

Preparing Pre-service Teachers to Support Children With Refugee Experiences

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Within the Canadian context, there is limited understanding of the attitudes and perspectives of pre-service teachers' preparedness to support students with refugee experiences. Using a trauma-informed and culturally responsive approach to pedagogy, this study documents the perspectives of 33 pre-service teachers on their preparation to teach students with refugee experiences in one teacher education program in Canada. Results demonstrate that although pre-service teachers recognize the needs of refugee students, they noted that they have few opportunities in their courses or practicums that address how to meet these needs. They identified training in trauma-informed practices, parent communication, and recognizing and understanding students with refugee experiences as gaps in their preparation.

Dans le contexte canadien, nous connaissons peu sur les attitudes et les perspectives qu'ont les étudiants se destinant à l'enseignement relatives à leur état de préparation pour appuyer les élèves réfugiés. Reposant sur une approche qui tient compte des traumatismes et des réalités culturelles, cette étude fait état des perspectives de 33 étudiants dans un programme de formation des enseignants au Canada quant à leur état de préparation à enseigner à des élèves réfugiés. Les résultats indiquent que si les étudiants se destinant à l'enseignement reconnaissent les besoins des élèves réfugiés, ils constatent que leurs cours et leurs stages leur offrent peu d'occasions d'apprendre comment répondre à ces besoins. Comme lacunes dans leur préparation, les étudiants ont identifié la formation en pratiques tenant compte des traumatismes, la communication avec les parents, ainsi que la reconnaissance et la compréhension de la réalité des réfugiés.

Supporting Students with Refugee Experiences in Canada

As Canada continues to accept refugee families from around the world, the composition of schools and the consequent needs of students continue to evolve (Okoko, 2011). There have been a number of studies that have identified the unique challenges and educational needs of refugee children (Hamilton & Moore, 2004; MacNevin, 2012; McBrien, 2005; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Stewart, 2012). These studies have resulted in various recommendations for best practice for teachers in the school and classroom when working with refugee children. However, aside from a few studies in Australia by Ferfojla (2009), Ferfolja, and Vickers (2010), Naidoo (2009; 2010; 2012), and Ryan, Carrington, Selva, and Healy (2009), there is limited knowledge on how refugee education is being incorporated into initial teacher education programs and how prepared pre-service teachers are to meet the needs of refugee children. The research literature on pre-service teachers' attitudes, experience and knowledge on educating refugee children is

limited, particularly from a Canadian perspective. This paper provides a review of current research on pre-service teachers' preparation for supporting students with refugee experiences in Canada as well as explores the perspectives of 33 teachers in one teacher education program in Canada.

Objective

This is an explorative study that seeks to document the perspectives of pre-service teachers on their preparation for teaching and meeting the needs of children with refugee experiences within schools. Using both qualitative analysis and descriptive statistics, this study brings to light pre-service teachers' perspective on working with refugee students. It also puts forward strategies to better support pre-service teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills they need, either at the pre-service level or at the in-service level to better meet the challenges associated with supporting the academic and psychosocial needs of refugee children in schools.

This study will:

- explore pre-service teachers' perspectives on their knowledge about teaching and meeting the needs of students with refugee experiences;
- document pre-service teachers' perspectives on how their teacher education program is preparing them to meet the needs of students with refugee experiences and pre-service teachers' suggestions how they can be best supported.

Conceptual Framework

This study approaches teaching and meeting the needs of children with refugee experiences in schools through a trauma informed and culturally responsive approach to pedagogy. In their review of literature on best practices for refugee students, Dressler and Gereluk (2017) highlight the importance of a two-pronged approach that includes culturally responsive and trauma informed practices:

A Trauma-Informed Practice is beneficial to refugee students because it provides the safe place for them to form meaningful attachments and learn self-regulation. Due to refugees existing in more than one culture upon resettlement, a culturally responsive pedagogy is important to support their shifting identities. (p. 48)

A culturally responsive approach is not intended to homogenize students with refugee experiences as a singular cultural group but to recognize, as Dressler and Gereluk argue, that children with refugee experiences must navigate more than one culture like other newcomers. A culturally responsive/sensitive/appropriate approach has been employed by several studies focused on children with refugee experiences in schools (Decapua, 2016; Skidmore, 2016; Tavares et al., 2012; Tran & Hodgson, 2015). Culturally responsive pedagogy was first introduced by Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) to better support the achievement of students from diverse backgrounds. It entails an approach to teaching and learning that identifies and nurtures the strengths of students to promote achievement and occurs in learner-centered and culturally supported context (Richards et al., 2007). Culturally responsive pedagogy arose from classrooms becoming increasing diverse with respect to culture, language, abilities and other

factors and the resulting need for teachers to respond to this diversity through their teaching practice (Richards et al.). Many theorists have contributed to the growing body of research on culturally responsive pedagogy through their work on culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) or culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Though differing on some points, there is a consensus between these different approaches that views student diversity as a strength and an opportunity to enhance learning instead of viewing diversity as a challenge to learning or a deficit of the student or their respective community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). More recently, it addresses the divide between students of colour and mainstream school practices that are based on Eurocentric approaches and the need to make classroom practices reflective of the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). Though not specifically focused on refugee students, the framework is particularly salient to addressing the needs of refugee children because it is multidimensional in its approach. Culturally responsive pedagogy is comprised of three dimensions:

1. The institutional dimension reflects the administration and its policies and values.
2. The personal dimension refers to the cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally responsive.
3. The instructional dimension includes materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction (Richards et al., 2007).

