

AN ANALYSIS OF CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICY FOR SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN  
FROM A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

by

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## **DEDICATION PAGE**

This research is dedicated to all refugee children who have the potential, power, and skills to achieve their dreams if they are provided adequate services and resources.

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## **ABSTRACT**

My study examines a sample of the ideas, plans, goals, procedures, and programs recommended in Canadian educational policies for Syrian refugee children and interrogates educational policies with a critical social work lens. My research's main focus is not educational analysis but rather a study of how social justice for Syrian children's education can be realized. Multiculturalism, integration, inclusion, and critical theory are the concepts and theoretical approaches that guide my research. This study employs a critical policy analysis research design to reveal the complexity, subjectivity, and inherent in/equity in Ontario's educational policy. Ontario was chosen as the research location as it is the province with the highest Syrian refugee numbers, with almost 50% of them being children. My research findings show that Ontario's educational policy for Syrian refugee children needs a more inclusive and social justice-oriented awareness, and Social Work Profession could play a critical role in achieving this.



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

CMAS	Childminding Monitoring, Advisory and Support
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship of Canada
RAP	The Resettlement Assistant Program
SPO	Service Provider Organizations
TVDSB	The Thames Valley District School Board
UNCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

According to the United Nations 1951 UN Convention (1993), a refugee is defined as:

any person, who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/ herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his/her former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (p. 1)

There are 25.9 million refugees worldwide, and 16,299,244 are children (UNCHR, 2018). Most of the refugee children spend their entire childhood away from home and separated from their families. Today, Syrian refugees make up the largest refugee group across the world, and 40 percent of them are children under eighteen (Mercy Corps, 2020). These numbers reflect the stark realities of the Syrian civil war, the second deadliest war of the 21st century, prompting the most massive refugee movement in recent history (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The violence of the global refugee crisis was brought into sharp relief on the morning of September 2nd, 2015 when the body of three-year-old Alan Kurdi was discovered on the beach of Bodrum, Mugla, Turkey. Kurdi was a Syrian refugee child who lost his life while his family was trying to reach Greece. Appearing on 20 million screens worldwide in only twelve hours (The Guardian, 2015), a photograph of Alan's death dramatically raised global awareness of the crisis.

Even though it took years for Canadians to notice the Syrian refugee crisis, it took only moments to react and respond to the Syrian refugees' situations through social media after they saw Alan's lifeless body (Ayed, 2015 as cited in Braun, 2016). There was a shift in recognition that every refugee was Alan Kurdi fleeing from the conflict in Syria on September 2, 2015. At that time, in the fall of 2015, Canadian federal political parties were campaigning for an election and they promised aid for Syrian refugees in their campaigns. In November 2015, the Liberal Party won the elections and kept its promise by settling 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada (Braun, 2016).

As one of the vulnerable groups, refugee children experience violent acts and, in exile, are at risk of abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, trafficking, or military recruitment (UNCHR, 2018). UNCHR (1994) mentions the experiences of refugee children in the guidelines that they prepared to provide information on refugee children's care and protection. The consequences of being a refugee child are extremely serious. Individuals are deprived of their normal social, economic, and cultural environment, human relationships often suffer, and parental distress and anxiety disrupt the psychological and social development of children. Moreover, children often lose their role models while experiencing refugee situations as a result of separation from one or other parent and large parts of their extended families as well as their community networks. Even though both refugee parents are present, they struggle to continue to provide role models to their kids as they are hampered by the loss of their normal livelihood. Children also have different roles in refugee situations. If they lose one of their parents, they may have to take on adult responsibilities. For example, an older daughter may have to substitute for her mother in caring for younger children when a

mother has to take over a missing father's tasks and responsibilities. As a result, the daughter often loses the opportunities to play or to attend school, and her developmental needs might be neglected. After exiling, children come into contact with different cultures in the context of resettlement, and children often lose their culture more quickly than adults. They also lose the mother-tongue, which is a vital part of children's identity (UNCHR, 1994). In the same guideline, UNCHR (1994) stresses the fact that most of the refugee children -estimating no more than 30 percent- don't receive basic education. Children's rights are violated by the absence of basic education and this violence proves to be a lifelong handicap. There are many issues that must be provided as solutions to ensure that refugee children receive education. Inadequate resources and lack of trained teachers are common obstacles in host countries.

Syrian children have lost loved ones, experienced violence and brutality, and suffered injuries. They have been at risk of malnourishment, exploitation and abuse. The decline in education is the sharpest in the Middle Eastern region (CMAS, 2015). Currently, the Canadian government has been working with Syrian refugee children and their families to contribute to the resettlement process. However, teachers are declaring that they do not know how to respond to refugee children's needs and expectations (Ratkovic et al. 2017) and that the current education system is ill-equipped to facilitate integration and overcome the socio-psychological challenges Syrian refugee children experience as they enter the Canadian school system (Ratkovic et al. 2017; Gagné et al., 2012; Kovačević, 2016). The thousands of Syrian refugee children, who attend Canada's public schools, have been challenged by more than just learning English and making friends. Many have struggled with the concept of school itself, of literacy even in Arabic,

of studying in a school building- that will not likely be bombed, and feeling safe enough, at last, to wonder about learning. The children have the confusion of upheaval, startling gaps in education and hidden wounds that schools are expected to help mend (Brown, 2015).

In Canada, the delivery of education is a provincial mandate, and the federal government does not offer any specifics regarding the reception of previous refugee students into Canadian schools. It means that even though the essential resettlement plan for former refugees is arranged by the federal government, many other services that the refugees need are provided by provincial governments. Since the country has 13 different service delivery systems as a result of the British North America Act (Scott, 1934), each of the provincial and territorial governments has their own education systems, and within each province there are public, private and federal schools. Regarding these differences in my thesis, I used the phrase “the educational policies” to stress that there are many related policies to education in Canada. Responding to space limitations, my research particularly interrogated the education policy in Ontario.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Arar, Brooks and Bogotch (2019) identify that there is a risk that the host nation’s educational system might foster failure and social deviancy for refugee and immigrant students if there are insufficient planning and resource allocation. Schools are mirrors of the policies of national and local governments and in Canada education policy is under both Federal and provincial governance. Thus the policies and practices concerning refugee children might differ across the country in terms of how they welcome, monitor and integrate the newcomers. Federal directives call for the assimilation of newcomers

with the objective of integration, inclusiveness, diversity and multiculturalism (Arar, Brooks & Bogotch, 2019). However, despite this directive, there has been research evidence that nations can discriminate against refugees by using access and placement policies (like access to social services and settlement policies) as tools during the integration process (Arar, Brooks & Bogotch, 2019). Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2017) published a monograph on the research findings of studies that examined the programs supporting refugee students in the Canadian classroom. They report that the Canadian school system does not provide sufficient support for the adaptation of Syrian refugee children who face a loss of identity, labeling, and social exclusion. The monograph underlines that refugee children continue to experience and demonstrate socio-psychological challenges, and that resettlement officers, teachers, and policymakers in Canada are unable to solve the problems as they do not have sufficient cross-cultural competence, transformative leadership skills, and a social justice focus to solve the problems (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2017). These issues can cause challenges for child refugees, and as a result of school experiences, they have worse mental health outcomes (Hadfield, Ostrowski, & Ungar, 2017).

My study examined a sample of the ideas, plans, goals, procedures, and programs recommended in Federal educational directives and specifically Ontario's educational policy for Syrian refugee children. My focus was on the socio-psychological challenges Syrian children face, and I interrogated the educational policies with a critical social work lens. I was mindful of the mental health problems, loss of identity, labelling and social exclusion challenges that exist. I considered the appropriateness and, in some cases, the

omissions of the plans and strategies that are currently in place. Thus, the main focus of my research is not educational analysis, but rather a study of how social justice for Syrian children can be realised.

Social justice-oriented social work aims to assist individuals and groups in meeting their needs by using transformative and participatory approaches. It simultaneously focuses on challenging and transforming those with power and privilege and empowering those who experience exclusion and marginalisation (Baines, 2017). Social work is one of the rare professions recognizing the pursuit of human rights and social justice as core ethical practices (International Federation of Social Work, 2018). The Canadian Association of Social Workers (2015) mentions social justice as one of the Social Work profession's core values in its Code of Ethics:

Social workers believe in the obligation of people, individually and collectively, to provide resources, services and opportunities for the overall benefit of humanity and to afford them protection from harm. Social workers promote social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs. Social workers oppose prejudice and discrimination against any person or group of persons, on any grounds, and specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2015, p: 5)

Therefore it can be said that the problems, which have been experienced by the Syrian refugee children in Canadian schools, are strongly related to the core mission of the social work profession since social exclusion, labeling, discrimination, and injustice



are topics often interrogated by social workers. Refugee children are among the most disadvantaged and oppressed groups whom social workers serve (Denov and Shevell, 2019; Fenning and Denov, 2019; Hadfield, K., Ostrowski, A., & Ungar, M. (2017).)

Moreover, as Baines (2017) stresses, “social work is not just a neutral, caring profession, but an active political process” (p.7). When social workers address client needs in the context of pro-market, corporatized society, which benefits from war, injustice, poverty, and colonialism in a nation-state or across the world, every action that social workers undertake is political. The actions and services of the social workers are about power, resources, and those who have the rights and opportunities to have positive feelings about themselves, their future, and identities. There is no political free zone and no way to avoid power and politics in social work (Baines, 2017). The social work profession has the knowledge and critical understanding to contribute to the educational problems of the Syrian refugee children at the policy and practical level.

### **1.3 My Epistemology and Situated Knowing**

Alan’s death prompted me to re-direct my professional efforts toward refugee protection to help refugee children. I have worked as a social entrepreneur to help Syrian refugee children in Turkey, which has the highest Syrian refugee population, with 3,588,131 (UNCHR, 2020a). My field experiences allowed me to see the problems of refugee child protection, and I experienced moments of passion and pain in my work to improve refugee children’s living conditions.

I describe my position in this study as a non-Western researcher having an Eastern and Anatolian culture with Islamic values in the Western academic space. I refuse all forms of assimilation serving to reinforce the dominance of colonial power (Hunt, 2015),

and define myself as an academic activist and define my research as academic activism (Askins, 2009; Young, 1999). I intend to use social science methodologies to make the undervalued, disadvantaged and discriminated refugee children visible. From this vantage point of increased knowledge and awareness, more effective social justice-oriented interventions and policies can then be formulated and advocated for (Grundy & Smith, 2007).

In Chapter 2, I review the theoretical framework which drove my analysis specifically the significance of Poststructural Theory and Anti-Oppressive Theory, which provided me a strong framework to interrogate power and domination. This is followed by a critical review of the empirical literature which I examined. As my study is centered on policy analysis, I used the existing empirical literature to provide information and examples of the current educational needs and problems of Syrian refugee children.

## CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CRITICAL REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1.1 *Critical Theory*

Critical theory can be described as an amalgamation of theories, which has emancipatory aims and targets to change both knowledge and the social structures that oppress people (Moosa-Mitha, 2015). According to Mullaly (2007), critical theory has twofold characteristics: Engagement in critiques of traditional mainstream theories and emancipatory claims that target to fight against both oppressive knowledge and social structures. It claims that institutional and structural practices are political and serve the interests of dominant groups in society (Mullaly, 2007 as cited in Moosa-Mitha, 2015).

In opposition to ‘traditional theory’, critical theory generates a new understanding of how to bring about social conditions free from fear and domination. The fundamental factor in eliminating domination is to produce conditions for individuals’ self-emancipation (Hammond, 2019). Critical theory emphasizes ‘charting the progressive emancipation of individuals and society from oppressive forces’ such as ‘dominant discourses and ideologies’ as well as ‘structural economic forces’ (Dryzek, 2000, pp. 20–21).

Critical theories provide various benefits to scholars for the exploration of policy roots and processes. For example, the ways that policies presented as reality are often actually political rhetoric; how there is often an unequal distribution of knowledge, power, and resources; how educational programs, implementations, and policies reproduce stratified social relations, and how service users react to social and institutional

forces with resistance and acquiescence (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014).

Critical theory analyzes competing power interests between privileged and disadvantaged groups and individuals. In this identification, specific attention is given to interrogate who gains and who loses, what is gained and lost, and the means the dominant groups use to win the competition (Kincheloe & MacLaren, 2005). Critical scholars argue that it is important to uncover the winners and losers in the competition revolving around race, class, gender, and sexuality. Through this analysis, the systemic inequity hidden in policies can be unveiled (Kincheloe & MacLaren, 2005).

According to critical theory, *instrumental or technical rationality* is one of the harmful dimensions of the contemporary world. Critical theory argues that *instrumental/technical rationality* cares a lot about method and efficiency with a goal of expediency and profit and is inappropriate for humanitarian projects such as integrating refugees into their host country. This perspective restricts questions to “how to” instead of “why should.” In a research context, the issues of technique, procedure, and correct method can become the main focus and the humanistic purpose of the research activity is forgotten or undervalued (Kincheloe and MacLaren, 2005).

Critical theory explains that linguistic descriptions are used to construct the world and form regulation and domination. The state uses these discursive practices to strengthen its authority and to validate its social constructions. According to the principle of *linguistic/discursive power*, in the educational context, legitimated discourses of power determine what books students may read, what instructional methods may be used by educators, and what belief systems might be taught (Kincheloe and MacLaren, 2005).

I mainly used two critical theories for my thesis: poststructural theory and antioppressive theory. The dimensions of the theories are useful to construct a social justice oriented research and policy analysis. They also contribute to make analysis with an emphasis of that each individual has the power and potential to create a social-political change relevant to the issues that they experience, and individuals' expectations and problems are different from each other. So that, political and social change should promote solutions by recognizing and addressing different features and dimensions of each individual, even in a social group which has same or similar cultural, social and religious background. From this point of view, one of the focuses of my thesis was that Syrian refugee children might have different needs and problems from other refugee children in Canada, and Syrian refugee children might have even different expectations in their own social group.

The views from poststructural theory provide me some research tools that I might employ for my epistemological and ontological foundations. The poststructural theory makes me able to ask myself at the inception of my research project (Strega, 2015). How can I best capture the complexities and contradictions of Canadian educational policy, which the Syrian refugee children's experience in Canadian schools, or the educational policy documents that I am studying; does my research address social justice issues; whose interests does my thesis serve; how can I tell if my research is a good research? As a social justice researcher, my answers represent my choices about resistance and allegiance to the hegemony of Eurocentric thought and research traditions (Strega, 2015).

Poststructural theory provides me insight that all social and political practices are discursive because their meaning and position can be changed in term of their articulation

within socially and politically constructed systems of rules and differences. Agents, objects, words, and actions are rendered within the framework of particular practices and can gain meaning only in relation to the others (Fischer and et al., 2017). This perspective provides me tools to analyze how social and political practices, which are relevant to Syrian refugee children's education, are discursive within Canadian classrooms, schools and policy-making process. Are Syrian refugee children seen as agents of the change or objects of the educational policy? What are the meanings and consequences of the relations between Syrian refugee children and Canadian teachers, students and policy makers? Does the educational policy serve the interests of mainstream society or the interests of refugee children? How might the interconnectedness of Syrian refugee children's and mainstream society's identities and interests affect the educational policy?

Anti-oppressive theory reminds me that I should have a commitment to social justice and my research has a political purpose for contributing to the change (Potts and Brown, 2015) of Syrian refugee children's educational conditions in Canadian schools. In my study, I do not seek for proving and disproving a singular truth about Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children. I am looking for meaning, understanding, and insights that can enable change of the educational policy (Potts and Brown, 2015).

Regarding antioppressive theory, my study does not intend to present an exclusive emphasis on changing individuals but on assisting individuals in meeting their needs by participatory and transformative ways (Baines, 2017). For example, if Canadian educational policy demands or forces Syrian refugee children to change in particular ways for ensuring their adaptation to mainstream society, my study argues this perspective. Instead, my study advocates that each Syrian refugee child should be provided with the

opportunities to participate and to transform some situations for their adaptation as the active agents of social and political change.

### ***2.1.2 Conceptualizing Multiculturalism and Integration***

It is not my intention here to provide a detailed overview of the existing literature on multiculturalism, integration and inclusion. Instead, I want to make a general point that these theoretical frameworks helped me to interpret the situation of Syrian refugee youth in Canadian schools. Despite the more expansive interpretations of multiculturalism and integration, my focus is to understand how these three concepts intersect with the features of Syrian refugee children coming from the Middle Eastern area of the world, namely the intersectionality of being Arab, Muslim, a refugee, and a child. In addition, I intend to question the possible institutional and societal impacts of four important concepts: exclusion, domination, discrimination, and inequity, while analyzing the data.

#### ***2.1.2.1 Multiculturalism***

Multiculturalism considers the construction of societies that are composed of people from different cultures, contexts, backgrounds, experiences, and positions. It has intersections with the politics of inclusion and exclusion and of the positioning of multiple cultural forms within nation-states (Ponzanesi, 2007).

