

# Hospitality, Self-Determination, and Black Refugee Students in Manitoba

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Résumé de l'article

Un grand nombre de réfugiés arrivent au Canada chaque année, ce qui appuie les déclarations du gouvernement d'encourager la « diversité culturelle ». Néanmoins, l'omniprésence du racisme et la rareté des recherches axées sur l'identité intersectionnelle des étudiants réfugiés noirs soulèvent plusieurs préoccupations, en particulier à la lumière du mythe du sauveur blanc ancré dans une société blanche comme celle du Canada. Basée sur l'éthique de l'hospitalité, la théorie de l'autodétermination et les principes de la théorie critique de la race, cette étude de cas explore l'hospitalité d'écoles de la maternelle à la 12e année envers les élèves réfugiés noirs au Manitoba. À travers les voix de cinq étudiants, cet article démontre comment les besoins d'autonomie, d'appartenance et de compétence des étudiants étaient souvent menacés par des (in)actions racistes d'enseignants et de camarades de classe, ce qui a eu un impact négatif sur leur expérience éducative.



# Hospitality, Self-Determination, and Black Refugee Students in Manitoba

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## Abstract

A large number of refugees come to Canada every year, supporting the government's claims that they are encouraging of "cultural diversity." Nonetheless, the pervasiveness of racism and the paucity of research focused on the intersectional identity of Black refugee students raises several concerns, especially in light of the White savior myth that is embedded in a White society like Canada. Based on the ethic of hospitality, self-determination theory, and the tenets of critical race theory, this case study explored the hospitality of K–12 schools for Black refugee students in Manitoba. Through the voices of five students, this research demonstrates how students' needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competency were often threatened by racist (in)actions of teachers and classmates, thus negatively impacting their educational experience.

*Keywords:* hospitality, self-determination, Black refugee students

## Résumé

Un grand nombre de réfugiés arrivent au Canada chaque année, ce qui appuie les déclarations du gouvernement d'encourager la « diversité culturelle ». Néanmoins, l'omniprésence du racisme et la rareté des recherches axées sur l'identité intersectionnelle des étudiants réfugiés noirs soulèvent plusieurs préoccupations, en particulier à la lumière du mythe du sauveur blanc ancré dans une société blanche comme celle du Canada. Basée sur l'éthique de l'hospitalité, la théorie de l'autodétermination et les principes de la théorie critique de la race, cette étude de cas explore l'hospitalité d'écoles de la maternelle à la 12e année envers les élèves réfugiés noirs au Manitoba. À travers les voix de cinq étudiants, cet article démontre comment les besoins d'autonomie, d'appartenance et de compétence des étudiants étaient souvent menacés par des (in)actions racistes d'enseignants et de camarades de classe, ce qui a eu un impact négatif sur leur expérience éducative.

Mots-clés: *hospitalité, autodétermination, étudiants réfugiés noirs*

## Introduction

Despite the high number of refugees settling in Canada every year (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022), or in Manitoba more specifically (Immigrate Manitoba, 2021), educational literature indicates that “refugee youth often ‘fall through the cracks’ in Winnipeg’s education system” (von Stackelberg, 2020). Indeed, Black and refugee students in Canada (and in Manitoba) have pervasively and continuously struggled with racism, alienation, stereotyping, despair, feeling undermined, experiencing misunderstandings about the educational system (especially the credit system), fear of speaking up, fast-paced curriculum and curricula that do not speak to their experiences, teacher irresponsiveness, stigmatization, and exclusion (Ayoub & Zhou, 2021; Baker, 2013; Guo et al., 2019; Jowett, 2020; Kanu, 2008; Li & Grineva, 2016; Schroeter & James, 2015; Selimos & Daniel, 2017; Skidmore, 2016; Stewart, 2012; Stewart et al., 2019; Teclé, & James, 2014; Walker & Zuberi, 2019).

Although important research has been conducted with Black students and refugee students in Canada, the intersectional identity of *Black refugee students* has not been given the attention it deserves—a silence which becomes even more disconcerting given that of the 10 most common countries of origin of refugees settling in Manitoba in 2016,

six are part of the African continent (Immigrate Manitoba, 2017). Such intersectionality (Black *and* refugee) can add several layers of complexity to one's experience and may lead teachers to respond to students in inhospitable ways. I use the term "intersectionality" in this study in reference to the ways the interconnected and overlapping social and political categorizations of a person combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Current approaches to refugee education tend to fall short of providing a genuine hospitable education because they remain informed and dictated by White, patronizing, and unethical structures even if disguised by "good intentions," such as those that are *for* the Other (e.g., discourses of care, compassion, or empathy) and those that are *about* the Other (e.g., multicultural education) (Kumashiro, 2000; Todd, 2003). For example, multicultural education certainly had its value when it was introduced as, for the first time, (some) aspects of (some) minority students' cultures could appear in the curriculum in a way that was not derogatory (Leonardo, 2009; Wilson, 2016). However, it should be observed that even a pedagogy that may be perceived as "welcoming to diversity" but that does not challenge the boundaries of its own system will fall short of welcoming the uniqueness of the guest.

