Integrate or Assimilate?: How the Policy Discourse of Manitoba's *School Partnerships: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Communities* Enforces Hegemonic Understandings of Parental Involvement on Recently-Resettled Refugees

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Abstract
Among the challenges that many recently-resettled refugee parents face is the possibility that their children may fail academically in their new home country. Ostensibly, in order to decrease this possibility, provincial education ministries offer policy guidance regarding expectations related to parental involvement with school to all parents, including recently-resettled refugees. In spite of the intentions that drive such counsel, the dominant, Westernized perception of formal education dictates the roles and functions of educators and parents. This perception monopolizes judgments about what is considered to be acceptable "Canadian" parental behaviour as it pertains to the involvement of recently-resettled refugees in their child's education. Using a critical policy analysis approach to examine Manitoba Education's (2005) *School Partnerships: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Communities*, this article illustrates the ways in which the dominant parental involvement discourses that are encoded in one educational policy normalize and reify a hegemonic ideology of parenting that marginalizes recently-resettled refugees as they attempt to integrate into Canadian society.

Résumé
Parmi les défis auxquels font face de nombreux parents réfugiés récemment réinstallés, il y a le risque d'échec scolaire de leurs enfants dans leur nouveau pays d'origine. En apparence, afin de réduire cette possibilité, les ministères provinciaux de l'éducation offrent à tous les parents, y compris les réfugiés récemment réinstallés, une orientation politique concernant les attentes en matière de participation des parents à l'école. Malgré les intentions qui motivent ces avocats, la perception occidentale et dominante de l'éducation formelle dicte les rôles et les fonctions des éducateurs et des parents. Cette perception monopolise les jugements sur ce qui est considéré comme un comportement parental «canadien» acceptable en ce qui concerne la participation des réfugiés récemment réinstallés à l'éducation de leurs enfants. Utilisant une approche critique d'analyse des politiques pour examiner les partenariats scolaires d' Éducation et Formation Manitoba (2005) *School Partnerships: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Communities*, cet article illustre la manière dont les discours sur la participation parentale dominante, codés dans une politique éducative, normalisent et réifient une vision hégémonique. idéologie de la parentalité qui marginalise les réfugiés récemment réinstallés qui tentent de s'intégrer à la société canadienne.

Keywords: critical policy analysis, recently-resettled refugees, parental involvement

Introduction

According to a 2017 report issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the worldwide number of refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons exceeded 65 million by December 2016. In Canada, a 2017 report released by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) highlighted the fact that, from January 2015 through July 2017, 84,000 refugees were resettled to Canada. Of these recently-resettled refugees, about 43 percent were 17 years of age or younger (IRCC, 2017). Ostensibly, close to half of the recently-resettled refugees were school-aged. In keeping with these statistics, the then Federal Citizenship and Immigration Minister, the Honourable John McCallum stated in 2016 that, "The government was surprised by the number of Syrian refugee children they admitted in the last year. The large number of children poses challenges for schools as does finding appropriate housing" (Glowacki, 2016). In short, Canada was not prepared for so many refugees to be children, and the transition to schooling environments was not shaping up to be easy, especially in light of the difficulty involved in securing stable housing for all of the families.

The sheer number of refugee children who have already been resettled, as well as those who will be resettled to Canada in the coming years, will continue to challenge our conceptions of what constitutes successful academic and social integration in Canadian school contexts (Kanu, 2008; Stewart, 2011). The very presence of these children demands a deeper awareness of the factors that impact the likelihood of integration. The challenges surrounding integration arise within the context that parents, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, religious, or racial backgrounds, want to support their children as they move from a stage of complete dependency as infants to one in which they achieve a relative level of self-sufficiency in order that they may one day flourish independently as adults (Coll & Pachter, 2002).

For recently-resettled refugee students and their parents, schools offer tremendous educational opportunities and also provide a significant means of social integration into the larger society (Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Kanu, 2008; Stewart, 2011, 2014; Yau, 1996). Research suggests that while recently-resettled refugee children face numerous challenges to adapt to their new countries and schools, so do their parents, who are forced to deal with issues of maintaining economic survival, facing acculturation and adaptation, developing English proficiency, and encountering novel cultural and social norms associated with parenting (Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Kanu, 2008; Stewart, 2011, 2014; Yau, 1996).

Without parental involvement, refugee children are at risk of failing socially and academically (Hamilton & Moore, 2004). Positive relationships between school personnel and parents are critical to a refugee child's school-related successes, and even to their broader relationships with the community (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010; Bhattacharya, 2000; Kanu, 2008; Stewart, 2011, 2014). Consequently, refugee parents play a significant role in assisting their children to develop academically and socially as they begin to trust their children's teachers and principals (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010). For many refugee parents, a lack of familiarity with the Canadian school system, including school- or division-specific policies (Kanu, 2008; Stewart, 2011, 2014) as well as the implicit "Canadian" expectations of "good parenting" (Thomas, Keogh, & Hay, 2015) can each be overwhelming (Lightfoot, 2004), although privately sponsored refugees may receive some degree of personal assistance from their sponsors (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003).

In light of the outlined challenges that a large number of recently-resettled refugees are facing in Canada, surprisingly little research has focused on the ways in which Western governments have the capacity to reinforce and reify a hegemonic framework of parental involvement, which is easily enshrined and promulgated through educational policy. This paper critically analyzes one specific governmental educational policy and illustrates the ways in which the policy acts as a tool of assimilation rather than of integration for recently-resettled refugee parents in Canadian society.