Stuart Hall explains the differences between the concept of multicultural and multiculturalism. The term multicultural is an adjective that stresses the problems and the governance which exists in a society with the presence of different cultural communities within the same nation-state. Multiculturalism refers to the strategies and policies used to manage the issues of multiplicity and diversity that multicultural societies have (Hall,

2000). As a consequence, it can be said that ‘the multicultural’ is a theoretical discourse, whereas multiculturalism is used as a governing policy of specific nation-states (Ponzanesi, 2007). Pierre Trudeau’s Liberal government launched Canada’s federal multiculturalism policy in 1971, in response to the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963-69)*. It was an unexpected by-product of recommendations for biculturalism as Trudeau was also responding to demands from Indigenous leaders for greater autonomy, unrest among newcomer immigrants as well as Francophone nationalism so multiculturalism was an expedient policy solution to all of these issues (Johnstone & Lee, 2018; Jedwab, 2020).

Adopting a national multiculturalism policy was a powerful symbolic recognition of cultural diversity, but there has not been a substantive change in government policy. The government directed few resources for implementing multicultural initiatives, and it has remained as a marginal factor in related policy formulation (Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, 2020). Even though Canadian multiculturalism is seen as a source of national pride and Canada’s national identity, the marginalization of migrants, Indigenous, and non-White Canadians has persisted while (re)constructing Canadian citizens and Canadian nationhood (Johnstone and Lee, 2018).

The application of the tenet of honouring differences which the multicultural state (such as Canada) claims to adhere to, is particularly complex for Syrian refugee children. The issues are multiple and complex and include religious diversity, ethnic diversity, refugee status, and confronting xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism and ageism. Edward Said (1994) argues that the relations of the state are linked to culture and ideas about “us” and “them” which results in xenophobia. Syrian youth define and elevate themselves



regarding their own unique culture but when they are re-settled, they are confronted with a different culture which not only does not know or recognize their culture but regards parts of it with suspicion and distrust:

As I use the word, “culture” means two things in particular. First of all, it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure... Second, and almost imperceptibly, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought... In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them”, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent “returns” to culture and tradition. These “returns” accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviors that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity” (Said, 1994, p. xii – xiii).

The discussion of multiculturalism has become increasingly fraught with anti-immigrant arguments questioning its viability. Muslim communities, even second and third generation, have been viewed by Western countries as an external problem related to Islamic political activism worldwide. The host societies have claimed that Muslim communities have resisted integrating (Madood, Triandofyllidou, and Zapata-Barrero, 2006).

In her book, *Contesting Islam, Constructing Race and Sexuality*, Sunera Thobani

(2020) questions the complexities surrounding the construction of Islam in the West in its configuration as a 'religion of violence' conflating Muslim with terrorist in the popular imagination. In her analysis she brings race, religion, gender and sexuality into a single analytic frame, in contrast with scholarship which separates these relations: "I demonstrate how race and religion are mutually constitutive, and also how their nexus is constitutive of the West itself" (p. 2). Thobani's analysis is both historical and current.

Arat Koc (2005) is a non-Western scholar who also examines the impact of popular understandings of the September 11 event and how this has impacted the understanding of multiculturalism as an identity. She then considers how this in turn has influenced the political and social situations of immigrants and refugees coming from the Middle Eastern region. Arat Koç (2005) notes a growing increase in defining Canadian identity as a part of Western civilization and she uses a clash of civilizations framework to interrogate this. This framework highlights how following September 11, Canadian national identity was reconfigured by right-wing politicians, editors, and columnists in the corporate media, as Western Civilizational superiority pitted against the 'savage' and 'terrorist' Civilizations of the East. Invoking this Civilizational superiority, resulted in strong anti-immigrant and racist challenges and heightened the racism that dominated Canadian discourses relevant to immigration and refugee policy. This new configured notion of the nation based on the clash of civilizations perspectives rejected Arab and Muslim backgrounds as inferior to Western nations and civilizations and this created an unstable and unsettled sense of belonging and political citizenship for not only Arab Moslem Canadians but also for many other Canadians of color As a result of this re-whitening of Canadian identity, the marginalization of non-white minorities increased.

(Arat-Koc, 2005).

After September 11, Arab and Muslim Canadians experienced direct physical attacks, and their fundamental civil liberties were ignored. The Canadian Arab Federation described the experiences of Arab and Muslim Canadians as psychological internment (Raja, 2003). Arat Koc (2005) states that Raja Khouri is grim when reflecting on the consequences for Canadian multiculturalism:

Our country has effectively engaged in an exercise of self-mutilation: stripping away civil liberties it holds dear, trampling on citizens' rights it had foresworn to protect, and tearing away at its multicultural fabric with recklessness. Arab Canadians are today convinced that there is a bigger threat to our way of life from the security agenda than there is from terrorism itself. The question that remains is: Given that multiculturalism is premised on the equal treatment and respect of all citizens, will multiculturalism survive the security agenda? (Raja, 2003 as cited in Arat Koc, 2005 p.38)

It can be interpreted that the reconfiguration of Canadian identity through civilizational lines might be the end of multiculturalism or the deepening of preexisting tensions within it (Arat-Koc, 2005).

If multiculturalism aims to adhere to the policies used to manage the issues of multiplicity that multicultural societies have (Hall, 2000), a multicultural state needs to consider the intersections of discrimination and exclusion that a Syrian refugee child might experience.

Hage (1998) questions the ontological gap between violent, white racism -enacted

by white people- and tolerant white multiculturalism. White racists and white multiculturalists consider the nation as a space structured around a white culture. In this culture, white nationals will can move the Aboriginal and non-white ethnics as national objects (Hage, 1998). Ethnic minorities and the others are part of the white nation, but only so far as the white nation accepts them (Bannerji, 2000). Therefore, tolerance cooperates with inequality of power between those who have the privilege to tolerate and those who tolerate it (Arat-Koc, 2005). Multicultural tolerance is a form of symbolic violence that masks domination and proclaims that multicultural tolerance exists as a form of egalitarianism. This strategy aims to reproduce power in society (Hage, 1998).

Sunera Thobani (2007) argues that “the transition from white settler national identity to a multicultural identity had far more prosaic (sometimes mundane) motivations (and limitations), as well as far more profound consequences than might be suggested by the self-exalting claims of enlightened national commitments to cultural diversity and pluralism” (Thobani, 2007, p. 329). Canadian official multiculturalism rests on posing Canadian culture against multi-cultures, and white Canadians define inclusions and exclusions in the nation as the final authority. Strengthening the position of the “real” white Canadians against the immigrants of color as others help to produce and enhance stereotypes about immigrants as fundamentalists, terrorists, and criminals (Bannerji, 2000).

The promotion of cultural diversity and full and equitable participation and inclusion of all ethnocultural groups in a society are the essential dimensions of multiculturalism (Berry, 2013). Since inclusion has a significant role to lead to the attainment of positive intercultural relations in the framework of multiculturalism (Berry,

2013), I discussed the importance of inclusion in this section.

### *Inclusion*

Without the simultaneous promotion of inclusion through the implementation of policies and programmes to prevent obstacles to equitable participation, then a form of segregation and discrimination is maintained (Berry, 2013). The shifting emphasis in multiculturalism programmes towards equity and inclusion has been demonstrated by the evidence that not all individuals in culturally diverse societies are seen and served equally (Berry, 2013). Various ethnocultural groups have experienced the consequences of this unequal perspective and practice, such as in employment (Statistics Canada, 2011) and in educational attainment (Boyd, 2002). These implementations may be the outcomes of prejudice and discrimination (Berry, 2013).

The state's legal classification of immigrant status in a hierarchy of citizenship and privilege creates racial outsiders and this has deeply shaped the identities of immigrants and their perceptions of collective interests. Internalization of this resulting racial hierarchy resulting from these state policies around belonging and inclusion in the nation-state's economic and cultural projects, results in unequal rights and access and internalised oppression (Thobani, 2007). Thus Canada has a racial configuration of subject formation within settler societies where full citizens have a place at the center of the state and state promises to enhance their national well-being and newcomers have varying levels of conditional inclusion (Thobani, 2007).

Thobani (2007) argues that the association of rights and entitlements like an identity produces a material stake in protecting nationals from others, and the exaltation

of full citizenship promotes desire among insiders to defend and protect their precious nationality from the Other's perversions and pollutions. This then creates a national motivation to restrict the Other's Access to the much coveted nationality. In Canada, this exercise of power has ensured benefits to the national subject for accessing citizenship, land, mobility, social entitlements, and employment. So, the exaltation in citizenship gains national support for the State to continue to implement policies that exclude outsiders, protect the coherence of the nation, and the subject's privileged access to the rights of citizenship (Thobani, 2007).

The increasing numbers of racial strangers in daily life in Canada, and their demands for inclusion require political and social attention. In this framework, the implementation of multiculturalism has allowed the state to represent itself as accomplishing the transformation from an overt racial settler state to a liberal and democratic form. Even though liberal reforms have enhanced the qualified inclusion of immigrants, nevertheless, immigrants have continued to be seen as cultural strangers to the national body (Thobani, 2007)

#### *2.1.2.2 Integration*

Integration refers to a long-term engagement process where newcomers can adapt to Canadian economic, civic, and community life (Robson- Haddow and Ladner 2011). The literature claims that social inclusion and participation are consistently related to youth wellbeing and integration (Drolet and Moorthi, 2018; Sleijpen et al., 2016).

Government literature describes Canada's integration model as a process of mutual adaptation by Canadian society and newcomers (Government of Canada, 2016).

Integration includes some key components for achievements and access, including education and health, housing, employment, the social connection within and between groups, citizenship, and rights (Ager and Strang, 2008). While some other countries see Canada as a model of how best to respond to Syrian refugees, there is also current literature that claims that refugees from Syria still experience various integration issues in Canadian communities. These sources cite systemic barriers to education, discrimination, mental health challenges, and slow social integration as some examples of the problems (Wilkinson and Garcia, 2017; Drolet and Moorthi, 2018).

Cheyne-Hazineh (2020) conducted a study by interviewing ten service providers serving Syrian refugee youth in a mid-sized urban community in the Waterloo region. The purpose of the study was to explore the needs of Syrian refugee youth through the integration process. Findings show that despite the efforts of Syrian youth and service providers, there are still systemic challenges in education. Refugee youth have obstacles such as segregated classes and limited resources in the secondary school system. Social engagements and mental health were identified as the areas where youth demonstrated resilience and as areas for enhancement. This study claims that Syrian refugee youth still need to be supported. There is also a need for advocacy at community and larger system levels for the integration of Syrian refugee children (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020).

Integration and multiculturalism are based on the idea that maintaining heritage culture and identity and honoring the host society and other cultural groups should govern educational policies and approaches (Berry, 2013). Assimilation occurs when non-dominant ethnocultural groups cannot maintain their cultural identity and must conform to the daily interactions of the host culture. Integration is envisaged as allowing

ethnocultural groups to maintain their original culture while interacting with other groups. When Canada adopted multiculturalism as its national identity there was a shift from immigration policies of assimilation to policies of integration with equitable participation and diversity as the feature of the society as a whole (Berry, 2013). Multiculturalism is explicitly recognized as an instrument and ideological approach for integration (Scott and Safdar, 2017; Duncan, 2005).

Some scholars claim that policymakers and practitioners assimilate the newcomers under the mask of integration and multiculturalism (Arar, Brooks & Bogotch, 2019; Sakamoto, 2007). The traditional idea of immigrant assimilation is still lurking behind social policies that echo the rhetoric of integration but practice assimilation. New immigrants are being assimilated behaviourally without being provided opportunities to assimilate structurally with reduced citizenship privileges – e.g. an international student is not eligible for certain funding options; they must pay international student fees; they have restrictions on their ability to seek employment and how long they can stay in the country but they are expected to compete with Canadian citizens on an equal footing. Assimilation permeates through social policies that include various social services such as initial settlement and language (Sakamoto, 2007). For example, where there is a requirement that the person be fluent in English or French, be gainfully employed and self-supporting after a year

In my view, the adaptation is more on the part of newcomers. Integration does not include a mutual adaptation process of newcomers and mainstream society, and maintains oppressed and privileged positions.



## **2.2 Critical Review of Empirical Literature**

Through a review of the empirical literature, I established a framework of general Canadian educational policy for refugee children, and more specifically for Syrian refugee children. In addition, I explored the research literature on the challenges and struggles Syrian refugee children have experienced as participants in Canadian educational programs. I planned to use this information as data to develop a framework for analysis. In this part, I introduced the general situation and provided my detailed analysis in later sections where I interrogate the policy documents and specific programs and research.

### ***2.2.1 The Background of Canadian Educational Policies for Syrian Refugee Children***

The Canadian Government's strategy for refugee families and their children's education was shaped by the Ministries of Education and the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) at the federal level. In my study, I focus on the Ontario case and illustrate the policy regarding the educational implementations in this province because Ontario has the highest Syrian refugee population in Canada (Government of Canada, 2019).

IRCC was a partner of the Ontario Ministry of Education during the integration process of Syrian refugee children into their new schools in Canada. The families are informed by Service Provider Organizations (SPOs), which are the government's partners serving with The Resettlement Assistant Program (RAP). SPOs might be non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or settlement agencies, and they collaborate with district school boards. One of the IRCC reports (2019) mentions that RAP SPOs assist

RAP clients, including Syrian refugee children and their families, to register their children to the schools (Government of Canada, 2019b).

### *2.2.1.1 The Resettlement Assistant Program (RAP) and Its Services Relevant to Education of Syrian Refugee Children*

Integration of refugee children involves a pre-migration and a post-migration process, which is described as the new experiences of children while adjusting to new schools and communities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). The social and daily experiences of refugee families and their economical life conditions have impact on children's integration into schools.

RAP provides government-assisted refugees immediate and essential supports, which include: greeting at the airport, temporary housing, help with finding permanent housing, guidance to registering for mandatory federal and provincial programs, orientation to the community (providing contacts for safety and emergency services, introducing refugees to the city where they have settled, explaining – public transportation, Canada's education and health care system, Canadian laws and customs, the local climate), personal finance support like budgeting, setting up a bank account and using debit and credit cards, basic life skills support for the ones who are in high needs, and referrals to other refugee programs. Eligible refugees are also provided income support under the RAP if they cannot pay for their essential needs. Income support includes a one-time household start-up allowance and monthly income support payment (Government of Canada, 2019b). RAP SPOs work together with school boards to support the integration process of Syrian refugee children and their families. Providing translators, cultural brokers and language and training are further examples of RAP

services.

To provide the most efficient school enrollment process for refugee families' school-aged children, RAP SPOs contact the local school boards and ensure the school communicates with SPOs if refugee children and families need support for particular concerns. RAP SPOs also provide orientation tailored to topics such as assessment and placement of a child, parents' legal obligation to ensure children go to school, textbooks and school supplies, report cards, dress code, extracurricular activities, bullying, and settlement workers in schools (IRCC, 2019c). The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) are the workers from community agencies in schools providing culturally appropriate services to incoming students and their families. SWIS workers have been seen as important assets for Syrian youth and their families. It is reported that SWIS workers have played an active role in supporting the Syrian children during their integration process at schools (IRCC, 2019d).

#### *2.2.1.2 Recent Educational Policy in Ontario*

As with all Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), Syrian refugees were admitted to Canada with the status of "permanent residents" and as such are exempt from paying any fees. School boards were connected with community services to support Syrian children and their families during the transition period. Walk-in clinics, tele-psychiatric referrals, referrals to mental health and addiction nurses are some examples of the supportive services which were made available (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015a).