The ethic of hospitality, however, is not only underused in empirical educational studies (let alone as an analytical lens for the experiences of refugee students), but its use in tandem with self-determination theory appears to be a novelty that this research brought forth, which demonstrated to be a pertinent and helpful framework to assist educators in planning for refugee education that is genuinely welcoming. Therefore, the main question that drove this study was: *How do Black refugee students conceptualize hospitality in education?* In other words, what makes Black refugee students feel (un)welcome in the classroom?

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

This research was informed by and designed based on the ethic of hospitality (Derrida, 2000a, 2000b; Ruitenberg, 2011a, 2011b, 2016), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017), and the tenets of critical race theory (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1995; Lawrence, 1995). Based on Derrida's and Ruitenberg's arguments, the ethic of hospitality, in

a nutshell, posits that genuine hospitality is necessarily unpredictable, necessarily unconditional, and therefore, necessarily uncomfortable for the host (Heringer, 2021). The host can make arrangements to receive the unknown guest who may arrive at an unknown time, but the arrival of the guest also marks the end of the host's arrangements as the guest must have agency to make changes in the environment. Applying this framework to the context of education, the ethic of hospitality supports the idea that teachers (and the educational system as a whole) may (and should) plan for refugee education but genuine hospitality will not take place if the home (e.g., the classroom, the educational system) and the host (e.g., the teacher) remain grounded on a priori assumptions and expectations (i.e., metaphysical, totalizing approaches to the other). In other words, hospitality will never look the same for different students and it will only take place if the host and the home (in the present case, teachers and schools) are transformed by the arrival of the guest (i.e., the student)—and what such transformation could entail is what this research sought to investigate. The most relevant constructs of the ethic of hospitality, namely, *responsibility*, *agency*, and *feeling welcome* were thus one of the main lenses through which this research was operationalized. The goal was to understand how students themselves perceive the hospitality with which they have been received in their schools, who they perceive as having been (ir)responsible hosts to them and how, in what ways (if any) they have experienced a sense of agency in their education, and what makes them feel (un)welcome.

Critical race theory (CRT), in turn, is pivotal to the current study, for it demonstrates how race function as a central pillar of hegemonic power (Crenshaw et al., 1995). CRT scholars have for decades strived to debunk a myriad of White gestures that may be portrayed as fair at first but that, in reality, are merely disguises for White supremacy and interest convergence (e.g., affirmative action) (Bell, 1995). CRT emphasizes how racism, more than individually performed acts, is ingrained and institutionalized in White societies as a whole—including in schools, where practices (rein)force racial segregation while legally accommodating racism (Aladejebi, 2021), thus hindering students' educational experiences in many complex forms (George, 2020; James & Taylor, 2010; Maynard, 2017; Schroeter & James, 2015). The ethic of hospitality in light of CRT, for instance, evidences the resistance (conscious or not) that a White teacher might experience when receiving a Black student in their class, seeking to reproduce, reinforce, and sustain the White home (be that the school or the teacher's self) to the detriment of the knowledge, experience, and interests of the Black refugee student which would disturb the boundaries of the home.

Self-determination theory (SDT) stems from the assumption that people are naturally agentic, eager to learn, and eager to apply newly acquired skills responsibly (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In other words, the theory posits that individual human development is characterized by curiosity, the intrinsic motivation to master one's inner and outer worlds and thus achieve social integration. Those scholars observed, however, that factors intrinsic and extrinsic to an individual can lead them to become apathetic, alienated, and irresponsible. Deci and Ryan (1985) thus identified three innate human psychological needs that are the foundation for one's self-motivation and consequent well-being and flourishing: *autonomy* (behaving according to one's authentic values and interests), *competence* (feeling able to operate effectively within their important life contexts), and *relatedness* (feeling socially connected, cared for, belonging, and feeling significant among others). These needs "specify the conditions under which people can most fully realize their human potentials" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 263), and can be helpful in evidencing how hospitable education has been to students. One important critique of the SDT theory is its shortcoming to acknowledge power relations in society—in this case, the education system. Nonetheless, combined with the ethic of hospitality and CRT, this study demonstrated the relevance and pertinence of this framework to better comprehend the experiences of Black refugee students and to better promote an education that does not merely welcome conformity to an existing system but fosters students' agency and self-determination.