This study uses the culturally responsive pedagogy lens and adapts it to the refugee context, through the incorporation of a trauma-informed practice, given that the needs of refugees set them aside from other newcomers. There is a rapidly growing body of literature in Canada on the incorporation of a trauma-sensitive practice within schools and classrooms. Presented as trauma-sensitive (Wrench, Soong, Paige, & Garrett, 2018), trauma-informed (Bath, 2008; Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016; Tweedie, Belanger, Rezazadeh, & Vogel, 2017) or trauma-sensitive schools (Stewart, 2017), these approaches argue that educators can make important contributions to the healing and growth of children impacted by trauma within classrooms and schools. The trauma-sensitive and culturally responsive approach to pedagogy provides a framework for both the literature review and data analysis on how school systems and teachers can best support children with refugee experiences through a multi-dimensional approach that is culturally responsive and sensitive to the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration experiences.

A Trauma-informed and Culturally Responsive Approach to Pedagogy

Institutional dimension. This dimension requires that the organization of the school, and school policies and procedures, take into account the particular pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration experiences of refugees. This includes how refugee experiences are defined and the process of how students are serviced within schools. It requires schools to have policies and procedures, often mandated by ministries of education, to identify and assess the learning needs of refugee children. Lack of support as a result of systemic, organizational, and policy issues are barriers to education for newcomers (Stewart, 2012; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). This dimension also includes community involvement with respect to how refugee families and communities are supported to engage with the school and classroom community. The teacher training program is also included in this dimension.

Personal dimension. This dimension is particularly salient to the current study as it involves teacher self-reflection, a critical aspect of the pre-service education program. Richards et al. (2007) suggest that the values held by teachers directly impact their relationships with their students and their families. As such, they argue that it is important for educators to reconcile their negative perceptions of cultural, language, or ethnic groups. In the case of refugees, they are not only members of another cultural, language and/or ethnic group, they are also subject to the negative stereotypes, deficit perspectives, and stigma about the refugees that are prevalent in society (Keddie, 2012). This requires another layer of exploration and critical self-reflection on the part of pre-service teachers with respect to their personal views, histories, and perceptions of the refugee identity and experience. Teacher education programs have the responsibility to facilitate meaningful discussions on issues of racial bias as studies have shown that pre-service teachers often resist, aggressively, contemporary issues on race (Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). In his study of pre-service teachers in Canada, Solomona et al. found that pre-service teachers often employed “ideological incongruence, liberalist notions of individualism and meritocracy, and the negation of white capital” (p. 147) strategies to resist discussions on race and racism by teachers. These challenges are echoed in Denis and Schick's (2003) study that speaks to the difficulties of integrating an anti-racist pedagogy in teacher education programs in Canada that are made of predominantly white-identified students.

Instructional dimension. With changes in attitude comes a change in practice which leads to the instructional dimension that requires teachers to use materials, strategies, and activities that are sensitive and responsive to cultural differences as well as the experiences that are particular to children with refugee experiences. These experiences include loss of a homeland, war, trauma, missing family members, prolonged stays in refugee camps, or as internally displaced people in their own home countries. Richards et al. (2007) includes fostering positive interrelationships between students, their families, the community, and the school in this dimension. This is particularly salient for students and families that have had refugee experiences to ensure they have the right support systems in place to help them with their transition to life in Canada. These challenges and others will be further explored in the following literature review focused on teacher pre-service teacher training to work with students with refugee experiences in the Canadian context.

Literature Review

Students with Refugee Experiences versus Refugees

This study employs the phrase students *with refugee experiences* versus *refugee students* to be more inclusive of children who may not meet the legal definition of refugee but have undergone the same experience. This distinction is based on current understandings of global migration patterns. It draws on the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants that recognizes the complex array of displaced people, which includes refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons, who undergo challenges in the pre-migration, migration, and post migration experience:

Refugees and migrants in large movements often face a desperate ordeal. Many take great risks, embarking on perilous journeys, which many may not survive. Some feel compelled to employ the services of criminal groups, including smugglers, and others may fall prey to such groups or become

victims of trafficking. Even if they reach their destination, they face an uncertain reception and a precarious future. (United Nations, 2016)

Not recognizing these experiences can lead to oversight of critical needs and a lack of utilization of services and supports that are already in existence. Within the Canadian context, Yau (1995) and Kovinthan (2016) in their study of refugees schools used a similar definition that included refugee claimants, refugee immigrants, and illegal immigrants in their definition of refugee. Other scholars in Australia have used the term *refugee-background students* (Block, Cross, Riggs, & Gibbs, 2014). This study emphasizes experience over legal status and includes any persons in Canada who meets the Geneva Refugee Convention definition irrespective of their legal status or means of entry into Canada. A similar emphasis is made on the experience of students by Gagné, Schmidt, and Markus (2017) who state that, “Although the trauma and interrupted schooling that many refugees have experienced may appear to be strong distinguishing characteristics, we highlight that many migrant students also suffer different degrees of trauma and chronic stress, as well as interruptions in schooling” (p. 434). Some scholars have adopted the term *refugee and migrant-background students* in recognition of the diverse experiences related to forced migration (Wrench et al., 2018).

Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, and Frater-Mathieson (2004) identified three distinct phases of the refugee migration experience that sets them apart from other immigrants. These phases include the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration periods where an individual’s life may be disrupted (Anderson et al.). During these phases, the ecologies that influence the development of a child may undergo major changes that can hinder a child’s development and their consequent transition into the school system (Anderson et al., 2004; Stewart, 2012). This unique experience sets students with refugee experiences apart from other immigrants. A definition based on experience and need rather than legal status is critical to safe guard the well- being of students who have undergone the refugee experience but may not be legally identified as refugee claimants. Emphasizing students’ experiences over labels is relevant at the institutional dimension with respect to how individual provinces, school boards, and schools provide services to students who may have gaps in their education, experienced trauma, separation from their parents etc. and the particular services they are afforded irrespective of whether they meet the convention definition of a refugee. It is also relevant at the personal and instructional dimension because teachers’ knowledge and understanding of students with refugee experiences will impact how they can provide the necessary supports.

The Needs of Students with Refugee Experiences

In many cases, children with refugee experiences arrive to Canada having experienced war, violent conflict, interrupted schooling, separation from their family, and the loss of their home and homeland (Gagné et al., 2017; MacNevin, 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016; Stewart, 2011). Children must cope with their own personal trauma, in addition to the impact of their parent’s trauma, as they make their way in a new country (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Once in Canada, children with refugee experiences and their families face a number of obstacles that are distinct from other immigrants, which include: post-traumatic stress and on-going sense of fear, precarious residence status and endurance of long bureaucratic processes, disintegration of the family unit, financial difficulties, frequent relocation, and drastic cultural disorientation (Yau, 1995). The intense cultural disorientation experienced by students is not

something that ends with the learning of English and adaptation to Canadian culture as in the case with other immigrants. These students must always contend with a lost homeland that was forced upon them and a lingering sense of alienation within their new home. Even for those who are born in Canada to refugee/immigrant parents there is a missing link, a sense of alienation, and generational trauma. Feuerverger (2001) describes her experience of growing up as the child of Holocaust survivors as living on “a psychological border-always on the margins, never in the center; always looking in through the window of loss and alienation, never quite belonging.” A clear understanding of students’ experiences and consequent needs is critical at the institutional, personal, and instructional dimensions if the right supports are going to be provided at the school level, and for teachers to have the tools and training to provide the appropriate instruction and supports in the classroom to this highly vulnerable population.

School Experiences

For many refugees, school is a safe haven from the displacement and confusion they may be experiencing; at the same time, these students are also dealing with feelings of grief and loss and may find it difficult to do well in school (Coelho, 1998). Feuerverger (2011) suggests refugee students “carry with them hidden but enduring scars that influence all aspects of their educational lives” (p. 360). As a result, the school experience can be a difficult transition for refugee children. Traumatic experiences that children may have gone through or witnessed can manifest itself in troubled behaviour at school (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008). These behaviours may include: explosive anger that is inappropriate to the situation, rule testing, problems with authority, age inappropriate behaviour, inability to concentrate, withdrawal, and lower academic achievement (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000; Strekalova & Hoot, 2008). In some cases, students may fear and distrust teachers, who are authority figures, as a result of violence perpetrated by such figures during their precarious pre-migration and trans-migration experience (Khanlou, 2008). Ethnicity, refugee camp experience, grade placement, parents’ health, place of residence, and the time spent in Canada are factors that are correlated with school success (Wilkinson, 2002). Although classroom teachers cannot meet all the needs of students with refugee experiences, knowledge and understanding of their experience is a good start. Classroom teachers need to be aware of these factors and given the right tools and training to best support their students to succeed in school. In fact, teachers are expected to be trauma informed in order to provide the necessary supports to ensure that newcomers feel valued and have a sense of belonging in their new school environments (Clinton, 2015; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Working with refugee students is a challenging task for teachers, particularly regular classroom teachers, because the strategies and pedagogies that were used with English speaking students or even English as a Second Language (ESL) students will not necessarily work for refugee students (MacNevin, 2012)

Teachers Attitudes and Schools Supports

Teachers’ values and attitudes towards refugee students play an important role in providing a safe and welcoming environment (Cummins, 2001; Frather-Mathieson, 2004). But in many cases, schools and teachers are unprepared to address the unique psychosocial, linguistic, cultural, and educational needs of refugee students due to a lack of preparation time given, training on working with refugee children, and deficit perspectives of refugee students (Roy &

Roxas, 2011). Rummens and Dei (2010) note that educators have the power to include or exclude by either seeing or not seeing refugee students through their day-to-day practice. Student-teacher relationships play an important role in how refugee students navigate the school environment. Yau (1995) reported in her interview with refugee students that most of them were content with their teachers. Many students felt that their Canadian teachers were friendlier than the teachers from their own countries; however, these positive comments were usually reserved for their ESL teachers. Refugee students reported that they felt more comfortable approaching and asking questions of their ESL teachers than their classroom teacher. Several students described their classroom teachers as being distant, indifferent, reserved, and in some cases uninterested in them (Yau, 1995). Similar findings have been echoed in more recent studies in Canada by MacNevin (2012) and Stewart (2012).