In order to respond to increasing numbers of incoming refugee children, the Ontario Ministry of Education established four working groups to identify goals,

deliverables, and outcomes of the resettlement process: 1) Settlement, Housing and Municipal Support (Co-chaired by Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing); 2) Health including Mental Health (Co-Chaired by Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and Ministry of Children and Youth Services); 3) Education, Literacy, Training and Employment (Co-chaired by Ontario Ministry of Education and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities); 4) Faith-Based supports (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

Ontario Ministry of Education (2016) declared that various resources would be developed to provide information sharing across the province and the country. A repository for government materials in a Google Drive was provided to Directors of Education, service providers and Syrian children and their families. School boards were provided with the listed information to support Syrian students and their families: the regional office contacts and the Re-settlement Assistance Partner (RAP) agencies in specific communities that coordinate services and support the children and youth, pre-arrival and one- year settlement plan, the list of refugee settlement services, information on adult non-credit language training, bridge training program and language interpreter services, registering for Ontario Health Insurance Plan Coverage, dental coverage provider fact sheet, important contacts for health care providers, employment and resources for mental health care (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

As a means of supporting district school boards to promote the mental health and well being of Syrian refugee children and their families, the School Mental Health (SMH) Newcomer Resource Group with voluntary membership from boards across the province, was set up (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). A Newcomer Advisory Network was

established to bring together experts in immigrant and refugee mental health to promote strategic advice and direct consultation for the issues (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). SMH Newcomer Resource Group developed an info-sheet welcoming the Syrian refugee students and their families to school, providing information on mental health and well being. The source emphasizes that all school staff and students are responsible for supporting newcomers to feel welcome (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). A Refugee Mental Health online course was organized through the Center for Addiction and Mental Health's Refugee Mental Health Project. A mental health sharing platform was also created using Google Drive (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

The *Building Healthy Relationships-Parent Tool Kit and Guide* was developed in partnership with the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE). This is a parent resource and guide to help support parents' role in an inclusive and whole-school approach perspective. The tool kit has six sections explaining the ways to support the mental health and well being of young people (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

In order to provide a co-ordinated response, collaborative efforts were made by municipalities, community agencies, ministry-funded family support programs (Ontario Early Years Centers, Parenting and Family Literacy Centers, Better Beginning, Better Future and Child Care Resource Centre), local partners, including municipal service system managers (oversee child care, income assistance, and housing), settlement agencies, and public health were strongly recommended to the school boards to work together for ensuring a responsive and warm welcome to arriving families (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

The Ontario Ministry of Education offered a two-day session for designated staff

in Toronto to support an initial assessment process on newcomer students' placement and the programming needs of newcomer students. This learning session was designated for staff who were responsible for administering the initial English language assessment of children and youth by using the Steps to English Proficiency resource. The resource also includes the assessment of mathematical skills and knowledge. A six-part video series complete with facilitator guides on Supporting English Language Learners in an English Literacy Development Program was provided to the board and school staff to support students with limited prior schooling (Ontario Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch, 2015).

### *2.2.1.3 Critiques of the Current Educational Policy*

Canadian politicians often argue that Canadian society is one of the few societies, which still thinks positively about immigrants. Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, said that "...Canadian immigrant system is rules-based, it is fair, independent-minded, it is open and accessible" (Ferraras, 2019, para. 18). On the other hand, Duhaney (2010) identifies that in Canada, stereotyping is evident in policy frameworks in which different languages, accents, religions, ethnicities, and races are underestimated and not viewed as assets that could enhance and strengthen the dominant culture (Duhaney, 2010).

Gagne et al. (2012) mention that teachers need support and training on effective strategies in working effectively with refugee children (Gagne et al., 2012). ). A recent report on collated research findings regarding the education of refugee children (Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2017) notes that Canadian literature about K-12 migrant students' education and well-being addresses the needs of

immigrants or the people whose second language is English but does not explore the experiences of refugee children. In addition, the Canadian educational policy on supporting refugee children in Canadian schools is sparse, and often the references used in Canadian educational policy are borrowed from other countries. They recommend that the policy needs to develop its own new strategies tailored to the unique features of Canadian society to support teachers, policymakers, refugee families, and researchers and empower refugee children (Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2017). Furthermore, they state that the system lacks sufficient partnership and collaboration between the federal government, provincial governments, local school divisions, service providers, and local schools. This is sorely needed to construct a holistic, cross-cultural, and multi-sector approach.

### ***2.2.2 The Problems and Needs That Syrian Refugee Children Experience in Canadian Schools***

#### *2.2.2.1 Psychological, Social, Cultural, and Academic Needs and Problems*

Numerous scholarly studies report that mental health issues, cultural and social conflict, discrimination, separation from family members, limited English proficiency, limited financial resources, and pre-migration gaps in schooling are pervasive economic, psychological, social, and academic challenges that refugee youth experience (Reynolds and Bacon 2018; Anisef and Kilbride 2003; Hassan and Kirmayer 2015).

As a result of war, violence, forced migration, and torture, refugee children and families are at risk for various specific psychiatric disorders (Wilson et al., 2010; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Efforts, perspectives, and services to better understand what

provides resilience through the forms of war and migration-related adversity, often lack a progressive shift for war-affected children. “Resilience is the continuing articulation of capacities and knowledge derived through the interplay of risks and protections in the world” (Saleebey, 1996, p. 299). The study of resilience seeks to individualize the problem by focusing on what the subjects/victims can do to help themselves rather than addressing broad structural and systemic issues. Nevertheless, the education system doesn’t address the children’s voices as the center of analysis and understanding, thus allowing children to contribute to their own well-being and development. There is a growing body of literature that attests that children, as reflexive subjects, can actively negotiate and make meaning of the social spaces and relations around them (Chaudhry, 2017; Fernando & Ferrari, 2013; Kostelny & Wessells, 2013; Werner, 2012; Denov and Shevell, 2019). Practitioners and researchers need to be aware of the danger of overemphasizing traumatic experiences and the vulnerability of war-affected children. All the refugee children may not have the capacity to handle the trauma experiences and recover. An understanding of trauma and resilience within each child’s unique sociocultural context is essential (Denov and Shevell, 2019; Denov and Akesson, 2017).

There is considerable documentation on the academic challenges that refugee children have experienced in the classroom, which include a lack of comprehensive programs, disrupted schooling, and limited or biased skill assessment. The tests that are used are often culturally inappropriate and language difficulties impede accuracy. The integration process of refugee children decreases when they face a lack of diverse pedagogical approaches (Kilbride et al., 2000). Many Syrian youth missed a considerable amount of schooling due to exiling. The challenge of combined language and literacy



gaps causes problems for a large number of Syrian youth. Language barriers and refugee youth's experiences, with a curriculum that is new to them, increase the impacts of literacy gaps (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). The Canadian education system has struggled with the English language needs of refugee youth in general, and this has been further overwhelmed by the large numbers of incoming Syrian youth (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). A comment from a service provider working with Syrian refugee children reflects the significant impact of learning a new language in the school environment. He says:

I think what we fail to recognize, is the psychological trauma of not necessarily just your past experience but your experience coming into a system that treats you kind of like you are either voiceless, or you have some kind of learning disability because you just can't communicate" (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020, p. 123).

Cheyne-Hazineh (2020) conducted a qualitative research study to interrogate the settlement and integration experiences of Syrian refugee youth in the Waterloo Region of Ontario by interviewing ten community-based service providers. The findings include high early school leaving or dropout rates which seem to be related to the responsibilities or pressure that refugee youth have. For example, some boys leave schools because they want to or sometimes because they must support their families and girls have different responsibilities such as caring for their siblings (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). Although early school leaving is a problem for Syrian youth in Canada, Cheyne-Hazineh (2020) stresses that service providers speak about the perseverance of these youth, despite the challenges and problems they experience in the education system. One service provider stressed that one of the main strengths of many Syrian youth is that no matter what the challenge is,

they're going to fight and overcome it. She reported that although they do not do the greatest at school and don't understand the homework, they still try to get it done and try to come (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020).

In her research, Kovacevic (2016) explored the challenges and problems that refugee children from former Yugoslavia experienced when they came to Canada. She noted that even though the values, traditions, and immigration experiences of former Yugoslavian and Syrian children are different, they experience similar problems such as language barriers, lack of support, and lack of specific programs or policies for refugee children in the Canadian schools, which remain universal challenges for all refugee children.

Education can be a healing and empowering process for refugee students, but Canadian teachers state that they do not have the experiences and skills to alleviate refugee children's problems and to respond to the severe trauma-based injuries the children are struggling with (Ryeburn, 2016). The existing literature shows that even in the reconceptualized documentation on how Syrian refugee children can integrate into Canadian schools, educators and policymakers have not determined the requirements for the successful transition of Syrian refugee children (Kovacevic, 2016).

Refugee children lack social support, which is one of the most important mediators in their transition process and usually occurs as a result of diminished pre-exile friend networks and post-exile exclusion or bullying (Gagné et al., 2012). Self-esteem challenges, anxiety, the risk of depression, early school withdrawal, and the risk of criminal behaviors may also be related to rejection by peers (Gagné et al., 2012). In addition, refugee children often experience psychological and relational challenges such

as a lack of trust since they experience the stigma related to the “refugee” label (Kilbride et al., 2001). They lose a sense of belonging as a result of the challenges inherent in adaptation to a new country, coupled with the loss of identity, loss of culture, post-traumatic stress disorder, stolen youth, and misdiagnosed student abilities (Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2017). Seat (2000) reports that immigrant youth aged 16 to 19 years have experienced racism, negative attitudes, and prejudice about their home cultures from their teachers. Furthermore, their peers in classrooms with a high anti-immigrant climate are likely to harass them. Young (Canadian born) people with prejudiced beliefs in youth social networks often engage in ethnic harassment (Bayram et al., 2017).

Long-term social exclusion might be an important risk for most immigrant and ethnic-racial minority youth in Canada regarding racism, social and cultural isolation, and educational challenges (Cooper and Cooper, 2008). Refugee children can be lost among various identities such as being the teenager, the immigrant, the first language speakers, the individual from the first culture, the individual expected and required to learn a second language and to engage the host culture (Gunderson, 2000). If youth are not socialized and do not have a sense of active citizenship, they do not lessen it later on. A permanent decline of social capital and ethnic youth integration will affect Canada’s social and political resources (Stolle and Cruz, 2005).

Refugee students’ passion for performing well academically in Canadian schools has been undervalued due to being placed in lower academic streams below their capabilities and the doubts of teachers of refugee students’ placement in advanced classes. This is often directly related to refugee students’ language skills rather than their

academic capacity and knowledge. Refugee students adopt their own strategies to persevere in fulfilling their academic desire, such as keeping on asking questions until they have the answers. Refugee students underestimate their own potential and think that they are perceived as less capable of succeeding in academic responsibilities. As a result of these factors, they have to re-take much of secondary school before they can enroll in a university (Shakya et al.,2010).

As a result of the challenge to define the scope of the criteria of being successful in the Canadian educational system, the educational trajectories of refugee students in Canada are not easy. Academic achievements, attitudes towards school are some examples commonly considered for academic success. Even though refugee students have some barriers like lack of time spent in Ontario schools, racism, and language barriers, they rely on one another and other friends to excel in school (Shakya, 2010).

The federal government's decision to assist Syrian children and families as priority groups has caused an extra strain on the educational systems of some provinces. Teachers state that there has been an increase in the learning challenges and exceptionalities of students in their classrooms. Long waiting lists for particular services, including English as a Second Language classes and learning support, have become problems, especially in high poverty schools (Skidmore, 2016).

Most Syrian refugee students, particularly those arriving mid-school year after the schools' financial resources were consumed, lacked extra funding to be supported. School Boards, administrators and classroom teachers have experienced various issues to fulfill their responsibilities to support Syrian refugee students because of the scarcity of educational resources. Syrian students found themselves in mainstream classrooms full of

Canadian students and experienced the prevailing practice of inclusion (Skidmore, 2016).

By adopting a trauma-informed approach there would be recognition that all Syrian children have lost their homeland and home-based social network and that many of the Syrian children have witnessed extreme violence and may have lost their relatives, been injured and may have been at risk of becoming ill because of malnourishment and privation. Seventy-nine percent of Syrian families have had a death in their family, witnessed violence and/or become victims themselves and this experience of trauma may have future health consequences (www.cmascanada.ca). Adjusting to everyday life in Canada, like handling transportation, food, new culture, language can be considered another type of trauma that makes Syrians have double trauma (Bogotch & Kervin,2019).

#### *2.2.2.2 Professional Development As An Educational Policy Concern and Its Impacts on Refugee Children*

School principles usually focus on funding and hiring new staff to accomplish refugee children's integration process, rather than examining how current teachers can handle the needs and problems of refugee children. This would involve investigating whether or not they are prepared, and what kind of professional development might help them to ensure the best for refugee children and their families in their schools and community.

Professional development means the professional growth of a teacher, through individual and group reflection on accomplishments, as well as critiques of the current trends in education, and the continuing analysis of essential beliefs, thoughts, and values within education (Braun, 2016). Professional development includes formal and informal

approaches, such as teacher conferences and professional learning networks (PLN). It is obvious that school divisions and governments do not take the idea of professional development seriously, specifically concerning the professional development relevant to the Syrian refugee crisis (Braun, 2016). Even though some conferences were organized to assist teachers to prepare to work with Syrian children, educational policy was far removed from permanent solutions and improvements concerning the children's issues and needs.

Even though refugee children have lost the opportunities to continue their education and this impacts their test-taking abilities, and they lack the necessary language skills to read the mathematics exam, the most common Canadian method to demonstrate an understanding is taking an exam. Education policies rarely encourage teachers to question their own deficit understanding, which might cause discrimination. Policies might see the pedagogical tools in the curriculum as valuable professional development, but teachers should criticize their discourse because words are seen as a starting point for deficit thinking (Braun, 2016)

If teachers are expected to question their beliefs and practices in the classrooms through professional development programming, particularly with respect to their own adherence to a deficit discourse, time constriction can not be a priority. Furthermore, the process differentiates from the other areas of professional development resulting in tangible, standardized, and measurable results, such as higher test scores in children (Braun, 2016). Professional development related to beliefs and values may not have these kinds of specific results since the core principles of this kind of development are not directly relevant to content acquisition. It concerns the holistic development of all

children. From this point of view, professional development can be described as an ongoing experience, which requires more than practice and teachers' foundations (Braun,2016).

### ***2.2.3 The Relationship Between Educational Policies for Syrian Refugee Children and Social Work***

Definitions of social work practice change regarding the institutions and organizations in which social workers are employed, such as governmental organizations, civil society organizations, or community-based organizations. As a general concept, the social work profession can be defined as a profession that promotes social change, problem-solving in human relationships and the empowerment and emancipation of people to enhance well-being. Interventions at the points where people interact with their environments, human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IFS,2002).

The critical role of the social workers is particularly relevant with regard to problems such as discrimination and stigma, which immigrants and other disadvantaged groups face during their education (Ghafournia, 2019). Social work has a critical role in all resettlement countries but is particularly relevant to the unique needs of refugees during the global plight of war-affected refugee crises. Social workers can carefully unpack key concepts and translate these into practice interventions, to address well-being, health, illness, distress, healing and family (Denov and Shevell, 2019).

Western perspectives have overly dominated the traditional approaches to refugee psychological support by centering on individualism and individualistic approaches to practice and intervention. Western paradigms of interventions may reveal the ways which are socially constructed and culturally relative with their conceptions and implications

(Bilotta & Denov, 2017; Denov and Shevell, 2019). Refugee-related social services assume that refugees have a homogenous identity with a dominant trope that sees refugees as needy, poor, foreign, and traumatized. The services for refugees are then designed assuming these vulnerabilities. Refugees are then categorized with a lack of considerations to their diverse identities (Nobe-Ghelani and Ngo,2020). By developing and implementing social-justice-oriented policy, programs, and practices, social work has the capacity to integrate socially constructed, culturally relative, and diverse perspectives to the enhancement process of the Syrian refugee youth.

School social workers are seen as a professional group serving on the margin of an educational logic that dominates schools as institutions. School social workers' tasks and the aspects of social work knowledge and practice they apply are relevant in the school setting. They can transcend established theories of social work practice as a sole professional and relative outsider in the organization. As they are not part of the dominating collective of teachers, school social workers can take a position against an oppressive and discriminative school environment more easily than an individual teacher (Isaksson and Sjostrom, 2017). From this point of view, social work has a critical role in dealing with marginalization, discrimination and the exercise of power that refugee children experience at schools.

Ahmed (2000) encourages practitioners to criticize the practices of refugee communities regarding ethical concerns. Refugees are already seen as helpless, backward, and a potentially dangerous groups by mainstream society, theory, and practice. The practitioners know them to be deserving of help, traumatized, and vulnerable. These widely held assumptions and knowledge about refugees no doubt influence service



providers and interrupt them meeting refugees in the here and now. In Canada's settler-colonial context, services towards Syrian refugee children might have a role in reproducing whiteness notions. In this context, the colonial legacy of sexism, racism, and classism enhances the views of considering refugee youth as racialized, helpless people who need Canadian professional skills and experiences (Ahmed, 2000). A critical social work approach focuses on going hand-in-hand with target groups during consultancy and advocacy. Critical social workers respect client autonomy and stress that refugees are not just victims (Baines, 2017). They have the skills and experience to guide service providers during the refugee service provision process.

Thobani (2007) argues that the organization of access to the social programs and services through the institution of citizenship has been shaped by the historical racialization of Canadian citizenship. Public sector and the caring professions provide essential supports and services to nationals by binding them with the racialized relations such as reciprocity and obligation. The welfare system reinforces citizenship with this mechanism, which supports the racial hierarchy (Thobani, 2007). Social workers have a particular responsibility to fight against racism by being aware of the hurtful stereotypes, harmful practices, and vilification of exclusion through racism. Social work challenges neoliberal dictates and resists the societal and political wrongs through its values and ethics (Yassine and Briskman, 2019).

In the following section, to further situate my study, I have contextualised this review of the empirical literature on the lived experience of Syrian refugee children in Canadian schools with a three level description of the structural and systemic dimensions which impact the lives of these children. I discuss the global context of a refugee

humanitarian crisis and then the specific context of the Syrian civil war and finally the Canadian context of the challenges confronting a multicultural state accepting an influx of Syrian refugee children.