## Methods

This case study of Black refugee students in Manitoba is part of a larger research project that also involved an in-depth, critical analysis of provincial curriculum documents, and a research journal developed throughout the project. This article focuses only on the data collected through the interviews. I am a White researcher who, not too long ago, immigrated to Canada from Brazil. Although I experienced to some extent the difficulties of being a foreigner, being undermined for not being a native English speaker, and being stereotyped, and despite having had the opportunity to teach Black (refugee) children in different countries, I recognize that I am not subject to anti-Black racism. I have also not even nearly faced the traumatic experiences that a refugee may go through, nor can I rely on my previous experiences to analyze what these five students shared with me. Therefore, my innermost desire is that the voices of those whom I interviewed speak louder than my own privileged interpretations.

## **Participants**

This research was conducted in compliance with the University of Manitoba's Ethics Review Board. A purposeful snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used to recruit five Black refugee students with the support of community centres in Winnipeg. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted through Zoom, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, and were digitally recorded. Pseudonyms were attributed to participants, and any other identifiers were replaced with a term, in brackets, that would allow the sentence to maintain its meaning.

At the time of the interviews, students were between 14 and 22 years old. One participant identified as male and four as female. One student was in Grade 9, one was in Grade 10, two were in Grade 12, and one participant had already graduated from high school. Each student came from a different country (Eritrea, Uganda, Nigeria, Sudan, and Ethiopia), and by the time of the interview they had lived in Manitoba for between two and five years.

## **Data Analysis**

An inductive thematic analysis was conducted in order to familiarize myself with the data and to organize it according to emergent themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the data had been coded, I organized the emerging themes in light of the three innate psychological needs outlined by SDT; namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Such analysis indicated ways in which students' behaviours in their new educational context evidenced fostered or hindered autonomy, how their need for competence in a (White, western) English-speaking country was influenced by their language skills, and how Blackness influenced their relatedness in a White school—autonomy, competency, and relatedness thus being exponents of how they perceived hospitality.

## **Findings**

In the following subsections I present and discuss the most relevant data from the interviews according to the domain they appeared to be most closely under, though they are certainly intertwined. Although the findings from this study's interviews must not be generalized to all Black refugee students in Manitoba, they surely shed light on urgent and serious matters that are a reality in the province and arguably in other jurisdictions.

## Autonomy

*Non-intrinsically motivated practices and one's sense of self.* According to SDT, autonomy is linked to feeling volitional, congruent, and integrated (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Evident from all interviews was how students perceived the need to act differently in the long term after they arrived. For instance, a couple of participants commented about having to ignore and/or avoid certain (White) students for their racist behaviours—an attitude dissonant to their beliefs, thus an incongruence to their personality and sense of self. As Hiba mentioned, “I felt so bad when they were making fun of me and they were ignoring me and I had to avoid them as much as I could.”

No sooner had they arrived in the new school than they realized that they did not look like their classmates (“everyone else in my classroom, they’re all White,” said Ediye), did not speak like them (“they talked very fast,” described Yonas), and did not behave like them (e.g., having to sit quietly as the others did: “I’m not quiet usually, but I had to be quiet,” said Hiba). The desire to feel accepted and to “blend in” and “mingle” thus motivated students to try to speak and behave like the others, which led some participants, like Hiba, to say: “I was not my truly self.” Ryan and Deci (2000) argued that non-intrinsically motivated practices can become *internalized* (i.e., values and regulations can be taken in) and *integrated* (i.e., a transformation of the self, which allows for those practices to emanate from their sense of self) (p. 71), which is a way toward self-determination. So, while the apparent internalization and integration of Eurocentric values and practices encountered by students in Manitoba classes could be contributing to their autonomy and hence their well-being, it is also possible that their motivation remains external, merely as a response to the context, and its rewards and punishments (e.g., being accepted or excluded by others). Potential evidence of this can be seen when I asked the participants whether they felt they could be themselves, which would be expected in an environment perceived as hospitable. In response, some participants promptly said “yes” (but their responses in other moments contradicted that), and others promptly said “no.” This ambivalence between feeling that they can/cannot be themselves is illustrated, for example, when I asked Kamali whether she felt accepted for who she is. She thought for a while before answering:

Did I feel accepted? Yes, and that’s because I had to work on myself and I have to accept myself and all that. I should say, I think, yeah, I believe yes,



I felt accepted, but there's always, you know, there's always that concept of like not being accepted by others just because of the racism and which I don't really, I don't know. I don't really feel that way. But it's still there, you know?

