and ethnicities should be given the choice to explore their history, their beliefs in order to build their identity. Representational pedagogy is a way of being transparent and not ignorant. However, in some of the interviews, some parents and some teachers have mentioned that the culture of the refugee is not always present in school. The Nicaraguan mother said “the school is multicultural but our culture was not represented during the fair because there are not a lot of students from Latin-American”. The Burundi/ South African

mother said that did not notice the school talking about their culture but she did not want to force them, especially if they do not have the right resources. Although the schools did not explicitly represent the culture of refugee students, the refugee students still felt comfortable showing their national identity, for instance they were not bullied for speaking a different language or eating different food. Freire, another critical pedagogy theorist mentioned that education is not about domination but rather it is more about freedom and liberation, which is a theme that we have seen during the interviews. The students feel proud and grateful to be in Canada and receive an education.

5.4: Conclusion

To conclude, parents and teachers' interview responses provided insights on the research questions. Refugee youths' educational experiences and integration into the Canadian culture have been impacted by several factors. First of all, the multiculturalism environment observed in Vancouverite schools has allowed Canadian students to be exposed to diverse cultures. This has conveniently permitted refugees to arrive into a school where being different is the norm, and sometimes has given them the chance to find another student that spoke the same language as them. Second of all, friendship has played a tremendous role in facilitating their integration into the school and has made their educational experiences better. This research showed that the lack of friendship can be negative on the refugee students, as they might feel more like a stranger. Third of all, being in a multicultural space has allowed the refugee students to express their national identity, and also embrace the Canadian culture. This study shows a collaboration and acceptance of both the host country's culture and the culture of their country of origin. There was no sign of assimilation or acculturation. Fourth of all, this study showed that refugee youths' English proficiency showed whether they were integrating easily or having more difficulties. Last but not least,

the study showed that when refugee youths socio-economic status matched the school socio-economic background they had a better integration, clothing was one example that showed this correlation. Additionally, overall despite all the difficulties and the pandemic, parents and teachers have sensed gratitude in the refugee youths which would broadly mean that the student has had a positive educational experience in Canada.

Furthermore, while these factors allow students to feel more welcome into the classroom and the school community, there are still some situations occurring putting in question the integration process. As mentioned at the beginning, integration is seen as a two way process where refugees need to be prepared and have the tools to integrate the host society, and where the host society also prepares to include, accept, acknowledge and respect refugees. However, in the case of the Nicaraguan boy, one can see that there is implicit discrimination when the Asian boys do not want to help or include the Latino boy into their friend group. Despite the fact that not all students had to experience this, one can ask, is it the role of the teachers to prepare (in this case) the Asian students prior to refugees' arrival?

Additionally, whilst a multicultural fair procures fun and good food from different countries, does it provide anything else when the event ends? These factors allow the refugee students to feel welcome and allow them to have positive educational experiences, but do they effectively allow them to integrate the host society?

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Conclusions

As we have seen previously, the current literature tends to think that refugee youths have had negative educational experiences. The existing literature mentioned possible challenges that refugees may face including linguistic challenges, economic challenges, cultural shock and psychosocial challenges (Ryeburn, 2016). My research confirmed similar challenges but also found that some refugee students did not struggle with language and that economic challenges were projected and observed through different avenues such as fashion. Refugee students wanted to adapt to the Canadian culture by following social norms through clothing. The current literature also mentioned that refugee students struggled academically due to traumatic shock, lack of comprehensive programs and limited skill assessment; however, this research proved that when some of them struggled academically, ELL classes were provided when needed and a 10-week program was provided to some with language-based difficulties according to Antoine interview. As we have seen in the literature review, Suárez-Orozo (2017) and Wilkinson (2002) mentioned that ethnicity played a role and that refugee students that had a proximity to whiteness integrated better in schools. My research also found that ethnicity played a big role, and that students from different backgrounds integrated well including minorities, not only students that resemble Caucasian students. In fact they became friends with children from different backgrounds. This was facilitated through a multicultural environment. My research has brought a different perspective to the current literature, especially the gap of knowledge in relation to parents' perspective of their children's educational experiences.