## CHAPTER 3 CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY

### 3.1 Global Context

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of refugees and 1967 Protocol which fine-tuned the scope of protection for refugees were designed to guarantee refugees the broadest possible protection of their rights (Nicholsan and Kumin, 2017). The 1951 Convention established the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR, 2017), which has a responsibility to ensure the implementation of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Individual States who signed the convention then develop regional laws and standards that complement the international refugee protection regime to address their regional specificities (UNCHR, 2020). The Convention and 1967 Protocol are intended to apply to children in the same way as to adults (UNCHR, 1994). As education is vital to the well-being of children, it is recognized as a universal human right. Art. 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child binds signatories to the Convention to implement their responsibilities in ensuring it. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees reaffirms in art. 22 the duty of the government of the country of asylum to ensure education for refugees (UNCHR, 1994).

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol (Relating to the Status of Refugees) set standards that apply to children in the same way as to adults:

1. A child who has "well-founded fear of being persecuted" for one of the stated reasons is a "refugee,"
2. A child who holds refugee status cannot be forced to return to the country of origin (the principle of non-refoulment), and

3. No distinction is made between children and adults in social welfare and legal rights. (p. 4)

Even though Canada participated in drafting the *United Nations Convention relating to Status of Refugees (1951)(Convention)*, they did not accede it. Canada produced a refugee policy on December 31, 1951, which was exclusionary so that only refugees from European countries were accepted. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration defined refugee as a person who was displaced from one European country to another; or a person who left one of the countries listed as: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, East Zone of Germany, U.S.S.R., and Yugoslavia because of fear and has not been permanently resettled (Vineberg, 2018). The exclusion and discrimination on the basis of race and country of origin were eliminated with the announcement of *Immigration Regulations (1962)*, which welcomed refugees from outside Europe (Canada 1962). Five years later, the United Nations adopted a *Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (1967)*, which was inclusive like Canada's *Immigration Regulations (1962)* in terms of eliminating the time limitations and geographical limitations of the original *Convention (1951)*. Canada signed both the *Convention (1951)* and the *Protocol (1951)* in 1969.

Humanitarian aid can create unintended violence, such as exclusion and depoliticization of refugees, labeling them as incapable people (Ferguson, 1994). International policy toward the Syrian refugee crisis is premised on the same antiquated logic that has shaped refugee policy since the 1950s (Betts and Collier, 2015).

### **3.2 Syrian Context – Civil War**

In December 2010, the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit vendor sparked what is now

called the Arab Spring, which is defined as a series of demonstrations against to the autocratic regimes across the Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Bahrain, Morocco, Algeria, and Jordan (Campante and Chor, 2012). The unrest in Syria broke out in 2011, which started as anti-government protests and uprisings, and unlike the other countries in the Arab Spring, it turned out to be a civil war following the violent and disproportionate interventions from the Syrian army. The civil war and the authority gap in the country created a fertile feeding ground for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS. Rebel groups and President Assad used harsh and excessive measures, including unlawful weapons, to gain power. United Nations found evidence of the use of chemical weapons (United Nations, 2018) both by the Syrian Government forces and non-state armed groups.

Before the civil war, the population of Syria was more than 21 million (Worldbank, 2011). During this brutal conflict, as noted by Human Rights Watch (HRW), more than 511.000 people were killed, 6.6 million people displaced internally and 5.6 million people fled the country (HRW, 2019).

Even though more than half of the Syrian population has been displaced in the past eight years, the number of refugees is expected to increase unless a permanent solution is achieved. Currently, Turkey is hosting the largest refugee population and has accepted almost 3.6 million Syrian refugees, and is now taking preventive actions for future asylum seekers. (HRW, 2019). The second biggest Syrian refugee population with one million registered is in Lebanon, and Jordan also registered more than 600,000 refugees in 2018, but since 2016 has closed its borders to new refugees. Considering the current context in these countries, and the ongoing civil war in Syria, we can expect

different routes, even illegal departures to other countries (Mercy Corps, 2020).

### **3.3 Canadian Context**

As of August 2019, Canada has received 44,90 Syrian refugees since 2015. The majority of these refugees have been registered to Ontario (19,835), Quebec (9,350) and Alberta (5,145) (Government of Canada, 2019).

The first group of Syrian refugees arrived at Pearson International Airport in Toronto in December 2016. Most of them stayed in nearby hotels to wait for relatives or sponsors who helped them to find houses, jobs, and schools for their children. When the press interviewed them, they showed hope and excitement about their futures. They had already suffered immensely and would continue to experience economic, social, emotional challenges in Canada while adapting to Canadian society (Skidmore, 2016).

The government program resettled the Syrian refugees in five phases:

*Phase 1: Identifying which Syrian refugees could come to Canada:*

The Government of Canada started Operation Syrian Refugees (OSR) to come to Canada by cooperating with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNCHR) and private sponsors for the Syrian refugees who needed resettlement. If the Syrian refugees lived outside of Turkey, registered with the UNCHR or Government of Turkey, or identified by private sponsorship, they would be eligible to resettle in Canada (Government of Canada, 2019a).

*Phase 2: Processing Syrian refugees overseas:*

Canada processed 25,000 refugees in 100 days, and it was the most challenging part of the initial project. The Government of Canada set up temporary visa processing centers in Amman, Jordan; Beirut, Lebanon; and Ankara, Turkey to help manage the work. Eligible

Syrian refugees for the resettlement process were thoroughly screened before coming to Canada. Full immigration medical exams and criminal and security checks were the parts of this screening process (Government of Canada, 2019a).

*Phase 3: Transportation to Canada:*

By the end of the Operation Syrian Refugees (OSR) project, a total of 99 chartered flights, including two military aircraft, Syrian refugees were transported to Canada. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) cooperated with the governments of Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon to charter these flights. All Syrian refugees landed first in Montreal or Toronto to finalize their permanent resident status (Government of Canada, 2019aa).

*Phase 4: Welcoming in Canada:*

The Government of Canada works with provinces, territories, municipalities, settlement organizations and other partners to ensure that refugees travel smoothly to their long term settlement communities. Consideration was given to the presence of family members in Canada and the availability of some services like schools, housing, language training, and specific services for those with medical conditions/disabilities. Privately sponsored refugees settled in their sponsors' communities. Organizations and sponsors were able to prepare and provide a welcome to Canada in 24-72 hours after they were informed of the refugees' arrival information (Government of Canada, 2019a).

*Phase 5: Settlement and Community Integration*

The OSR refugees were provided with income support by alignment with provincial social assistance rates. The support included basic household needs, staples, linen,

clothing, food, winter coats, furniture, boots, and shelter, and it lasted for 12 months or until refugees were self-sufficient. Syrian needed immediate help with essential services like learning how to use public transportation, getting a social insurance card, opening a bank account. OSR provided the Resettlement Assistance Program to provide Syrian refugees with the immediate services. Privately sponsored Syrian refugees received similar support from their sponsors. They were also provided medical coverage under the Interim Federal Health Program. The Government of Canada ensures Syrian refugees to access regular settlement services like help to find a job, community support, and language training (Government of Canada, 2019a).

According to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship of Canada (IRCC) records, the gender distribution is close; 21,720 females and 22,875 males are registered to IRCC (IRCC, 2019). However, when the age of these refugees is considered, almost half of them (21,545) is 17 years old or younger (IRCC, 2019). Consequently, the main number of Syrian refugees are women and children, and thus the education of refugee and immigrant children is a very important topic for the Canadian schooling system (Government of Canada, 2016b). However, Canadian teachers and classrooms are not prepared for such an important integration as voiced through various media (Kovacevic, 2016).

In the Canadian context and at the heart of this study, the challenges children are facing will be considered. Besides their differences in ethnicity, age, race, gender, religion, education and physical ability (Ratkovic, 2014), the challenges children face are also different.

Canada is seen as a world leader in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers in the



past through its resettlement programs covering language, cultural orientation practices, and employment (Ontario Ministry of Government, 2015a). The Syrian refugees' resettlement process has differed from previous migration because of the high number of people requiring relocation. Canadian frontline workers, including healthcare, social service, and education workers were preparing for their roles to support Syrian refugees integrate into Canadian life. At the same time, civil servants worked abroad and were screening hundreds of potential candidates daily. Educators were among the first Canadians who refugee families met.

In the following chapter, I present and discuss my research questions and research objectives and I outline the methodology I chose to use to answer my research questions. I provide an explanation of why I chose to proceed in this manner and outline the principles that guided my data collection. I then elaborate on my method of data analysis and describe the critical template I adopted to map my analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **4.1 Research Objectives**

When I began this study, I had four major objectives that guided my inquiry 1) To investigate whether there have been specific education policies developed for meeting the needs of a) refugee children and b) more specifically of Syrian refugee children in the classroom 2) To illuminate the problems that Syrian refugee children face in Canadian classrooms. 3) To use a critical theory perspective to examine the implications of existing (or the absence) of Canadian educational policies for Syrian refugee children 4) To discuss the relevance of these problems that Syrian refugee children have in classrooms through a social work social justice lens and to explore how these perspectives could improve Canadian educational policies for Syrian refugee children.

### **4.2 Research Questions:**

My specific research questions are:

- 1) What are the specific educational policies that Canada has constructed for Syrian refugee children?
- 2) What are the problems that Syrian refugee children face in Canadian classrooms?
- 3) How appropriate are the policies (or the absence of policies) for meeting the identified needs of Syrian refugee children?
- 4) What might be the contribution of social work to improve the construction and delivery of Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children?

### **4.3 Research Design**

This study employed a critical policy analysis research design. Critical policy analysis is a way to discover and examine the complexity, subjectivity, and inherent equity in a policy. It is a method that can illuminate the intended as well as the unintended consequences of policies (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014). While conventional policy analysis is evaluative in focusing on statistical facts and their empirical dimensions to measure effectiveness, a critical approach uses reflexive deliberation as the main tool, and analyses the normative assumptions, the understandings of the social world and the interpretive judgments upon which policies are based (Fischer, 2015). A critical theory approach to research has an ontology that assumes that what we understand reality as socially constructed and epistemology as controlled by power relations (Patel, 2015). Thus from the perspective of critical theory, I interrogate the current situation Syrian refugee children face in Canadian schools, and I understand that they live in a socially constructed universe where popular Canadian discourses regarding race, immigration, gender, class, and disability impact their daily experience. My study is then situated in examining how discriminatory discourses and ideas may have infiltrated related education policies and consequently become part of the structure, hierarchy, culture, and organizational implementations that might produce discrimination in the Canadian education system for refugee children. I agree with Fisher (2015) that it is important for policy analysis to be relevant and to provide practical insights and solutions for both policymakers and public citizens.

### ***4.3.1 Sampling***

To analyze the Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children, I focused on the educational policy in Ontario since Ontario has the highest Syrian refugee numbers with 19,685, and 9,695 of them are children (Government of Canada, 2019). In order to understand Ontario's educational policies for Syrian refugee children, I considered the Ontario Ministry of Education's memorandums, info sheets, report, monographs and some of the educational policy documents at the federal level, which are relevant to the Ontario's Ministry of Education's policy for Syrian refugee children. I also considered the GENTLE program since this program is as an example of the application of the Ministry's educational policy. The GENTLE Center was in operation at White Oaks Public School in Thames Valley, Ontario for four months and aimed to address the needs of incoming Syrian refugee students and their families by providing a school-based reception, orientation and essential assessments (TVDSB, 2016)

#### *Document Selection*

I drew from grey literature using memorandums, info-sheets, programs, reports, monographs, departmental and governmental plans explaining the relevant aspects of Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children. To analyze the practical dimension of the application of the principles of the policy, I used the Syrian refugee orientation program of the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) as they developed a specific program to integrate Syrian refugee children which they called *Guided Entry into New Teaching and Learning Experiences* (GENTLE). TVDSB operates 160 schools serving approximately 77,000 students in elementary, secondary,

adult and continuing education programs (TVDSB, 2017). Over 4,600 refugee children registered to the publicly funded schools in Ontario across 26 English Public, 14 English Catholic, two French Public and three French Catholic school districts (Faubert and Tucker, 2019).

#### **4.4 Data Collection**

##### ***4.4.1 Primary sources***

Policy documents relevant to Syrian refugee children's education:

- 1. Annual Report of TVDSB, Guided Entry into New Teaching and Learning Experiences (GENTLE) Program 2016 (TVDSB, 2016):* I contacted TVDSB and asked for any written documents such as plans and reports on GENTLE. Unfortunately, TVDSB has no written documents and reports on GENTLE and the school board only provides information on GENTLE via its website, where GENTLE was shortly described in the 2016 Annual Report of the school board (TVDSB, 2016) see above. In addition, I draw on the follow-up study which was conducted by Brenton Faubert and Bill Tucker who interviewed eight education leaders who were directly involved in integrating Syrian student refugees in Ontario and particularly focuses on the GENTLE program (Faubert & Tucker, 2019). Their publication provides some further details on the structure and outcomes of the program.
- 2. The Resettlement Assistant Program (RAP) (Government of Canada, 2019b):* RAP was developed by the Government of Canada to provide Syrian refugees with regular settlement services like finding a job, community support, and

language training (Government of Canada, 2019a). The program also collaborates with community organizations which are the partners of schools and provide information about the Canadian educational system to the Syrian refugee families.

3. *Capacity Building K-12 Report: Supporting Students with Refugee Backgrounds (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016)*: The Report was designed by the Government of Ontario to provide information on Whole School Approach for the integration of refugee children to the school environment. It provides information for teachers and the other school staff on how they should approach Syrian refugee children.
4. *Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Departmental Plan 2018-2019. (IRCC, 2018)*: The Plan was developed by the Ministry of IRCC, which is one of the partners that Ontario Ministry of Education has collaborated to serve Syrian refugee children. It seeks to fulfill Canada's prosperity through immigration by reuniting families and offering protection to displaced and persecuted people. I interrogated this Departmental Plan to see that if they involved any services to contribute to the Syrian refugee children integration process through education as they promised.
5. *Resettlement Assistant Program (RAP) Service Provider Handbook. IRCC, (2019c)*: RAP is a crucial program to contribute to Syrian refugees' integration process. Regarding RAP implementations and services, Service Provider Organizations have worked together with schools to enhance the integration of Syrian refugee children and their families. RAP Service

Provider Handbook provides information to the staff working with directly Syrian refugees about the integration process which was useful for my study.

6. *Syrian Outcomes Report (IRCC, 2019d)*: This Report provides rich information about various dimensions of the settlement and integration process of Syrian refugees including health and social services, employment, and education.
7. *Memorandum to Directors of Education. (Ontario Ministry of Education, December 4, 2015)*: The purpose of this memo is to provide Directors of Education with information around the Syrian refugee settlement in Ontario, the children and youth that would attend schools across Ontario. This memo also provides information on funding and expenses, language supports, mental health supports, and community supports.
8. *Memorandum to School Board Chairs. (Ontario Ministry of Education, December 4, 2015)*: It provides information on how teachers and community members could be volunteers to help and welcome Syrian newcomers. The memo also declares that Ontario Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Federal Government, ensured that school boards would have the resources and supports for the integration of Syrian refugee children into Ontario education system including language and mental health support.
9. *Memorandum to Directors of Education. (Ontario Ministry of Education, March 2, 2016)*: It provides information on the first arrival of Syrian newcomers to Canada, explains the working groups, which have been

established to identify goals, deliverables and measurable outcomes of the resettlement efforts of the Government of Ontario. It also provides links to on-line and electronic resources of governmental materials relevant to the integration of Syrian refugee children and their families in addition to the resources on refugee mental health and a parent tool kit and guide. All of these resources can contribute to my research since they provide information about the strategies and programs of the educational policy for Syrian refugee children in Ontario.

10. *Memorandum to (Ontario) Directors of Education Secretary Treasures and Supervisory Officers of School Authorities. (Ontario Curriculum and*

*Assessment Policy Branch, December 22, 2015):* The Memorandum aimed to respond to needs that had been identified in English-language school boards and to provide school authorities with information about additional supports. My purpose is to use this Memorandum is to interrogate the requirements of the English language for refugee children and the resources and strategies of the state to provide English learning services to Syrian refugee children.

11. *School Mental Health Assist, INFO-SHEET Welcoming Syrian Newcomer Students & Families to School. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016):* This

Info-Sheet was designed to provide information to educators on how they can support the mental health and well being of newcomer Syrian students and how they can welcome the students and their families. I can gain the perspective and strategy of the Ontario Ministry of Education on mental health services for Syrian refugee children by using this resource.



## 12. *Supporting Refugee Students in Canadian Classrooms, What Works*

*Monograph. (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2017):* This monograph was assembled by SSHRC to summarise the research findings of scholars who were evaluating outcomes in refugee education initiatives.