Kamali seems to experience some tension between acceptance and non-acceptance. However, the underlying message that students like Kamali seemed to want to convey is that they felt accepted *in spite of* racism. However, I also observed that throughout the whole interview she was hesitant to make negative remarks about her schooling experiences. This may be potential evidence of how power relations play out, compounded with the fear of consequences if the participant critiqued the school system—a fear that can be likely even bigger for a refugee student. Such phenomenon also appears to be reinforced by current research and educational practices, reifying the White savior myth (Heron, 2007) and fostering the “anti-confessional impulse” noted among Canadian refugee stories (Dawson, 2017).

This hybrid effect of being “neither here nor there” is certainly influenced by the linguistic, cultural, and emotional burden that follows those who immigrate somewhere else, especially refugees (Jowett, 2020; Rosello, 2001). But while students could adapt and integrate into the existing system in many ways through their own efforts, as will be discussed later, their race remains immutable. The White home is doomed to be a prison insofar as it remains White, and thus being Black “makes them eternally fragile guests” (Rosello, 2001, p. 165; see also Bryzzheva, 2018).

**Choice, voice, and initiative.** Although some participants seemed to be having their autonomy fostered through the opportunity to choose subjects based on the career they wanted to pursue, feeling powerless to change a distressing situation was pervasively noted in the interviews. Hiba, for example, mentioned how she struggled with a racist teacher in a course she was taking and, finding no solution (even after talking to the principal), felt compelled to drop the course. This meant she would have to re-take the course in the summer, which was not what she had desired, “just to avoid that teacher.” Indeed, surrendering to a racist environment and avoiding racist individuals (who are agents in such systems of structural racism) became a commonality among Black refugee students, attitudes that went against their volition and were thus a countermove to fostering their self-determination.

According to SDT, “teachers who are autonomy-supportive effectively facilitate intrinsic motivation, often despite the external demands and pressures on them, and they remain concerned with the points of view, initiative, and choice of students they teach” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 356). Conversely, students often commented how their views were ignored by teachers (and principals) during and outside of class time. For example, although Yonas said he feels free to ask questions, he also observed that there are teachers who have laughed at him (and at other newcomers) “because of my pronunciation” which then “blocks you.”

So, despite Yonas’s expression of initiative (which is the heart of autonomy), his mentioning that the teachers are respectful, and that he does not care if others laugh at him, it became evident through his narrative that students’ point of view and initiatives are often not welcomed by educators. This became even more clear as participants mentioned how all refugee students are placed in the English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes indistinctly, disregarding their previous English skills and their willingness to be placed in regular classes—an aspect to be further observed in the competence domain. The school thus becomes a double agent of un-welcoming, creating a space where the student may no longer face the immediacy of risks related to their refugee status, but constantly being reminding that their self is not fully welcome here either.

***Influencing the class.*** In an ethic of hospitality, the guest has agency to make changes in the environment. When I asked students whether/how their presence influenced the class (i.e., what difference could they make in the curriculum), their responses were similar to Ediye’s: “I don’t think so...I don’t think my presence does influence how the lesson is taught.” Besides the aforementioned distressful situations, the lack of teachers’ agency-supportive responsiveness was also particularly felt during the COVID-19 pandemic, as students struggled to navigate the system and keep up with what was posted online. Some teachers did not accommodate timelines even when students might have had to help their siblings at home: “Some of the teachers were helpful and understanding, other teachers would be like, ‘we don’t care, as long as you are not in the classroom, you are absent’ or ‘you are not getting that mark’” (Ediye).