Challenging the Doctrine of Parental Involvement

After a review of the literature (and against the backdrop of national policies in both the United States and the United Kingdom that support the potency of parental involvement to improve student achievement), Avvisati, Beshas and Guyen (2010) conclude that parental involvement is believed to positively correlate to every child's success in school, despite the fact that there is limited empirical research to support such a sweeping generalization. The assumed potency of parental involvement, Fernández and López (2017) argue, has reached such a point of uncritical acceptance in the minds of educators that many

of them advocate for it as a panacea to cure whatever they imply ails the education system. In many respects, parental involvement is simply presented as an idea that is so universally understood that it no longer requires a definition or description (Fernández & López, 2017).

According to Bower and Griffin (2011), the Epstein et al. (2009) framework of parental involvement is widely accepted, despite its limitations, and it is one of the most pervasive models used in schools. In fact, Fernandez & López (2017) state that, "[p]arent involvement is now at the point where only those practices and actions that correspond to Epstein's typology are recognized and privileged in school" (p. 126). Epstein et al.'s (2009) model offers six broad dimensions of parental involvement. Each of the six dimensions reflects a form of cooperative relations between schools and parents: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community collaboration (Epstein et al., 2009).

Increasingly, scholars (see, for example, Daly 2013; Fernandez & López, 2017; Jensen, 2010; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001) are challenging the dominant definitions of good parenting and parental involvement in education. Critical scholars argue that the dominant, Westernized models are generally rooted in middle-class perspectives of good parenting (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). In many regards, the dominant and normative discourses on effective parenting and parental involvement presuppose a universal model of child-rearing that positions white, middle-class women as ideal mothers (Coll & Pachter, 2002; Prins & Toso, 2008; Yau, 1996). These idealized parenting practices are likely to focus on a normative and predominantly Westernized belief of what good parents do to engage with their children's schooling (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Coll & Pachter, 2002). In this conceptualization, parents are positioned to be focused on the general classroom and school needs as cheerleaders and boosters, but to otherwise be irrelevant in educators' conversations about what children need to be to succeed at schooling and within schools (Coll & Pachter, 2002; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

For at least the past two decades, an unshakeable faith has been anchored in the power of "good parenting" practices as a means to compensate for the social and economic challenges that many children face as a result of being born into poverty and/or as a member of a racialized minority group (Jensen, 2010). Gillies (2005) contended that "good parenting," once the providence of private, familial life and focused on the healthy development of one's own children, has now become a matter of importance to the state. The doctrine of good parenting has provided the state with an avenue through which to influence the lives of its citizens and to ensure that they are encouraged to learn about and to enact "socially desirable parenting" (Daly, 2013, p. 160), which is a model of parenting that is defined by the practices of the dominant group of society and then subsequently prescribed by the state.

However, this state-endorsed model of "good parenting" effectively serves to absolve the government from its own contributions to the structural injustices that exist in a given society (Gillies, 2005). When the doctrine of the good and responsible parent is encoded into educational policy, it allows those in power to avoid addressing the inequities and injustices that hold some children back from achieving success in school and subsequently later in life by shifting the blame onto their parents for not doing a satisfactory job of parenting (Cooper, 2009; Gillies, 2005; Vincent, 2017).

In the Westernized, hegemonic construction of parental involvement, some parents—such as those who live in poverty, who belong to racialized, or ethnic or religious minority groups, or who are recently-resettled refugees—tend to be regarded as being deficient in their ability to parent when measured against the normative assumptions of the dominant group (Bernhard, Freire, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Villanueva, 1998; Coll & Pachter, 2002; Cooper, 2009; Yau, 1996).

Such normative and normalized understandings of parental involvement do not position minoritized parents as simply embodying a differential approach to parenting. In an educational policy context, the accepted definitions of good parental involvement in schools generally do not reflect the actual location in the social stratification of Canadian society that many minoritized groups actually occupy (Coll & Pachter, 2002; Cooper, 2009).

Cooper (2009) argued that, in the current education system, the mere presence of middle-class, white parents yields greater influence, status, appreciation, and value among educators. Cooper (2009) claimed that

> [t]hese benefits are then extended to many nonpresent, white parents by way of positive association. In other words, parents' whiteness and middle-class socioeconomic status alone can

> motivate educators to assume they are well-resourced and actively (if not overly) involved in their children's education [...] Consequently, middle-class, white parents are more likely to be perceived as caring parents. (p. 381)

Normative assumptions about parental involvement permit the concept to not only be taken-for-granted as a universal understanding but also to apply to all white, middle-class parents regardless of their actual involvement in their children's schooling (Cooper, 2009; Fernández & López, 2017).

Particularly in the context of the lives of recently-resettled refugees, each dimension of Epstein et al.'s (2009) model presents prima facie obstacles in terms of language barriers, limited free time, and other extended challenges of resettlement. This critical policy analysis was designed to expand, elaborate upon, and/or challenge a government policy text developed from Epstein et al.'s (2009) model of parental involvement because it may not adequately reflect the realities associated with parental involvement for recently-resettled refugees.