With Canada's multicultural approach, refugees are able to practice their cultures in Canada without fear, yet one can still observe institutional racism. My research looked at

how one environment can appear multicultural and yet have traces of racism. More than theoretical multiculturalism, Canada has created effective programs for refugees through governmental education institutions like Vancouver School Board (e.g., VSB Reading Coach Program, access to ELL classes with ELL specialists) and the BC Teachers Federation (e.g., guidelines for the teachers).

Education plays a crucial role in the integration of refugee youths in Canadian society. It gives them a taste of their life. Studies have shown that it is important to know that refugee education experiences in Canada are not only based on their personal behaviours but also on their interactions with their teachers, parents and friends. Perhaps they are willing to receive an education but the educational programs are too small, or if the teachers are prejudicial and not trained properly, the outcome of their schooling will be different (Wilkinson, 2002 and Tavares and Slotin, 2012). My study has added to that knowledge by saying that the multicultural environment, friendship, language proficiency and socio-economic status of the school and of the refugee family, also contributes to the educational experiences of refugee youths. Through interviews with parents and teachers I was able to analyze the impacts of Canadian schooling environment, and educational programs have on refugee youths' experiences. This study indicates that there are six main key factors that play a role in the integration of refugee youths at school, and that have impacted their educational experiences. The six key factors are (1) the role of a multicultural environment at school; (2) the role of friendship; (3) the role of cultural acceptance; (4) the role of [English] language proficiency; (5) the role of clothing and socio-economic status; (6) the role of the pandemic. In order to understand the main key factors that have positively influenced refugee youths into having a successful integration into the school community and rewarding educational experience, I

have described below the optimal scenario for refugee students to have a positive powerful inclusitory educational experience. According to the data corpus received through this research I argue that one of the optimal environments for a refugee youth to feel safe and to do well in class, would be an environment where there are different cultures and they are not singled out, which will allow them to form long-lasting friendships. According to my study, having a multicultural environment has shown to eliminate feelings of sadness and loneliness. The data showed that first of all, in a multicultural environment the new refugee students are more likely to find their same culture and language, which means they were able to have someone speak their language and support them when the teacher was not able to. Second of all, the fact that there are students from different cultural and ethnical background has made the refugee students feel less like strangers because being different was/is the new normal.

Additionally, due to the environment containing different cultures, the refugee students had to learn how to speak English more and practice with their Anglophone friends. The more individuals practice a new language the better they will become. The data collected in this research has shown that refugee students tend to progress in their English proficiency when they have friends that are Anglophone rather than a friend group that speaks their mother tongue. This inclusive environment would not only allow for better English fluency through practice but it would also allow the refugee students and the regular students to learn from each other's culture. This study shows that refugee students and non-refugee students are willing to learn from each other's culture. In fact there was a scenario where a class picked a refugee book to study instead of a different book. This approach is based on child-centered pedagogy where students were in charge of their learning process, as they are given

choices about their learning activities. Cultural curiosity was quite common among students. This is in fact beneficial for both actors, and there is an exploration and acceptance of different cultures, which is honouring and fulfilling the multicultural environment. The last factor that my research has found, in order to produce the optimal environment for a refugee to feel safe and do well in school, would be that their family's socio-economic status matches the schools and the other students. It has been shown that when there is a difference in social status between the refugee and the other students, the refugee tends to match the rest of the students in order to feel accepted. However, it becomes complicated because the refugee's family are not always able to match the standard (e.g., having multiple clothing items), which makes the acceptance through clothing almost impossible, resulting in the refugee feeling even more lonely. In fact, there was a scenario where a refugee student from a lower social class was attending a school where the students had more financial resources to buy multiple clothes, but the refugees' family was incapable of providing more clothes. This financial division created issues for the refugee student as they were not able to integrate the school community. In fact, to some extent they were made fun of for having only one jacket. The difference of social status can create a need to feel accepted and to dress the same way as the other students. The data corpus also showed that when all the students from the school are financially in the same social class, they are not singled out since perhaps all students only have one or zero winter jackets. Having the same social class will allow everyone to feel more comfortable and less pressured.

