

# **Rethinking Inclusive Education: The Challenges for Refugee Students in a Small Urban Setting**

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**Keith Power**

**PhD Candidate**

**Faculty of Education**

# Study Context

- Study took place in St. John's, Newfoundland (NL)
- Two school districts (English & French) in NL
- This study involved 5 schools in St. John's with specialized services for refugee students with educational gaps.
- Specialized services include a LEARN program and ESL services.
- All students also attend mainstream classes to a varying degree.

# Research Objective

This study sought to understand how the education system in a small urban centre in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Canada is supporting the psychosocial and academic needs of refugee youth through their inclusionary model of education.

# NL Inclusion Policy

- the right of all students to attend school with their peers, and to receive appropriate and quality programming;
- a continuum of supports and services in the most appropriate setting (large group, small group, individualized) respecting the dignity of the child;
- a welcoming school culture where all members of the school community feel they belong, realize their potential, and contribute to the life of the school;
- an atmosphere which respects and values the participation of all members of the school community;
- a school community which celebrates diversity; and
- a safe and caring school environment

# Literature Review

- Jurisdictions around the world are failing to provide adequate educational programming to refugee students.
- Current inclusive education models are failing to meet the academic and psychosocial needs of refugee students.
  - Lack of understanding of refugee student needs
  - Inability to provide adequate instruction and supports
  - Lack of effective leadership
- Neoliberal policies place refugee students at a significant disadvantage.

# Theoretical Perspective

## Self-determination Theory

(Deci & Ryan, 2000)

- Optimal functioning (e.g., learning) and wellbeing can only occur when people have three innate psychological needs satisfied.
  - ◆ Competence
  - ◆ Relatedness
  - ◆ Autonomy
- Based on the dialectical view that social contexts can either foster or impeded need satisfaction.

# Analytical Framework

## Comprehensive School Health (CSH)

- CSH is a whole-school framework, which addresses student development in a planned, integrated, and holistic way in order to support improvements in their academic achievement and wellbeing
  - 1. Social and Physical Environment
  - 2. Teaching and Learning
  - 3. Healthy School Policy
  - 4. Partnerships and Services

(Joint Consortium for School Health, 2015)

# Comprehensive School Health



Joint Consortium for  
School Health, 2015

# Methodology

## ➤ Triangulation Mixed Methods

## ➤ Data sources:

- Student surveys to measure students psychological need satisfaction (n=47; 25 refugee students & 22 non-refugee students)
- 37 Semi-structured Interviews (Teachers, Administrators, Students, Service Providers, and Parents)
- Observations within the schools, during field trips, and while acting as a volunteer tutor (>100 hours)
- Document and policy analysis

# Results

***t*-test results comparing refugee and non-refugee junior high and high school students' academic competence, teacher-relatedness, student-relatedness, and autonomy.**

	Refugee Students			Non-refugee Students			<i>t</i> -statistic	<i>p</i> -value	<i>d</i>
	M	SD	<i>n</i>	M	SD	<i>n</i>			
Competence	3.40	1.09	25	1.77	0.88	22	5.60	<b>&lt; .001</b>	<b>1.65</b>
Teacher-Relatedness	2.71	1.31	25	2.47	1.25	22	0.66	.516	0.19
Student-Relatedness	3.30	1.57	25	2.22	1.04	22	2.82	<b>.007</b>	<b>0.81</b>
Autonomy	3.75	1.53	25	3.82	1.50	22	-0.16	.875	-0.05

*Perceived Competence Scale* – Competence ( $\alpha = .80$ )

*Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale* – Relatedness ( $\alpha = .80$  /  $\alpha = .82$ ) & Autonomy ( $\alpha = .82$ )

# Results

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Competence	3.35	1.14	18	1.90	0.87	12	3.73	<b>.001</b>	<b>1.43</b>
Teacher-Relatedness	2.74	1.23	18	2.60	1.14	12	0.30	.766	0.12
Student-Relatedness	2.90	1.59	18	2.30	1.10	12	1.12	.273	<b>0.44</b>
Autonomy	3.63	1.65	18	4.15	1.55	12	-0.87	.394	<b>-0.32</b>

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*Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale* – Relatedness ( $\alpha = .80$  /  $\alpha = .82$ ) & Autonomy ( $\alpha = .82$ )