Conceptual Framework and Methodological Approach

According to Fernández and López (2017), "the politics of the everyday – what we experience, know, witness, and take for granted on a 'day-to-day' basis – is not objective or neutral, but discursively formed" (p. 126). Critical policy analysis allows scholars to focus on the politics of the everyday and what is normally taken-for-granted within the social world of schools, including the very structures that organize our daily lives (Apple, 2019; Fernández & López, 2017). Critical policy analysis approaches to research, as Fernández and López (2017) contended, draw our attention to the fact that "policies are both visible and invisible; simultaneously textual and discursive" (p. 126). Citing a number of studies, Cooper (2019) argued that research focused on family-school relations involving "low income and families of color have found that educators typically do not welcome, expect, or articulate power sharing with all students' families, and instead develop strategies to limit and/or structure parental involvement for *some* [emphasis added]" (p. 380).

In a broad sense, the analysis was informed both conceptually and methodologically by numerous scholars of critical discourse and critical policy analysis (for example see, Ball, 1990; Gildersleeve, 2013; Fairclough, 1993 2001; Widdowson, 2004; Yarrow, 2007). Such approaches are necessary because as Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014) proposed in their review of critical approaches to educational policy analysis, these approaches allow for an examination of the effects of a specific policy on relationships of inequity and privilege by allowing for a policy to be interrogated. Such an examination can identify whether or not the policy reinforces and/or reproduces the social injustices and inequities embedded in the educational system (Diem et al., 2014).

A goal of critical policy analysis is to "un-silence the discursive framings of policy initiatives" (Gildersleeve, 2013, p. 4). Critical policy analysis allows researchers to illustratively respond to the question: "Who really benefits from this specific policy?" (Gildersleeve, 2013). Methodologically, critical policy analysis adopts the stance whereby policy is regarded as "inherently value-laden and contentious – across its development, adoption, implementation, outcomes, analysis *and its language*… critical policy analysis recognizes that policy is not only a product of societal values, but also *produces social value itself*" (Gildersleeve, 2013, p. 3). The discursive aspects of policy are important because as Ball (1990) stated:

> [d]iscourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations. Discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' ... In so far as discourses are constituted by exclusions as well as inclusions, by what cannot as well as what can be said, they stand in antagonistic relationship to other discourses. (p. 2)

While it is well beyond the scope of this analysis to unequivocally disentangle the complex interpretations of what constitutes critical policy analysis, the approach adopted in this analysis took the position that policies are representations that are discursively encoded, coded and decoded in complex ways (Ball, 1993; Yarrow, 2007). The author took the stance that while "critical policy analysis is not a homogeneous movement in social science" (Young & Diem, 2017, p. 1), it does allow for the interrogation of the problematic nature of oppressive systems and structures that reproduce inequalities in society through educational policy (Fernández & López, 2017; Young & Diem, 2017). Any particular text will have a plurality

of interpretations by a plurality of readers (Ball, 1993). However, this act of interpretation does not deny the reality that policy authors attempt to assert control over how readers make sense of and subsequently enact a policy text (Yarrow, 2007).

Bourdieu and Passerson (1990) contend that schools and the school system reproduce the norms and values of the dominant and powerful classes of society and thereby play an influential role in aiding and abetting the social inequities and injustices that are sewn into the fabric of contemporary society. "Critical policy analysis," wrote Apple (2019), "is grounded in the belief that it is absolutely crucial to understand the complex connections between education and the relations of dominance and subordination in the larger society" (p. 276).

One aim of critical policy analysis is to highlight the multiple ways in which educational policy structures and texts reproduce and reify inequities in society (Gildersleeve, 2013; Marshall, 1985; Prunty, 1985). Critical policy analysis provides an important lens through which to examine how the informal, invisible, and "discursive" textual aspects of policy might profoundly shape how individuals experience and come to know the world around them (Fernández & López, 2017; van Dijk, 2001). In using a critical policy analysis approach, social inequalities are assumed to not be naturally occurring phenomena but are regarded as the intentional or unintentional by-product of policy intent, interpretation, and implementation. Policies shape the social world of schools by virtue of presenting normative and biased views of a so-called universal truth (Apple, 2019; Ball, 1993; Fernández & López, 2017; Rogers et al., 2005; Young & Diem, 2017).

School Partnerships: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Communities

As a state-sanctioned policy text, Manitoba Education's (2005) *School Partnerships: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Communities* (referred to herein as the "*School Partnership Guide")* was chosen because the stated intent of the *School Partnership Guide* is to offer support that will:

- encourage parents and communities to be partners in learning;
- increase and sustain school partnership participation;
- support open communication in school partnerships;
- explore a variety of roles and responsibilities of school partnerships;
- recognize and address potential disputes;
- and outline procedures and guidelines for formalized school partnerships. (p. 2)

While not officially titled as "policy" by Manitoba Education, the *School Partnership Guide* can be interpreted as an example of what Sossin and Smith (2003) refer to as "soft law," which is by nature a political and legal creation. The *School Partnership Guide* carries with it the power and influence of an artefact of "quasi-legislation" (Ganz, 1987). Specific to the development and construction of the *School Partnership Guide* is the fact that "soft law tends to be developed and applied within the government's policy-making apparatus, with little if any input or scrutiny from the public" (Sossin & Smith, 2003, p. 869). The limited public involvement in the development of the *School Partnership Guide*, therefore, suggests that it is timely and appropriate for the *School Partnership Guide* to be critically analyzed as a policy framework that was "designed to support parents or guardians, educators, community members, and other individuals interested in participating in a partnership to support student learning" (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. 2).