Contrary to what would be expected from an autonomy-supportive teacher, students’ narratives reveal how they often had to comply with “controlling teachers [who] pressure students to think, feel, or behave in particular ways while relating to the students from their own (the teachers’) perspectives rather than from the students’ perspectives”

(Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 367)—thus a major factor impinging on students’ autonomy, which would surely be necessary in the provision of a hospitable environment. Interest convergence, which CRT has long warned about, seems to be at play here one more time, as schools can portray themselves as “welcoming to Black refugees” but have no interest in who the Black refugee student is, how they feel, or what they think. In such a model of conditional hospitality, the guest’s agency is thwarted by the power of the host, and the “identity of the refugee remains ambivalent, complex, and contradictory” (Rosello, 2001, p. 155). Although Derrida (2000a) observed that unconditional hospitality is that which is offered to the one we do not even know the name of (i.e., a complete stranger), what is at play here is an outright decision to welcome the refugee-as-a-victim, the powerless, the voiceless, but not their undesirable different ideas, knowledge, and experiences. The imperviousness of the White system (with its White hosts) is thus experienced by students not only through the violence of determining from the outset who can(not) be recognized as a subject (Butler, 1997, 2021), but by the constant reminder of what their unchangeable roles in such an environment are: sovereign and guest.

## Competence

***Left out and belittled.*** When it comes to the way in which students’ competence needs are satisfied in schools, the role of the English language became strikingly evident. Only two students claimed to have had mastery of English upon their arrival in Canada, while the others “felt dumb” (Hiba), felt inferior, and were left out of classroom conversations and classmates’ interactions from the outset, because they could not interact in English. While it is arguably natural to some extent that students may take time to adjust to a new environment and a language they are not yet familiar with, what emerged as worrisome were the ways in which students felt belittled in the long term, both by classmates and by educators. Students particularly felt that some teachers did not take the time to explain things and be supportive, as if it would be pointless (“he would show us that we cannot do anything, we cannot be better” said Hiba)—a reaction they felt to be directly related to the fact that they were newcomers and Black (“it was mostly for newcomers...racist depending on skin colour,” said Hiba). Afiya also commented on how she perceived unfair grading from some teachers who would immediately judge them by their appearance, not their knowledge:

There is this Miss [Z], they always say, like if you're in her class, even though you do good, even though you have 100%, everything is good, she'll give you zeros. I was like, if she does that to me, oh God, I would have to talk to this teacher. But when I went to her class...I think they treated people differently because if they see you, like, you can't say something that is wrong.

As CRT has argued, racism is ordinary and normalized. Being White in a White society still grants asymmetrical power to Whites. Being a White host further centralizes Whiteness, even when the teacher has "hospitable intentions" (Bryzzheva, 2018); the pathological and deficit approach toward Black people continues to dictate actions in institutions and social relations.

***EAL classes and alienation.*** While some students appreciated the support received from the English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes and its teachers, others criticized the way in which all refugee students are placed in those classes indistinctly. Afiya, for example, vehemently observed how she felt her school completely disregarded her previous outstanding performance and her willingness to be placed in regular classes:

I think the way the system is, if you're new to Canada, the classes that they give to this people, it's not fair because you find yourself like doing things that—because in Africa I think classes are harder.... So when you come to Canada and you find yourself in EAL classes, that's disappointing.... It's really like baby classes.

Moreover, the way in which students were told that they needed to take EAL classes was often done in an alienating way, "forcing" them to do so. As Kamali pointed out, teachers would often tell newcomer students about their need to take English classes with a disparaging tone. So, even if today she understands the need to study the language, she did not feel encouraged to do so by the teacher's pathologizing remarks.

It is noticeable from the quote above how Kamali may understand the value of English classes today, but the teacher's attitudes were not supportive of her self-determination. In a similar vein, even Afiya, who could already speak English, was confused about her placement in the EAL class because she was not properly informed about her education route:

I didn't know what EAL was. They just put me in these classes.... It was so easy, I was like "this is not a class." So [my friends] told me that when you are new, they put you in EAL classes, that you have to start from down, down, down, like, from low level to make sure you kind of understand things when you are on top of it. When I came from Africa, I was almost a graduate. They gave me a test when I started to go to this school and on the test I did so great. And the teacher was like "oh, I'm impressed. You are the first student do this test like great." And then they put me in EAL classes. I was kind of confused.

Similarly, a common remark among students concerned the fast pace of regular classes and how teachers were often unresponsive to their individual needs, specifically by ignoring their questions or responding to them in a humiliating way:

I think the teachers need to take the time, don't exactly like rush us in a way...teachers just need to take their time and they should have, if they see us struggling, speak to them more about it, and don't make them feel bad about it, don't single them out in the classroom. (Ediye)

The teachers in my school, they talk very fast.... They should change the way that they teach if there's a newcomer in the class. (Yonas)