A number of studies in Canada, including by Dachyshyn and Kirova (2011), Kanu (2008), Mac Nevin (2012), Stewart (2012), and Kirova (2010), have identified educators' attitudes and knowledge levels as factors contributing to racism and discrimination. In Australia Wrench et al. (2018) reported that refugees are often dehumanised, including their children who are perceived as dangerous. Muslim students in particular, both refugees and immigrants, experience considerable racism from teachers and school systems (Adam, 2011; Amjad, 2018). Educators do express a desire for students to succeed; however, they often peg the success or failure of students on the hands of parents and students rather than examining ways in which they or the school could better support this vulnerable population (Roy & Roxas, 2011). The Canadian studies identified a number of areas of concern for teachers working with refugee students including the challenges related to behavioural issues, intrinsic motivation and attitudes of students, addressing gaps in students' schooling, deficit perspectives about students, and relating the value of education or often the devaluation of education on the culture of particular refugee groups. Amjad's study of the experience of Muslim elementary children in Canadian schools, found the presence of Islamophobia in schools and amongst teachers. To counter this, Roy and Roxas (2011) recommend that teacher training programs move beyond the language of tolerance and engage in critical self-reflection, investigation, and analysis of their discourse about refugee students to transform deficit practices. Similarly Solomona et al. (2005) stress the "continued focus on multiculturalism as the solution to all the inequities of the education system continues to be a liberalist trope that limits and restricts transformation and ensures the systems of domination and oppression remain in place," (p.165) and that there is a need to provide teacher candidates with concrete tools and strategies to create equitable classrooms.

Teacher Education for Meeting the Needs of Children with Refugee Experiences

There is little research, particularly from a Canadian perspective, on if and how pre-service teachers are being prepared to work with refugee students (Kovinthan, 2016). What is known is that existing multicultural education approaches in current and past pre-service programs have not effectively changed new teachers' attitudes and perspectives towards culturally and linguistically diverse students (Arthur, 2005; Kovinthan, 2016; Lenski, Crawford, Crumpler, & Stallworth, 2005). Teacher education programs that take an exclusively multicultural approach to learning about diversity have received criticism for their one-size-fits-all approach for working with diverse students (Arthur, 2005; Kovinthan, 2016). A study by Kovinthan on refugee children in Toronto found that pre-service teachers had limited training in identifying which students were refugees, talking about refugee experiences in the classroom, bridging the

home-school divide, and taking a more nuanced perspective of diversity and multiculturalism. Given the growing refugee population in Canadian schools, there is an urgent need to see how pre-service teachers are being trained to meet the needs of refugee students, a highly vulnerable subset of the newcomer population.

Studies from Ireland (Leavy, 2005), Australia (Ferfolja, 2009), and the USA (Walker-Dalhouse, Sanders, & Dalhouse, 2009) found that teachers required experience, explicit exposure, and training with and about refugees in order to develop sociocultural understanding and perspective to foster safe spaces for learning, build positive teacher-student relationships, recognize the importance of student agency for engagement, and become aware of the particular realities and experiences of refugee children. Examples of these experiences include service-learning work with refugee students (Ferfolja, 2009) and pen-pal writing programs with middle school refugee students (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Both experiences demonstrate that pre-service teachers can and should be better prepared to meet the needs of refugee students (Kovinthan, 2016). Furthermore, pre-service teachers should acquire these skills during their pre-service education rather than through on-the-job training through years of teaching experience as it would be an injustice to the refugee students who need the support now (Ferfolja, 2009).

Methodology

This study employed a combination of qualitative analysis and descriptive statistics based on responses to a questionnaire that was administered at a two-year teacher education program in Canada. Given the limited research in the Canadian context, the goal of the survey was to collect explorative data on the experience of pre-service teachers with respect to their preparation to teach children with refugee experiences. At the time of the data collection, the researcher was a recent graduate of the two-year teacher education program and the results of this study were part of the requirements of the program. Ethical approval was granted for the study to be conducted at the institution as per program requirements.

Data Collection and Sample

The instrument used in the study was a short survey questionnaire that was completed by hand in class at the end of a lecture. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions as well as closed ended (yes/no) questions for the purpose of quantification. In total there were 16 questions. Questions were developed after a review of the literature resulting in the following key themes associated with meeting the psychosocial and educational needs of refugee children. The themes included: knowledge and perspectives of teachers, school and community supports, and pre-service education. The survey instrument was validated by the researcher's thesis supervisor, an expert in the field of refugee education.