The *School Partnership Guide* is a 49 page document that was developed by a team of 13 individuals drawn from across the province of Manitoba and who represented specific education-sector organizations and interest-groups such as: Manitoba Education, the Manitoba school trustees' association, the school superintendents' association, the teachers' professional association, and the parent council association. Initially, the focus of the analysis of the *School Partnerships Guide* was to identify discursive text segments that could be interpreted as descriptors of parental involvement and that could be mapped against Epstein et al.'s (2009) model of parental involvement. Recognizing that while terms and phrases in isolation may have limited meaning, the discursive text segments were subsequently critically analyzed to "unmask hegemony and address oppressive forces" that might serve to suppress diverse understandings of parental involvement (Crotty, 1998, p. 12). Such an unmasking is important because, as Ball (2009) suggests, policy is not only a text but is also a power relation whereby power is exercised through a production of truth, knowledge, and as discourses that might enable or disable parents.

Assessing the Lexicon of the Policy

Ninety-seven discursive text segments in the form of complete sentences or successive sentences were identified that could be mapped against Epstein et al.'s (2009) typology of parental involvement. Each of the six types of parental involvement identified in Epstein et al.'s model was represented in Manitoba Education's (2005) *School Partnership Guide*.

Below, Table 1, "Mapping the *School Partnership Guide* against Epstein et al.'s (2009) Framework of Parental Involvement," provides a brief overview of the frequency and distribution of the types of involvement along with representative examples of the discursive text segments that were identified through the analysis.

Table 1
Mapping the School Partnership Guide against Epstein et al.'s (2009) Framework of Parental Involvement

Type of Involvement	Parenting	Communicating	Volunteering	Learning at Home	Decision Making	Collaborating with the Community
Epstein et al. (2009) Description	Help all families establish home environments to support children as students	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school	Recruit and organize parent help and support	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development
Number of Discursive Text Segments	11	10	4	4	27	41
Selected Examples of Discursive Text Segments	"Promote attendance, punctuality, and instill a positive attitude towards education." (p. 30)	"Positive relationships are strengthened when school staff and parents communicate clearly and frequently with each other about school policies, programs, or the individual growth and development of students." (p. 11)	"Volunteering to be a school partnership council member takes time, patience, and energy." (p. 9).	"When we get involved with our children as they work on their homework, we partner with schools to support student success." (p. 14)	"School partnerships play an important role in decision making and	"By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us." (p.1)

Critically Analyzing the Discursive Implications of the Policy

In general, the analysis that follows critically considered the *School Partnerships Guide* (Manitoba Education, 2005) for authorship, authoritative voice, and stance in light of the very real vulnerabilities and social disadvantage of some parental groups that the *School Partnerships Guide* was intended to communicate with. More specifically, given that many recently-arrived refugees' lives have been marked by violence and trauma, displacement, poverty, and social isolation (Crawley, 2001; Phillips, 2006) the *School Partnerships Guide* was analyzed along five important relational dimensions that are intertwined with lexicon, discourse, and power: 1) pretextual; 2) contextual; 3) intratextual; 4) intertextual; and 5) subtextual relations (Ball, 1990, 1993, 1994; Fairclough, 1993, 2001; Widdowson, 2004).

Pretextual Relations

Pretext refers to the structure imposed on a whole policy as text in order to render it with a sense of "practical reasoning that might lend its readers to accept its authoritativeness" (Widdowson, 2004, p. 75). Pretextual relations focus on the means and manner through which the policy was developed and subsequently drafted "so as to formulate 'complete and identical representations' of meanings for a diverse audience of readers" (Widdowson, 2004, p. 80).

The *School Partnerships Guide* was prepared by a "development team" who each had an education-sector institutional affiliation. Their affiliations ranged from being an employee of Manitoba Education to being a volunteer who represented the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. iii). The development team created the document as a "guide" designed to assist interested persons in participating in school-family-community partnerships aimed at supporting students' in-school success. The intent was to support both formal and informal groups in reaching a better understanding of their roles in supporting student success. According to Manitoba Education (2005), the *School Partnerships Guide* was "designed to support parents, educators, community members, and other individuals interested in participating in a partnership to support student learning" (p. 2).

In 1996, the Province of Manitoba passed the *Advisory Councils for School Leadership Regulation, 54/96* and established the legal basis for the formal creation of school advisory councils. The advisory councils were permitted to provide advice to locally elected school boards and school principals on a variety of matters, such as: school policies, activities and organization, including department and locally developed curricula; cultural and extracurricular activities; student discipline and behaviour management policies; community access to facilities; and fundraising. In response to the legislative and regulatory changes, Manitoba Education provided guidance on how to establish the terms of reference for these newly created advisory councils for school leadership through a document titled *Advisory Councils for School Leadership: A Handbook for Parents, Teachers, and Administrators.* However, Manitoba Education regarded the publication of the *School Partnership Guide* as "a collaborative response to … update [the] *Advisory Councils for School Leadership: A Handbook for Parents, Teachers, and Administrators* (1996)" owing to the fact that the context of the relationships between schools, families, and communities had evolved greatly since 1996 (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. 2).

The pretextual relations embedded in the *School Partnerships Guide* placed the development team, and Manitoba Education, as its publisher, in a position through which they could exercise three main forms of social power: legitimate power, expert power, and referent power (Ball, 1994; Fairclough, 1993, 2001; Widdowson, 2004). The most obvious form of power being afforded here is legitimate power since Manitoba Education is, in fact, the state-sanctioned ministerial branch for K-12 education in the Province of Manitoba. This fact is significant because, as the policy developer and producer, Manitoba Education constructed a position for parents within the policy as receivers of "expert" advice with the legitimacy of governmental approval (Ball, 1994, p. 22).