Refugee youth in Jowett's (2020) study also vehemently noted not being able to keep up with the class given the pace at which the teachers were speaking. According to SDT, competence is thwarted "in contexts in which challenges are too difficult, negative feedback is pervasive, or feelings of mastery and effectiveness are diminished or undermined by interpersonal factors such as person-focused criticism and social comparisons" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 11). While a lot could be said here in terms of universal design for learning and other approaches to inclusive education, what emerged as particularly alarming from the interviews is how these Black refugee students felt they were treated negatively and differently by their teachers, who did not take the time to respond to their needs, as if they were worthless, undeserving of attention and care, and incapable of learning or expressing their knowledge in different ways. As it seems, Black refugee students are to face a certain premeditated inhospitality because of the extent to which their difference

obstructs the flow of Whites' expectations, thus their voices will be shut down by the sovereign host. The host, in these terms, "feels responsible for policing the guest, for making sure that he conforms" (Rosello, 2001, p. 95).

***Fear and mastering the English language.*** Being in a fast-paced classroom, around Canadian classmates, and oftentimes without a supportive teacher, became a source of constant tension for Black refugee students:

If you just talk to someone that is fluent in English, you are always going to think, "oh my God, they are going to judge me if I say this," or "I'm going to say some horrible words, I'm going to mess up." So you [are] always worried about those things. (Kamali)

In order to be able to relate with classmates and keep up with the classes, therefore, students quickly decided to find ways to improve their English skills, whether through watching videos online, going to the library, or other ways. On one hand, these initiatives may be perceived as evidence of their intentional behaviour and how "children's general regulatory style tend[s] to become more internalized or self-regulated over time" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73). However, the regulatory process of their behaviours often appeared to be associated with conscious valuing, ego-involvement, or compliance, rather than pure enjoyment and inherent satisfaction, as this quote seems to evidence:

I had to teach myself how to speak to the English in a way that I don't have to. Now I am speaking to my true like this is how I speak. But at the time I was like, I need to be like Canadian just to make them, like, my classmates, so they don't think that my English is broken or whatever. I have to speak this way, it has to be fast. I have to say, rather than saying, hey, I have to say this or that. (Hiba)

Especially in colonizing contexts such as Canada, language is easily used as a weapon to criminalize, (further) disempower, and continuously marginalize the guest by ascribing incompetence (Rosello, 2001). The foreigner "has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own" (Derrida, 2000a, p. 15) whereas the host "shows no intention of learning the other's language" (Rosello, 2001, p. 92).

## Relatedness

*Walking on eggshells.* The need to feel cared for and to care for others, and the need to feel belongingness and connectedness were greatly evident in the interviews, both in relation to classmates and educators, with race/racism playing a major role in their experiences. Students strongly emphasized their perceived need to constantly have their guards up so as to fight stereotypes held by White classmates and teachers. For instance, when I asked Kamali whether she felt she could be herself in school, her reply was:

Sometimes. You always try to fit in, right?... Sometimes yes and no. No when you think that, well, maybe they're going to say this so I should behave this way, or they might have this kind of stereotype about people who came from this country and so I should be behave a certain way or should, you know, not really in your comfort zone or trying to be someone else.

Ediye shared a similar perspective, noting how she found it a lot easier to be friends with other Black students with whom she did not have to “have my guard up all the time and speak properly all the time.” Due to their fear of behaving in ways that would be incongruent with White values/expectations and given the way that students feel essentialized by their White counterparts, participants emphasized how much easier it was for them to connect with other Black refugees (or at least other non-White immigrants). Not only did they feel they were facing similar struggles, but it also made them more comfortable to relate with people without the fear of being constantly judged by their English or behaviour.

With people that are different [i.e., not Black] I feel like I have this pressure to always, you know, act appropriately so as not to have this certain idea about all Black people, because I have had situations that everyone is put in the same box or same stereotype as like Black students act in a certain way. So I kind of like, stress myself to like, “oh, no, I just I want to be like, oh, we are, we're not always what the media portrays us to be” or something like that. So, I definitely act different to people who are not the same colour as I am. (Ediye)

Thus, not only are students constantly bombarded with the stigmatized and stereotyped images of Black people, as CRT scholars have constantly pointed out, but also forced to pass as White—in other words, being complicit with White expectations so as not to suf-

fer (more) from Whites' "fragility" (DiAngelo, 2018). While Rosello (2001) argues that hospitable exchanges create situations in which "not knowing what the other expects, or wants, will create moments of malaise and discomfort" (p. 171), what emerges as an intrinsically inhospitable gesture here is how the threat of the disruption caused by the other sustains a condition whence students' self is violated.