Two samples were drawn from the population of pre-service teachers: beginning teachers, students who had just completed their program and were about to enter the teaching profession, and teacher candidates, students who just completed year one. The total population was approximately 80, with 40 first-year and 40 second-year students. Paper copies were left with professors teaching a course in the two-year program with the request of providing a brief explanation of its purpose and a few minutes at the end of class to complete the surveys. Participants were not required to provide identification information and remained anonymous.

Participation was voluntary. In total, 18 teacher candidate surveys were returned completed and 15 beginning teacher surveys were returned, with a response rate of 45% and 37.5 % respectively.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to provide answers to closed-ended yes/no questions. Results for these questions are provided in Tables 1, 2, and 3 showing the breakdown between teacher candidates and beginning teachers. Due to the small sample size, no statistical procedures were conducted to compare the two groups and the counts for both were combined in the analysis.

For open-ended questions responses were transcribed from paper surveys for each question and coded using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in NVivo. Thematic analysis allows a flexibility that privileges the inductive data-driven development of themes with the acknowledgment the data is not coded in a theoretical vacuum (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allowed the researcher to iteratively develop themes going from the data and the theoretical framework of culturally responsive pedagogy. The analysis was conducted at the latent level, which begins with first level semantic coding focused on explicit or surface meaning of the data,

Table 1

Close-ended Questions on Knowledge and Understanding of Refugee Students

Question	Participant	Yes	No	Unsure
Do you think refugee students are different from immigrant students with respect to their pre-migration, migration, and post-migration experiences?	Teacher candidate	18	0	0
	Beginning teacher	14	1	0
Can you differentiate between a refugee student and other newcomer students in your class?	Teacher candidate	3	14	1
	Beginning teacher	4	10	1
Do you think refugee students have different needs (academic, social psychosocial, financial etc.) that differentiate them from other newcomer students?	Teacher candidate	10	5	3
	Beginning teacher	10	4	1

Table 2

Close-Ended Questions on Participants' Observation of School Supports and Training

Question	Participant	Yes	No	Unsure
Do you feel you have sufficient access to resources including multilingual staff to assist you in teaching a refugee child within the schools that you had your practicum placements in?	Teacher candidate	1	17	0
	Beginning teacher	2	13	0
Were you aware of any support services that were available specifically to refugee students or their families in the schools you taught in?	Teacher candidate	1	17	0
	Beginning teacher	2	13	0
Do you think schools in the X board are providing teachers with the resources and training they require to meet the academic and psychosocial needs of refugee students?	Teacher candidate	1	17	0
	Beginning teacher	1	12	2

Table 3

Close-ended Questions on Participants' Teacher Education Program Experience

Question	Participant	Yes	No	Unsure
Do you feel you have sufficient knowledge and training for teaching refugee students in your classroom?	Teacher candidate	0	17	1
	Beginning teacher	1	13	1
Do you feel you are capable of reaching and connecting with parents of refugee children?	Teacher candidate	8	8	2
	Beginning teacher	5	9	1
Do you think your teacher education has prepared you to meet the needs of refugee children in your future classroom?	Teacher candidate	0	17	1
	Beginning teacher	1	13	1

Table 4

List of Themes used in Coding

Themes/Codes	Sub Themes/Codes
Understanding of refugee experiences	Legal, escape from persecution; identification of students and needs; experience of refugee students and their families
School Supports	Community programs; resources; ESL; professional development; workshops; in-service; training on trauma; mandatory; translation services; internal (school support); external (community support)
Teacher Education	Refugee issues absent; communication with parents; strategies to support refugee students and their families; mandatory classes; superficial dealing with diversity; guest speakers; anti-bias workshops/workshops; information on trauma; identification of students and needs

and then moves to the second latent level to examine underlying ideas, assumptions, and ideologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This secondary level of analysis was guided by the three dimensions of the culturally responsive pedagogy framework. The analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's six phases which include: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The final list of themes used to analyze the qualitative data for the open-ended questions are listed in Table 4.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study should be noted. The results of this study are reflective of one pre-service education program in Canada. Both the qualitative and quantitative findings of this study are not generalizable to the entire population of pre-service teachers because no statistical analysis was done due to the small sample size. Second, the instrument of data collection, a survey, holds the potential for bias responses due to its voluntary nature. Last, the response rate for the surveys was low, with 45% of teacher candidates responding and 37.5% of beginning teachers responding. A large response would have allowed for the comparison of the two groups to see whether there was a difference between first and second-year students for the closed questions. These limitations should be addressed in future research on pre-service teachers'

readiness to meet the needs of refugee students in their classrooms.

Results and Analysis

Pre-service Teachers' Understanding of Refugee students and their Experiences

Participants were asked both open and closed-ended question regarding their understanding of students with refugee experiences. A total of three close-ended questions addressed knowledge and understanding (Table 1) and two open-ended questions.