The *School Partnerships Guide* also embodies expert power as it is positioned to denote a sense of expertise with respect to knowledge of effective forms of parental involvement in education. Undoubtedly, as a document published by the Province of Manitoba, it would possess the authority to support the so-called practical wisdom of how parents might best become involved with the education system and schools. The production of the *School Partnerships Guide* implies that policy makers, administrators, educators, and those with power in the education system "know" what parental involvement is—that is, what it should look like and what it is supposed to be like for every child in every school setting regard-

less of the family's actual life-circumstances (Fernández & López, 2017).

Finally, as a result of having these two types of power, the *School Partnerships Guide* also has a referent power as this document provides a model that is regarded as standard and normative and one that might shape the perceptions of recently-arrived refugees who are trying to better understand what constitutes parent, school, and community partnerships in their new home communities.

Contextual Relations

Context refers to how a policy was textually created so that it might be discursively interpreted by a specific social group (Widdowson, 2004). For the purpose of this analysis, the contextual relationships respond to the question: How might the *School Partnerships Guide*'s meaning be inextricably bound to social realities and interpreted by its readers, which includes school division and school staff, but also, in particular, recently-resettled refugee parents (Widdowson, 2004)?

The most likely audiences for the *School Partnerships Guide* includes personnel with Manitoba Education and central office staff in school divisions, as well as principals and vice-principals, teachers, parent council members, and school advisory committee members. However, it is also intended for community stakeholders. As Manitoba Education (2005) noted, "When parents, families, and *the community* [emphasis added] are involved in the education of children and youth

- student achievement tends to increase
- students feel more supported
- students' attitudes change in a positive way." (p. 5)

Principals and teachers are among the likely end-users of this text. The *School Partnerships Guide* uses discursive language that positions school leaders to take action to increase parents' involvement with their children's schools. For example, *School Partnerships Guide* notes that "[p]rincipals have a strong influence on how parents, families, and communities are welcomed to the school system. They have the capacity to create environments that support students, educators, parents, families, and communities" (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. 31).

In addition, school division superintendents and ministry of education staff are potential end-users of the *School Partnerships Guide.* Two specific discursive text segments illustrate that fact: "Superintendents perform the supervisory management duties required to facilitate parent, family, and community involvement in the school system" (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. 32); and, "The role of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth is to: prioritize school, family, and community involvement in school affairs; strongly encourage schools and school divisions to include parents; families, and communities in all aspects of planning relating to teaching and learning" (p. 34).

All of the school leaders are positioned as social actors within the existing structure of the system at the school-level, divisional-level, or provincial-level and hold institutional positions of authority within the education system. These actors have the power to determine what they might believe to be the best practices for parental involvement. By virtue of the policy they created, and their authority and positionality as insiders, they are able to promote a particular framework of parental involvement for a group of parents that includes individuals whose lives they may know nothing or very little about.

Other audiences for the *School Partnerships Guide* include the members of parent councils and school advisory committees. While the document is available for both viewing and downloading from the Manitoba Education website, it seems reasonable to assume that individual parents who are neither members of a parent council nor school advisory committee would not access it with frequency.

Thus, individual parents who are not part of a formal parent group may not be aware of this policy document. It is also unlikely that community stakeholder-agencies, such as agencies who support government-assisted or privately-sponsored refugees, are aware of the *School Partnerships Guide.* In the hierarchical construct of society, individual parents or community stakeholders have limited individual agency and access to institutional power in comparison to those who function within the structure of the existing education system.

The contextual relations of this policy document leave the impression of a deeply hierarchical education system, with those in the professional class maintaining dominance over the system and subordinating any limited power held by un-organized parents and community agencies. The contextual relations create a homogeneous, subordinate class out of parents who demographically share but a single

characteristic in common, which is the fact that they are the primary care-givers of school aged children. This discursive construction of a universal category of parents and parenting allows Manitoba Education and its sanctioned institutional-affiliates to maintain political power and to constrain and influence the ways in which parents are able to exercise their agency in a milieu governed by institutional policy and practice (Ball, 1994).

Another social manifestation of power that is significant in the analysis of the contextual relations of the policy is the implied disciplinary power of the *School Partnerships Guide* (Ball, 1993; 1994). Although the term "resource guide" (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. 2) denotes one meaning, the authoritative voice and prescriptiveness of Manitoba Education's guide identifies a particular model of parental involvement as ideal and subsequently treats it as normal. This treatment causes those who do not fall in line to run the risk of being "punished" as a non-conformer and being looked upon in a negative light by those with power in the education system.

Intratextual Relations

Intratextuality refers to the ways in which policies have used specific language and discursive practices to encode specific representations of "how things are" in schools in order to create, in the minds of the policies' readers, a homogenous interpretation of a shared social reality (Fairclough, 2001, Widdowson, 2004). Intratextual relations focus on the ways in which interpretations of policies are guided through the use of grammatical and syntactical patterns (Fairclough, 2001). Intertextual relational analyses examine how "internal co-textual relations" are employed to shape interpretation (Widdowson, 2004, p. 120).

The *School Partnerships Guide* contains certain phrases that create forced-upon value propositions that diminish the possibility of debate by using phrases such as: "positive parenting," "positive relationships," "positive school climate," "participate," "involvement/ engagement," "safe, caring, appropriate, and inclusive education," and "effective school partnerships." It is hard to imagine that anyone, including recently-arrived refugees, would suggest they do not support these ideas as being worthy of consideration. These phrases are semantically constructed in ways that they position those who might disagree with their particular applications in the *School Partnerships Guide* as subscribing to socially unacceptable and perhaps morally questionable ideas of what constitutes effective parenting.