### **4.4.2 Secondary Sources**

My secondary data source is the literature relevant to the Syrian refugee children's integration process in Canadian schools. This data provides me with material to examine the application and outcome of Ontario's educational programs for Syrian refugee children as reported by social science scholars. I conducted a literature review (see chapter 2) to examine the academic literature on the Syrian refugee children in Canada. Initially, I used the search terms "Syrian refugee children" AND "Canada" AND ("education policy" OR "integration" OR "social inclusion" OR "needs" OR "problem" OR "multiculturalism"). I conducted my search on ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Canadian Public Policy databases, with limiting location to "Canada", time period from 2016 to current, and by including only peer-reviewed academic articles.

As a result of this initial search, I found 27 relevant articles. In the next step, I extended my database search with new terms, "Syrian child\*" and "Syrian refugee", which provided me 13 and 24 more articles, respectively. Consequently, 64 citations were retrieved with this method. (Table 1) After merging the same articles coming from different databases, a total of 40 articles were included in my review. Of these 40 articles, a minority (n=9) were relevant to my research question.

Table 1 Secondary sources search

Database Name	"syrian refugee children" + search terms		syrian child*		syrian refugee, education, canada, child*		TOTAL	
	Search results	Relevant articles	Search results	Relevant articles	Search results	Relevant articles	Search results	Relevant articles
PROQUEST	17	17	12	11	56	17	85	45
EBSCOHOST	9	9	4	2	20	6	33	17
Canadian Public Policy Collection	9	1	10	0	11	1	30	2
TOTAL	35	27	26	13	87	24	148	64

For literature research on the theoretical concept and contextualizing the study (see Chapter 2), I used academic databases such as PAIS Index, ERIC ProQuest, EBSCOhost Databases, and Canadian Public Policy Collection from the Dalhousie University's online database. Google Scholar is another academic source that I used to search for academic journals. I searched for information on the education strategy, service, and policy outcomes for Syrian refugee children and I looked for the education and orientation programs and booklets, policy documents, journals, researches and government reports.

#### **4.5 Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, I applied the policy analysis framework developed by Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014) in their study named *The Intellectual landscape of critical policy analysis* which was developed specifically to critique educational policy.

These scholars outlined five fundamental areas to consider:

1) *The difference between policy rhetoric and policy implementation/outcome:*

The space between policy development and implementation is important. There is often a difference between the intent of a policy expressed in the rhetoric and how the policy is actually implemented on the ground. This means looking at the rhetorical devices, and the symbolic nature of a particular educational policy, and then considering the space between policy development and implementation. Thus looking at general Ministry of Education guidelines and comparing these with the actual structure and process of the GENTLE program. The rhetorical devices might be expressed in the press briefings on the educational policy of refugee children and the declarations and guides provided to the district schools on best practices for the integration of refugee children.

2) *The context in which the policy was created: its roots and its development.* This means investigating how a particular policy emerged, what issues the policy aimed to provide solutions to, what kind of changing and development process the policy had, and how it reinforced the dominant culture. The policy tools and the process, which resulted in policy institutionalization, is important. My interest was to define the historical and contextual clues of the educational policy to understand the results, changes, and conditions of the policy and the ways that it emerges. I also explored the policy tools and

the process, which contribute to policy institutionalization.

3) *The distribution of power, resources, knowledge, and the creation of winners and losers – who gains from the policy* – is it the service users or the service providers or both? For the implementation of the third tool of analysis, I considered the functions of the policy and interrogate the ways that the Syrian refugee children benefit from the implementation of the policy, the power distribution between them and their peers, the access refugee children and their families have to school resources.

4) *The effect of the policy on the relationships between inequality and privilege or social stratification.* I identified the relationship between the Syrian refugee children and their peers, teachers, and school authorities. I reflected on who has the privilege and who experiences inequality or marginalization in the Canadian education system. This included considering the construction of the refugee and social discourses around Islam and Middle Eastern immigrants in relation to educational policies on inclusivity and a multicultural approach to education.

5) *The presence and processes of resistance to domination by the members of non-dominant groups.* I focused on how the Syrian refugee children and their families resist domination and oppression (if they experience it) in the Canadian education system and the ways that Syrian children and their families show resiliency and independence (if they do so). This how policies and approaches can become sources of domination and oppression were considered alongside considering any evidence of resistance from the refugee children.

Thus I used these five dimensions of critical policy analysis as tools to explore

the intellectual landscape of Ontario's refugee education policy and to consider whether social justice principles are embedded in the approaches and programs which have been operationalised (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014). While I engage with the five analytic guides I took a critical stance toward power, knowledge, and be aware of theorising my social, cultural, and political positionality such as race or religion. I considered how elements of power and privilege are at play in my research process (Strega and Brown, 2015).

In the following chapter, I lay out my critical analysis in accordance with the critical questions provided by Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014). Beginning with a discussion of the context in which the policies were created, I then continue with a discussion of the differences between policy rhetoric and policy implementation and outcome. This then leads into a discussion of the distribution of power, resources and knowledge looking particularly at how, in the language of Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield & Lee, this creates winners and losers in the educational process, a question which invited a detailed examination of the impact of the educational policies in the school system. This discussion then led naturally into the next question which considered social stratification, inequality and privilege and finally a discussion a disussion of resistance.

## CHAPTER 5 A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IN ONTARIO FOR SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN

### 5.1 Introduction

To analyze the data, I applied the policy analysis framework developed by Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014) in their study named *The Intellectual landscape of critical policy analysis* which was developed specifically to critique educational policy. My findings involve five different dimensions: (1) The context in which the policy was created: its roots and its development (2)The difference between policy rhetoric and policy implementation/outcome, (3)The distribution of power, resources, knowledge, and the creation of winners and losers (4)The effect of the policy on the relationships between inequality and privilege or social stratification (5)The presence and processes of resistance to domination by the members of non-dominant groups (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, and Lee, 2014).

The Ontario Ministry of Education has partners at both the federal and provincial levels. They work together with the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada (IRCC) at the federal level and provincial partners such as municipal organizations, settlement agencies, and other relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Health. They then partner with district school boards who have committed to work together to ensure the successful integration process of Syrian refugee children and their families into the Canadian school system. From this perspective, it is significantly important for my study to analyze the Ontario Ministry of Education and partner organizations, strategies, implementations, and programs relevant to educational aspects.

## **5.2 The context in which the policy was created: its roots and its development**

### *The Roots of the GENTLE Program*

Canada's provinces and territorial governments wished to ensure that all newly arrived Syrian refugee children transitioned successfully into their new schools and social environment. The educators in the Thames Valley District School (TVDSB) designed the GENTLE center as a grassroots initiative, lead by the Ontario's Ministry of Education with the support of the Government of Canada. Ontario's Ministry of education sent memorandums to the district boards of the schools in Ontario and asked them to successfully integrate Syrian refugee children. TVDSB is one of the district schools with a significant number of Syrian refugee children. The English as a second language/English language development (ESL/ELD) team in the board determined the potential needs of Syrian refugee children by cooperating with the existing Attendance and Social Work team, who provide direct social work services to students and parents regarding counselling, agency referrals and other interventions that respond the underlying social, emotional, family, peer and learning issues and needs that cause barriers to learning. They co-ordinated with previous TVDSB staff who had past experiences with refugee students from Kosovo in 1999, local Syrian community leaders, and community agencies (Faubert and Tucker, 2019). The potential needs and issues of the incoming students were thought of as mental health supports for dealing with trauma, strategies for closing gaps in knowledge and skills, and school readiness. Educators also searched for ways to work with newly arrived students regarding the issues of race and stigma. Educators then asked for their senior administrators' approval for the GENTLE program, which was presented as a family-based reception model focusing on trust-

building and significantly considered incoming students' mental health (Faubert and Tucker, 2019).

*The Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) and The GENTLE Team*

The Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) is located in the southwest corner of Ontario and an English Public district. It is among the largest school boards in the province by covering 7,000 km<sup>2</sup> and involving urban, suburban, and rural communities. The board operates 160 schools serving approximately 77,000 students in elementary, secondary, adult and continuing education programs (TVDSB, 2017). Over 4,600 refugee children registered to the publicly funded schools in Ontario across 26 English Public, 14 English Catholic, two French Public and three French Catholic school districts (Faubert and Tucker, 2019).

The TVDSB School Board assembled a GENTLE team which consisted of English as a Second Language/English Literacy Development staff, Arabic speaking educators, a social worker, a team of retired educators, staff from the SWIS (Settlement Workers in Schools)-London partnership, Educational Assistants and an Early Childhood Educator (TVDSB, 2016). Ontario's Ministry of Education provided training to teachers so they could assess English language proficiency and the academic skills of incoming children. These trained teachers became members of the Responsive Assessment Centre team. The Ontario Ministry of Education also organized a symposium for 100 teachers of English-language learners in Ontario.

*The Activities Fulfilled by GENTLE*

According to the TVDSB's explanation on its web page (TVDSB, 2016), the GENTLE



center fulfilled the following activities: (1) Partnered with Cross-Cultural Learner Center to register students; (2) Addressed transportation needs of the students from their residence to GENTLE center; (3) Provided educational plan to create a comfortable learning plan; (4) Worked with a social worker for addressing the special needs of the families; (5) Assessed the language and mathematics skills and knowledge of to students and reported the outcomes to receive schools; (6) Provided a positive transition of students from GENTLE to their new school in Canada (TVDSB, 2016)

### **5.3 The difference between policy rhetoric and policy implementation/outcome**

While politicians and political documents declare that Canada has a comprehensive educational policy and ensure successful integration for Syrian refugee families and children (Ontario News 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education 2015b; Ontario Ministry of Education 2016), practiced reality often differs from the political discourse which drives policy construction (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019; SSHRC, 2017; Brewer, 2016; Braun 2016 ). There are differences between policy rhetoric and practiced reality relevant to the educational integration of Syrian refugee children into Canadian schools and education. The differentiation is proved regarding the gaps between political discourses and announcements of the political leaders; and practical and research reports of some governmental organizations (like SSHRC) and scholars as I explain through the following paragraphs. In an Ontario Citizenship and Immigration news release (2016), Mitzie Hunter, Ontario Minister of Education, stressed the importance of partnerships between school boards and community partners to enhance the integration process for newcomers in communities and schools. She expressed a commitment to continue working with these partners after the arrival of newcomers in Ontario, to ensure the best possible start in life

for refugee children (Ontario News, 2016). In the same report, Laura Albanese, the Federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration expressed her pride that the investments that they were making would ensure that refugees were in the best position to succeed in the future. She praised the accomplishments of the government on timing and evidence that Ontario was a welcoming place for those fleeing war and oppression ( Ontario News, 2016). However, despite the statement from the Minister of Education that she would continue working with the Boards and partners, the IRCC did not state any specific plans for Syrian refugee children's education in their succeeding Departmental Plan in 2018-2019 (IRCC, 2018). It was only mentioned that the government would continue with improvements to national waitlist managements for Syrian refugees and refugees would be able to access all settlement services (IRCC, 2018). There seemed to be a lack of evaluation and follow-up to the initial receiving programs and responses such as the GENTLE program in the Departmental Plan of IRCC for the years of 2018-2019 (IRCC, 2018). Integration is a long term process that requires a much greater investment of teaching and support programs than an initial welcoming program. The literature (Yohani, Brosonsky, and Kirova, 2019) shows that teachers and educators did not make enough preparations for working with Syrian families, and they were not provided with enough support. Linguistic barriers related to low English proficiency continue to cause marginalization at school (IRCC, 2019d). Syrian parents reported that language is a barrier within the school system, and they are unable to understand what teachers require from them to fill out school forms and support their children's homework. Children can not complete their homework because they do not understand what they are asked to do (Yohani, Brosonsky, and Kirova, 2019).

The Syrian Outcomes Report (IRCC, 2019d), which provides a thematic overview of the Syrian refugees resettling in Canada between November 2015 and December 2016, stated that some Syrian students continue to face social and linguistic barriers. They reported a need for teachers to learn more about intercultural communication and anti-discriminatory education. They stressed that being more sensitive and supportive about the special needs of Syrian children instead of focusing on the modification to programming would have more beneficial outcomes (IRCC, 2019d).

An example of the gap between policy and practice is illustrated in the monograph assembled by SSHRC to summarize the research findings of scholars who were evaluating outcomes in refugee education initiatives. They identified that refugee students continue to experience socio-psychological challenges since some of the teachers, resettlement officers, and policymakers do not have sufficient cross-cultural competency, an adequate social justice focus, and the necessary transformative leadership skills to work with refugee students. This demonstrates that even if the policy directives are sound, the successful implementation is still hinged on many other factors such as lack of comprehensive programs, absence of diverse pedagogical approaches, and limited abilities to complete adequate skill assessment (SSHRC, 2017).

Leaders working in the TVDSB used what they describe as an inclusive leadership style. By this, they mean using trust between colleagues, families, and students; engagement of the families and community stakeholders in key decisions; and welcoming innovation and new ideas that would be beneficial to fulfill inclusive aims. (Faubert and Tucker, 2019). Even though GENTLE stressed inclusion, the presence of inclusivity does not necessarily prevent exclusivity. These two phenomena are not on a

continuum where greater inclusivity assures that there is less exclusivity (Mitchell & Shillington, 2005). In their research monograph in 2017, SSHRC scholars identified that the challenges confronting Syrian refugee children are numerous, some the results of lack of inclusivity but some the outcome of being excluded and being “othered”. They noted evidence of children experiencing a lack of peer support, having already lost all of their pre-exile friendships, they then experience post-exile exclusion, bullying, and rejection, and the stigma associated with the “refugee” label. As a result of their religion, Muslims in Canada may experience racist incidents, otherment, and marginalisation (Hadfield, Ostrowski, Ungar, 2017). This may result in a loss of identity, accompanied by a loss of culture, and often post-traumatic stress disorder. This is all compounded by their loss of their youth as war forced them into premature adult responsibilities. As Canadian newcomers, many of these developmental and experiential challenges can be misdiagnosed as a lack of student abilities as they struggle with all the social and psychological challenges of refugee students confronting the school integration process (SSHRC, 2017). Decorating classrooms with the Syrian flag and mentioning the Syrian war and how Syrian children suffered through the war and exile process (Faubert and Tucker, 2019) does not adequately address these issues. While it is admirable that inclusivity is a goal, on its own it is insufficient. There should be measures in place to address major stigmatising stereotypes and derogatory prejudices which Canadian children who are the new peers of Syrian children have undoubtedly been exposed to. Strengthening the position of the white Canadian students against the Syrian refugee children may promote stereotypes about the refugee children as fundamentalists, terrorists, and criminals. Integration and multiculturalism can be achieved if Syrian

refugee children can maintain their own heritage culture and identity and at the same time the Canadian-born peers, and other cultural groups in the school environment are educated on their role, in the integration process. I suggest that the role of Canadian-born participants is to be respectful and welcoming which means being open to learning and exercising cultural humility. This requires mounting an active anti-racist education program which shows the toxicity of hate, intolerance and prejudicial assumptions and biases. This would require a policy which reaches beyond inclusivity and also addresses exclusivity. If Syrian refugee children cannot maintain their cultural identity then assimilation occurs. If Syrian refugee children are provided equitable participation and diversity in schools, then the educational policy can be called as multiculturalist (Berry, 2013).

Educational policies and strategies for refugee children's well-being must anticipate this potential bullying and discrimination and begin educating Canadian children on the injustice of xenophobia and Islamophobia. If the racialization of Muslim students and Islam is unchecked and unaddressed in school, integration and inclusion will be hampered. The GENTLE program did not appear to have anticipated these issues or to have extended its reach beyond initial school placement. The engagement of Syrian refugee children as the active actors of these initiatives could be very valuable.

In the Memorandum to School Board Chairs, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2015a) stated that the Ministry would work with the Federal Government to ensure a seamless transition and manage a responsive support for Syrian refugees. The Ministry declared that school boards would have the resources and support to ensure successful integration for Syrian refugees into the Ontario education system (Ontario Ministry of

Education, 2015b). However, it appears that the GENTLE program was not provided adequate resources to continue. As a result of this, the promises of a responsive support system were not fulfilled, and the GENTLE Center, which seemed to have the potential to offer so much more was closed only four months after starting operation (TVDS, 2016).

SSHRC reports that more research needs to be done on the educational experiences of refugees in Canadian schools and that this could contribute to filling the gaps in policy. Canadian literature about K-12 migrant students' education and well-being is largely focused on immigrant students or English language learners and does not address the specific experiences and needs of refugee students. This significant gap in research and in Canadian educational policy is filled by a dependence on studies which have been conducted in other countries, mainly from Australia (Ratkovic et al., 2017). The policy needs a deeper understanding of the psychological, social, and educational needs and problems specific to the experiences of refugee students living in Canada. (SSHRC, 2017).