**Racial segregation.** A social divide seems to have accompanied students throughout their schooling journey whereby they not only had to avoid White classmates whom they perceived as racists, but also felt being ignored by most peers. As Ediye observed, "There's kind of a wall between us in a way because I didn't talk to them, they didn't talk to me." This perceived wall between Black and White classmates was also experienced by Hiba, who shared how much racial discrimination/segregation she observed among classmates, who just "want to be friends only with White people" and "don't want to include somebody that's Black." Students' experiences, therefore, indicate that being physically received into a new environment is not necessarily synonymous with hospitality. Or, looking from a SDT angle, the perceived walls among classmates and feeling ignored by educators certainly shows how the need for relatedness is not satisfied by simply being around others.

**Feeling (un)cared for and caring for others.** A hospitable environment requires a healthy host-guest (and guest-guest) relationship. Students expressed how they felt cared for when teachers would stop to talk to them, showing interest in their experiences and knowledge. They were able to perceive a genuine smile from some teachers as a welcoming gesture, as described by Yonas:

I feel like even when I came to my school, [my teachers] welcomed me, you know, through their smile, they are happy like that: "Hi, Yonas, how are you?" And things like that. And the way that they talk with me, the way that they act, like they smile like "Hi Yonas," you know, they welcome me in a good way.

The way in which students often commented about the value of a genuine smile certainly seems to corroborate SDT's observation that "even a small dose of adult autonomy support and relatedness can significantly influence the school experience" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 357). But student sensitivity was also felt when the contrary happened, which led them to feel uncared for. As Hiba observed, "You could sense when somebody is happy



to have you and when somebody is not so happy to have you. You know what I mean? You can just sense it in the room, you can sense that.”

All students emphasized how friendly their teachers were (which they perceived as a positive contrast with their home countries) and how being able to talk to teachers as friends “made my experience more enjoyable” (Ediye). However, being friendly and funny was not necessarily synonymous with being supportive. When sharing the experience she had with a racist teacher, Hiba said, “He’s kind of funny to everybody, but his work and how he deals with us was not so much great.” Students often felt ignored, neglected, or undermined by educators either when they asked questions, when they brought forth an idea, or voiced an issue they were facing. Indeed, students’ narratives generated several pages of rich and vivid descriptions of their experiences with racism in Manitoba schools—which unfortunately cannot be fully registered within the constraints of this article. Hiba, for example, who referred to racism in schools as a “cancer” and “asthma,” eloquently discussed the major role played by teachers and principals in welcoming Black refugee students, pointing out how important it is for educators to resist and actively fight against racism. She noted, however, that racism is outrightly ignored by educators in an attempt to protect the school’s reputation, which only serves to perpetuate and spread the disease: “It doesn’t matter if somebody say[s] that this school is racist or not. It’s going to be at the end of the day because you’re not doing anything to solve that” (Hiba).

According to SDT, “people can experience *relatedness* while helping others, through a sense of empathy and interest in others, and their active involvement on the others’ behalf” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 625). Therefore, despite the adverse circumstances, one possible way in which students’ need of relatedness was being satisfied was through their contributing to other refugees’ well-being, particularly in helping others navigate the system and seeking to foster a positive classroom environment for all students: “I welcome everybody because I know how it feels to be as a newcomer. I know how it feels to be new” (Hiba). Feeling uncared for by teachers thus not only led students to advocate for themselves in many circumstances, but also to advocate for peers who were going through similar situations. Afiya, for example, shared how she would often be the one who would address classmates’ concerns to teachers, or the principal, whom others feared. In a sense, then, instances of inhospitality appear to have created micro-cosmos of hospitality whereby the guest becomes the pseudo-host for other newcomers. Such redefinition may be perceived as a locus of resistance but also a gesture that approximates

the guest to the host (teacher) and other “more powerful” guests, arguably an attempt to obtain some kind of control. Such efforts, however, although admitted and even desired by educators to some extent (after all, having students help each other means less work for them), proved not to be necessarily enough to foster students’ self-determination, nor to make educators address the situation.

## Discussion

Acknowledging the self as process, fluid, and not as an object, does not necessarily make this process supportive of their autonomy either. In fact, the interviews revealed how often the dynamic nature of the self can be hostile and alienating to students. Feeling pressured to speak and behave differently in order to be accepted, witnessing racism but feeling powerless to make any changes, being responded to irresponsibly, and having limited agency/voice in their education were some of the ways in which students’ autonomy appeared to be in jeopardy.