Survey results showed that 32 out of the 33 respondents provided a definition what refugee meant to them. Two themes arose in the analysis of the definitions that were provided: a) escape from some form of persecution, and b) the legal aspect of the person's status in the country. Respondents provided a definition that distinguished a refugee's movement to a new country from other immigrants by emphasizing the forced nature of their migration as a result of some form of persecution they were experiencing in their homeland. Persecution, war-torn, unsafe, fear of, upheaval, and conflict were some categories that emerged from the language used by the respondents. The responses demonstrate that both participant groups had a clear idea of the disruption involved in the pre-migration and trans-migration periods that distinguished refugees from other immigrants.

Legal status. The legal status of refugee students in Canada was the second most common theme. Respondents provided definitions of a refugee that were based on a legal understanding of refugee status in Canada. The terms "refugee status," "according to immigration procedures," and "Canadian refugee laws" were used in the definitions. Other respondents focused on the forced nature of students' migration, escape from war, trauma, and separation from family. Focusing exclusively on a legal framework can be problematic because it is restrictive in nature and overlooks the needs of children who have refugee experiences but do not meet the legal definition of refugee (Kovinthan, 2016; Yau, 1995). It also does not include displaced immigrants, children who have arrived in Canada as landed immigrants after being separated from parents for extended periods of time due to war (Gagné et al., 2017). All these students have undergone hardships and traumatic experiences that have caused them to leave their homeland and will require supports that are different from other newcomers. Children in particular will experience disruptions in their development as a result of the challenges they undergo in the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration phases. Classifying refugees by their legal status, a very narrow and exclusive definition, can potentially exclude people and prevent children and families from receiving the services that are readily available (Kovinthan, 2016).

Identifying refugee students. When asked if they thought refugee students are different from other immigrant students with respect to their pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration experiences, 97% of the respondents stated yes (Table 1). However, when asked if they felt they were prepared to discern a refugee child among other newcomer children in their future classrooms, 22% answered yes, 72% answered no, and 6% were unsure (Table 1). Although both groups of teachers understood what constitutes a refugee and how they differ from other immigrants, a large percentage did not feel they had the skills and knowledge to differentiate a refugee child from other newcomers. Some spoke to accessing student records that could provide this information, but others reported "only if they told me" (- 013). Another participant responded, "In my experiences, I did not see noticeable differences, although I know there are

differences” (– 021). Most of the participants however did identify that students with refugee experiences had different needs compared to other newcomer students. In response to the question, whether they thought refugee students have different needs (academic, social psychosocial, financial etc.) that differentiate them from other newcomer students, 61% responded yes, 27% responded no, and 12 % were unsure (Table 1 provides breakdown between teacher candidates and beginning teachers).

These results are reflective of the teachers in the study conducted by Yau (1995) and Kovinthan (2016). Teachers were aware of the growing number of refugees, but few had a clear idea of who the refugee students were or how many of them there were. Similar results were found among American teachers, who were unaware that they had refugees in their classroom and the kinds of experiences that these students had undergone before their migration to the United States (McBrien, 2005). Although community and professional services are limited, many schools have intake procedures that flag newcomers for particular services provided by community organizations, but many schools are not even aware of the community services available for refugee families and their children. This is particularly salient for this study as it was focused on a large board with access to substantial community services and supports for refugees and other newcomer families. The report by People for Education (2012) found that 40% of schools in Ontario were unaware of community services and supports available for refugee children and their families.

School Support and Training

Based on their practicum placements in schools, teacher candidates and beginning teachers were asked to respond to questions related to how they perceived schools were supporting teachers to meet the needs of refugee children. The average teacher candidate (completed first year) has between 288 and 360 hours of practicum experience. Beginning teachers (completed second year) have between 608 and 680 hours of practicum experience. A majority of their placements are in urban schools in Canada. A total of three closed- ended question addressed the types of school supports, resources, and training that participants observed while in their placements (Table 2).

Participants were asked if they were aware of any specific support services for refugee students in their schools. Ninety-one percent reported that they were not aware of any specific support services; and 9% reported that they were aware of services, which included external community programs that were working in partnership with schools (Table 2). When asked if they felt that they had sufficient access to resources such as multilingual staff to assist them in their teaching, 91% reported they did not and 9% felt that they did (Table 2).

English as a Second Language (ESL) support. A common support identified by respondents was ESL support. Survey participants were asked if they felt there had been an increase, decrease, or stable trend in support services like ESL that could potentially assist refugee students. Eleven percent reported an increase in services, 32 % reported a decrease, and 57% said stable. Many previous studies have shown the positive effects of ESL in refugee children’s school experiences. An American study on Somalian refugees showed that all the participants said that their favourite class was ESL because they felt that they could be themselves and not worry about being looked at differently by other students (McBrien, 2005). Depending on their age, English language learners may require five to six years of ESL support to reach a level of language competence needed for academic success (Cummins, 2015).

Although including refugee children in mainstream classes is important, it is also important to provide withdrawal support for total beginners in English and to focus on specific assignments and allow students who may have experienced trauma to develop trusting relationships with adults (Loewen, 2004; Ogilvie & Fuller, 2016).