However, recently-resettled refugee parents may have fundamentally different understandings of what these terms and phrases mean in action from the ideological meanings that the writers intended them to accept (Coll & Pachter, 2002; Cooper, 2009). These misunderstandings are also the case with other ethnic or racialized minorities who often hold little to no formal power or social capital within the education system. Unfortunately, these parents have no power to contest what the phrases mean to them in their particular cultural contexts.

Grammatical relations have been enacted by employing specific intensifiers to create a sense of common understanding in the minds of the readers of the *School Partnerships Guide*. For example:

> "When *all partners* take responsibility for student learning, *we share* [emphasis added] school improvement planning" (p. 5).
>
> "*Working together* strengthens *our ability* to support positive educational change for *our children and schools* [emphasis added]" (p. 6)
>
> "When *we get involved* with *our children* as *they work* on their homework, *we partner* [emphasis added] with schools to support student success" (p. 14).

The use of the inclusive pronoun in such forms as "we" and "our" in the active voice presents an image of a collaborative relationship between parent, school and community that conjures a sense of solidarity among the interested parties. However, this tactic is an example of relational modality (Fairclough, 2001) or, in other words, expressing authority by speaking on behalf of everyone involved. In so doing, Manitoba Education positions itself at the level of other partners—parents, schools, and communities—in a display of unity to disrupt any potential "divisions of interest" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 106).

The second appendix to the guide, entitled "School Partnership Shared Roles and Responsibilities," (Appendix B) embodies a strong imperative mode in its grammatical structure. For example, this appendix underscores the direction of influence within the partnership by stating that, "Parents and families

- provide parental perspectives that complement teacher skills

- monitor homework and school projects
- promote attendance, punctuality, and instill a positive attitude towards
- education
- volunteer at school activities
- assist school organizations
- provide information about their child's beliefs, values, and preferred
- learning styles
- provide information about their culture and family beliefs
- teach and learn as true partners in the educational process
- provide suggestions for successful schools." (p. 30)

The list continues, but these few points exemplify a particular semantic composition wherein the policy authors and policy architects make suggestions as imperatives and the addressees—in this instance of analysis, recently-resettled refugee parents—become compliant actors.

A "Toolbox for Leaders" (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. 15) contains another representation of intratextual relations as it pertains to grammar usage. The statements made therein, besides being implicit in their relational modality (Fairclough, 2001), have an expressive value and a curious undertone, particularly as shown in the following statement: "Make *sure* [emphasis added] that the Council is representative of the community – invite members of minority groups to participate" (Manitoba Education, 2005, p 15). The possibility exists that readers might detect both a negative and positive connotation attached to these words, depending on the reader themselves.

As it relates to the overall structure of the policy, what makes the document coherent is the recurring theme of "successful school partnership" and the stated purpose of said partnership, which is that "working together strengthens our ability to support positive educational change for our children and schools" (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. 6). This sentiment is reworded numerous times throughout the document to the point that "school partnerships," "working together," and "parents/families, schools and communities" become hyponymy for Canadian society framed in a particularly, Westernized philosophical and ideological discourse.

Intertextual Relations

Intertextuality refers to the ways in which a policy text draws on other specific texts and academic writing conventions or forms of representation to perpetuate not only its authoritative voice but also to shape an interpretation based on historical expertise in the minds of its readers (Fairclough, 1993). According to Fairclough (1993), intertextuality is "basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and with the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth" (p. 84). Intertextual relations examine the ways in which a policy is supported by external, expert discursive utterances in the form of selected quotes, citations, and references to form a chain of communication based on a historical expertise on the subject (Fairclough, 2003).

Interpreting the illustrations contained in the *School Partnerships Guide* is important because ideologies are not only expressed and reproduced discursively through text, but also through non-verbal semiotic messages such as illustrations and figures (van Dijk, 1995). The concept of what parent, school, and community partnerships constitute is further reinforced through the diagram entitled "Supportive Partnerships" on page six of the *School Partnerships Guide.* The diagram contains three separate drawings which represent the family as a home, the school as a book and apple, and the community as the planet Earth. The drawing depicts the connections and the relationships that exist among the three images and situates the child at the center of the diagram, who is represented by a certificate and graduation cap. This image perpetuates a Western and Eurocentric ideology of school partnerships and, for recently-resettled refugee parents, this representation may contrast with their own ideologies. The fact that this ideology is positioned at the centre of the document undermines the philosophy of inclusion as a foundation of the *School Partnerships Guide.*

The text uses several quotes from secondary sources and overtly refers to concepts that support this specific Western ideology of parental involvement. Eight selective quotes chosen to represent specific authoritative voices related to parental involvement and aligned with the state-sanctioned model of parental involvement are included in highlighted text boxes that stand out from the main text of the policy.

The reference list at the end of the document includes five policy-type documents or pieces of legislation created by the Province of Manitoba, another one produced by the Province of Alberta, as well as five books, an earlier iteration of the Epstein et al. (2002) framework, and a reference to an online document produced by Iowa State University Extension (2003). All of the references are written by authority figures or organizations and they are used as authoritative voices on their own, as well as to be used as evidence support to substantiate the *School Partnerships Guide* and to verify the statements the policy authors make.