The necessary threshold that makes hospitality a possibility (Derrida, 2000a, 2007) is also constitutive of SDT’s postulates. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that people can still be autonomous when assenting to certain constraints. Notwithstanding the importance of helping refugee students develop their English skills, the overcontrol experienced by students and the generalization that all newcomers must be placed in EAL classes irrespective of their strengths and interests was perceived as strongly alienating to some participants. Furthermore, Ryan and Deci (2017) observed how important awareness and mindfulness are for self-regulation. Thus, by not explaining to students the idea/role/purpose of EAL classes, schools further prevented students from performing their education autonomously. Mindlessness leads individuals to being more at risk of being controlled—hence fostering *automatic* rather than *autonomous* behaviour. The perceived educational rush, the pressure of getting to the end of a unit/lesson plan (as well as the potential subconscious belief that Black refugee students are not able to “effectively” understand the lesson) seems to be preventing teachers from taking the time to support students’ smooth transition. As a consequence, Black refugee students feel neglected, lost, and have their autonomy impinged.

Ryan and Deci (2000) posited that intrinsic motivation is dependent on experiences of autonomy and competence: “Feelings of competence will not enhance intrinsic

motivation unless accompanied by a sense of autonomy or, in attributional terms, by an internal perceived locus of causality” (p. 70)—an intertwining that also became noticeable through the present study. A striking finding was the role of the English language in students’ need of competence (and mastery, more specifically), particularly because the ability to speak English as their Canadian peers impinged on their feelings of mastery beyond the language *per se*. Not being able to speak English as Canadian students seemed to create an automatic response from some teachers, who undermined, neglected, and ignored what Black refugees had to share. This research also showed how feeling judged and being mocked for the way they speak hinders students’ competence and prevents them from interacting with White classmates.

Given the external pressures to speak as their Canadian classmates, it is quite possible that students’ initiative to master the English language through their own efforts is driven not necessarily by their intrinsic motivation but by the pressure to *perform*—and particularly to perform a White, Canadian English, which could erase any trace of one’s “non-native speakerism.” Differentiating mastery from performance, Ryan and Deci (2017) observed that “*mastery goals* concern learning in order to enhance your competence or knowledge, whereas *performance goals* focus on performing or doing well relative to others” (p. 372; emphasis in original). As such, performance goals may increase academic achievement but are not associated with enhanced wellness. That is, being competent in an activity that is not autonomously initiated or endorsed will not have the same positive effects as if it had been. Feeling safe to voice their ideas and share their knowledge is fundamental to satisfy Black refugee students’ competence need, but it is something that requires fostering their *mastery* (as agentic beings) rather than *performance* (which is deficit-oriented) of new skills, such as the English language—an area with a lot of room for improvement in their schools, particularly among teachers, classmates, and principals.

Feelings of belongingness, caring/being cared for, and significance were discussed by students with a mix of enthusiasm and despair, especially with regards to classmates, teachers, and principals, evidencing that “not all social contacts yield a sense of relatedness or satisfy people’s basic psychological needs” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 295). Students’ perceived need to constantly have their guards up and avoid making any mistakes in front of their White counterparts seems to be impinging on their authenticity—which would presumably be expected in high-quality close relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Particularly worrisome was the fact that students felt that educators (particularly teachers, principals,

and school division leaders) do not take their experiences with racism seriously. Rather, educators found ways to diffuse racist situations though trivializing and denying these incidents at both individual and institutional levels, thus allowing racism to remain pervasive and unchallenged. Conversely, schools must be a place where students feel comfortable, feel that they belong, and are not afraid of making “mistakes.” It must be a place where students do not feel they have to pass as White in order to pass through its doors.

## **Conclusion**

Despite their adaptation and academic achievements over time, this study revealed several roadblocks to Black refugee students’ self-determination and thus feeling genuinely welcome in Manitoba schools. Feeling ignored, undermined, and ridiculed by educators and classmates because of their skin colour and perceived lack of English shows how the need for relatedness is not satisfied simply by teachers’ friendliness, and hospitality does take place merely by being around others in a “safe” environment. Furthermore, the ways in which students found no solution but to remain quiet and acquiesce to a racist environment demonstrates that compliance is not synonymous with concurrence, and that being in a classroom that suppresses their voices, interests, knowledges, and experiences will not be enough for them to feel welcome.

How much longer will we allow racism—individual *and* systemic—to remain unchallenged in our midst? As we open the door for Black refugee students to enter Canadian and Manitoba classrooms, educators cannot simply expect them to acquiesce to pervasive “settled expectations of white privilege” (Harris, 1995) while claiming to be welcoming diversity.

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