ESL teachers are also more likely to be familiar with refugee issues through their additional qualification training and networks with community organizations. There is a growing recognition of the need for ESL classrooms and teachers to support newcomers (People for Education, 2017); however, small schools with a few ESL students continue to struggle as they often do not have the funding to hire dedicated staff to run ESL programs. Students at these schools must then be supported by the classroom teacher who may not always have the specialized training to teach refugee children.

Professional development on supporting refugees. Teacher candidates and beginning teachers were asked if they felt that their schools were providing educators with the resources and training they needed to meet the academic and psychosocial needs of refugee children. Six percent of the respondents reported yes, 87 % reported no, and 6% were unsure (Table 2). When asked how the schools could better support them as teachers in their future classrooms, two themes emerged in the open-ended responses: a) the need for professional development, and b) the need for services from within the school and outside agencies. Respondents felt that they would benefit from workshops and in-service training that would help them understand issues surrounding refugee children related to identification, and strategies for working with refugee children including identifying and supporting students and families that have experienced trauma. Some participants even suggested that professional development be mandatory “having professional development on issues related (mandatory)” (O30). There was a clear theme of participants wanting to have more knowledge and be better trained on the issue of identifying and teaching refugee children. Also, evident from the above quotes is the recognition of trauma that students may have experienced and the need for training to support these students.

Community support systems. The second theme that was most evident was the need for services from within the school and outside agencies. From within schools, participants suggested that there be additional ESL support, translation services, literature in the home language of the child, and more background information of the child when they arrive: “Increase the number of ESL teachers and training for regular classroom teachers to a level that serves the needs of the general immigrant student community” (O19); “Provide teachers with additional support such as ESL and literature in the home language of the child” (O23). With respect to outside agencies, participants reported that schools should have close working relationships with agencies that provide refugees with services: “develop partnerships between teachers and community organizations” (O24); “Close working relationships with outside agencies that serve refugee families should be established” (O19). These agencies offer several services that support refugees but are highly underutilized because teachers and/or schools are not aware of them (People for Education, 2012). And this is despite the fact that these services could play a significant role in improving students’ and their families’ experiences with the school system. Parhar and Sensoy (2011) found that during parent-teacher interviews, parents of refugee students usually will not come unless they know for sure there are going to be multicultural workers at the school from the community that can help with translation. Within the institutional and instructional dimension, the role of community services is critical for parent engagement in refugee children’s school experiences.

The two themes reflect respondents' need for change at both the external and internal levels. The external being a need for resources in the form of community networks and agencies, ESL support, multilingual books, and administrative support with respect to the child's background. The internal being the need to improve teachers' knowledge and awareness of refugee children as well as developing strategies to meet their needs in the classroom. Apparent again here is the overlap and bridging between the institutional and personal and or/instructional dimensions, which is not surprising as strong policies and systems that support refugees at the institutional level are more likely to translate to the personal and instructional level.

Teacher Education

Respondents were asked to reflect on their teacher education programs. There were close-ended questions that addressed the teacher participants' teacher education program and their preparation to support students with refugee experiences (Table 3).

Both groups were asked if they felt that they had sufficient knowledge and training for teaching refugee students in their class. Three percent of the respondents reported yes, 91% reported no, and 6% were unsure (Table 3). These results reflect pre-service teachers' preparation to work with diverse populations in general. Many pre-service teachers have limited prior knowledge and experience in working with diverse students and this often leads to uncertainty and anxiety about their preparation to work in diverse schools and classrooms (Dunn, Kirova, Cooley, & Ogilvie, 2009). And in some cases, some pre-service students are actually resistant to efforts made by faculties of education to challenge social inequality and privilege through intercultural inquiry models (Dunn et al. 2009).

Similar issues are also found within the practicum experience of pre-service teachers. Cherian (2007) found in his study of associate teachers (ATs) and teacher candidates that some ATs were reluctant to embrace anti-racist and social justice pedagogy that would allow discussion about refugee experiences in the classroom. In Cherian's study, a teacher candidate reported that his AT was more focused on getting through the provincial curriculum and preparing for standardized test than addressing controversial issues in the classroom such as refugees (Cherian, 2007). Consequently, teacher candidates have few opportunities to engage in best practices associated with working with refugee children in and outside of the classroom during their teacher education. This is despite this study's results showing that many pre-service students want to be knowledgeable about refugee issues that impact their classrooms. However, the current context of classrooms shows that associate teachers themselves need training in identifying and working with refugee children.

Communicating with parents. Both groups of teachers were asked if they felt capable of reaching and connecting with parents of refugee children. Overall, 39% reported yes, 52% said no, and 9% were unsure (Table 3). One of the biggest challenges for teachers reported by Kanu (2008), Stewart (2012), and McBrien (2005) was establishing meaningful home-school communication and getting the parents of refugee children involved in the school. Tuomi (2005), who conducted a study on Finnish teachers' ability to support refugee children, found similar results. The participants wanted more training at the pre-service and in-service level for engaging with the parents of refugee students.