#### **5.4 The distribution of power, resources, knowledge, and the creation of winners and losers. Analysis of if the service users benefit from the policy, or it is more beneficial to the service providers**

##### ***5.4.1 The Policy is More Beneficial to the Service Providers***

Faubert and Tucker (2019) state that they see values and policies as intermeshed and reference the policy description of Lingard: "as the authoritative allocation of values" (Lingard, 2013, p.116 as reported in Faubert and Tucker, 2019). The educators who designed the GENTLE program stressed that they were always thinking about how GENTLE aligned with the strategic plan of the School Board. Leaders at the district and

school level underlined the importance of upholding these mainstream Canadian values and efforts were made to achieve these goals as professionals. They also expressed that this was important to them as it aligned with their personal targets, aims, and values (Faubert and Tucker, 2019). But what about the Syrian refugee children's values, needs, expectations, and issues? The children's situations and viewpoints are at best an afterthought to the institutional policy and priorities and values of the professionals who designed the GENTLE process. From this point of view, policy and procedural guidance concerning the registration and support of refugee children and the allocation of power, which was from top to bottom, were more beneficial to the service providers. The needs and expectations of Syrian children and their families were pre-determined regarding general assumptions and decisions of the service providers, and the values of refugee children and their families were not a priority. Furthermore, refugee children are already positioned as needy and powerless. This ignores and invisibilizes their rich linguistic and cultural experiences and diverse background and perspectives which could potentially be significant resources for their integration process into the school system (Yohani, Brosonsky, and Kirova, 2019).

District leaders saw the GENTLE program fitted with the Ontario Ministry of Education's mission, vision, and strategic plan for education (Faubert and Tucker, 2019). This approval is directly related to the policy institutionalization process, where the priority is given to how the proposed program fits into institutional culture. Unfortunately, as the GENTLE program was not systematically evaluated and there were few research initiatives attached to this critically important program, it is not clear which strategies and implementations were fulfilled by GENTLE. The institutionalization

process serves to assist the service providers and to ensure a smooth and efficient functioning of the institutions involved and sidelines the values and needs of the refugee children who ironically are the actual reason for the existence of the program.

#### ***5.4.2 Language Supremacy In Term of Distribution of Knowledge***

Canadian schools reproduce the values and norms of mainstream society. Schools apply language-based activities in English and French, which belong to the dominant society, to determine students' success. Furthermore, those seen as successful by schools are the ones who achieve the tasks and expectations that schools select as important and establish in their educational policies and procedures. These tasks and expectations perpetuate the dominant class's privilege and power and thus the state maintains policies which perpetuate refugees as a marginalized population (Brewer, 2016). Immigrants and newcomers continue to experience being seen as cultural strangers in the national society (Thobani, 2007). A study which interviewed Canadian teachers revealed that even though Syrian refugee children participated more fully in small group activities in their ESL classes, they were quieter than their Canadian-born friends in mainstream English classes (Shamim et al, 2020). In ESL classes, all of the students are from immigrant or refugee families and I hypothesize that the commonality generates a comfort level that is absent in the mainstream classroom. Emphasizing similarities and facilitating peer communication with small group activities in the mainstream classroom might contribute to increased peer interaction which can enhance the mutual integration process. (Shamim et al., 2020). Stewart & El Chaar (2020) suggested that providing better communication and more training to the service providers and teachers- might contribute to the increased inclusion of refugee children. The need for better communication between teachers, social workers,



and school managers that the Syrian refugee children interact with and the need for providing more information and training on Syrian culture, values and a mutual adaptation process to the people working with Syrian refugee children are among the essential needs that should be addressed for the integration process.

Refugee children are required to adopt multiple identities such as being the new Canadians the immigrant, the first language speakers, the individual from the first culture the individual expected and required to learn a second language and to engage with host culture (Brewer, 2016). Even though the Ontario Ministry of Education declared that a welcoming school environment contributes to a student's sense of belonging and overall mental health and belonging and educators should encourage and support Syrian refugee children to use their first language in schools and at home (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016); learning English and French remains a priority for the integration of Syrian refugee children. These languages are seen as part of Canadian history and national identity (Government of Canada, 2018) and considered as assets to help Canadians define who they are (Government of Canada, 2018). The state demands of learning the mainstream languages can be questioned under the framework of multiculturalism. Even though multiculturalism is seen an instrument and ideological way for integration (Scott and Safdar, 2017; Duncan, 2005), policies, such as settlement, educational, and employment policies, may assimilate the newcomers under the mask of integration and multiculturalism (Arar, Brooks & Bogotch, 2019; Sakamoto, 2007). The State's language policy which is adopted through corresponding educational policies can be considered as part of an assimilation to the dominant languages (Sakamoto, 2007).

GENTLE also had a language learning policy, and the integration of refugee

children was thus shaped by the perspectives of mainstream Canadian culture. The preparation process of the GENTLE center shows that integration activities were organized mainly for the refugee children, not for Canadian-born children, even though they would meet a high number of new peers having an absolutely different culture, values, and beliefs. This reflects the belief that integration is a one way process which requires the active work of the refugee children to adjust to Canadian culture but that there is no expectation that multicultural Canada will integrate new knowledge and ideas from newcomer Syrian people.

#### ***5.4.3 Distribution of Resources***

In the Canadian educational system, the integration and transitional process of Syrian refugee children are considered and planned around language and mental health supports. The resources are mainly allocated to ensure the language services (Ontario Ministry of Education 2015a; Ontario Ministry of Education 2016). GENTLE was also designed to welcome student refugees and facilitate their early integration in one of the Ontario school boards, TVDSB (Faubert and Tucker, 2019). However, the Ontario government outlines that a successful and healthy adaptation requires three transitional periods to support refugee students: a) students' life experiences in their home country (pre-migration); b) the process between their home community and their immigration to Canada (trans-migration); c) their new experiences while they adjust and integrate into new school and community (post-migration) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Surely the distribution of the resources should be planned according to the needs associated with the three main periods identified.

Teachers should be consistent with the understanding of culture as everyday life and interactions and be aware of the children's cultural backgrounds through daily interactions, including greeting. Even children from the same region may not have the same cultural traditions and values. While language, food, and clothing are obvious aspects of culture, children also have less visible aspects of culture like parent's beliefs and the understanding of child development (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019). When parents have struggles with navigating multiple systems in their host country, such as the education systems and health care, the parents can have higher stress that could have negative outcomes for children's development. As a result of this process, it might be difficult for children to relate themselves emotionally with their social environment, including school. School systems need a holistic model to ensure a collaborative process of bringing together educators and other key stakeholders to support refugee children and families (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019).

Ongoing safety concerns might be a common barrier for refugee children and their families. Without understanding the pre-migration experiences and current retraumatization process, educators may not truly understand the psychological and social symptoms of these experiences (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019). To provide an example of how retraumatization can occur for instance. Social isolation, perceived or real discrimination, and poverty are post-migration systemic barriers that should be considered to understand the stressors better. If educators were educated to understand refugee children's pre-migration and post-migration experiences, they could work with them more effectively (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019). The example shows us that the distribution of resources to fund service providers who can respond to the special

needs of refugee children and their families is a critical factor to optimize the long-term adjustment process required for refugee children's well-being.

#### ***5.4.4 Distribution of Power***

The dominant construction of refugee students strips them of every single component of their identities with the exception of being stateless, placeless, functionless, powerless and refugees. Besides education and trauma, this vulnerability puts them at an even higher risk of being inappropriately categorized (Braun, 2016). It is important for educators to have cultural humility and to recognize and reduce power imbalances wherever possible both in policy and practice to minimize oppressive and privileged attitudes in Canadian schools. Brewer (2016) notes that pre-service teachers tend not to accept and understand that they have power and privilege in the education system. Their study points out that teachers can reproduce norms and values, privileging some while marginalizing others, including refugee students and that what they do and the approval and disapproval that they communicate is of pivotal importance. It is imperative that teachers consider how they use power, in what context, and over which children (Gallagher, 2008). Understanding the experiences of refugee children at schools through the lens of kinds of power and power relations reveals that it is not an equal playing field and the power used by a teacher over her students is greater than the power those students exercise to resist their teacher's demands and attributes (Gallagher, 2008). Teachers should be trained to recognise that they have the power to reduce oppressive practices through self-awareness and critical reflexivity of their own cultural biases. Educators need to check their biases and should not make assumptions (CMAS, 2015). It is reported that some teachers' discriminatory attitudes cause risks for refugee students' self-esteem,

social competence, and academic achievements (Ratkovic et al., 2017).

The policies developed for a school-aged population often fail to consider cultural, racial, and ethnic imbalances. The policies need to aim to reduce power imbalances through communication and building relationships with refugee students (Brewer, 2016). However, in my review of the GENTLE program there was no mention of the leaders' biases and stereotypes about Syrian refugee children. The report on the program which was posted on the school website described a picture in which educational leaders had a magic stick, and when they touched Syrian refugee children, they transformed the children into a form in which Syrian children could experience and represent idealized Canadian values and norms since TVSDB claimed that they achieved the complex and lengthy process of integration of Syrian refugee children in four months (TVSDB, 2016).

Constructing a positive relationship with caring adults in schools is needed to help refugee students protect their identities and a sense of belonging. Brewer (2016) conducted a literature review to explore the inclusion of refugees in Canadian educational policy and found that refugee students distrust authority figures and furthermore the students stated that decision-makers, including the administration, did not allow them to voice their objections. According to Ratkovic et al. (2017), who conducted a scoping literature review on Canadian educational policy to support refugee children, policy-makers and teachers seem to be more comfortable discussing multiculturalism through celebratory rituals with Syrian food or dress rather than critically questioning the inequities immigrant and refugee children experience in Canadian schools (Ratkovic et al., 2017).

#### ***5.4.5 Creation of Winners and Losers***

While the self-fulfilling prophecy is inherently neutral, if it is combined with equity and inclusion, then overwhelmingly positive outcomes could be gained. A caring and trusting school environment is needed to enable refugee students to use self-fulfilling prophecies to their benefit (Braoun, 2016). Teacher perspectives, policy, and the negative prognoses of deficit discourse (i.e. ESL students don't express themselves well; refugee students take a long time to understand; refugee children don't understand Canadian culture) are obstacles for former refugee students (Braun, 2016). Educational policy recommends that teachers must make students believe that they can achieve since young people have a sense of whether their teachers believe they can succeed (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). According to Ratkovic et al. (2017), the low expectations of teachers have caused academic barriers, discouragement and the development of low self-esteem. This can be the source of inequality among Canada born students and refugee students if the teachers are not trained in critical self-reflection and awareness of the prevalence of deficit discourses .

### **5.5 Social stratification, inequality and privilege**

#### ***5.5.1 Social Stratification***

The teachers, who taught in the GENTLE program, described their classroom practices as awareness-raising in a classroom community and affirming student identity. To raise cultural awareness teachers explained the Syrian crisis as part of a classroom lesson and discussed war struggles and human displacement. It is indicated that the classes were diverse and newcomers shared their experiences with their peers (Faubert and Tucker,

2019). Some national students were seemingly unaware of their classmates' histories and situations. The teachers emphasized that even though the topics were sensitive, it was worth taking such a risk described as a potential to develop a deeper appreciation for lived experiences of others (Faubert and Tucker, 2019). Students also decorated their classrooms with flags and pictures of items from Syrian cultures to create a welcoming social environment. Teachers were assured that their implementations were consistent with the inclusive visions and goals of the school board and the Ministry (Faubert and Tucker, 2019) Even though the school principal implemented professional learning sessions to ensure that teachers learned more about Syrian culture and appropriate pedagogical approaches to enhance smooth integration (Faubert and Tucker, 2019), the above-mentioned implementations might create social stratification or strengthen the current social stratification where Syrians or refugees are viewed as needy and “damaged” and the Canadians in classrooms are reassured that they are the rightful inheritors of a “superior” environment. Discussing the Syrian war, exiling, the impact of the war on Syrian people might also increase Syrian children’s war trauma. Asking questions to Syrian children about life in camps and other war-related events are seldom appropriate since they can cause high stress and anxiety (CMAS, 2015). Besides, when the Syrian children’s war experiences are explained in the classrooms, it might create a differentiation between the ones having war experiences and the rest of the class who do not experience such heavy and intensive life events. Syrian children have limited social engagement with Canadian-born students in high school and students from other cultures. Despite Syrian children explaining that they do not prefer being just with each other, they sometimes say that they want to stay in their groups (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). It shows

the challenge of making new social connections when it creates a comfort zone to stay within one's own group. Canadian-born children think it is unnecessary to initiate a conversation with Syrian peers since the Canadian-born children have their own friends (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020).

### ***5.5.2 Inequality and Privilege***

District leaders saw the GENTLE program as fitting with the Ontario Ministry of Education's mission, vision, and strategic plan for education (Faubert and Tucker, 2019). This approval is directly related to the policy institutionalization process, where the priority is given to how the proposed program fits to institutional culture. It is not clear which strategies and implementations were actually fulfilled by the GENTLE program, but the institutionalization process serves mainstream policy, not the service recipients who in this case are refugee children. Even though the political discourses and implementation accounts suggest that the program is optimal for the educational adjustment of refugee children, research shows that Syrian children have experienced obstacles to school integration while they are trying to adjust to Canada (IRCC, 2019d). Feelings of isolation and separation are reported which are examples of emotional and social barriers. Syrian children report facing bullying, racism, Islamophobia, discrimination, and issues in making friends. Due to language barriers, they do not feel a part of school activities and have a sense of exclusion (IRCC, 2019d). If refugee children have not had benefits from the policy, it must reinforce the dominant culture and policy tools of the mainstream society.

In the GENTLE program, school administrators could independently organize



timetables to schedule workshops and professional learning sessions to strengthen the academic skills of newcomer students. Orientation to the schools, literacy, numeracy, and settlement needs were the essential issues that the leaders focused on (Faubert and Tucker, 2019). However, it can be seen that the integration process was designed primarily to address the academic needs and skills of refugee children as ascertained by the program designers. Thus the teachers have the privilege to determine what refugee children need and their cultural, religious, social needs and expectations were not considered.

The Ministry stated that various assessment tools should be implemented to ensure the appropriate placement of students and programs for newcomer children and youth. Refugee students should be placed into age-appropriate classes in subject building on students' interests and prior learning experiences. In this way, students could have opportunities to build interactions with their peers. For secondary school course placements, students should not be streamed directly into particular courses regarding solely their English or French language abilities. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). However, as a result of the differences between language instruction, curriculum and educational structures in their home countries and Canada, refugee children have had inaccurate grade placement and the ones aged 14 to 18 have educational gaps and had to re-start their education at earlier grades (IRCC, 2019d). However, the Syrian education system was free, highly valued, and was seen as a model among Middle Eastern Countries. Syrian children were one of the best-educated populations in the region. Even during the conflict, Syrian parents gave great importance to education and sought to find ways to keep their children educated (CMAS, 2015). This suggests that Syrian families

gave significant importance to their children's education and that if they are provided with the opportunities, they are willing to support their children's education and collaborate with teachers and the other service providers in schools.

Many refugee youth stressed that they feel lost and unsure about what their next steps would be after completing high school (IRCC, 2019d). They reported that the overall requirements for postsecondary education and the courses they are responsible for in high school are not clear. Syrian youth also reported that it is difficult to figure out what they should do to get into university (IRCC, 2019d). This is an indicator of refugee youth's underprivileged situation and the current educational policy does not address this cultural difference or suggest any ways that Syrian youth could be mentored into higher education so that inequalities in refugee youth's current and future social, economic, and political lives could be mitigated.

Equitable access to services is a common barrier for Syrian refugees that affects children's school process. Syrian families experience issues with health care, financial viability, accessing the welfare system and a lack of support for refugee children with disabilities. The education system often responds by threatening these children with suspension instead of understanding the situation and working with the family. Yohani, Brosonsky, and Kirova (2019) report that one family had two children with severe mental/physical disabilities which were diagnosed by a United Nations medical officer before arriving in Canada. However, upon arrival the family had not been able to access any specialist or disability services during the ten months that they have been in Canada. Another family living in Canada for one year had a child with a medical condition (Thalassemia) who was not provided supports and services. Disconnection with the

essential health and social services makes families and children unsuccessful in integrating into Canadian culture (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019). In another case, a young mother experienced isolation, and suffered an acute episode of depression. She was not able to raise her hands to care for the child and was taken to the hospital (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019). This example illustrates that the post-migration integration process is challenging and has significant importance on refugee children's lives. It should be considered by educational authorities and schools should work together with community organizations to connect Syrian refugee children and their family to health and social services. These kinds of post-migration systemic barriers impact children's adaptation process and suffering from bullying, anxious or acting-out behaviours in school may affect their school attendance. Educators could better understand the source of a child's behavior and help the child to engage in school life by acknowledging pre-migration experiences and by identifying the post-migration systemic barriers (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019).