# Results: Teaching & Learning

## LEARN PROGRAM

- Essential, Safe Environment (student engagement)
- No program in primary/elementary, limited availability in junior high

## ESL INSTRUCTION

- Itinerant-based in junior high (~ 2/3 hours instruction per week)
- Permanent teachers in the high school (everyday instruction)
- Student need intensive English focused instruction
- Lack of resources

## MAINSTREAM CLASSES

- English is the main challenge
- Lack of teacher support and understanding of students' needs/learning
- Students often feel alienated

# Results: Teaching & Learning

- *I don't think they get what they should; they deserve more. We should be giving them LEARN science and social studies like in high school. (Teacher)*
- *LEARN is a safe haven for the students. It's a place where they are able to be themselves and talk with their friends. I feel like they are more likely to take risks with their language learning, whereas I don't see that in the other classes. (Teacher)*
- *Because of the English. The people spoke English and I didn't understand. I just sit down and watch. (Student)*
- *I didn't do all of my work in class because I didn't know how to do it and I was stressed out. And they would think that I just didn't want to do it, but it was hard for me to read the sheets and answer the questions. (Student)*
- *They will just have to learn through osmosis. (Administrator)*

# Results: Partnerships & Services

- The schools have an essential partnership with the local settlement agency for new Canadians (Girls & Boys Club, REAL program, parents)
- Having a settlement worker in the school is key to the success of the students. (A full-time presence is needed)
- Lack of equity between partners
- Lack of school supports means students rely on outside agencies for the help they need (Guidance & Academic)

# Results: Partnerships & Services

*I depend on (this) program “because the school system doesn’t have the time, resources, commitment, or even the interest in saving these kids. (Teacher)*

*Just the fact that I have an office in that school speaks to their valuing of the diversity. I work with every teacher there and very closely with the administration; it’s just like I am a staff member. (Community Worker)*

*We are fortunate to have a SWIS worker in our building that does that job. And although it’s not a part of that mandate for that program, often the SWIS worker is the person they go to deal with some of their concerns they have. Now, when that worker feels the issues are above and beyond their ability to deal with them then I have a relationship developed with him so that he will approach me and I will step in to assist. (Guidance Counselor)*

# Results: Social & Physical Environment

- The school environment varies from school to school (the high school provides an array of programming and celebrates diversity).
- The involvement of a team effort in the high school mediates the welcoming climate of the school.
- There is a worrisome lack of engagement on the part of the guidance counselors in the junior high schools.
- Numerous safe spaces have been established within the high school, whereas the junior high students tend to congregate in the LEARN classrooms.
- Generally speaking, the students have good relationships with their teachers

## Results: Social & Physical Environment

- Last year there was a joint project between student council and the International Club for spirit week. Spirit week had an international focus, so all the games played were internationally focused. (Teacher)
- Because everyone is sweet and nice. And in my country they are always hitting people. Like, my English teacher is very nice, but little bit strict. (Student)
- No, when I am there I feel shy. I feel like I am not Canadian, I feel bad. Like all the guys and girls, they are Canadian but I am different. (Student)
- But like, last year I had gym and there was nobody like black people. Just I was black people. They all play together, no problem. (Student)

# Results: School Policies

- Inclusive education policy is placing refugee students at a disadvantage and creating a two-tiered system of education.
- NL Department of Education's transportation policies are discriminatory.
- Lack of adequate leadership (hiring qualified teachers; understanding student needs).
- The high school has adopted several school-level policies to support newcomer students' basic psychological needs (e.g. two seats on the student council)

# Results: School Policies

- *If the student is identified as a new Canadian with gaps in education then there is no reason why they shouldn't be able to access supports. It should just be automatic. (Guidance Counselor)*
- *I feel our qualifications as ESL teachers with specific ESL training is not valued or understood. Now the people that are making these decisions are doing the best that they can, but they don't have all of the information because we don't have an ESL department in this province and we don't have one in our school board. It's a huge gap. (Teacher)*
- *The school has now designated the gym for the soccer club one day a week right after school ends because of transportation issues. If we are slotted in for the gym later in the evening, then it is difficult for these kids. (Teacher)*

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# Questions or Comments

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**kbp201@mun.ca**