Parental involvement in a child's education has been found to be a positive influence on school performance (Hamilton & Moore, 2004). Parents can be involved at a number of levels from monitoring homework to actively volunteering in the school (Hamilton, 2004). When

schools and teachers fail to communicate and consequently involve parents in the school community and their child's education all parties are at loss. The involvement of parents differs depending on the refugee population (Hamilton, 2004). Each refugee population has their own understanding of their role in the school and their level of involvement. Thus, schools and teachers cannot generalize a single definition of involvement for all parents. As front-line mediators between school and home, teachers need to be trained to deal in culturally sensitive ways with the parents of different groups of refugees in order to secure maximum participation at individual parents' comfort levels. The 52% of respondents who reported that they did not feel confident communicating with parents of refugee children is evidence of a gap in both the teacher education program and/or within practicum placements. This is reflective of the findings by DeCastro-Ambrosetti and Cho (2005), who found that pre-service teachers were poorly prepared to communicate with ethnically and linguistically diverse parents.

Teacher education preparation. Teacher candidates were asked if they felt that their teacher education had prepared them to meet the needs of a refugee child in their future classrooms. Three percent of the respondents reported yes, 91% reported no, and 6% were unsure (Table 3). Both groups of teachers were not satisfied with their preparation to deal with issues related to refugee children. When asked how their teacher training could be improved to better prepare them to identify and meet the needs of refugee students, two themes arose: 1) the need for incorporation of refugee issues into the pre-service curriculum, and 2) practical strategies for identification and support. The need for incorporating issues related to refugees was reflected by respondents who felt that it had not been discussed at all. Some respondents, particularly beginning teachers who had completed the program, felt that it should be a mandatory part of the teacher education curriculum. Many respondents felt that just discussing the issue in class would have been a helpful start, or in some cases a more in depth and critical examination of issues rather than surface level coverage of diversity issues.

The findings indicate a two-fold challenge. One, beginning teachers do not feel that their teacher training has prepared them to meet the needs of refugee children. Two, the issue of refugees in schools was not only missing from their curriculum but was also never discussed in class. Refugee related issues often fall under the umbrella of multicultural education; however, multicultural approaches to teaching have not effectively met the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Arthur, 2005; Lenski et al., 2005). It certainly does not meet the needs of a highly vulnerable subset of this group, children who come to Canada from war-affected countries (Kanu, 2008; McBrien 2005; Okoko, 2011). Respondents felt that they would benefit from practical strategies for identifying and supporting refugee children. Participants had several suggestions that ranged from sensitivity training to more information on the countries that students came from. These suggestions reflect respondents' understanding of some of the challenges surrounding having a refugee child in their class. Many also have an awareness of their knowledge gaps and limitations to deal with the situation. This realization is the first step toward addressing the issue. Both groups of teachers demonstrated their willingness to learn by wanting their pre-service curriculum to reflect the classrooms they will be teaching in the future.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study show that both beginning teachers and teacher candidates of this particular program feel that they are not prepared to meet the needs of refugee students in their

classrooms. There are gaps in their preparedness in all three dimensions of a trauma-informed culturally responsive approach to pedagogy to support students with refugee experiences in the following areas:

- ability to identify refugee students in the classroom by differentiating between other newcomers and a refugee student;
- the lack of practical tools and strategies to support students with refugee experiences;
- ability to communicate with the parents of refugee children and develop appropriate home-school connection;
- a pre-service curriculum that does not include refugee student experiences; and
- an understanding of the refugee experience.

Teacher education programs have an important role to play in addressing these gaps. Faculties of education hold the potential to facilitate effective community partnerships with organizations that work with refugee families and children and the school system. Teacher education programs also have the responsibility to challenge the language of tolerance which perpetuates deficit beliefs about refugee students and move towards language that challenges pre-service teachers ingrained attitudes and perceptions about immigrant and refugees (Roy & Roxas, 2011). This study also demonstrates the need for a more nuanced understanding of refugee experiences that reflect current global migration patterns. Teacher education programs in Ontario are now requiring teacher candidates to have skills and knowledge in supporting students with English language needs and mental health, addiction, and well-being issues, all of which are conducive to better supporting refugee children (Gagne et al., 2017). As such, there is now a greater impetus to ensure the refugee education is a component of teacher education programs in Canada.

For refugee children, school is one of the first steps back into a normal life; they provide a welcoming, safe and predictable environment (Coelho, 1998). Teachers play a large role in providing this stable environment. Using a trauma-informed and culturally responsive approach to pedagogy demonstrates that there is considerable overlap and interrelation between the institutional, personal, and instructional dimensions. This study shows that 33 the respondents of this study have considerable gaps in their ability to meet the needs of refugee children; however, they have also demonstrated a strong sense of agency about their learning. The 33 pre-service teachers in this study recognize many of the challenges refugee children face in schools, want to be supported at the pre-service level to better meet the needs of these children, and identify the areas they want to learn more about. As such, it is up to faculties of education to capitalize on the current increase in refugees in Canada to make refugee education a critical component of teacher education in order to better support pre-service teachers so they can better support their students.

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