The education policies contribute to inequality and privilege by not providing Canadian national students and families with orientations that provide information on Syrian culture, values, belief, and responsibilities that Canadian born people may fulfill to contribute a mutual integration process. Even though it was well-known that a high number of refugee students (477 Syrian newcomer students) would come to Thames Valley Schools, the school leaders and teachers did not prepare an orientation for the Canadian-born students and their families. The educational policy does not include a mutual adaptation process of both sides: the Syrian refugee children and the rest of the students in the schools. Even though refugee students are likely to consider that they have

many common features like being forced to migrate, potentially speaking a different language, adjusting to a new school system, and working through identity conflicts, nevertheless the policy should also address the unique and individual needs of each refugee student. Lack of provision for each individual is a serious gap in the education policy planning and limits a positive outcome. Individual resilience and the potential of the refugee youth to fight against adversity are core resources that can be mobilized while working with individual refugee students (Brewer, 2016). Neither the uniqueness of the refugee children nor their strengths were seen as critical elements by the GENTLE policy's integration process.

Providing communication in Arabic to parents and the engagement of new students are described in the GENTLE center analysis of the scholars as follows:

Parents' continued presence and having support workers communicating in Arabic helped ease anxieties and allowed the newcomers to share stories and laugh – all of which fostered a sense of belonging. Once reception services with GENTLE were complete, students were transitioned into their designated schools and classrooms with their new student colleagues. School-level educators continued the work that began at GENTLE: working directly with students and parents and encouraging students to work with each other (Faubert and Tucker, 2019, p: 86).

It should be considered that building *a sense of belonging* requires more work than communication during one visit and laughing together even though it might decrease the level of stress during that particular event. This communication process might provide an initial positive impact. But the outcome of the services need to be articulated by the service users -the Syrian refugee children and their families- to understand whether the

services decreased their anxieties and contributed to their integration or adaptation process. It appears that the current educational policy and service providers have the privilege to decide if the services are beneficial for the service users without consideration of the feedback and evaluation of the service users.

### **5.6 Resistance to domination and oppression by the members of non-dominant groups**

The Canadian educational policy lacks at least one of three critical factors necessary to provide good practice for Syrian refugee children described by Braun (2016): the provision of linguistic and psycho-social needs, a hospitable classroom, and a welcoming school environment, free from discrimination. Refugee children need an inclusive learning community that helps educational achievement. (Braun, 2016). The need to accept students; identities for addressing unique situations are related to social location and understanding the reasons for children's resistance and protest. As a result of a failure to acknowledge students' identities and respond to their needs and expectations through policy and practice, refugee students can be oppressed and marginalized. The policies are not adequate to engage the experiences of refugee students and cultural competencies within the mainstream classroom to accept multiple identities (Brewer, 2016). Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova (2019) provide an example of a Syrian refugee child's reaction to the mainstream educational policy. They report that a child was angry since he was taken out of English-Language Learning classes and put into mainstream English classes. The young boy reported that he was not ready for this change (Yohani, Brosnosky, and Kirova, 2019).

In my final chapter I conclude my study with a discussion of my findings. This is

organized in four sections corresponding to the four research questions which drive the study. Following this I reflect on the overall study findings and comment on what my expectations, assumptions, feelings and surprises have been. I elaborate briefly on what I consider to have been the main strengths of the study and the limitations and then discuss the implications of the study for social work principles and for social work education. Finally, I address the question: What next? And outline some suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Overview and Summary of My Findings

The purpose of my study is to interrogate the Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children from a social work perspective. I used *The Intellectual Landscape of Critical Policy Analysis* (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014) as a policy analysis framework developed specifically to question educational policy using a critical policy approach. In this section, I discuss my study findings with the guidance of my original research questions and provide information on: 1) What are the specific educational policies that Canada has constructed for Syrian refugee children? 2) What are the problems that Syrian refugee children face in Canadian classrooms? 3) How appropriate are the policies (or the absence of policies) for meeting the identified needs of Syrian refugee children? 4) What might be the contribution of social work to improve the construction and delivery of Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children?

#### ***6.1.1 What are the specific educational policies that Canada has constructed for Syrian refugee children?***

Canada has very limited educational policies for refugee children in general or for Syrian refugee children since the educational policies have been designed with a concern for immigrant children. Canadian literature for K-12 migrant students' learning and well-being is beneficial for immigrant children and English language learners, but not for refugee children. Canadian educational policymakers often use references from other countries to inform their planning as there is a shortage of Canadian research-based information on the educational needs of refugee children. Consequently, what educational

policy there is lacks an asset-based approach and instead focuses on the assumed needs (deficits) of refugee children. I agree with scholars who believe that there needs to be an informed understanding of the differences between immigrants and refugees with more relevant guides and training for teachers (Ratkovic et. al., 2020).

Despite the political declarations and discourses claiming that Canada has a comprehensive educational policy to ensure successful integration for Syrian refugee children and their families, practiced reality demonstrates a contradiction. An example of the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality has been shown in the monograph assembled by SSHRC to present scholars' research findings interrogating refugee education initiatives of the Canadian government. This demonstrates that even if the policy directives are sound, the successful practice depends on various factors such as comprehensive programs and diverse pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, the policy itself is not a guarantee of adequate services to refugee children unless there is sufficient collaboration (funding, planning and co-ordination) between the federal government, provincial governments, local school divisions, service providers and local schools. The policy for refugee children education and well-being must include a holistic, cross-cultural, and multi-sector approach (SSHRC, 2017).

### ***6.1.2 The Problems that Syrian Refugee Children Face in Classrooms***

The clash of civilizations perspective which identifies that Eastern, Arab and Muslim backgrounds are understood and perceived as inferior to Western nations and civilizations is widespread in Canada and creates an unstable and unsettled sense of belonging and political citizenship for Arab Muslim Canadians (Arat-Koc, 2005). This



means that Syrian refugee children are confronted with these discourses and derogatory beliefs that they are potential terrorists from some of their school peers. Syrian refugee children are at risk of being forced to confront long-term social exclusion, from racism and Islamophobia, resulting in social and cultural isolation, and these stressors are further compounded when they also experience educational challenges (Cooper and Cooper, 2008). Syrian children can become lost among various assigned identities like being a refugee, being Arabic first language speakers, being an individual from a foreign culture, following the Islamic faith and being expected and required to learn a second language and to engage with the host culture (Gunderson, 2000). Thus refugee students have many socio-psychological challenges, and some resettlement officers, teachers, and policymakers have insufficient cross-cultural competency, social justice focus, and transformative leadership skills to adequately respond to these stress factors (SSHRC, 2017). Policies that fail to consider these exclusionary realities can produce inequality, privilege, and social stratification in the classrooms.

Refugee children often lack social support, which is one of the most important mediators in their transition process and usually occurs as a result of a diminished or absent pre-exile friendship network and then compounded with post-exile exclusion or bullying. (Gagné et al., 2012). Rejection by peers can cause self-esteem challenges, anxiety, the risk of depression, early school withdrawal, and the risk of criminal behaviors (Gagné et al., 2012). Loss of culture and loss of identity decreases the refugee students's sense of belonging. Post-traumatic stress disorder, stolen youth, and misdiagnosed student abilities can be listed as the additional psychological challenges. (Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2017). Canadian-born

children with stereotypic misconceptions and prejudices about immigrants and refugees often engage in ethnic harassment in youth social networks (Bayram et al., 2017).

Efforts, perspectives, and services to better understand what provides resilience through the forms of war and migration-related adversity, is under-researched for war-affected children. The current education policy and implementations do not respond to the children's voices as the center of analysis and understanding and do not allow children to contribute to their own well-being and development. Refugee children have expectations to discuss about their needs and problems, and negotiate actively so they can participate in making meaning of their social environments (Chaudhry, 2017; Fernando & Ferrari, 2013; Kostelny & Wessells, 2013; Werner, 2012; Denov and Shevell, 2019). The traumatic war experiences of refugee children can be overemphasized creating an identity that limits, confines and excludes children from active and egalitarian participation with their peers. Practitioners and researchers need to be careful about these children's vulnerability, and must be able to discern whether some issues should be addressed individually or with refugee peers rather than in an integrated classroom environment. Trauma and resilience must be carefully considered within the unique sociocultural context of each child (Denov and Shevell, 2019; Denov and Akesson, 2017).

As a result of exiling, many Syrian youth have missed a considerable amount of schooling. In addition to this, the challenge of combined language and literacy gaps causes problems for a large number of Syrian youth. Literacy gaps are often due to language barriers and new curricula (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2015; Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). The Canadian education system has struggled with the English language needs of refugee youth in general, and has been further overwhelmed by the arrival of large

numbers of Syrian youth (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). Provinces have experienced fulfilling the federal government's promise to assist Syrian children and families as a priority as an extra strain on their educational systems. Teachers indicate that there has been an increase in the learning challenges and exceptionalities of students in their classrooms. High poverty schools have problems such as long waiting lists for particular services, which include English as a Second Language classes and learning support (Skidmore, 2016).

Lack of comprehensive programs, limited skill assessment, being inappropriately categorized, and lack of diverse pedagogical approaches are obstacles that Syrian refugee children have faced (SSHRC, 2017; Ratkovic et al., 2020; Brewer, 2016). The tests that are used are often culturally inappropriate, and language difficulties further impede their accuracy. Refugee students' passion for performing well academically in Canadian schools has been undervalued and inadequate assessment has often resulted in students being placed in lower academic streams which are actually below their capabilities. This leads to self-fulfilling prophecies of underperformance and also contributes to teachers of refugee students underestimating their abilities and academic potential. This educational impediment is directly related to the educational assessment system which focuses on the refugee students' language skills rather than their academic capacity and knowledge. Refugee students underestimate their own potential and think that they are perceived as less capable of succeeding in academic responsibilities. As a result of underestimating their potential and being perceived as less capable of succeeding in academic responsibilities, refugee children have to re-take much of secondary school before they can enroll in a university (Shakya et al., 2010).

Since education can be a healing and empowering process for refugee students,

there is a need to support teachers and educators to improve their skills to contribute to the solutions of refugee children's problems and to respond to the severe trauma-based injuries the children are struggling with (Ryeburn, 2016). Research shows that even in the reconceptualized documentation on how Syrian refugee children can integrate into Canadian schools, educators and policymakers have not yet determined the requirements for the successful transition of Syrian refugee children (Kovacevic, 2016).

The Canadian educational system needs to increase the financial resources for providing enhanced support systems for Syrian refugee students, particularly those arriving in the mid-school year. School boards, administrators and classroom teachers have been challenged to fulfill their responsibilities to support Syrian refugee students because of the overwhelming scarcity of educational resources. Syrian students find themselves in mainstream classrooms full of Canadian students and experience the vast competitive disadvantage of struggling with the issues I have identified with little or no support or understanding (Skidmore, 2016).

### ***6.1.3 The Appropriateness of The Educational Policies for Meeting the Identified Needs of Syrian Refugee Children***

There are very few existing educational policies specifically for Syrian refugee children and even for refugee children in general. As already noted, the needs of refugee children are often conflated with the needs of immigrant children, and there is a dramatic shortage of research on the unique needs of Syrian refugee children. In the existing policies, there is a reliance on research findings from other countries and on the assumptions of the policymakers. Thus the distribution of power is very much in favour of the policymakers and the voices of the Syrian children and families are largely absent in the planning

process. Teachers are in a position to reproduce imbalances and inequalities and to privilege some while marginalizing others, including refugee students (Brewer, 2016). Thus it is important that educators are assisted to become aware of their biases and assumptions about refugees. The education policies do not describe teacher training and teacher orientation in detail and it is not apparent that this kind of training is occurring.

Many of the policies are more beneficial to the service providers and appear to be designed to strengthen the values of the culture of educational institutions and staff rather than prioritizing refugee children's values, expectations, and needs (Faubert&Tucker, 2019). Schools implement language-based activities to evaluate if refugee children succeed in English and French, which are the languages that belong to mainstream Canadian society. These language relevant tasks and expectations perpetuate the mainstream society's privilege and power and support the state to maintain policies which position refugees as a marginalized population (Brewer, 2016). If Canada is a multicultural society and honors difference and diversity, then there should be space in the educational planning process for diversity in language, culture and beliefs. Most of the policies for the integration of Syrian refugee children have been planned and established around language and mental health supports thus building a program which rectifies assumed deficits rather than honoring the assets and contributions that children from a different cultural and language tradition can contribute to the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015a; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). All the policies focus on the immediate absorption and integration of the children into the mainstream Canadian society, and there is a significant gap in policies that address the pre-migration and post-migration support which is needed for a healthy adaptation.

Some of the class activities which were described in the GENTLE program included expectations that refugee children would explain their war experiences, and that there would be classes on the situation in Syria for the edification of the class. This was described as part of a program to enhance inclusivity so that the Canadian born children would learn about other countries and become aware of the history and traditions of the Syrian children. However, there is also a risk that this might create a differentiation between the ones having war experiences and the rest of the class who do not experience such heavy and intensive life events. There was no discussion in the policy outlines of addressing discriminatory Islamophobic ideas which are in circulation in Canada and which may be held by many of the potential peer group. While they planned activities that were designed to be inclusive, they did not anticipate racism and exclusion and design policy responses for these possibilities. Service providers exercised their privilege to decide if the services are beneficial for service users-Syrian refugee children and their families- without consideration to service user's comments.

#### ***6.1.4 The Contribution of Social Work to Improve the Construction and Delivery of Canadian Educational Policy for Syrian Refugee Children***

The social work profession has a critical role to contribute to the solutions of the problems such as discrimination and stigma which immigrants and other disadvantaged groups face during their education (Ghafournia, 2019). All resettlement countries but particularly those trying to address the unique needs of refugees during the global plight of war need the support of social work. Social workers can carefully unpack key concepts and translate these into practice interventions, to address well-being, health, illness, distress, healing and family (Denov and Shevell, 2019).

The social work profession has the knowledge, approaches, and strategies to contribute to the Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children. Social justice oriented policy approaches and anti-oppressive practice implementations could contribute significantly to strengthening the planning by anticipating some of the potential barriers and by acting as a go-between between Syrian families and the policy planners. The political rhetoric claims that Syrian refugee children are served equal and inclusive educational programs. However, Syrian refugee children experience labeling and social exclusion, and these unaddressed needs call for a shift in the current educational programs and education policies in Canada. My study's findings are of importance in two social work domains; the necessity of social work services in Canadian schools for Syrian refugee children, and the role of social work in developing Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children. I addressed each of these domains in turn.

#### *6.1.4.1 The Role of Social Work in Developing Canadian Educational Policy for Syrian Refugee Children*

The current policies are informed by a multicultural rhetoric of integration but the implementation of these policies resembles assimilation and Canadianization, which ignores the existing values and identities of Syrian refugee children and thus does not provide adequate educational programs for their needs. Multiculturalism is expressed as an ideology of integration but thinly masks assimilation policies. For example, the language learning requirements in English and French are prioritised, thus promoting mainstream values and Canadian culture. The content, strategy, programs and models, need to be redefined and centred on a social justice-oriented policy. The social work profession has the knowledge and critical understanding to contribute to the educational

problems of the Syrian refugee children at the policy level by promoting social-justice-oriented educational approaches based on the perspectives that: (a) refugee children can be active actors to contribute to the political and social change relevant to their education; (b) the Social Work Profession specializes in using an Anti-Oppressive approach to practice and so can identify and respond to oppressed and marginalized groups, and can provide a balance by advocating refugee children's rights during the policy producing process; (c) Social workers can be allies of teachers in the schools and can serve refugee children by advocating for teachers' rights (such as workload and resources) while the policy focuses on teachers' responsibilities for serving refugee children (when teachers are burnt out by the demands of policymakers, they are not be able to serve refugee children in adequate ways); (d) the Social work profession has a critical lens to fight against the standardized educational strategies which are often designed with a liberal policy focus. Social workers understand that refugee children have individual and collective needs and policies should accept and respond to the unique differences of individual refugee children as well as their collective needs.

Integration oriented education policy does not include mutual adaptation process of Syrian refugee children and Canadian born students-society. The education policy produces oppressed and privileged positions by not demanding fair efforts from refugee children and Canadian society to know, understand, respect, and accept each other. For example, even though it was well-known that a significant number of Syrian refugee children would come to Ontario's schools, Canadian-born students and their families were not provided orientation sessions to know more about the Syrian refugee children. Integration initiatives require refugee children to speak the mainstream language, obey



the rules without demonstrating any resistance and protest, and accept dominant Canadian culture and values. Even though Syrian children define their identities in terms of their own unique culture, after re-settling, they are confronted with a new dominant culture and society, who distrusts the refugee children and asks them to leave behind their own beliefs and values. Mainstream education merely tolerates Syrian refugee children during the integration process and that tolerance cooperates with inequality of power (Arat-Koc, 2005). Multicultural tolerance can be a kind of violence masking domination and oppression (Hage, 1998).

Canadian official multiculturalism poses Canadian culture against multi-cultures (Bannerji, 2000). Syrian refugee children experience obstacles because Arab and Muslim communities are seen by many as inferior to Western society, and this notion creates an unsettled sense of belonging for Arab Muslims. The education system needs inclusive reforms, and the school Boards need to find a solution in combating xenophobia and Islamophobia (Bogotch & Kervin, 2019) so that Canadian-born children can learn from their own families and teachers. New non-standardized policies and practices concerning the uniqueness of refugee children are necessary to ensure social justice and equity for the recognition of Syrian refugee children, who have different needs based on their different values, beliefs, and culture. Social work is a profession that has the strength to contribute to rebuilding Canadian educational policy, particularly in the areas of discrimination and oppression towards refugee children and in addressing the traumatic context of their relocation to Canada.