For example, under the heading "Communication" of the *School Partnerships Guide* is a sidebar quote referenced back to Manitoba Education (2004) that states the following:

> When we take positive approaches to resolving our disputes, we are creating opportunities to build strong working relationships. When our relationships are built with trust, respect, and creative problem solving, we are setting positive examples for our students. (p. 12)

In reality, the more recent educational policy document developed by Manitoba Education to promote parent, school, and community relationship relies on the expert voice of a previous document developed by the same state ministry to support its argument.

Elsewhere listed beside the heading "Appendix B: School Partnership Shared Roles and Responsibilities," is a sidebar quote without attribution to a specific source that states the following:

> As the first teachers in their children's lives, parents and families pave the way for successful school experiences. Parent and family involvement in a child's life experience has a great effect on school learning and achievement. Beyond the essential bond of parent and child that is so critical for physical and social, and intellectual wellbeing is the need for co-operative interaction with other people. (Manitoba Education, 2005, p. 30)

These two illustrative examples represent the ways in which power has been used—as referent, disciplinary, authoritative, and legitimate—to present a particular hegemonic and normative model of parental and community involvement through the employment of targeted textually-referenced discourse (Fairclough, 2001).

A central focus of Fairclough's (1993, 2001, 2003) work is that "language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language" (2003, p. 2). According to Fairclough (1993, 2001, 2003), it is not a matter of reducing everything to discourse or discursive elements, rather this is just one of many analytical tools to use in conjunction with other forms of analysis. Fairclough's approach has been to combine analysis of text and the language of texts together with an analytical approach, which takes into account social theoretical issues and "the socially 'constructive' effects of discourse" (1993, p. 3). Fairclough expounds that discourse analysis is about "oscillating" between a focus on specific texts and a focus on what he refers to as the "order of discourse" (p. 3).

None of the references appear to focus on the needs of historically marginalized communities, whether ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities. These references also do not seem to focus on the need for schools and school systems to be culturally adaptive and to reflect the aspirations of the students, families, and students they purport to serve. In addition, the textually-referenced discourses embedded within the policy add a supportive element to the importance of adopting a Westernized, Eurocentric and middle-to-upper-class ideology of parenting and partnerships, which is a position that does not reflect the changing demographic composition of Manitoba and Canada, and the population's understandings, experiences, and first-hand expertise in parenting their own children.

Subtextual Relations

Subtext refers to the ways through which a policy is crafted to represent more than a simple sum of the words contained within it. Subtextual relations focus on what is not written and how that also contributes to interpretations of policy. In a critical policy analysis approach, subtextual relationships refer to how the words and phrases have been structured in the policy to create a storied or narrative understanding in the minds of the policy's readers (Ball, 1990; Fairclough, 2001; Widdowson, 2004).

One example of subtextual relations can be found in the number of times the word "effective" is used in the policy document—23 times in 49 pages—to make explicit how the concept of school and family partnership should be interpreted and enacted. Any other understanding of or desire to negotiate

an understanding of what partnership between parents and the school might constitute could render it ineffective.

The *School Partnerships Guide* develops a picture in which stakeholders—namely parents, families, schools, and communities—adhere to a Canadianized (read: Westernized and Eurocentric) ideal of partnership and, in turn, perhaps a somewhat narrow understanding of student success. The ideology that the *School Partnerships Guide* perpetuates is Canadianized in its orientation, language, definitions, assumptions, and in its foundational ideology that the state knows what "good parenting" entails. In addition, the *School Partnerships Guide* positions some parents as "behaving badly," and as individuals who will not bend to the state's universal declaration of parental involvement, which is governed by the discursive configurations and definitions of its own policy (Fernández & López, 2017). The six dimensions of the Epstein et al. (2009) framework, which are described, and, arguably, overtly and covertly prescribed in the *School Partnerships Guide*, do not necessarily represent recently-resettled refugee parents' understandings of culturally specific terms. Some terms include "attending school concerts or open houses," "volunteering," "cheering," and these are taken-for-granted as understood similarly by all parents, regardless of their background and, furthermore, they are sanctioned by the experts who drafted the *School Partnerships Guide* as de facto parental involvement.

Public policy, including educational policy, shapes the perspectives and lives of those with limited and/or little power in society because it promotes a state-sanctioned view of "what is thinkable and unthinkable," and declares the authoritative allocations of what is of value to society (Woodside-Jiron, 2004, p. 174). While the *School Partnerships Guide* 's stated intention is to support parents, teachers, and the community, it does so by promoting a discursively standardized model of parental involvement that has been determined and handed down by the authority of the state. Manitoba Education uses the references it cites as a way of establishing "expertise," "knowledge," and "authority" in order to assume a dominant relational position (Fernández & López, 2017). This position forces parents to assume a subordinate position of being compliant and receptive to the discourses of the *School Partnerships Guide* as they outline the roles and responsibilities of "good parents" in Manitoba (Fernández & López, 2017). This position is important because, as Cooper (2009) explained, "when parents do not fulfill the deferential parental involvement roles that educators prefer, they are often judged as uncaring" (p. 380). The over-riding tendency for educators, claims Cooper (2009), is to hold an unconscious bias that tends to correlate their biases about appropriate forms of school-related parental involvement to a parent's existing position in the social hierarchy of contemporary society.

Somewhat surprisingly, given the title of the policy, the *School Partnerships Guide* omits details about the community. Significantly, no specific details are offered to describe "who" and "what" constitutes the community, even though it is presented as a "partner" for parents and schools to be in a relationship with. As a result, it is hard to conclude if refugee resettlement organizations that supported recently-resettled refugees, be they privately sponsored or government service agencies, are considered a part of "the community."