The five factors mentioned above can be considered as regular factors that can impact refugees' educational experiences in Canada. One irregular factor that the research found was that COVID-19 pandemic negatively influenced refugees' integration due the fact that

resources decreased (e.g., VSB decreased their reading programs such as Reading coach which is a program where a person volunteers at schools and helps refugees, immigrants and newcomer students one on one about English). In this case COVID-19 can also be replaced by any natural catastrophes.

6.2 Implications:

6.2.1 Implications for teaching

This study has shown that refugee students do not need a different curriculum than non-refugee students. They need the proper environment with adequate support for them and their parents. Policy makers should enforce a program based on no-bullying and no-racism. This program will not only help refugees integrate the school better and reduce the likelihood of them being bullied, but it also allows the teachers to teach non-refugee students about racism, and respect/ no-bullying. These policies will not only be fruitful for refugee students but will also be useful to other students of colour, gender differences among others. In this case, this implication reveals a tendency of critical child-centered pedagogy.

There are two types of refugees that come to Canada: ones that are proficient in English and have to learn English. Refugee students that speak English usually do really well in class and do not require any additional resources and are not put in a lower grade. However, students with less English fluency need additional help and resources, and are at times put in lower grades. This research showed that refugee students can be put in a lower grade because of their language abilities and they do not feel empowered. In fact when graduating late, they usually feel very ashamed. Additionally we have learned through this research that context matters. Claudia mentioned “The context of the school really matters, I cannot imagine how they would feel if they were put in a school with all White students. The

government should focus more and be more intentional into where they place the kids, having a diverse multicultural school will definitely help more”. Hence, after interviewing the teachers and parents we understand that the placement of refugee students into a multicultural environment is important. For instance, when a refugee student is placed at a school, the staff in charge of putting students into class should make sure they place refugees in classes that have students from different backgrounds.

Additionally, through critical pedagogy this study has shown that the more students are involved in the learning process the more they feel empowered. Every class and especially classes with refugee students should incorporate exercises that involve their culture (for instance, Antoine’s flag exercise).

Furthermore, in order to facilitate refugees’ integration into the school community, a proper placement would be beneficial. Policy makers and administrators should develop a policy where all schools in Greater Vancouver have a multicultural awareness program. Which means teaching the students from a young age about cultural diversity. That would be a program to prepare the students prior to refugees arrival or any immigrant student, so that it would reduce the likelihood of bullying, and exclusion like we saw in the results of this study. Policy makers and administrators cannot control where refugee students and family will live, and in which neighborhood. However, schools can prevent exclusion by creating programs on multiculturalism and social class status awareness. This could possibly look like a simple program where students are taught not to make fun of other students for their clothes (e.g., culturally different outfits or old and few outfits). Additionally schools can place students in the correct language proficiency class.

Refugees should not be placed in ELL classes just because they are refugees, instead they should receive a test and be placed in these classes only if they need to. This is where this research places a huge role in the implications of curriculum and policies. In addition, this research has local and global implications due to the fact that the global refugee population is increasing. Refugees are not all the same, they are not a homogeneous group that come from the same country and have the same English level, same mother tongue, same culture or same socio-economic status. Thus, there is not only one way of teaching refugees, but individual education learning plans should be carefully designed for each one of them.

6.2.2 Implications for future studies:

While I was conducting this research there were a lot of single themes that were brought up and that should be investigated in the future. First of all, there was one parent that mentioned that the use of prayers really helped their son recover from his trauma. This would be interesting to look at, to what extent religion is correlated to good and positive integration into a new country and into a school. Even if only one out of the seven interviewees mentioned religion, it was still a very important factor for their well-being. Second of all, there was one case of a refugee child with learning and mental disability (autism). Future studies should look at the integration of refugee children with disabilities and their ability to integrate into Canada and whether there are enough resources provided to them to succeed into Canadian schools, and whether they are able to receive any IEP (Individual Education learning Plan). Lastly, during Claudia's interview she mentioned "Holistic indigenous type of education really worked with refugee students as well, it is a different and diverse set of tools for education which includes the use of visuals, outdoor education, and it is a much more well-rounded type of education). It is considered an education for diverse learners". Future

studies should look at whether Indigenous type of education could be applied to refugee youths and be beneficial for their educational integration.

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