A social-justice-oriented educational policy provides Syrian refugee children with opportunities for growth and new beginnings. Instead of an exclusive emphasis on

changing refugee children, the political perspective of social justice-oriented social work assists them in meeting their needs in participatory and transformative ways. Policy formulated with a social work perspective challenges the forces which overlook the needs of marginalized populations and interpret and how to meet their needs (Baines, 2017). Social workers do not attempt to resolve larger social and political problems on their own. Social work joins with other groups to achieve large-scale, transformative changes (Baines, 2017). From this point of view, social workers give importance to building allies and working together with educators, teachers, and policy-makers to contribute to developing inclusive and diverse educational policies. Rather than seeing Syrian refugee children simply as victims, social work contributes to a perspective which encourages refugee children to be active in their own transformation and to be participants in their new schools and society. Social work does not claim any single social-justice oriented approach and model to create a social justice-oriented educational policy. It prioritizes the use of a heterodox approach, involving and incorporating the strengths of various critical approaches such as feminist, Marxist, postmodernist, poststructuralist, Indigenous, post-colonial, (dis) ableist, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and critical constructionist to provide the greatest vibrancy and potential for ongoing development (Baines, 2017).

I am presenting the necessity of social work implementations in the following part, which includes both social work approaches and practices for Syrian refugee children.

#### *6.1.4.2. The necessity of Social Work Implementations in Canadian Schools for Syrian Refugee Children*

I concur with the argument that Syrian students need more individualized supports and

more individualized case planning. Educators, teachers, policymakers, and service providers make assumptions that refugee children all have the same features, needs, issues, and expectations, but when the children are asked, they give the service providers and teachers different answers, which makes Syrian refugee children unique (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). The adaptation of the Syrian refugees into Canadian society requires patience, time, work not just for Syrian refugees but also for Canadians since both sides need to learn from each other (Skidmore, 2016). Social work practice might contribute to both the process of recognizing the unique features and experiences of Syrian refugee children and to the adaptation process as one that needs to be mutually achieved by both Canadian society and refugee children. Social work practice with war-affected children and families, can embrace anti-oppressive social work approaches, task-centred approaches, system approaches, and the strengths approaches, and how to work with resistance which might arise from Syrian refugee children and their families. All the approaches can be directly used in a school environment by social workers while working with Syrian refugee children.

In addition to above mentioned approaches, social workers can also contribute to the solutions of the problems that Syrian refugee children experience in schools by using some practical ways such as:

a) contributing by harmonizing service delivery (brokering services and ensuring that available resources are accessed – e.g. settlement services, NGOs offering relevant support services’ community programs, public libraries etc.):

b) collaborating on service delivery - collaborating with teachers (consulting with teachers and providing assistance in curriculum development, specialized groups (e.g.

refugee children having war trauma ), education programs for mainstream Canadian students on diversity, different cultures;

c) providing family work and working towards bridging the gap between family members around education in Canada and adjusting to life in a new country;

d) co-educating – working side-by-side with teachers in the classroom by providing presentations of special topics such as on antiracism in schools, living together with differences, hate speech and the ways to prevent it, and dealing with bullying and injustice;

e) empowering teachers by organizing group sessions and providing trainings on some particular approaches (e.g. anti-bias approaches or dealing with the resistance of the refugee children) that teacher can use in their classrooms.

#### *Approaches to Social Work Practice With War-Affected Children and Families*

Western perspectives, which focus on individualism and individualistic approaches to practice and intervention, have been the center of traditional refugee psychological support approaches. Privileging individual, trauma-focused Western interventions may impose ethnocentric assumptions and create harmful power asymmetries between the helpers and service providers (Denov, Shevell, 2019). Social work is a profession and discipline that can practice with war-affected populations, particularly refugees, including refugee children. Family approaches and attention to context and culture can be considered key social work contributions to practice (Denov, Shevell, 2019) with Syrian refugee children. The family approach suggests assessing existing proactive capacities and deficits in the system surrounding refugee children to provide a protective shield.

This shield reduces the impacts of socioecological shocks, which are the result of war and war-induced migration (Denov, Shevell, 2019).

#### *Task Centered Approach - System Approach and the Strengths Approach*

The focuses of ***the task-centered approach*** are individual problems and short term interventions with fixed time limits. Social workers provide a clear structure for interventions such as termination and evaluation (Isaksson & Sjöström, 2017). By using this approach, social workers can clarify the expectations of refugee children, and the children have the chance to articulate their problems and needs from their own point of view. Syrian refugee children might be given responsibilities, and they are allowed to realise small achievements. Articulation of the problems by refugee children and fulfilling some responsibilities and tasks are powerful means to make the children concentrate their school lives, particularly in the first months of their school lives.

***The system theory approach*** stresses the position of the student within the environment and deals with transactions within and across social systems. Adaptation between the student and the school environment is the main aim of the approach (Isaksson & Sjöström, 2017). Social workers should aim to identify the stressors in the school environment and target a comprehensive change at the individual, group, organizational, and community levels in order to enhance the refugee child's adaptive capacity. In a general context, educational programs for refugee children require an essential change from the refugee child, but this approach aims at comprehensive systemic change for the well-being of the child.

***The strengths approach*** focuses on enabling children to articulate and work

towards self-help and to build hope for their future (Isaksson & Sjöström, 2017). Refugee children's personal capacities and potentials are the main resources for social workers and the essential target of a social worker to understand the refugee children's problems. This approach eliminates seeing Syrian refugee children as stateless, functionless, vulnerable, traumatic, and victim. Refugee children's unique culture, beliefs, and personal features are among the resources that social workers can remind the children to use for establishing their new social network and lives in their new schools. It should be considered that Syrian children are bringing a new spirit to the Canadian schools and society, presenting a new attitude to life and new standards of what can be right and wrong. Canadian society and Canadian born children can learn from Syrian children about humility and compassion (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). Moreover, as social work scholar Massaquoi (2017) advocates, we need to learn the values and traditions of oppressed and marginalized groups, who do not have Canadian culture, to address their needs and problems.

#### *Anti-Oppressive Social Work with Syrian Refugee Children*

The anti-oppressive approach insists that social workers recognize various forms of oppressive behaviors, practices, and policies. Unequal power distribution causes oppression; social workers are constantly alert to the social divisions impacting their clients (Isaksson & Sjöström, 2017). Social workers describe themselves as allies, and they are aware that they have unlearned oppressive beliefs and actions (Gibson, 2014). Social workers working with Syrian refugee children in schools can make a difference by acting and speaking out against social injustice related to refugee children. They are aware that they can make mistakes, and are willing to learn from their clients (Gibson,

2014). Social workers are educated to know how to learn from refugee children's and their families' experiences and life stories by cooperating and collaborating with them. They trust refugee children's potential, knowledge, and strengths, and they are aware that their and other school staff's and policymakers' voices, experiences, and practices could be related to a unique and complex relationship to privilege and oppression. The knowledge that service providers, teachers, and policymakers use, can reflect Eurocentric, patriarchal, and bourgeoisie biases.

Social work anti-oppressive practice teaches that theories are not laws, but they have functions such as description, explanation, prediction and control and management of events or change (Mulley & West, 2017). So, they do not consider theories more important than refugee children's experiences and stories. Social workers are trained to empathise with the experience of being a student and letting refugee children and parents become their teachers. In this way, social workers listen to how refugee children describe their own situation and social workers start where the Syrian refugee children "are", instead of starting with where the educational system think they "should be" (Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005). By doing this, as Maurice Moreau suggests (as cited in Lundy, 2013), the purpose of social workers is to increase the power of Syrian refugee children in the relationship between them and the school system, to respect their dignity and autonomy, recognize their abilities and skills, and reduce the distance between the school system and them (Lundy, 2013). To address the needs of Syrian children, social workers learn the culture and values of Syrian people and activist practices such as consciousness-raising. Social workers can adapt some of the other approaches to their anti-oppressive practices with refugee children. For example, the rich tradition of Indigenous knowledge and

theory might be used as a tool for consciousness-raising activities (Massaquoi, 2017). In the school environment, incorporating refugee children, their families, teachers, mutual support, and shared decision-making are the key features of organizing a consciousness-raising group activity. Re-disruption of power in the relationship with refugee children is necessary, and social workers and other school staff need to go hand in hand with refugee children during the whole adaptation process; trans-migration and post-migration. Social workers present information about how refugee children and their families reach the material resources, provide inside information from other organizations, refer mainstream services, and introduce useful associations and unions; however, the children and their families must decide what the best for them is.

Barnoff (2017), emphasizes that social workers should recognize that the client brings the issues that are rooted in systems of social oppression. From this point of view, schools need to consider not just Syrian refugee children as individuals but also on social levels. Maurice Moreau's client empowerment activities can guide social workers during the empowerment and involvement process of refugee children (as cited in Corniol, 1992). For the implementation of "client-worker power activity", social workers can provide Syrian refugee children and their parent the choices how and where they can gain information about the social, political, and cultural life in Canada, where they can find services for their psychological needs, and how they can learn or improve their English. Social workers assess the choices together with refugee children and parents and invite them for feedback. During the assessment and feedback sessions, they avoid both professional jargon and political rhetoric (Carniol, 1992).

Social workers can provide information to refugee families about the social



movements and the unions acting for Syrian refugees in Canada, and if the refugee parents prefer, social workers can support the parents' participation in these kinds of activities for strengthening collective consciousness. As Carniol (1992) stresses, providing progressive networks also contribute to the political and social change process. In this way, Syrian refugee families can meet with different people who are advocates and activists on refugees' rights.

*Working with the Resistance that Might Arise From Syrian Refugee Children and Their Families*

The current literature and policy documents I reviewed do not mention the resistance of Syrian refugee children and their families within the transition process. I know that resistance has an important effect on the social action process. We are individuals having different histories, backgrounds, emotional registers, and communication styles.

Differences might strengthen the process of working with Syrian refugee children, but they also might disrupt the social action process (Benjamin, 2017). Social workers should engage in the process of critical self-reflection and invite the other school staff to do so to recognize and describe their own differences, history and the source of their differences to understand their strengths and weakness (Benjamin, 2017). It is necessary to build a strategy to know who or what they are up against. An assessment of barriers, opportunities, and supports is needed, and social workers should be ready to ask for the help of refugee children, their families, and the school staff since all of them are the allies of social workers (Benjamin, 2017).

Domination and oppression take several forms; enlightenment and emancipation have also demonstrated various forms in the lives of Syrian refugee children. It is

necessary to provide a social, cultural and political space in which Syrian refugee children and their families can demand their own rights.

## **6.2 Reflection on Study Finding: Expectations, Assumptions, Feelings, and Surprises**

In this section, I considered my study findings in light of my research objectives, and consider my own implied feelings, expectations and assumptions at the outset of this study. The initial thrust of this study was to explore the scope of existing (or absent) Canadian educational policy for Syrian refugee children and the relevance of the problems that Syrian refugee children encounter in classrooms to the social work discipline by exploring the strengths that the social work profession can bring forward for the improvement of Canadian educational policy for the Syrian refugee children. I discussed the outcomes of my main expectation when I embarked on this study and my assumptions, and the surprises related to my expectations. Then, I mentioned the feelings that I experienced while working on my research.

When I started to conduct my research, I was expecting that Canada must have a great educational policy for Syrian refugee children. When Canadians saw Alan Kurdi's lifeless body on the beach of Bodrum in Turkey, and they reacted to the Syrian refugees' situation through social media, I was living in Turkey, my home country, and feeling guilty about what Syrian refugees, especially Syrian children, had to experience. I was looking forward to doing something beneficial for them and seeing some policies that could enlighten the Syrian refugees' lives, which could be the best policy practice across the world. At that time, Turkish TV news showed that Canadian federal political parties were campaigning for an election and promise of aid for Syrian refugees in their campaign. This was great news since we, the Turkish people, knew that Syrians wanted to

immigrate to the West to have a better life and education for their children. In November 2015, after the Liberal party won the elections, they settled 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada (Braun, 2016). Again, I was watching the Canadian state's initiatives for Syrian refugees through Turkish TV programs and was surprised to hear the number of refugees that would be accepted to Canada. There are more than 3,5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, and when I learned the small number of Syrian refugees that the Canadian government was accepting and that they were selecting refugees regarding their education and professional background, I was surprised. Then I thought that even though the selection process was discriminatory, the Syrian refugee children would have a great education and bright future since Canada has social-justice-oriented policies regarding health, essential social services and education.

By having the perspective mentioned above, I expected that Canada should have a particular and successful educational policy for Syrian refugee children. I assumed that Syrian families should have been provided with sufficient services, which also greatly impacted children's lives. I was surprised when I explored that Canada has very limited educational policies for neither refugee children in general nor for Syrian refugee children. Furthermore, I discovered that Syrian refugee children have been experiencing discrimination, racism, bullying, and social and educational obstacles in Canadian schools.

I was surprised to learn that even though Canada is a multicultural nation, and Canada's integration model is described as a process of mutual adaptation by Canadian society and newcomers (Government of Canada, 2016), only Syrian refugee children have been expected to learn and to live according to Canadian culture, values, rules,

languages, and there is no requirement for Canadian students to learn about Syrian children's values and culture before the Syrian students arrived at Canadian schools. The literature suggests that even if the refugee children have tried to adapt in their new country, they have experienced marginalization in terms of their religion, color of skin, and country of origin. In my view, integration should be a two-way process which is inclusive, equal and respectful.

### **6.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

#### ***6.3.1 Strengths***

I constructed my research using the principles of critical theory. As Kincheloe and MacLaren (2005) stress, "there are many critical theories, not just one, the critical tradition is always changing and evolving, and critical theory attempts to avoid too much specificity since there is room for disagreement among critical theorists" (p. 89). The feature of critical theory facilitates the interrogation and interpretation process of my analysis. I did not focus on only one critical theory, and I gained information from the critical tradition as an umbrella approach. While I analyzed the research data, I questioned different principles of critical theory, and at the end of the process, I reached a set of critical theory principles, which is unique to my research issue.

I also harmonized social work approaches and my social work frontline experiences with the critical theory. This expanded my analysis and critiques during my research journey. Even though the limited resources seemed like a limitation at the beginning of my research, then it turned to advantage and strengthened my interpretation and analytical analysis. I felt the moments of creativity and flexibility to produce new

ideas and even to suggest new approaches to the issue.

Another strength of my research is that I share similar values, cultures, and beliefs with Syrian refugee children. With regard to the shared features, I could develop a better empathic approach while I analyzed the educational needs and problems of these children. In addition, my previous work experience contributed to my research process. As an international social worker, I have worked with immigrants and refugees both in Turkey and Belgium, and collaborated with front-line workers, high-level managers in governmental and non-governmental organizations and this experience sensitized me to policy issues.

### ***6.3.2 Limitations***

My research does not include an empirical study involving participants. If I had used a mixed-method study, I could have presented the perceptions, needs, and expectations of Syrian refugee children. Additionally, I could have mentioned the expectation, feelings, and thoughts of Syrian refugee children's parents. Focus group meetings with social workers and educators working in the schools with Syrian refugee children and policymakers preparing policy and programs for Syrian refugee children could also have contributed to the research data.

### **6.4 Social Work Principles and Social Work Education**

My Social Work Education at Dalhousie's School of Social Work has showed me that Social Work Education should provide more research and practical skills and knowledge to contribute to refugee studies. To make Social Workers more able to understand and analyze refugee children's needs and problems, and to affect the policy process, social

work education should provide more social justice oriented research approaches from a global perspective and stress the differences between the issues that immigrants and refugees experience.

### **6.5. What's Next? Questions for Future Research**

My study suggests many questions for future research: 1) What do the voices of Syrian refugee children tell us about the Canadian educational system? Honoring the voices of Syrian refugee children is of significant importance to make them the active actors of the research process which will demonstrate their expectations, perspectives and needs. Using art based research methods, story telling, and participatory methods like shadowing (refugee youth watches the staff who has responsibilities relevant to refugee youth problems and needs in their work places and take notes about the process) might be some examples to make the Syrian refugee children active in the research process. 2) Is there a better process, which can replace integration, to assist refugee children to participate successfully to their new life in Canadian schools and society? My suggestion is to conduct research to interrogate the meaning and implementations of integration and if it might be possible to apply a mutual adaptation process instead of integration. Mutual adaptation process might mean a kind of adaptation process in which both Syrian refugee children and Canadian born children make efforts to know each other's cultures, values, expectations, and the process involves both sides' respect to each other. These research projects might provide more inclusive and equal perspectives to the literature and field relevant to refugee children. To address these issues comprehensively, research should include interviews with Syrian refugee children, their parents, teachers, cultural brokers, social workers, policymakers and other service providers might contribute to building a

diverse educational policy.

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