Discussion

In general, the findings of this analysis offer several implications for educational leaders and policymakers. Firstly, when regarded as a policy text, the *School Partnerships Guide* (Manitoba Education, 2005) can be seen as a system of signs and representations which are designed to encourage educators and parents to develop specific, government-sanctioned understandings of how parent-school-community partnerships ought to be conceived of and enacted. Secondly, the *School Partnerships Guide* is predicated on taken-for-granted notions of parental involvement that reflect the dominant segment of society's mythical notion of parenting. As a result, it promulgates myth as reality, and serves to further marginalize recently-resettled refugees and other minoritized segments of society.

Kymlicka (2007, p. 63) is highly critical of policy approaches that support the "rabid pursuit of cultural homogeneity," and that are guided by political pressures that privilege and normalize the majority's ways of thinking about and romanticize beliefs about a parochial form of familial life. Such narrow constructions of family-life and familial relations come at the expense of more expansive cross-cultural ways of living together in diverse communities (Kymlicka, 2007).

The conceptualization of parental involvement articulated by and advocated within the *School Part-*

nerships Guide is grounded in a middle-class, Eurocentric perspective that focuses on a particular view of parental participation in schooling. The policy document proposes a "laundry list" of activities that the self-declared experts believe "good parents" ought to perform as they, perhaps blindly, support the agenda of those in the system with power and authority (Fernández & López, 2017). While this model is problematic for many parents, it is particularly so for recently-resettled refugee parents, who are left to navigate a foreign educational system and to search for the power to parent within the system, even though they do not possess much of the social or political capital that would allow them to do so (Cooper, 2009). Unfortunately, the particular findings of this critical analysis are not out of step with the overall history of public schooling, which indicates that educators typically urge parents to serve as cooperative volunteers rather than to participate in the education of their children as equal power-holders in the relationship between parents and schools (Cooper, 2009).

Not all parents hold the same precise developmental goals for their children, and, thus, attitudes and approaches to parenting and parental engagement with schools can vary according to the immediate contextual demands of family life. These challenges are no different for parents who are recently-arrived refugees; they are not all the same. Ennab (2017) illustrates this point through a study focused on refugee parental involvement in Manitoba's recommendations that educational policy makers and educational leaders consider how different ethnic, cultural, and religious traditions shape understandings of parenting and parental involvement practices as they are structurally constructed and embedded in the social contexts and experiences of distinct refugee groups.

Notions of parent involvement are understood to be socially and historically constructed. In particular, many ethnic, racial, and cultural communities have markedly different ideals of good parenting from one another, and, as such, no one correct sort of parental involvement exists (Coll & Pachter, 2002). Even though parents from different backgrounds may differ in the ways in which they understand their roles as parents, arguably all agree that parental involvement in children's lives is important. Therefore, as part of the integration and socialization processes implicated in welcoming recently-resettled refugees, it is critical for governmental education departments to permit flexibility and diversity in their constructions of parental involvement. Formal education (i.e., schooling) cannot serve as the great social leveler if it perpetuates a discourse of domination through the very policies that support it (Goodall, 2019).

What is needed is critically-focused research, as well as theories that better support marginalized segments of society and do not position them as being somehow deficient or inferior as parents (Coll & Pachter, 2002). The differences in the approaches *to* and understandings *of* parental involvement in school may represent differences in cultural and religious tradition as much as they reflect the socioeconomic disparities that recently-resettled refugees face as they attempt to integrate into their new country (Coll & Pachter, 2002). More robust and critical understandings of the ways in which educational policy shapes notions of parental involvement will help to initiate more culturally-responsive partnerships between homes, schools, and other refugee supports that, in turn, will encourage the long-term success of refugee parents' involvement in their children's educational pursuits (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000).

Clearly, there is a need for a more critical assessment of the existing policies and programs that are intended to encourage parental involvement. In effect, documents like the one featured in this study impose an assimilationist position on recently-resettled refugees rather than an integrative one. These documents privilege the dominant segment of society's discourse of parental involvement and render invisible those views held by the minoritized groups (Kymlicka, 2001). Critical assessments should seek to uncover and replace the agendas and activities that singularly advance the institutional and instructional goals of educational systems and school leaders. Many educators are well-intentioned but, unfortunately, not directly informed by refugee families' self-articulated preferences and needs in the realm of parenting (Cooper, 2009).

Finally, given the western-world's ongoing commitment to refugee resettlement, more research is needed that examines the ways in which recently-resettled refugee families conceptualize parenting and involvement with schools. Many recently-resettled refugees are confronted by the fact that multiculturalism, as defined by the majority population, may, in fact, be assimilationist in its delivery and as it is practiced in schools. The tendency of society to frame itself as multicultural through assimilationist policy mechanisms exists despite the fact that refugees resettle in countries that are not in the grip of armed conflict and live in communities where schools attempt to become microcosms of a tolerant, multicultur-

al society. It is important for educational policy authors, ministries of education and school divisions, and policy implementers and educators to expand their understandings of parental involvement to include the diverse ways in which parents from various ethnic, racial, religious, and other marginalized communities enact child care and also make commitments to their children's success in school. Specifically, the kinds of considerations illustrated in the paper will serve to better support refugee students' successful integration into Canadian schools as well as their parents' integration into Canadian society without forcing them to assimilate.

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